



Enrollment Preferences Survey, Spring 2013

Analysis of Results

New Mexico State University, Las Cruces

Key Survey Results

- For most NMSU students, Mondays through Thursdays were the preferred weekdays to have classes, while Fridays and weekends were the least popular choices. However, a small group of students chose Fridays or weekends as their first choice.
- Two groups of students can be identified based on their different course preferences, “Traditional Student” and “Weekend Student”.
- The majority of traditional students were full-time, undergraduate students who worked less than 40 hours per week. They would like to take courses from Monday through Friday, they preferred morning courses, and they liked face-to-face settings.
- Most weekend students were part-time, graduate students. They usually worked 40 or more than 40 hours per week. They preferred to take classes on Fridays or weekends, and they would like to take evening classes. Unlike traditional students, weekend students were more interested in online courses.
- Both traditional and weekend students liked the flexibility and convenience of online courses, while weekend students were more interested in completing degree programs offered online than traditional students.
- Few respondents had taken a course on another NMSU campus as a Las Cruces campus student; few respondents said they had taken courses outside of the NMSU system as an NMSU student because of difficulty enrolling in an NMSU course.
- NMSU students were satisfied with the course availability of developmental courses.
- General education courses met the majority of students’ needs, while students were less satisfied with major course availability.
- Undergraduate students were more likely to be affected by major course availability than graduate students; weekend students were less satisfied with their major course availability than traditional students.
- Students would like more classes offered every semester, more classes offered online, and more and improved advising on course scheduling.

Report prepared by:
Danielle Xiaodan Deng,
Institutional Analysis
New Mexico State University
<http://irpoa.nmsu.edu/SpecialReports.html>

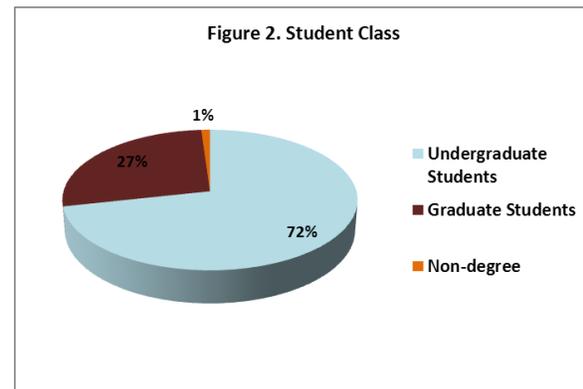
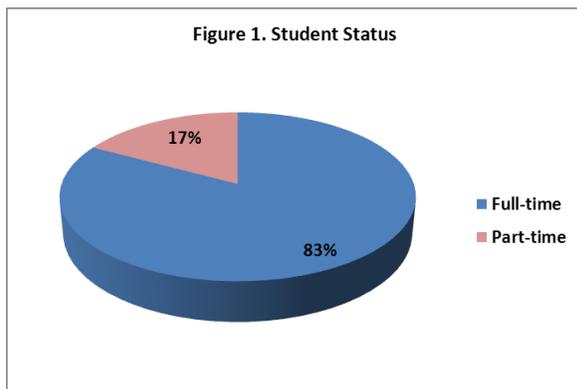
All questions regarding this report should be addressed to the author.

Methodology

At New Mexico State University, graduation is the number one goal. The university is working to provide students the courses they need for graduation when they need them. One of the purposes of this survey was to identify when and how students prefer to have classes. The web-based survey was sent to all NMSU-Las Cruces students on April 5, 2013. The survey was closed on April 22, 2013. Of the 2,997 students who responded to the survey, 2,787 participated in the survey.

Respondents

Of the 2,787 NMSU-Las Cruces students who participated in the survey, 83% were full-time students (Figure 1). Twenty-seven percent of respondents were graduate students (Figure 2), 28% self-identified as seniors, while 10% said they were freshmen. Sixty-two percent of respondents work more than 10 hours per week; approximately 18% work more than 40 hours per week. Among the students who had a job in addition to attending NMSU, half of them worked at NMSU.



Course Scheduling: What days do you prefer?

The survey asked students to rank the days they prefer to have classes. Six options were provided: Mondays and Wednesdays; Tuesdays and Thursdays; Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays; Wednesdays and Fridays; Fridays; Weekends (Table 1). For each option, the percentage of respondents who ranked this option as the first choice (% of 1st choice) and the percentage of respondents who ranked this option as the second choice (% of 2nd choice) were calculated. The six options were also scored based on their ranks: the higher the average score, the more popular the option.

