

Estrella Mountain Community College
Student Focus Groups
Feedback on Current and Potential Changes to the Schedule
Fall 2008

Focus Group Protocol

Research Question:

What are student preferences related to the current Estrella Mountain day schedule compared to the potential Four-Day + Friday Hybrid schedule?

Student Targets:

- Group of liberal arts students
- Group of occupational students
- Group of science and math students
- General open group of day students

Focus Group Questions and Protocol – 15 minutes

The facilitator will explain the purpose of the focus group to the students (**1 minute**). After the explanation, the following questions will be asked:

1. “What guides you in scheduling your classes?” (3 minutes)

If necessary, follow up with an explanation. “In other words, why did you schedule your classes during specific days and times?”

The facilitator will record all ideas and ask how many people have similar reasons by a show of hands. This will be recorded with a number next to each item.

2. Overall, how many of you are satisfied with the current day schedule? How many are not satisfied?” (4 minutes)

The facilitator will ask for a show of hands and record the tally on the flipchart.

a. “For those of you that responded that you liked the current schedule, please explain why?”

The facilitator will record the responses. Each time a response is put on the chart, the following question will be asked: “How many of you had this same reason?” The number of students sharing the same reason will be placed by each response.

- b. “For those of you that responded that you don’t like the current schedule, please explain why?”**

The facilitator will record the responses. Each time a response is put on the chart, the following question will be asked: “How many of you had this same reason?” The number of students sharing the same reason will be placed by each response.

3. Questions on the potential For-Day + Friday Hybrid schedule (4 minutes)

The facilitator will provide the following introduction:

Estrella Mountain is considering a change to a four-day schedule.

- This would necessitate that all three-day classes be converted to two-day classes.
- While the four-day class schedule could allow you to attend school for fewer days each week, each class sessions would be longer. Additionally, you may need to attend classes until 2pm or 3pm if you are taking a full load and only want to come to school two days each week.
- Hybrid courses would not be offered during the Monday – Thursday during the day. Fridays, Saturdays and evenings could include Hybrid cases.

- a. “How many would prefer a schedule that eliminates the three-day per week courses in favor of longer two-day courses? How many would prefer the current class schedule that includes some three-day courses?”**

The facilitator will ask for a show of hands and record the tally on the flipchart.

- b. “For those of you that responded that you would prefer a four-day schedule that eliminates three-day courses, please explain why.”**

The facilitator will record the responses. Each time a response is put on the chart, the following question will be asked: “How many of you had this same reason?” The number of students sharing the same reason will be placed by each response.

- c. “For those of you that responded that you would prefer the current schedule that includes a mix of two and three-day courses, please explain why.”**

The facilitator will record the responses. Each time a response is put on the chart, the following question will be asked: “How many of you had this same reason?” The number of students sharing the same reason will be placed by each response.

- 4. Hybrid courses would primarily be offered on Fridays during the day and also on the evenings and Saturdays if the college adopted a four-day schedule. (3 minutes)**

- a. “How many of you have taken a hybrid course?”**
- b. “How many of you know what a hybrid course is?”**

The facilitator will ask for a show of hands and record the tally on the flipchart. The facilitator will also define a hybrid course using the following statement.

A hybrid course meets only one day per week, but requires just as much work as one that meets two or three days a week. Activities that would have occurred on the second or third day of a traditional course are accomplished online.

- c. “Raise your hand if it matters to you when hybrid courses are offered.”**

The facilitator will ask for a show of hands and record the tally on the flipchart.

- d. For those of you that indicated that it matters to you when hybrid courses are offered, what are the pros and cons of offering most day hybrid courses on Fridays?**

The facilitator will tally the pros and cons of a Friday Hybrid schedule. The facilitator will then ask for a show of hands for those that prefer hybrid courses be consolidated on Fridays and those that would prefer the current Tuesday and Thursday Hybrid schedule.

Focus Group Responses

1. “What guides you in scheduling your classes?”

