Major and Course Navigation Project

Executive Summary

Summary of Findings

The goal of this study was to develop a somewhat thorough picture of the challenges and barriers students face, the knowledge and strategies they utilize, and their recommendations for maintaining effective practices, improving or eliminating ineffective practices, and developing new practices as it relates to Major and Course navigation.

The project used an integration of both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to provide a more holistic understanding of the research questions. Below are prominent findings of the study.

Major and Career Decision: students were asked where they first learned about their career of interest, and the most common answer was *internet search*. Students also did research on different career information, such as alignment with interest, potential income, time needed, projected growth, promotion opportunity, etc. before deciding on a major. In fact, about half of participants reported that the most important factor in deciding a major / education goal was *Alignment with passion and interest*.

Major Change: when asked if they had changed their majors since they started Mesa, about two third of students (from both focus group and the survey) reported that they did not.

Major Information: the majority of students said that they knew about the requirements for their education goal, where to get that information, and how long it would take them. However, about half of the students reported that they received inconsistent information about their major requirements and it was challenging to meet with a counselor.

Challenges and Strategies: the top three most common challenges around major and course navigation were *Schedule conflicts*, *Limited class offerings*, and *Canceled course sections.* To address these, students typically *Took other classes in the meantime*, *Plan ahead*, or *Talk to counselor*.

The most impactful challenges (that delayed at least a year of their education journey) were *Making ends meet (cost of living , other expenses)*, *Personal or family challenges*, *Work related challenges*, and *Lack of / inconsistent information about major requirements*. To address these, students typically *Worked and went to school*, *Took online classes*, *Talk to others / ask for help*, and *Talk to counselor*.

Program Familiarity and Usage: students were asked if they had heard and used any of the 29 student-services programs. The most common response was “Never heard of it.” In fact, only 3 programs - *Counseling Center*, *Library Services*, and *Financial Aid* – had at least half of the students indicating “used it (helpful resource).” On the other hand, *Career Center* and *Health Services* topped the category for “Heard of it, but never used it.”

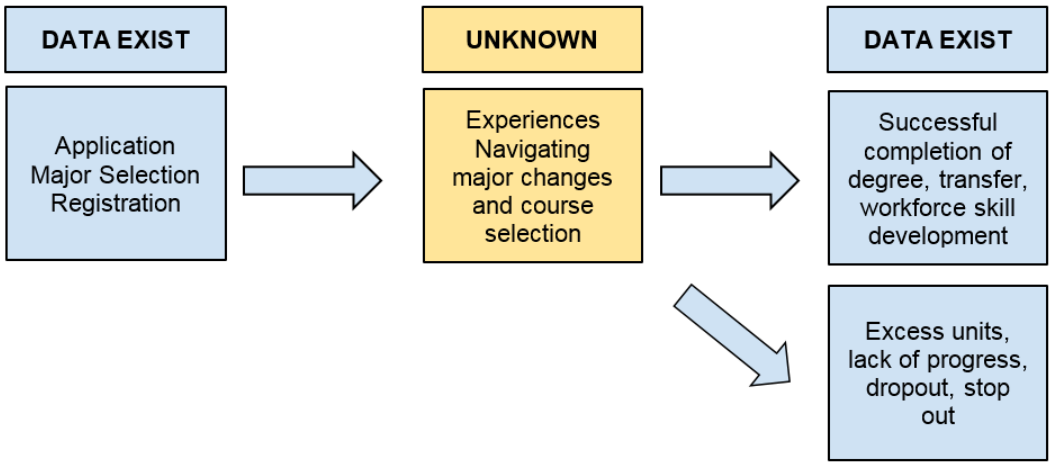
Suggestions for Improvement: consistent with earlier findings students were not aware of many student services. The most common suggestion from students was to increase awareness of campus services. Other suggestions include improve access and consistency of information and counseling, provide low to no cost options for services and supplies, place more emphasis on career outcomes, create more parking spaces, and increase course offerings throughout the day.

Methodology

This project used a mixed method approach beginning with Qualitative data collection through a series of 15 focus groups. Data from the focus groups were analyzed for themes. These themes were then used as the foundation for developing a survey that would be administered to the larger student body as a means to validate the focus group findings and explore additional areas that merged during the focus groups.

