
Office of Survey Research

6-1-1993

Academic Advising at Western: Some Feedback from Alumni

Carl Simpson

Western Washington University

Joanna Gregson

Western Washington University

Linda Clark

Western Washington University

Gary R. McKinney

Western Washington University

Joseph E. Trimble

Western Washington University

Follow this and additional works at: http://cedar.wwu.edu/surveyresearch_docs



Part of the [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Simpson, Carl; Gregson, Joanna; Clark, Linda; McKinney, Gary R.; and Trimble, Joseph E., "Academic Advising at Western: Some Feedback from Alumni" (1993). *Office of Survey Research*. Paper 492.

http://cedar.wwu.edu/surveyresearch_docs/492

This Report is brought to you for free and open access by Western CEDAR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Office of Survey Research by an authorized administrator of Western CEDAR. For more information, please contact westerncedar@wwu.edu.

Academic Advising at Western:
Some Feedback from Alumni

Report 1993-02

Carl Simpson
Joanna Gregson
Linda Clark
Gary R. McKinney
Joseph E. Trimble

June, 1993

Executive Summary

Repeated studies in recent years, both at Western and elsewhere, have found students less satisfied with advising services than with instruction or various university services. For example, 77% of recent Western alumni are "very" or "mostly" satisfied with the undergraduate courses they took at Western, while 41% are similarly satisfied with the academic advising they received from all sources at Western. Satisfaction with advising received from faculty and major departments was lower than satisfaction with advising from the Academic Advising Center.

Because of the concerns these studies raise, Western's Academic Advising Center requested that our 1992 alumni survey of the class of '91 include a special set of questions on the Center. The focus of these questions was to provide feedback to the Center on ways to improve services, but the entire issue of advising is of great enough concern that a report was written to be more generally available.

A total of 1412 (75.9%) alumni of the class of '91 completed our survey about one year after their graduation. Of that total, fewer than half (43%) of the class of '91 report that they used the Academic Advising Center at least once, and only ten percent more than once. Most of the 57% who never used the center report that they never felt a need. One in six say they were unaware of the office.

Of those who used the Academic Advising Center, half (49.8%) sought advise on at least one occasion regarding "class scheduling or selection." Two-fifths (42.9%) sought help "choosing a major or making major life decisions." Another 41.7% asked about specific university policies. A similar number, 39.8%, asked for information concerning transfer courses or GURs. Nearly one-third (29.2%) asked about pre-professional courses or programs. Another 9.8% sought "other" types of advice.

The Academic Advising Center is more often used by students who are younger, who study more but who get less good grades, who entered Western as native freshmen, who changed their majors more often, who received financial aid while at Western, who value well-

rounded education more than occupational training, and who found departmental advising especially weak. Other background characteristics, such as gender and ethnicity, do not predict use of the center, nor do most student orientations regarding the value of higher education or occupational plans.

Students who used the Academic Advising Center for relatively specific informational requests were quite highly satisfied. For information regarding transfer or GUR courses and on university policies, about 38% were "very" satisfied, another 52% were "moderately" satisfied, and only 10% were "not" satisfied. For class selection or scheduling, figures are 32%, 51%, and 17%, respectively. For choosing a major or making major life decisions," however, satisfaction falls to 19% "very", 51% "moderately," and 30% "not" satisfied. Advice concerning pre-professional programs is similar, with 19%, 53%, and 28%, respectively.

In order to guide planning efforts, the Academic Advising Center requested analysis of the reasons why particular students reported that they were not satisfied with their visits to the Center. Nearly all the explanations students offered for dissatisfaction focused on shortcomings of the *advice itself*--that it was not useful, not new, not accurate, confusing or vague, etc. Similarly, where staff were criticized, the great majority of criticism was for lack of knowledge--i.e., failure to give useful advice. We found no evidence that any particular group of students (e.g., particular majors or ethnic minorities) are less satisfied than others. We also found very few cases in which the student felt that Academic Advising Center staff had been rude or non-responsive.

In broad strokes, the best interpretations for much of what we found appears to be that advising works well for those who have specific needs, but that dissatisfaction arises when students receive advice they see as less useful than they want or expect, often because their questions are complex ones involving life planning. This interpretation is consistent with national studies of advisors, who report that most problems arise when students expect more than the advisers feel they can provide--e.g., solutions to very basic questions such as what major to choose (Crocket, Habley, and Coward, 1987).

Introduction

A growing set of surveys of Western students and alumni has consistently found satisfaction with advising to be lower than satisfaction with instruction, curriculum, or other facilities at Western. These findings are open to various interpretations. They may speak to advising at Western, university advising in general, the particular desires and needs of recent university students, or all of these. What is clear, however, is that advising is one area students and alumni consistently target as somewhat less satisfactory than other aspects of the university.

Most of our surveys asked only a few questions about advising. Western's student and alumni surveys are multi-purpose and must address many different topics. Findings from earlier surveys led the Academic Advising Center, directed by Ron Johnson, to request that our 1992 alumni survey include a special set of questions focusing on the Academic Advising Center at Western. Only a portion of all advising at Western takes place through the Academic Advising Center, but this closer look is intended to give that particular office additional input.

The survey that served as a vehicle for this look at the Academic Advising Center was our 1992 alumni survey. We conducted a one-year follow-up of the graduating class of 1991, all individuals who received undergraduate degrees from Western during the twelve month period, Fall, 1990 through Summer, 1991. Of the 1857 graduates in the class of 1991, 1412 surveys were completed, for a response rate of 75.9%.

This report also presents findings from previous surveys. These include our 1990 survey of 1989 graduates, our 1987 survey of advanced seniors, and our 1991 follow-up of 1987 seniors.