Group A: ENG 101 Class n=15 (Moderator: Willekens– 12/9/2008)

- Work schedule (7)
- My Major (6)
- The ability to spend time with my Family (kids, etc.) (3)

Group B: Business Class n = 14 (Moderator: Reyes)

- Instructor preference (14)
- Work schedule (13)
- Core Classes/ My Major (13)
- How classes fit together (10)
- The ability to spend time with my Family (kids, etc.) (3)
- When I am available (14)

Group C: Open Invitation Focus Group n=18 (Moderators: Shellenbarger/Willekens– 12/12/2008)

- Not wanting to be here all day (8)
- Carpooling – transportation (7)
- Having classes together with short breaks (7)
- Work (7)
- Teachers (6)

Group D: BIO 101 Class 12-16-09 n = 16 (Moderator: Orr)

- Work Schedule: (11) Most students reported working- nights/weekends and preferred early day classes.
- Preferred 2-Day Schedule: Students seemed to prefer a 2-day school schedule where they can take as many classes on only two days out of the week. Several students stated this helps get school out of the way so they have more free time for other activities & work.

Group E: BIO 101 Class 12-18-09 n = 16 (Moderator: Orr)

- Work Schedule: (10) Many stated they plan their school schedule around their work schedule.
- Ease of Schedule: (9) Students scheduled classes together so they could get them over with early in the week.
- Instructors: (5) Took classes with their favorite instructors.
- Child Care: (1) Scheduled classes around child care.
- Extra Curricular Activities: (1) Scheduled classes to fit in other activities.

2a. Overall, how many of you are satisfied with the current day schedule? How many are not satisfied?”

Group A: ENG 101 Class n=15 (Willekens moderator)

- Satisfied (12)
- No Response (3)

Group B: Business Class n = 14 (Moderator: Reyes)

- Like Day Schedule (satisfied) (11)
Why?
 - Classes line up (9)
 - I can finish early in the day (5)
- The number not satisfied was not recorded, but the reasons were recorded why the schedule didn't meet a few students needs. It can be implied that 3 students were not satisfied.

**Group C: Open Invitation Focus Group n=18 (Moderators:
Shellenbarger/Willekens– 12/12/2008)**

- Satisfied (6)
- Not Satisfied (7)

Group D: BIO 101 Class 12-16-09 n = 16 (Moderator: Orr)

- Satisfied (15)
- Not Satisfied (0) - While no students indicated they were not satisfied, all 16 indicated they would be more satisfied with longer class times in a two-day per week schedule format.
- No vote (0)

Group E: BIO 101 Class 12-18-09 n = 16 (Moderator: Orr)

- Satisfied (15)
- Not Satisfied (1)

2b. “For those of you that responded that you liked the current schedule, please explain why?”

Group A: ENG 101 Class n=15 (Moderator: Willekens– 12/9/2008)

- Question not asked.

Group B: Business Class n = 14 (Moderator: Reyes)

- Question not asked.

Group C: Open Invitation Focus Group n=18 (Moderators: Shellenbarger/Willekens– 12/12/2008)

- MWF classes are quicker – teachers are more focused on the core topic. Seeing the instructor more often is better than longer classes that can drag on and get off topic (8)
- Allows for activities during the day (3)
- Allows school and work (2)
- Teachers provide time to work on work in class (1)

Group D: BIO 101 Class 12-16-09 n = 16 (Moderator: Orr)

- Most stated they were satisfied with their current schedule because it worked with their current work schedule.

Group E: BIO 101 Class 12-18-09 n = 16 (Moderator: Orr)

- Ease of schedule (14) They get all their classes over with on the same days and have the rest as free time for other things.
- Commute: (7) They didn't want to drive back and forth to school every day.
- Early Classes: (4) They can schedule them in the morning when their brains are functioning better.

2c. “For those of you that responded that you don’t like the current schedule, please explain why?” (b)

Group A: ENG 101 Class n=15 (Moderator: Willekens – 12/9/2008)

- There were no students that didn't like the current schedule (0)

Group B: Business Class n=15 (Moderator: Reyes)

The specific number of those not satisfied with the class was not recorded. Both students that were satisfied and not-satisfied responded to this question.

- Some classes not offered at all times (10)
- Timing of classes/Not enough options (9)
- Having to go to school 5 days and work (6)
- Want more hybrid courses (5)

Group C: Open Invitation Focus Group n=18 (Moderators: Shellenbarger/Willekens– 12/12/2008)

- Too many courses are only offered in the evening or only in the day (10)
- Need more variety of classes in the morning (6)
- Need early classes – more at 7:00 am (5)
- Not enough honors cohort classes (2)
- Need more 8-week or hybrid classes in the evening (1)
- Science labs conflicting with schedule (1)

Group D: BIO 101 Class 12-16-09 n = 16 (Moderator: Orr)

- Of those dissatisfied they stated that there were too many classes scheduled at the same time on the same days. They couldn't get into the classes they needed because they were all scheduled at similar times. (Number not recorded).
- They also stated there was not enough time to have lunch with the current schedule.(Number not recorded).

