

REPORT

Academic Advising highly important to students



Excerpted data from the 2009 Noel-Levitz National Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report and Database

How important is academic advising to students—and what aspects of advising are students most and least satisfied with?

This report builds on the considerable evidence to date that students view advising as an important and needed service. It also documents specific strengths and challenges related to the advising process for public, private, two-year, and career/private campuses.

A few highlights:

- Students rated academic advising as one of their most important needs, with specific priority rankings varying by institution type.
- Only one specific aspect of advising—the approachability of advisors—was widely satisfying to students across most institution types.
- Every institution type has work remaining to be done to meet student expectations for advising, ranging from increasing advisors' level of concern about the success of students as individuals to, on some campuses, improving advisors' knowledge about program requirements.

The report begins by documenting the importance students placed on academic advising relative to other aspects of their educational experience. In a subsequent section, the report looks more closely at the specific aspects of advising which were most and least satisfying to students.

The Source of Data

Findings in section one of this report are excerpted from the 2009 National Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report, the 16th annual study of student satisfaction conducted by Noel-Levitz. You can download this complete report, without charge, at www.noellevitz.com/benchmark2009.

The 2009 National Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report was based on survey data gathered between the fall of 2006 and the spring of 2009 from students attending nearly 727 colleges, universities, community colleges, and career and private schools. Sample sizes were as follows: 84,638 students from four-year publics; 253,294 from four-year privates; 184,145 from two-year community, junior, and technical colleges; and 27,663 from career and private schools.

Section two findings are extracted from these same survey data but are not included in the National Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report.

The survey instrument used in the study was the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory™. This instrument consisted of over 70 items that cover the full range of college experiences. Each item was expressed as a statement of expectation. Each statement included a rating scale of 1 to 7 (7 = *very important/very satisfied*; 1 = *not important/not satisfied at all*). Students were asked to rate the level of importance they assign to the expectation as well as their level of satisfaction that the expectation is being met.

The 70-plus items on the survey instrument were grouped into 11 scales. These included, in alphabetical order:

- Academic Advising Effectiveness
- Academic Services (two-year and career/private schools)
- Campus Climate
- Campus Life (four-year schools)
- Campus Support Services
- Concern for the Individual
- Instructional Effectiveness
- Recruitment and Financial Aid Effectiveness
- Registration Effectiveness
- Safety and Security
- Service Excellence
- Student Centeredness

Key Findings, Section One

The Importance of Academic Advising

As noted, the survey items were grouped into 11 scales of which Academic Advising was one. Below are the scales in the order of importance students assigned to them, so you can see the high relative importance students placed on advising, by institution type. (For the items that comprised each scale, see Key Findings, Section Two).

Note that the rankings below are consistent with earlier national studies conducted by Noel-Levitz dating back to 1993.

In addition, the importance of advising is evident in a separate companion study focusing only on students 25 years and older, the 2009 National Adult Student Priorities Report. You can download this complete report, without charge, at www.noellevitz.com/AnnualBenchmark.

Four-Year Public Colleges and Universities

At four-year public colleges and universities, students rated Academic Advising the most important aspect of their educational experience, followed by Instructional Effectiveness.

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|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Academic Advising | 7. Campus Climate |
| 2. Instructional Effectiveness | 8. Student Centeredness |
| 3. Safety and Security | 9. Campus Support Services |
| 4. Registration Effectiveness | 10. Service Excellence |
| 5. Recruitment and Financial Aid | 11. Campus Life |
| 6. Concern for the Individual | |

Four-Year Private Colleges and Universities

At four-year private colleges and universities, students rated Academic Advising second only to Instructional Effectiveness in importance.

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| 1. Instructional Effectiveness | (tie) 7. Campus Climate |
| 2. Academic Advising | (tie) 7. Concern for the Individual |
| (tie) 3. Safety and Security | 9. Campus Support Services |
| (tie) 3. Student Centeredness | 10. Service Excellence |
| (tie) 3. Registration Effectiveness | 11. Campus Life |
| (tie) 3. Recruitment and Financial Aid | |



Two-Year Community, Junior, and Technical Colleges

At two-year community, junior, and technical colleges, students rated Academic Advising third most important, behind Instructional Effectiveness and Registration Effectiveness.