The remainder of this report is organized into three sections. The first sets the context for the others by reviewing some findings from studies elsewhere. The second reviews the findings from previous surveys here at Western. The final section presents our analysis of the set of questions in the 1992 alumni survey that focused on the Academic Advising Center at Western.

Background

Data from Other Studies

Summarizing a national study, Astin (1985) notes that academic advising is "one of the weakest areas in the entire range of student services" (p 165). The body of literature dedicated to this topic is also weak. A review of Educational Research Information Clearinghouse (ERIC) listings identified rather limited literature on student satisfaction with advising. However, three recent studies in the California state system offer some basis on which to orient our discussion. These are studies of advising at U.C. Santa Barbara and U.C. Davis, and a report of the "Student Needs and Priorities Survey," which includes some advising items for the entire U.C. system and for U.C. Fresno in particular. These reports blend departmental and university advising. One, the U.C.S.B. study, refers primarily to departmental advising. These reports are hardly representative of all universities, but we offer a brief summary of them because they offer at least some protection against assuming that every aspect of our findings concerning advising at Western stems from Western's services only.

Although most universities have academic advising centers, not all students use them. A large majority (80%) of students at U.C. Davis have used academic advising services of some kind, but more get advice from faculty within the major (70.7%) than from the centers at the college deans' offices (40.5%) (Hunziker, 1991). In the entire C.S.U. system, few (13.8%) report receiving the majority of their advising from advisors (Daigle and Stock, 1990). Instead, students turn to their peers for advice. At U.C.S.B., an overwhelming majority of students (94.9%) refer to their friends as their primary source of advice. Compared to other alternatives (peers, catalogs, etc.), students seldom value academic advising as an important source of information. Only two-thirds (63%) of students at U.C.S.B. report that they know where they can go on campus to get advice (McKinney and Hartwig, 1981). Still fewer make use of advising facilities.

Students' evaluations of advising are less positive than for other aspects of their universities. In the California state system, two-fifths of students (40.5%) rate academic advising as "Excellent" or

"Good" (Daigle and Stock, 1990). This compares favorably to their ratings of high school counseling (21.6% excellent or good) and career guidance and placement services (22.0% excellent or good), but among academic support and instruction, only "convenience of class scheduling" was rated lower than academic advising. For example, instructional quality was rated "excellent" or "good" by 76.5%; the library, by 73.3%; and computer facilities by 45.5%.

Satisfaction with advising is higher at U.C. Davis than in the U.C. system as a whole, with 68.1% "satisfied" or "very satisfied" and only 11.6% "dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied." These ratings are slightly above the national norms for the ACT Student Opinion Survey (Hunziker, 1991). Despite these high ratings, 16% of U.C. Davis students felt academic advising was inadequate for their needs. Almost one in seven students (13.7%) were dissatisfied with the value of information provided by academic advising, while just over half (52.5%) of the students were satisfied (Hunziker, 1991). Reasons for dissatisfaction include the unavailability of advisors (15.9% at U.C. Davis; 45.4% in the C.S.U.), advisors' lack of concern or interest for students' needs (46.6% in the C.S.U.), and advisors who are poorly informed about degree programs and requirements (37.9% in the C.S.U.) (Daigle and Stock, 1990 ; Hunziker, 1991).

Perhaps one reason student ratings of academic advising are somewhat low is that their felt need for advice is greater than the availability in most university settings. Academic advising is seen as important or very important by most (75.6%) students in the C.S.U. system (Daigle and Stock, 1990). At C.S.U. Fresno, students in both the top and bottom 25% by grade point average rated "Provide more/better academic advising" as the best way the university could help undergraduates reach their educational goals (Daigle and Stock, 1990).

The picture painted by these California studies looks roughly similar to the one presented by findings at Western. Students say advising is very important, although fewer make use of it than one might expect. The advice students receive is greeted with moderate satisfaction, somewhat lower than with most other aspects of the university's instruction and academic support services. One area of difference between findings for Western and those reported in these California studies is that Western students are somewhat more satisfied with the Career Services Center than with the Academic Advising Center. In contrast, the U.C. Davis study shows slightly lower satisfaction for career advisement and placement; the C.S.U. system-wide findings show much lower satisfaction for "Career

Guidance-Placement" services (22.0% satisfied vs. 43.2% for academic advising). More consistent with the California findings, students rate career advising at Western from all sources, including departments, lower than they rate academic advising from all sources.

