

**- PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION REPORT -**

**THAT #\$\$% @ &! SANDY CREEK POST OFFICE!**

(George Dieter, El Paso location)

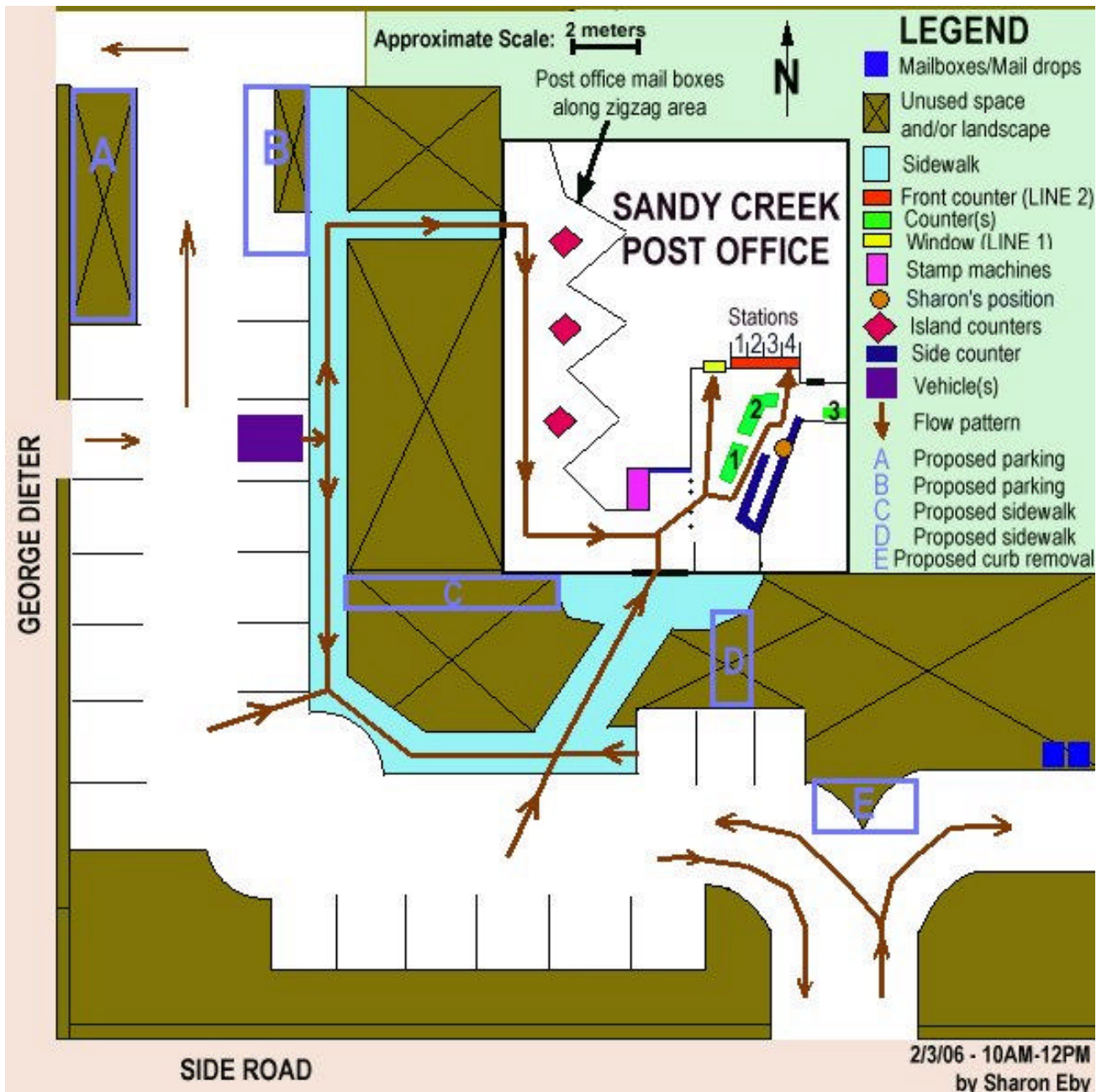
At 10:08AM I arrived at what many people refer to as the #\$\$% @ &! Sandy Creek Post Office. On this particular Saturday morning the parking lot was bustling with vehicles, and at least 3 cars were stopped in front of me while they, and I, waited for other cars to pull out of their parking spaces so that we could fill their vacancies one by one. I was in the lane that went to the left, toward the parking area, while the lane that branched off to the right (with a wedge-shaped divider between each of these two lanes) went toward the large blue mailboxes that were lined up and ready to gobble up peoples' mail as they fed them envelopes. That wedge-shaped curb divider had all kinds of black tire scuff marks, evidently from countless cars that had run into it. A bad design, I thought. Even though I came to the post office for a anthropological participant-observation study, as well as to conveniently mail a couple of packages, this error in scuffed-wedge-curbs-type traffic routing design brought my attention to the rest of the parking lot, as well as the building, grounds layout, and landscaping.