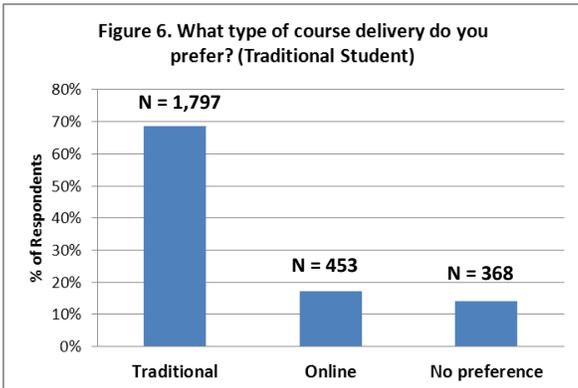
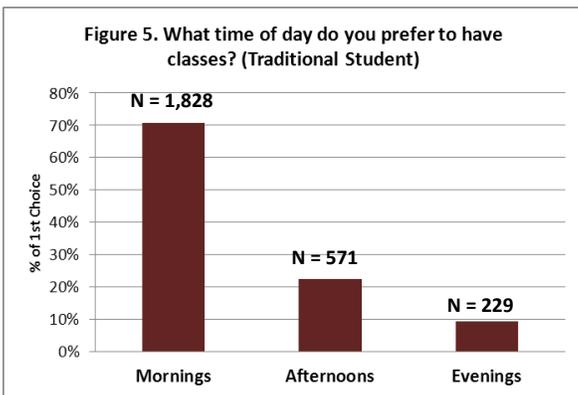
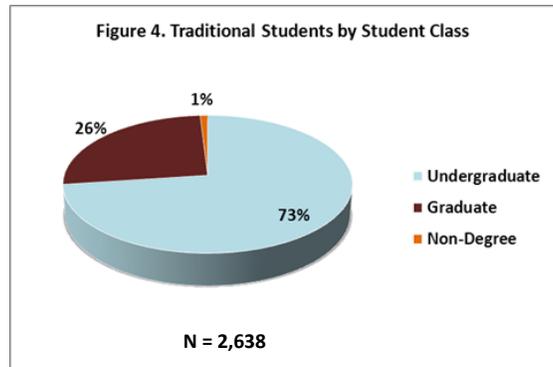
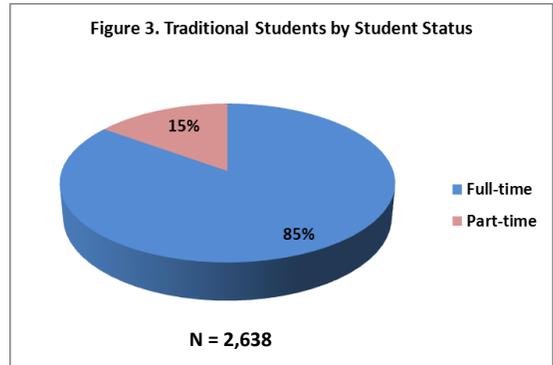
Table 1: Course Preference						
	Mon. & Wed.	Tue. & Thu.	Mon., Wed., Fri.	Wed. & Fri.	Friday	Weekends
% of 1 st choice	35.67%	33.94%	24.47%	0.57%	1.44%	3.91%
% of 2 nd choice	38.03%	45.75%	9.01%	2.84%	2.83%	1.54%
Average Score	4.97	5.04	4.14	3.17	2.21	1.47

*Highlighted value is the highest value in each row.

Among students who responded to the option “Mondays & Wednesdays,” more than 35% ranked this option as their first choice. Compared to the other options, more respondents preferred to take classes on Mondays and Wednesdays. However, more than 45% of respondents ranked “Tuesdays and Thursdays” as their second choice, while 38% ranked “Mondays and Wednesdays” as their second choice. Therefore, “Tuesdays and Thursdays” had the highest average score (5.04) overall; “Mondays and Wednesdays” was slightly lower (4.97) while “Fridays” (2.21) and “Weekends” (1.47) had the lowest average scores. To summarize, for the 2,787 NMSU-Las Cruces students who participated in the survey, “Mondays and Wednesdays” and “Tuesdays and Thursdays” were the top two choices, and “Fridays” and “Weekends” were the least popular options. This was especially true for full-time and undergraduate students. On the other hand, some respondents chose “Fridays” or “Weekends” as their first choice.

