

D.O. Rhoodie

The functional structure of the academic year at higher education institutions in the United States of America and at South African technikons, with particular reference to the communication sciences

ABSTRACT

The decision to undertake this study was based on the belief that both time management and the time-allocation framework of the academic year of South African technikons, specifically as regards journalism, public relations and mass communications programmes, needs substantial organisational and functional restructuring to come to terms with radically changed societal, economical, political and educational realities. Legitimacy, quality assurance and resources are the three main components of an educational system. Time is a vital resource as well. The major thrust of the study was to ascertain at first-hand how the American academic calendar works in practice and whether it offers distinct advantages that could practically and in accordance with current legislation and policy be introduced in the academic calendar of South African technikons in general, and communications programmes in particular. This included looking at continuous student assessment and summative final examinations insofar as they impact on the use of academic time for teaching. In conclusion, the study proposes the creation of a new time mould which will result in a more effective use of existing academic time and also provides a number of additional benefits and advantages to both student and teacher/instructor.

Dr. Denys Rhoodie has been associated with Technikon Pretoria for the past 17 years, inter alia as head of the Department of Journalism and Public Relations and as Academic Director of the School of Communication Sciences. He currently teaches Political Science and Journalism in the Department of Journalism. He is a graduate of both the University of Cape Town and Pretoria University, and is accredited as an APR. Over the past 10 years he has, in total, spent more than a year visiting schools and departments of journalism and mass communication in the United States of America, including two continuous periods of four months.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Despite various refinements and innovations introduced over the past 20 years, no fundamental change has really been made to the very foundation of the technikon academic system, namely the time-allocation framework of the academic year. This invited the following question: Can one continue adding new or changed educational demands, personnel functions, teaching methods and organisational units without considering whether the very chassis of the educational vehicle, the academic calendar, should be redesigned? Flowing from this, it seemed logical and practical to undertake an empirical-analytical first-hand study of the academic calendar used by the world's strongest and most advanced higher education system, viz. that of the United States of America. The American institutions chosen were restricted to accredited universities offering four-year first-degree programmes in the mass communication disciplines, since a four-year bachelor's degree has become the typical prerequisite for entry into the mass media professions (Cf. Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986:165-166, Becker, 1987:7). Seven four-year institutions were selected from the states of Texas and Florida, two of the eleven states resorting under the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), one of the six regional associations formulating accreditation standards for universities throughout the entire US: Southern Methodist University (SMU), Texas Christian University (TCU), and the University of North Texas, in Texas, and Flagler College, Jacksonville University, the University of North Florida (UNF), and the University of Florida, in Florida. This selection provided a balanced variety of institutions and educational circumstances, ranging from small to large private universities and state universities.

Individual discussion sessions were held over one four month period with 47 academics (professors), including deans and heads of departments, and with members of academic administration, including designates such as Vice-President for Academic Affairs, Vice-Provost for Academic Affairs, President-Elect of the Faculty Senate, Chairperson of the University Calendar Committee, Director of Institutional Research, Registrar, and Director of Academic Advising. Apart from talks with individual students, four organised discussion/question sessions were held with altogether 80 upper-level students at SMU, TCU, and North Florida University. Other institutions visited during previous visits included the Department of Journalism, Baylor University (Texas), the College of Journalism at the University of Maryland, the Department of Journalism, University of Texas (Austin), the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University (New York), and the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill).

In South Africa, only the technikon system, as distinct from the university system, was included.

Some 12,5 million undergraduate students attend more than 3 600 higher education colleges and universities in the United States, with over one million bachelor's degrees awarded annually (Almanac of Higher Education, 1994:4), whereas the 14 South African technikons (excluding Technikon SA) had a combined head count of just over 86 000 enrolled students in 1996 (Committee of Technikon Principals Survey, July 1997). A parallel point-by-point comparison of two systems of such vast disparity in size, maturity and diversity made no practical sense. It made more sense to look at the two systems separately and then deduce whether the US academic calendar offers practical advantages of real benefit to South African technikons.

The study was deliberately not aimed at evaluating curricula content, teaching methods and student assessment standards, but logically required a thorough look at the American student evaluation system insofar as it impacted on time available for actual teaching/training. The major thrust was to ascertain whether the American academic calendar structure offered advantages that could practically and in line with educational legislation be included in the academic calendar of South African technikons in general and the journalism, public relations and mass communication programmes in particular. In essence, the research was of developmental and strategic nature, geared towards achievement of functionally feasible outcomes.

At an advanced stage of research, important steps were taken in South Africa to introduce a fundamentally new national education policy and system for higher education. A perusal of official documentation at hand confirmed that the theme still was very relevant and the original research design, sound and appropriate. A reading of the final Education White Paper (SA, 1997a) and the eventual Higher Education Act, Act 101 of 1997 (SA, 1997b), and visits to the Department of Education and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), reinforced these conclusions.

THE ACADEMIC CALENDAR YEAR IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Introduction

An outside observer briefly assessing the American higher education landscape, is immediately struck by its tremendous and rather bewildering diversity and decentralisation, by an institutional fabric reflecting an intricate assortment of diversified institutions with a wide variety of names, and by an absence of national (federal) planning and policy control. However, the following relevant features can be distinguished:

American educational policy is characterised by independence from federal (central) government control.

American educators follow a policy of self-assessment and self-regulation, primarily through a system of academic accreditation by 6 voluntary regional associations of colleges (universities) covering the entire US.

American higher education institutions have divorced themselves from the British (Oxford/Cambridge) tradition of separating teaching from examination. The use of a time-based credit system for class schedules and graduation requirements.

