

An Unfortunate Side Effect

Students at semestered high schools lose out when it comes to academics.

By Gordon R. Gore

(Mr. Gore is a retired physics and science teacher in Kamloops, BC.)

Using the 1996 British Columbia provincial grade 12 exam results, I compared the achievement of students in the following types of schools.

Full-Year (FY)

- More than 90% of provincial exams written in June

Semestered (S)

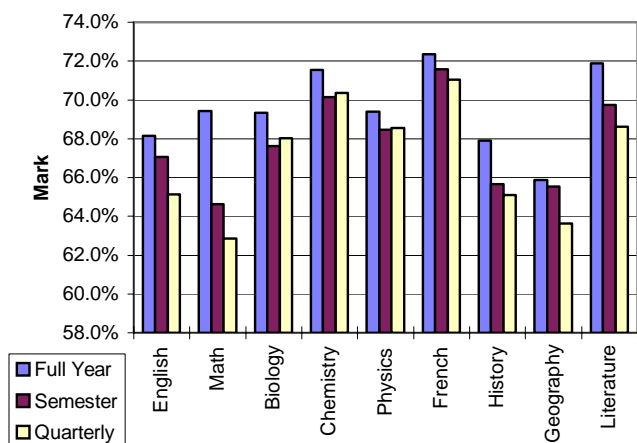
- More than 35% of provincial exams written in January

Quarterly (Q)

- Provincial exams written four times a year

I first analyzed the students' marks in each subject.

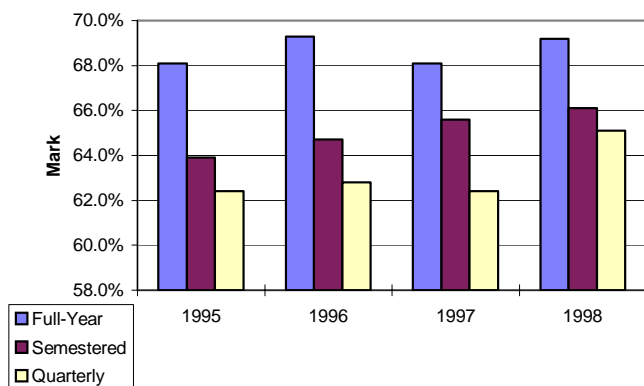
Marks on 1996 BC Province-Wide Exams



I found that the full-year students did markedly better than the semestered students in every subject, and that the quarterly students did worst of all.

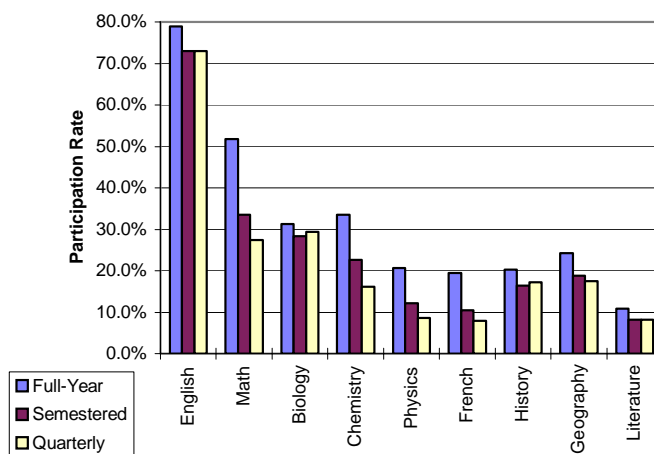
Realizing that it was possible that this phenomenon was limited to only 1996, I looked at math results over several years.

BC Province-Wide Math Exam Marks



Since the difference in marks might be the result of selectivity in terms of the students who wrote the exams, I examined the participation rates of students in each of the programs. Using the ministry's figures, I determined that a higher percentage of full-year students wrote final exams in every subject.

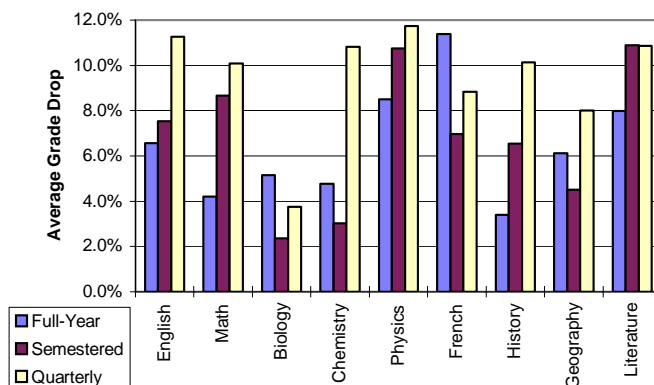
1996 BC Provincial Exam Participation Rate



Of course, marks on the provincial exams don't tell the whole story, since teachers use a wide variety of criteria to arrive at their grades. If, however, there is a disproportionately large difference between school marks and provincial exam marks, universities might take note of this fact when formulating their admission policies.

Accordingly, I calculated the difference between the average mark on the provincial exams with the average mark awarded by teachers. In every case, the students got lower average marks on the provincial exams.

1996 BC Average Grade Drop



(There are several other Canadian studies showing similar results. More information about them can be found at www.athenet.net/~jlindsay/Block.shtm.)