This dichotomy of course preferences indicated two groups of students, “Traditional Student” who liked to take classes on traditional weekdays (Monday through Friday) and the “Weekend Student,” who preferred Fridays or weekends. Comparing these two groups of students may provide a clearer understanding of NMSU-Las Cruces students’ course preferences.

Traditional Student: Morning and Face-to-Face



A traditional student is defined as a student who ranked “Mondays and Wednesdays”, “Tuesdays and Thursdays”, “Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays”, or “Wednesdays and Fridays” as his or her first choice. Of all respondents, 95% (N=2,638) were identified as traditional students. Even though most traditional students preferred to take courses Monday through Thursday, 698 of them chose “Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays” or “Wednesdays and Fridays” as their first choice. These 698 students shared characteristics similar to the rest of the traditional students.

Figure 3 and Figure 4 show that most (85%) traditional students were full-time students, and approximately 73% were undergraduate students. However, 26% of traditional students were graduate students. Of the 2,638 traditional students in the survey, 31% mentioned that they did not work during the semester; approximately 15% worked 40 or more than 40 hours per week. Not unexpectedly, traditional students were more likely to work less than 40 hours per week. In addition, among those “working” traditional students, more than half of them worked at NMSU.

Two interesting trends were found among traditional students. First, traditional students preferred to take classes in the morning. As Figure 5 indicates, nearly 71% of traditional students who responded to the option “Mornings” ranked it as their first choice, while only 9% ranked “Evenings” as their first choice. Second, traditional students preferred to take classes in classrooms. Figure 6 shows that over 68% of traditional students said they preferred traditional, “face-to-face” courses rather than online courses.

Weekend Student: Evening and Online

A weekend student is defined as a student who ranked “Fridays” or “Weekends” as his or her first choice. Of the 2,787 respondents, 149 can be identified as weekend students. Different from traditional students, weekend students were more likely to be part-time and graduate students. Figure 7 and Figure 8 show that more than half of weekend students were part-time; approximately 50% were graduate students. The comments weekend students provided were very different from those provided by traditional students.

“Since I work full time, it is sometimes hard for me to take courses during the day. Sometimes getting the time off from work to go to class is not allowed by supervisor. Most of the courses are not offered on the weekends or after 5. “

“More evening/online classes need to be available for working graduates.”

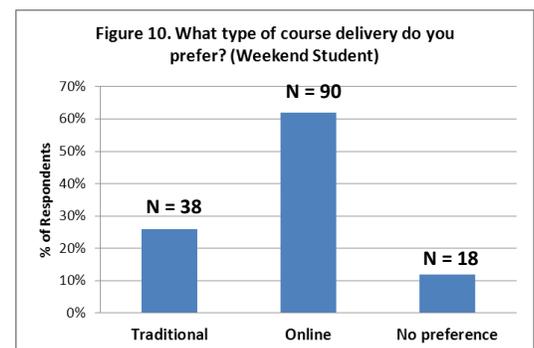
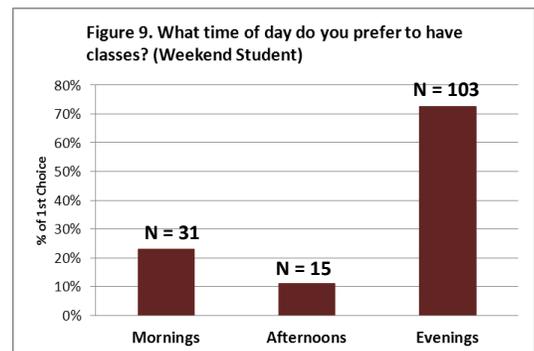
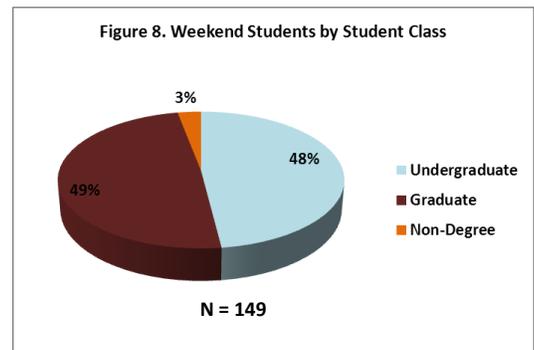
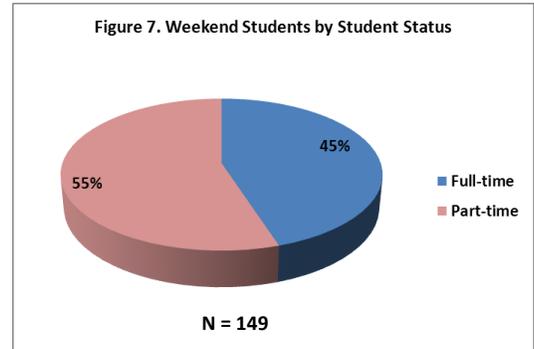
“Being in full time employment affects when I can take courses and I find NMSU is not ‘friendly’ to those of us who are not full time students.”

