

University of Minnesota Academic Calendar Conversion
UCLA Site Visit Notes
Discussions with Faculty/ Staff at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities Campus
August 8 and 9, 2002

John Sandbrook (UCLA College of Letters and Science) and Caroline West (UCLA Office of Analysis and Information Management) met with several faculty and staff members at the University of Minnesota on August 8 and 9, 2002, to discuss the institution's experience with the conversion from a quarter to a semester calendar. The individuals and their positions were:

- *Peter Zetterberg, Director of Institutional Research and Reporting*
- *Peter Hudleston, Associate Dean, Office of Student Affairs, Institute of Technology*
- *Kate Maple, Director, Office of Student Services, College of Human Ecology*
- *Sue Van Voorhis, Director Enrolled Student Services and Registrar*
- *Tina Falkner, Associate Director, Office of the Registrar*
- *Steven J. Rosenstone, Dean, College of Liberal Arts*

The following is a summary (prepared by Caroline) of many of their comments, which are supplemented by the personal commentary from Dr. Zetterberg provided separately.

We should note that everyone we spoke with emphasized the critical role that Peter Zetterberg played in the transition. They all credited much of the success and smoothness of the process to him. He, in turn, cited the backing that leadership provided for him when he stood firm on policies and deadlines. Peter designed the schedule, communicated the process and the timeline dependencies, and came up with the idea of the on-line curriculum management system. He also spearheaded the efforts to conform policies across the colleges.

General observations:

The conversion went very smoothly. There was very little complaining about the process because it had been essentially dictated by the legislature. Language was added to the appropriations bill at the very end of the session, without a hearing. The language ordered the institutions under direct state control to convert to semesters, and requested that the university do the same. (Like the University of California, the University of Minnesota has constitutional autonomy but depends on the state for funding the core academic mission.)

The keys to success were (1) communicating and requiring units to adhere to a disciplined plan and (2) using an on-line tool to let everyone see and act on curriculum changes in real time. There was a well-articulated four-year time-table from the start. Minnesota used a Gantt chart to display the sequential activities that dictated staying on course. Everyone could see that tasks had to be completed on time because later tasks depended on the outcome of earlier ones.

For the most part, departments attempted a straightforward conversion of the existing curriculum. Some departments incorporated an overhaul of the curriculum. They started with the conversion of the core undergraduate prerequisite courses in mathematics and science, because many of the majors would depend on how the new calculus, chemistry, and physics courses were structured. (See the Laboratory section below for more detail.) Then departments went on to work on the rest

of the catalog. Most faculty members found that the workload was not that great. Most curriculum work occurred in the second year of conversion, and required about 1 hour every two weeks on average. Advisors were very involved in the curriculum design at the department level; they ensured that the articulation rules were clear and transition policies were in place.

It would be hard to match the challenge that Minnesota set for itself during the late 1990s. There were three major workload and culture changes: budget, curriculum, and information systems. The campus was part of a consortium that implemented a newly developed PeopleSoft student system. It also responsibility centered management. It is somewhat difficult to isolate the effects of the conversion because of the system changes and incentives inherent in the new funding environment.

The only real remaining semester issue at Minnesota is the length of the fall semester. The university wanted to adopt the same semester calendar as the University of Wisconsin, but the Minnesota state fair calendar prevents full conformance. (Classes cannot start until the fair, which shares its parking lots, completes its run on Labor Day.) The fall semester is 71 to 74 days, depending on which day of the week Labor Day falls. The spring semester is 74 days. Peter Zetterberg persuaded the faculty to accept a shorter fall semester by pointing to the wide variation in semester length at other institutions. (The faculty was concerned that the legislature would conclude that it was reducing its workload and the quality of the students' education.) The occasional December 23 ending of the fall semester remains a problem. Zetterberg thinks that the university may eventually settle on two 70 day semesters, or perhaps slightly less, but he doubts it would go to 65 day semesters (the policy at the University of Michigan).

Burnout resulted from the necessity to squeeze as many instructional days as possible into the fall semester. It was a significant issue the first year, but is now less of a problem. Among the reasons for burnout is the lack of any holiday between Labor Day and Thanksgiving (UM does not observe Veterans' Day).

Observations on particular aspects of the conversion impact follow.

Conversion process.

