



UC Berkeley – Office
of Planning & Analysis

The Use of UCUES Data in Planning and Assessment of Undergraduate Advising

Overview

The University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) and other survey data (Graduate Program Review Survey and the Doctoral Exit Survey) have been used during the review of academic programs to assess student satisfaction with a variety of aspects of the educational experience, including faculty and staff advising, and have informed local strategic planning activities since 2005. As Campus-wide efforts to evaluate and improve student service continue to take shape, the UCUES results on advising may be able to guide global evaluations of service and may help identify areas of critical importance to future planning and assessment.

In support of the Operational Excellence Student Services Initiative, this paper will:

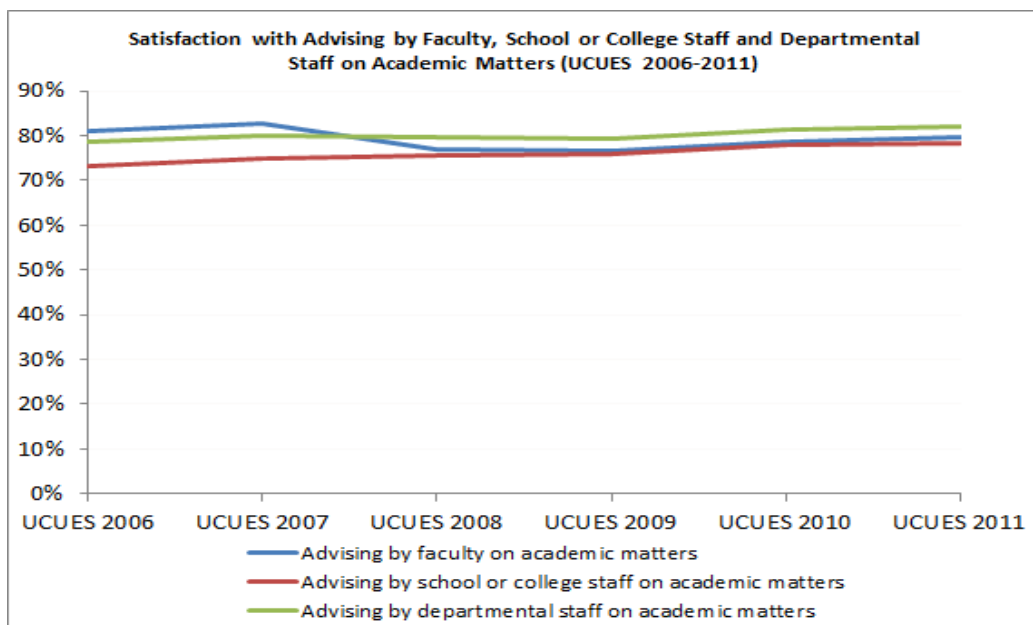
- Provide a brief overview of the historical satisfaction ratings with advising; compare satisfaction with departmental, college and peer advising; examine the relationship between faculty and departmental advising; and examine patterns where there are low and high levels of satisfaction with advising.
- Examine satisfaction as it relates to other indicators of academic quality.
- Identify questions that may be relevant to on-going strategic planning.

The 2010 UCUES survey results serve as the basis for analysis in this paper since the response rate for this survey was higher than in more recent years. The response rate for the Berkeley Campus was 44% (6,719/15,269) and in the Schools and Colleges it ranged from between 50% in the College of Engineering (842/1,692) to 43% in the Colleges of Chemistry (189/437) and Letters & Science (4,805/11,150).

The Spring 2012 UCUES survey includes a wild card module designed to provide additional information on advising outcomes and student satisfaction for both curricular and co-curricular advising. As these survey results become available, they will provide additional information to expand analysis, assessment and planning. We envision this as an initial paper in an on-going series.