I'll talk about the parking lot first, since it is one of the major features of this post office that bothers me personally. The left lane (by the wedge) I was in was far too narrow to enter without worry of hitting oncoming vehicles, even though an "out" facing arrow was painted on the asphalt. Was this really safe? With all of the SUV's and Hummers running around El Paso did the designer(s) think that El Pasoans were actually driving in compact European-like economy cars? In fact, I have thought about this lane and parking lot issue every single time I came to this post office. I had witnessed a few near-accidents in this area, especially in the parking lot itself, which was laid out in an L-shape. I was driving in at the bottom of the L. The longer part of the L ran north and south, and at times the traffic was so heavy, and the place so busy, that ALL of the parking spots were taken

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and people were having to park on the sides of the exit lane near the back (top part of the L). This was frustrating to me, and others whom I've overheard boast similar grumblings. There was nothing user-friendly about this post office. Not outside or inside, however, the landscaping was nice – xeriscaping of sorts, with rock and boulders and few plants that would soak up too much water. At least someone had saving water in mind.

**MAP of Sandy Creek Post Office (estimated, not to scale)**



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Ergonomics. The meaning of this word is one of practicality, i.e. “designed for ease of use” (source: trimarkcorp.com), or “Ergonomics (from Greek *ergon* work and *nomoi* natural laws) is the study of optimizing the interface between human beings, and the designed objects and environments they interact with” (source: wikipedia.org). I bring up this word because it is something that the designer(s) of the Sandy Creek Post Office need to know. When this place was designed ergonomics seems to be the last thing that was on their minds, and equally well, it appears – based on what I was about to find out by watching the people in the lines within the post office – *ease of use* was not something that the USPS employees appear to be trained in as well. Buildings are spaces, and specifically, they are spaces that people USE. If they are designed well they are used well. A good design for a public space might include a welcoming front, a safe parking lot, an exterior and interior plan that would aid in the flow of foot-traffic, etc. People tend to walk in straight lines to get from point A to point B. If they go around corners they tend to chop off (by walking over) the squared edge because it is more efficient and they can get to their destination faster (this is why grassless paths often cut across these areas). All kinds of people come to the post office... people who need to check their postal mailbox, business owners who need to ship packages, people who are moving and need to place a forwarding address into the system, etc. Most of these folks, I would dare to say, are likely wanting to get in and get out – not to linger, or waste time at the post office. What is there for them besides taking care of some kind of mail-oriented business? It is not a place where friends hang out and chat. No restaurant seating is available. No benches for relaxing weary feet are offered. It is not a cyber café or a coffee shop. No phones (not even pay phones) are available, and no restrooms are available for little-kid emergencies or the gut rumblings from last night’s dinner either. Post offices are not about ergonomics! They are not designed for ease of use. They are not designed with the customer in mind. At least the Sandy Creek Post Office doesn’t seem to be.

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A good example of the lack of ergonomics is the sidewalks. Like many public spaces they are all straight and boxy with angled corners that finally lead up to the front of the building. One might argue that straight pathways help one to achieve the point-A-to-point-B goal, but when one has to go from point A, round off a corner to go perpendicular to the previous direction, and then round off another corner to go diagonally onto a ramp that will finally take you to the front doors of the building, then it is hardly unidirectional, or convenient. If only they had a little side-path (with steps) from the longer side of the L-shaped parking lot, I thought. It would cut off all of this going-around-your-elbow-to-get-back-to-your-thumb type of walking. Of course, I thought, all of this waste of time is giving me more exercise. That is the glass half full, but should it be this way? Ergonomically speaking... no.