The course revisions all had to go through the senate approval process. There were four graduate councils overseeing the process as well, each responsible for a disciplinary area. Only one data entry person in each department needed to learn the on-line system in depth. The number of courses in the catalog was cut by about one third, ending up at approximately 14,000. Departments were given the one-third reduction as a guideline and a goal.

Faculty members were not compensated for participating in curriculum restructuring at the department level. Faculty members who worked over the summer on course approval committees received summer ninths.

Student Credit Hours

Student credit hours decreased during the 1999-00 academic year, by approximately one half unit per student, but have since recovered. Minnesota's fee structure charged by the unit both before and after the conversion, and advisors are reputed to urge students to take light loads. However, there will be a 13-unit fee "band" this fall, and other policies are being implemented to encourage both higher unit loads and better graduation rates.

Financial Impacts:

Tuition revenue. Student credit loads fell from an average of 13.4 units in Fall 1998 to an estimated 13.0 units in Fall 1999 at the Twin Cities campus. Tuition revenue (during what was also the first year on responsibility centered budgeting) fell by about \$3 million in the College of Liberal Arts. State funds are not provided on a workload basis so there was no impact on the state allocation. Course loads have since returned to the prior level.

Financial Aid: It is easier to fully disburse all funds under semesters. The financial aid office does not have to hold back on winter quarter packaging due to uncertainty about need for spring quarter; it simply awards all available money for spring semester. Staff mentioned that if faculty members are late turning in grades it can delay packaging and aid may be disbursed to disqualified students by mistake, but this can occur under quarters as well.

Teaching Assistants: The only area where they expected and experienced an increase in the need for teaching assistants was in biological sciences. This was the result of increasing the general education lab science requirements from two quarters to two semesters. The biological sciences promised to handle the extra expense from RCM revenue, and did. The number of teaching assistants overall is more or less unchanged.

Salaries and Benefits. While Academic Senate notes had suggested that there might have been a salary issue related to over-withholding of benefits during the transition year, Peter Zetterberg discounted this. No other salary or benefit issues were raised.

Business operations. The bookstore lost sales due to the reduction in the number of textbooks required in the semester calendar. Neither the registrar nor Peter Zetterberg was aware of any impact on local retail business or on the rental market. The regular year calendar is about 10 to 12 days shorter, so parking lost some revenue. However, parking operations expenses are somewhat reduced as well.

Interest income. Students can pay fees on an installment basis, so there was no measurable financial impact from switching to semesters.

Time to degree:

The four-year and six-year graduation rates at Minnesota are significantly lower than they are at UCLA. Early in the 1990s less than ten percent of UM students graduated in four years. The most recent six-year graduation rate is 51 percent. The university has undertaken several steps to improve retention and graduation, so changes cannot be attributed to the calendar conversion alone. For example, Minnesota is just phasing in a 13-unit minimum progress requirement.

Peter Zetterberg is studying time to degree this summer and was unable as yet to give us any firm answer. He has found that there is less attrition *during* the year with just one break between terms. Stopping out for a term has become more problematic, however; it is a bigger interruption for the student. He observes that the student needs to declare a major earlier. Under quarters there is enough flexibility to wait until the second quarter of the junior year to declare, but not so under semesters.

Class size and room scheduling.

We heard various opinions about class size. Some staff members believed it had increased, some believed it had remained the same. Generally, the responsibility to balance teaching load, the curriculum, and class size as left up to the departments and was well managed. The departments

take the quality of instruction and the student experience seriously. Some program requirements did creep up.

The data show an increase in the percent of classes enrolling 20 to 29 students and a decrease in the percent enrolling one to nine students, between Fall 1998 and Fall 2001. Peter Zetterberg thought that the drop in the number of very small lecture courses may have resulted from a reduction in offerings of some small vanity courses. One respondent thought that class size might have increased slightly due to courses being offered fewer times.

The first year classes had to be scheduled farther in advance so that advisors could work with students to develop individual transition plans. The first year there was significant difficulty in the fall term scheduling classes. The number of classes offered actually increased, going from about 12,000 to about 14,000. The registrar told us that after running Schedule 25 room assignment program there were 800 primary and secondary sections without a room. This was due to a variety of factors:

- There were two classroom buildings off line.
- Departments didn't know what to expect under semesters, and probably offered more courses than were needed.
- Arts and Architecture listed all of its directed readings, rather than adding them as needed.
- Implementation of RCM encouraged departments to offer more classes to generate revenue.
- There was a new freshman seminar program with 60 to 70 offerings.
- During transition there were extra make-up and transition offerings.
- Enrollment was growing.
- There was no enforcement of standard start and end times for classes.