Historical Satisfaction Ratings with Departmental, Faculty and School or College Advising

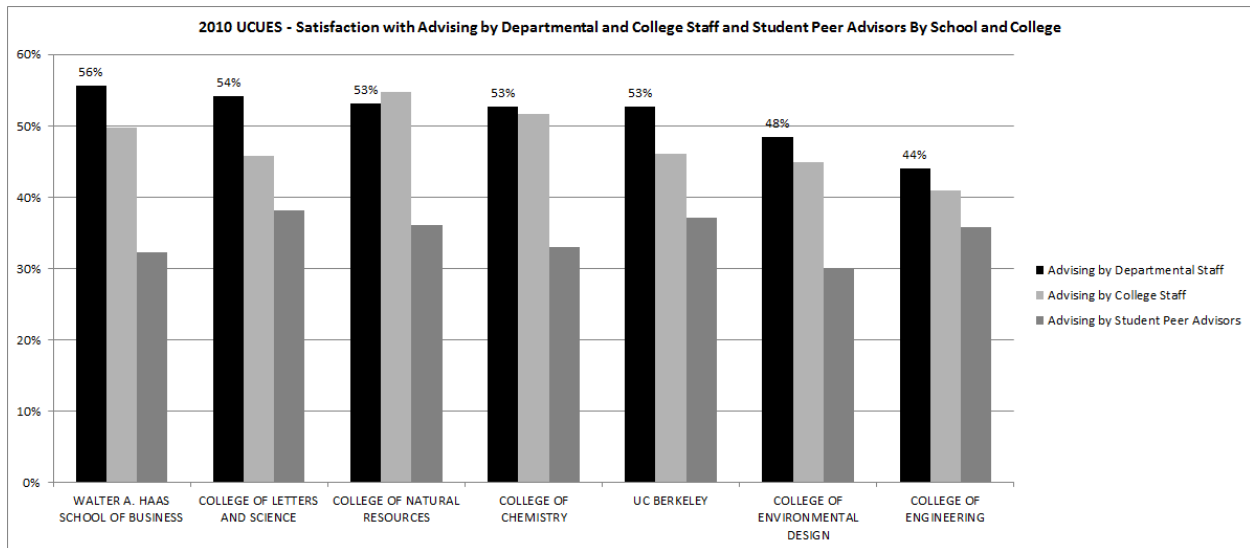
The chart below provides the satisfaction ratings for advising by faculty, departmental staff and school or college staff on academic matters. It shows that, overall satisfaction with advising has been high and stable for the last six years. More than 3 out of 4 undergraduates report that they are satisfied (somewhat satisfied, satisfied, and very satisfied) with the advising received on academic matters. In addition, it shows that students were more satisfied with departmental advising than faculty and college advising.



Observation: Based on the survey results presented above, there appear to be some features of the current system which have been satisfying to students. Additional inquiry is needed to better understand which features of advising have been most satisfying and could be developed and enhanced in any reconfiguration of service delivery and distribution of resources.

Satisfaction with Departmental, College and Peer Advising

The table which follows provides the 2010 UCUES results for satisfaction levels (very satisfied, and satisfied) with advising by departmental and College staff, and student peer advisors. In all cases, except the College of Natural Resources, satisfaction ratings were highest with departmental (staff) advising, followed by College advising; students were significantly less satisfied with advising by student peer advisors. The College of Letters and Science had the most pronounced differences between satisfaction with advising by Departmental (staff) and college advising; the differences between satisfaction with departmental and college advising were less pronounced in Chemistry, Engineering, and Natural Resources. Also, satisfaction levels across Colleges varied, satisfaction with departmental advising was higher in the Haas School of Business and lower in the College of Engineering.



