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Executive Summary

During the 2018 Summer Term, the Office of Institutional Research and Planning (OIRP) collaborated with North Orange Continuing Education's (NOCE) academic senate to inquire about students' attitudes towards possibly switching NOCE's current academic calendar from trimester to semester. NOCE is one of three institutions in the North Orange County Community College District (NOCCCD) and currently operates on a trimester academic calendar, while the other two institutions (Fullerton College and Cypress College) are on a semester academic calendar. While discussions about the possibility of NOCE switching to a semester calendar surfaced, both the academic senate and NOCE leadership agreed it was important to include students' opinions in this decision.

OIRP gathered data on students' perspectives on this possible switch through two methods: surveys (online and paper) and focus groups. The expected outcome of gathering this data was to provide student feedback to both NOCE leadership and the academic senate on which academic calendar students would prefer and why. The purpose of this report is to give voice to the opinions and perspectives of NOCE students to guide data-driven changes that meet the direct needs of NOCE's student population. This project examined the following topics:

- **Preferences between trimester and semester academic calendars among NOCE students**
- **Reasons behind why NOCE students drop a class**
- **Resources that would be helpful to NOCE students**

A total of 1,149 students provided feedback via the survey, and 66 NOCE students participated in five focus groups that were conducted at the three main campuses: Anaheim, Cypress, and Wilshire. The student survey was administered between July and December 2018. The focus groups were all conducted in the month of November 2018.

Key findings from the survey and focus groups are:

- Most students prefer a trimester calendar because they believe it allows them to complete classes faster, take more classes, and commit more easily because of the shorter schedule.
- ESL students primarily preferred a semester calendar because they felt the 18-weeks would allow them more time to digest class content.
- NOCE students who are parents expressed a preference towards semester due to the alignment with their children's school calendars.
- The common reason for dropping out of class differed for survey participants and focus group participants. The most common reason for dropping for focus group participants was due to exceeding the number of absences in a course per the attendance policy, whereas work and course schedule conflict was the main reason for dropping for survey participants.
- Extending lab hours and providing more tutors in the labs were resources desired by NOCE students.

Methodology

This section explains the approach OIRP used to gather the opinions of NOCE students about their preferences between a trimester and semester, the barriers they experience as students, and resources that may be helpful to them.

Data Collection Procedures

OIRP solicited the help of several departments and faculty members to help administer the survey and conduct the focus groups to better understand the experiences of NOCE students and their preferences for an academic calendar.

Survey

From July to December 2018, students had the opportunity to provide their feedback on their preferences via a survey (Appendix B). The survey was administered either in the classroom by a NOCE faculty member in a paper format or electronically via a Qualtrics link. During the 2018 Summer Term, NOCE faculty were contacted via email and iTendance messages to raise awareness about the survey. Faculty were informed about the purpose of the survey and were given the opportunity to administer the paper version of the survey in their classrooms during the 2018 Summer and Fall terms. If a faculty member chose to administer the paper survey with their students, they were instructed to contact OIRP to receive a *survey packet*, which included printed surveys and instructions on how to administer the survey (Appendix A). These packets were then sent to instructors via inter-district mail, and completed surveys were returned to OIRP. Instructors who chose to print out the survey themselves were sent an electronic version of the *survey packet* which included the PDF version of the survey and protocol along with instructions for printing.

In collaboration with NOCE campus communications, survey flyers were posted on social media, the NOCE website, and across campuses to inform students of the opportunity to share their opinions. A total of 1,149 NOCE students completed either a paper or online survey and represented all five of NOCE's programs (CTE, ESL, HSDP, LEAP and DSS).

Focus Groups

In November 2018, five focus groups were conducted at NOCE's three main campuses: Anaheim, Cypress and Wilshire with a total of 66 students. The students participated in a group discussion that lasted approximately one hour (Appendix C). Groups were led by one facilitator and one or two note takers from OIRP. The students' participation in the focus groups was voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. OIRP provided food and beverages to students to thank them for their time and feedback.

The focus groups ranged from nine to 19 students from all five of NOCE's programs (CTE, ESL, HSDP, LEAP and DSS). Students were recruited through several marketing efforts including flyers, online announcements, and social media posts. Two criteria were used for student participation: 1) Must be over the age of 18 and 2) they must currently be a NOCE student. Informed-consent procedures were explained at the beginning of each focus group and after distributing the consent forms (see Appendix D). Focus group discussions were digitally recorded with the permission of the participants. The anonymity of participants in the focus groups is protected in this report.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data

OIRP created the paper survey template using Remark Office software. Once surveys were completed, they were scanned and imported into a data shell. Survey data was exported as Microsoft Excel files from the Remark Office software and Qualtrics. The survey responses from both data collection sources were appended in SPSS, a statistics software. SPSS was used to get descriptive information about survey data. Data was summarized using frequency tables on students' academic calendar preference and using crosstab procedures to further break down the data at NOCE program level.

