

# WAITLISTS

Mt. San Antonio College

May 2, 2016

## Waitlists: What Did We Find?

Waitlists were initially conceptualized as a way to help faculty manage enrollment on the first few days of classes. The list provided a way for faculty to sequentially add students to their roster. Given the many students on waitlists, the College began exploring the use of this data for enrollment management purposes. However, students' on waitlists did not always enroll in newly opened sections of the same course. Why, then, were they on the waitlists?

Stemming from research-led focus groups, the purpose of the Waitlist Survey was to assess how students were perceiving and using the waitlists. The survey stemmed from student interviews and focus groups in early 2016. A total of 937 students responded to the spring 2016 Waitlist Survey (13% response rate).

The results were mixed. It was concluded that waitlists had the ability to magnify students' interest in specific sections of courses, but they are not the sole indicator of students' future enrollment. In other words, waitlists alone can't predict student behavior when enrolling into newly created classes. Further results are presented below by the research questions.

## Research Questions

We used three research questions aligned with the Waitlist Survey. Answers indicated the variation in students' use of and perceptions of the waitlist.

### Q: How do students use waitlists?

A: Overwhelmingly **92%** (n = 937) of students stay on waitlists for as long as possible as a waitlist strategy.

### Q: Do students view waitlists as useful here at Mt. SAC?

A: **61%** (n = 937) of students agreed with the statement "[Waitlists] make me feel like I have a good chance of getting the class I want/need."

### Q: Do students experience the process of enrolling in waitlists as positive or negative?

A: While 61% (n = 937) of students viewed waitlists as helpful, **80%** viewed waitlists as **stressful**.

Survey: A 15-question survey was created with numerous seven-point Likert scales and fill-in-the-blank questions.

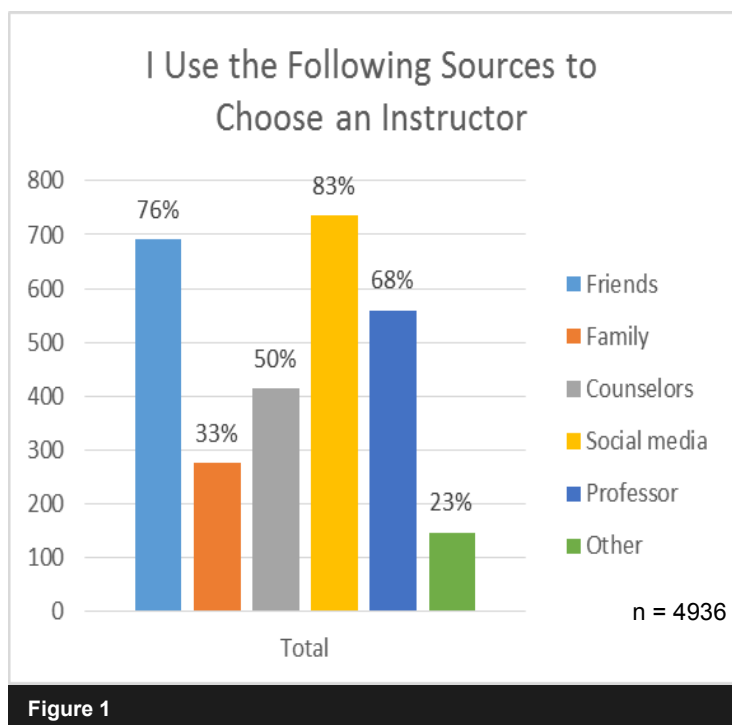
Distributed: Currently enrolled students (**7201 students**) who had been on at least one wait list in 2015-2016 academic school year were invited to complete the survey in spring 2016. Two email reminders were sent between 2/19/16 and 2/29/16.

Response Rate: Of the 7,201 participants, **937** completed the survey, yielding a **13% response rate**.

Findings are noted in the two articles to the left and more details are on the remaining pages. For further information, please see appendices.

## Further Discussion

- How Do Students Use Waitlists?
- How do Students Feel about Waitlists?
- What's Next?



