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The Necessity For Students To Consider The Academic Term

When Choose The Universities

There are two major academic Terms used by the American universities nowadays – the semester system and the quarter system. The universities with quarter system calendar have three quarters per year, and each quarter is 10-week long. If a university is using the semester system calendar, the academic year is cut into two 4-month long semesters. The quarter system is less popular than the other one, with only few universities using it. The most well known ones are the ten campuses of University of California and the three campuses of University of Washington.

When high school students are choosing universities to get advanced education or transfer students are making the decision of study at another university, they like to focus on the tuition, the location and the ranking, only very small percentage of students consider the academic term as a factor while making the choice. Some of them think the academic term is not important, and some students even don’t realize the university is using the quarter system until they start their freshman year. Students don’t care about the academic terms but the different systems do have impacts on the academics and their life. The academic terms have significant effects on the amount of classes students can take each term, the depth of a class a professor can go in a class, the length of vacations and the convenience when students want to study abroad or transfer to another university. Therefore, students should think of the academic terms when make the decision.

In universities with quarter system, most students take three classes each quarter while the other students take 4-5 classes each semester. Because a quarter is shorter than a semester, students under quarter system can take more classes and students under semester system can understand a class deeper. Some students like to try all kinds of different classes; they might feel more comfortable going to a university with quarter system. The others are only interested in a specific area and they want to study further, the can be benefited from the semester system. Compare to the semester system, the quarter system has a longer summer vacation but a shorter winter vacation. Student may have different preference of the length of the vacation. For example, international students who fly home twice a year may prefer the semester system. The airline tickets are expensive in December and January and students won’t be happy to pay high-price airline tickets and stay home for only three weeks. But for those students who only go back home at summer, quarter system will be a better choice. They pay cheap price and get a long vacation at home. Because of the great amounts of universities under the semester system, it will be very inconvenient for students who are interested in study abroad programs. It’s very hard for them to find a program in appropriate time period.

In this major paper, I’m going to start with the explanation of the two academic terms and describe the history and background of each. *Academic Calendars – Encyclopedia of Education* written by Brenda Ashford will be my first source. I’m compare the two systems and analyze the reasons of the development, the change and the transition of the two systems. The increasing percentage of one system used in the colleges may illustrate the benefits that system has and the shortcomings of the other. The news *Strength in Numbers* published on Feb 7, 2012 talks about the transition from quarter system to semester system in a university. This is a good example of showing the impacts of different academic terms on students in real life. Parts of the news have evidence supporting what has been mentioned in the last source, but there is also conflict. I’m going to analyze it further in the paper.

Mengsu,

Great start! This is really clear, and you seem to have a very good grasp on the differences between the two systems and the benefits and drawbacks. I look forward to reading your paper! ☺

Works Cited

Ashford, Brenda. Ed. James W. Guthrie. *Academic Calendar – Encyclopedia of Education* Vol. 1.  2nd Ed. New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2003.

Smith, Mitch. *Strength in Numbers*. Inside higher ED. Feb 7th, 2012.