Enrollment Management: Spring 2016 Waitlist Analysis

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Key Findings:

- Overall, **current and returning students** have extensive knowledge of the registration process. **Incoming students** have the greatest confusion about course enrollment.

- The two most popular ways students choose classes is through **word of mouth** and **ratemyprofessor.com.**

- Students have some **inflexibility** in choosing their classes. This is due to personal and school related responsibilities.

- The common theme students mentioned is that waitlists are challenging because there is always the risk of **wasting time** if they do not get their class.

- There is an **inconsistency** of how faculty enforce waitlist rules.

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Executive Summary

Since the Fall of 2010, waitlists have been a staple part of Mt. SAC's enrollment management. Over time, improvements have been made to the system including: an internal log to track student activity, email notifications for opening classes, and reminders to register.

The purpose of this report is to outline some of the key findings of waitlists here at Mt. SAC and evaluate the effectiveness of this practice.

Due to the nature of this study, it was decided to perform a qualitative analysis. Further, a mixed methods approach was applied in order to create a more robust analysis. Within this methodology, a series of interviews, focus groups, and a content analysis was conducted.

Some of the key themes found throughout this report include: student motivation, student knowledge of course registration and waitlists and how the concept of time is

heavily integrated into their decision process of waitlists, the challenges of student inflexibility, as well as possible ideas to help improve waitlists.

Other key findings within this report include: a clear divide between incoming students and current students on their knowledge of course registration and waitlists, the importance of a good professor is in choosing a class and being on a waitlist for them, and student's perceptions of inconsistencies of faculty handling waitlists within their own classrooms.

In sum, several suggestions were presented by the students including: creating a more user friendly website for course enrollments including added alerts, extending the length of the waitlist, extending the number of seats in a class, and working with faculty to make a consistent set of waitlist rules.

Demographics

- **Six interviews** conducted.

- **Three focus groups** conducted over a one week period.

- A total of **33 students** participated in this study.

- **11 women and 22 men** participated.

- **All** 33 students were **currently enrolled** at Mt. SAC.

- All 33 students were at least **18 years** or older.

- **All** 33 students have had at least **one semester** here at Mt. SAC.

- **30 out of the 33** students have been on at least one waitlist for the **2015-2016 academic calendar.**

- **One** content analysis on a popular social media was conducted.

"[To me, waitlists are] going to be like the Hunger Games - hide in the closet to get a spot."

[Student mention the biggest challenge in waitlists is the waiting] "When I would go into the classroom, it was very nerve wracking. What if I don't get into this class? Is there another class I can get into?"

Methods

A qualitative methodology was used that consisted of interviews, three focus groups and a content analysis on social media.

First, six initial interviews were conducted near the Language Center and Health Careers Buildings consisting of questions relating to student's knowledge of course registration and waitlist processes. These students were asked about their experiences and expectations with waitlists.

Second, three focus groups were conducted with a panel of 8 to 10 students on their experiences with waitlists. This consisted of student workers and students recruited on and around campus. Confidentiality was stressed as well as the voluntary nature of this study.

Further, a content analysis was conducted on a popular social media that coded themes of student posts regarding enrollment and waitlists.

Finally, the intent is to continue the research by distributing an online survey to all students that have been on at least one waitlist in the 2015 to 2016 academic year. This added dimension of quantitative analysis will contribute to a mixed methods approach that will provide a more robust and thorough assessment of the intricacies of waitlists here at Mt. SAC.

Student Knowledge

Overall, current and returning students are fairly knowledgeable about the registration process and enrolling into the waitlists.

Students provided detailed descriptions of the course registration process as well as how to enroll for classes and a waitlist. Additionally, **almost all** of the students mentioned their Education plan. When asked further, they replied that they worked with counselors to map it out.

When asked about receiving notifications electronically, there was a clear divide between students that check their student emails and students that mainly check their personal emails. For example one student mentions that he *"checks it on a daily basis."* Whereas, a majority of the student workers said that *"most students don't check their school email."*

Further, students were asked how they choose classes. **Almost all of them** concluded that through word of mouth and websites like ratemyprofessor.com heavily contributed to their decision making. Students will talk with others that have taken that class to figure out if this is a *"good"* (easy) instructor or not.

