

The calendar question: term or semester?

Academic Assembly to poll students

By JIM BARR

Collegian Staff Writer

The Academic Assembly will conduct a campus-wide poll tomorrow and Thursday of student opinion on the issue of the University calendar.

The poll, supported by the Association of Residence Hall Students, Organization of Town Independent Students, Undergraduate Student Government Senate and other student groups, is part of the Academic Assembly's continuing fight to save the term system at Penn State.

Ballot boxes for the poll will be located in the dining halls in each dorm area, on the ground floor of the HUB and in Chambers. The polls will be open from 9:30 a.m. to 7 p.m.

This will be the second poll taken by the Assembly in the last month in reaction to the University Calendar Commission's decision to concentrate its study on four types of semester systems.

The commission was set up last December by University President John W. Oswald to find the best possible calendar system for Penn State. The commission hopes to complete its study by the end of December. It appears likely that the commission will recommend that the University change to a semester system.

The commission has not yet decided to recommend any particular system. It has only narrowed its field of study to four of eight possible alternatives.

Apparently, some students are con-

fused on this point.

In a letter sent to Commission Chairman Asa Berlin last month, Joe Kaplan, president of the Academic Assembly, prefaced a list of 14 questions on the possible calendar change by saying, "In light of the Calendar Commission's recent decision to recommend to the President one of several semester calendars..."

Even if the commission does recommend changing to the semester system, Oswald must make the final decision, and he may not approve the change.

At its Oct. 25 meeting, the commission, pressed for time by the December deadline, decided to spend much of its remaining time studying four semester calendars as possible alternatives to the term system.

Commission members agreed, however, that the decision would not prohibit them from studying the other systems at a later date or from recommending any of the other systems, including the term system.

Last month's poll by the Academic Assembly showed that students who voted favored keeping the term system by a margin of almost six to one.

A similar poll taken by the Student Council of the College of Earth and Mineral Sciences on Oct. 24 found that 435 of the 598 persons questioned preferred the term system. Of 188 persons questioned who had attended schools with both the term and semester

systems, 102 said they favored the term system.

The results of both polls were presented to the commission. Berlin said he also has received a number of petitions from students in East Halls supporting the term system.

During their study, commission members have used a number of assumptions to guide their decisions. The following is a partial list which may help students voting in tomorrow's poll:

—The primary goal of any calendar system is to enhance the academic programs at the University.

—There is no available evidence that any type of calendar is intrinsically superior to any other.

—Housing, food service and administrative services can adapt to any calendar, given reasonable time for preparation.

—Frequency and length of class periods can be adjusted in any calendar.

—A symmetrical calendar is preferred but not mandatory.

—A common calendar for the whole University is desirable.

—Each calendar must allow for a final examination period even if it is only used by a minority of faculty.

—Any change from the present calendar will upset some portion of the University and please some other portion.

—Any calendar would be accepted in time, and activities would be adjusted to fit it.

Academic Assembly Calendar Opinion Poll. Please answer as indicated. Register your vote with an "X". I. Do you prefer a term system to a semester system? Yes ___ No ___ No opinion ___

Opinions: Calendar Commission members voice views on term, semester

The following article concerns the opinions of undergraduate, graduate and commonwealth campus representatives to the Calendar Commission, along with Chairman Asa Berlin and Academic Assembly President Joe Kaplan:

By JANICE SELINGER, Collegian Staff Writer

Michael Ostroff (7th-social welfare), undergraduate student representative to the Calendar Commission:

"As undergraduate representative, I voted in favor of the term system. I support all the polls and student input, but I don't feel they will make a real difference in the commission's leanings," Ostroff said.

"Therefore, I am in favor of either the early or short semester. I think they are better for students," Ostroff said, adding that the starting and ending dates are better for most students.

Bob Lloyd (graduate-rural sociology), graduate student representative to the commission:

"Graduate students as a body have not reached any decision. My gut level interpretation is that they favor semesters," Lloyd said.

Lloyd said he got this impression by talking to other graduate students. Lloyd also said he voted for the semester system.

Lloyd said he thinks the University should go to a semester which will end early to allow students to get summer employment. This is very important to undergraduates but most graduates are here all year long so it wouldn't affect them anyway, he said.

Lloyd said he is in favor of the short semester since it begins after Labor Day.

"The modified system is intriguing," Lloyd said. "But I don't feel new material should be presented during the week of intensive study."

The committee also should consider having oral exams instead of traditional finals if a modified semester system is used, Lloyd said.

John D. Vairo, director of the Delaware County Campus: "I prefer the semester system. Our faculty is on record for preferring the semester system," Vairo said.

Vairo said Delaware County Campus faculty and students want to go back to the semester system.