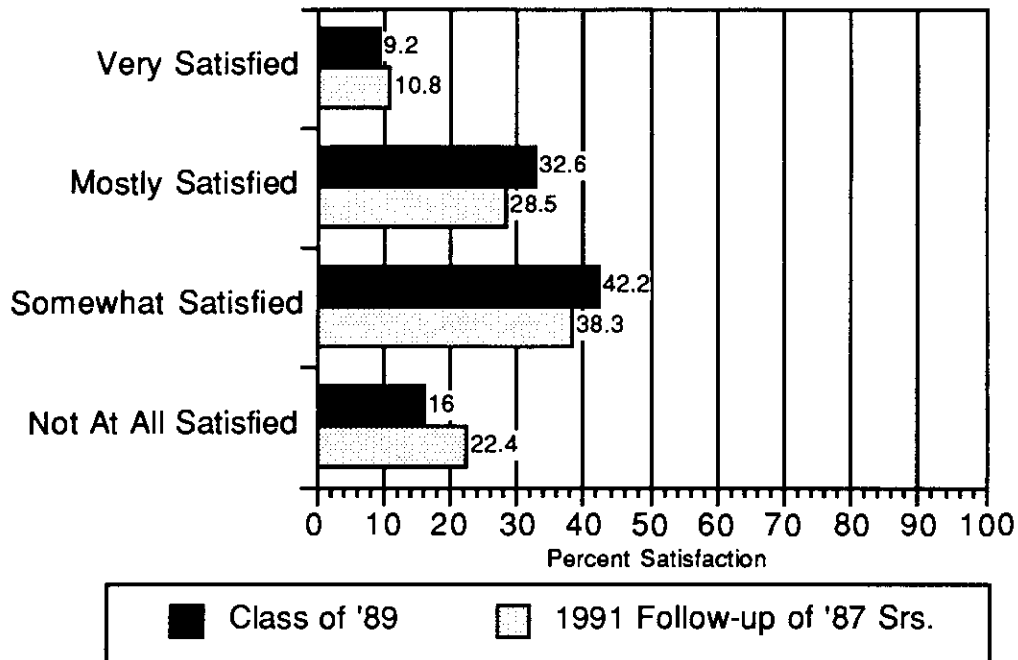
Previous Studies at Western

Some data presented in this section of the report come from our 1992 follow-up of the class of '91. The remainder comes from two previous studies. In 1990, we conducted a one-year follow-up of the graduating class of '89. We completed interviews with 1251 alumni of the class of '89, 73.6% of all 1989 graduates. The second study was of advanced seniors (those with more than 150 credits completed) enrolled during Spring, 1987. Of the 1902 individuals who fit that criterion, 1280, 71.0%, completed the survey.

On the whole, Western graduates are quite satisfied with their experiences at Western. For example, 32.2% are "very" satisfied and another 57.8% are "mostly" satisfied with Western, overall. For undergraduate courses, the figures are 12.7% and 64.7%, respectively. For these questions, only 10-13% choose the lowest two responses, "somewhat" and "not at all" satisfied. Other, more specific satisfaction questions produce slightly lower satisfaction, but the general pattern finds the bulk of responses in the "mostly satisfied" category.

This pattern changes, however, when academic advising is the subject. We asked two different samples how satisfied they were with all the academic advising they received at Western, from all sources. In both samples, the proportion of "not at all satisfied" alumni exceeded the proportion of "very satisfied." About 40% of each sample are "moderately" or "very" satisfied, about 40% "somewhat satisfied" and another 20% were "not at all satisfied." These figures are respondents' subjective averaging of all academic advising experiences they had at Western. (See Figure One.)

FIGURE ONE.
 CLASS OF '89 AND 1991 FOLLOW-UP OF '87 SENIORS:
 SATISFACTION WITH ACADEMIC ADVISING
 AT WESTERN, OVERALL



One component of advising experienced by nearly all Western students is advisement from departments and faculty. We asked students to evaluate several "aspects of your major at Western," including advising by faculty and others in their majors, regarding courses and careers. Figures for "departmental/faculty advising concerning courses" are markedly more positive than for advising concerning careers. For advising concerning courses, 21-24% are "very satisfied" and 13% "not at all satisfied." For advising concerning careers, on the other hand, more than twice as many alumni report being "not at all satisfied" as being "very satisfied" (26-28% vs. 10-12%). (See Figure Two and Figure Three).

Even in the case of advising concerning courses, students' reviews of departmental advising are less than stellar. This particular type of advising is something one's major department ought to be uniquely capable of doing well. The best interpretation of the findings in Figure Two may therefore be that students are damning with faint praise.

FIGURE TWO
SATISFACTION WITH DEPARTMENTAL/FACULTY ADVISING
CONCERNING COURSES: CLASSES OF '89 AND '91:

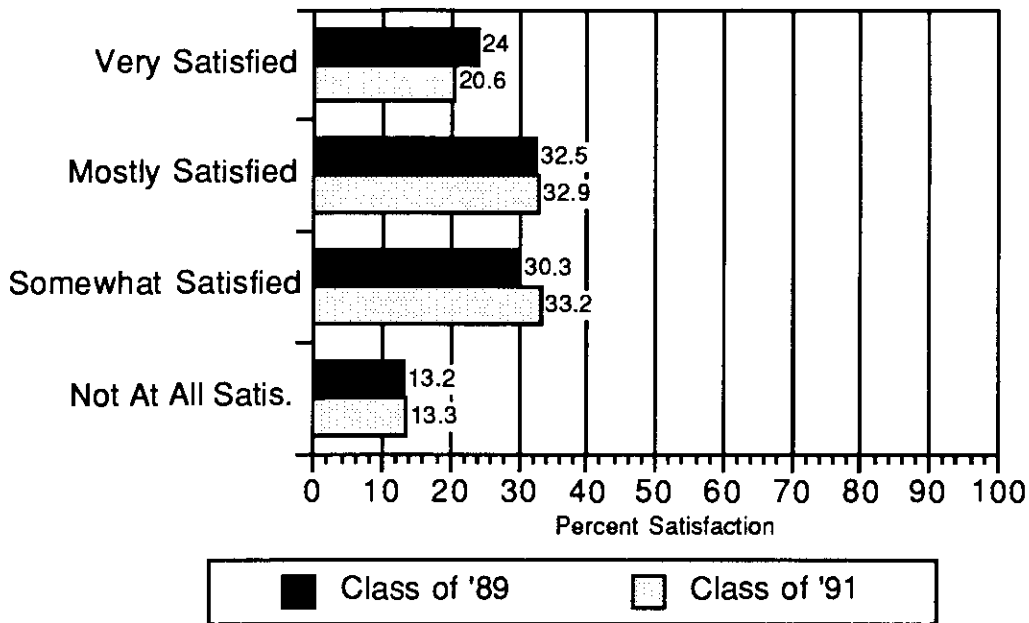
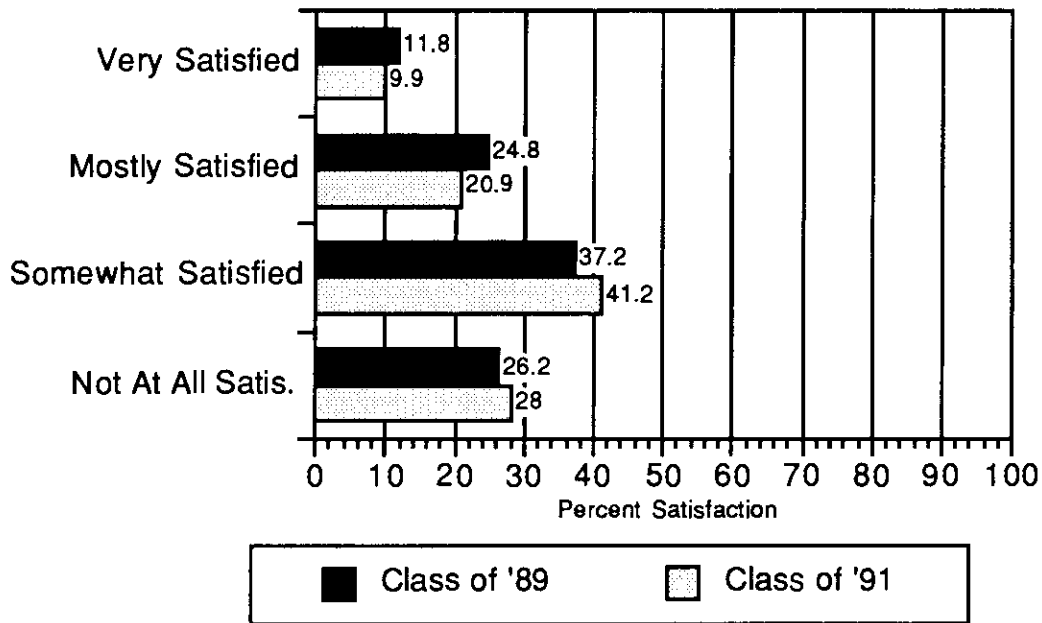
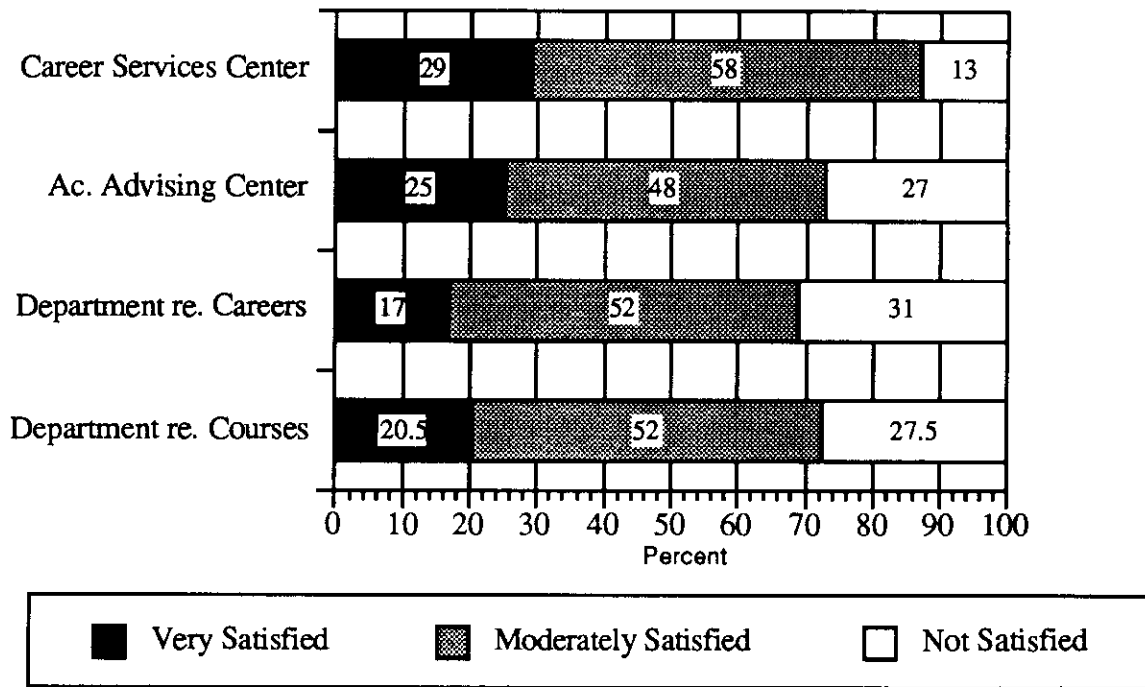


FIGURE THREE
SATISFACTION WITH DEPARTMENTAL/FACULTY ADVISING
CONCERNING CAREERS: CLASSES OF '89 AND '91:



In one case, our survey of Western Seniors enrolled in Spring, 1987, we asked a single question that produced parallel ratings of four types of advising: the Academic Advising Center, the Career Services Center, departmental advising concerning careers, and departmental advising concerning courses. The question used a three-point rating scale ("very", "moderately", and "not" satisfied), which alters the percentages compared to those in Figures One through Three, but the parallel questions allow the direct conclusion that, at least among this sample, satisfaction with the Academic Advising Center lay midway between satisfaction with the Career Services Center and departmental advising "on courses and careers." Ratings were gathered from only those individuals who had made use of each resource. (See Figure Four.)