Enough about that. All of these thoughts were going through my mind as I walked around the demarcation that was set before me. I was happy to have gotten a parking space, and interestingly enough there were still 3 other parking spaces available for others! I grabbed my packages and was in the line to drop the mail by 10:10AM. Two minutes from entering the parking lot to entering the line in the building wasn't too bad, I thought. Perhaps my criticisms were moot. I squeezed through a line of people (the LEFT line – line 1) to enter my own line. Luckily I knew which line I needed to be in... this was what I will call the RIGHT line (or line 2), which takes you to the counters up front (there are 4 main stations for workers at this front counter area). You can buy stamps there, or send packages that are over 16 ounces, etc. However, if you choose the LEFT line (1), you are probably there to pick up your mail after having a vacation hold on it, or because there is an issue with your P.O. mailbox, or to hand in a little form for a forwarding address, to pick up a package that was too big for your mailbox, to pick up certified mail, or a host of other possibilities. No sooner did I enter the RIGHT line (2) when I heard a lady, with a little baby in her arms, exclaim, "This is terrible. Look at all these people in line!" I snickered to myself as I considered the alternative to waiting in

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the line (either of them)... oh wait, if you HAVE to be there to pick up something, or to drop something off (that another location such as the UPS Store, FedEx Kinkos, or other businesses cannot help you with) then you have no alternative to waiting in line! You're stuck. Too bad, so sad. My face fell. Suddenly flashes of the old 1976 Saturday Night Live shows with Lily Tomlin playing "Ernestine," the telephone company operator, came rushing into my head. With a huge wig and a scrunched-up face and a whiney voice she would say (and with all contempt), "We don't care. We don't have to. We're the Phone Company." – this was usually followed with a laugh and a snort. (source: [snltranscripts.jt.org/76/76aphonecompany.phtml](http://snltranscripts.jt.org/76/76aphonecompany.phtml)) I could just picture this poor lady beside me actually complaining to one of the postal workers (what she had said aloud), and the postal worker telling her, "We don't care. We don't have to. We're the Postal Service." (SNORT/LAUGH) The word *service*, in the sense of the Postal Service, is an oxymoron, no?

I think the real proof is in the pudding, so to speak. I say a lot of this tongue in cheek, and with great sarcasm to help alleviate my own anger towards this very post office (located on George Dieter, just north of Montwood in east El Paso). I have been one of those unsatisfied customers more than once, and particularly at this very post office. I was actually hoping, upon beginning this participant-observation 1-2 hour study that I would hear or witness some GOOD NEWS. Only time would tell if this was to be. Instead of giving a narrative of every single detail I will hereby announce my methodology for this short one-time study (which could easily be duplicated by other social scientists/anthropologist and/or students, etc. for validity and consistency).

## **METHODS**

Participant-observation is the main method used to observe behavior, space, etc. at the Sandy Creek Post Office in El Paso, Texas. The date this study occurred was on Saturday, February 3, 2007. I arrived at 10:08AM and began my observations of the interior space of the post office by

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10:10AM. I went through the line as a customer, and asked the man at the counter (station #2 ) if I could have permission to do my participant-observation study, to watch the flow of traffic and such. The man's name was Freddy, and he was very nice and professional. The other person (station #4) was a male, and later a woman opened up station #1 and stayed a while. I kept time as I took field notes the entire nearly-two-hour study. Notes were separated into objective and subjective areas. I added my own input based on my own experience(s) at Sandy Creek as well. The data I collected, based solely on observation, supported what I already knew. I took the time to track people going through the lines to see how long it took them to reach the front (taking into account how many people were in front of them at any given time, as well as people who piled in behind them during this process). Additionally, I performed unstructured interviews of 2 of the people I had tracked in the LEFT line (1), and 1 questioning of a boy. I was able to obtain verbal consent to use the first names of the interviewees for this study, with the knowledge that this may be published (in any form or manner) in the future. The people I tracked were at random (whoever came in at any given time).