Qualitative Data

To begin the qualitative data analysis process, OIRP facilitators debriefed after focus groups to discuss session content and what was learned. Next, major themes that surfaced from data collection were identified and used as codes for content analysis for both focus groups and open-ended survey questions. The research team conducted structured thematic analysis for all qualitative data to examine themes that surfaced within and across groups. Focus group recordings were transcribed electronically using Temi software and reexamined for accuracy. The focus groups were then coded for thematic content. For focus group coding, OIRP utilized the cloud-based qualitative data analysis software program, Dedoose, which allows for the extraction of primary and sub-primary themes. For the open-ended survey questions, OIRP utilized Excel, which allowed filtering of the responses based on key words and themes. Each open-ended response was read in its entirety and categorized into one or more themes accordingly. The resulting analysis is intended to inform academic senate and NOCE leadership about the perspectives and experiences of NOCE students.

Limitations

This section discusses the limitations to this research study. One limitation that is across both methods is that all the data gathered from students is self-reported. That is, researchers take the responses of participants, whether in focus groups or the survey, at face value. Another limitation that cuts across both methods is convenience sampling. Participants in focus groups and surveys were not randomly selected and participated in these data collection methods based on convenience and potentially other motivators. Convenience sampling may lead to a skewed representation of NOCE's student population towards the topics explored. Lastly, fluency in English was a limitation across both methods. Both focus groups and the survey were administered in English, and questions may have not been fully understood by students who are not native speakers. This may have led to mis-interpretations of questions, therefore impacting the responses provided.

Another limitation that OIRP encountered was related to the limited information students had regarding the pros and cons of each academic calendar schedule. Some students shared that they did not have enough information to form an opinion between the two. Some focus group participants also expressed confusion regarding the calendar schedule on which NOCE currently operates. Thus, students were only able to express their opinion based on the information for which they had the most understanding.

One limitation exclusive to the administration of the survey was that although students were encouraged and instructed to not complete the survey more than once, some students may have submitted multiple responses. The online version of the survey was administered via an unlimited sharable link to provide greater access to potential participants. Respondents may have thought their

submissions were not going through, and thus they may have completed the survey again. Additionally, since surveys were administered online and directly to students in class on paper, students may have completed both the online and paper forms assuming the surveys were different.

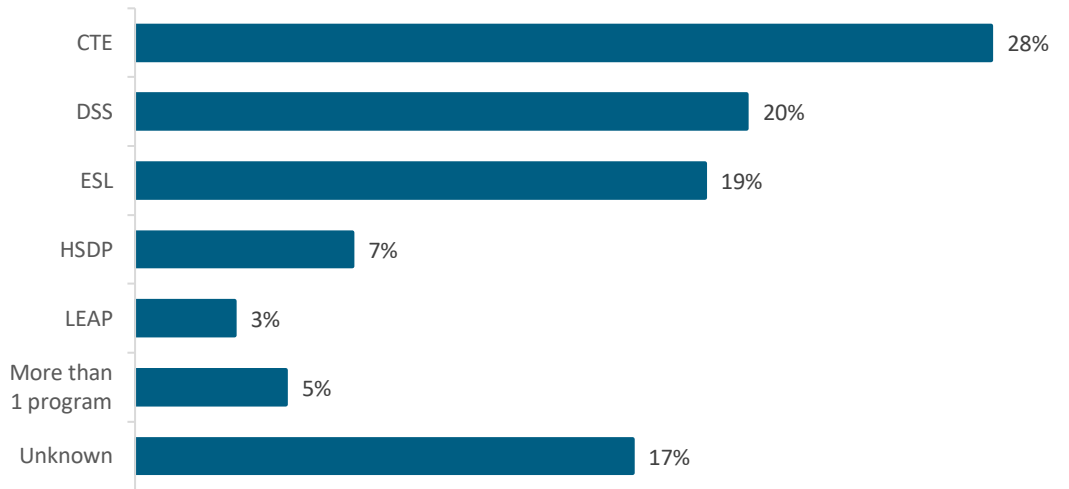
Participant Demographics

The following demographics reflect the self-reported information by the survey and focus group participants:



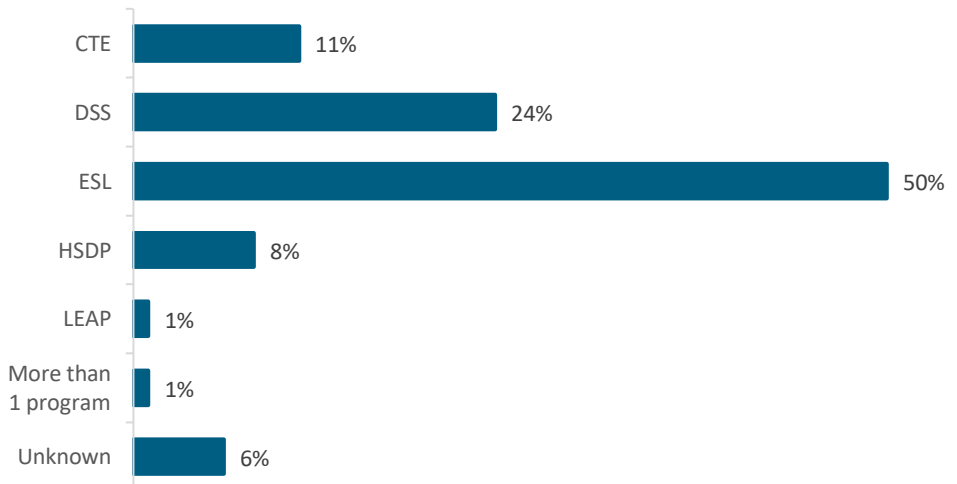
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from Noun Project

**Survey Participants by Program
(N=1,149)**

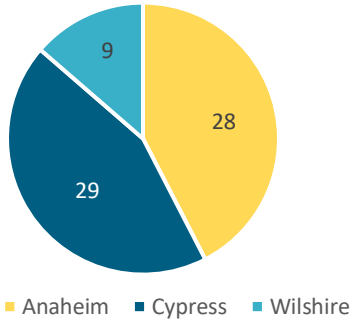


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from Noun Project

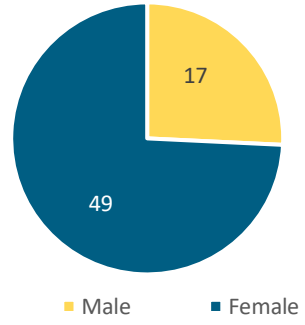
**Focus Group Participants by Program
(N=66)**



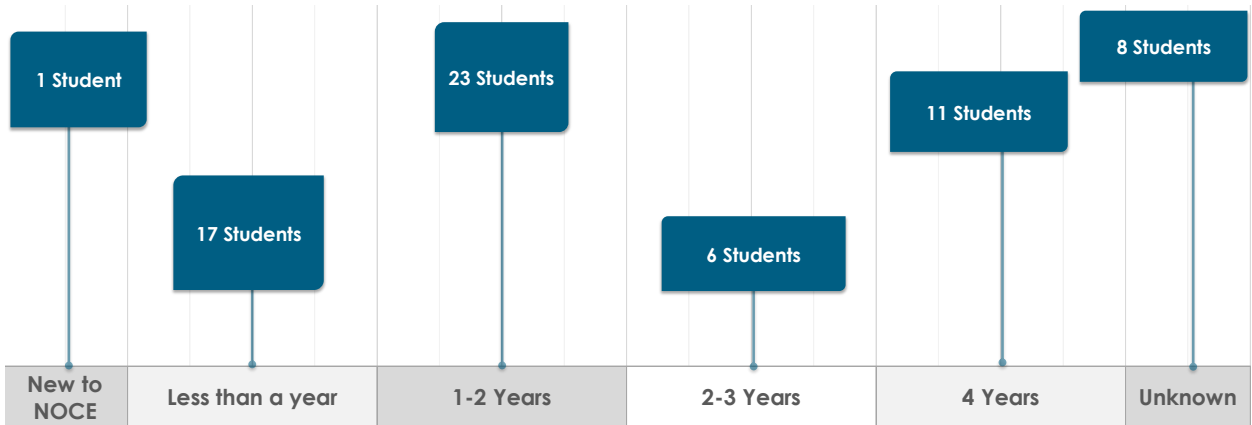
Focus Group Participants by Site (N=66)



Focus Group Participants by Gender (N=66)



Length of Time at NOCE for Focus Group Participants (N=66)



Key Findings

A total of 1,158 surveys were completed via Qualtrics or paper. Of those, 9 surveys were excluded as they were identified as instructors based on the responses to the open-ended question that asks why the selected schedule is better for the participant. The remaining **1,149 survey responses** were included in the analysis.

A total of **66 NOCE students** participated in **five focus groups** across the three NOCE campuses: Anaheim, Cypress and Wilshire. The focus groups ranged from nine to 19 students and involved students from all five of NOCE's programs (CTE, ESL, HSDP, LEAP and DSS).

Academic Calendar Preference

Of the 1,149 survey respondents, 639 (**56%**) indicated their preference for a **trimester** calendar, and 44% (n=500) preferred a semester calendar. A few students (n=10) chose not to indicate their preference.