## How Do Students Use Waitlists?

Throughout the study, students consistently stated that there were not enough classes that they needed in order to enroll. It was decided to investigate further and assess what ways student use the waitlist.

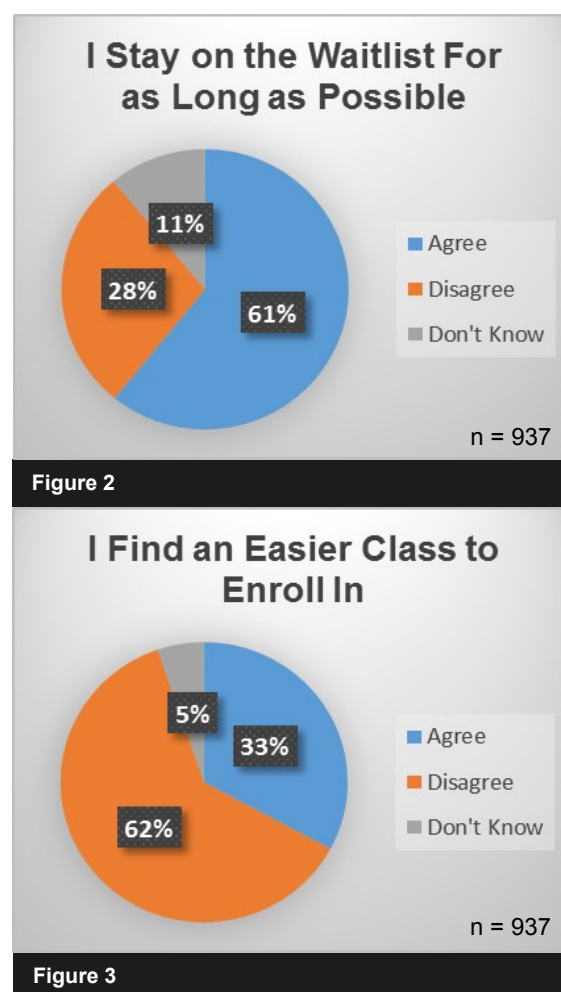
One common theme: students tended to choose classes based on instructor preferences. Further, the sources that students used to decide on which classes to enroll into were analyzed. Figure 1 shows that **83%** (n = 937) of the students surveyed regularly use **social media** to find instructors. Some of these social medias included ratemyprofessor.com, Facebook, Eduplan, and Google+.

When trying to get into a desired class, students have several options. Figure 2 shows that **61%** (n = 937) of students try to **stay on waitlists** for as long as possible while only **33%** of students try to **find an easier class** to enroll in (See Figure 3).

When asked how students choose their classes, **94%** (n = 937) agreed with the statement that they schedule based on **days of the week and scheduled meeting times that meet their schedule**. Interestingly enough, only **78%** (n = 937) of students stated that they choose classes based on the **instructor**. This suggests that that students tend to place a higher priority on choosing classes based on their schedule availability rather than instructor preference.

The most confusing (and possibly most interesting of the findings) included student's actions towards available classes. The question "There have been times when classes have been available that fit my schedule, but I have not enrolled in them" yielded interesting results. Of the participants, **49%** (n = 937) **disagreed** and **46%** (n = 937) **agreed**.

This sentiment emerged throughout the study where there appeared to be a divide between student's opinion and their actions.



## How Do Students Feel About Waitlists?

(Figure 4 provides the student headcount of figure 5a and 5b) Overall, students seem to view waitlists as a tool that can benefit them. According to the survey, **77%** (n = 937) of students viewed waitlists as beneficial towards getting the classes that they need compared to **21%** (n = 937) that disagreed with the statement "Waitlists help me get into the classes I need" (Figure 5a).

Interestingly, while students are **more likely** to suggest that waitlists **help** them get into the classes that they need, they may not necessarily view it as making class **enrollment easier**. According to the survey, **61%** (n = 937) of the respondents agreed with the statement "Being on waitlists makes enrolling into classes harder" (Figure 5b).