Class Decisions

For many students, there is a challenge of getting into the classes that they need. This includes: to graduate, transfer, or earn their certificate.

According the interviews and focus groups, the most challenging classes are English, Math, and Science classes. One student suggested that this is due to the **limited number of seats available.**

Once an student is on a wait-list, they are ranked from 1 to 10 with 1 being the first person eligible to get into the desired class. One student commented, *"I feel like if I am in the top five, then I am guaranteed that I would get in [from] the waitlist. Anything below five, I would drop."*

Additionally, students suggested that there is some inflexibility in their decision making process. Often they choose classes based on days/times as well as instructors. Many of them stated that they like attending classes during the day. One student said, *"I take the bus and I live far away and it takes about an hour and half. [The class] has to be after 8am and before 8pm because I have to take care of my siblings."* Other students mentioned that they have mandatory club activities and they must leave certain time slots open.

Why Aren't You Enrolling?

Throughout this study, students were asked when a class they needed was open, why they weren't enrolling. The responses varied and while each answer was unique, there appeared to be a common theme of timing and prior knowledge.

Mt. SAC has a very determined student body. Many of these students mentioned that they *"put [themselves] onto the waitlist [and] to the first day of class and every day thereafter until [they] get in. [They] just wait it out."*

Many students noted that there may be some confusion with adding classes. For example, one student worker commented, *"some classes are linked with a lab."* This mean that some lectures have an attached lab where a student can enroll in the lec-ture separately one term, but couldn't enroll in the lab the following term.

Further, the theme of using ratemyprofessor and talking with other students factored into whether they would enroll in a course or not. This appeared to be consistent on whether this class was open or they would have to add themselves on the waitlist. When asked about classes that were taught by "STAFF" and one student replied, *"If I'm desperate...but that makes me question it. I don't know if I would do it."*

For these students, enrolling into classes appears to be an art and a science. They enroll into the classes that they need, then they will be on the waitlist and gauge to see if they are wasting time or not. Student repeated that being on waitlists are time con-

"For the rest of the day, I was crashing courses trying to get in and I couldn't get one until 6:30 that night."

suming and that it's hard to find the will. There is always a feeling of dread thinking that they could be doing something else.

The Student's Story

What was of special interest was there appeared to be an inconsistency of how waitlist rules are implemented in the classroom.

"Some professors tell you to hang out. Some tell you to leave because they don't have a seat." One student worker succinctly explained, *"For me, like, I remember taking English 1A and I was actually waitlisted on the course – I was second on the waitlist and I show up at like 7 o'clock in the morning at the class thinking I was going to get in, but the professor comes in and said, "Sorry, but there is no way I would be able to add anyone from the waitlist." I ended up talking to him because I stuck around after the class and he said, "Look, if I was a math professor, it would be different. I would take everyone on my waitlist, but I have to read papers and that's 25 papers and if I add anyone else, that's more work for me and I know that by the middle of the semester, half of the students are going to drop, but I'm sorry I can't." So for the rest of the day, I was crashing courses trying to get in and I couldn't get one until 6:30 at night. The professor sometimes don't take students from the waitlists."*

This appears to be a common theme for the students in the interviews and the focus groups.

Another student comment-ed, *"you just don't know."* He mentioned that he was waiting in class and the instructor told him that if the waitlist student didn't show up, he could get the seat, but he was unsuccessful.

"It defeats the purpose when it looks like you are about to get in, but then the student rolls in and then you automatically get booted from the class."

Waitlists: A Content Analysis

Another way of addressing waitlist concerns was examining the social medias that students use most.

After further discussion with the Director of Marketing, the main types of social media that students at Mt. SAC actively use are: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+ and Snapchat.

Currently, the Marketing Department is doing a big push with Snapchat by incorporating "Joe the Mountie" mascot into snapchat in order to encourage more high school students to attend.