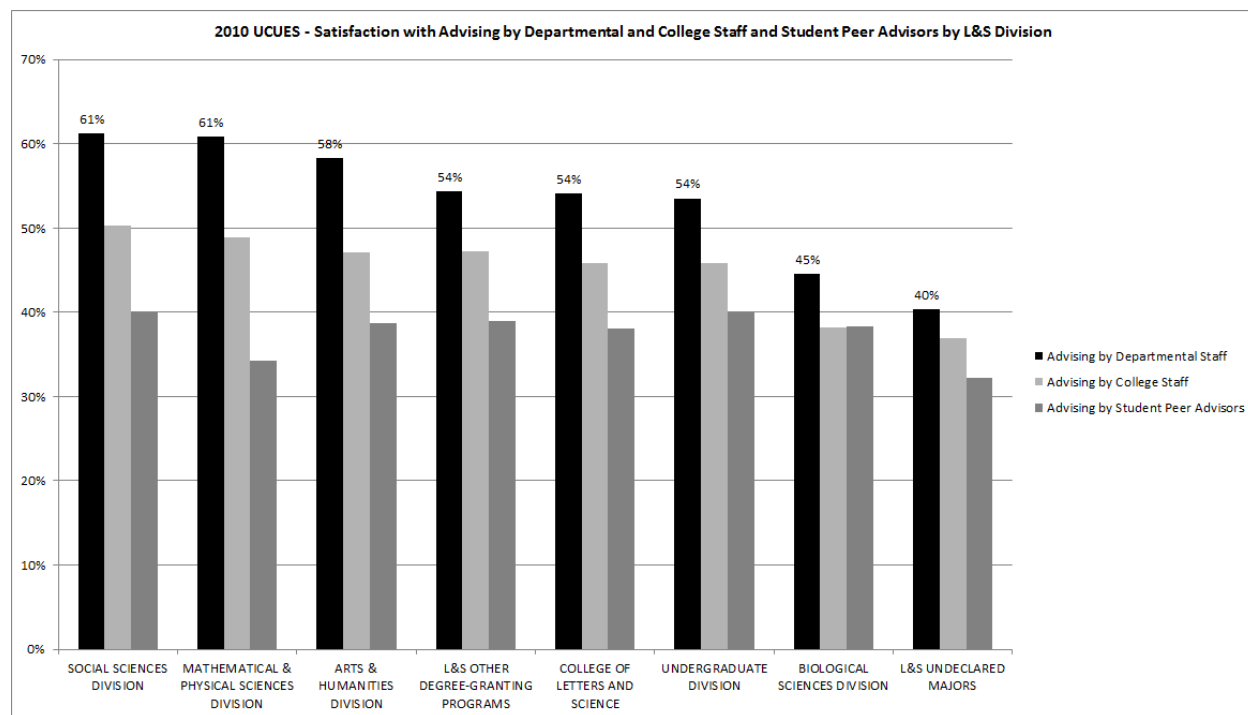
Observation: Given the high levels of satisfaction with departmental advising across Campus, it may be worth examining in more detail how departmental advising differs from other advising interactions to determine what characteristics are most satisfying to students. These results, for example, could be related to certain distinct aspects of departmental advising such as identification with a single identifiable advisor and with their “specialist” as opposed to “generalist” knowledge base. It may also be related to milestones in student development such as strong feelings of personal connectedness and intellectual identification with the life an identity of a department or disciplinary group. These results may also be related to structural differences in the delivery of advising by College. For example, in Colleges where the lower division curriculum is highly tracked and coordinated at the College level (such as in the Colleges of Chemistry, Engineering and Natural Resources) differences between departmental and College advising are less pronounced as compared to advising in the College of Letters & Science where advising is highly decentralized and the range and variety of programs is more complex. Because academic plans are individually constructed and highly variable in Letters & Science as compared to other Colleges, the potential for advising inconsistency is compounded¹. Advising services at the Haas School of Business are highly specialized and coordinated for upper division majors only and are based on predictable schedule planning around well-defined core requirements. Advising in the College of Environmental Design was decentralized at the time of this survey (with Architecture as the dominant major) although it has now been reorganized following a centralized model. There are also significant variations in advisor to student ratios at the School and College level that may be related to satisfaction levels. All of these, and other potential explanations, seem worth examining.

Satisfaction with Departmental, College and Peer Advising Among the L&S Divisions

Given that the College of Letters & Science serves the majority of undergraduate students, we also examined satisfaction levels with advising across the L&S Divisions.

¹ Depending on the College, the range and variety of programs College advisors are advising for is highly variable, for example, L&S advisors support advising across 52 departments as compared to 4 departments in the College of Chemistry, 7 in Engineering, 4 in Environmental Design, 6 in Natural Resources and 1 at the Haas School of Business.