I also listened to things that people said (whenever possible – most people stayed quiet unless they were chatting together or using cell phones) to see what kinds of things they might say about the post office. I drew a map of this (shown previously) in digital form although it is from memory and not to scale, nor exact in detail. It is basic and gets the point across. Some of the people going through the line were not alone, so I decided to not count them separately but as single UNITS instead. So three individuals and one couple would be considered as 4 units (as opposed to 5 people). This made the counting of “turns” in line and/or going to the window or counter more accurate. Upon compiling my data I finalized my notes and ended the observation study by 11:54AM. I have decided to deliver the final data in the form of a table rather than a narrative. The details of timekeeping, and which line was doing what, are easier to envision and keep separate for accuracy. The interviews of the two people I tracked from LEFT line (1) will follow the table.

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Table 1

TIME	INFORMATION	LEFT – LINE 1	RIGHT – LINE 2	NOTES/COMMENTS
10:10	Lady with baby	<b>14 people</b>	<b>12 people</b> , 2 of 4 stations open	She exclaims, “ <b>This is terrible. Look at all these people in line!</b> ”
10:15	Man in front of Sharon	1 <sup>st</sup> man in line still being taken care of since 5 minutes ago.	I’m 2 <sup>nd</sup> in line. The man in front of me goes forward to station #4.	Man complains about the price of postage, although remained friendly. \$22.60 was his total price.
10:18	<b>Freddy – USPS employee</b>		Postal worker “Freddy” at station #2	Obtained permission to do participant-observation by sitting on sidelines
10:20	Man in line 1	<b>17 people</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> man in line is finally done.	<b>2 people</b>	<b>10 MINUTES TOTAL FOR MAN IN LINE 1</b>
10:21	Person in line 1	<b>18 people</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup> person in line is done already	3 people added <b>(5 people total)</b>	<b>1 MINUTE TOTAL FOR MAN IN LINE 1</b>
10:22			<b>7 people</b>	
10:23	<b>Decide to track individuals in lines. Couples &amp; families that equal “one turn” are counted as UNITS (individuals included)</b>	Couple leave. <b>TRACK 1: Asian family – 18 people in front of them, 2 behind them, 23 people 20 units total</b>	<b>TRACK 1: man in blue sweater with horizontal stripe – 6<sup>th</sup> in line (with lady in front of him) 5 units total</b>	<b>2 MINUTES TOTAL – LINE 1</b> Hear people talking on cell phone(s).
10:27			Track 1 man is 4 <sup>th</sup> in line with 5 people added <b>9 units</b>	People shuffling in and out, using front stamp machines and mail drops. Hear crinkling of plastic bag(s)?
10:29		<b>14 people ahead of Track 1 family, 3 behind. 18 units</b>	Track 1 man is 3 <sup>rd</sup> in line <b>13 units</b>	Asian man walks to side of line 2 to see/look for something – left to machines
10:32		People talking more and using cell phones	People are quiet except for a mom talking to her daughter.	
10:33	End of track 1 – line 2		Track 1 man (lady with him) at counter	<b>10 MINUTES TOTAL – LINE 2</b> Line 1 window stays shut... subliminal message? No particular smells in the building. Carpet and tile with 9 pieces of torn paper on floor near me.
10:36	New track 2 – line 2	<b>8 people in front of track family, 6 people behind 15 units</b>	<b>TRACK 2: woman (blonde lady with brown shirt, and her husband(?)) - 9 people in front, 1 unit (a couple) behind 11 units</b>	
10:39	Station #1 opens (3 stations total are open now – because Freddy was busy long-term?)			<b>3<sup>rd</sup> front desk area opens!</b> Lady USPS worker in station #1 (line 2 area) but Freddy is gone People swarming in, hear a man behind front desk giving directions to Freddy