As of February 18, 2016, the current weekly statistics of the Mt. SAC facebook page:

- Has a post outreach of **1.8 million**

- There have been a total of **22K likes**.

- **131K** users have visited the webpage.

- There has been an **88%** response rate to adverts

When focused specifically on course registration, an announcement on January 21st, 2016 was posted stating that there were over **1,500 classes** available for registration. There were a total of **13 likes** and **34 comments** posted. Many of these comments contradicted the statement.

One post in particular mentioned that *"All R[egistered] V[et] T[ech] classes [are] full. [D]oes that mean I have to wait till next semester or should I just look at another school?"*

Another posed commented *"Is anyone having issues registering for classes today? I get 'webpage not available' on every browser"* suggesting that there have been some network difficulties.

The Future of Waitlists

When asked what the College can do in order to improve waitlists, there was quite a bit of feedback.

Adding More Classes

One student suggested, *"The majority of classes that get impacted are Math 71, English 68, [and] English 1A. Figure out which are being waitlisted and open up more classes."*

Another student wanted to see more Chem 50 classes opening up while a current transfer student wanted to see more sections available for the higher level classes for Chemistry and Math.

When pressed further about this issue, it was mentioned that the College is trying to do that, while one student replied that Building 9B regularly makes announcements, most of the students replied that they hadn't seen or heard of any new classes added.
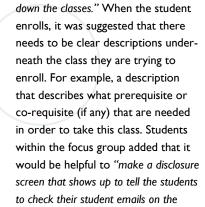
Adjusting the Waitlists

In addition to the idea of adding more classes, one student worker commented, *"Mt. SAC is one of the biggest junior colleges in California and stuff like that. Every class I've been to has a cap. For example, one thing I noticed is that every class I've seen is that they can only take 35 students. [I say] increase the amount of students in the class and shorten the waitlist. Maybe take like 45 students for a class instead of 10."*

However, it should be noted that other students within the focus group provided contradictory solutions such as increasing the size of the waitlists of classes.

Effective Course Registration

Another related issue to waitlists involved the process of course registration. As previously stated, there seemed to be a clear divide between current and incoming students as far as their knowledge base. Technology is becoming an increasingly important tool students use to navigate their college path in how they enroll for courses and waitlists.

"[For new students that don't understand the process and waitlists] dumb-
down the classes." When the student enrolls, it was suggested that there needs to be clear descriptions underneath the class they are trying to enroll. For example, a description that describes what prerequisite or co-requisite (if any) that are needed in order to take this class. Students within the focus group added that it would be helpful to *"make a disclosure screen that shows up to tell the students to check their student emails on the registration screen."*

Further suggestions included the idea of creating a website model similar to Amazon for waitlists. As students scroll through the list of courses, they can check mark a course if they are interested in it and then, later, receive a notification about the status of the class. The key difference between this and the current system is that the student doesn't have the increase stress on whether they can get this class or not. This is merely interest, not a vested one.

Student also liked the idea of receiving alerts either through their personal email or via text messaging.

Orientation

Furthermore, student workers emphasized the importance of students attending an orientation and what incoming students can get out of it. Within this orientation process, the focus group subjects stressed the importance of walking students through on how to enroll into waitlists and how to think strategically on adding and dropping classes.

Faculty Involvement

One common theme was the increasing need to work with faculty on waitlist management.

"See Profs [tend] to be more
lenient. There are spots available that other students could take. That is one of the biggest issues that needs to be addressed. I've seen it from both ends—one trying to get into the course and one in the class watching others trying to get into it."

Students viewed these kind of situations as unfair. For them, a good instructor plays a huge part in their decision making process of enrolling into particular classes as well as being on their waitlists. One student even mentioned that he has a list of good and bad professors. Therefore, inconsistencies within waitlist management provides a frustrating experience for the students.

In sum, waitlists here at Mt. SAC work to a certain degree, but much can be done in order to improve it. Hopefully this report has provided an initial interest to continue exploring the nuances.