

Fiscal Estimate Narratives

WTCS 2/27/2009

LRB Number	09-0840/3	Introduction Number	AB-0051	Estimate Type	Original
Description Scheduling of classes at technical colleges					

Assumptions Used in Arriving at Fiscal Estimate

AB 51 would require that one-third of all class periods each semester are scheduled to begin after 5pm and that at least once every three years, each WTCS course be offered after 5pm. There are numerous courses for which a night offering would be impractical. In addition, this legislation, if enacted, might have the unintended effect of reducing daytime course availability as colleges try to meet the requirement that one-third of class periods begin after 5pm. Course section enrollment management is an important tool for WTCS colleges that are seeking to address increased enrollment demands without corresponding increases in resources. Mandatory scheduling requirements such as proposed in AB 51 will make appropriate management of available resources more difficult.

Course section enrollment management requires consideration of a wide-range of factors that vary by semester, by type of program, by instructional delivery method, and by campus location. The most important factors considered by college staff in developing course schedules are 1) program educational requirements that students must fulfill to graduate and 2) anticipated student demand for courses offered at various times, in various formats and at various locations. Full- and part-time faculty availability to teach offered courses also must be considered along with classroom, lab, and general facility availability. Colleges also have minimum and maximum course enrollment levels that vary by type of course and, which ensure a minimal level of cost recovery and the appropriation faculty to student ratio. Colleges report already being at or near capacity for evening courses, both for classroom space and for other important facility space such as parking and computer labs.

AB 51 does not address any of the factors that must be taken into account when developing course schedules. For example, the legislation does not distinguish between program courses required to earn a specific degree and non-degree courses offered to improve particular skills that may be related to one's vocation or for adult enrichment. Courses intended to help those who are working already are frequently scheduled on evenings and weekends as are a significant percentage of required program courses.

AB 51 does not recognize the need for specific learning experiences that might only be available during particular times of day. For example, any course with an outside component outside (horticulture, agriculture, or truck driving to name a few) require day time scheduling. Most health occupations programs include clinical requirements where students spend time learning through hands-on activities conducted on-site at health care facilities. Appropriate clinical experiences require a certain level and variety of activity at the health care facility as well as on-site supervisory availability, which is often more accessible during the daytime. Night time clinical shifts of five to eight hours can also be difficult for students to balance with other classes, work and family demands.

Technical College districts report that implementation of AB 51, if even possible, would increase administrative and operational costs, but it is difficult to estimate to what extent because the bill does not clearly define "class periods" and makes it difficult to know the bill's scheduling expectations or understand how WTCS colleges would calculate their compliance. WTCS colleges schedule course sections that meet for different periods of time and it is not clear how these differences relate to the proposed legislation. For example, does a course scheduled to meet for three hours in a single evening count as one class period while the same course, offered three-days per week for one-hour each day count as three? Other examples where the class period requirement mentioned in the legislation is not applicable to WTCS courses are courses with required laboratory work, which frequently have flexible times for students to do the work, basic education courses that allow flexible drop-in self-paced work, and contract training courses provided to meet specific employer needs.

The legislation also does not address how classes using alternative delivery methods or accelerated delivery are counted. Course sections offered completely online or as hybrid courses that meet only limited amounts of time may not have specific course meeting times associated with them.

Finally, the legislation refers to scheduled class sections but does not clarify if that term refers to the offered course schedule or the actual course offerings after course schedules are finalized based on student enrollments.

Long-Range Fiscal Implications

If the requirement to offer one-third of class periods after 5:00pm required additional space (such as campus additions, renovations or leasing space) or faculty, local colleges would incur costs or be forced to reduce daytime course sections to ensure their evening offerings accounted for one-third of class periods.

If the requirement goes into effect, there will be additional state costs associated with monitoring compliance, developing corrective action plans, and assessing whether changes have occurred. The WTC System Office will be unable to absorb these costs within existing resources.