The registrar also noted that there was plenty of classroom space available outside of prime time. Peter Zetterberg provided us with data about the actual number and size distribution of classes before and after conversion. Now the registrar reports being unable to find rooms for only about 60 classes. With the exception of Management, most schools and colleges use Friday for instruction.

Introductory Mathematics and Science Classes

As noted above, the curriculum changes in the sciences and engineering started with the core introductory classes in calculus, chemistry, physics, and mechanics. Departments developed drafts of the new structure of these classes and department representatives took them to the committee that was coordinating the effort. Representatives from other departments evaluated the proposals in terms of whether the material would be presented in the appropriate "packages" for their own curricula. They also evaluated how the proposed unit values would affect the total units required of their majors. The feedback from this committee went back to the department, and an iterative process continued until the group reached consensus on the number of terms, the units per course, and the content of each term.

Peter Hudleston, the Associate Dean in the Office of Student Affairs of the Institute of Technology, sent us the following information about the chemistry sequence.

The issue of increased demand for labs was not considered at length by our committee, although the Chemistry department did assess the situation carefully. Eventually, Chemistry settled on the same schedule for labs as under quarters - one per week of 2 hrs 45 mins... One factor that lessened the impact of going from

two quarters to two semesters of chemistry was the decision by two engineering departments with large numbers of students (electrical and mechanical) to reduce the chemistry requirement from two to one course. The total number of students taking the first chemistry course in 1998-99 was about 650 per term, and in 1999-00 it was 815 per term. This is about 25%, a big jump but less than the 50% it would have been if the student numbers taking the course per year stayed the same.

Grading and Probation Reports

The grading period remains the same. Faculty must submit grades 72 business hours after completion of the exam. The last exam can occur on December 23, so with holidays the due date can be close to New Year's Day. That should allow the Registrar's Office to notify students about their probation status well before the spring semester starts. However, some faculty members believe that they have until the Martin Luther King holiday to submit grades. This means that some students who end up on probation have already started classes and drawn financial aid

Course Units

Originally departments were encouraged to design three-unit courses. Later it became clear that many lower division courses would need to carry four units. Some departments have four-unit upper division courses as well; there was no enforcement of a three-unit standard. There has been no wholesale re-uniting. However, student complaints during the first semester term suggested that in some cases faculty had included more content than the revised units justified, and faculty adjusted accordingly in subsequent terms. The one exception was foreign language. Foreign language instruction went from five days a week for five units to a four-credit semester course because other departments felt the five units weren't justified. However, after one year the courses returned to five-unit status. However, staff noted that following Michigan State's conversion it had to revisit unit values extensively.

While in the early stages of curriculum reform some departments discussed splitting the teaching between two halves of the semester, in practice there has been no increase in team teaching. Instead, some one or two unit courses are offered for only half a semester, primarily in the School of Management. The students then go on to another half semester course in another subject, taught by a different faculty member.

Peter Zetterberg provided us with data about the number of courses offered in 2001-02, by unit value. He found that, at the undergraduate level, approximately 21 percent of courses at the Twin Cities campus carried one unit, 17 percent carried two units, 36 percent carried three units, 22 percent carried four units, and 3 percent carried five units.

Course sequences.

For the most part, three-quarter sequences converted to two-semester sequences. However, the introductory chemistry sequence went from two quarters at four units each to two semesters at four units each. The impetus for this was to match the chemistry sequence at peer institutions. This reduced student flexibility about when they could start the sequence. In addition, chemistry now constitutes a slightly larger percentage of units required for some majors.

Summer

The summer program went from two five-week sessions to a three-week special session and an eight-week summer session. Very little use is made of the three-week session; offerings include study abroad and field courses. One person said while there had been good ideas of possible uses

for the period, people were just too tired after conversion to implement them. The campus first attached the three-week session to the regular academic year for purposes of financial aid, but now it is considered part of summer.

Courses can begin at the beginning of the three-week session and continue into the eight-week session. Courses can be of any length, but they have the same content, contact hours, and unit value as regular term courses. For the most part, faculty members teach summer courses on an overload pay basis. A few departments, however, have their faculty teach during summer in exchange for larger salary increases that are funded by the extra workload revenue. (The same arrangement may occur with revenue from continuing education courses taught by regular faculty.)