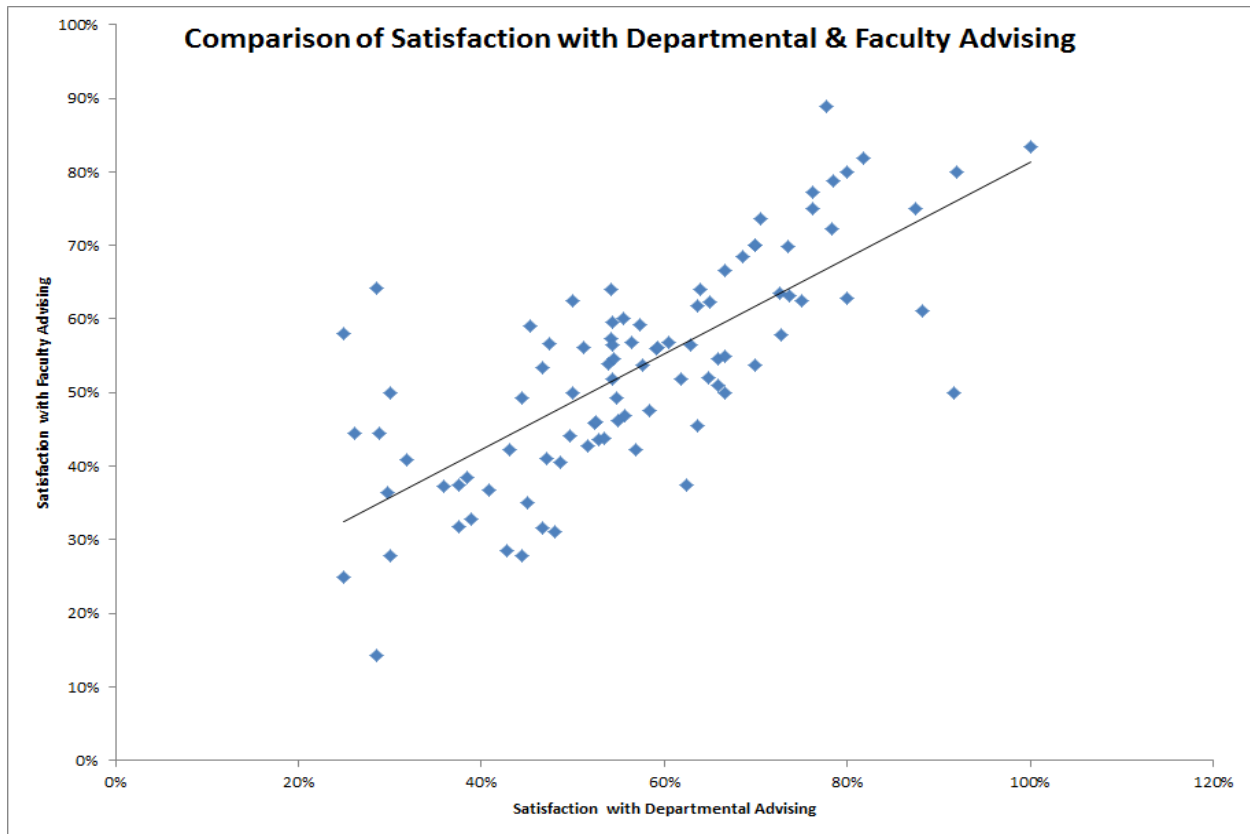
As the following table shows, students were, again, more satisfied with departmental advising than College or peer advising across the L&S Divisions. There were higher levels of satisfaction with departmental advising in the Social Sciences, Mathematical & Physical Sciences, and Arts & Humanities Divisions and lower levels of satisfying in the Biological Sciences Division.



Observation: There are variations in faculty to student ratios and advisor to student ratios in these divisions that warrant further examination. For example, the ratio of assigned majors to permanent faculty FTE in 2010 in the Mathematical & Physical Sciences Division (3.94) and Arts & Humanities Division (7.46) were significantly lower than the ratio in the Biological Science Division (11.79) and in the College as a whole (23.55). In addition, there are many more small majors in the Mathematical & Physical Sciences and Arts & Humanities Divisions (<100 headcount majors) as compared to the Biological Sciences Division which has only two relatively large majors (MCB and IB). Although the student to faculty ratio in the Social Sciences Division (11.99) was higher than peers, there are several large majors in the Division with high satisfaction ratings (e.g., Political Science and History). It is also possible that these results are related to unmet advising needs, for example in the Biological Sciences where there have been no formal pre-med advising programs. This may also be a factor in the results for L&S undeclared students where there are few specially designed resources and no overarching model which organizes service for undeclared students.

