

WPCC will change to semester calendar by '97

By CHARLANDA CLAY OLLIS
News Herald Staff Writer

The semester system is coming very soon to Western Piedmont Community College.

After several years of debate, the State Board of Community Colleges approved a plan last month that will transform all 58 community colleges within the state to a semester calendar by fall term 1997.

"I love the idea," said WPCC president Jim Richardson, who went on to say that there should not be any major hikes in tuition after conversion. "The real benefits of this conversion will go to the students."

Although a 3/4 majority of state community colleges voted for the changeover three years ago, the plan was tabled.

"You have to get everybody on the same wagon. If there is a split, you need to get everybody going in the same direction," said Richard Greene, vice president for academic affairs. "You have to try to get a team approach to the process before anything can be done. Some are just opposed to change."

The local community college has been operating on a quarter schedule ever since inception in 1963. However, the semester is currently being used by the North Carolina University system and state public schools.

Many of the community colleges are considered technical/vocational institutions. One reason conversion has taken so long in coming involved the concern that the semester schedule for technical colleges ran too long.

This latter concern is simply a myth, said Greene. Greene said most students who take these types of courses usually do not drop out as often between sessions, mainly because these students will be dealing with less registration periods.

Under the semester system, students will meet for 15 weeks and 45 hours of class meeting for each 3-credit course. Under the quarter system, students meet for 11 weeks and 33

hours of class meetings for each 3-credit course. The summer term will be reduced to 10-11 weeks with longer class periods meeting for 45 hours per 3-credit course.

Some other benefits of the conversion include:

- Transfer among community colleges will become easier for students.

- Transfer of community college student to four-year colleges and universities, regardless of their field of study, will be made easier.

- Administrative costs associated with registration will be reduced.

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istration will be reduced.

- Alignment with other education systems across the nation will be improved.

- The re-engineering project and semester-system conversion will provide for a systematic evaluation and revision of all curriculum programs and course.

Another positive aspect of the conversion, said Richardson, deals with the dual-enrollment process.

"A quarter system doesn't match up with the high school's semester system," Richardson said. "They still have some time to finish other classes in high school when their classes are over at Western Piedmont."

Richardson added that once the semester system is in place, students in high school will be able to complete their high school courses around the same time they complete course taken at the college.

"I think that it is a very positive

thing," said Greene. "The whole thing is a massive undertaking."

The State Board will use half of the \$900,000 from the State Board Reserve Fund to help with the conversion process, with the majority of the cost going toward revamping

the computer system at each college. No faculty or staff salaries will be effected, said Greene. "We're just extremely excited with the changeover," said Richardson. "Now we are going to be true members of higher learning in the state."