

Porterville College

Academic Senate

Academic Calendar Transition Study, Spring 2009

Introduction

After much debate and study, Porterville College switched from a traditional 17.5-week community college calendar beginning with the fall 2006 term. Upon making the change, the Academic Senate of the College made a commitment to study the effects of the new calendar, particularly focusing on how it impacted student success. This report provides the result of that study.

There were two parts to this study. First, we review several statistical reports on how students have been affected by the calendar change. This review examines student impact by reviewing several measures using data from the fall and spring terms the two years previous to the change (2004-05 and 2005-06) comparing them with the two years immediately following (2006-07 and 2007-08). The second part of the study involves a brief faculty survey on pedagogical issues related to the calendar change.

Statistical Overview

Senate desired to review several statistical measures in evaluating the calendar change. These data are presented in charts beginning on page 4. As we describe the change over time, it is important to note that the data presented here simply describe the changes between the two years just prior to the calendar change and the two years just after. Change does not imply causation however, and any changes seen here could be due to any number of intervening factors. Among other changes that occurred simultaneously were an enrollment drop and subsequent increase, campus construction affecting two buildings, and the introduction of a new vocational program.

The first thing to examine is course retention and success rates. The retention rate increased slightly from 89.7% to 90.5% with the calendar change. The course success rate also improved, from 66.4% before the change to 68.1% afterward. Average term GPA also improved from 2.02 with the 17.5-week calendar to 2.07 after the switch to 16 weeks.

The Academic Senate also wanted to look at the average unit load, given the possibility that the calendar change might have impacted students' ability to take the course load of their preference. The average unit load decreased after the calendar change from 8.28 units attempted to 8.12. The average number of earned units also dropped from 6.10 with the 17.5-week calendar to 6.00 afterwards. We also reviewed the average unit load of full-time students separately (those attempting at least 12 students) and found a similar drop, from an average of 14.0 units attempted prior to the change to 13.9 units attempted afterwards. Earned units also dropped from 10.9 to 10.8 for full-time students.

Lastly, we examined course offerings and student enrollment. The number of sections offered in fall terms increased from 479 to 495.5 with the calendar change while the number offered in spring terms decreased from an average of 509 to 502.5. While summer terms were not as directly impacted by the calendar change, the college was offering an increased number of summer sections, from 100 to 125.5. Overall, the number of annual sections offered increased from an average of 1,078 in the two years prior to the calendar change to an average of 1,123.5 in the two years afterwards.

Enrollment was similar with each of the calendar options. Unduplicated fall student headcount decreased slightly from 3,869 prior to the change to 3,787 afterwards. Overall enrollment increased from 28,183 to 28,412 while the number of full-time equivalent students (FTES) went from 3,112 to 3,078.

While success and retention rates improved slightly, and most measures remained similar with both calendar types, some data may differ for individual programs. Success and retention data can be viewed for individual divisions and departments at the program review web page: <http://www.portervillecollege.edu/research/Program%20Review.htm>. Other data are available upon request from the Office of Research & Grants.

The Faculty Survey

In addition to reviewing the direct effect on student success via statistical comparisons, the Academic Senate desired to consider input from faculty regarding the pedagogical issues they faced with the calendar change. With input from the Senate, the Office of Research & Grants created a 5-question web survey of full-time and adjunct faculty who had taught at Porterville College for at least four years, covering the first two years of the new calendar and the last two with the previous calendar. The survey was anonymous and was conducted in the spring 2009 term. The first four questions were scaled asking about how the calendar change had affected their pedagogy and classroom experiences. A last question was open-ended, allowing faculty with the opportunity to provide input to the Senate on specific issues. A total of 59 faculty responded, two of whom answered only the open-ended question. The survey responses are provided in detail beginning on page 7. A brief overview is provided here.

When asked about the amount of material covered, a majority (54%) stated that they are covering the same amount of material with the new calendar as previously. Sixteen percent are covering more material and 30% are covering less.

The next question asked how the quality of learning was affected by the calendar change. Nearly half (49%) said that learning was about the same as before; 33% indicated learning had improved and 18% said it had deteriorated.

