

Advising and Advice at Cal: What do Undergraduates Tell Us?



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Background: The Importance of Advising



- ❖ Advising is a crucial component of a student's experience in higher education (Gordon & Habley, 2000; Habley, 2004).
- ❖ Historically, academic advising has taken two approaches: the prescriptive and the developmental (Crookston, 1972). Developmental approaches have become the prevalent approach to advising in post-secondary institutions.
- ❖ Quality academic advising involves helping students integrate the various curricular and co-curricular aspects of their education into a meaningful whole, referring them to campus resources, providing information about degree requirements and how things work at the university, and providing them with opportunities to develop planning, problem solving, and decision making capabilities in a context of shared responsibility (Smith and Allen, 2006).
- ❖ Student satisfaction with academic advising is an important part of a successful college experience; student satisfaction with academic advising is related to overall student satisfaction and retention (Light, 2001; Corts, et al., 2000).

Background: Studying Advising



- ❖ Assessing student satisfaction allows institutions to gauge how effectively they deliver what students expect, need, and want as well as providing information on how institutions can improve their services.
- ❖ Almost all of the data on students' satisfaction with advising has been gathered via closed-ended survey questions which ask students to rate their satisfaction with certain aspects of advising.
- ❖ Rarely do institutions ask students to tell their stories in their own words about advising; there is a need to hear directly from students about their experiences with advising.
- ❖ There has also been little or no research on the relationship of formal “advising” to the broader construct of “advice” that students receive from disparate sources.

The Present Study



Today's presentation is part of a larger study that attempts to:

- ❖ Better illuminate Cal students' experience with advising by using both traditional quantitative data and new forms of qualitative data
- ❖ Examine interrelationships among qualitative and quantitative findings
- ❖ Use student data and research findings as a catalyst to engage Cal staff and faculty in further inquiry and reflection about the undergraduate experience
- ❖ Provide support for the ongoing efforts to make possible an outstanding undergraduate experience for all our students

Research Questions



1. In students' own words, how adequately do advising services meet their needs?
2. What are the sources of perceived best and worst advice, and what is the nature of that advice?
3. What is the advice that current students would give to new students?
4. What types of contradictory advice do students report receiving from administrative offices and staff?

Methods



About the UCUES

- ❖ Census survey
- ❖ Survey structure: One core module and four special topics modules
- ❖ Overall response rate of 50% (N = 11,832)

The Dataset

- ❖ UCUES 2008 Wild Card Module on Advice and Advising (2000+ Responses)
- ❖ Survey questions regarding:
 - Satisfaction with advising
 - Adequacy of advising
 - Best or worst advice received
 - Advice current students would give incoming students
 - Conflicting advice received

Methods (Cont'd)



Analysis

- ❖ Qualitative coding
 - ❖ Getting to know the data
 - ❖ Rubric development , use, and refinement (iterative process)
 - ❖ Reliability checks
- ❖ Quantitative chi square and regression analysis

Demographics



2413 UCUES Wild Card respondents

- ❖ 57% Female
- ❖ 78% admitted as new freshman; 22% transfer students
- ❖ 30% declared major in STEM field, 34% declared in non-STEM field, 36% undeclared
- ❖ Average GPA 3.12
- ❖ 27% First generation college student
- ❖ 44% Asian/Filipin@/Pacific Islander; 31% White; 10% Chican@/Latin@; 3% African American/Black; < 0.5% Native American; 3% International; 9% decline to state/unknown/other

Organization of the Presentation



Focus on qualitative analysis of undergraduate student responses to four open-ended questions about advising and advice at UC Berkeley

- ❖ Satisfaction and Adequacy of Advising
- ❖ Best and Worst Advice Received
- ❖ Advice current students would give incoming students
- ❖ Conflicting advice

Findings: Satisfaction Ratings



Conventional Survey Questions: “How satisfied are you with each of the following aspects of your educational experience?”

- ❖ Advising by faculty on academic issues
- ❖ Advising by student peer advisors
- ❖ Advising by school or college staff on academic matters
- ❖ Advising by departmental staff on academic matters

	Faculty	Peer	College	Dept
Very Satisfied	10%	5%	9%	13%
Somewhat Satisfied & Satisfied	67%	71%	67%	67%
Somewhat to Very Dissatisfied	23%	24%	24%	20%

Findings: Adequacy of Advising Services



- ❖ Survey Question: “Consider for a moment the advising, counseling and mentoring resources that have been available to you. Regardless of whether you have used them, to what extent have they met your needs as a Cal undergraduate?”
- ❖ Adequacy results: 25% More than Adequate; 55% Adequate; 20% Less than Adequate
- ❖ No overall relationship between UC GPA and adequacy of advising
- ❖ First generation college students, transfer students, and Chicano/Latino students more likely to report advising was “more than adequate”

Quotes About Adequacy of Advising



My major adviser is awesome. [She] does everything she can to give personal time to any student that needs it. and when you are in her office you don't feel rushed she will sit and talk to you even though she might have a line out the door.