The focus groups utilized a consensus-based methodology to identify common issues, generate solutions, and inform decision-making. The methodology adopts practices from Nominal group technique, the Delphi Technique, and traditional focus group protocols. The objective is to facilitate structured dialogue around a narrow set of topics to prioritize responses and reach consensus around accuracy of the responses, overall impact of the topics/issues discussed, and the prevalence of the issues amongst their peers. The survey was sent to a random sample of 2,000 students who were enrolled at Mesa College during Fall 2018. We received 379 responses for a response rate of 19%.

The following graphic was used during the focus groups to demonstrate the gaps in knowledge that exist when we only using Quantitative data.



Guided Questions

- What information did you use to choose your major?
    - How close is the major you identified on your application to what your major is today? (Scale of 1-5). 5= exactly the same 1 = totally different field, different requirements
- What challenges/barriers have you faced, if any, around your major and course selection? (internal, external, on campus off campus, etc.)
    - What proportion of other students do you think experience similar challenges/barriers (0%-100%)
- What strategies/knowledge have used to help you navigate course selection and choices around your major?
- What's working, if anything, in helping you make choices around your major and course selection? (people, programs, information, etc.)

- What suggestions do you have to college leadership to improve the supports/services around Major and course selection?

Focus Group Themes

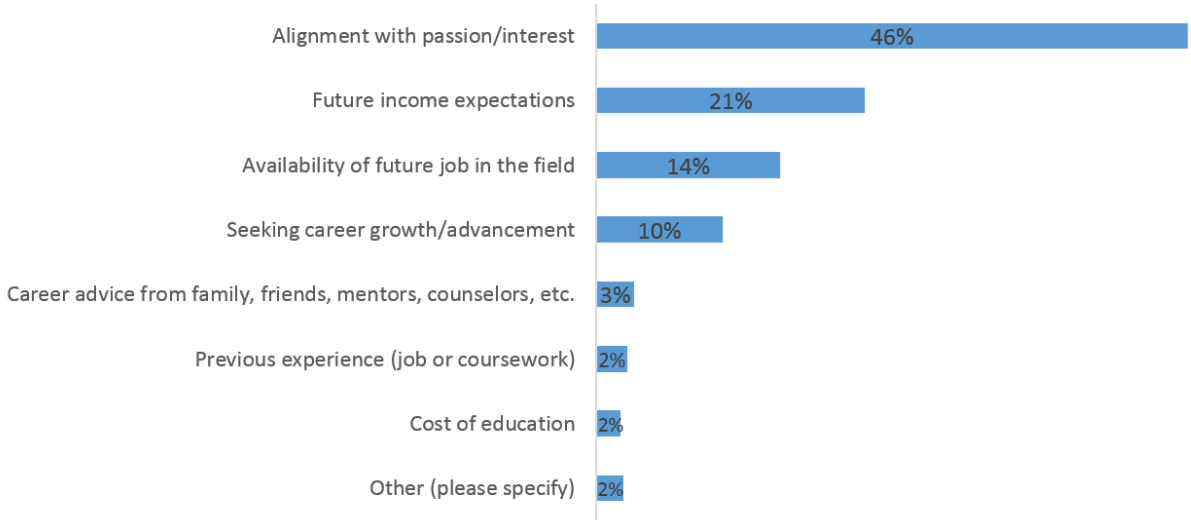
Question	Major Themes
What information did you use to choose your major?	**Career** *" I needed a job with a decent income potential"* *" I want to get farther in life so that I can support my family"* **Experience in the field** *"I'm in the field but want to move up in the field"* *"I had the opportunity to go for supervisor but I needed more education… I am reinvesting in myself"* **Passion/Interest** *"I decided to follow my passion which is writing"* *"I could have gone to city or mesa but I chose mesa culinary because it's a great environment."* **Exploration** *"I google it"* *"Assist.org… to find out the classes needed"* **Learning/Growth/Skill Development** *"I want to feel challenged"* *"Projected income, time and position in the community and the projected growth"*
How close is the major you identified on your application to what your major is today? • 5= exactly the same • 3 = similar course requirements/skills • 1 = totally different field/req.	Average score = 3.8 5 (Exactly the same) = 57% 4 = 10% 3 (Similar) = 8% 2 = 4% 1 (Totally different) = 21%
What challenges/barriers have you faced, if any, around your major and course selection?	**Class Availability** *"I want to take classes for my major but certain classes are only available some semesters… the classes that are available have conflicting schedules"* *"More support for impacted classes… Chemistry 201 needs a lab …but there not enough lab seats"*