FIGURE FOUR
 SATISFACTION WITH ADVISING AMONG 1987 SENIORS:
 ACADEMIC ADVISING CENTER,
 CAREER SERVICES CENTER,
 AND DEPARTMENTAL ADVISING
 (AMONG THOSE WHO EVER USED EACH SERVICE)



Western's Academic Advising Center

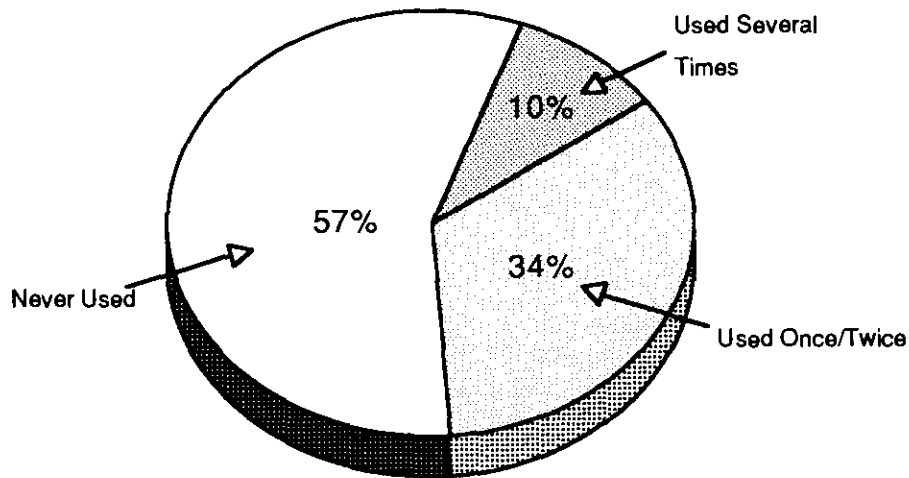
We move now to report our focused analysis of the Academic Advising Center at Western. The first two sections of this report explained why the Academic Advising Center requested additional information. Satisfaction expressed by Western students and alumni is lower for advising services than for most other aspects of the university. At the same time, it has also become clear that this relative dissatisfaction is not unique to Western's Academic Advising Center. The same pattern is present at other universities, and the satisfaction with advising by the major department is as low as with the central Academic Advising Center.

Western's Academic Advising Center is involved in a number of programs that our survey did not ask about, including orientation advising, freshman advising night, and university 101. The only focus of this survey, however, was on students' visit to the Academic Advising Center for purposes of seeking academic advising on various topics.

Use of the Center

We asked 1991 graduates whether they ever used the Academic Advising Center while at Western. The majority (57%) report that they never used the Center. One-third (34%) say they used the Center "once or twice", and ten percent indicate they used the Center "several times." These reports are from Western graduates, about 40% of whom completed their entire education at Western, typically spending 4.5-5 years at Western, and about 60% of whom transferred to Western, most often after having completed their first two years at a Community College. The proportion of the class of '91 who report using the center is higher than among 1987 seniors. (See Figure Five.)

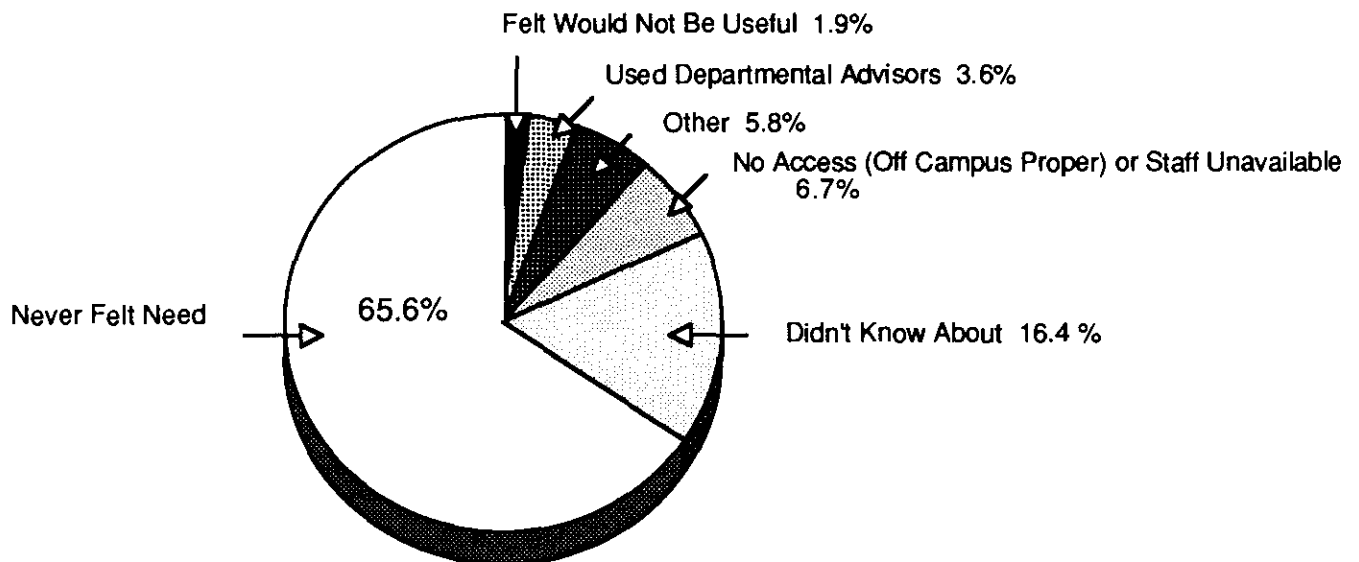
FIGURE FIVE
USE OF ACADEMIC ADVISING CENTER, CLASS OF '91



Number of Times Used Academic Advising Center

Among the graduates who state they never used the center, nearly two-thirds (65.6%) indicate that they never felt any need to use it. We do not know how many of these felt no need of advising from any source and how many found their needs met elsewhere. We do know, however, that transfer students, especially those entering Western with the AA, require somewhat less advising than native freshmen and are less prone to use the Center. Since about three-fifths of the graduating class entered Western as transfers, this fact explains some, but by no means all, of the lack of felt need to visit the Center. Although most non-use appears driven by lack of felt need, 16.4% say they did not know about the Academic Advising Center, and a few say that access was limited or they preferred other resources. (See Figure Six.)