Time-allocation framework of the American academic year

The academic calendar refers to the period of time during a year devoted to teaching activities and student evaluation. The so-called early Semester System (Fall or Autumn Term: September to just before Christmas) and the Spring Term (mid-January to May) have become the most common academic calendar in use (Munson, 1990:178 & 194). At the beginning of 1986, counting both public and private institutions, 2 260 higher education institutions, 67,66% from a total of 3 340, used the Semester calendar or a variation thereof, 820 (24,55%) used the Quarter calendar, 112 (3,35%) the Trimester calendar, and 157 (4,70%) used other systems (American Council on Education, 1989-90:140). In 1984, the state university system (12 of the 50 States plus Washington, D.C.) still used the Quarter Terms, but by 1997 only 5 States were still applying the Quarter System. The percentage using the Semester System (public and private institutions combined), currently may well exceed 70%.

Of particular significance is the fact that, in addition to the full or long academic terms, the overwhelming majority of four-year institutions have credit-earning academic Summer Sessions in the form of approximately two 6-week terms or one 12-week term, with a limited number of courses (subjects) and increased class hours providing the same credit-hour opportunities per subject as during normal Semester or Quarter terms. Some advantages of this vital mechanism are mentioned below. In addition, it must be noted that this mechanism also applies to the Quarter Term system, because in reality, the American Quarter System consists of three 11-week terms of normal class attendance (i.e. of the same total duration as the two 16-week terms of the Semester System), with the fourth quarter term in effect being the equivalent of the semester calendar's Summer Term. To bring about a balance in terms of credit, with the Semester System, 3 quarter hours equal 2 semester hours.

In Texas, the State's Higher Education Coordinating Board Rules for public (state-supported) institutions states that a Semester shall include at least 15 weeks for instruction and 1 week for final examinations, or 16 weeks instruction and examinations combined, and that each of the two Summer Terms shall include no less than 5 calendar weeks including registration, instruction, and final examinations. The State of Florida's

Administrative Code expects all state universities to provide for a total of 220 days of instruction, including examinations, or 210 days of instruction excluding examinations, in their two Semesters and Summer Terms combined. A Semester Credit Hour is defined as a credit based on the learning expected from the equivalent of 15 fifty-minute periods of classroom instruction, but with the provision that laboratory and internship work can earn credits.

Of the 6 regional accrediting bodies that accredit all public and private higher education institutions for the entire US, only the Western Association and the Northwest Association refer to student contact time by defining the academic year as consisting of at least two Semesters of 15 weeks each or three 10-week Quarters of academic class work. The Southern Association (SACS), which includes Texas and Florida, makes no mention of academic calendars or credit in its accreditation guidelines, but simply states that an institution must demonstrate that educational programme length, clock hours or credit hours are appropriate for the degrees it offers. From information supplied by 945 institutions using the early semester calendar, the overwhelming majority has changed to a calendar with fewer instructional days (mostly from a 16-week semester of about 80 days to a 15-week calendar of approximately 75 days), resulting in an average of 73,8 instructional days for the Fall Semester and 74,8 days for the Spring Semester (Munson, 1990). (Project sponsored by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers).

All seven universities visited use the Early Semester Calendar. Generally speaking, the Autumn-Spring academic year consists of two 15 week Semesters, plus 1 week each for final examinations, usually when taken, during a normal class period. And generally speaking, there are 3 Summer Session Terms, two of 5 or 6 calendar week duration and one of 10 to 12 calendar week duration. At the time of the visit, the public University of Florida had 76 class days during the Fall Semester and 76 days during the Spring Semester, and the private universities of SMU and TCU 72 and 73 days and 73 and 71 days, respectively. For Fall 1997 and Spring 1998, SMU planned for 69 days and 68 days respectively, i.e. a total of 137 days for classes.

As in the case of most Early Semester institutions, North Florida uses a Monday/Wednesday/Friday and a Tuesday/Thursday class schedule arrangement, with periods of 50 minutes and 75 minutes, respectively. Summer Term classes meet for 100 minutes, Monday through Friday. At SMU, there basically are one-hour lectures on Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and one and a half hour lectures on Tuesday and Thursday. During the two five-week Summer Terms, classes meet for two hours a day (per subject), Monday to Friday, and during the combined ten-week Summer Term classes could meet for 2 hours and 15 minutes twice a week or for 1 hour and 30 minutes three times a week.

Interviews with both academic professors and senior academic administrators reflected a broad acceptance of the Semester System being better balanced and more practical than the Quarter System. In some respects the Quarter System does have certain advantages, like more condensed time-frames, but overall and considering all aspects involved in instruction (e.g. sufficient in-depth study, the learning rate of students, reasonable time to complete assignments and projects, etc.), the Semester System is accepted as the superior of the two systems. When asked for their preference, 15 professors at 5 institutions who actually had experience of the Quarter System, including 1 who taught in the Trimester System, 14 without hesitation preferred the Semester System, while 1 expressed a qualified acceptance of the Semester System.

Student evaluation methods and academic time utilisation

American degree-awarding institutions decisively moved away from the Oxcam tradition of separating teaching from final examinations, and from attempting to achieve common compulsory standards of evaluation through a system of external examiners and moderators. Evaluation takes place by means of continuous assessment, and final examinations are limited to a maximum of five days (prescribed by State legislatures for public institutions and generally followed by private universities). The teacher/instructor compiles and supervises the final exam, if indeed there is one, and decides on the weight of such an exam relative to overall assessment. A random sample of 20 courses (subjects) at 5 universities visited, mostly journalism and public relations, but also including political science courses, showed that apart from courses which had no final examination or only final projects/portfolios, the weight of final examination marks varied from 10% to 30% of total final assessment. Thus tradition, practice and legal prescription firstly have restricted the role and weight of final examinations drastically, and secondly by doing so, made possible the introduction of Summer Terms to bring about multi-purpose flexibility in the education system.