Numbers and comments suggested that weekend students were significantly different from traditional students, and weekend students’ course preferences were greatly affected by their working schedules. Over 70% of weekend students worked 40 or more hours per week; among those “working” weekend students, more than 70% worked outside the university, which makes it harder for them to take classes on campus during the day.

Furthermore, weekend students expressed significantly different course preferences from traditional students. Unlike traditional students, weekend students preferred to take classes in the evenings (Figure 9). Among weekend students who responded to the option “Evenings”, more than 70% ranked it as their first choice, while only 23% ranked “Mornings” as their first choice. Instead of face-to-face settings, weekend students preferred to take classes online. Over 60% of weekend students mentioned they would likely take a course that was offered online at NMSU (Figure 10).

While not a majority opinion, there is considerable interest in taking courses online, in the evenings, on Fridays, or on weekends by this specific group of students. NMSU is trying to meet the majority of students’ course needs. However, more emphasis may need to be placed on weekend students. Providing the courses when students need them will be important for weekend students’ graduation.

“I would have graduated 5 years ago if courses had been available on weekends or evenings or online.”

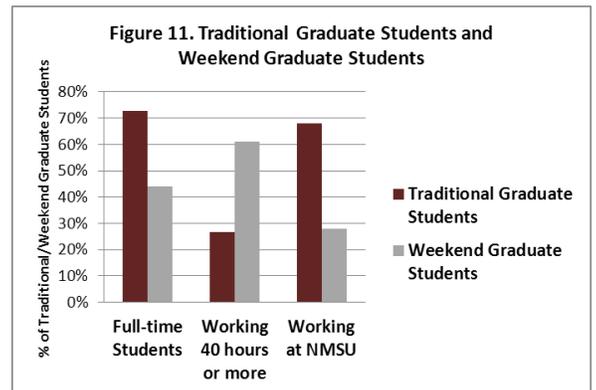


Graduate Students: Traditional vs. Weekend

Graduate students usually have different course preferences and working schedules from undergraduate students. Within this survey analysis, some graduate students were defined as traditional students, while others followed the pattern of weekend students.

Most traditional graduate students were full-time students. Less than 30% of them worked 40 hours or more per week, but if they worked, 68% of them worked at NMSU (Figure 11). On the other hand, less than half of weekend graduate students were full-time students; more than 60% of them worked 40 hours or more per week, and only 28% worked at NMSU.

That is to say, full-time graduate students who did not have full-time jobs, or those who worked at NMSU were more likely to follow the traditional student pattern. They would like to take courses from Monday to Thursday, they preferred morning courses, and they liked face-to-face settings. To the contrary, part-time graduate students worked full-time, worked outside of the university, and tended to prefer Friday or weekend courses, evening courses, and online courses. After controlling for student class, student status and working schedule significantly affected course preference at NMSU.



