8-10-2023

Did a Trimester System Successfully Reduce Time to Graduation for Computer Science and Cybersecurity Students?

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AMCIS: Did a Trimester System Successfully Reduce Time to Graduation for Computer Science and Cybersecurity Students?

TREO Talk Paper

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Abstract

In early 2019, Southern Utah University was given a grant of 3.8 million dollars from the state legislature to improve their summer offerings and change their academic calendar (Nelson, 2019). These changes included switching from a more traditional nine-month semester-based system where semester are roughly 4.5 months long, to a system of three semesters of about 3.5 months each. This system allows students to obtain a four-year degree in three-years (Nelson 2019). A four-year degree, obtainable in three-years, have been tried elsewhere with varying successes and failures (Vise 2011). Besides a shorter time to completion, there are other benefits like improved space utilization over the summer, incoming freshmen using their existing college credits more efficiently, or a discounted tuition cost. Student who take the summer off in this new schedule could potentially have more time to earn money to finance their degrees. However, there are disadvantages like compressed cost, faster paced learning, schedule conflicts, potential burnout, and summer crowding (Nelson 2019, Vise 2011, Fant Jr 2020). Some of these factors include not only students trying to obtain their degrees in three years, but even students who opt out of summer courses. In accordance with the legislative grant, SUU changed degree plans, scheduled more courses in the summer, as well as changed the academic calendar (Barker et al, 2020).

Southern Utah University started the trimester program in early 2020 amid the global pandemic. Although COVID presented many challenges in education, this summer marks the three-year anniversary of the start of the program, with students potentially graduating with a four-year degree in just three years. The authors are interested in input from others in the CS/IS/Cybersecurity fields as to what metrics of success, or failure, would be useful to include in a potential research project. These discussions could include, total number of four-year degrees earned in three years, change in average time to graduation, positive or negative effect on students who did not take courses in the summer, the validity of such a study given the global pandemic, and if an IS audience would prefer to see IS specific data or also data from other fields of study.

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