Students earn one credit unit for each hour in class per week over the semester period of 15 weeks, but laboratory and practical work generally require two or three hours of work to earn one credit unit. Mostly students take 5 courses per semester, with 3 credit units per course at stake. To graduate, a student will have to accumulate a total of at least 120 credit units or hours.

The large majority of American higher institutions group students' academic achievements in categories or classes by way of letter-grades. It appears that students have few complaints about letter-grade assessment. Virtually every professor involved in this study strongly favoured a letter-grade final course evaluation. Letter-grade, it was said, take into account the natural groupings of excellent/good/average/marginal students found in most classes. Letter-grades, it was argued, identify and indicate a

category of competencies and skills or a class of achievement when judging a group of students taking a particular course, whereas it was felt that in the human and communication disciplines the percentage-ladder system was a too subjective measurement creating "the appearance of impersonal objectivity" or "an illusion of preciseness". Some professors remarked that employers were less interested in percentages than in the category of skills and competence in which the university placed the particular student applicant.

Advantages of American summer academic terms

The very strict time limit imposed on final examinations, the inclusion of final exams as an integral part of continuous evaluation, and the letter-grade system, made possible the creation of credit-earning Summer Terms and thereby fundamentally affected academic time-utilisation and the time-structure of the academic calendar.

Certain misgivings were expressed about Summer Terms, particularly if viewed in isolation. It was said that the short time scale of a Summer Term and the short time intervals between class sessions resulted in students primarily getting "knowledge (facts) but not sufficient understanding, insight and comprehension". This meant lack of adequate time for proper contemplation, not enough interaction with the teacher and insufficient time to properly complete self-study assignments and off-campus projects. However, when seen as supplementary to and supporting the two main Semester Terms, it is generally accepted that Summer Terms bring about a significant greater flexibility to the organisational and academic activities, while also extending the range, diversity and extent of these activities.

Virtually all professors and students spoken to regarded the Summer Term as a necessary and valuable part of the academic year. The following are some advantages mentioned during discussions:

Students can lighten their course loads without losing overall time in completing a degree programme.

Students who are getting behind in their studies and who want to catch up, can use the Summer Terms for such purposes. Students can also accelerate their studies with the aid of Summer Terms, thereby creating more time to be devoted to their majors or more complex courses or internships.

Summer Sessions tend (in practice) to be more relaxed by nature because classes are generally smaller, fewer courses per session promote a sharper study focus, and students get more individual assistance.

The three to four month Summer interval enables students to find vacation jobs. At the University of Florida, the ninth largest university in the US, some 70% of all students work to a greater or lesser extent, while a survey undertaken in 1995 at the University of North Texas, the fourth largest university in the State of Texas, showed that 85% of students enrolled at the time of the survey, worked either full-time or part-time.

Professors/instructors are afforded the opportunity of teaching a course which they are particularly interested in but which the Semester class schedule grid might not permit. They can also use the Summer break for self-development, research, working in industry to stay updated, or to generate additional income (professors are, in effect, paid a salary for nine months, the equivalent of a normal academic year).

There is no stigma attached to a Summer Term course, because it is a full-fledged course (in terms of contact and credit) for which a student must register and pay, as well as submit to formal examination.

ACADEMIC TIME MANAGEMENT AT SOUTH AFRICAN TECHNIKONS

Introduction

In terms of SAQA regulations planned for promulgation in 1998, it appeared that one would be able to differentiate between a 4 year technikon degree and a 3 year university degree on the basis of three criteria: firstly, a credits distinction (480 credits against 360), secondly, a difference in education levels in terms of the National Qualifications Framework (level 7 against level 6), and thirdly, a qualification title distinction, e.g. B. Tech. (Journalism) as distinct from a B.A. (Communication Studies).

Official documents and legislation at hand when the study was undertaken, provided little detail about the academic time utilisation aspect. However, a fundamental principle regarding the organisation of learning (syllabus contents, assessment criteria and learning outcomes) in the new dispensation, has a direct bearing on the time factor, namely the acceptance by SAQA of the Unit Standard concept, which is linked to a time/credit system (SAQA Decision 0208/96, as amended 8 November 1996, Decision 0302/96). SAQA adopted "a credit system on the basis of 1 credit equaling 10 notional hours of learning, motivated in context in each case" (SAQA Decision 0209/96). In other words, each Unit Standard of learning will be valued at a specific number of credit units, with each credit unit reflecting ten notional hours of learning. In turn, notional hours of learning was defined as "the learning time that it is conceived it would take an average learner to meet the outcomes defined, and includes concepts such as contact time, time spent in structured learning in the work-place and individual

learning". This shows that time allocation will remain the basis of academic activities, but with the hypothetical adjective "notional" introducing a degree of flexibility.

Accreditation and the academic year

Currently, the Certification Council for Technikon Education (SERTEC) is still the supreme accreditation body for all technikon educational programmes, and performs this function within the framework of the general education policy determined by the Central Government's Minister of Education (SERTEC, 1996: Section 3.1).