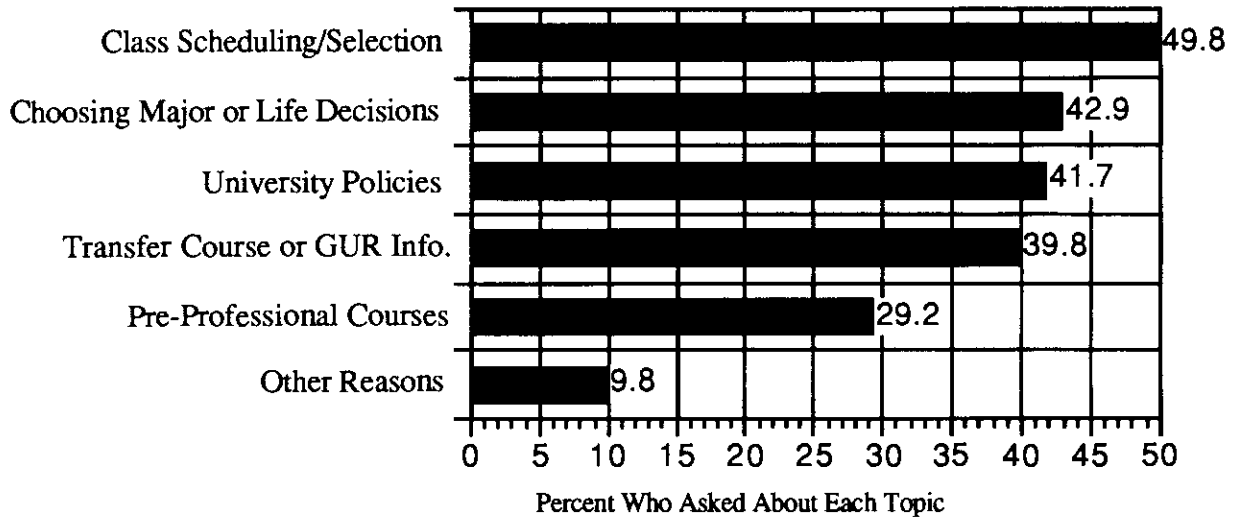
FIGURE SIX
 REASONS WHY STUDENTS DID NOT USE
 THE ACADEMIC ADVISING CENTER, CLASS OF 1991



Graduates who reported that they did use the Academic Advising Center were asked to indicate whether they sought advice on each of five issues. Nearly half (49.8%) of those who visited the Academic Advising Center for any reason report they sought advice concerning "class scheduling or selection;" 42.9% sought advice about choosing a major or other important life decisions; 41.7% sought advice concerning university policies; 39.8% needed information concerning transfer courses or GUR requirements; and 29.2% requested information concerning pre-professional programs.¹ In addition, 9.8% of respondents used the Academic Advising Center for a wide variety of other reasons: to inquire about applying to graduate schools, to discuss problems with a faculty member, to seek advice about selecting an internship, etc. Some also listed "career planning and resume preparation," which indicates possible confusion with the Career Services Center, and "tutorial assistance," indicating possible confusion with the Tutorial Center. (See Figure Seven.)

¹ Figures add to more than 100% because some students made multiple visits for multiple purposes.

FIGURE SEVEN
 AMONG STUDENTS WHO VISITED THE WWU ACADEMIC
 ADVISING CENTER, PERCENTAGE WHO CAME
 FOR EACH OF FOLLOWING PURPOSES, CLASS OF '91



Profile of Students Using The Academic Advising Center

It may be helpful to ask which of Western's students tend most often to make use of the Academic Advising Center. Here, the strategy is to profile the characteristics of students who visited the center versus those who did not. We can profile only the characteristics of students that we have measured, making this profile incomplete. Even so, we can provide some interpretative information about what student interests the Center serves.

The summary of findings presented below is the result of two types of analysis: a descriptive profile and multivariate analysis to identify those characteristics most likely to actually *influence* whether particular individuals do or do not use the center. Specific findings from multivariate analysis are not presented here in the interest of readability, but that analysis played a role in dictating the characteristics we profile below.²

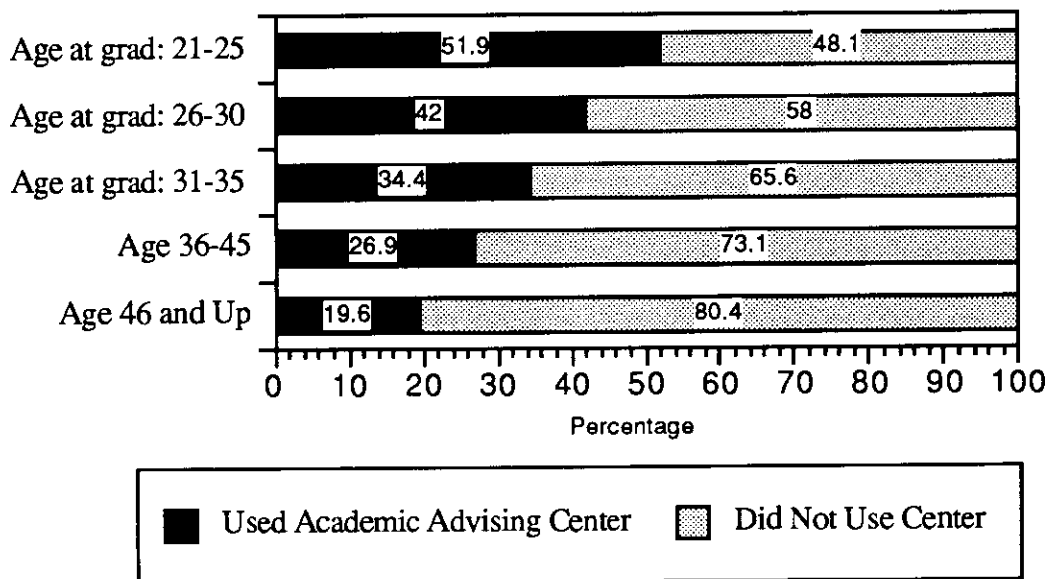
² If the reader is interested, we can provide a copy of the computer results.