Relationship between Departmental and Faculty Advising

As displayed in the scatterplot chart on page 5 (which provides the satisfaction ratings for both staff and faculty advising for all Campus departments), there is a positive correlation between satisfaction with faculty and departmental advising. For example, when satisfaction levels are high for departmental advising they are also high for faculty advising and when they are low for departmental advising they are also low for faculty advising (with some exceptions at the low end).

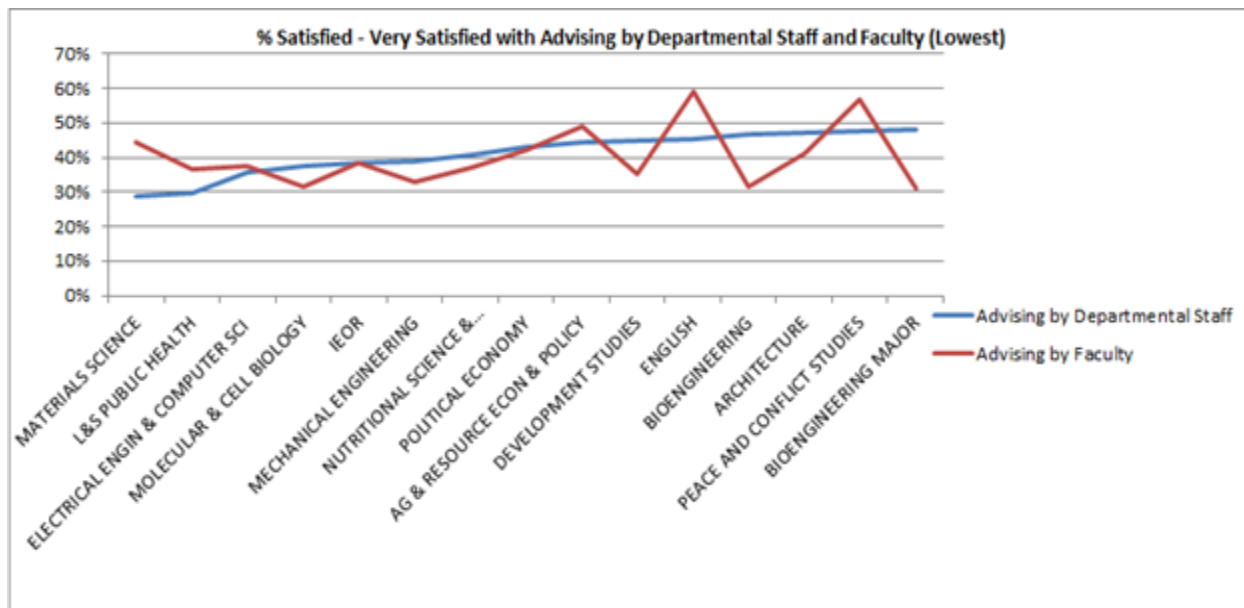


Observation: Although we are unable to explain the causal link, the association between satisfaction with departmental and faculty advising may indicate, particularly in advising on academic matters, that the involvement of faculty in advising is critical to sustaining high functioning and meaningful advising programs and resources. It appears that faculty engagement in the delivery of advising for undergraduates has an effect on the level of satisfaction with the overall advising experience although the relationship is not well understood. However, there is no way to tell if satisfaction is related to intentional coordination of service or if the two entities simply happen to be doing well independent of each other. In cases where the satisfaction levels are disparate (satisfaction with faculty advising is high and departmental advising is low or vice versa), more information is needed to determine if advisor to student ratios or individual advisor performance are contributing and interrelated factors.