In terms of this policy (Report 150, 96/01), academic credits are not awarded to individual courses (subjects). A complete instructional programme involving a full year's academic study for a full-time student represents one credit (Section 3.2). Experiential time (internships/in-service training) may cover no more than a maximum of 33,33% of the credits for a 3 year technikon diploma instructional programme, and experiential time need not necessarily form a component of technikon instructional programmes (Section 2.2.2). Most important: Policy Report 150 specifically states that the credit value of an instructional programme includes no reference to how such a programme is to be offered (e.g. module, semester or year-based curriculums) or examined (examinations) (Section 3.2).

All this must be read in conjunction with, and bearing in mind, the South African Qualifications Authority Act and the Higher Education Act, and the SAQA multi-level unit standard credit system based on 10 notional hours of learning equaling 1 credit.

In contrast to the American evaluation system, SERTEC prescribes that student evaluation in all subjects must be monitored by an internal or external moderator (SERTEC Manual: section 2.6). Final assessment must be calculated from a combination of a year or semester mark and a final examination mark (although the specific weighting of the examination mark can be as determined by a technikon (Cf. Sections 3.2, 3.2, 3.8, and 3.10). However, and of substantial importance to this study, SERTEC does provide for an alternative evaluation procedure, viz. a system of continuous evaluation/assessment without a final summative examination, but with a minimum of 60% of marks to be moderated by external or internal moderators (Cf. Sections 3.23, 3.26, and 3.27-3.29). Although a minimum of 60% for moderating appears to be highly excessive in the case of higher education, it at least provides an alternative assessment mechanism to the traditional final examination system.

To summarise: With reference to parameters within which to manoeuvre regarding academic time management at technikons, the following points can be taken into consideration: There are no existing SERTEC prescriptions regarding the number of

contact (teaching) days per academic year for an instructional programme or the number of class hours per course (subject). There are no references to a compulsory semester or year duration of courses (subjects). There is nothing that prevents a technikon from introducing a so-called Academic Summer Term. The statutory responsibility for establishing education and training standards for higher education has now been vested in SAQA's National Standards Bodies (NSBs). These bodies will have to take cognisance of SAQA's Unit Standard Credit System. To date this development does not appear to diminish the practical possibility of a technikon time-managing its academic year in such a way as to provide for the creation of Academic Summer Terms.

Journalism and Mass Communication programmes

Since the visit to the United States primarily targeted departments of journalism and mass communication, particularly journalism and public relations programmes, it is appropriate to refer to journalism and public relations programmes at some South African technikons. In 1997, 5 of South Africa's residential technikons offered journalism programmes and 7 offered one or more of a variety of public relations programmes. The journalism programmes involved a combined total of 524 students at various levels, while public relations programmes involved a combined total of 1 152 students. (Data provided by the departments concerned).

South African technikons organise their academic calendar on a two semester calendar year basis, but with no credit-earning Academic Summer Terms at either mid-year or end of year. In 1997, the Cape Technikon had a total of 145 teaching days (76 plus 69 for the two semesters), while in 1994 Technikon Pretoria had a total of 148 class days (74 plus 74) and planned for 154 class days for 1998 (81 plus 73). In 1997, Peninsula Technikon had an academic year consisting of two 20 week semesters.

In terms of time, the relatively lengthy period involved in the final examination system makes it impossible to introduce an Academic Summer Term. Yet, there is an impression that between October and January nothing substantially academic happens in practice as far as the teaching and instruction of students are concerned. At Technikon Pretoria, the non-teaching period in 1997 amounted to 36 working days, equal to 23,37%, or almost one quarter, of the proposed 154 teaching days for 1998. This does not include time taken for tests to determine year and semester marks. In contrast, the journalism programme at the Peninsula Technikon is on a fully continuous evaluation basis, i.e. no final examinations, yet nine of the forty week time-table for the year (or 22,50%) are set aside for evaluation purposes. Looking at class schedules exclusively, there is a summer time gap of anything between two and three months.

At the seven technikons offering public relations programmes in 1997 there was, for all practical purposes, no continuous evaluation of subjects in terms of the SERTEC definition. The exception was the Cape Technikon, where 9 of the 21 courses in its four year programme were evaluated on the basis of continuous evaluation. In the case of journalism programmes, Technikon Pretoria for example, had no courses subjected to continuous evaluation in 1997.

The weighting of final examination shows some interesting variations. In the case of the public relations programmes, 4 technikons (Natal, Port Elizabeth, Witwatersrand and Vaal Triangle) have weighted the year/semester marks and the final examination marks at 40% and 60% respectively, of the final combined evaluation mark, while 3 (Cape, ML Sultan and Pretoria) used a 50%-50% weighting system.

A point for debate is that although SERTEC prescribes 50% as the final pass mark for all courses, six of the above technikons use a 40% sub-minimum for entry to the final examinations and one has no sub-minimum, which means that a student can perform at a failure level for a full year in year courses and still be permitted to use one 3-hour exam to attain a pass assessment for the course as a whole. This observation also applies to journalism programmes.

Generally speaking, South African technikons still offer the main or major subjects in journalism and public relations programmes in the form of so-called "year courses". Technikon Pretoria is a case in point, with based on 1997 figures. A total of 1 783 final examinations were written, including 1 358 semester courses and 425 year courses. The year courses were mainly from the Faculty of Information Sciences and the Arts Faculty. In addition, there were 167 courses (127 semester courses and 40 year courses) which were evaluated on a continuous evaluation basis. This means that of the grand total of 1 950 courses subject to either a final examination or continuous evaluation process, only 167 (8,56%) were evaluated, in terms of SERTEC provisions, on the basis of continuous evaluation. Of the latter, most were in the Faculty of Engineering, while there were none in the journalism and public relations departments of the Faculty of Information Sciences. (Data provided by Examinations Section).