	"You don't have enough classes available online if you are working" **Communication/Information** *"Lack of knowledge on the best path, shortest path"* *"Mesa online stuff is confusing… outdated information"* *"The process to transfer was really slow and not having someone to talk to directly"* **Financial Challenges** *"Affordable textbooks"* *"Going to school and working full time... it's just challenging"* **Transportation** *"Need more Parking"* *"I don't drive and it takes 2 hours"* **External Responsibilities** *"I need to plan my semester ahead being a mom"* *"For parents and people working there are not enough classes online"* **Counseling Challenges** *"I had a Counselor tell me I needed to take something I didn't need to take. I took it twice even though they were named differently"* *"Challenges knowing what classes to take... some counselors say you need to take these to transfer and others say you don't "* *"I had to act as if I was my own counselor because the counselor did not know what to recommend for me to take"* **Major Requirements** *"Not enough classes for STEM majors."* *" There needs to be more sections for required courses"*
What strategies/knowledge have used to help you navigate course selection and choices around your major?	*"TAG to help you transfer"* *"I go to the website of the college I want to transfer to and look up what they need"* **Seek out Information** **See a counselor** **Seek out resources** **Organize self/manage time**
What's working, if anything, in helping you make choices around your major and course selection? (people, programs, information, etc.)	*"The Library staff are great!"* *"DSPS helped me get my Ed plan early"* *"The STEAM center is open until 10 and well lit"* *"The counselors are the bomb here - [Counselor Name]"* *"This [focus group] reinforces the idea that the school is here for our success "* **Campus Programs** (E.g. EOPS, DSPS, VRC) **Tutoring** **Counseling**

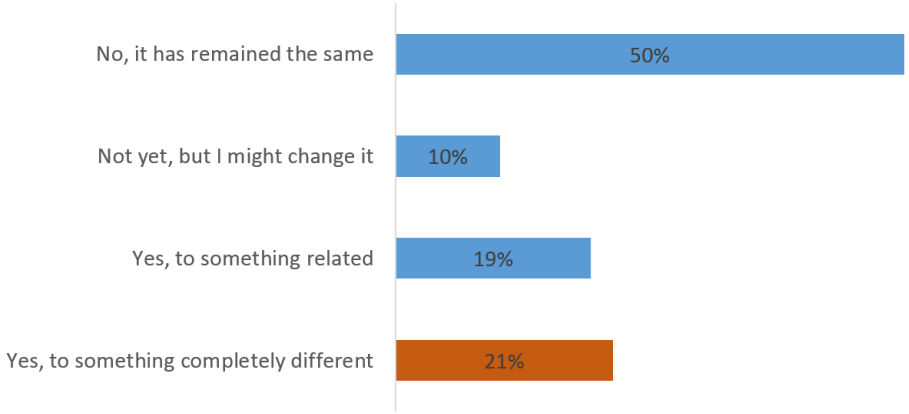
	Equity Services (STAND, Farmer's Market)
What suggestions do you have to college leadership to improve the supports/services around Major and course selection?	*"More emphasis on getting a job"* *" Questionnaire to find out why did you drop out"* *"A way to connect people of the same major. If I knew all the math majors we could help each other out."* *"Keep the doors open till the classes end. It's not very safe at night"* **Information** • Improved access to, more consistent, more reliable • Low/no Cost options for services/supplies • Texts, access codes, parking • Counseling • Required, Specialized, more access, more reliable • Schedule

Primary Findings from Survey Data (n = 379)