(M, White, Junior, Integrative Biology)

I feel at times I was treated like a 'SID number' rather than an actual student. I felt that at times there was no real personal regard for me as a student, but instead I felt rushed to get through college and almost pushed out the door.

(M, Chicano/Latino, Junior, Mechanical Engr)

Findings: Best and Worst Advice Received



- ❖ 76% reported best advice; 24% reported worst advice
- ❖ Level of parental education has a significant impact on source of best advice

	Parent (s) w/ No College	Parent (s) w/ Graduate Degree
Cal Undergrad	38%	46%
Parent/Guardian	6%	17%
UCB Staff/Faculty	35%	21%

Findings: Source of Best and Worst Advice

Source	Best	Worst	Overall
Another Cal undergrad	43%	31%	40%
Cal Staff Advisor	9%	29%	14%
Cal Faculty Member	11%	14%	12%
Your parent/guardian	11%	3%	9%
Other Source	8%	9%	8%
Cal Graduate Student	5%	3%	4%
Friend not enrolled at Cal	4%	3%	4%
Another relative of yours	4%	2%	4%
Other Cal Staff member	2%	4%	3%
Website/Publication	1%	3%	2%
Total N	1595	494	2089

Findings: Best and Worst Advice Themes

CATEGORIES OF BEST/WORST ADVICE RECEIVED

- ❖ After responding to the initial closed-ended item so as to indicate the valence of the advice or advising experience, students then provided an open-ended response.
- ❖ Responses were coded individually

Top 5 Best Advice Themes	Top 5 Worst Advice Themes
1. Effort and persistence needed to succeed (20%)	1. Classes (24%)
2. Exploring options and enjoying one's time at Cal (12%)	2. Choosing majors (11%)
3. Get involved (6%)	3. Exploring options and enjoying one's time at Cal (10%)
4. Classes (6%)	4. Effort and persistence needed to succeed (6%)
5. Pursue interest (5%)	5. Course load (5%)

Quotes from Best Advice



Always go to class. You never know what's going to be passed out, or mentioned. It means that you will always, at least, pass your classes. (M, Chicano/Latino, Soph, Psychology)(Another Cal undergraduate)

You're here not to get a degree but to 'get' your life. This helped me keep the big picture in mind--not to sweat the small stuff and to keep in mind the things that are truly important. (F, Asian/Filipina/Pacific Islander, Senior, Public Health)(Another Cal undergraduate)

Quotes from Worst Advice



*Don't pass out of APs because Cal's classes are much more difficult. I didn't pass out of Physics 7A because of this but I'm finding that I know everything that is being taught.
(M, Asian/Filipino/Pacific Islander, Soph, Mechanical Engr)(Another Cal undergraduate)*

*I think my major advisor is crazy. She always tells me wrong things. Within one hour, she asked me to change my major, to not change it, and to double major.
(F, Asian/Filipina/Pacific Islander, Junior, Undeclared)(A Cal staff advisor)*

Findings: Advice From Students to Students

CATEGORIES OF ADVICE STUDENTS WOULD GIVE

- ❖ Survey Question: “Based on your experience, if YOU were to give one piece of helpful advice to an incoming freshman or transfer student about to start at Cal, what would you say?”
- ❖ Demographic correlates of advice students would give
 - Students with less years at Cal: “Effort, persistence, keep up”; students with more years at Cal: ”Explore and have fun”
 - Lower GPA students: “Effort, persistence, keep up”; Higher GPA students: ”Explore and have fun”

Best Advice Received	Advice Would Give
1. Effort and persistence needed to succeed (20%)	1. Explore (13%)
2. Exploring options and enjoying one’s time at Cal (12%),	2. Effort (12%)
3. Get involved (6%)	3. Get involved (8%)
4. Classes (6%)	4. Collaborate (5%)
5. Pursue interest (5%)	5. Major (5%)

Quotes from Students to Students



Socialize, study abroad, do not take much more above the recommended amount of units, choose a major early and try to choose breadth requirements that fulfill major electives, and remember to enjoy your time at Berkeley while you still can!
(M, White, Junior, Marine Science)

Make friends so that you can support each other, particularly in your major. Keep up with your assignments and make sure you get enough sleep. Don't forget to have fun, too.
(M, White, Senior, Film)