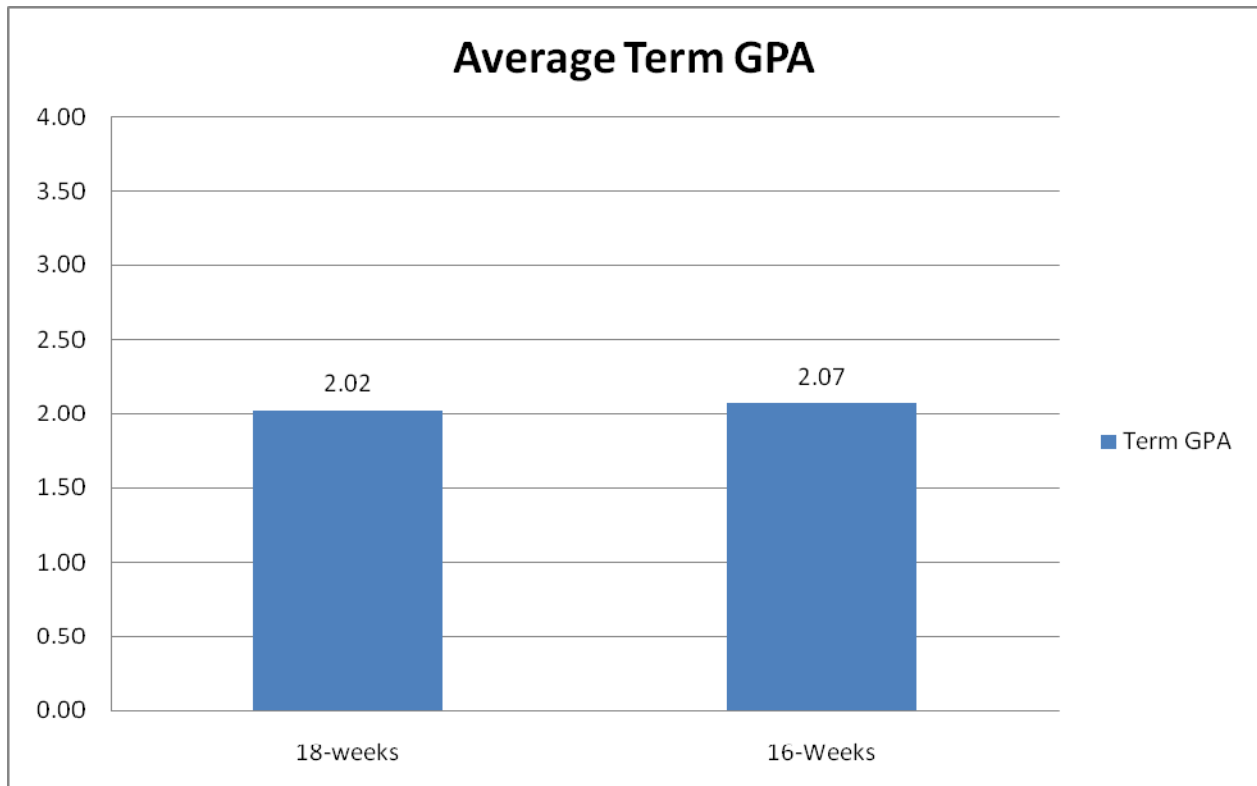
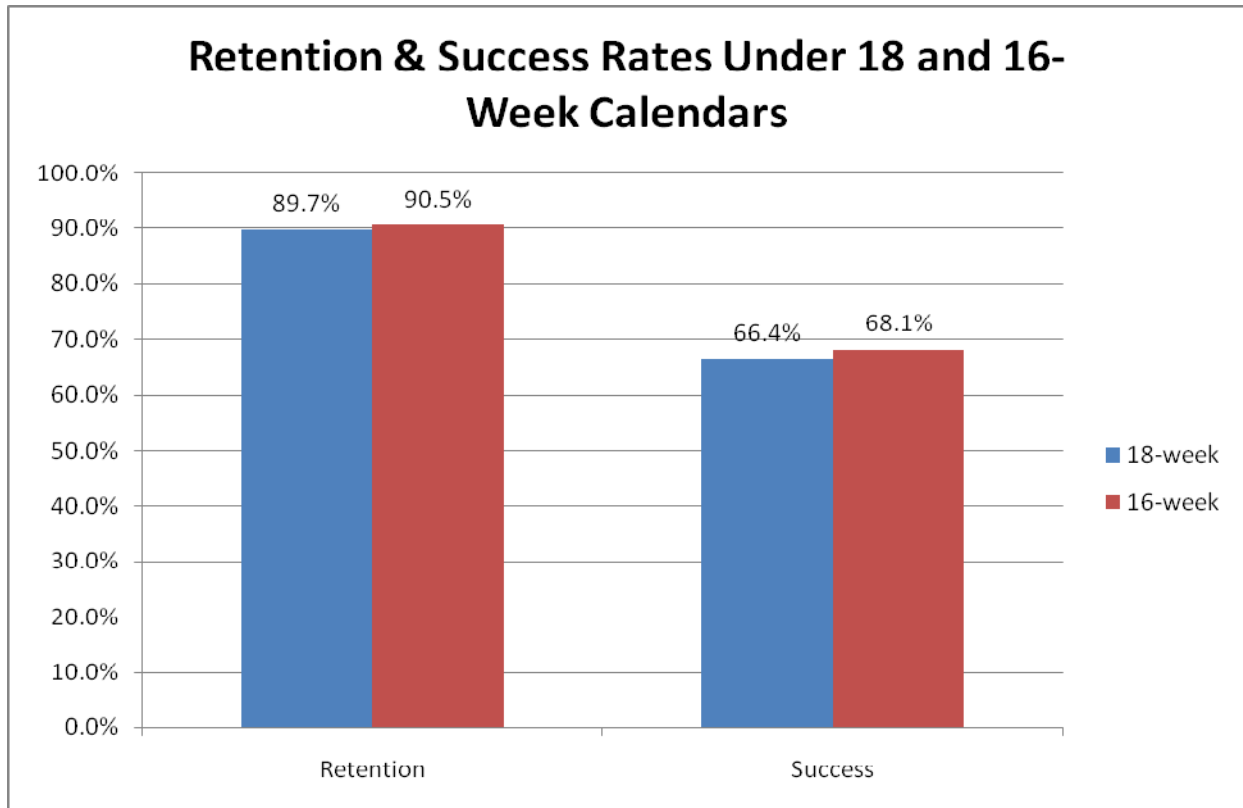
Question 3 asked about the class atmosphere before and after the calendar change. Just over half (53%) said that the atmosphere was unchanged, 33% said it had improved and another 14% said the atmosphere had deteriorated with the calendar change.