Several groups were more likely than others to report that they used the Academic Advising Center. In particular, the Center is more often used by students who are younger, who study more but who get less good grades, who entered Western as native freshmen, who changed their majors more often, who received financial aid while at Western, who value well-rounded education more than occupational training, and who found departmental advising especially weak. Other background characteristics, such as gender and ethnicity, do not predict use of the center. Nor do most student orientations regarding the value of higher education or regarding occupational plans. In the paragraphs that follow, a bit more detail is provided about factors that appear to influence whether or not particular students use the Academic Advising Center.

Personal Background Characteristics

- The younger the student, the more likely he/she used the Academic Advising Center. Use was highest among those aged 22-26 at graduation (51.9%) and lowest among those 46 and older (19.6%). Much of this age effect is accounted for by correlates of age; in particular, older students get better grades, have clearer academic goals, and are more likely to have entered Western as transfers, all of which decrease their use of the center. (See figure Eight.)

FIGURE EIGHT
USE OF ACADEMIC ADVISING BY AGE AT GRADUATION,
CLASS OF '92



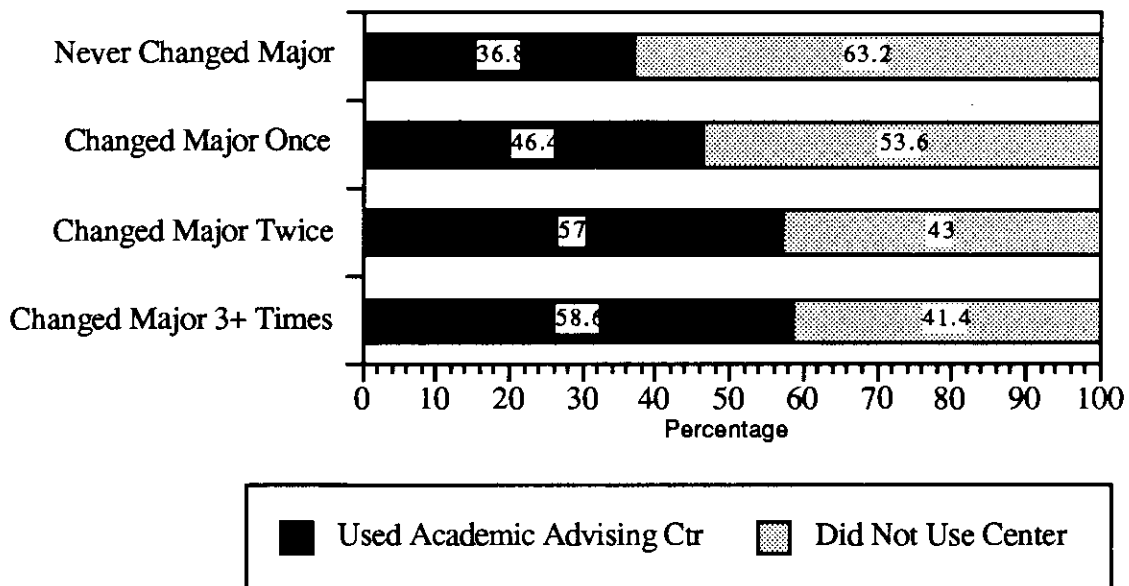
Educational Trajectories

- Those who entered Western as native freshmen used the Academic Advising Center more than transfers used it. This is reasonable given their longer time at Western and the fact that they spent more time here not attached to a major. Only one-third (32.2%) of those who transferred with AA's reported using the Center.

- Students who transferred directly or within one year were most likely to use the Center. Those who took a break of 4 or more years before transferring to Western were least likely to use it.

- The majority (58.6%) of students who changed their majors three or more times used the Academic Advising Center, while only one-third (36.8%) of those who never changed their major used it. This factor is closely related to entering as native freshmen, since more than two-thirds (69%) of transfers but only 39% of native freshmen say they never changed their majors while at Western. (See Figure Nine.)

FIGURE NINE
USE OF ACADEMIC ADVISING BY NUMBER OF
TIMES CHANGED MAJOR AT WWU, CLASS OF '91



- Students who chose majors during their freshman year were least likely to report using the Academic Advising Center (34.4%). Those

who decided on majors as seniors were most likely to use the Center (55%). However, the number of times students changed majors was more important than the timing of their final choice in determining probability of visiting the Academic Advising Center.