Based on their preference, students received a follow-up question asking for an open-ended response to why the selected schedule is better for them. Of the 1,149 respondents, 753 provided a response. The open-ended responses were coded in one of the six categories: **work related, academic related, family related, alignment with other community colleges, transportation, and other**. A few additional themes emerged based on students' responses, which were coded into the following categories: no preference regarding the academic calendar, preference for the existing calendar because the schedule works as it is, and due to students' familiarity with the existing calendar system.

As a part of the focus groups, students were asked to raise their hands for their preference between a trimester and semester calendar. Across all three sites (Anaheim, Cypress and Wilshire), focus group participants shared their preferences for the academic calendar to lean towards a **trimester** calendar. Students were then asked to share why they chose that academic calendar. Like survey findings, focus group transcriptions were coded in one of the above six categories. Subcategories of themes emerged through the qualitative analysis and were categorized as: length of trimester works best, trimester provides more class options, length of semester works best, semester calendar aligns with K-12 system, and semester calendar is best for course curriculum. Below is a breakdown by site of which academic calendar students preferred.

	Trimester	Semester	Total Students
Anaheim	16	12	28
Cypress	18	11	29
Wilshire	5	4	9
Total	39	27	66

Key Finding #1: Most students prefer a trimester calendar because they believe it allows them to complete classes faster, take more classes, and commit more easily because of the shorter schedule.

Both survey and focus group participants were asked to share why they chose either a trimester or semester as their preference for an academic calendar. Most participants who voiced their opinions mentioned that they preferred the 12-week trimester because it provided them with shorter classes, and this would allow them to complete more classes in one academic year. Some students expressed that when they returned to school, an 18-week semester seemed daunting to them, but a 12-week trimester felt more “do-able.” As noted by a student who participated in a focus group:

“I chose the trimester because I remember when I first saw the flyers and started taking classes here. I thought to myself, ‘Oh, for summer term there’s only one month, and then you get to finish it. And then for fall term, there’s only two months because it starts in September and ends in November. That really encouraged me because I don’t really like the idea of going to college and then having to sit through classes for three months, four months, five months. It’s just very discouraging. I don’t think I would have been here if it was longer.” – Focus group

Survey respondents also indicated that a trimester calendar made it easier for them to commit to a shorter schedule and therefore made NOCE more accessible to them. Many responses included students mentioning how a trimester allows them to finish classes *fast*. Below are a few of the students’ comments regarding why they prefer a trimester calendar:

“...Also, I like a trimester system because it doesn’t take too long to complete a class. It is discouraging to have a class for that many weeks and commit to that long time period for a class. Things may come up that may have me skip too many classes.”- Survey

“I got to Cypress College too. It is too much for NOCE to switch to semester. Then, I have to worry about my college classes exams and submitting in work for NOCE classes. If NOCE stays trimester, I can get things done faster since the classes are short and fast pace. Then I have time to study for final exams at Cypress college.” - Survey

Another common response from students about why they preferred a trimester calendar was that they felt a trimester provided them with more class diversity. That is, students felt that the three-term schedule provided them the opportunity to explore more classes within an academic year:

“I can take more classes in short period of time. It is easy to commit short period of time than semester.” - Survey

Key Finding #2: ESL students primarily preferred a semester calendar because they felt the 18-weeks would allow them more time to digest class content.

There was a consensus among NOCE ESL students across all sites for a preference towards a semester calendar because this would allow them additional time to cover the coursework. Students shared that they felt the curriculum in the ESL courses was too rushed in a trimester calendar and did not provide enough time for them to truly comprehend the course material. This finding aligns with survey results and reveals a common theme among ESL students. One focus group participant noted how a semester would allow them more time to understand the course content:

“We need more time in the class. Right now, we are taking this class, the teacher goes too fast with the content. It’s a lot of content to learn in a short time. We need more time. More practice.”- Focus group

Several survey participants also shared how a semester would allow them more time to practice their English skills:

“Because we have more practice and continuity with the English content.”- Survey

“Because more time learning something is better, [you] get more knowledge and your skills become better.”- Survey

Survey results for students’ academic calendar preference was further broken down by NOCE academic program type and revealed that ESL was the only academic program where most students preferred a semester calendar:

	Trimester	Semester	Unreported Preference
CTE	69.6%	29.1%	1.3%
DSS	51.2%	46.4%	2.4%
ESL	43.9%	55.3%	.8%
HSDP	53.8%	41.3%	4.8%
LEAP	63.5%	32.7%	3.8%
Unreported Program	54.2%	45.8%	0.0%

Key Finding #3: NOCE students who are parents expressed a preference towards semester due to the alignment with their children’s school calendars.

