BACKGROUND

As part of the 2011/12 AFA Contract, ratified June 14, 2011, the All Faculty Association, the Santa Rosa Junior College Academic Senate, and the Sonoma County Junior College District Administration formed a task force to study the possibility of reducing the number of weeks of instruction which at this time is 17.5 weeks. Because the Calendar is a negotiated item that greatly affects faculty, staff, administration, and students, this decision to study the various possibilities required broad input and ultimately will require broad support in order to make any necessary changes; furthermore, any changes to the Academic Calendar requires Chancellor’s Office review and approval. This review assures that community colleges meet the minimum requirements for the number of days and minutes of instruction in order to collect apportionment. (See California Education Code, Title 5, section 55701: Education Division; Division 6: California Community Colleges; Chapter 6: Curriculum and Instruction; Subchapter 8: Academic Calendar; Article 1: 175 Day Minimum Academic Calendar).

AFA AND DISTRICT NEGOTIATING INTERESTS

The District and AFA shared many common interests in negotiating any potential changes to the calendar, and included the following key concerns:

- The calendar should address the learning needs of students, especially with respect to possible impacts on retention, success, persistence, and engagement;
- Changes to the calendar should not disproportionately or negatively impact particular disciplines and take into account all methods of instruction;
- Any changes should be data driven and validated with sufficient research;
- Changes should assure that faculty working conditions and pay remain the same and that faculty can productively use work days to meet accreditation standards with regard to curriculum, program review, and student learning outcomes.

CONSTITUENT VOICES

Faculty, Staff, and Administrators Survey Summary
Several departments wrote resolutions either in support of or against the idea of compressing the calendar. The Task Force also prepared and implemented two comprehensive district-wide survey of Faculty, Staff, Administration and Students (See www.santarosa.edu/afa/senate_survey.shtml). Results showed that every instructional department participated in the survey that went to Faculty, Staff, and Administrators with a total of 505 respondents. The questions covered several key areas: 1) perceived effectiveness of calendar compression; 2) preferences for teaching schedules; 3)
preferences for placement of Spring Break and Final Exams; 4) preferences for length of the semester.

The preferences for length of semester showed:

22% preferred 18 weeks  
21% preferred 17 weeks  
44% preferred 16 weeks  
12% had no preference

There was one question (number 27) that asked for a general preference for some kind of compression, and 67% of faculty, classified staff, and administrators responded that they were in favor of some version of a compressed calendar while 19% preferred no change, and 15% were unsure or had no opinion.

Student Survey Summary
The students were asked similar questions with the focus of those questions begin the link to their education and career goals; 359 students did respond to the survey. While the questions were not the same as those asked of the faculty, the students did respond from their perspective.

In response to a question regarding lengthening the summer break or offering more or longer classes during summer session 30.9% of students replied that they preferred lengthening the summer break while 11.3% preferred a longer winter break or an opportunity to take short/intensive classes during winter session. Another 38.7% wished to start each semester a week later and end the semester a week earlier. The remaining 12.8% had no opinion or were unsure.

Probably the most definite message was to have final exams take place during the last one or two days of classes as 62.3% of students stated that preference. Along those same lines, 62.6% of students were in favor of compressed calendar of some kind. (Survey results can be found, along with detailed comments from the respondents at www.santarosa.edu/afa/senate_survey.shtml)

Departmental Input
Beyond the district-wide survey, many departments passed resolutions either in support or against compressing the calendar. Generally speaking departments in the Arts (with the exception of Theatre Arts), Humanities, Social and Behavioral Sciences favored compression while faculty in the Sciences, especially the Lab Sciences, were against the concept. Karen Frindell Teuscher administered a survey of lab faculty in all disciplines including thirty-three different departments. Although only 19 surveys were returned, the survey did show a disproportionate impact on lab classes in that the number of labs per day would have to be reduced. This would definitely affect students and their ability to move through their programs.
PROS AND CONS

Summary of Pro Arguments from Position Papers presented to the Academic Senate

- Students become burned out during a long semester
- Research shows that a compressed calendar improves student retention at other campuses in the California Community System.
- A change would align our calendar more closely with our transfer institution and a majority of California Community Colleges who have elected to compress.
- A change would better align our calendar with the CSU and UC systems.
- A shorter semester would allow more preparation time between Fall and Spring semesters for both Academic Affairs and Student Services.
- Basic Skills students have a high attrition rate, especially as the end of the semester approaches.

Summary of Con Arguments from Position Papers

- Diablo Valley College study showed decreased student success for students with learning disabilities, weak students, students with children, and math and science students.
- Pushing students harder and faster will not decrease fatigue and burnout.
- Compression would mean speeding up the pace of learning with longer class times and shorter hours to complete work.
- Students with jobs and families would have a more difficult time balancing longer school days and shorter intervals between tests and assignments.
- Time to process information is essential to learning, especially in math and sciences.
- It would be harder to engage in participatory governance, especially for faculty who teach laboratory classes.
- Nursing and Allied Health already have difficulty coordinating with clinical sites, and increase the lengths of clinicals would make that even more difficult.
- Agriculture/Natural Resources cite various challenges with compression related to the speed of natural cycles and animals in a shorter semester.
- Facilities space is already severely impacted. Increasing the number of minutes in a class would limit accessibility even further.
- Laboratory classes requiring staff support would be impacted by a longer day and shorter semester.

It would seem that a compressed calendar would work very well in some departments and disciplines but would be challenging to implement across the district.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

As this Academic and Contract year comes to a close, and a new Tentative Agreement is ratified, the discussion and findings of the Compressed Calendar Task Force will be forwarded to District and AFA Negotiations for their consideration in the 2013-2014 Academic Year. Given the lack of consensus among constituent groups, it would seem unlikely that negotiations would result in any radical change to the Academic Calendar.
During Fall 2012, Abe Farkas, Dean of Curriculum and Education Support Services, was asked by the task force to develop a template that would allow maximum flexibility to schedule classes anywhere between 16 and 17.5 weeks. This template can be viewed at http://www.santarosa.edu/afa/Schedule_Master_Template_for_Compressed_Calendar_16_Weeks_01.30.2013_Negotiating_Teams.pdf. Within this template departments and disciplines would schedule the required number of minutes required by the state, passing periods would be sufficient for students needs, final exams would be scheduled in Week 16 for compressed classes, and professional development activities would be scheduled before Week 1 or after Week 16. As a compromise solution this template seems workable at this time; however, the District and AFA will need to analyze the potential impacts of this template, especially the crucially important reprogramming of the SIS system with regard to scheduling of classes.