Findings: Conflicting Advice



- ❖ Survey Question: “Have you ever received advice from two different offices or staff members at Cal that was contradictory or in conflict?” Please explain what happened.
- ❖ 17% reported receiving conflicting advice
- ❖ Open ended responses were coded
- ❖ Major Themes of Conflicting Advice:
 - ❖ Fulfilling and completing requirements (23%)
 - ❖ Declaring a major/Double majoring (11%)
 - ❖ Classes (10%)
 - ❖ General advice (9%)

Findings: Conflicting Advice



- ❖ Female students were more likely to report having received conflicting advice than male students (18% versus 14%).
- ❖ Asian students less likely to indicate that they received conflicting advice; Chicano/Latino students more likely
- ❖ Students with more years at Cal (3 years & beyond for both freshman and transfer admits) more likely to indicate that they received conflicting advice.
- ❖ No difference as a function of STEM major or admit status
- ❖ Receipt of conflicting advice was related to overall satisfaction with advising such that those who reported lower satisfaction with advising from peer, faculty, college, or departmental level advisors were more likely to report that they had received conflicting advice

Quotes About Conflicting Advice



It was my first semester after transferring to Cal. Because Bearfacts hasn't uploaded all my academic records yet, so I went to the L&S office to ask questions regarding some course requirements. The person at the front desk told me that I still needed to fulfill my AC requirement, so I chose a course that would fulfill it. A couple months later, I figured from bearfacts that my AC requirement has already been fulfilled by my previous coursework, but it was already too late to drop the class.

(F, Unknown, Junior, Sociology)

One advisor told me not to double major because it would be too difficult; Another told me I could do it easily. I decided not to double major, not because it would be too hard, but because I found different interests.

(F, Chican@/Latin@, Frosh, Undeclared)

Quotes About Conflicting Advice



When planning for the Spring semester, I asked about taking a language class of an L&S adviser when I was trying to plan for my schedule and the level I needed was only offered during Fall, which I only found out when talking to a department adviser. The LS adviser insisted that it was offered during Spring and this was just extremely frustrating.

(F, Asian/Filipin@/Pacific Islander, Sophomore, Undeclared)

Department and College advice often clashes. In my experience, my department was overwhelmingly helpful and interested in catering to my needs/circumstances. The college was not; rather, they expected every student to follow strict guidelines in what felt like an attempt to produce cookie-cutter academicians.

(M, Native American, Senior, Social Science)

What Have We Learned?



- ❖ Satisfaction with advising and assessment of its adequacy
- ❖ Sources of best and worst advice
- ❖ Inadequate, worst, and conflicting advice -- a common theme?
- ❖ Best advice received and advice students would give:
 - Effort and Persistence versus Explore and Enjoy

Example: “Don’t AP Out”




- ❖ A number of the most vehement “worst advice” testimonials said that this was bad advice; the student perspective
- ❖ Source and rationale for the advice
- ❖ Multiple perspectives and stakeholders
- ❖ Is it really bad advice? How do we know?

Revisiting the Prescriptive and Developmental Models of Advising

	Prescriptive	Developmental
Old	Academic advising: requirements, declaring a major, how to approach one's studies	Partnership in making life choices, focus on whole person, advising as counseling, etc.
New	"Tighten up" - Instrumental advice on what a student needs to do to achieve academic success at Cal	"Loosen up" - Advice on (the need for) the non-academic realm especially given the Cal environment

Four Types of Advice/Advising



	Academic Success	Self-Development
Global	Broader strategies to avoid failure and ensure academic survival and success	Overall orientation to college, strategies for self-survival and development in intense academic environment
Specific	Rules and requirements, tips for academic success, what to choose and pitfalls to avoid	Tips for personal success, fulfillment, navigating college (including housing, finances)

Advising and Diversity at Cal: Special Challenges

Our previous research on undergraduate diversity at Cal based on UCUES and institutional data demonstrates differences in the relative balance of “academic success” versus “developmental” orientation to undergraduate life at Cal associated in particular with immigrant generation and family educational background.

What are the implications of this for advising at Cal and the “tighten up” versus “loosen up” kinds of advising that might be offered?

Specifically, for example, is it helpful to encourage all of our more “tightly wound” (seemingly academically intense or pressured) students to “loosen up”? Or not? To what extent do differences in student background require differences in the advice given? How do we know?

Questions? Comments?



- ❖ What was the most interesting/surprising thing you heard today?
- ❖ What did you not hear that you expected to hear?
- ❖ Does anything you heard today have implications for your work with students?
- ❖ Where should we go from here to further our understanding of the student experience of advising and advice?

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