

Preliminary Assessment of University Hour

November 2006

Institutional Planning & Analysis

Introduction and Considerations

Institutional Planning & Analysis conducted a preliminary assessment of the "University Hour" pilot at Cal State San Marcos. The following three factors and background information were considered:

Freshmen must be effectively engaged to increase persistence between first and second year. Engagement also increases the likelihood of persistence to graduation. Student engagement is positively related to first-year and senior student grades and to persistence between the first and second year of college.¹ Participation in co-curricular activities is one variable used to measure student engagement. Interaction with faculty members outside the classroom, working with other students outside of the classroom to prepare or collaborate on projects and discussing ideas with classmates outside of the classroom are other factors included in the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE).

In 2006, freshmen reported increased levels of participation in co-curricular activities (from 36.6% in 2005 to 46.4% in 2006) and collaboration with students outside of class (36.8% in 2005 to 44.0% in 2006). At the same time, CSUSM experienced a jump in the retention of first time freshmen from 70.3% last year to 75.7% this fall. The fall 2006 entering class was the largest freshmen class in CSUSM history. A review of applications for fall 2007 at CSUSM and statewide indicate that this trend will continue. University Hour enables an increase in the activities identified by NSSE as factors for engaging students and improving first year retention and persistence.

Upper Division, commuting and working students require flexible course scheduling and availability of classes. CSUSM seniors are more likely than students at other Master's level campuses to work at least 20 hours per week off campus (48% vs. 38%) and more likely to have responsibility for dependent care (57% vs. 45%). Compression of schedule (courses offered at the same time) can reduce student flexibility and can have an impact on time-to-degree.

Cal State San Marcos experiences challenges with space utilization and the limited addition of new space. Enrollment at CSUSM surged from 6303 full-time equivalent students in 2005-06 to 7133 in 2006-07 (estimated). The number of course sections grew from 1360 in fall 2005 to 1518 in fall 2006. Lecture space during CSUSM's historically peak hours (9 a.m. – 3 p.m.) is increasingly limited. The campus will not increase capacity until the completion of the Social and Behavioral Sciences Building in 2010.

Findings

After reviewing anecdotal information and conducting a more systematic evaluation, it is evident that the university has an opportunity to recognize the early successes of University Hour and further institutionalize it by identifying those days best suited for long-term implementation. A one- or two-day University Hour would allow for more focused and consistent programming, mitigate known concerns of upper division, commuting and working students and address the

¹ National Survey of Student Engagement 2006 Annual Report

current and future challenge of limited space. This is consistent with other universities that have successful activities hours. Cal Poly and USD are two examples.

Based on discussions with Associated Students, Inc. (ASI), Student Life and Leadership, Academic Affairs, students, faculty and staff, the key successes of the “University Hour” concept include:

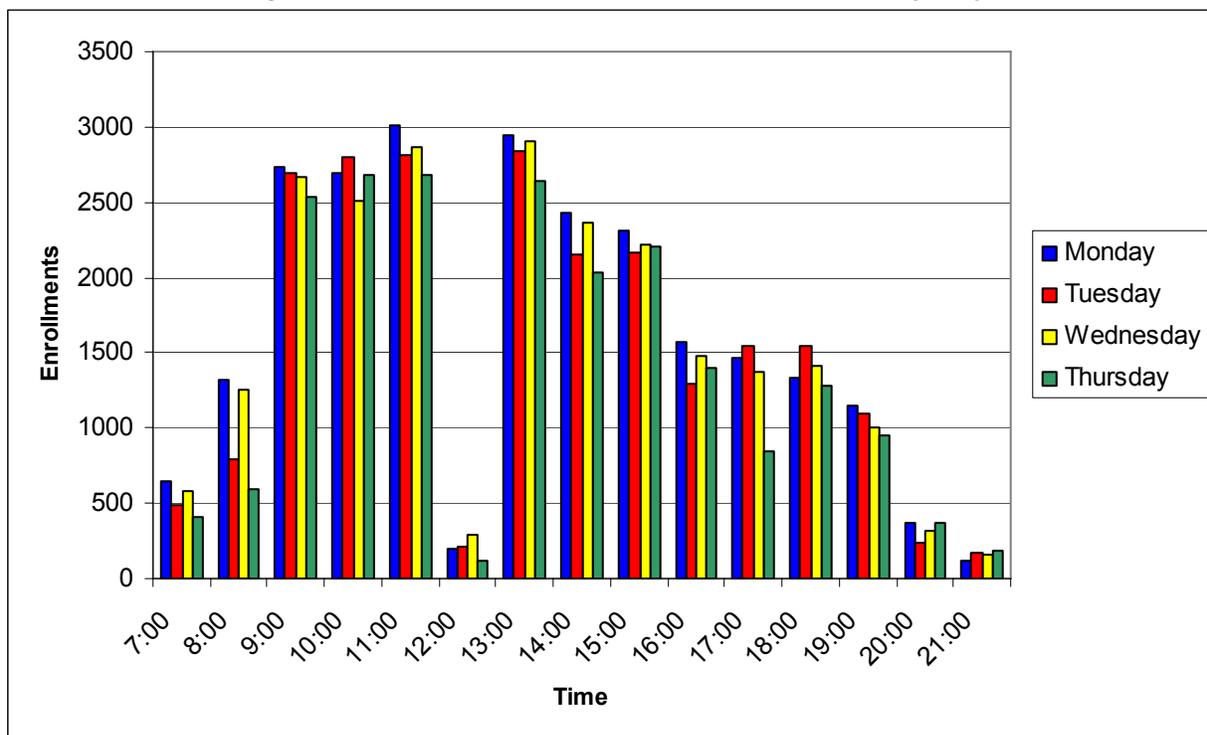
- Increased student engagement and improved campus climate
- Increased faculty and staff engagement
- Increased club participation and programming
- Increased ASI programming and participation
- Increased use of advising and the learning support centers