SOME OPINIONS OF AMERICAN AND SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENTS ON THE TECHNIKON SYSTEM

Almost without exception, the professors at the seven universities visited, without much hesitation, identified the major shortcomings in technikon journalism and mass communication programmes as the use of year courses, the lack of a technikon term equivalent to the American academic summer term, and in particular the final examination system.

The reaction of American and South African journalism and mass communication students appeared to reinforce these views. Interestingly, South African and American journalism and public relations students, pro rata, reacted in virtually identical fashion to the questions relating to year courses and summer terms. The students participating in the discussion and answer sessions were obviously not selected by way of a systematic probability sampling method. Nevertheless, they were involved in the sessions representing formal classes in journalism and mass communication programmes, and the process took place on the basis of thorough first-hand addresses by the author regarding both the American and the South African situation, with questions answered individually in writing and follow-up conversations with individual students. In this combined sense, the views expressed are indeed of value.

Of 80 upper-level students at TCU, SMU and NFL asked to indicate a choice between semester/quarter courses and year courses, 71 (88,75%) preferred the former (with 59 or 83% of this sub-group indicating semester courses). Of 44 students at TCU and SMU who were asked whether Summer Terms served a useful or unnecessary purpose, 37 (90,2%) thought them to be useful.

The make-up of the technikon student groups was: Peninsula: 25 1st year journalism and 19 2nd year journalism; Pretoria: 24 1st year journalism and 30 2nd year journalism, and 62 1st year public relations and 34 2nd year public relations; making a combined total of 194 students (98 journalism and 96 public relations). Of this combined total, 170 (87,63%) preferred semester courses to year courses and 179 (92,27%) favoured the introduction of a Summer Term system.

RELEVANCE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TECHNIKON STUDENTS

The various advantages expressed in favour of continuous student evaluation combined with inter-semester Summer academic terms might appear to reflect an overriding preponderance by downplaying or ignoring serious disadvantages.

However, in terms of overall weight, very few if any, disadvantages of substance were encountered during discussions and observation in the United States. As already mentioned, some misgivings were expressed about certain educational drawbacks of the short time scale of Summer Terms, but only when seen in isolation from the main academic semester terms. And, from a South African perspective, the proposals below do not imply replacing an existing system with an entirely different system and do not affect existing curricula contents, teaching methods or student evaluation techniques.

South African students and American students share the same universal overall time framework, viz the 365 day calendar year or 12 month time period, and they share it

with virtually every economic, social and political activity of societies world-wide. In fact, all South African technikons work on a two semester basis.

In respect of technikon students in the communications field of study, the proposed new academic calendar would provide most, if not all, the advantages of the American system. By comparing the Draft Calendar below with existing calendars, it is self-evident that the new system would not affect the total time to achieve formal qualifications; on the contrary, it could contribute towards preventing the uneconomic extension of degree qualifying time caused by a few subjects still outstanding. It would not affect existing vacation periods of students or teachers at all. And it would not affect the admission of students from other colleges, technikons or universities. This is important for creating a system with multiple entry and exit points (Draft White Paper on Higher Education, 18 April 1997, Chapter 2: paragraph 2.5). Furthermore, both the existing year courses and semester courses can be accommodated in the new system.

Regarding possible criticism that a switch to continuous student evaluation could result in a sort of bits and pieces evaluation without a final exam to test a student's composite and coherent understanding of the overall field related to a particular course, it could be countered by saying that continuous evaluation does not exclude concluding overview evaluation.

In South Africa a fundamentally new education dispensation has triggered a massive growth of previously disadvantaged black students at historically white technikons, resulting in a dramatic change in the cultural composition of student bodies. The total number of white full-time equivalent students at the seven historically white technikons more than halved from 84,5% in 1992 to 41% in 1996 (Report 1997. Strategic Information and Planning Division, Technikon Pretoria), while at the largest of the fourteen residential technikons, Technikon Pretoria, the number of white students dropped from 88,4% in 1992 to 37,6% in 1998 (Pocket Statistics. 1998. Strategic Information and Planning Division, Technikon Pretoria).

When looking at the journalism and mass communications programmes, a further major factor is the fact that an increasing number of students are dealing with English as a second and even a third language in acquiring knowledge and communication skills, while education policy stresses the necessity of being able to compete in the global arena (Final Education White Paper, 1997: Chapter 1, paragraphs 1.7 - 1.9).

In this broad context, the proposed new calendar for South African technikons increases the number of credit earning hours available to students, be it in organised class contact or self-learning situations, and can provide the various advantages available

to American students. This added flexibility is in harmony with the intention expressed in the Final White Paper on Higher Education of promoting "flexible learning environments" (Chapter 2: paragraph 2.62).

THE POSITION OF TEACHING PERSONNEL

Growth in student numbers has gone hand in hand with increasing pressures on financial resources. In the early 1990's the average state funding level for technikons dropped from 90,9% to 56,4% in 1993, and in 1997 the Ministry of Education stated that "significant real increases in public expenditure on higher education are unlikely to greatly exceed the real rate of economic growth" (Draft White Paper on Higher Education. April 1997. Chapter 2: paragraph 2.49). The Ministry at the same time asked for the introduction of new strategies "to improve throughput and completion rates" of students (Ibid: paragraph 2.52. Also cf. Final White Paper, July 1997, Chapter 4: paragraph 4.2).

