

# **California Community Colleges on Compressed Calendars: FTES, Success, and Retention Rates Before and After Compression**

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In the fall of 2007, the Academic Senate of San Joaquin Delta College voted to endorse the concept of moving to a compressed calendar that is one week shorter than the current 17.5 week semester. A number of community colleges in the California system have made the schedule transition in recent years, but little systematic research has been done on the broader impact that these shortened sessions have had on rates of student learning and college enrollments. To investigate the role compressed calendars have on California Community Colleges we gathered data on full-time enrolled students (FTES), success, and retention rates from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office website. The key research questions explored in this study were:

- 1) Did the transition to a compressed calendar have any effect on FTES?
- 2) Did the transition to a compressed calendar have any effect on rates of student success?
- 3) Did the transition to a compressed calendar have any effect on rates of student retention?

A list provided by Elias Regalado from the Chancellor's Office was used to identify the colleges that were on compressed calendars. In addition, information regarding the first academic year each college began their compressed calendars was also obtained from this list. Data from the Chancellor's Office Data Mart were obtained from colleges if they met two predetermined qualifications: 1) were semester-based and 2) FTES, success, and retention data were available (3 years before compression, the 3 years when the new calendar was in place). After screening the colleges, 33 California Community Colleges were selected and FTES, success, and retention rates were obtained for each of the colleges. (See Table 1 for a list of colleges).

## College Descriptives

Most of the colleges made the transition to shorter semester weeks between 2001 and 2002. All 33 community colleges shortened their semesters to 16 weeks and all provided students with summer sessions. Of the 33 colleges, 27 colleges also included winter inter-sessions.

## Results

Independent Means t-tests were used to determine whether there were differences before and after the colleges made the change to shortened semesters. When looking at FTES, the results indicate no significant differences before and after the change in calendars

(4,637 before the switch vs. 4,659 after). However, the results did reveal significant mean differences in success rates and retention rates before and after the switch to compressed semesters. Overall student success rates were significantly higher during compressed calendar terms than before the change (67.5% vs. 66.0%). In addition to the increase in student success percentages, student retention rates were also significantly higher after the change (84.2% vs. 82.7%, see Table 2 for t-test results).

In order to test against a possible rival explanation for success and retention rates, we also collected data on colleges that made no change in their calendar during the same time frame. Focusing on the period of 1998 to 2003, we analyzed 11 community colleges that did not shift to a compressed calendar format. This period coincides with the years when some of the colleges moved to a compressed calendar, and encompasses the period when all California Community Colleges benefitted from Partnership for Excellence budget augmentations. The data from those non-compressed calendar colleges reflect only slight improvements in success rates and retention rates, and the changes were not large enough to be determined statistically significant. Because the findings were insignificant, we do not report them in a table.

### Conclusions

Based on results above, it can be suggested that compressed calendars have a positive impact on students attending California Community Colleges. Compressed calendars appear to noticeably improve student success and retention rates. Assuming that Delta College possesses many of the same institutional traits and student demographics of the 33 community colleges in this study, the college may clearly benefit from a change to a 16-week semester. Future research might be needed to assess rates of learning and retention in broad disciplinary areas, but the overall data suggest a positive impact for student learning if Delta College made a change to a compressed calendar.

Table 1. *List of Community Colleges on Compressed Calendars Included in the Study*

<b><i>Community Colleges on Semester-Length Compressed Calendars</i></b>		
Antelope Valley	Glendale	Orange Coast
Bakersfield	Golden West	Pasadena City
Cabrillo	LA Harbor	Riverside
Cerro Coso	LA Mission	San Diego City
Coastline	LA Pierce	San Diego Mesa
College of the Desert	LA Southwest	San Diego Miramar
College of the Redwoods	LA Trade Technical	San Jose City
Columbia	LA Valley	Santa Barbara
East LA	Los Angeles City	Victor Valley
El Camino	Mission	West LA
Evergreen	Modesto	West Valley

Table 2. *Means and t-test Results: FTES, Success, and Retention Rates Before & After Changing to a 16-Week Semester*

<b><i>Variable</i></b>	<b><i>Mean</i></b>	<b><i>t-test</i></b>	<b><i>Prob. significant</i></b>
<b><i>FTES</i></b>			
Before change	4,637		
After change	4,659	-.07	.946 n.s.
<b><i>Student success</i></b>			
Before change	66.0%		
After change	67.5%	-2.77	.006 **
<b><i>Student retention</i></b>			
Before change	82.7%		
After change	84.2%	-2.88	.004 **

*Note \*\* p < .01*