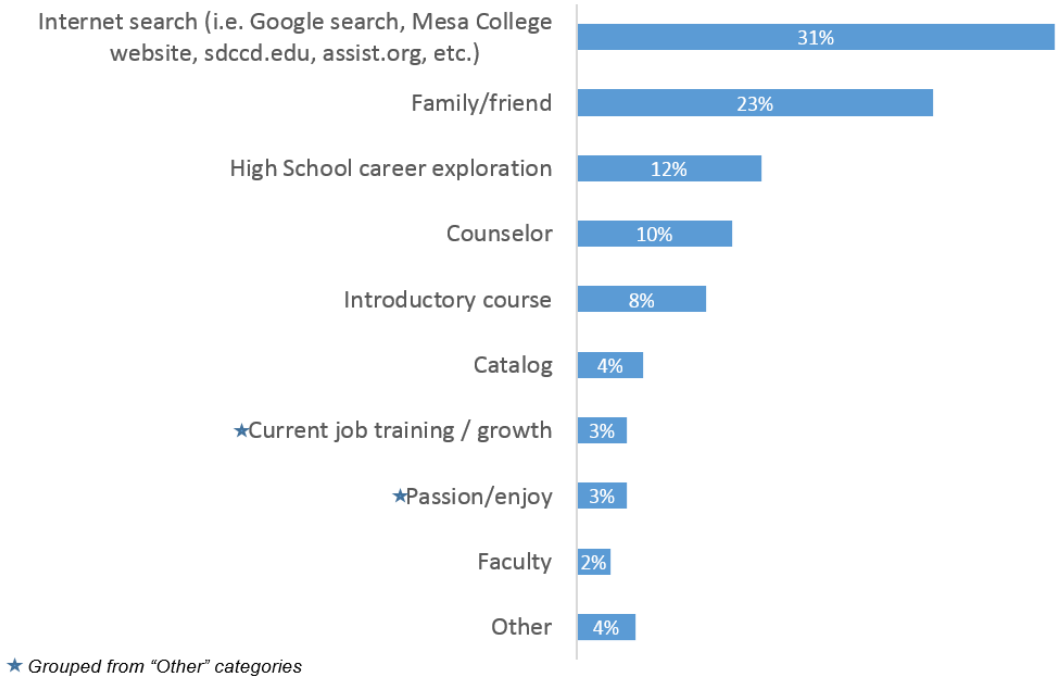
1. The most important factor in deciding a major / education goal is alignment with passion and interest (46%).



2. Consistent with the Focus Group's finding, only 21% of the survey students reported that they changed their major to something completely different.

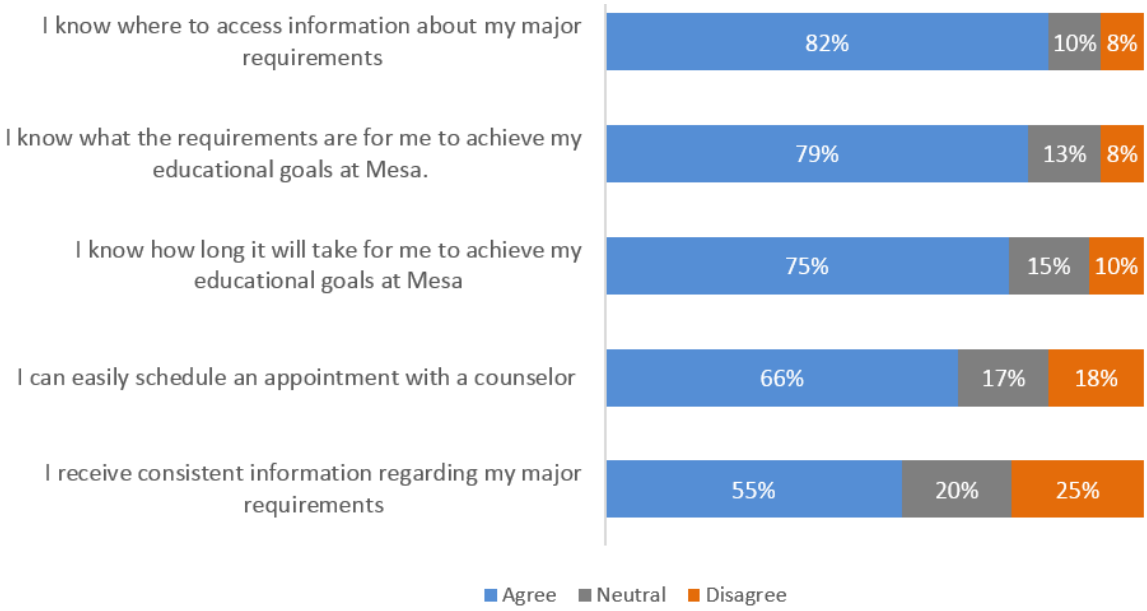


3. The majority of the survey students (31%) first learned about their major course of interest through internet search. About 10% learned from counselors, and 2% learned from the faculty.