The general effect has been to place a cumulative set of pressures on the academic (teaching) personnel. Today's technikon teacher/lecturer/instructor is expected to be appropriately qualified, to acquire further qualifications, to undertake research, to meet the current explosion of knowledge and technology, to be an entrepreneur and innovator, to sell services in the public marketplace, to spend time in industry, to internationalise or globalise his academic and technological workplace, and still have time for line function work (teaching, training and advising students, as well as scout around for internship positions for students and visit them) and for dealing with the implementation of the new higher education dispensation.

It speaks for itself that time is a major resource and that any improvement in the time structure of the academic year should be advantageous in trying to meet these challenges.

At Technikon Pretoria, for example, a full-time lecturer's on-campus academic activities were scheduled to commence on 11 January 1999 and finish on 3 December 1999. And while the student population grew from 17 514 in 1996 to 22 137 in 1998, the number of permanent teaching and professional staff actually decreased from 620 to 586 (Pocket Statistics, April 1998).

All the above activities could benefit from the proposed new academic calendar. A look at the Draft Calendar below shows that two full months of non-vacation time are added to the academic year. Good planning could ensure that a lecturer is involved in teaching activities in only one of the two Summer terms and on occasion in none of the two.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on all the aforesaid, it is proposed that a new time mould be used to bring about a new Academic Calendar which would include two Semester Terms and inter-semester credit-earning academic Summer Terms, based on semester courses and continuous student evaluation. In addition, it is suggested that a Letter-Grade evaluation system be considered, if it is student friendly and acceptable to industry.

As a concrete point of departure, the following Draft Academic Calendar, using Technikon Pretoria's 1998 Calendar as basis, is presented:

Academic terms	Duration	Class days
Summer Term B	12/1 - 13/2	25
First Semester	16/2 - 27/3	
	15/4 - 19/6	75
Easter Vacation	27/3 - 15/4	
Mid-year Vacation	19/6 - 13/7	
Second Semester	13/7 - 23/9	
	5/10 - 4/11	75
Spring Vacation	23/9 - 5/10	
Summer Term A	9/11 - 11/12	25
Summer Vacation	11/12 - 8/1/99	

Explanatory notes:

The two Semesters of the Draft Calendar have a total of 150 class days compared to 145 (in 1997) at the Cape Technikon and 148 (in 1994) and 154 (in 1998) at Technikon Pretoria. The Calendar's 150 semester days plus 50 summer term days are in line with the American system, which appears to have found a practical balance and satisfactory flexibility for the academic year. The Calendar can only work on the basis of continuous evaluation, but not by simply off-loading the existing over-regulated final exam system in toto onto the proposed new academic sessions. One wants to avoid the criticism

the Wall Street Journal leveled at the State of New York's hospital system, viz. that it was "one of the most tightly regulated and inefficient health-care infrastructures in the nation". (October 25, 1996:1).

The advantage of the proposed system is that any individual technikon can adopt it. Furthermore, the system lends itself to implementation by individual departments or by faculties or by a technikon as a whole. In fact, both systems could be used side by side: the journalism and mass communications programmes could use the new system without affecting other programmes. It is suggested that one of the communications study programmes at one of the technikons considers obtaining permission in the prescribed manner to implement the new system on a trial basis. At worst, it would be relatively easy to revert to the existing system.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATION

The proposed new academic calendar has the potential to lead to more effective education and training of students, to lessen the frustrations of students with the way their academic progress is measured and interpreted, to promote research activities and advance the overall efficiency and motivation of teachers and, in short, to create a more practical, flexible and better balanced academic year. It would be in line with the official encouragement of "flexible learning environments" and a "flexible learning system" with "a diversity of programme mixes". (Final White Paper on Higher Education. July 1997. Chapter 2: paragraphs 2.6 and 2.62).

REFERENCES

ACTS see SOUTH AFRICA

ALTBACH, P.G. 1991. *International Higher Education*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.

AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EDUCATION. 1987. *American Universities and Colleges*. New York: Walter de Gruyter, Inc.

AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EDUCATION. 1989-90. *Fact Book on Higher Education*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co.

BECKER, L.B. et al. 1987. *The Training and Hiring of Journalists*. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

CERTIFICATION COUNCIL FOR TECHNIKON EDUCATION (SERTEC). 1996. *Manual for the Evaluation of Standards at Technikons*. SERTEC 1 - 05 (08/96). Pretoria: SERTEC.

CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION. 1994. *The Almanac of Higher Education*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

CLARK, R. and NEAVE, G.R. 1992. *The Encyclopedia of Higher Education*. New York: Pergamon Press.

COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMINATION BOARD. 1997. *The College Handbook*. New York.

COLEMAN, D. 1983. Academic calendar change impact on enrollment patterns and institutional outcomes. Florida: The State University System of Florida. ERIC Document ED 232 581.

DEINOZKA, E. & KAPEL, D.E. 1991. American Educators' Encyclopedia. New York: Greenwood Press.

DEPARTMENT of Education see SOUTH AFRICA. Department of Education.

ELMORE, G.C. 1990. The Communication Disciplines in Higher Education: A Guide to Academic Programs in the United States and Canada. Kentucky: The Association for Communication Administration and the Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication.

GAUNT, P. 1988. The Training of Journalists in France, Britain and the U.S. Journalism Quarterly: 65(3): 582-588.

KNOWLES, A.S. 1977. The International Encyclopedia of Higher Education. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

MUNSON, G.W. 1990. Variations on a Theme: The Semester Calendar. In: College and University. Washington, D.C.: The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers.

OREGON, University of. 1987 (2nd ed.). Planning for Curricular Changes: A Report of the Project on the Future of Journalism and Mass Communication Education. Eugene, Oregon: School of Journalism, University of Oregon.