The most difficult area for faculty was question 4 where we asked about how schedule management had been affected. Almost half (46%) said managing their schedule was more

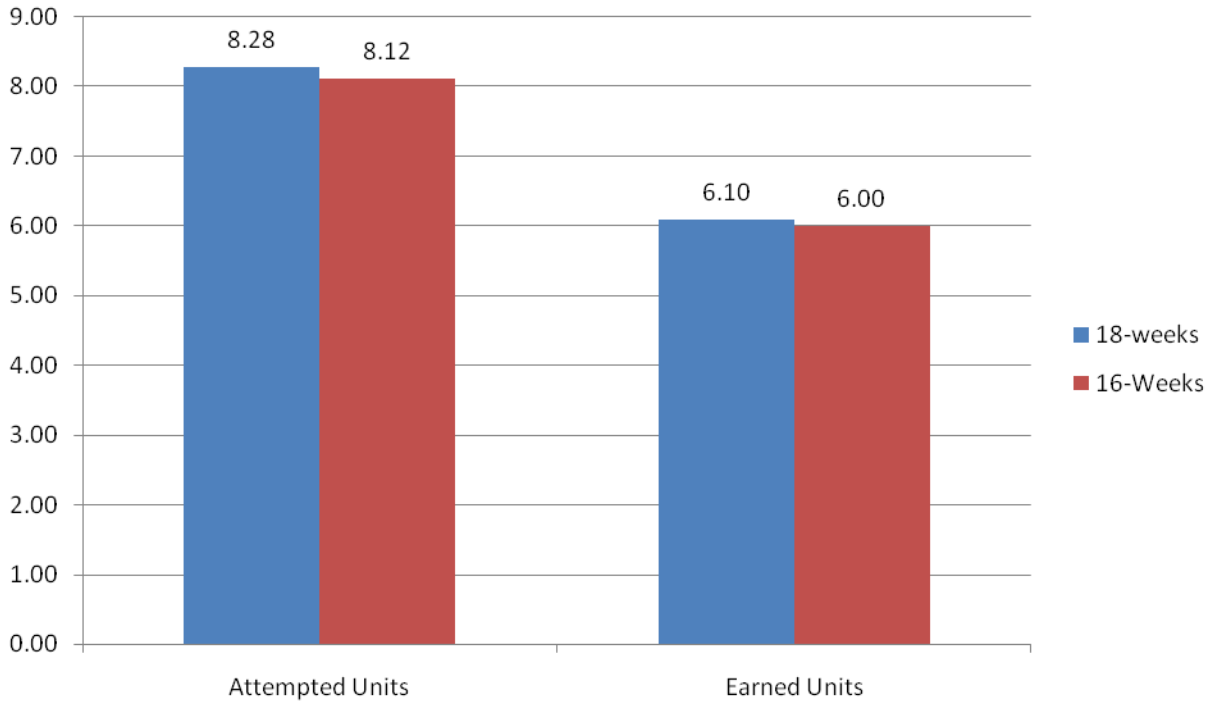
difficult to manage with the 16-week calendar; 33% said it managing their schedules about the same as it had been and 21% said it was easier.