The final theme that surfaced among NOCE students regarding a calendar preference was having an aligned school calendar with their school-aged children. NOCE students who are parents shared that a semester calendar would provide them the same summer and winter breaks as their children and would alleviate the stress of having to find childcare while they attend courses at NOCE. Focus group participants at both Cypress and Wilshire expressed this preference. Students mentioned that they oftentimes notice that fewer students attend courses during the traditional K-12 breaks. One student attributed this lower attendance to the difficulty some parents may experience in finding childcare while their child is on break and they still have to attend classes:

“I noticed in my class a lot of students, they don’t come, why? Because they had Christmas and Thanksgiving break and the schools are closed. And many of the students, they are parents, and I understand that it’s hard to find a babysitter for your kids, they prefer to stay home and not come to school.”- Focus group

Among the survey participants who based their calendar selection on alignment with their children’s schooling (n=34), a large majority (n=29) indicated the semester calendar would best align with their children’s school schedule. Parents indicated that having their NOCE classes and breaks mirror the school districts in the area would allow for higher attendance among this group (parents of school-aged children) of NOCE students. One ESL student indicated this in their response to the survey:

“I want to start and end my ESL classes when my children start and end their classes so that I don’t miss any classes.”- Survey

Another parent indicated that school related tasks may be difficult to complete due to their parental responsibilities:

*“I have more family responsibilities later in the day that prevents me from taking evening classes. I stop and may not continue the required courses since they are in the evening...”
- Survey*

Key Finding #4: The common reason for dropping out of class differed for survey participants and focus group participants. The most common reason for dropping for focus group participants was due to exceeding the number of absences in a course per the attendance policy, whereas work and course schedule conflict was the main reason for dropping for survey participants.

NOCE students were asked to share the reasons of why they have had to drop an NOCE course before. A common theme that surfaced during focus groups was students sharing how they had to drop a course due to having excessive absences. For some of NOCE's courses, there are strict attendance policies, and if students miss more than the allocated absences per this policy, they are dropped from the course. One student shared:

"I was enrolled in the excel class, doing very well, but then because I had missed two or three days, I had a time of crisis and I had no choice, but to drop out in the middle of the term." - Focus group

Another student suggested there be exceptions to the attendance policies. For example, if a student was sick and provided a doctor's note, the absences would not count against them:

"... I think they should add something like if you have a job, you know, if you have a doctor's note, you can still continue to take the course because some people, they get sick...I don't know, maybe it's up to the teacher to go ahead and say that and be like, all right, its okay. But I mean, I don't know how that really works." - Focus group

The common reason for dropping a course **differed** for survey participants. Of the 154 survey participants who indicated they dropped a course, **29%** indicated work and course schedule conflict was the main reason for dropping. One student shared:

"I had to drop classes because I have to work and sometimes my school schedule doesn't fit with my work schedule." - Survey

Students who experienced barriers related to their job responsibilities shared that they usually looked for courses that could accommodate their existing work schedule. Many shared that they lacked the flexibility in their work schedule to allow them to explore a variety of courses. Students voiced their desire to have courses be available at various times and days of the week. Some students shared that either switching the times and dates every term or providing more sections of a course at various times and days would allow them to enroll in desired courses. For others, choosing between work and school is a reality they face even during the registration process, as mentioned by some students:

“Jobs are not flexible. Sometimes, you have to register today, and you have to work that day, and sometimes you have to make that decision, between work or school and it gets hard.”
- Focus group

“Yes, my job was not willing to work with my class schedule.” - Survey

Reasons for dropping classes were consistent across focus groups and survey participants. These included dropping courses due to family responsibilities, scheduling conflicts, and transportation. Students shared stories of having to prioritize basic needs up against their education. For some students this included:



**Finding adequate
childcare**



**Having a flexible schedule
to accommodate their
coursework**



**Finding an academic
schedule that fit their
transportation needs**

Students across survey and focus groups mentioned family responsibility as a reason behind dropping a course. Some did not specify on what they meant by having “family issues,” while others shared that they dropped a course specifically because of lack of family support or they could not find childcare:

“Like for me, it’s my because I have little kids and sometimes its hard to find the time, between school, taking them to school, picking them up, and bringing them back. That for me was the challenge... It’s the childcare, that’s actually my challenge.” -Focus group

Several students mentioned they dropped a course because of a schedule conflict, especially related to night courses. Some students dropped a course because it did not fit well with their schedule and others because the course was offered at an undesirable time of the day. One survey participant shared:

“Class time didn't work for me. I just enrolled in a class that I need to finish the Administration program and it's only offered at night. I would prefer a day class.” - Survey

Experiencing transportation as a barrier was not as frequently mentioned by focus group participants and survey participants but was mentioned by a few primarily during the Anaheim focus group sessions.