In a report Vairo wrote for the commission he listed some faults of the term system:

—The term system does not make academic sense.

—It is unfulfilled, instead of being 10 weeks of instruction it reduces itself to 8 weeks.

—Students have to cover too much material in too little time.

—Students must work too rapidly for excellence.

—Students can't retain the information.

—A term system is costly. Students must travel home between frequent breaks.

"Pressure creates emotional and behavioral stress.

"Too much time is wasted because of term breaks.

"—It is a hurry, hurry system."

A semester system would slow down the pace and make college the pleasant, well-paced experience it was meant to be, Vairo said.

Joe Kaplan (10th-pre-law), president of the Undergraduate Student Government Academic Assembly:

"Personally, I am in favor of the retention of the present term system. The Academic Assembly has also voted this way," Kaplan said.

Many students are drawn to Penn State because of the term system, Kaplan said. It's different from what most schools have and it allows students to concentrate on fewer courses at one time.

Kaplan said he thinks 10 weeks is long enough to have a course.

"Personally, I have had several good courses but not one that I wish I had for an additional five weeks," Kaplan said.

"In a 10-week term students who find themselves in a course which is not what they expected or is somehow inappropriate or with an instructor who is not the type they expected for the course they only have the course for 10 weeks and not 15," Kaplan said.

It is much easier for students who need to drop out for medical or financial reasons under a term system than under a semester system, Kaplan said. When you have missed a semester you have missed one half of a year's work, he said. It isn't that hard to take 15 credits instead of 12 but it is difficult to take 21 instead of 18, he added.

Under a semester system, classroom work could become more compressed and sketchy, Kaplan said. While students, now have 30 weeks of work for 75 minutes a day, under semesters, students would have 30 weeks of work for 50 minutes a day, he said.

"The idea of a semester being less pressure just doesn't seem to hold," Kaplan said.

"I would not deny that both the term and semester systems have advantages," Kaplan said. "But I would deny that the benefits of switching to semesters are worth the perceived benefits of one over the other."

The Academic Assembly is conducting a poll on the calendar issue tomorrow and Thursday.

"I am not counting on the poll to make an impact on the President's Calendar Commission but I am counting on it to make an impact on the president," Kaplan said.

Asa Berlin, chairman of the Calendar Commission.

"At this moment I am completely undecided as to which is best," Berlin said. "I still feel students would tend to be more relaxed under a semester."

"The final decision will have to be close. Even if we stay with the term, people will be disappointed," Berlin said.

Berlin said he is worried that the faculty will ignore the calendar question until a decision is made.

Calendar system comparison

Table comparing Semester System and Term System across various metrics: instruction time, courses, class periods, registration, exams, and holidays.

The Calendar Commission answers questions

But Kaplan dissatisfied with 'sketchy' answers

By JANICE SELINGER, Collegian Staff Writer

Joe Kaplan, President of the Academic Assembly, said in an interview Sunday that he was dissatisfied with the Calendar Commission's answers to his questions.

Kaplan said most of the answers were sketchy. He said his overall impression was that the commission's decision to limit study to a semester system is premature.

Kaplan said he disagreed with the commission's answer to his first question. A switch to semesters may not involve monetary costs, Kaplan said, but it will certainly mean added time costs.

Faculty and staff who are spending time revising the calendar will have less time to spend on things, such as teaching and research, Kaplan said.

The commission should devote more time to studying course repackaging, tuition payment, and the practicum situation before making any recommendation, Kaplan said.

Tuition must be looked at seriously, Kaplan said.

"We are a land-grant state institution created for the sons and daughters of the working class so every dollar spent on tuition is a dollar not spent elsewhere (in the home) where it may be needed," Kaplan said.

It is much easier to pay tuition in three

installments rather than two, Kaplan said.

The commission may be putting too much emphasis on term breaks and vacations, Kaplan said. They should not have such a great effect on deciding a calendar system, he added.

"We are looking for the system with the highest learning potential, not the best vacation period," Kaplan said.

"The commission's views on the perceived benefits of the semester system seem to indicate that any vote to recommend a semester system now is premature," Kaplan said.

Kaplan termed the commission's answer to question 13 a half-truth. Although most universities may be experiencing a decrease in attendance, Penn State still has more applicants than it can accept, Kaplan said.

"We still get quite a few students during the summer. Maybe 10,000. That is more than some universities have all year long," Kaplan said.

Kaplan said the course offerings at some branch campuses will have to be limited because they only have one teacher for certain courses.

"Can that teacher handle the increased workload per term?" Kaplan asked.

Even if he can, Kaplan said a professor who would go on sabbatical for one term how used to go for a whole semester. This will mean added workloads for those remaining, Kaplan added.

