

## **UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS' CLASS MODALITY PREFERENCES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Understanding students' satisfaction and preferences for different class modalities is important in determining if changes need to be made in order to increase the overall graduation rates. Lower graduation rates in recent years may be the result of the increase in non-traditional students. One definition of a non-traditional student is a student who deviates from the traditional age of 18-24, holds a part/full time job, and cares for a family [3]. These types of students have been categorized as being minimally, moderately, or highly non-traditional, depending on how many of the seven non-traditional characteristics apply to them [1,4]. In general, non-traditional students have the greatest need of flexible study time and space [5]. Many non-traditional students have other priorities with time constraints that do not easily fit into regular class schedules. For example, several non-traditional students return to school as a suggestion from their employer to be able to receive higher pay or promotions. Therefore, the primary hypothesis is that students who have work and/or have family commitments will be more likely to enroll in an online or hybrid course. Knowing the reasons behind students' preferences for class modality is important in helping students get the classes they need to graduate. The supporting hypothesis is that by increasing the number of online and hybrid courses, the overall rate graduation rate will also increase. Prior enrollment patterns and graduation rates were studied, revealing that students' behaviors show that their preferences for online and hybrid classes have increased over the years. Research shows that there is an increase in distance learning courses due to students wanting to complete a course that normally would not fit into their personal time schedule. The purpose of this study is to determine students' satisfaction with the current course modality offerings as well as their preferences and behaviors for each individual modality.

With the goal of increasing the rate of timely graduation in the future, an online student satisfaction survey was created during the fall of 2015 and sent out to approximately 20,000 students currently eligible to enroll at California State University, Dominguez Hills. The survey received an 11% response rate, giving a total of 2,199 complete responses. We learned that 48.1% of the students who responded met the non-traditional age criterion. By including students that are not currently enrolled, the results may show that there are students who were unable to enroll due to schedule and work and/or child care conflicts. The survey asked students to share their schedule and modality behaviors and preferences, their overall degree of satisfaction of their programs, and factors affecting their timely graduation. Data analyzed from the survey indicated that students should be better able to complete college given a wide range of modalities. The responses can help the university determine whether or not more distance-based courses should be offered.

Students who are defined as non-traditional will be more likely to choose online or hybrid courses that do not conflict with their personal schedules. For this study, 5 out of the 7 non-traditional student criteria will be used [4]. The data collected was analyzed and cross tabulations were placed on the variables. As a result, this study has shown that there is a relationship between preferences for distance learning

courses and students who meet the moderately to highly non-traditional criteria. By having the option for students to complete necessary courses through distance education, students may be able to complete their required classes on time. Having distance courses where students can learn on their own time will result in a lower drop rate and completing required classes will result in more timely graduation.

## REFERENCES

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