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| 1. Instructional Effectiveness | 7. Safety and Security |
| 2. Registration Effectiveness | (tie) 8. Student Centeredness |
| 3. Academic Advising/Counseling | (tie) 8. Campus Climate |
| 4. Concern for the Individual | 10. Service Excellence |
| 5. Academic Services | 11. Campus Support Services |
| 6. Admissions and Financial Aid | |

Career/Private Schools

At career and private schools, students rated Academic Advising as fourth in importance among the 11 scales.

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| 1. Instructional Effectiveness | 7. Campus Climate |
| (tie) 2. Concern for the Individual | (tie) 8. Service Excellence |
| (tie) 2. Admissions and Financial Aid | (tie) 8. Academic Services |
| (tie) 4. Academic Advising/Counseling | 10. Safety and Security |
| (tie) 4. Registration Effectiveness | 11. Campus Support Services |
| (tie) 4. Student Centeredness | |

Supplemental information: Steps toward developing an effective advising plan

Steps	Tasks	Major Questions
Begin the planning process	Describe the need and background that led to the development of the advising plan.	What is the state of affairs in regard to the delivery of advising services?
Set goals	Formulate the major goals and objectives for the advising program.	What does the college or university want to accomplish as a result of the advising program?
Establish a definition of advising	Develop a consensual definition of advising.	What is a working definition of advising for the college?
Build administrative support and commitment	Determine what would represent strong administrative support and commitment for advising.	What are tangible examples of administrative support and commitment to advising?
Define advisor assignments	Develop and communicate a specific statement on the responsibilities of advisors and advisees in the advising system.	What are the expectations for advisors/advisees?

Steps toward developing an effective advising plan, continued

Steps	Tasks	Major Questions
Define the advisor selection process	Decide on the criteria to be used in the selection of those who will advise students.	Should all faculty advise, or should advisors be selected on the basis of desired characteristics or willingness to serve?
Define advisor load	Develop guidelines on the ratio of advisors to advisees and strategies to deal effectively with advisor overload if necessary.	What is a reasonable advisor load?
Design an information system	Identify the information needs of advisors and design a system for providing advisors with relevant information on a timely basis, and in an understandable and usable format.	What are the information needs of advisors and how can the college or university ensure they have the information when they need it?
Discuss student participation	Decide on voluntary vs. mandatory participation, required contact times, and strategies that encourage advisor/advisee interactions.	How proactive should the advising program be?
Provide training/staff development	Develop a comprehensive, ongoing in-service training program for those involved in advising on a regularly scheduled basis.	What are the developmental needs of advisors and how might these best be addressed in an advisor training program?
Evaluate effectiveness	Determine how, when, and who will evaluate the advising program and individual advisors.	How should the advising program be evaluated?
Recognize/reward those involved	Determine what form of recognition and reward will be afforded those involved in the academic advising process.	How can the college or university provide a tangible, meaningful, and realistic reward system for advising?
Coordinate/manage the program	Decide how the advising program will be managed.	Who will be responsible for coordinating the advising program?
Integrate the program with other resources	Design an advising system that uses all the various campus resources to address student needs.	What are the relationships between the advising system and other campus resources?
Address special needs	Design an advising system that meets the specific needs of important student subpopulations.	For each priority subpopulation, what are the special characteristics and the most effective advising strategies?
Define a delivery structure	Decide on an administrative model for the delivery of advising services including centralized vs. decentralized authority and accountability, relationships, etc.	How and by whom will the delivery of advising take place?

Key Findings, Section Two

Specific Areas of Strength and Challenge

Students' responses to the individual survey items were analyzed to determine strengths (high importance/high satisfaction) and challenges (high importance/low satisfaction). Strengths were defined as survey items that students rated above the mid-point in importance and in the top quartile of satisfaction. Challenges were defined as items that were above the mid-point in importance and in the bottom quartile of satisfaction and/or the top quartile of performance gaps.

