

Four Day Schools - 2011

There are a disturbing number of what I call 4-day colleges now operating. These are almost all highly rated liberal arts schools so perhaps we should presume that they pack a full five-day load into four days. I don't. Rather I see this as part of a reduction of work that these schools have found to be attractive to students and faculty. These schools also give 4 credits (or the equivalent) for 3 hours of class and so it is natural to pack those limited hours into four days. I give the data and discussion on [credit hours](#) separately. I speak out now because I want to expose this and keep it from spreading further through higher education.

The 4-day schools seem to cluster together, feeding off their neighbors' inclination to succumb to this tempting indulgence. Perhaps the farthest gone in this direction are the [Claremont Colleges](#), which I will describe below along with others. These schools no doubt will say that their students are so strong that they don't need class on Friday to use that day productively. Maybe these students don't succumb to a lazy three day weekend and study as much as they would if they had class on Friday. If so these schools ought be eager to show how much their students study with their NSSE data.

I have tabulated the proportion of these schools' courses that meet on Friday. I count only full credit courses, not labs and not courses that meet at night. When schools have only courses that met MWF or TTh, more than half of a school's courses will have a Friday class. There are still many schools that meet this standard, although now most schools have some classes that meet only on MW. To keep a healthy proportion of classes on Friday, they also have courses that meet MF, WF or TF and sometimes courses that meet three hours on Friday. Regrettably, there are schools that have such seminars on all days except Friday and few or no classes that meet MF, TF or WF.

The school that comes closest to a pure 4 day week is [Pitzer](#), one of the Claremont schools. For Fall 2011, I find only 56 of 593 courses in the Pitzer part of the five college list that meet on Friday. There is cross listing of courses on this list that I make no attempt not to double count, but I doubt that this substantially affects the proportion. It is .094, less than 10 percent! Now Pitzer is unusual in that it has "a curriculum that emphasizes the social and behavioral sciences, particularly psychology, sociology, anthropology and political studies" ([see Claremont description](#)). The other Claremont schools' proportions are somewhat higher: [Claremont McKenna](#) (.229), [Pomona](#) (.242) and [Scripps](#) (.243). But they differ only in that they have a substantial number of courses in math, natural sciences and foreign language that tend to use the MWF time codes. If you ignore those types of courses at these schools, their percentages are much lower. If you're not taking much math, language or science, then you would find it very hard to have many Friday classes or very easy to avoid them at these schools.

There are other clusters of schools of this sort. There are the "five colleges" in Massachusetts, two of which fall below 30 percent for courses with class on Friday. One is [Hampshire College](#); a casual count from their "hub" gives 34 courses that meet on Friday out of 287 total, which gives .118 for the proportion. But that includes tennis classes and such, so I used their system to count only courses that satisfy distribution requirements and got 13.8

percent that meet on Friday. [Mount Holyoke](#) is a little better with a proportion of .219. Not in the five colleges, but not too far off are [Bowdoin](#) (.205), [Connecticut College](#) (.206) and [Vassar](#) (.197). A little farther away is the other cluster in or near Philadelphia.

Here the worst offenders are [Haverford](#) (.249) and [Bryn Mawr](#) (.225 or .243 if we don't count a 29 sections of a seminar that meets TTh). There is also [Muhlenberg](#) (.271). [Moravian](#) and [Swarthmore](#) are above 30 percent for F11, but in F10 they were below it (.239 and .260 respectively). Aside from these schools there is only one other in the US News Top 125 that has less than 30 percent of its courses with a class on Friday. [Birmingham-Southern](#) has a proportion of .255. I only report proportions less than .30, not because percentages in the 30's are good, but rather because I devoted my limited time to the schools that look the worst. Maybe in the future I'll have time to report on other schools with few Friday classes.

I'll finish by emphasizing that faculty don't have to have the traditional MWF schedules to have class on Friday. They can still meet only twice a week by shifting a good portion of their MW classes to either MF, WF or TF as some schools have. That will require a larger portion of the students and faculty to come to school on Friday, which may not be popular, but would be good for the quality of education. After all, students won't have a 4-day week when they get out in the real world. As I've grown older I appreciate that a primary purpose of college is identify young people who will function well in the real world. Why should we have colleges that are less like the real world than they need to be?