Several students mentioned that they would choose courses and would continue in courses that accommodated their local bus schedules. One student shared that they travel to NOCE by bus, which is usually a two hour commute for them. They shared how an 8:30 a.m. start time was *do-able* for them, but anything earlier would not be feasible due to their transportation situation:

“I have to take the bus two hours prior to that [8:30 a.m. class start time], so I’d have to get up around 4:30-5:00 a.m. in order to make an 8:30 class... If we are going to ask to keep it at 8:30 a.m., I definitely don’t think they should go any sooner than that, that’s too early.” - Focus group

One of the survey participants also shared he or she dropped a course because of a lack of transportation. However, the student is still determined to complete the program.

“Yes because I didn’t have reliable transportation and enough time to go after work but I am determined to finish the program I started. - Survey

Focus group participants discussed experiencing barriers commonly shared among adult learners¹. Balancing basic needs such as job responsibilities and childcare, along with schooling is a common experience among NOCE students. For some, as indicated in the focus groups, addressing these basic needs may lead to absences in their courses, which in turn may lead them to dropping the course entirely for the term.

¹ California Competes (2018, October). *Back to college part one: California’s imperative to re-engage adults*. Retrieved from http://californiacompetes.org/assets/general-files/CACompetes_Back-to-College-Part-One.pdf

Key Finding #5: Extending lab hours and providing more tutors in the labs were resources desired by NOCE students.

Only focus group participants were asked about the types of resources or support that would be helpful to them in attending NOCE classes. Two themes emerged from their responses: a need to extend lab hours and providing more tutors in the labs. Some students shared that they would like to see the school's lab hours expanded during the day and later in the evening. This was mentioned particularly among students who utilize the high school labs on all three campuses. In addition to longer lab hours, students also mentioned the desire to have more tutors in the labs to support them with their academic work. One student mentioned both themes as they shared how expanding the lab hour would be helpful to them:

"I also have a point with the learning center here on this campus. I noticed that they have extended their hours to eight (8 pm), but some of us high school lab students need the lab opened a little more time here on campus. Some students are still currently working, and I wish they would be able to extend their hours a little bit more, open until like 9:30 at the latest because that would help students out. I also wanted to note that I wish they had more tutors on site for us students, for when we need help. That would be a good thing for us."
- Focus group

Additionally, students who were not aware of the ARISE lab services shared that having therapists on campus or other types of mental health services would be greatly beneficial to them. Students who had utilized the ARISE lab mentioned they felt the staff and lab provided them the additional support they needed while attending NOCE. They particularly mentioned the benefits of having access to counselors and mental health services:

"You'd like to talk about basic stuff like your school and what you need, and I think everyone could use some therapy because you know, sometimes life gets hard and that's what makes it hard to come to school. Like when you're having family issues or depression or any kind of issue. It would be nice to talk to someone... so if the school could offer that for those who can't really afford it, that would be great!" - Focus group

Other support services that were mentioned throughout several focus groups included providing students the opportunities to network and connect with other NOCE students, have NOCE courses and services be accessible online, provide more "one-stop" centers where students can complete all enrollments steps in one location, and provide access to a library and/or store where students can also find everyday products.

Meeting NOCE Student Needs

Based on student feedback gathered from both the survey and focus groups, students expressed a desire to have an academic calendar that serves their needs. These needs include:

- Having the flexibility to take a wider range of courses in a shorter amount of time.
- Completing an academic program of study faster in order to quickly enter the workforce or other educational pathways.
- For students who are parents, there was a desire to have an academic calendar that would align with their children's K-12 academic calendar.
- Alleviating students' concerns, especially new students, about embarking on their academic journey. Students expressed a fear of not being able to fully commit to the time it takes to complete their academic studies.
- A clear explanation to students of how either academic calendar will impact their class schedules and program milestones at NOCE.
- Having multiple sections of a same course be offered at different times and days to provide students a variety of options to meet their schedule needs.
- Connecting students to community resources that will help them overcome barriers they experience that hinder their ability to complete their education at NOCE. The most common barriers experienced by participants were a lack of childcare, conflicting work and school schedules and inadequate means of transportation. Providing students with a list of existing local resources that inform them about public assistance in broad areas such as childcare, public transportation, financial assistance, health, mental health and employment can make a difference in a student staying or dropping out of a class and/or NOCE entirely.

Appendix A: Student Survey Protocol

PROTOCOL for administrating the STUDENT SURVEY- Paper Survey

Please read this entire document before administering any surveys.

- Identify students who should take the student survey.
 - Only students over 18 years of age should take the survey. Please make sure to ask group if everyone is 18 and over.
- Make sure both pages of the paper survey are printed and handed out.

Survey administrators should determine how to administer the survey in a way that maximizes the number of students taking the survey, but also minimizes the disruption to the classroom.