Finally, students were asked whether they trust waitlists and are satisfied with them. Some **81%** (n = 937) viewed the process of enrolling in waitlists as stressful. A smaller percentage (**61%**) (n = 937) indicated that waitlists help them enroll in the classes they want or need.

# Correlations

Throughout the analysis, students' perception of the waitlist became a topic of interest. Two-variable correlations were used to determine if there is a relationship between a student's perception of waitlists helping them get into the classes they need and whether waitlists make enrollment easier or harder.

The results suggest **significance** for the correlations meaning that there is a strong likelihood students perceive waitlists as a tool to make enrollment easier and that students also perceive that waitlists will help them get into the classes they needed. In other words, the more students view waitlists as a tool to make enrollment easier for them, the more students believed waitlists will help them get into the classes. The opposite is also true; if students didn't value waitlists as a way to get into courses, they felt the waitlists were less helpful.

Overall, the effectiveness of waitlists is determined by the user experience. This finding is further reinforced by the comments students submitted in the survey

Wait lists...	Help Me	Do Not Help	Easier Enrollment	Harder Enrollment	Neither Help/Hurt
Agree	722	306	509	576	344
Disagree	200	566	410	331	476
Don't Know	15	65	18	30	117
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>937</b>	<b>937</b>	<b>937</b>	<b>937</b>	<b>937</b>

Figure 4

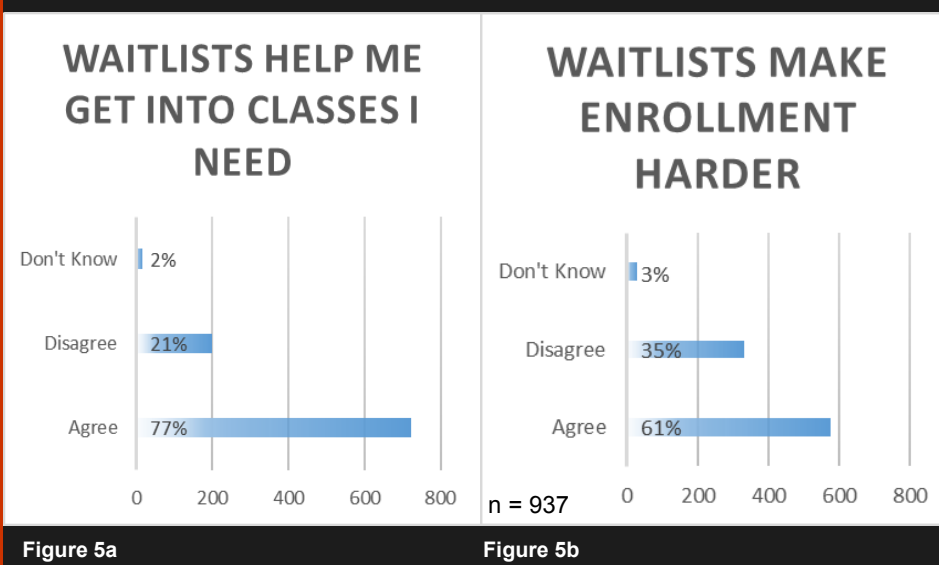


Figure 5a

Figure 5b

## Now What?

Based these findings, the conclusions are as follows:

1. Students use social media as their main tool in choosing an instructor (83%)(n = 937) .
2. Waitlists are viewed by the students as effective tools in getting the classes they want or need (See figure 4).
3. Students are divided on the effectiveness of waitlists. Based on the survey responses, one student's response perfectly sums it: *"It's stressful yet leaves a little hope that I might get my class!"*

### Possible Takeaways

1. There are merits to the waitlist system. It can be an effective tool for faculty to manage their classrooms prior to census and can show student demand; however, demand does not equate to enrollment; it is not a one-to-one ratio.
2. The use of the waitlist in predictive analytics may continue to produce mixed results for effective enrollment management. It can be an effective supplementary indicator of course enrollment, but there are inconsistencies when it is used as a main tool to predict enrollment. For future research, other indicators of students' academic pathway may provide more insight.