Several examples of how a university hour is being utilized on the campus were provided, including senior experience meetings, faculty and staff association meetings, career center events, athletics team meetings and academic advising, the CoBA “Meet and Greet”, intramural events and club sports captain meetings.

Discussions with some students and faculty further illustrated the challenge of increasing campus engagement while meeting the needs of our diverse population – such as students that will be engaged by, and are expecting, a vast array of co-curricular opportunities and activities, residential students, commuter and working students and our adjunct faculty.

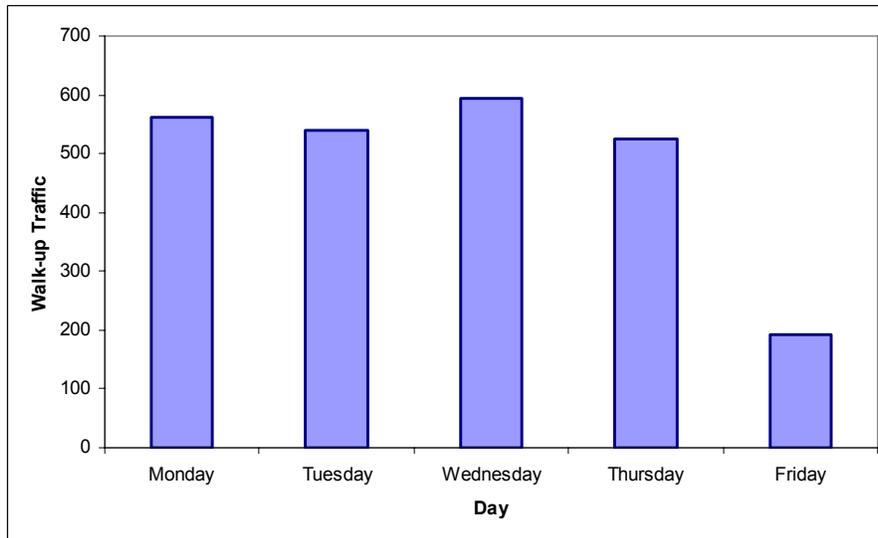
A review of campus population by hour confirmed that population, based on course enrollments, is higher Monday through Thursday from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. The population drops to below 2,500 at 2:00 p.m., close to 1,500 at 4:00 p.m. and below 500 at 8:00 p.m. (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Fall 2006 Course Enrollment Patterns by Day



In reviewing submitted data, campus service centers are experiencing marked increases in traffic during the university hour. The traffic at the service centers was fairly steady Monday through Thursday, with Wednesday and Thursday being heaviest (Figure 2). Campus service centers included the Language Learning Center, Math and Writing Labs, EOP and SSS, Disabled Student Services, Computer Support Center, Career Center, Student Life & Leadership, Food Services, Field House, Student Financial Services, Student Life & Leadership and Parking & Transportation Services.

Figure 2: Campus Service Center Walk-Up Traffic During University Hour
 Service Centers allowed to track during Week of October 16th or 23rd



The Associated Students, Inc. reported that to date, they've held eighteen events during the University Hour. While the number of events was highest on Monday, the heavily attended events - those with 150 or more in attendance, were Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday (Figure 3). It's recognized that serving food most likely increases participation at an event; however, that was not factored. A review of the Student Activities Calendar, excluding student organization meetings and ASI Programs, shows highest activity on Tuesday and Thursday (Figure 4).