Please follow the guidelines below:

- Administer the survey in the classroom.
 - Once all students are seated, begin reading the directions to the survey (see Appendix A).
 - As you are doing this, begin handing the surveys to students.
 - When each student has completed the survey, please collect the survey and put it into an envelope for intra-district mail.
 - Mail to Dulce Delgadillo at the Office of Institutional Research and Planning (OIRP) at Wilshire Center.
- Read the script as written. It is important that all students receive the same instructions to the survey. To begin, read the introductory script in Appendix A.
- Students should not talk to each other (or make comments about the items) as they complete the survey since this might influence the way their peers respond (leading to inaccurate data).
- The administrator should first allow students to read the survey items on their own. If they need assistance there are some guidelines below:
 - For DSS students share the below guidelines with aids who assist them in completing the survey.
 - You may:
 - Read the survey item or items out loud to individual students.
 - Offer a word that is easier to understand or simplify the sentence.
 - If students still don't understand, just ask them to answer as best as they can and remind them that they can skip the question if they want to.
- Collect the Complete Surveys:
 - Make sure all (most) survey questions are answered and that open-ended questions are clearly written.
- Return the Surveys:
 - Once students have been surveyed and you have collected all completed surveys, mail back to Dulce Delgadillo at the OIRP Wilshire Center.

Appendix A- Introductory Script

(Once students are seated, please read the following script. Note: The text below is slightly different than what appears in the survey. Do not read text in italics; those are additional directions for you.)

Begin reading out
loud HERE 

(Read to students taking the survey.) **North Orange Continuing Education (NOCE) currently operates on a 12-week trimester calendar and is considering changing to 18-week semester calendar. We would like to receive feedback from our students about their opinion on this change. Please answer the following questions regarding the impact this change would have on your schedule. This is not a test. There are no “wrong” answers.**

THIS SURVEY DOES NOT HAVE YOUR NAME ON IT, SO EVERYTHING YOU WRITE IS CONFIDENTIAL, which means that no one (not me or any other staff) will know how you answer these questions. We need your feedback to keep making NOCE better for you.

You do not have to answer any of the questions if you don’t want to, and you can stop doing this survey at any time. PLEASE RAISE YOUR HAND NOW IF YOU DO NOT WANT TO COMPLETE THE SURVEY.

(If any students decide not to take the survey, that’s OK. Just have them sit quietly until others have completed the survey).

Ok, here are just a few instructions before we started: This is a paper survey. Please make sure you read each question carefully and select the best response that best fits you. Mark your answers by filling in the bubble answer *(show students how to fill in the bubble if necessary on a chalk/white board)*. If you want to change any of your answers, cross out your first answer and then bubble in the correct answer. If you have any questions, raise your hand, and I will come over to help. When you’ve completed the survey, please bring your survey to the front of the room. Any questions? Go ahead and get started.

Appendix B: Student Survey

Should NOCE Switch to semesters?

North Orange Continuing Education (NOCE) currently operates on a **12 week** trimester calendar and is considering changing to an **18 week** semester calendar. We would like to receive feedback from our student about their opinions on this change. Please answer the following questions regarding the impact this change would have on your schedule.

Please make sure to use the paper version of this survey if you are filling out on paper.

What program(s) or courses are you enrolled in at NOCE? (Check all that apply.)

- Career Technical Education (CTE: Administrative Assistance, Early Childhood Education, Electrical Trainee, Fundamental Computer Concepts and Skills, Funeral Service Assistance, Graphic Design and Webs skills, Management, Medical Assistance, Office Application Essentials, Pharmacy Technician, Quality Assurance Management for Medical Devices)
- Disability of Support Services (DSS), Educational Assistance classes
- English as a Second Language (ESL), including Academic Success
- High School Diploma Program (HSDP)/GED Preparation
- Lifeskills Education Advancement Program (LEAP: Parenting, Kids College, Health and Safety, Fine Arts, etc.)

Which schedule works best for you?

Trimester- This is our current schedule



Semester



Please tell us why the schedule you chose is better for you.

Have you ever had to drop out of a class at NOCE? If so, what were the reasons?