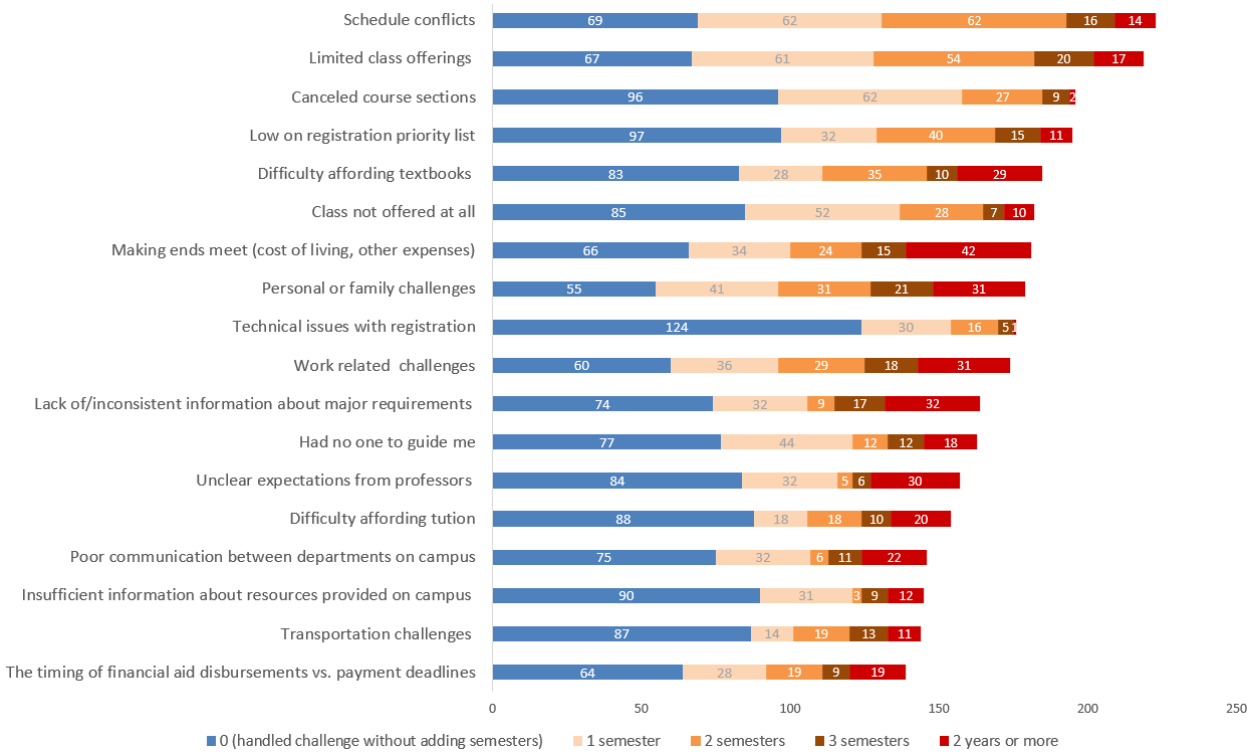
★ *Grouped from "Other" categories*

4. Overall, 82% reported that they knew where to get information about their major requirement, 79% said they were aware of the requirements for their education goals, and 75% said they knew how long it would take to achieve their goals. However, students seem to have trouble



scheduling an appointment with the counselor and students are not receiving consistent information about their major requirements.

5. A list of challenges was developed based on the Focus Group data. Students were asked if they were impacted by those challenges, and how many semesters the challenges had added to their education journey.
   The top three most common challenges were *Schedule conflicts* reported by (223 students), *Limited class offerings* (219 students), and *Canceled course sections*(196 students).
   The top three most impactful challenges (that delayed at least a year of their education journey) were *Making ends meet -cost of living other expenses* (reported by 57 students), *Personal or family challenges* (52 students), *Work related challenges* (49 students), and *Lack of / inconsistent information about major* (49 students).



6. Overall, students used different strategies to address different challenges. Below are the top three strategies students used to handle each of the mentioned challenges.

	Challenges	Top three strategies		
Top 3 most common	***Schedule conflicts***	*Take other classes in the meantime* (n=88)	*Plan ahead* (n=87)	*Take classes at a different college* (n=69)
	Limited class offerings	*Plan ahead* (n=103)	*Talk to Counselor* (n= 101)	*Take other classes in the meantime* (n=98)
	Cancelled course sections	*Take other classes in the meantime* (n=51)	*Talk to Counselor* (n=46)	*Seek out information online* (n=39)
Top 3 most impactful	***Making ends meet***	*Work and go to school (n=113)*	*Study part-time (n=52)*	*Seek out alternative source of income (n=43)*
	Personal or family challenges	*Talk to others / ask for help (n=75)*	*Take online classes (n=53)*	*Plan ahead (n=43)*
	Work related challenges	*Take online classes (n=64)*	*Study part-time (n=54)*	*Talk to others / ask for help (n=47)*
	Lack of / Inconsistent information about major	*Talk to counselor (n=88)*	*Seek out information online (n=85)*	*Talk to faculty (n=35)*