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TIME	INFORMATION	LEFT – LINE 1	RIGHT – LINE 2	NOTES/COMMENTS
10:41	Disgruntled and confused customer.		<b>Line FULL</b> (to end of counter 1) Man in blue collar uniform looks by front of line and leaves.	Lady came to me asking if I work here. She needed a package done – she states, <b>“I don’t want to go in THAT line!”</b> and points to line 2, <b>“Nevermind.”</b> And puts package (lg. Envelope) back on shelf and leaves.
10:44		Track 1 family – 7 units in front with 7 units behind <b>15 units</b>	Track 2 lady is 7 <sup>th</sup> in line, 6 units behind her. <b>13 units</b>	
10:45			2 people in front, 7 behind <b>TRACK 3:</b> man “all in black” comes in	
10:47			Track 2 lady at front counter with husband Track 3 man 7 <sup>th</sup> in line	<b>11 MINUTES TOTAL – LINE 2 (track 2 lady)</b> 8 <sup>th</sup> person comes in line 2, gets out of line, walks to front to look, then leaves.
10:48			<b>TRACK 4:</b> lady with daughter walks in behind Track 3 man. 5 units are behind her. <b>13 units total</b>	
10:52	Both lines FULL! 3 stations open at counter			Many people are talking, very busy in here. The lights are bright, two-toned tile floor, kids and people wandering around. Hard to distinguish conversations.
10:53	Track 1 family has been in line for 30 minutes so far!	Track 1 family – 5 units in front, man still on cell phone (is right behind track 1 family)	Track 3 man “all in black” leaves from front, Track 4 woman and daughter now at front of line. <b>6 units</b>	<b>8 MINUTES TOTAL – LINE 2 (track 3 man)</b> <b>5 MINUTES TOTAL – LINE 2 (track 4 woman)</b> Line is about ½ length from front to back. Will get a new line 2 track (next person who comes in).
10:59			<b>TRACK 5:</b> Man in plaid walks to front counter (line 2 area), then gets in line. 6 people in front of him, none behind. <b>7 units</b>	Woman gets large envelope from beside me. She leaves.
11:02		Track 1 family – 4 units in front	Track 5 man at front desk. Line now empty except for lady mid-counter (counter #2), she is packaging something. <b>Line empty</b>	<b>3 MINUTES TOTAL – LINE 2 (track man 5)</b>
11:03	3 stations still open	Track 1 family – 2 units now in front	New man in line, lady still mid-counter. <b>1 unit</b>	

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TIME	INFORMATION	LEFT – LINE 1	RIGHT – LINE 2	NOTES/COMMENTS
11:04			No line, lady still at mid-counter <b>Line empty</b>	2 girls wandering by me
11:05			1 man in line – <b>1 unit</b>	
11:06	Track 1 family finally done!	Track 1 family is able to be taken care of sooner – via lady at front counter, station #1		<b>43 MINUTES TOTAL – LINE 1</b>
11:07		<b>TRACK 2:</b> man with sunglasses, 17 <sup>th</sup> in line (of units) with 3 coming in behind now. <b>20 units</b>		
11:11	<b>INTERVIEW of Track 1 family</b>	Track 1 family about to leave, I catch them as they near the exit door		Interviewee seems a bit hurried, but <b>“Patricia”</b> was there for mailbox keys – they were not there despite being ordered on Dec. 29 <sup>th</sup> , 2006. She said this whole 43 minutes of waiting was a <b>“Waste of time.”</b> Plus she has to come back and do it again to get the keys.
11:13	I sat back down after interview	Track 2 man has 11 units ahead, 7 units behind. Line is wrapped around toward the front door of the building. <b>19 units</b>		Man with a little girl sat down beside me.
11:16			<b>3 units</b> , plus man in yellow jacket is mid-counter at counter #2	Man and girl beside me got up and went to back right corner (counter #3)
11:17	<b>INTERVIEW with boy</b>	Boy left the line to sit down beside me on the low counter/platform that I have been using as a bench	<b>2 units</b>	Man with girl at mid-counter (#1) with wife(?). Boy in yellow sat beside me – he says he’s been here a while (came from line 1) and that <b>he is tired because he’s been here too long.</b>
11:20		<b>18 units</b> Track 2 man is in the 10 <sup>th</sup> position in line	Man in yellow jacket left mid-counter (#2) and got in line, 1 unit ahead, none behind <b>2 units, then quickly to 1 unit</b>	
11:22				Couple by me choosing a box
11:23	So far the extra station has only helped line 1 once (for the Track 1 Asian family)		<b>1 unit in line</b> , plus 2 at mid-counter (#2), and 1 at mid-counter (#1)	Heard the window close in line 1, people facing the shut door.
11:25	New lady in blue shirt comes in, nods her head (no) and proceeds through line 1 to line 2	Track 2 man has 6 units ahead and 10 units behind <b>17 units</b>	Lady in blue is the <b>ONLY person in this line</b> - goes to Freddy in station #2 immediately	Line 1 is way back to the front of the store (backed up).