The final question was open-ended and asked faculty to provide additional information that the Senate might consider when addressing the calendar. The responses to this question are provided verbatim, beginning on page 9. The Academic Senate will review these and consider them in addressing whatever kind of calendar we will have in the future and how such a calendar is implemented.

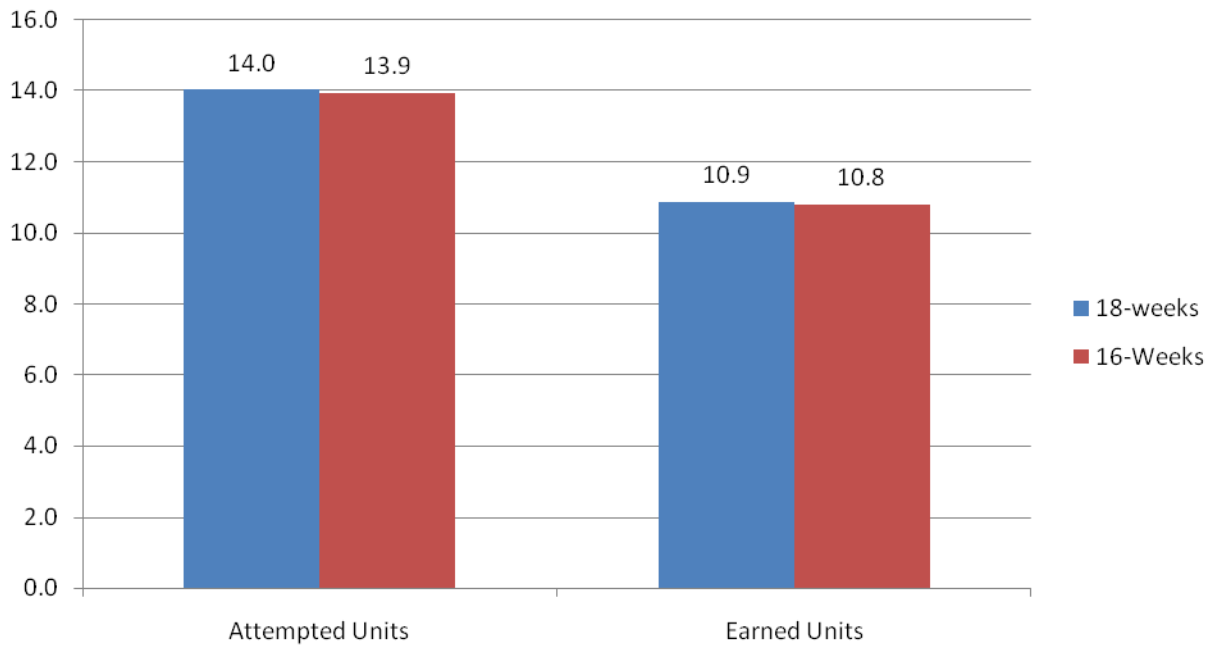
Charts Showing Calendar Change Data



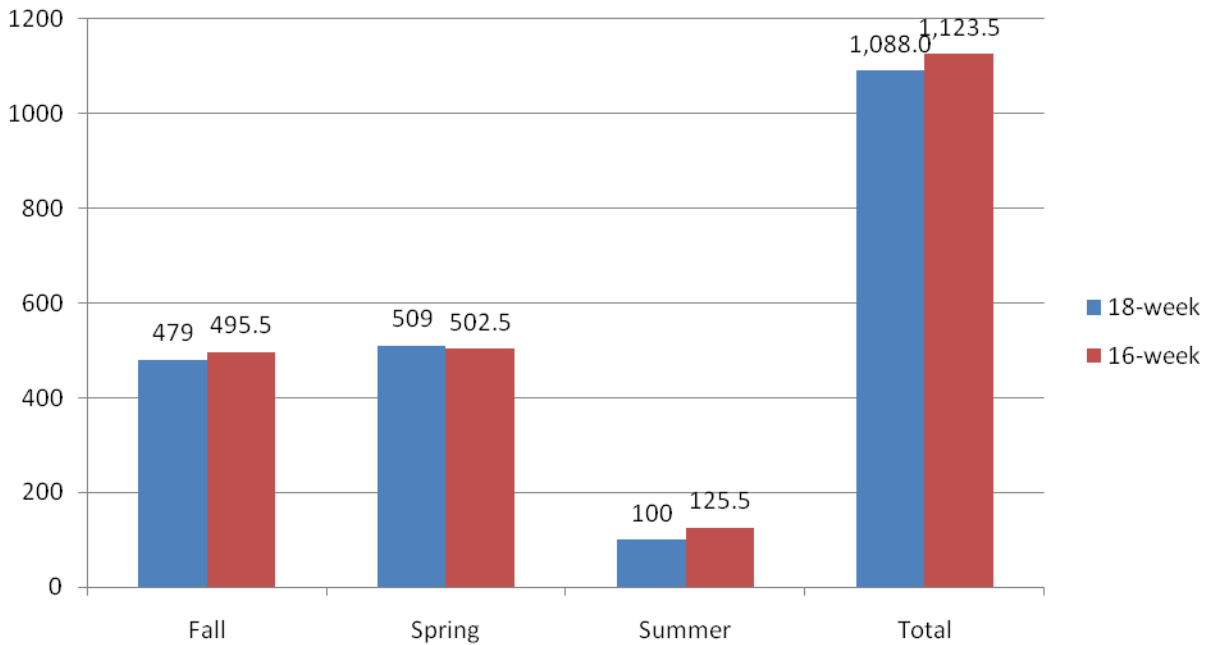
Attempted & Earned Units by Calendar Type



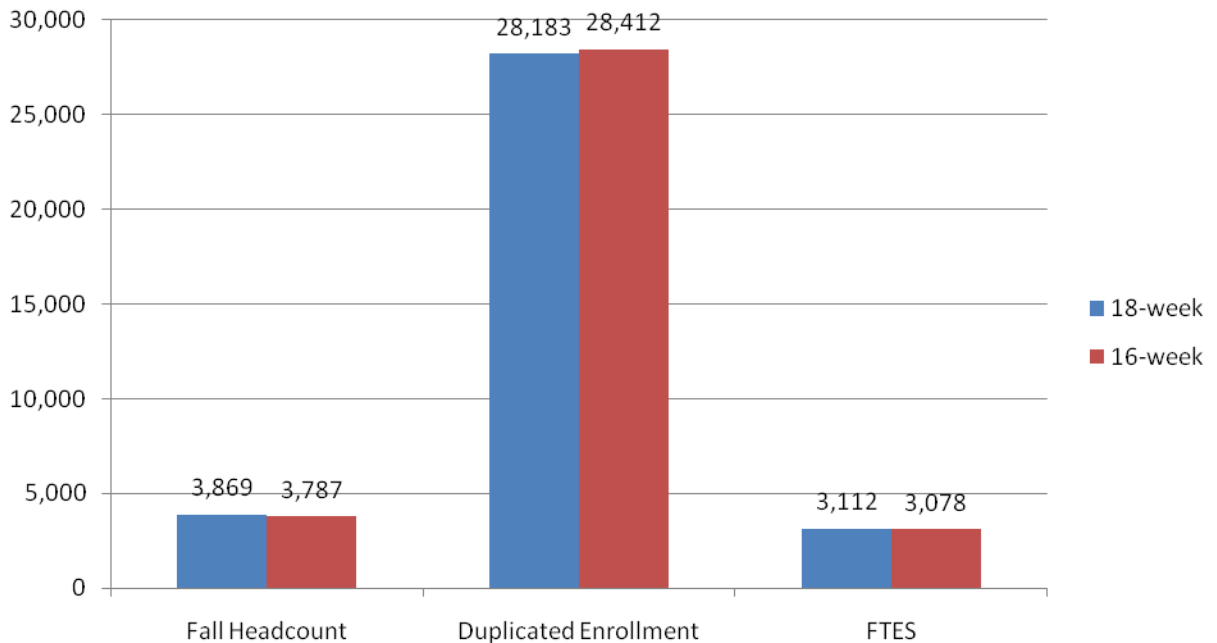
Attempted & Earned Units by Calendar Type: Full Time Only



