

Calendar options require student input

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DISCLAIMER:

The following is not intended to reflect the actual views of the writers. This work is only intended as an exercise in debate.

Point

The Calendar and Schedule Committee has been hard at work developing calendar options that fit with NCSSM Strategic Planning goals, such as increased synchronicity between residential and DEEP schedules, more common time for students and teachers, and alignment of breaks with major holidays. They have come up with five options: the current trimester system, trimesters with a November intercession (essentially an extended Mini-Term), semesters and/or quarters with Mini-Term, semesters/quarters with a January intercession, and semesters/quarters with both Mini-Term and an intercession.

It is essential that the school stay on a trimester schedule.

What makes NCSSM unique and different from other schools is our variety of classes and unique electives, such as graph theory, classical mythology, and computer science.

One of the goals of strategic planning was to preserve "authentic choice of courses and electives" for students.

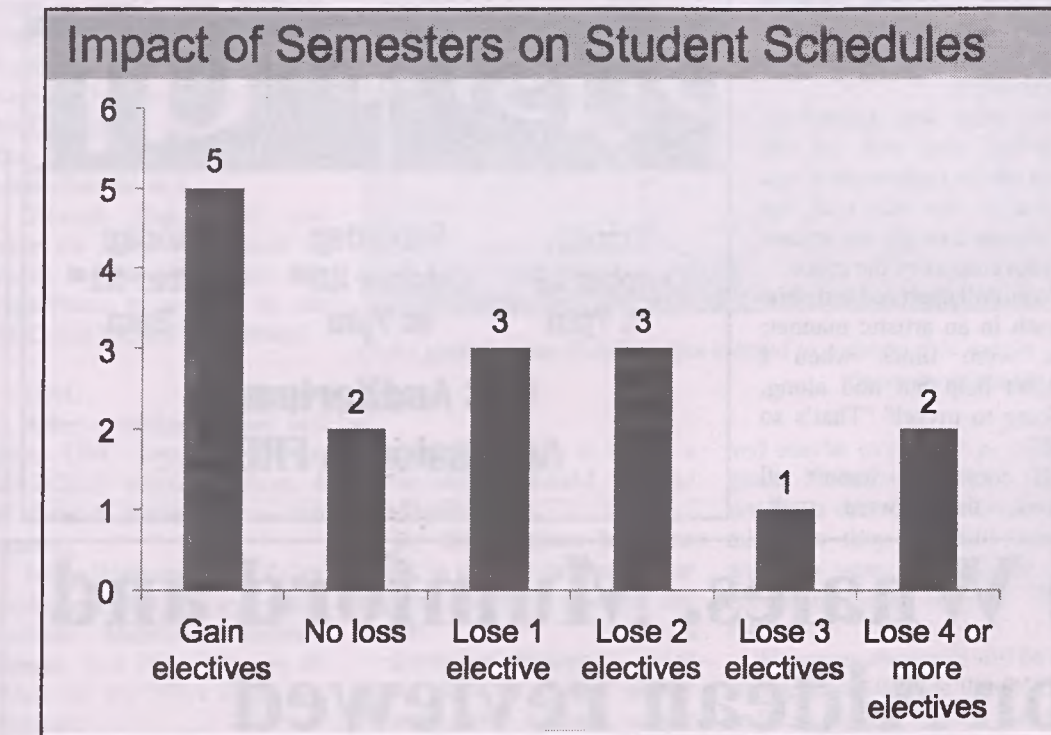
Moving to a semester system would decrease that authentic choice.

In a sample of 16 student schedules on the current trimester system that were converted to a semester system, three schedules lost one elective, three schedules lost two electives, one schedule lost three electives, and two schedules lost two or more electives, whereas only five schedules gained electives.

While some departments, such as math and chemistry, would like semesters because they would give classes more "soak time", the engineering and technology department would likely lose student participation, as it doesn't have a graduation requirement.

Another benefit of trimesters is that they align well with fall, winter, and spring sports. Therefore, when students go home for trimester breaks, they can rest easy knowing that they not only are done with assignments, but also won't get rusty in their chosen sport over the break.