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TIME	INFORMATION	LEFT – LINE 1	RIGHT – LINE 2	NOTES/COMMENTS
11:27	Station #1 lady at front counter helps 2 <sup>nd</sup> person in line 1 (2 <sup>nd</sup> time this has occurred to help alleviate the strain in that line)	2 <sup>nd</sup> person in line is able to be helped at the front counter		
11:28	<b>INTERVIEW of track 2 man in line 1</b>	I walk up to the man I've been tracking to ask him how he feels WHILE in line (rather than after)		Interviewee is a nice man named " <b>Daniel</b> ", he suggests that <b>they need more help at the window (at least 1 person more)</b> . He came <b>yesterday to pick up his mail</b> and it was the same thing ( <b>too slow</b> ). He also suggested that <b>having more options to take care of things online</b> might help fix these problems. Daniel picks up his mail every day, but <b>his key isn't working</b> .
11:31	Daniel got through faster due to lady at station #1 helping	Track 2 man is at window		<b>24 MINUTES TOTAL – LINE 1</b> Postal worker says to Daniel to <b>come back next week</b> and hopefully they'll have a new key for him. Until then he <b>has to wait in this long line to get his mail, daily</b> .
11:34	Daniel finished at the line 1 window	Track 2 man leaves window, comes to me to borrow a pen		I asked Daniel, " <b>How was your service here at the Post Office?</b> " <b>He replied, "Disappointing."</b> He suggested there be <b>more available staff</b> , and thinks again that this is something that he could have <b>taken care of online</b> .
11:39		<b>13 units</b> in line with 1 standing at the side waiting for a guy to return	<b>3 units</b> in line	It appears that the postal worker at the line 1 window is attempting to help 2 people at once (making one wait while the other is being dealt with).
11:42		Line extended to far end of counter #1, not far from entrance	<b>TRACK 6: lady with hair band</b>	
11:44			<b>Track 6 lady has 3 units ahead of her but 1<sup>st</sup> one goes to counter as I watch – so not 2 units in front, 2 units behind 5 units</b>	
11:45	I just noticed that 2 front counter stations are open instead of 3 ( <b>station #1 lady closed down</b> ) – Post office fixing to close			Lady is choosing between boxes but leaves without anything. <b>Why did station #1 lady leave and not help out with line 1???</b>

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TIME	INFORMATION	LEFT – LINE 1	RIGHT – LINE 2	NOTES/COMMENTS
11:47		7 units total	3 units total (with track 6 lady in front of line)	Things are moving much faster now – lines are diminishing
11:50	A herd of people coming in!		Track 6 lady at front counter (station #2 with Freddy)	6 MINUTES TOTAL – LINE 2
11:51		Last person in line at window but 3 more people come 3 units	Lady in line asks where the tax forms are – told they are at the main post office so she and her little girl leave. 10 units	
11:53		4 units	9 units	
11:54	END STUDY	4 units	9 units	END OF STUDY

## INTERVIEWS

Three interviews (including one informal interview with a boy in yellow) were conducted during this study. The first was the Asian lady (with her family/kids) named “Patricia.” She had to wait in the LEFT line (1) for a total of 43 minutes. The interview went as follows (as per chart):

Interviewee seems a bit hurried, but “**Patricia**” was there for mailbox keys – they were not there despite being ordered on Dec. 29<sup>th</sup>, 2006. She said this whole 43 minutes of waiting was a “**Waste of time.**” Plus she has to come back and do it again to get the keys.