Group E: BIO 101 Class 12-18-09 n = 16 (Moderator: Orr)

- It didn't work with my work schedule (1)

3. Questions on the potential 4-Day + Friday Hybrid Schedule (4 minutes)

3a. How many would prefer a schedule that eliminates the three-day per week courses in favor of longer two-day courses? How many would prefer the current class schedule that includes some three-day courses?"

Group A: ENG 101 Class n=15 (Moderator: Willekens)

- Prefer the modified schedule with longer class meetings and eliminated 3-day classes (6) (Slight majority)
- Prefer the current schedule (mix of 2 day and 3 day classes) (5)
Follow up questions: how many of you were enrolled in a three-day per week course?
 - 12 of the 15 students indicated they had experience in a 3-day per week course.

Group B: Business Class n=15 (Moderator: Reyes)

- Prefer the modified schedule with longer class meetings & eliminated 3-day classes (4 – a small minority of the class)
- Prefer the current schedule (mix of 2 day and 3 day classes) (11 large majority)

Group C: Open Invitation Focus Group n=18 (Moderators: Shellenbarger/Willekens– 12/12/2008)

- Prefer the 2-day schedule with longer class meetings & eliminated 3-day classes (5 – a small minority of the class)
- Prefer the current schedule (12 – large majority)

Group D: BIO 101 Class 12-16-09 n = 16 (Moderator: Orr)

- Prefer the modified schedule with longer class meetings & eliminated 3-day classes (15 – super majority)
- Prefer the current schedule (mix of 2 day and 3 day classes). (0) Some students commented they would prefer to get all their classes over with and be on campus as little as possible.
- Abstained from voting (1)

Group E: BIO 101 Class 12-18-09 n = 16 (Moderator: Orr)

- Prefer the modified schedule with longer class meetings & eliminated 3-day classes (15 – super majority)
- Prefer the current schedule (mix of 2 day and 3 day classes) NOTE: At this point in the student’s conversations they started to contradict their earlier statements. When asked if they wanted a 4-day schedule they all reported as preferring this to the traditional schedule because they could attend 2-days per week. When told that a 4-day schedule would require longer class times which could result in longer days they stated reasons why they wouldn’t prefer the modified schedule. However, the 4-day plus Friday Hybrid schedule was initially appealing to the students.
- Don’t care either way (1)

3b. “For those of you that responded that you would prefer a four-day schedule that eliminates three-day courses, please explain why.”

Group A: ENG 101 Class n=15 (Willekens moderator)

- I could attend fewer days (4)
- I could have three day weekends! (1)

Group B: Business Class n=15 (Reyes Moderator)

- Ability to attend fewer days during the week (4)
- Ability to avoid Friday/Saturday classes (4)
- I would learn more (3)

Group C: Open Invitation Focus Group n=18 (Moderators: Shellenbarger/Willekens– 12/12/2008)

- More flexibility with non-school schedule (5)
- Concentrated better – focus

Group D: BIO 101 Class 12-16-09 n = 16 (Moderator: Orr)

- Students reported they would prefer to get all their classes over with and be on campus as little as possible. (specific number not recorded)

Group E: BIO 101 Class 12-18-09 n = 16 (Moderator: Orr)

- Students initially showed support for the modified schedule and then reverted back to preferring the current schedule. This resulted in no reasons being mentioned to support the 4-day + Friday hybrid schedule.

3c. “For those of you that responded that you would prefer the current schedule that includes both two and three-day courses, please explain why.”

Group A: ENG 101 Class n=15 (Willekens moderator)

- Courses would be available three days per week (3)

Follow-up question, why is that important?

-You can learn more when the class meets more often (3)

Group B: Business Class n=15 (Reyes Moderator)

- The days are shorter (8)
- Choice of more class offerings (7)
- Prefer hybrid courses during the week (6)

Group C: Open Invitation Focus Group n=18 (Moderators: Shellenbarger/Willekens– 12/12/2008)

- Spreads out the school work (9)
- Able to take more classes in a week with short class periods (8)
- A block schedule can be overwhelming – longer class periods can be difficult (8)
- Like online/hybrid courses focus on one course at a time
- Attention span is difficult in longer class
- Time to have student involvement
- I can go to school MWF and use Tuesday and Thursdays for homework

Group D: BIO 101 Class 12-16-09 n = 16 (Moderator: Orr)

- No students preferred the current schedule over the modified schedule.