Figure 3: ASI Programming Attendance by Day and # in Attendance, Fall 2006

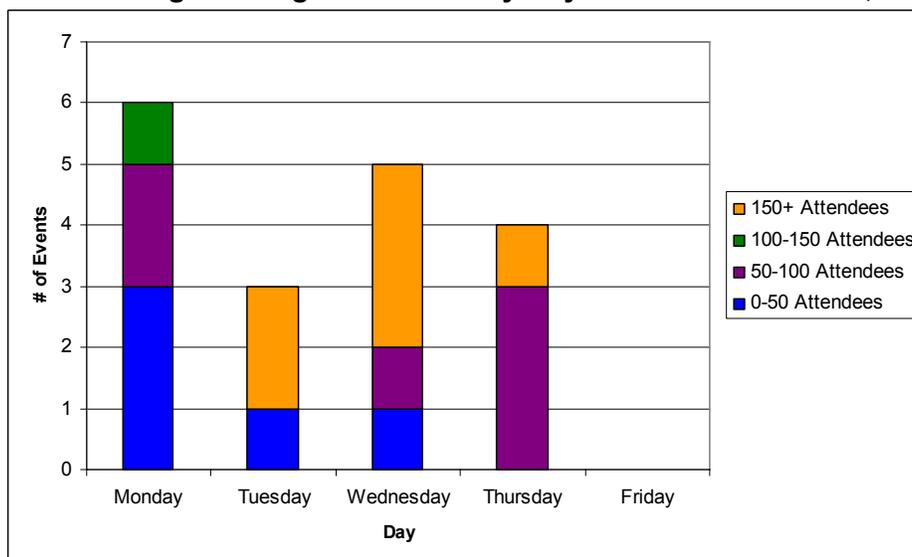
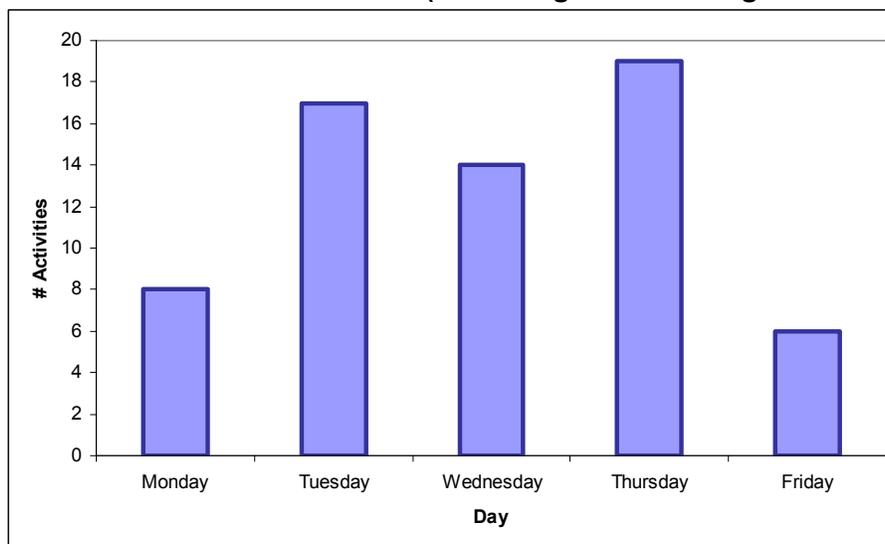


Figure 4: Student Activities Calendar (excluding club meetings and ASI Events)



Approximately 42% of student organizations hold meetings during University Hour. One faculty member commented, *“In the last 2 years we averaged between 3-7 students per weekly meeting and this year we have had 19-25 at our first few meetings. The students say that this University Hour is making it easier for them to attend.”* In a survey conducted last spring, student organizations indicated that their clubs typically meet weekly on Tuesday or Wednesday. Academic departments indicated that they typically meet semi-monthly on Monday or Tuesday.

Recommendation and Final Thoughts

It is clear that the University Hour is being utilized Monday through Thursday. However, the data and discussion also suggest that the activities can be compressed to a two-day schedule. With a continued robust Tuesday and Thursday class schedule, a University Hour on those days would further strengthen the tradition by allowing for focused and consistent programming and accommodate student organization meetings, department meetings, workshops and seminars, and high profile events.

The assessment also identified additional areas for consideration to ensure long-term success including adding seating and shaded areas in the campus center, updating the Dome to be a more inviting atmosphere (e.g. sofas, café & bar tables, paint, art, lighting, music), and marketing and announcement of campus events and student organization activities through marquees.

Institutional Planning & Analysis will continue to assess the long-term implementation of University Hour and report periodically to the Executive Council and campus community.

Questions should be directed to Matthew Ceppi, Director, Institutional Planning & Analysis, at mceppi@csusm.edu.