

Examining Perceived Barriers to Access and Success in Higher Education

Issue Brief 6: *Finding Desired Courses Offered on Weekends*

Background

The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® (T.E.A.C.H.) initiative, operating in more than 20 states, provides [comprehensive scholarship support](#) to help the incumbent early childhood workforce take courses leading to two- and four-year degrees in early childhood education. Scholarship recipients are early childhood educators working with children from birth through 5 years of age, often making poverty-level wages, who represent the diversity of young children in our nation, may be the first in their family to go to college and work full time while going to college part time. Each T.E.A.C.H. recipient is supported by a T.E.A.C.H. counselor who helps them navigate college, work and family commitments and helps them meet the expectations of the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship.

In fall 2018, the [T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® National Center](#) (National Center) began a three-part study to examine what T.E.A.C.H. counselors, T.E.A.C.H. associate and bachelor's degree scholarship recipients and their faculty in community colleges and universities believe are the biggest barriers to access and success. Respondents include 61 counselors, 2,071 scholarship recipients and 170 faculty members. Surveys were offered in Spanish and English to scholarship recipients. Participants were asked to rate the degree to which 49 different items were perceived as difficult. These items covered six basic categories: College Application and Admission Processes; T.E.A.C.H. Scholarship Application Processes; Meeting College Expectations for Coursework and Degree Completion; Services for Dual Language Learners; Special College Requirements or Accessibility Issues; and Work/Life/School Balance. Questions about college affordability were not included on this survey, because recipients are all receiving scholarship support that allows for graduation from college with no debt.

Issue: Finding Desired Courses on Weekends

Non-traditional students, including adult or working students, have various demands on their time that make attending classes during the week very difficult. Students may have jobs outside school or may be required to care for children or other family members. Furthermore, classes offered during the week are often held multiple times in a week, which increases commuting, parking and other costs. For many of these students, attending classes on weekdays is an impossible request. However, many programs offer weekend courses to alleviate these additional responsibilities and/or costs. In addition, many weekend courses are often geared toward adult or non-traditional students. Offering these courses may allow enrolled students an opportunity to [network with students with similar backgrounds](#). Furthermore, [these weekend courses are useful alternatives to online courses](#), since some students prefer face-to-face instruction but need more flexible course offerings.

Findings

Across all three survey populations, finding desired courses offered on weekends is in the top 10 barriers facing T.E.A.C.H. recipients. A high percentage of college faculty (approximately 74%) rated finding weekend courses as difficult or very difficult. Just more than half of the T.E.A.C.H. counselors (58%) rated finding weekend courses as difficult or very difficult, while a significant percentage of T.E.A.C.H. scholarship recipients (38%) rated finding weekend courses as difficult or very difficult.

“It was always easy for me to find my courses offered online and accelerated. However, I could never find a night or weekend class that worked with my schedule.”

Florida T.E.A.C.H. Recipient

Promising Practices

Higher education faculty identified practices being used to address the barriers faced by T.E.A.C.H. recipients. This issue brief identifies three potential strategies.

Strategy #1: Offer night, weekend and online courses to eliminate schedule and transportation barriers. By offering a variety of options for students with unpredictable or intense schedules, colleges can increase enrollment, involvement and success. Dr. Fran Langan, the Dean of the School of Professional Studies at Keystone College (PA) (email: fran.langan@keystone.edu), reports that they offer evening and weekend courses, though she encourages students to meet with advisors beforehand to select the format best suited to their readiness levels. Another example revolves around offering an entire weekend-only program. [Miami Dade College offers a weekend college program on their North Campus](#) with weekend-only degrees. While they do not provide an entire ECE program, they do offer some ECE courses depending on the semester, so this may be an option for other colleges to implement as well.

Strategy #2: Create weekend cohorts for working students, where they can access courses necessary to complete their degree. According to Phyllis Adams, a professor at Sinclair Community College (email: phyllis.adams@sinclair.edu), they have developed weekend cohorts for working students that include three courses to help students prepare (involving portfolio development) for the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential. These courses were developed specifically for the weekend cohort, but were included in their ECE degree recently. Weekend cohorts are designed to create groups of students that can progress through the program together, thus increasing connection between students with similar backgrounds or situations. This especially helps part-time students that may not have the full college experience and/or support.

Strategy #3: Teach courses on-site at recipient's workplaces, such as at preschool locations. Another option for helping students that cannot take courses on the weekend or cannot travel to campus for weekday courses due to work or family obligations is to [offer courses at student's workplaces](#) during lunch, break hours or weekends, or offer courses at closer branches of colleges, according to the second reference mentioned in the "issue" section of this issue brief. These on-site courses eliminate commuting and transportation costs. According to Phyllis Adams (contact info listed in previous section), their program offers a limited number of these on-site courses at locations, including early care and education programs.

The National Center is creating an expanding [list](#) of resources that address specific barriers in higher education.



T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® National Center is a division of Child Care Services Association
PO Box 901, Chapel Hill, NC 27514 919-967-3272 www.teachecnationalcenter.org