For the purposes of this report, only items that comprise the Academic Advising scales (see previous section) are included below.

Two items were strengths at all institution types, except at two-year community, junior, and technical colleges: "My academic advisor is approachable" and "My academic advisor is knowledgeable about requirements in my major/program." Two-year community colleges had no advising items rated as strengths.

Although every institution type has less satisfying areas that need to be improved to meet student expectations (the items identified as neither a strength nor a challenge), specific challenges were pronounced at two-year institutions and career private schools.

Four-Year Public Colleges and Universities

Of the five survey items that comprised the Academic Advising scale for four-year public institutions, students rated the first three as strengths (most important/most satisfying) and the remaining two items moderately as neither a strength nor a challenge. The rankings were identical to the findings below for four-year private colleges and universities.

STRENGTH ▶ *My academic advisor is knowledgeable about requirements in my major.*

STRENGTH ▶ *My academic advisor is approachable.*

STRENGTH ▶ *Major requirements are clear and reasonable.*

My academic advisor is concerned about my success as an individual.

My academic advisor helps me set goals to work toward.

Four-Year Private Colleges and Universities

Of the five survey items that comprised the Academic Advising scale for four-year private institutions, students rated the first three as strengths (most important/most satisfying) and the remaining two items moderately as neither a strength nor a challenge. The rankings were identical to the findings above for four-year public colleges and universities.

STRENGTH ▶ *My academic advisor is knowledgeable about requirements in my major.*

STRENGTH ▶ *Major requirements are clear and reasonable.*

STRENGTH ▶ *My academic advisor is approachable.*

My academic advisor is concerned about my success as an individual.

My academic advisor helps me set goals to work toward.

Two-Year Community, Junior, and Technical Colleges

Of the seven survey items that comprised the Academic Advising/Counseling scale for community colleges, students rated no items as strengths (most important/most satisfying) and four items as challenges (most important/least satisfying). The remaining three items were rated moderately as neither a strength nor a challenge.

My academic advisor is approachable.

My academic advisor helps me set goals to work toward.

Counseling staff care about students as individuals.

CHALLENGE ▶ *My academic advisor is knowledgeable about my program requirements.*

CHALLENGE ▶ *This school does whatever it can to help me reach my educational goals.*

CHALLENGE ▶ *My academic advisor is knowledgeable about the transfer requirements of other schools.*

CHALLENGE ▶ *My academic advisor is concerned about my success as an individual.*

Career and Private Schools

Of the seven survey items that comprised the Academic Advising/Counseling scale for career and private schools, students rated two items as strengths (most important/most satisfying) and two items as challenges (most important/least satisfying). The remaining three items were rated moderately as neither a strength nor a challenge.

STRENGTH ▶ *My academic advisor is knowledgeable about my program requirements.*

STRENGTH ▶ *My academic advisor is approachable.*

My academic advisor is knowledgeable about the transfer requirements of other schools.

My academic advisor helps me set goals to work toward.

Advising staff care about students as individuals.

CHALLENGE ▶ *This school does whatever it can to help me reach my educational goals.*

CHALLENGE ▶ *My academic advisor is concerned about my success as an individual.*





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Summary

This report confirms that academic advising is, without question, a highly important aspect of students' educational experience in postsecondary education. The findings also show that there is work remaining to be done to meet student expectations in this critical area.

Campuses that are serious about enhancing advising effectiveness will look at this national trend data as a valuable source of information, but they will not stop there. To serve students well, it is even more critical for each institution to listen to its own students' unique needs and priorities by conducting campus-specific satisfaction assessments. Resulting gaps and priorities can then be used to develop targeted action plans for retaining and serving specific student populations.

For more information

For more information on enhancing advising effectiveness on your campus, please contact Jo Hillman of Noel-Levitz at 1-866-982-4244 or 920-982-4244, or e-mail jo-hillman@noellevitz.com.

For more information on the survey instrument used in this study, the Student Satisfaction Inventory, please contact Julie Bryant of Noel-Levitz at 1-800-876-1117 or 319-626-8380, or e-mail julie-bryant@noellevitz.com.