

Student Affairs Committee Report on Student Experiences with Advisement

Summary of Findings

In response to a charge from the Faculty Senate to study student perspectives on advising, the Student Affairs Committee conducted a survey of students to assess issues related to academic advising, the First Year Experience program, and the length of winter break. Other reports from this committee will address the issues of FYE and winter break. Through a partnership with HUE, we were able to obtain approval to purchase two \$50 gift cards to provide an incentive for undergraduates to complete the survey and ~230 students took the survey.

Students taking the survey were overwhelmingly women (83.5%), and most respondents were juniors (27.4%) or seniors (52.2%). There was participation from students on the Las Vegas campus (46.4%), the Albuquerque campus (14.3%), the Santa Fe campus (4%), the Farmington campus (8.9%), the Rio Rancho campus (7.6%), and students who primarily take classes on Zoom (18.8%), but no students from the Roswell campus participated. Most of the students participating were in either their first (35.1%) or second (31.8%) year at Highlands, suggesting that many of the participants were transfer students. It is clear that there is a sampling bias, but collecting a more representative sample of the university would be beyond the scope of the committee's powers, and we are happy with the response rate.

The main purpose of the survey was to collect information on how students get advising and to determine what steps Highlands could take to improve the advising experience.

One issue we wanted to determine was how students use Degree Audit to make course selection decisions. We were pleased to discover that a majority of respondents use Degree Audit multiple times a semester (64%) or once a semester (23.8%) and few students don't know what Degree Audit is (1.9%) or never use it (4.2%).

However, the high rate of engagement with Degree Audit is also in part due to a sizeable group of students who are primarily relying on Degree Audit without significant input from faculty and academic advisers. Among respondents, 15% most rely on the academic advisers in Felix Martinez and 46.3% most rely on their faculty advisers, but 23.4% of respondents indicated that they primarily make advisement decisions on their own with the help of Degree Audit. This suggests a sizeable gap in faculty advising given the class makeup of the respondents. This is consistent with the results of the National Survey of Student Engagement which was last conducted at Highlands in 2016. In its report on engagement indicators, the NSSE tracks experiences with faculty among both first-year students and seniors. Highlands' results for faculty engagement among first-year students align well with other schools in three categories: public masters granting institutions, peer institutions, and open enrollment institutions. However, we lag behind in the measures of student-faculty interaction for seniors in all three comparison groups. Improving faculty advising is key to student success.

One issue is student awareness of who their adviser is. While 81.3% of students indicated that they know who their faculty adviser is, 15.9% of students answered that they don't know who their adviser is even though they have declared a major. Given the numbers of students who regularly use Degree Audit in the survey, this could suggest issues with departments not

updating Degree Audit to reflect advisers or advisers not proactively making contact with their students about advisement.

Unsurprisingly, students indicated that the main thing that they talk to faculty advisers about is selecting courses in their majors (74.8%), followed by selecting courses for other degree requirements (54.7%), and preparing applications for graduate and professional schools (29.4%). However, only 18% of respondents indicating that faculty advisers have talked with them about preparing for jobs.

One thing we wanted to determine was the effectiveness of online tutorials that are designed to help students navigate the university. The university currently has tutorials for issues such as enrolling in classes, checking grades, and using Brightspace. However, most students either didn't know these resources exist (43.5%) or knew they existed but never used them (33.2%). This is especially an issue for transfer students, given that much of this material is covered in the integrative seminar as part of the FYE.

In free responses, students indicated a number of areas that Highlands could improve. These issues include: faculty availability for advising, resources for advising on center campuses, advising prior to admittance to the School of Education and advising towards the NES exams, and ensuring that faculty and advisers are knowledgeable about how to help students with advising both in their major and in general education courses.

One pleasurable part of the survey was that students specifically mentioned several faculty and staff who have enhanced their experience at Highlands, and we wanted to make sure that we recognized them.

Advising shout-outs

Charley Ford, Registrar Rio Rancho Campus

Ann Wolf, Professor Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Shirley Meckes, Professor Department of Teacher Education

Judy Barnstone, Professor School of Social Work

Sessyon Crawford, HU Cares

Maria Munguia Wellman, Professor School of Social Work

Reyna Rivera, Instructor in School of Social Work

Julia Andrada, Administrative Assistant in School of Education

Steve Weatherburn, Director of Field Experiences and School of Education Admissions

Revisions Made to Undergraduate Advising Manual

Revisions to the Undergraduate Advising Manual are indicated throughout in green highlighting.