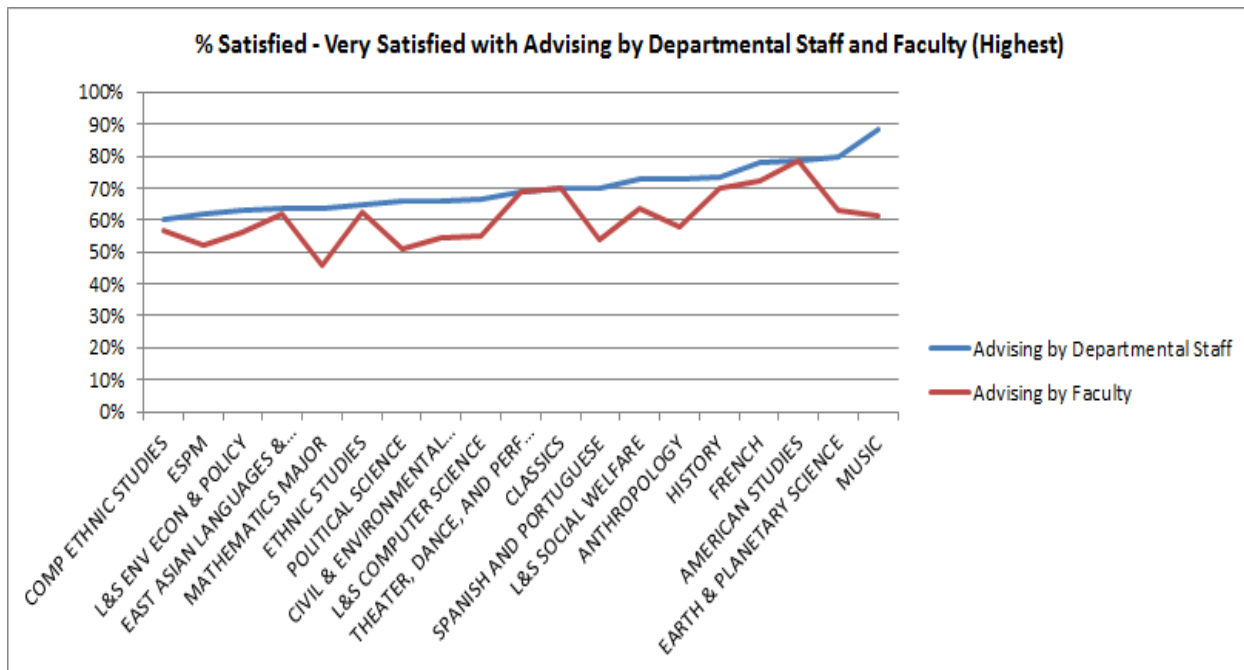
Characteristics of Majors with Lowest and Highest Satisfaction Ratings with Advising

The following table provides the units with the lowest levels of satisfaction with both departmental and faculty advising. These results do not appear related to program size; both large and small majors have lower satisfaction ratings. As mentioned previously, there is a relationship between departmental and faculty advising, when satisfaction is low for one it tends to be low for the other (except in the case of English, Materials Science, L&S Public Health, and Peace & Conflict Studies where satisfaction with advising by faculty is higher than satisfaction with departmental advising). Also, two cases seem worth additional investigation, satisfaction levels with both departmental and faculty advising in the College of Engineering are low and only one of the seven Engineering majors does not appear on this list. Also, the

largest of the majors in the Biological Sciences Division, MCB, appears to have consistently lower levels of satisfaction with advising by both departmental and faculty advisors.