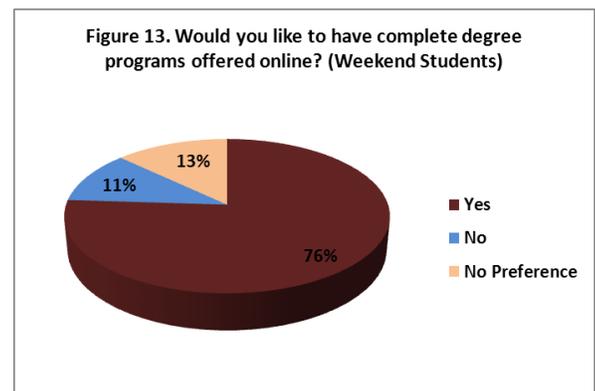
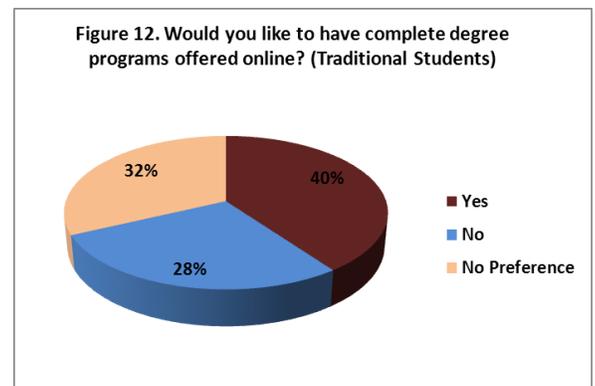
Online Courses

The survey asked students to identify how likely they would be to take a course or complete a degree program offered online. Most respondents (81%) indicated they would likely take a course that was offered online at NMSU. However, only 38% of respondents said they would like to complete a degree program offered online.

Traditional students were more interested in taking classes online than completing a degree program online. Most (82%) said the course work of online courses were not easier than face-to-face courses, but more than 90% of traditional students liked the flexibility of online courses, and more than 70% liked the scheduling of online courses. Responses regarding the primary reason for taking online courses indicated that nearly half of traditional students took online courses because they liked the convenience of online courses.

Weekend students also liked online courses. They liked the flexibility (93%) and scheduling (72%) of online courses. More than half of weekend students said they took online courses because they liked the convenience of online courses. However, over 70% of weekend students expressed that they would like to complete a degree offered online; this is significantly different from traditional students (Figure 12, Figure 13).

Overall, NMSU-Las Cruces students would like to take online courses because of the flexibility and convenience, while weekend students were more interested in completing degrees online than traditional students; both traditional and weekend students agreed that online courses were not easier than face-to-face courses.



Other Campus Courses and Courses outside of the NMSU System

Students were asked if they have taken a course on another NMSU campus as a Las Cruces campus student. Of all the respondents, only 26% (N = 721) said they had taken a course on another NMSU Campus. The most frequently cited reason for taking a course on another campus was because the Las Cruces campus did not offer an open section that fit students' schedules. In addition, very few (N = 117) respondents reported they had taken courses outside of the NMSU system as an NMSU student because of difficulty enrolling in NMSU course. With regard to other campus courses and courses outside of the NMSU system, there was no significant difference between traditional NMSU-Las Cruces students and weekend NMSU-Las Cruces students.

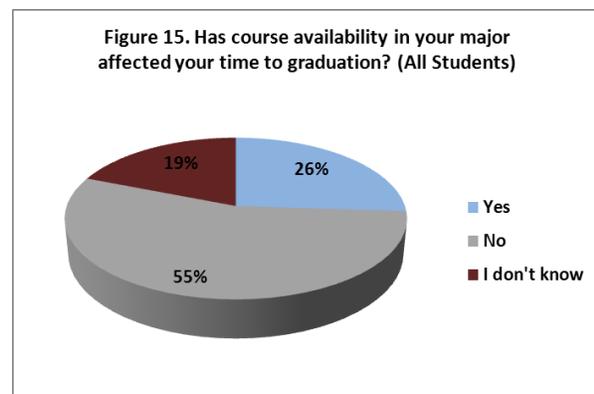
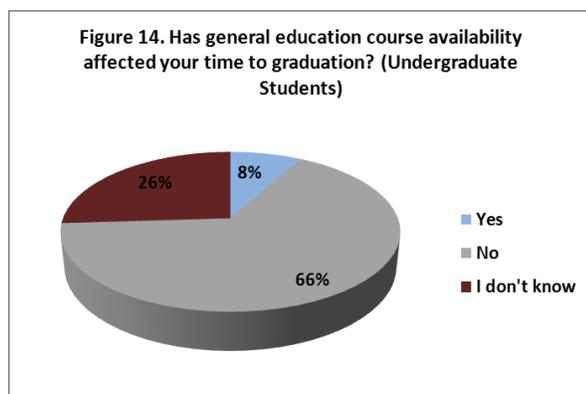
Developmental Courses

A developmental course is a course offered by NMSU's two-year campuses to help students meet course placement requirements for university-level courses. Of the 1,989 NMSU-Las Cruces undergraduate students who participated in the survey, only 225 (11%) respondents said they were required to take a developmental course; 16 said they had difficulties enrolling in the developmental courses. Again, there was no significant difference between traditional NMSU-Las Cruces students and weekend NMSU-Las Cruces students.