Average Number of Sections Offered By Term Type and Calendar Type



Headcount, Annual Enrollment, & FTES by Calendar Type



Survey Results: Questions 1-4

1. Since switching to the 16-week calendar in Fall 2006, how, if at all, has the amount of material you cover in your classes been affected?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	I cover more material now than under the previous calendar	9	15.3	15.8	15.8
	I cover the same amount of material as I did before	31	52.5	54.4	70.2
	I cover less material in my classes with the new calendar	17	28.8	29.8	100.0
	Total	57	96.6	100.0	
Missing	-1.00	2	3.4		
Total		59	100.0		

2. How, if at all, has the quality of learning been affected in your classes by the calendar change?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Learning has improved in my classes with the new calendar	19	32.2	33.3	33.3
	Learning is about the same as it was	28	47.5	49.1	82.5
	Learning has deteriorated with the calendar change	10	16.9	17.5	100.0
	Total	57	96.6	100.0	
Missing	-1.00	2	3.4		
Total		59	100.0		

3. How, if at all, has the atmosphere in your classes been affected by the calendar change?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Atmosphere has improved with the calendar change	19	32.2	33.3	33.3
	Atmosphere is about the same as it was	30	50.8	52.6	86.0
	Atmosphere has deteriorated since the calendar change	8	13.6	14.0	100.0
	Total	57	96.6	100.0	
Missing	-1.00	2	3.4		
Total		59	100.0		

4. How, if at all, has your ability to manage your work schedule been affected by the calendar change?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	My schedule is easier to manage now	12	20.3	21.1	21.1
	My schedule management is about the same as it was	19	32.2	33.3	54.4
	My schedule is more difficult to manage with the calendar c	26	44.1	45.6	100.0
	Total	57	96.6	100.0	
Missing	-1.00	2	3.4		
Total		59	100.0		

Responses to Open-Ended Question

Question 5: Please list here any other comments you have that the Academic Senate should consider. Please be brief, specific, and constructive. (Limit 1,024 characters--about 150 words or so).

ID Comment

- 2 I enjoy the 16 week calendar and hope we keep the same schedule in the future.
- 3 The 16-week calendar has been a welcomed change to the PC calendar.
- 4 It is very difficulty to schedule and cover lab material with the new schedule.
- 6 I have to admit that I didn't think I would like the 16-week semester but now that I've settled into the routine I love it! My classes are longer to be sure but that means I have more time to (a) do planned activities with groups, (b) take time out to review concepts from previous classes, (c)give more time for quizzes and exams, and (d) have students come to the board to present solutions to problems. The 16-week semester has challenged me to change the way I teach and the way I think about teaching...for the better!
- 7 It took some getting use to, but I feel that students do better with the shorter semester
- 8 It is definitely busier during the semester. Also, I am not sure students are committing the necessary (increased) time outside class. I think the time students put in outside of class should be surveyed.
- 9 Student learning is adversely affected when faculty are not able to meet with one another on a regular basis to discuss teaching-related issues and collaborate with one another to meet challenges.
- 11 I don't like it, but it has become the standard for most of the other community colleges in the state, so I guess I will learn to adjust over time
- 12 It is more difficult to schedule and attend meetings.
- 13 Don't mess with it anymore. It works good as is,you know the feeling.
- 14 Students have stated that they really like the 16 week calendar. It gives them more of an opportunity to work when we are not in session.
- 15 The 16-week calendar has caused little change in my classes. Simply managing the time a bit differently and developing some creative new assignments allows me to cover the same material as I did before. At the same time, students seem to be a bit less likely to go missing along the way. This doesn't surprise me given the research that is out there. It is also unsurprising since many semester-system colleges and universities in all the states with which I am familiar have traditionally followed a 16-week semester. The fact that we have more classroom time than than other 16-week colleges and universities (because ours is compressed from 18) seems to give us the best of both worlds.
- 16 These have been my problems: difficult to find time to eat; no open hour when students and faculty can all attend capus events; very difficult to coordinate meetings; weird starting and ending times for classes are confusing
- 17 My Prep time has changed to cover the longer time in class..need to be prepared from the get go!
- 18 The semester is faster paced, but doable. Students appear to prefer shorter calendar.
- 19 There's less time to cover the material adequately. Students like it because it fits today's lifestyle of quick and short. Fewer people want to spend time on mastering the information that's provided to them. No one is still teaching after 9:30 at night when the classes are scheduled till 10:00 p.m. The parking lot is cleared out significantly by about 9:00 p.m. This opinion is beyond the survey, but this space was provided for "other comments". I also think it would be a good idea if teachers were discouraged from cancelling anywhere from 4 to 7 classes per term without substitute instruction. Obviously the student's experience is considerably lessened at all levels. Why are instructors allowed to give their finals early, say the week before finals week? Why is there no final written exam with some teachers where it would be expected. Projects represent one aspect of learning but responding with a written expression would indicate the ability to communicate the concepts.
- 20 The odd times for classes is the greatest obstacle for the students and me.
- 21 1. The pace of the class has become faster and scares some students. 2. Students spend more time memorizing rather than learning due to less time for study and see number 4. If we fall behind, it's harder to get caught up. 4. This is because the tests are closer together & homework turned in sooner so grading papers becomes more frequent.