According to Peter Zetterberg, much of the summer teaching is provided by regular rank faculty as a means to augment their salaries. He said that regular-rank faculty deliver essentially all upper division workload.

Calendar Conformance with Peer Institutions

There may be some slight improvement in ability to coordinate with other institutions but it is insignificant. It was believed several years ago that there would be significant instructional interaction at the graduate level with the University of Wisconsin, but that has not occurred.

Pedagogy:

We did not speak with anyone who believed that there are significant pedagogical arguments in favor of one calendar or the other. There are plusses and minuses to both. The Committee on Educational Policy is scheduled to review the conversion this year.

Student Issues:

If a student does poorly one semester it is harder to recover because the semester is a larger percentage of his or her academic career. The idea of having more time within the semester to recover from health or emotional problems did not resonate. Students have two more weeks during the summer on the semester calendar to earn money for school expenses. Students have less opportunity to explore outside their major, or to explore widely before declaring a major if they enter without one. There are no electives left in tightly structured programs such as engineering. According to the registrar, there has been no impact on grade distribution. She was unsure whether there was an impact on incompletes or repeated courses.

The registrar has heard that students are happier under the semester system. They find it easier to get summer jobs, and their schedules are synchronized with those of friends at other institutions. It continues the rhythm of their K-12 experience.

Transfer

There is no perceived improvement in transfer student numbers or performance, probably due to the fact that the community colleges were on quarters as well prior to Fall 1998. The articulation process is perceived to work well. In a few cases community colleges are not able to offer courses that fully articulate. In electrical engineering the department has created a one or two unit "catch-up" course for transfers. Community college students in the Twin Cities area, however, can take the University of Minnesota course concurrently.

Leveraging the Conversion Process to Accomplish Other Goals:

Minnesota took advantage of the conversion process to standardize academic policies across academic units. They differed widely before the change. This was a significant benefit. For example, the campus now has a consistent policy on satisfactory academic standing. This allows

the registrar to have single program and report for many standard processes, such as imposing registration holds. Other policy conformations included residency and the dean's list. Before the standardization move, each of fourteen undergraduate colleges could have had its own policy. The campus also consolidated fourteen undergraduate bulletins into one.

According to the registrar course numbering policies had been applied consistently under quarters, so there was no clean-up accomplished during conversion.

Research:

Many of the faculty who used to have a light- or non-teaching quarter have expressed dissatisfaction with the inability to arrange their teaching in that way under semesters, but there is no objective evidence that the conversion has reduced research productivity. The complaints are reduced now but still heard occasionally. The dollar amount of research expenditures has increased steadily, as have the numbers of grant applications and awards.

The teaching policy in the College of Liberal Arts is now two courses per semester. The dean refuses to allow individual departments to have lower policies. However, in recognition that some of the best departments in the college compete for faculty with institutions that have lower teaching policies, he will grant exceptions to individual faculty members for finite periods of time. There is one department in which no ladder faculty member is currently required to meet the 2-2 policy.

The dean of the College of Liberal Arts suggested that a better version of the semester calendar might be to start spring semester immediately after New Year's Day and finish the term by the end of April. This would give faculty a full four-month summer break and would provide an opportunity to offer courses at full semester length over the summer if desired.

Staff workload.

The advising workload during transition was very heavy. Advisors worked during the year of curriculum conversion and during the next two years as they advised students about whether to complete general education and major requirements under the quarter or the semester plans.

The College of Human Ecology found it had to reassign staff tasks to manage workload, but that was in large part because the freshman orientation program changed. Formerly Minnesota advised all incoming students just before the start of the fall term; now it advises incoming students throughout the summer as UCLA does. As a result, Minnesota didn't experience a reduction in advisor workload. There is no perceived change in commencement workload. The director of student services observed that while there were only two advising periods during the regular year now, they are more intense, and possibly longer.

However, the registrar observed that there was a noticeable decrease in routine workload in her office. As a result, staff had time to plan and consult about upcoming events. She felt that there was a significant increase in the quality of service. Similarly, the workload in the Office of Financial Aid is reduced because staff package aid only twice a year. They can devote more time to analyzing student need and managing funds better. For example, they now have analyzed housing budgets and award different housing allowances for undergraduate and graduate students.