Some might argue that our unusual trimester calendar is what is keeping UNC from establishing an articulation agreement with NCSSM; however, many colleges operate on a quarter system, which is essentially a trimester with a summer session, such as Northwestern University, the University of Chicago, UCLA, California Institute



Elective gain and loss on semester system in 16 diverse schedules Courtesy of Calendar and Schedule Committee

of Technology, and others. Experience with trimesters would give students a leg up at these schools.

Changing the current calendar to semesters would require exhaustive curriculum development, time for which would be better spent elsewhere when we have a functional and efficient trimester system already in place.

Moving to a semester system would require that students have a 6-course load instead of 5-course load. While many proponents of semesters argue that longer courses in the calendar year would take stress off of students and allow more time to learn course material, but having more classes per day would just add that same stress back into the daily schedule.

Counterpoint

A number of new schedule proposals include a shift from the current trimester system to a semester system. This system is being considered because it will promote a number of programs and will benefit students more than the trimester schedule.

The length, depth, and breadth of knowledge that courses can impart to students is one of the primary arguments favoring a return to the semester system. Several departments claim that with a longer period to cover the material of their discipline, students will develop better understanding.

Courses that are currently two trimesters in length would be lengthened to two semesters, or a full year, which would yield more time for alternatives to the traditional lecture, like field trips and creative projects.

Proponents of the semester system also argue that a full semester or year for courses would allow for more free time during the week. The

homework load could be lightened because classes could move at a slightly slower pace and those courses that meet five days each week could start meeting four times instead.

This free time would give students more opportunities to rest, as well as meet with their teacher for consultation.

The semester system is significantly easier to coordinate with Distance Education and Extended Programs (DEEP). DEEP operates on a semester system in accordance with North Carolina public schools in order to serve the online students who are still working on semesters at home. This coordination would not only make it easier on the DEEP faculty and online students, but also on the residential students enrolled in web-based courses, who currently have to plan their breaks around scheduled visitation weekends for DEEP students.

The holiday calendar would also be much more manageable on a semester system. Particularly in the cases of November and December, trimester breaks and extended weekends fall at inopportune times, causing

severe gaps in instructional time. With exams taking place before the winter holiday break students would be free of stress and homework over their time with their families.

Perhaps the most interesting addition to the annual schedule that could come with semesters is the intercession. Much like a full month of mini-term study, the program would allow students to take a month-long pair of courses for academic credit in specific disciplines relating to their interests.

Proponents of semesters feel that intercession could provide an easier transition into school following winter break (as it would most likely take place in January) and could break up any monotony that might arise due to lengthened courses.

Other options that could be provided by changes to the trimester or semester system are more evening courses, an alternative "A-B Schedule" (in which one week of each month would come with time built in for field trips and projects).

Todd Roberts, NCSSM Chancellor, will release a decision based on the results of focus groups and Calendar and Schedule Committee meetings later this year.

SG teams at work

Continued from page 3

Director of Public Relations, Jay Buchanan, and the Chair of Public Relations, Albert Hong, at buchanan13j@ncssm.edu and hong13s@ncssm.edu, to get involved.

Student Affairs prioritizes improving the quality of student life at NCSSM. In recent months, Student Affairs has gained a number of student discounts from 9th street.

The committee is currently focusing on creating a "Smather's Guide to Durham", implementing the Privilege Card system, and organizing group college visits and tours in addition to expanding the library hours during exams.

For questions or concerns or to get involved, contact the Chair of Student Affairs, Corey Su at sul3c@ncssm.edu.

Apart from individual committees, the Executive branch serve the Senate to make an impact not only on-campus but off-campus as well.

President Anita Simha is currently working with the Sustainability Task Force to utilize the Green Initiatives Grant offered by University of North Carolina Association of Student Governments (UNCASG) to support sustainability on campus.

Treasurer Ankit Gupta is working to ensure a balanced budget and simultaneously fulfilling the needs of student organizations. Kyle Elmore, the SG Director of IT, is working to improve SG Website and possibly to create an extended website for student organizations.

Student Government always welcomes students' input. For any questions or concerns, or to be a part of Student Government, email sg@ncssm.edu or visit the website at www.ncssm.edu/sg/.

SG General Meetings

WEDNESDAYS 12:25-12:50PM
Every other SUNDAY 7:00-8:00PM

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