- 22 My students are performing better. The shortened semester allows my students to work more which ultimately helps their attendance.
- 23 1. All it takes is being absent one or two days for the schedule to consume the time...less gets done, even with planning and the extra 27.48 minutes (or whatever the number really is). 2. I have not noticed a significant increase nor decrease in overall grades, but if one considers that less material may be covered, this surely affects overall student learning. 3. Since the 16-week calendar has created so many schedule conflicts and since allowing overlapping classes has been discontinued, the atmosphere is significantly worse in my class, primarily due to the feeling of futility in building a program with so many conflicts being forced "top down" onto us. 4. I cannot seem to find a slot in the schedule where student access to my classes is not in direct conflict with other classes. This was far less a problem before the switch to 16-week.
- 24 Question #1 is inappropriate. The authentic implementation of SLOs into our pedagogical practices implies that instructors can no longer ethically act like vending machines dispensing knowledge. Our purpose is to facilitate learning, NOT TO COVER MATERIAL. There is abundant literature on this topic. Please see, "Creating Significant Learning Experiences" available in our PC library. Also, the 1 hr 25 min available for 3 unit classes is fantastic. It allows an appropriate amount of time for explanation, discussion, and active reflective writing activities.
- 27 The change has been great. It forces you to be more focused and prepared. It made me reconsider how I was teaching which resulted in changing how I presented material and challenged me to do things different. There isn't time for midterm boredom.
- 28 I appreciate the 16-week calendar over the 17.5-week. Yes I have to teach a bit more in the time I am allowed, but this schedule is beneficial and prepares them to the university's fast pace.
- 29 I am unable to cover the amount of material I was able to cover during a 17.5-week calendar. I feel as though I am on a time line and must rush through the material to get all the topics covered in class.
- 30 The change to 16 weeks has not been good for science labs. Instead of getting 3-hour blocks, the schedule makes up the loss of 2 weeks by giving 3:10-hour blocks. I can't do much extra with that added 10 minutes (we can't do a lab PLUS 1/36th of a lab), so it doesn't really make up for the fact that I have effectively lost 2 weeks worth of labs.
- 32 By the end of the 16-week semester it seems that I have covered a little less material than I used to under the 17.5-week calendar. Classes which meet only once or twice a week are suffer more loss to holidays than before.
- 33 #3 - students are a bit more stressed with the amount of material which must be processed in a shorter overall semester, and with the amount of material which must be processed during one class meeting. some students say it is more difficult to schedule their work around class times.
- 34 I have specific content and objectives required by both State and Federal certification/licensure umbrellas. This schedule does not allow the process time required for more complex material and limits discussion time for instructor explanations and clarifications. Also, it is difficult to take classroom time for administering exams.
- 36 Since I teach two skill-based courses in 8-week sessions, the sessions are more intense and there is less time to achieve higher skills. I have eliminated some coursework to concentrate on speed skills and accurate production work, but with any skill, the more practice the better to achieve competency. That was challenging for me at first, but an instructor always has to be flexible. I also inform the students of the importance of good attendance. In my other course, I chose to eliminate some chapters and condense more information into each session in the 8-week period.
- 37 I've found that my students do much better with a shorter term. They are more willing to stick through the entire semester this way. I had a 10-week term in Grad school & undergrad and loved it.
- 38 We need to go back to the expectation that faculty who do not teach Friday classes will be available for meetings on that day. When CLC made that change the impression was reinforced that Friday was a day to stay home.
- 40 The current time schedule has made it more difficult for campus events to be planned for, CHAP for example, and for students to attend these events. "Outside" speakers and other events add so much to a student's education and to the campus culture--in fact it is campus "culture." If the compressed calendar continues, having one "sacred hour" a week to schedule events would enable more events to happen and enable more attendance at these events. Actually it is harder for faculty to produce events for the campus because faculty have to work more during the compressed calendar and have less time for "extracurricular" activities.