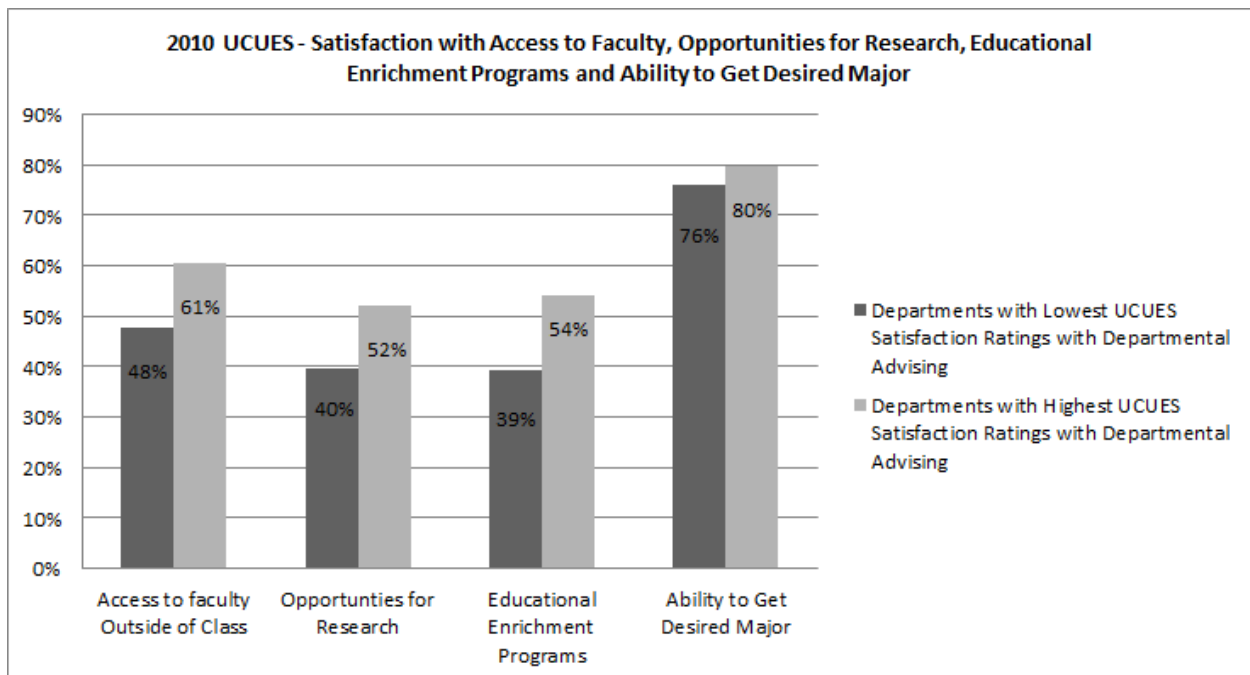
Among majors with the highest levels of satisfaction with advising, all but two are in the College of Letters & Science (ESPM and Civil and Environmental Engineering). Twelve of the top twenty are very small majors (where advisor to student and faculty to student ratios are very low) for example, Theater, Dance & Performance Studies, Classics, French, East Asian Languages, and Spanish & Portuguese. There are also three majors on the list with high percentages of underrepresented majors; Ethnic Studies (48% UREP), Social Welfare (45% UREP) and American Studies (36% UREP).



Observation: More information is needed to determine what factors affect both high and low satisfaction levels. For example, given the low levels of satisfaction with advising in Engineering, it is possible that these results are related to the structure of advising across the College. Engineering is the only College in which faculty release advisor codes to students during busy enrollment periods (this function is normally handled by staff after review of negotiated short and long term academic plans, clearing of blocks, etc.). It could be possible that this variation in service is unsatisfying for students. Also, given the low levels of satisfaction in the Biological Sciences Division, it is possible that this is related to an unmet advising need or the delivery of advising as students prepare for and transition into the major. While it is encouraging to see higher levels of satisfaction in majors with large underrepresented student populations, the resource distribution among these majors is particularly uneven and may be in need of review (i.e., the advisor to student ratio in Comparative Ethnic Studies is 3.5:156 as compared to 1:312 in Social Welfare and 1:230 in American Studies).

Satisfaction as Related to Other Indicators of Academic Quality

We also reviewed satisfaction levels with other indicators of academic quality. We examined satisfaction levels with advising as they related to satisfaction with “access to faculty outside of class”, “opportunities for research”, “educational enrichment programs” and “ability to get desired major”. These were selected for cross reference since they correlate with specific advising functions (i.e., facilitating connections with faculty and resources, and maximizing academic and co-curricular opportunities). We found that satisfaction levels correlated to satisfaction levels on each of these items except ability to get desired major. Additional significance testing was also done on these items for departments with the highest and lowest satisfaction with advising and, again, in many units the results appeared related. It is also worth noting that satisfaction with other aspects of the educational experience (overall satisfaction with the academic experience, quality of instruction, etc.) did not appear to be related to satisfaction with advising.