Editor's note: the following was sent to The Daily Collegian as an open letter to the University community by Asa Berlin, chairman of the University Calendar Commission.

Since students first became aware of the activities of the Calendar Commission there has been a great deal of interest in participating in the deliberations. Beside the letters in the Collegian, there have been letters, phone calls and personal conferences with members of the commission. Students have spontaneously created questionnaires and polls, and the results of many of these have been forwarded to the commission to become a part of the study process.

The Academic Assembly is one of the groups that has taken on the job of fostering and channelling the input of student opinion. Last week, Joe Kaplan, president of the Academic Assembly, sent the commission 14 thoughtful questions. Since they cover some of the major concerns which have been expressed in other ways, answers to these questions will perhaps be of interest to a wide audience. Therefore, I am replying to the Assembly (and all the students) through this channel of an open letter.

1. What is the approximate anticipated cost of changing from the term system to a semester system?

No one can say authoritatively, but our best guess is that the additional cost to the University will be modest, and may in fact be made up in the long run by some savings permitted in the semester system. Most of the work would be done by faculty and staff who are already on full salary. It would be another form of work on courses and curricula which these people are doing all the time as part of their jobs.

2. What is the approximate anticipated time span for the complete conversion from the term system to the semester system?

Probably a full year, and that is why the commission wishes to make its recommendations by the end of December. If a semester plan is recommended and implemented, this would provide time for conversion before the starting date of Fall, 1976.

3. Are there any plans to reevaluate the number of credits assigned to each course?

Probably not for most courses, but content to be completed in one year and currently offered in a three-term sequence would have to be repackaged. The content

and number of credits for some practicum experiences may change with the change in duration of the experience.

4. Will tuition have to be paid in two installments, i.e., one half year's tuition each semester?

This is outside the province of the commission. I hope the University would make appropriate provisions for any hardships.

5. Do you see a decrease in the number of students able to find positions in outside businesses and agencies for practicum purposes, due to the increased number of students requiring positions (1/2 of the annual number of students as opposed to one-third the annual number, under a semester system will be looking for such positions)?

This highly pertinent question will require additional study. Certainly the possibility of additional hardship exists, but there is a chance that placement may be easier if our calendar were closer to other institutions sharing those facilities.

6. Do you see any decrease in the variety of courses taught each semester as contrasted to the term system?

Theoretically there should not be, but since some members of the commission think there may be, this requires more analysis.

7. What role has the spacing and length of "term" breaks and vacations played or what role will it play in the Commission's deliberation and-or decision?

A great deal. One persistent problem has been the Christmas break: how important is it that this period come within or between terms or semesters? The impact of starting and ending dates for the summer "break," a spring break around Easter, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, etc. have all entered into consideration.

8. Will there be difficulty in securing new working policies with hospitals, school boards and other agencies where our students are placed for outside study? The answer is essentially the same as for Q5 above.

9. To what extent will rules affecting students such as those regarding course-repeat, drop-add, pass-fail, etc., have to be rewritten? They would have to be changed in terms of specific dates but not intent. For example, if a maximum of two courses of pass-fail is now permitted per term, this could convert to three courses per semester (although

the total number permitted would not change). Drop-add dates would also probably change to a comparable stage in the progress of the courses.

10. What are the perceived benefits of a semester system? A. The commission is actively reviewing these now, as well as the benefits of the term system, but a complete list is not yet available. Some of the most often heard benefits involve the probable advantages of a basic 50-minute period, better opportunity to absorb and understand material over a greater number of weeks, and presumed decreased pressure on the students under a semester system.

11. To what extent will faculty contracts have to be rewritten? Again this is outside the area of the commission's study. Essentially, a two-semester year would cover the same time as a three-term year. Any differences in length of employment might involve the summer, but this is not automatically necessary if we go to a semester plan.

12. Will the physical facilities of the university (classrooms, phys. ed. equipment, etc.) be able to accommodate students in a semester system? We have received no information, and have no reason to believe at this time, that the physical facilities will be inadequate for a semester plan.

13. Can you summarize why the University changed from a semester to a term system? Very briefly, I believe the major reason was to encourage students to go to school a full calendar year, thus graduating in three instead of four years, and thus permitting the university to accept more students in the same time with the same facilities. This was appropriate in the early sixties, when the number of students requesting college admission was growing rapidly each year. Not only did a relatively small percentage of students ever avail themselves of this opportunity for acceleration, but the pressure for accepting additional students has declined and is reversing. It would be interesting to note here also that the term plan was not popular when it was proposed.

14. Will the course offerings at the branch campuses be limited due to their relatively small staffs? Again a good question that will spur more inquiry than we have done: To this point the information from Commonwealth Campuses has been more in favor of the semester plans.