SA see South Africa

SOUTH AFRICA. 1995. South African Qualifications Authority Act, Act 58 of 1995. Pretoria: Government Printer.

SOUTH AFRICA. Department of Education. 1996. General Policy for Technikon Instructional Programmes. Report 150 (96/01). Pretoria: Government Printer.

SOUTH AFRICA. Department of Education. 1997. Formal Technikon Instructional Programmes. Report 151 (97/01). Pretoria: Government Printer.

SOUTH AFRICA. Department of Education, 1997a. Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education. Government Gazette:18207, 15 August 1997.

SOUTH AFRICA. 1997b. Higher Education Act, Act No. 101 of 1997. Pretoria: Government Printer.

SOUTH AFRICAN QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY. 1997. Draft Regulations for National Standards Bodies. Notice 764 of 1997. Government Gazette No. 17970, 9 May 1997. Pretoria: Government Printer.

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANISATION (UNESCO). 1976. World Guide to Higher Education. Paris: The Unesco Press; New York: Unipub.

WEAVER, D.H. and WILHOIT, G.C. 1986. The American Journalist. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

WEAVER, D.H. and WILHOIT, G.C. 1988. A profile of JMC educators: traits, attitudes and values. Journalism Educator: 43 (2): 4-41. Summer.

PERSONS CONSULTED

ALBARRAN, Prof Alan B. Assistant Dean: Research and Information Technology. Former Director: Center for Communication Arts. SMU.

BABBILI, Prof Anantha S. Chairperson: Department of Journalism. TCU. Vice President: International Communication Section, International Association for Mass Communication Research (IAMCR) (1992-1994). Former Honorary Consultant, United Nations, re international communication.

BARCLAY, Prof Russell. The John and Eleanor Chair in Mass Communication Department of Mass Communication, Florida Southern College.

- BARRETT, Dr Kathy. Communication Science and Public Relations, School of Management, Cape Technikon, Cape Town.
- BOHLE, Prof Robert H. Chairperson: Department of Communications and Visual Arts. University of North Florida.
- BOSHOFF, Adv Eben. Director: Legal Services and Legislation, South African Department of Education, Pretoria.
- BRANUM, Sandi. Office of the Dean, College of Arts and Science, Jacksonville University, FL.
- BURROUGHS, Gail M. Registrar Officer: Office of Records and Registration. University of North Florida, FL.
- CARBERRY, Prof Robert F. Political Science. Flagler College, St Augustine, Florida.
- CARVER, Prof Joan S. Dean: College of Arts and Science. Jacksonville University, FL.
- CHARISSE, Prof Marc. Professor of Communications. Jacksonville University.
- CLARKE III, Prof J Calvitt. Chairperson: Division of Social Sciences. Jacksonville University, FL.
- CLIFFORD, Prof Dale L. Associate Dean: College of Arts and Science. University of North Florida.
- DANIELS, CR. Director: School of Art and Design, Peninsula Technikon, Bellville (Cape Town).
- D'AVANZA-SCHRADER, Fran. Registrar: Office of Records and Registration. University of North Florida, FL.
- DAVIS, Prof Charles N. Professor of Journalism. SMU, Dallas, TX.
- DIEDERICHS, PD. Head: Department of Journalism, Faculty of Information Sciences. Technikon Pretoria.
- DIMUCCIO, Prof Ralph A. International Affairs Section: Department of Political Science. University of Florida.
- DU TOIT, Prof Brian M. Department of Anthropology. University of Florida, FL.
- FITZPATRICK, Prof Kathy R. Head: Public Relations, Center for Communication Arts. SMU, Dallas, TX.
- FOURIE MJ. Director: Academic Administration. Technikon Pretoria.
- GARTLEY, Prof John. Center for Communication Arts. SMU, Dallas, TX.
- GERHARDT, Prof James M. Department of Political Science. Member and President-Elect of the Faculty Senate. SMU, Dallas, TX.
- GRIFFITH, Prof John L. College of Journalism and Communications, University of Florida.
- GRIMM, Prof Edgar C. Advertising and Public Relations: Department of Communications and Visual Arts. University of North Florida.
- HAMMOND, Prof Frankie A. Department of Public Relations: College of Journalism and Communications. University of Florida.
- HARRIS, Prof Murray. Department of Communications. Flagler College, St Augustine, FL.
- HART, Prof Mary J. Chairperson: Department of Communications. Flagler College, St Augustine, FL.
- HOLLIS, Prof Thomas J. Professor of Communications (Television and Radio). Jacksonville University, FL.
- HONIBALL, Anna-Mari. Director: Education Centre. Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa. Johannesburg.
- HOPKINS, Prof James Kirkland. Department of History. Member of the Faculty Senate and Chairperson: University Calendar Committee. SMU, Dallas, TX.

HORVATH-NEIMEYER, Prof Paula. Department of Communications and Visual Arts. University of North Florida, FL.

HUFFMAN, Prof Suzanne. Broadcast Reporting and Radio/TV Newswriting: Center for Communication Arts. SMU, Dallas, TX.

HYATT, Debbie. Administrative Officer: Social Sciences Division. Jacksonville University, FL.

ISAACS, Samuel B. Executive Officer: South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). Pretoria.

JACKOFSKY, Dr Ellen F. Associate Provost: Academic Affairs and Faculty Development. SMU, Dallas, TX.

JACOBS, Dr DJ. Executive Director: Certification Council for Technikon Education (SERTEC). Pretoria.

JONES, Prof David. Government Documents Librarian. Jacksonville University, FL.