7. A list of 29 programs and services was given to students to assess student's awareness and the program's helpfulness. Below are key takeaways:

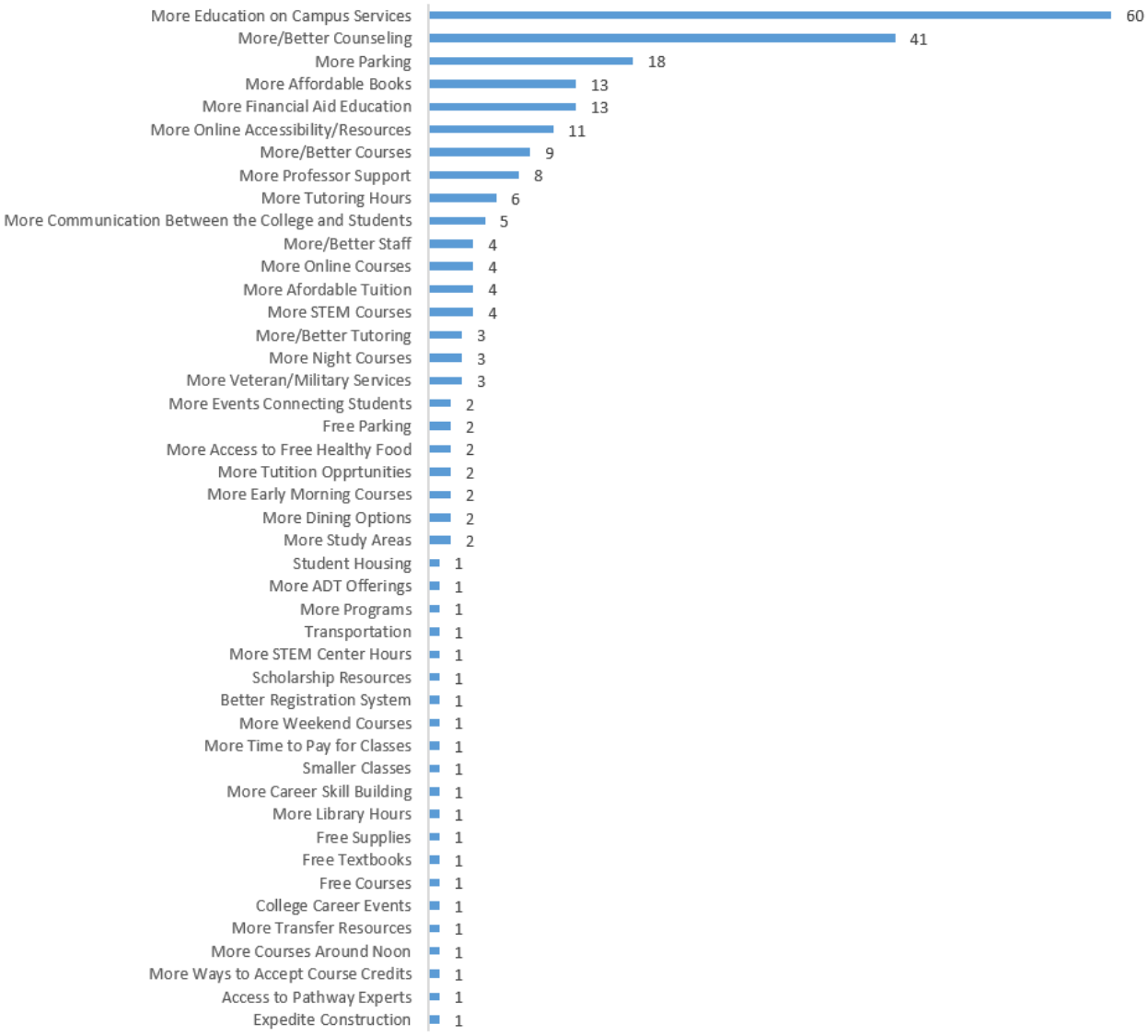
- Students generally found all programs to be helpful (the "unhelpful resource" category has the lowest total count, which is n=221)
- Overall, the most common response from students across all programs were "*Never heard of i*t" (total count for this category is n=3275). Many top programs in these categories were designed to serve special populations which may explain why students never heard of them. However, it's worth noting that The Stand was the 7th most common program that students never heard of.
- Counseling and Library Services were the most helpful resource that students had used. Interestingly, a small subset of students also reported Counseling as the most unhelpful resource.
- Career center topped the category for "*Heard of it but never used it*", followed by Health Services.

