

Academic Advising Survey

Student Government Association

Spring 2012

Background

In 2010, the Texas A&M University Student Senate passed an academic advising improvement bill, encouraging the University Advisors and Counselors (UAC) to work with SGA to address common advising issues “which prevent effective and efficient academic advising” (S.B. 63-22). In addition, there are student learning outcomes associated with academic advising in the areas of campus resources, critical thinking, degree requirements, policy, and prospective students. Within the area of campus resources, students should be aware of, and access as appropriate, experiences such as study abroad, internships, student organizations, professional organizations, counseling services, and career services. The SGA Academic Affairs Committee representative, a representative from Undergraduate Studies, and a representative from Student Life Studies coordinated the project. Although Student Life Studies has worked with Student Government and Student Senate on a variety of projects, this is the first time for this particular topic.

Method and Sample

The 17-question survey was developed using Qualtrics®, survey design software that creates web-based forms and databases. Only one question was qualitative in nature. Because of branching technology, not all respondents saw all of the questions. The data was analyzed using SPSS®, a statistical software package, and Microsoft Word®.

Invitations to participate were sent to campus email addresses to a stratified random sample by academic college and classification. U2s (sophomores) and U3s (juniors) were selected because those students are more likely to have met with academic advisors as they move into upper level courses and solidify majors. The survey was sent out on January 23rd, with reminders sent on January 26th and February 1st to non-respondents. The survey closed on February 3rd. Of the 2,500 students invited, 156 completed at least part of the survey, yielding a 6% response rate. Because of the small response rate, caution should be used when interpreting the data.

Results

Results will be reported as means, standard deviations (sd), and frequency percentages for the number of people (n) who responded to the question. For ease of reading, frequency percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole percent, so totals may not add up to exactly 100%. Tables are in descending mean or frequency order, unless otherwise specified. Qualitative themes are reported here; the entire list can be found in a separate document.

The first question asked students if they were required to meet with their academic advisor on a regular basis, and 75% said no. For the 25% (n=38) that said yes, when asked how often they were required to meet with their advisor, 89% said once a semester, 6% said less than once a semester, and 3% each said twice a semester and more than twice a semester.

All respondents were asked how often they actually met with their academic advisor. Just over half (52%) said once a semester, and 27% said twice a semester. Another 11% each said less than once a semester and more than twice a semester.

Students were asked to rate their agreement on four statements. Table 1 indicates that students think they know the requirements for their degree program, but do not necessarily think their academic advisor has taken time to get to know students.

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Mean (sd)
I know the requirements for my degree program	51%	38%	10%	1%	0%	4.38 (.72)
My academic advisor has provided me with accurate information about my degree program	51%	29%	9%	6%	5%	4.15 (1.13)
I am satisfied with the ease of making appointments with my academic advisor	46%	34%	10%	7%	4%	4.11 (1.07)
My academic advisor has taken time to get to know me as a person.	27%	18%	20%	21%	15%	3.20 (1.42)

Table 1—Academic Advising Experiences (n=143)

Respondents were asked a series of yes/no questions about efforts made by academic advisors to provide resources to students. Table 2 shows that academic advisors were fairly good at sharing study abroad opportunities but may not be as quick to share counseling resources.

	Percent Yes
My academic advisor has made me aware of study abroad opportunities	65%
My academic advisor has made me aware of career services resources	58%
My academic advisor has made me aware of internship opportunities	53%
My academic advisor has made me aware of student organizations	53%
My academic advisor has made me aware of professional organizations	50%
My academic advisor has made me aware of counseling resources	45%

Table 2—Academic Advisors Sharing Resources (n=141)

Students were asked two factual questions to determine what students actually knew about university requirements. When asked what the overall Grade Point Ratio (GPR) on attempted Texas A&M courses that an undergraduate must have to complete a degree, 64% of the students said 2.0, the correct answer. Other answers selected included 2.5 (24%), 2.25 (7%), 1.75 (4%) and “there is no minimum” (1%).

When asked about how many W/C (Writing Intensive/Communication) courses must a student have to complete a degree, 63% identified the correct answer of “two W courses OR one W and one C course.” Another 17% said two of each, 15% said one of either, and 5% indicated there was no minimum.

Respondents were provided the opportunity to make suggestions to improve academic advising at Texas A&M. Forty-four students made comments. A few students recounted positive experiences, but many made comments about difficulty getting in to see their advisor (too few advisors or not enough appointment/open times), advisors not providing accurate information, advisors not getting to know students as individuals.

Table 3 indicates the demographics of the sample and respondents. The colleges were somewhat similar, although the gender of respondents was very different than the sample.

	Sample (n=2500)	Respondents (n=156)
Agriculture and Life Sciences	12%	14%
Architecture	9%	8%
Business	12%	16%
Education and Human Development	12%	14%
Engineering	10%	8%
Geosciences	5%	4%
General Academic Programs	12%	6%
Liberal Arts	12%	16%
Science	8%	8%
Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences	8%	6%
U2 (sophomore)	54%	52%
U3 (junior)	46%	48%
Female	49%	70%
Male	51%	30%
White Only	72%	72%
Hispanic of Latino of any Race	17%	19%
Asian Only	5%	4%
Black only + 2 or more/1 Black	3%	3%
2 or more/excluding Black	2%	1%
International	1%	1%
American Indian Only	<1%	0%
Native Hawaiian Only	<1%	0%
Unknown or Not Reported	<1%	0%
U.S. Citizenship	96%	96%
Full-time	95%	97%
Half-time	3%	2%
Less than half-time	2%	1%

Table 3—Demographics of the Sample and Respondents

About 27% of the respondents self-identified as first-generation college students. Almost a third of the students (30%) were members of two student organizations, while 26% were in one. Another 20% were members of three organizations, and 7% were in four or more. About 17% were not in any student organization.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Unfortunately the response rate was very low, although the demographics of the sample were similar to the respondents. The results should not be generalized to the population, but they do provide some insight into academic advising. All of the comments should be reviewed to understand individual experiences. If there are other sources of information about students' advising experiences at Texas A&M, those could be added to these results to give a broader picture.

The results of this survey could also be used to start discussion about the expectations of how often students should meet with their advisors and the quality of those interactions when they do meet. Most students felt that their academic advisor provided them with accurate information about their degree program and developmental opportunities. The lowest rated responses—advisors getting to know students and providing counseling resources—are more personal in nature, so it may be more difficult to broach those subjects within limited meeting times. Addressing those issues could include training for academic advisors and suggesting conversation starters to enhance personal interaction.

Although two-thirds of students answered the “test” questions correctly, a third of them did not appear to know simple requirements for graduation. What can Student Government, Academic Affairs, and other entities do to increase knowledge among undergraduates? If students were more aware of the basics, it may free up time in the advising meetings. This could be done through posters, table tents, Facebook, the video signage at the Rec Center, etc. Academic advisors could help in the brainstorming of ways to increase knowledge.

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