KELLERMAN, Dr Coenie. Academic Administration. Cape Technikon.

KELLY, Dr David. Texas Higher Education Co-ordinating Board. Division of the Universities: Accreditation and Certification. Austin, Texas.

LAND, Prof F Mitchell. Department of Journalism. University of North Texas. Denton, TX.

LEATH-SUFI, Arva L. Director of Academic Advising: College of Arts and Sciences. University of North Florida.

LEBO, Cathy. Director: Institutional Research. SMU, Dallas, TX.

LEONARD, Prof Thomas M. Distinguished Professor and Professor of History. Director: International Studies Program. University of North Florida.

LEWIS, Lynda M. Assistant Provost: Academic Affairs. University of North Florida.

LOHMAN, Jody Kabel. Reference Librarian. Jacksonville University, FL.

LOUIS, Samantha. Education Centre: Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa. Johannesburg.

MATHENY, Prof Albert R. Vice-chair, Department of Political Science. University of Florida.

McHAM, Prof David. Head: Department of Journalism. Center for Communication Arts, SMU, Dallas, TX.

McKEEN, Prof William. College of Journalism and Communications. University of Florida.

MEGWA, Dr Eronini. Head: Journalism. Peninsula Technikon. Bellville (Cape Town).

MILLER, Patrick. Registrar. TCU. Fort Worth, TX.

MILLER, Paula B. Assistant Dean: Academic Affairs. Flagler College.

MONTGOMERY, Peggy. Administrative assistant: Office of the Director, Center for Communication Arts. SMU.

MORGAN, Prof Catherine L. Associate Vice President for Enrollment Services. Jacksonville University, FL.

NEWSOM, Prof Douglas Ann. Journalism and Public Relations: Department of Journalism. TCU. Fort Worth, TX. National President, AEJMC (1984-85). Chairperson: College of Fellows, Public Relations Society of America (1991-1992).

OXFORD, Donna. Administrative Assistant: Department of Communications and Visual Arts. University of North Florida. Ibid: KEEN, Jackie.

PAYNE, Prof Darwin. Journalism: Center for Communication Arts, SMU.

PLUMLEE, Prof John Patrick. Political Science and Public Administration. University of North Florida.

- REEDY, Karen L. Director: Center for Freshman and Sophomore Advising. University of North Florida.
- ROBERTSON, Prof Jesse S. Vice President: Academic Affairs. Jacksonville University, FL.
- ROOSENRAAD, Prof Jon A. Professor of Journalism and Director: Student Services. College of Journalism and Communications, University of Florida.
- SCHRIBNER, Barbara. Administrative Assistant: Office of the Director, Center for Communication Arts. SMU, Dallas.
- SEIB, Prof Philip M. Professor of Journalism: Center for Communication Arts. SMU, Dallas, TX.
- SHELTON, Prof Keith. Department of Journalism: Journalist in Residence. University of North Texas. Denton, TX.
- SHERMAN, Prof Michael J. Chairperson: Department of Social Sciences. Flagler College, St Augustine, FL.
- SMITH, Nelia. Assistant to the Chairperson: Department of Journalism. University of North Texas.
- SPARKS, Linda F. Associate University Librarian: Education Library. University of Florida.
- STANTON, Prof Robert J. Chairperson: Division of the Humanities. Jacksonville University, FL.
- STOFBERG, NJ vd M. Registrar: Academic. Technikon Pretoria.
- STOUSE, Prof Dennis. Professor of Communications and Public Relations, Co-ordinator: Journalism and Public Relations programmes. Jacksonville University.
- STEINGASS, S Jon. Director: Academic Development and Student Advising. Jacksonville University, FL.
- SUFI, Arva. Director: Student Advising, College of Arts and Sciences. North Florida University.
- SULLIVAN, Prof John Anthony. Political Science. Co-ordinator: International Studies Program. Jacksonville University, FL.
- TERHUNE, Prof James L. Associate Dean: College of Journalism and Communications. University of Florida.
- THAMES, Sarah. Administrative Assistant to the Chairperson, Department of Journalism. University of North Texas.
- THOMASON, Prof Tommy G. Department of Journalism. TCU. Fort Worth.
- TORELLI, Dedra. Administrative Officer: Humanities Division. Jacksonville University.
- UMPHREY, Prof Donald W. Head: Department of Advertising. Center for Communication Arts. SMU.
- VAN DER WALT, SE. Head: Department of Public Relations and Business Communication. Technikon Pretoria.
- VAN ELDIK, Dr Peter. Chief Director: Strategic Information and Planning. Technikon Pretoria.
- VAN HOOK, Dr John W. Associate University Librarian: Library West. University of Florida.
- VAN WYK, Rentia. Head: Examination Section. Technikon Pretoria.
- VAN ZYL, Jacques. Registrar: Cape Technikon. Cape Town.
- VICKERY, Prof Tom Rusk. Director of Teacher Education and Chairperson: Division of Education. Jacksonville University, FL.
- WALLACE, Doris. Program Assistant: Department of Journalism. TCU.
- WARNER, Prof Gary. Visiting Professor: Journalism. Department of Communications and Visual Arts. University of North Florida.

WELGEMOED, AJ. Director: School of Management. Cape Technikon.

WELLS, Prof Richard H. Chairperson: Department of Journalism. University of North Texas.

WHILLOCK, Prof Rita Kirk. Center for Communication Arts. SMU.

YANNIE, Mark J. Assistant University Librarian. North Florida University.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The financial assistance of the Centre for Science Development (HSRC) and the Central Research Committee of Technikon Pretoria towards research activities are hereby acknowledged.