Programs *Sorted by "Heard of it and used it (helpful resource)" Highlights are the top 2 programs per each category*	Heard of it and used it (unhelpful resource)	Heard of it and used it (helpful resource)	Heard of it, but never used it	It does not apply to me	Never heard of it	Total	Number of Students
Counseling Center	13%	69%	14%	3%	2%	100%	236
Library Services	4%	63%	16%	6%	12%	100%	234
Financial Aid	10%	53%	21%	11%	3%	100%	236
Health Services	4%	22%	54%	5%	15%	100%	233
Transfer Center	4%	22%	38%	6%	29%	100%	232
MT2C/Tutoring	5%	20%	28%	9%	38%	100%	234
Career Center	6%	17%	57%	8%	13%	100%	236
Testing Center	4%	17%	28%	9%	42%	100%	233
Evaluations	8%	16%	22%	9%	46%	100%	263
STEM Center	1%	14%	33%	5%	48%	100%	233
EOPS	4%	12%	31%	19%	33%	100%	236
The Stand	1%	12%	11%	4%	72%	100%	233
Peer Navigator	5%	11%	12%	7%	64%	100%	234
Promise	2%	11%	9%	9%	69%	100%	236
Disability (DSPS)	3%	9%	30%	39%	19%	100%	232
Veterans	3%	9%	19%	41%	28%	100%	231
CRUISE	1%	9%	13%	5%	72%	100%	235
First year Experience	3%	7%	15%	13%	62%	100%	234
Outreach	4%	6%	20%	12%	58%	100%	235
STEM Core	0%	6%	24%	6%	64%	100%	233
Child Development	2%	5%	32%	35%	26%	100%	234
Star Trio	1%	3%	18%	8%	70%	100%	233
Puente	0%	3%	10%	7%	79%	100%	233
UMOJA Mesa Academy	0%	3%	9%	6%	82%	100%	234
ADVOC8	2%	2%	5%	4%	87%	100%	235
FAST scholars	2%	2%	14%	8%	75%	100%	235
International Students Programs	2%	2%	21%	29%	46%	100%	235
MAAP/Athletes	2%	2%	11%	23%	62%	100%	235
SEEDS	1%	2%	8%	5%	84%	100%	231
Number of Responses by Each Category	**221**	**1001**	**1466**	**824**	**3275**	--	--

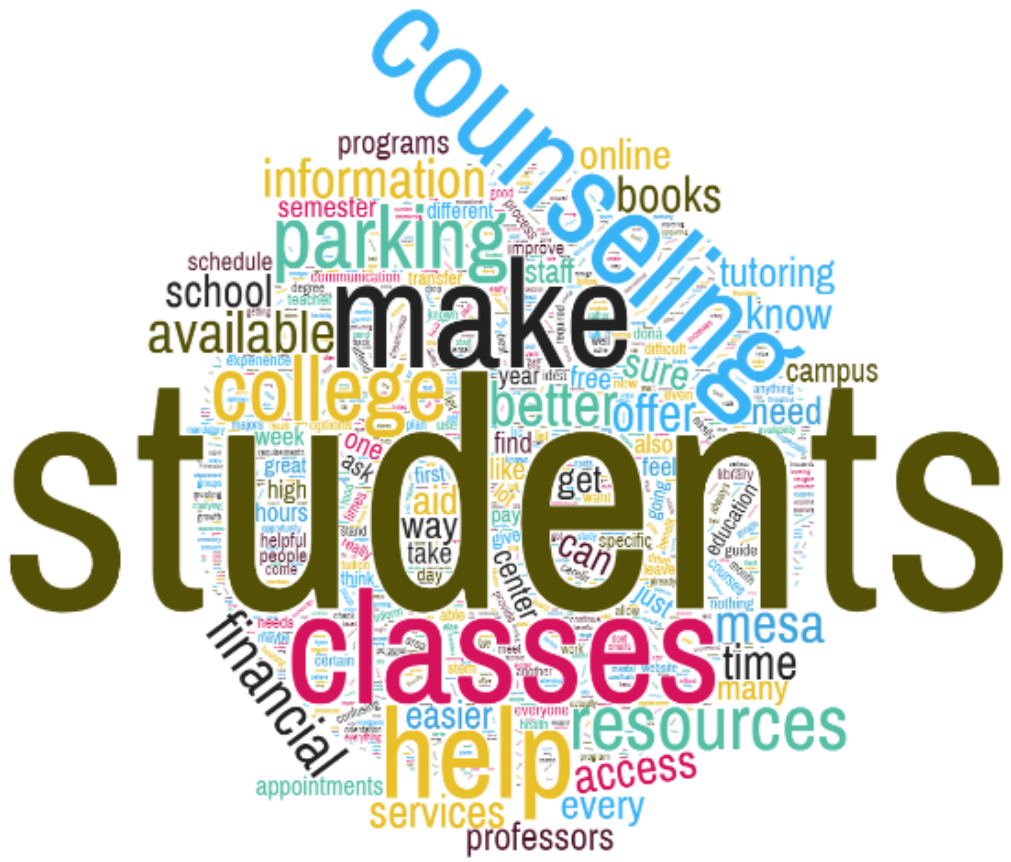
(Highlights are the top two in each category)