General Education Courses V.S. Major Courses

Students were asked if general education course availability or major course availability had affected their time to graduation. Results show that general education courses met the majority of students' needs. Of all undergraduate students, only 8% said general education course availability had affected their graduation time (Figure 14). However, respondents were less satisfied with major course availability. More than 26% of respondents said that course availability in their majors affected their time to graduation (Figure 15).

Furthermore, survey results also show that at NMSU-Las Cruces, undergraduate students were less satisfied with major course availability than graduate students. Of all undergraduate students who participated in the survey, nearly one of three said major course availability had affected their graduation time, while 18% of graduate students who participated in the survey said major course availability had affected their graduation time (Figure 16).



“I know that on some of my courses I have had to wait till the next semester to take it and it was hard when scheduling.”

“It's disappointing when certain courses are only available in certain semesters.”

“Having required classes only available in fall or spring has delayed graduation.”

The second most frequent suggestion was about online courses. More than half (N = 896) of respondents said they would like more classes offered online. While not cited as often as the first suggestion, there was considerable interest in taking courses online. This was especially true for weekend students.

“As a distance education graduate student-- would like to see more online classes.”

“It is hard to take classes on campus because I live 80 miles away from the closest campus and online is better for my schedule.

“Not enough online courses have caused me to push courses back into the next semester.”

Around 40% of respondents said they would like more advising on course scheduling. Many students suggested their advisors have more accurate information on course schedules, and students would like advisors to improve customer service skills.

“The only difficulty in the availability of course work I have seen is advisor uncertainty or ignorance.”

“Disappointed, every time I asked for help I was redirected to advisors who were not available. I completed my degree by using the web audit and searching for classes based on my own availability. It was very hard with no help...”

“Advisors do not explain that a course may be spring or fall only, this could push back graduation a full year for some people, including myself.”

Besides the three major issues, students also provided some other suggestions for course scheduling at NMSU. Many students (N = 358) mentioned the difficulty of enrolling in the courses they needed. As one student said, “the class filled up too quickly before I could enroll.” Students would like more sections to be offered each semester. About 100 students mentioned summer semester. They found it hard to graduate on time because of the lack of summer classes, and they suggested the university should offer more courses in the summer. Some comments (N = 56) were specifically about Biology courses. Student found the choices for upper level Biology courses were very limited. One student said, “One Biology class has been a struggle to get into even after having spoken with the instructors...” Other students (N = 42) said upper level English classes were difficult to get into. “This (English classes) has forced me to change my planned schedule.” A small group (N = 35) of students mentioned the price of online classes. They did not agree with paying \$75 to take a class online.

Conclusion

The two main purposes of this survey were to determine course preferences and to evaluate course availability at NMSU. The results of the survey strongly suggest that Mondays through Thursdays were the preferred days for most NMSU students even though “Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays” were also acceptable. A small group of students chose Fridays or weekends to take classes. Two groups of students can be identified based on their course preferences, “traditional student” and “weekend student.” The majority of traditional students were full-time, undergraduate students who worked less than 40 hours per week. They would like to take courses from Monday to Friday, they preferred morning courses, and they liked face-to-face settings. Most weekend students were part-time, graduate students. They usually worked 40 or more hours per week, they preferred to take classes on Fridays or weekends, and they would like to take evening classes and online courses.

The current course availability at NMSU meets the majority of students’ needs. Students were satisfied with the course availability of developmental courses and general education courses; however, students were less satisfied with major course availability. Particularly, undergraduate students were more likely to be affected by major course availability than graduate students, and weekend students were less satisfied with their major course availability than traditional students. Both traditional and weekend students liked the flexibility and convenience of online courses, while weekend students were more interested in completing degree programs offered online than traditional students. Few respondents had taken a course on another NMSU campus as a Las Cruces campus student, and few respondents had taken courses outside of the NMSU system.

Three major issues were discussed in the comments. Students overwhelmingly asked for more classes in their majors to be offered every semester instead of just in the fall or in the spring. Both traditional and weekend students wanted more classes offered online. Approximately 40% of comments addressed issues related to course advising.