Appendix C: Trimester/Semester Student Focus Group Protocol



Note Taker:	
FG Facilitator:	
Language:	
Site:	
Date & Time:	
# of Participants	

Welcome & Consent

- Before we begin, I want to confirm that everyone who is interested in participating in this focus group is over 18. **Is everyone over 18?**
- My name is [] and these are my colleagues [] and we are a part of NOCE’s Office of Institutional Research and Planning. First, thank you for agreeing to participate in this group discussion about NOCE possibly switching from a trimester, which is what we currently have, to a semester academic calendar.
- Some of you may have completed an online survey that covered the same topic. If you have already completed the survey, thank you for your participation. If you have not and are interested in completing the survey, we have copies and you can complete a paper version or online at your convenience. This focus group is to dive deeper into the survey and hear from our students about their preference.
- As a part of the process, NOCE is interested in hearing student’s thoughts on this possible switch and how this switch could potentially impact students.
- To participate in today’s focus group, we first need you to look over this consent form, ask us any questions you may have about the focus group, and then if you agree to participate, sign the form and give it back to us. Remember that your participation is **completely voluntary** and that you can refuse to answer questions at any time. Your responses will be **kept confidential**, and we will **never use your name in any of our work**.
- To make sure our notes are accurate, we will be recording the discussion and having someone take notes. We may use direct quotes from the recording, but names will be deleted to ensure confidentiality. **Is everyone comfortable with this conversation being recorded?**

[Participants sign and return the consent forms before moving forward with the focus group.]

Before we begin, I want to quickly discuss some common agreements for our discussion today. Can we make sure that everybody’s cell phone is on silent first:

1. **There are no right or wrong answers.** Everyone's opinion is valuable and should be expressed.
2. **One person at a time.** We want to make sure that everyone has an opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions. Because we are taking notes, we ask that only one person speak at a time in order to accurately record what everyone is saying.
3. **Respect each other's opinions.** We want to hear many different viewpoints and would like to hear from everyone. We hope you can be honest even when your responses may not be in agreement with the rest of the group and want everyone to respect each other's opinions even if it may be different from your own.
4. **Respect the confidential nature** of this conversation. As we mentioned during the consent, we will not share the names of people who are participating in the focus groups; therefore, we would like to ask each of you not to share what is discussed during this conversation with others. Can all of us agree to that?
5. **Time Limit.** We have about an hour for our conversation and we want to make sure everyone has a chance to speak. So I may have to interrupt you if I think we need to move on to the next question. Please do not take this personally. It does not mean that what you are saying is not important: this is just part of how focus groups are done due to time limits.

Lastly, we have food and refreshments for you. Please feel free to get up at any time if you need to or to grab food. **Do you have any questions for me before we begin?** [Answer all questions.]

Introduction

Before we dive into the questions, let's begin with introductions. Can everyone share:

- Name
- Program
- How long have you been a student at NOCE?

Questions

North Orange Continuing Education (NOCE) currently operates on a 12-week trimester calendar and is considering changing to an 18-week semester calendar.

1. How many people prefer to keep the current 12-week trimester calendar? Please raise your hand.
2. How many people prefer to change to an 18-week semester calendar? Please raise your hand.
3. Please tell us why the schedule you chose works best for you.
4. What are some barriers that you experience that make it difficult for you to attend classes?
5. What types of resources or support would be helpful for you to attend NOCE classes?
6. Have you ever had to drop out of a class at NOCE?
 - a. If so, what were the reasons?

Those are all our questions. Does anybody have any final comments before we wrap up the focus group?

Appendix D: Informed Consent Student Focus Group

Purpose

You have been invited to participate in a focus group. The purpose of this focus group is to gather data from students on their opinions of the possibility of NOCE switching from a trimester to a semester academic calendar. The focus group will take approximately 1 hour.

Procedure

A facilitator will ask you several questions related to the topic described above. This focus group will be audio-recorded and a note-taker will be present. However, your responses will remain confidential, and no names will be included in the final report.

You can choose whether or not to participate in the focus group, and you may stop at any time during the focus group.

Common Agreements

1. ***There are no right or wrong answers.*** Everyone's opinion is valuable and should be expressed.
2. ***One person at a time.*** We want to make sure that everyone has an opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions. Because we are taking notes, we ask that only one person speak at a time in order to accurately record what everyone is saying.
3. ***Respect each other's opinions.*** We want to hear many different viewpoints and would like to hear from everyone. We hope you can be honest even when your responses may not be in agreement with the rest of the group and want everyone to respect each other's opinions even if it may be different from your own.
4. ***Respect the confidential nature*** of this conversation. As we mentioned during the consent, we will not share the names of people who are participating in the focus groups; therefore, we would like to ask each of you not to share what is discussed during this conversation with others.

Benefits and Risks

The benefit of participation is that each focus group participant can provide information that can help NOCE make an informed decision about possibly switching the academic calendar to a semester basis. There are not foreseeable risks to you. You have the right to not answer any questions during the interview that may make you uncomfortable.

Please let us know if you have any questions regarding the consent.

If you do not have any further questions and are willing to participate in the focus group, please indicate so by signing below.

Consent

I agree to participate in the focus group. I understand I may choose not to participate without penalty.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Print Name: _____

If you would like a copy for your records please let us know and we will provide one for you.

If you have any additional questions please contact: Dulce Delgadillo, Interim Director of Institutional Research and Planning at ddelgadillo@noce.edu or 714-992-9512.