8. Students were asked what they would change at Mesa to benefit the greatest number of students. Two hundred and thirty five suggestions were analyzed in two ways:

- In terms of content, all suggestions were grouped into 45 themes. Consistent with previous findings, the most common change was *more education on campus resources* (mentioned 60 times), followed by *more / better counseling* (mentioned 41 times), and *more parking* (18 times).



- In terms of word frequency, the most common word were *students* (101 times), *classes* (49 times), *make* (47 times), *counseling* (42 times), and *help* (39 times).



Research Participants

	Focus Group n=92	Survey n=379	Survey n= 235*	Mesa Campus
Ethnicity	**Percent**	**Percent**	**Percent**	**Percent**
African American	10%	4%	6%	7%
American Indian or Alaska Native	--	1%	1%	--
Asian	8%	8%	13%	10%
Filipino	3%	3%	4%	5%
Pacific Islander	1%	1%	1%	1%
Latinx	41%	17%	29%	38%
White	29%	19%	30%	31%
Multi-ethnic/Multi-racial	--	4%	6%	--
Prefer not to say	--	5%	8%	--
Prefer to self-describe:	--	2%	2%	--
Unreported	1%	38%	--	2%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

*Unreported removed

	Focus Group n=92	Survey n=379	Mesa Campus
Age	**Percent**	**Percent**	**Percent**
25-29	12%	17%	18%
30-39	21%	16%	12%
40-49	7%	7%	4%
50 and >	8%	4%	3%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

	Focus Group n=92	Survey n=379	Mesa Campus
Gender	**Percent**	**Percent**	**Percent**
Unknown	1%	--	--
Female	60%	62%	54%
Male	39%	33%	46%
Other	--	5%	--
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Focus Group n=92		Survey n=373	
Have you changed your major since starting at Mesa?	**Percent**	**Has your major/educational goal changed since you first enrolled at Mesa?**	**Percent**
No	66%	No, it has remained the same	50%
		Not yet, but I might change it	10%
Yes	34%	Yes, to something completely different	21%
		Yes, to something related	19%
Total	**100%**	**Total**	**100%**

	Focus Group n=92
What is your current major? (Category)	**Percent**
Social/Behavioral	25%
STEM	16%
Other CTE/Vocational Ed.	12%
Humanities	9%
Graphic Design/Multimedia/Web	7%
Health/Global Health/Nutrition/Kinesiology	5%
Elementary Education/Child Development	5%
Business/Bus. Admin	5%
General/Unknown	4%
Allied Health/Nursing	4%
Urban Studies and Planning	2%
Fine Arts/Music	2%
Sustainability	1%
Languages	1%
Total	**100%**

	Focus Group n=92
Status	**Percent**
Completed my Associate's Degree/Transferred	17%
Currently enrolled at Mesa	72%
Not currently enrolled at Mesa and I have not completed my Associate's Degree/Transferred	11%
Total	**100%**

	Focus Group n=92
How many semesters have you/did you attend Mesa?	**Percent**
1 or 2	26%
3 or 4	36%
5 or 6	19%
7 or more	14%
No Response/Unknown	5%
Total	**100%**