The second interview was of “Daniel” who had to wait in LEFT line (1) for 24 minutes. The interview went as follows (as per chart):

Interviewee is a nice man named “**Daniel**”; he suggests that **they need more help at the window (at least 1 person more)**. He came **yesterday to pick up his mail** and it was the same thing (**too slow**). He also suggested that **having more options to take care of things online** might help fix these problems. Daniel picks up his mail every day, but **his key isn’t working**. Postal worker says to Daniel to **come back next week** and hopefully they’ll have a new key for him. Until then he **has to wait in this long line to get his mail, daily**. I asked Daniel, “**How was your service here at the Post Office?**” **He replied, “Disappointing.”** He suggested there be **more available staff**, and thinks again that this is something that he could have **taken care of online**.

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The third, informal interview of the boy wearing yellow was tired of waiting in LEFT line (1) (undetermined amount of time). Information obtained was as follows (as per chart):

Boy in yellow sat beside me – he says he’s been here a while (came from line 1) and that **he is tired because he’s been here too long.**

An additional comment overheard includes this:

Lady came to me asking if I work here. She needed a package done – she states, **“I don’t want to go in THAT line!”** and points to line 2, **“Nevermind.”** And puts package (lg. Envelope) back on shelf and leaves.

## **DISCUSSION**

It appears that although the majority of the people in RIGHT line (2) went rather smoothly, and quickly, the LEFT line (1) was the total opposite. Many people not only had complaints to make, but often suggested options or solutions that might be possible, if only the post office were willing to make such accommodations. I have my own opinions, based on my experiences and observations prior and during this study as well (they are included in the Conclusions and beginning sections).

The area where I sat had postal items for sale, but no one was there to man the cash register. In fact, I think I have only seen that register area open ONCE ever, and that was soon after this particular post office had opened up (I have been to this post office dozens of times since this location opened up). The entire space seems to be a waste of space. Could this space be of better use somehow?

Speeding up the service would get people in and out quicker, thereby relieving some of the parking lot clotting. Also, widening the parking lot entrance (from the side road), adding parking spaces, and eliminating (or reducing the size of) the angled curb wedge would all help the bottleneck traffic issue as well as making it safer (less likely to have parking lot accidents).

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If the length of LEFT line (1) were reduced on the whole then people moving to RIGHT line (2) wouldn't need to butt their way through line 1 to get there. The way it is set up now is counterproductive, and a very possible fire hazard to have a long line of people nearly constantly in the way for other customers to have to struggle to get through. It is a real hassle for people needing to get to the other side, and a hassle for people standing there in the first place.

Also, once in line and moving toward the window (via LEFT line (1)) I noted that the window (which is a ½ and ½ cut door, so that the top part opens like a window leaving the bottom shut) would be opened ONLY if the postal worker was speaking with the customer. If the postal worker walked away the window would be shut in the face of the customer. Symbolically this kind of nonverbal behavior/example shouts to the customer, “You are not important to us!” USPS customers are receiving the message loud and clear by simple, but tentatively neglectful actions such as this, and all of these little things add up. The old adage is: *Take care of the little things and the big things will take care of themselves.*

I waited for 55 minutes one weekday (within the last couple of months of this writing) in the LEFT line (1) in order to pick up a certified letter. During that time the people in line were getting not only frustrated, but were speaking out loud to anyone (namely the postal workers) who would listen. Many complaints were made at the window once people arrived to it. The line was so slow that I almost walked out (and countless others did walk out! – plus I have walked out on at least three occasions before), but I knew I had no choice if I wanted to retrieve that important letter (remember the Saturday Night Live phone company skit?). I, like so many others, complained once it was my turn at the window. People wanted to call the USPS office but who would listen? It is also very hard to find a phone number in the phone book where a customer can actually speak to a living person at all. Does the USPS even have a complaint line? (perhaps it would be overused?)

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Some people thought that an article in the newspaper would be a good idea (ya think?). When the RIGHT line (2) would go down to an empty line the postal workers would *finally* let someone from the LEFT line (1) go to the counter to be taken care of. Folks in line actually clapped their hands in amazement and wonder! Once another person would enter line 2, however, then they would stop taking care of people in line 1. It was the exact same scenario that I witnessed during this participant-observation period. Why is the Sandy Creek Post Office keeping only one person to help such a long line at the window??? What is the logic in making their customers so angry?