The most important issue that we took away from this process was that there is a lot of room for faculty to improve in issues of contact and accessibility. The Undergraduate Advising Manual had sections that discussed departmental and faculty adviser responsibilities, but they were relatively easy to miss. We have made them their own sections to better facilitate quick reference for department chairs and faculty.

In order to improve faculty advising contact, we have made several changes. First, we have included instructions on how to use Banner to access advisee lists. In talking to faculty, we have discovered that knowledge about how Banner can facilitate advising is unevenly distributed among departments. Some departments regularly use Banner to contact advisees, while other departments are completely ignorant of this capacity. We recommend that all advisers should contact their students at least twice a semester, once at the beginning of the semester to introduce and/or reintroduce themselves, explain their role as advisers, and inform advisees of their office hours, and a second time when course schedules are released to do advising for course registration.

We also added in a reminder that departments are responsible for updating Degree Audit so that students can see who their adviser is and recommended keeping an independent list of students and advisers, since sometimes the advisers can be inadvertently changed or lost in that system.

Another issue that frequently trips students up is the requirements for 120 total credits and 45 upper division credits. This is especially an issue for transfer students who enter with an AA and have the requirement to complete a minor waived. These students can often finish all the requirements for their major and still need to take additional courses to hit the minimums. It may be useful to consider lowering the 45 upper division credit requirement to allow students more freedom in choosing electives, but for the time being, it is important that faculty advisers talk to their students not just about their major requirements but also the minimum credit requirements, since students are often tripped up at the end of their programs. We have added language to address this issue.

The section on the FYE has been updated according to new language from HUE Director Leon Bustos.

Also, we have gone through the manual and updated all course codes to reflect the new department and four digit codes mandated by HED. In a small number of cases, Highlands is still waiting on course codes, so these may be subject to change. Ones that I'm aware of where this is the case include: GEOL 1050, PHYS 1050, MART 121, and the codes for CS classes. The only courses listed in the advising manual are those that count towards the core or extended core or are part of the AP Credit transfer matrix.

We have made a number of smaller changes to align the manual with current policies as outlined in the Undergraduate Catalog and to reflect changes in position and office titles.

Additional recommendations

Expanding advising support at satellite campuses is critical for success. Students on satellite campuses can struggle with accessing faculty who may not be located on the campus they attend classes at, staff who have to defer to administrative offices on the Las Vegas campus for answering student questions, and faculty who are overburdened by advising responsibilities. Faculty in professional programs like Social Work can have more than 50 advisees at a time. Students who have had good advising experiences on satellite campuses mentioned it frequently in responses, with Charley Ford at Rio Rancho especially cited multiple times, but at the same time other students on satellite campuses struggled to contact their advisers and grew frustrated.

It may be useful to create more advising support staff positions for programs or campuses with high student to faculty ratios who are able to work with students in conjunction with their faculty advisers.

It would also be worthwhile to look into improving transitions between first year advisers and faculty advisers. This could perhaps be accomplished with large advising fairs with faculty geared towards sophomores or other initiatives that allow first year advisers to make a more concrete handoff to faculty.

Also, we would recommend creating resources for transfer students who enter the university and have to play catch up on navigating the institutional bureaucracy that freshmen receive as part of the integrative seminar.

We would also recommend better training for faculty advisement, which is often ad hoc within departments. Last year members of the SAC committee held a session during faculty development week and we plan to do so again next year.

Lastly, there is a problem of bureaucratic lag in implementing improvements to the advisement process. The version of the Advising Manual currently available in Online Documents is for academic year 2016-2017. It is woefully out of date in many ways, and the Student Affairs Committee did a thorough revision of it a year ago, which was sent to the Faculty Senate in May 2018 and again in August, and as of now, almost a year later, it has still not been implemented and posted to Online Documents. If faculty only have access to outdated advisement materials, then they won't use them. Next year Student Affairs plans to have revisions completed and approved by early April (this was the plan for this year as well, but it was complicated by the number of changes being implemented in the new catalog to comply with HED policies).