Group E: BIO 101 Class 12-18-09 n = 16 (Moderator: Orr)

When told that a 4-day schedule would require longer 2-day class times and possibly longer days, the group stated reasons why they don't want a modified schedule:

- Harder to retain info in a longer class period
- Harder to stay focused in a longer class
- Wouldn't give enough time to do homework
- Harder on social life outside of school
- Harder to work around child care schedules
- Less free time on those longer days

3d1. Hybrid courses would primarily be offered on Fridays during the day and also on the evenings Monday through Thursday and Saturdays if the college adopted a four-day schedule. (3 minutes)

3d2. How many of you have attended a hybrid course? How many of you know what a hybrid course is?

Group A: ENG 101 Class n=15 (Willekens moderator)

- 4 students had taken a hybrid course
- 12 students knew the definition and 3 students admitted not knowing what a hybrid course is

Group B: Business Class n=15 (Reyes Moderator)

- 8 students raised their hands (slightly more than half)
- All 15 students knew what a hybrid course was

Group C: Open Invitation Focus Group n=18 (Moderators: Shellenbarger/Willekens– 12/12/2008)

- 13 students have taken hybrid courses
- All 18 students knew the definition of a hybrid course

Group D: BIO 101 Class 12-16-09 n = 16 (Moderator: Orr)

- 4 Reported having taken a hybrid course
- 12 Reported they knew what a hybrid course was

Group E: BIO 101 Class 12-18-09 n = 16 (Moderator: Orr)

- 5 Students reported knowing what a Hybrid course was
- 3 Students are currently taking a Hybrid course
- 1 Student was planning on taking one next semester
- 7 students didn't respond

3e. “Raise your hand if it matters to you when hybrid courses are offered.”

Group A: ENG 101 Class n=15 (Willekens moderator)

- Only one student indicated that it mattered when hybrid courses were offered (1)

Follow-up question, why is this not important?

- I am open to dates hybrids are available (1)

Group B: Business Class n=15 (Reyes Moderator)

- 9 students indicated that it mattered when hybrid courses were offered

Group C: Open Invitation Focus Group n=18 (Moderators: Shellenbarger/Willekens– 12/12/2008)

- 4 students indicated it mattered when hybrid courses are offered

Group D: BIO 101 Class 12-16-09 n = 16 (Moderator: Orr)

- A number of students indicated it mattered when hybrid courses are offered – the actual number was not recorded

Group E: BIO 101 Class 12-18-09 n = 16 (Moderator: Orr)

- None of the student cared when hybrid courses were offered

3f. For those of you that indicated that it matters to you when hybrid courses are offered during the day, what are the pros and cons of offering most hybrid courses on Fridays?

Group A: ENG 101 Class n=15 (Moderator: Willekens)

Pros:

- None offered

Cons:

- Friday may not be a good option because hybrids would only be available one day per week, this might not meet everyone's needs (1)

Group B: Business Class n=15 (Moderator: Reyes)

“Fridays” and “Weekends Open” were mentioned, but it is not clear if this was pro or con.

Group C: Open Invitation Focus Group n=18 (Moderators: Shellenbarger/Willekens– 12/12/2008)

Pros: no pros were mentioned

Cons:

- If only on Friday – would not be able to take one class a day (2)
- Not enough time to communicate with instructors

Group D: BIO 101 Class 12-16-09 n = 16 (Moderator: Orr)

Pros:

- No pros were mentioned

Cons:

- A number of students reported they didn't want to be on campus on Fridays. The specific number was not recorded.

Group E: BIO 101 Class 12-18-09 n = 16 (Moderator: Orr)

- No pros or cons were mentioned

4. Other improvement suggestions:

Group C: Open Invitation Focus Group n=18 (Moderators: Shellenbarger/Willekens– 12/12/2008)

- Can you consider a MW (hybrid) where Friday would meet virtually? This could complement the existing 50 min Tuesday/Thursday hybrid courses (10 students liked this option)
- Having some night classes offered during the day (3)
- Like 8-week back to back schedules
- In general hybrid courses are too much work, much more than a face-to-face class

Group D: BIO 101 Class 12-16-09 n = 16 (Moderator: Orr)

- Students reported that they preferred in person classes to online or hybrid courses
- Students asked for more Tuesday/Thursday courses
- Students stated too many courses were offered with the same schedule making it hard to schedule the classes they needed