Lastly, I would like to mention **a postman at another post office** (which has far better service and accommodations I might add – and I won't say which one so as not to get the postal worker in trouble). He once told me, when I made a negative remark about the Sandy Creek P.O., **“EVERYONE hates that post office! I get complaints all of the time about it.”** This seems to be a trend... or more than just a trend, yes? The bottom line is that something needs to be done to improve the quality of service at Sandy Creek... hhhmmm... ya think?! Or shall it continue to be “We don't care. We don't have to. We're the Postal Service.” (SNORT/LAUGH)

## **CONCLUSIONS**

I decided that it would be prudent to run some numbers on the (limited) data that I had collected to see what the average amount of people (units) and times were for each line. With the average minutes for each unit/person going from the back of the line, to the front window/counter at 1.9 minutes (LEFT line 1), and 1.8 minutes (RIGHT line 2), and the average number of units/people in line at any given time being at 13.3 (LEFT line 1), and 5.4 (RIGHT line 2), then the average time in line would be 25.3 minutes and 9.7 minutes respectively.

**1 UNIT = 1 or more people** (i.e. individuals, couples, families, or friends, etc.)

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Table 2

	LEFT LINE (1)	RIGHT LINE (2)
<b>Quantity of people/units tracked</b>	2	6
<b>Mean (length of time in line)</b>	33.5	7.2
<b>Mode (length of time in line)</b>	43	10
<b>Quantity of (counted) people taken care of by postal worker</b>		
	3	N/A
<b>Mean (minutes each)</b>	4.3	N/A
<b>Mode (minutes each)</b>	10	N/A
<b>Total # units taken care of at window between 10:23-11:51 AM (88 mins)*</b>		
	46	48+
<b>Average minutes for each unit to get to the window/counter between 10:23-11:51AM (88 mins)*</b>		
<b>Mean (# of units in line at any given time*)</b>	13.3	5.4
<b>Mode (# of units in line at any given time*)</b>	20	13
<b>Average # minutes new customers can expect to be in line</b>	<b>25.3*</b>	<b>9.7**</b>

\* includes rare "help" by front counter station #1

\*\*with 2-3 stations open at counter

Obviously there is a huge distinction here between the LEFT (1) and RIGHT (2) lines. If a second window were available at the LEFT line (1), or a second postal worker helping at the single window that is already there, then one could estimate that the time people spend in line would cut in half - average of 12.7 minutes each. This is not too far off from how long it takes people to go through the RIGHT line (1) - average of 9.7 minutes each. The difference between them is an average of 3 minutes/person (unit), which means that the people using the LEFT line (1) have to take care of things (their reason(s) for being there) that typically take longer than the other line.

The bottom line is that the Sandy Creek Post Office is helping the customers needing the *least* amount of help (time-wise) with about 100% - 200% more staff (postal workers) than the customers needing the *most* amount of help (time-wise). Another way of looking at it is that the people who spend an average of 3 minutes MORE per person (unit) in line are only getting ½ to 1/3<sup>rd</sup> the help

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they need to get in and out of the post office in a reasonable amount of time. The reasons for this 3 minute difference was not studied or analyzed but perhaps the fact that many customers in RIGHT line (2) are taken care of *on the spot*, whereas customers in LEFT line (1) get the door shut in their face so that the postal worker can walk, walk, walk around to retrieve or take care of what they need before coming back and opening the window again to finish what they started.

I think it is clear that the Sandy Creek Post Office has some major revamping to do. One suggestion would be to keep one of the front counter stations (such as station #1) open ALL or nearly all of the time as an aid to the LEFT line (1) window. Equally, simply adding an extra postal worker (or two) to help at the window would alleviate much of the long waiting time and lines for the LEFT line (1). Perhaps then, the customers won't be so apt to walk out and/or be disgruntled at the postal workers (or more likely their manager(s)) who obviously haven't figured out why the LEFT line (1) window takes so #\$\$@&! long. So there you have it. With this article the USPS should now know what the basic and generalized statistics are and how to go about remedying the matter. It is in their hands now to make the difference for the public they are attempting to serve.

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