Observation: Given the indirect relationship between these questions as they have been asked in UCUES, this form of analysis will not consistently yield much in the way of useable information on the impact of advising or the possible causal links between advising and other aspects of the educational experience. The “outcomes” questions as they were developed in the 2012 survey will be the first attempt to establish more direct and reliable means of establishing these important links. It is important to note, that until uniform and measurable advising standards are in place and are well understood by advisors and students, it will be difficult to fully assess the relationship between advising and student outcomes in the future.

Areas for On-going Evaluation

- More information is needed to understand why departmental advising is favored over College advising and what features of departmental advising are particularly satisfying to students.
- More information is needed to understand the relationship between faculty and staff advising and the ways in which consistency between these critical advising functions and interactions can be achieved and maintained over time. Delineation and clarification of the roles and responsibilities of staff and faculty advisors may also be needed in the future if these two functions are to support and enhance one another.
- More information is needed to understand the persistent patterns of low and high levels of satisfaction with advising across multiple and related units and the organizational and resource features of units at the high and low ends of the continuum. This may also be related to determining optimal advisor to student ratios and protocols that meet the needs of large numbers of students.

Additional Questions for Consideration

- Since service inconsistency has been identified as an area for on-going improvement, more information will be needed to determine the causes of service irregularities. It is unclear, for example, why there are low levels of satisfaction with peer advising and higher levels of satisfaction with departmental advising and if this is related to either the faith in or integrity of the information students receive from these sources. For example, is the opportunity for advising inconsistency simply greater in decentralized as opposed to centralized models of advising or are there other factors which result in service confusion?
- UCUES does not provide information on the value and uses of technology in the overall advising experience. For example, it is not absolutely clear whether the students are rating the quality of personal interactions as well as the overall quality of advising resources (web sites, electronic tools etc.). It is also not currently possible to tell if the use of technology on Campus has or will reduce the need for in-person advising interactions or whether it will simply change the nature of the advising appointment (or, possibly, create new advising needs).
- It will also be important to understand the impact of advising on student life and academic choices and performance (i.e., advising outcomes). Except anecdotally, there is no way to

determine the true value of advising to the institution. More information is needed to understand the direct links to retention, persistence, and graduation rates and to the overall quality of academic and student life. As Departments continue to develop their assessment strategies as they relate to the Undergraduate Student Learning Initiative, companion assessment strategies might be developed to determine the impact of advising on student development (i.e., improved academic performance and retention). The Spring 2012 UCUES results will be the first time students are asked to consider questions designed to evaluate advising outcomes. As noted previously, universal performance standards and goals for advising units and individuals do not exist across campus, making both comprehensive and fair assessments somewhat difficult. Also, there are no universally understood guidelines which define or distinguish the roles of staff and faculty advisors. Until these guidelines are in place, the impact of changes to advising will be difficult to source and track over time.

- Satisfaction, per se, may be an imperfect measure of quality since some advising interactions, particularly at the College level, may be experienced by the student as punitive (advisors place and refuse to release blocks, withhold financial aid, inform students that they are on probation, inform them that they were denied admission to a major, and a wide range of other actions which the student may not be “satisfied” with). This is not to say that these interactions should not also be handled with the utmost tact and diplomacy and with respect for the student, but that the student experience of “satisfaction” may not be the best measure of service quality. Expanding the range of questions and response options might be necessary in the future (i.e., strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, etc.) to meaningfully evaluate advisor performance.
- There is no way currently to accurately assess what might be missing from the current advising structure and contributing to lower levels of satisfaction. For example, the lack of uniform pre-med advising and distinct, identifiable and well managed service for lower division undeclared students may be sources of disappointment for students although this is simply conjecture currently.

We will continue to provide additional data and information on student satisfaction and advising outcomes as the spring 2012 UCUES survey results with the wild-card module on advising become available.