- 41 The students seem to be more focused over 16 weeks. 18 weeks was to long.
- 43 Even one missed class causes a noticeable loss of time to cover all material in the 16-week format. Also, it makes planning a class schedule far more difficult and causes far more class conflicts because the traditional 50-minute blocks of time fit so smoothly together.
- 45 It is nearly impossible to schedule time with my students away from class.
- 46 Why collect this information when it's been made clear that as long as students' retention rates, success rates, etc are the same or better, the 16 week calendar will remain. How it impacts faculty will not be taken into account.
- 47 Most of my comments come from observations of faculty as a whole. There is a strong pressure existing with the 16th week. Most faculty feel overwhelmed and stressed to get everything done. Everyone is running and trying to keep up. Also, as a campus there is less time for any events and more and more faculty are isolated from each other. The social human interaction between faculty and students seem to be left up to e-mail instead of true physical interaction. Is all this rushing around really accomplishing the academic excellence pursued? Wasn't this based on an intercession which has never been implemented? Service to our students is what sets Porterville College apart from many colleges, but it is harder to provide the many elements of service when time is cut so short.
- 48 Things seem more rushed with the 16 week calendar. Schedules seem complicated and illogical with the 16 week calendar. I liked the slower pace of the 18 week calendar, but don't see any real difference in what my students achieve.
- 50 I believe I came on board in January 2007 but, having taught at other colleges with more weeks per semester, I am answering your questions by comparing "there" with "here". I have ALWAYS noticed that SHORTER SEMESTERS result in INCREASED PRODUCTION per minute. Another case in point is that SUMMER SCHOOL SEMESTERS are HIGHLY PRODUCTIVE. There definitely seems to be a direct relationship. Perhaps in part it is that a STATE OF MIND exists when one knows that they have to keep marching, marching, marching toward that destination. There tends to be a TIGHT BUDGETING OF TIME.
- 53 Many of the students who receive financial aid who experience a personal problem find difficulty in catching up with assignments. The assignments are too bunch up during the week; many students just drop the class instead of trying to make up the work.
- 55 Scheduling is crammed through a matrix and mandated by administrators that have never been in a classroom teaching. What difference does any of this make?
- 57 Anatomy P052 students have a harder time learning the material with the 16 week calendar because so much information is taught to them each class. On the 18 week calendar the class met 3 days a week for 50 minutes. The information was taught in smaller more frequent intervals and the level of frustration was never as high as it is now. Anatomy P052 students are very overwhelmed at the end of each class session since it meets twice a week for 80 minutes.
- 58 Students learn better when classes are 1 hour 3X a week, than 1 1/2 hours/ twice a week...at least that my students say. (Seems to keep them "in" the material more) Seems harder for students to fit in convenient scheduling for themselves, definitely harder for fellow teachers and myself to schedule rooms. Drop rate has not improved in my class (since going onto the 16 week schedule) Student learning rate the same...I am just covering less.
- 59 The staff is friendly and helpful at all levels. The improvements to the campus have rejuvenated the attitudes of the staff. If there could be a way to add a component to the registration process that ensures students take the assessment tests it would be helpful. There's still a large enough percentage of people who select a class based only on the course description or someone's suggestion, and they incorrectly place themselves. Some of these students, when told they need to move up or down in the course sequence, decide to remain where they put themselves. Naturally, their grades land in the two extremes.