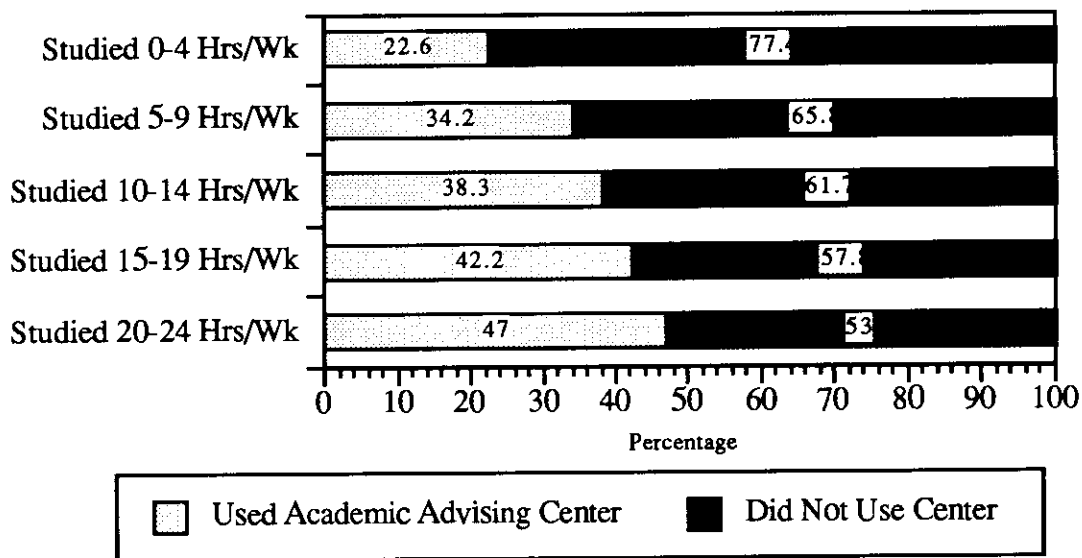
Academic Engagement and Success

- The higher grades students received at Western or other colleges, the less likely they were to visit the Advising Center. The strongest indicator of this relationship is the freshman/sophomore year GPA, perhaps indicating the importance of early adjustment to academic demands. Also, the Academic Advising Center does proactive outreach to students on probation, which increases contact with the center among those who receive the lowest grades.

- Confusingly, students with high school GPAs in the middle range (2.51 to 3.50) used the Center more (57%) than those whose grades were at either the high or low extreme (35-39%).

- The more hours each individual spent doing homework at Western, the more likely they were to visit the Academic Advising Center. In particular, those who did extremely little homework as freshmen (4 hours per week or less) visited much less often than others, even after other factors were taken into account. (See Figure Ten.)

FIGURE TEN
 USE OF ACADEMIC ADVISING BY NUMBER OF HOURS
 PER WEEK SPENT STUDYING, CLASS OF '91



Educational Values

- Students who placed greater value on attending Western in order to gain a well-rounded education used the Center more (46.7%) than those who placed greater value on occupational training (38%).
- On the other hand, several other measures of educational values showed no association with tendency to use the Academic Advising Center.

Financial Issues

- The greater the proportion of their time at Western students received financial aid, the less likely they were to visit the center.
- An intriguing, but confusing finding is that students who say they worked ten or more hours per week some of their time at Western used the Center more than those who worked "all" or "none" of the time (50% compared to about 39%).

Other Advising

- Students who reported being only "a little satisfied" with departmental advising used the Academic Advising Center the most (51.1%). Those who were "very satisfied" used it the least (37.5%). It appears clear that these two types of advising are operating as options to each other.

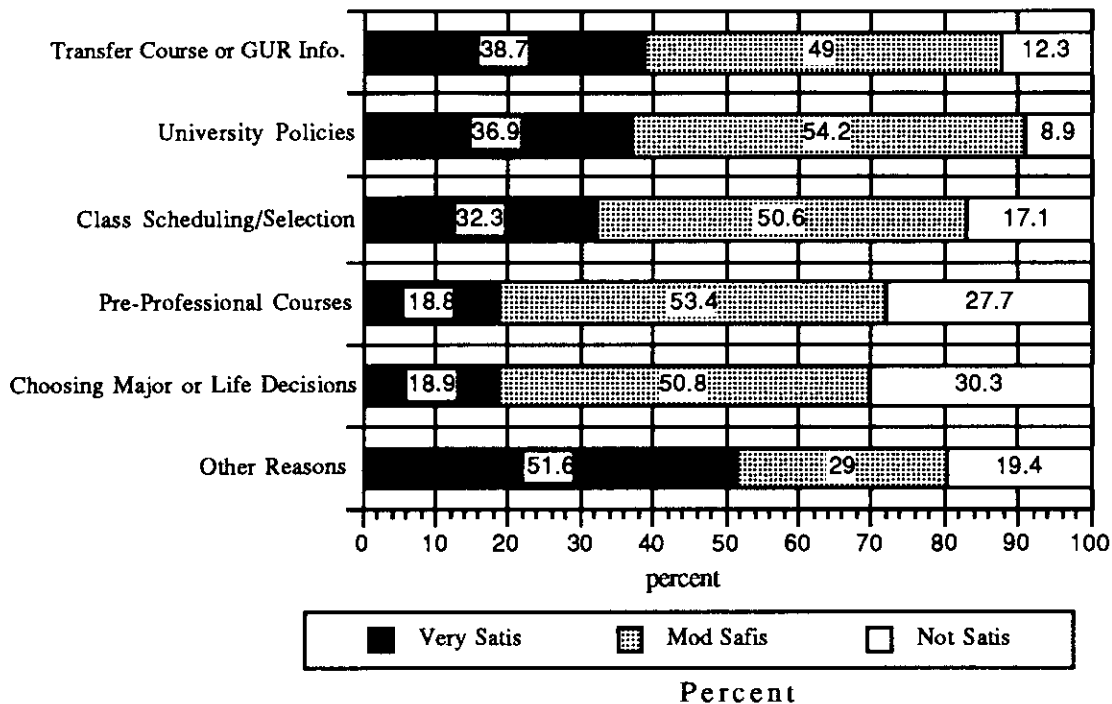
College

- Some differences in use of the Academic Advising Center follow college lines, although we have no particular explanation for these patterns. Almost half of students in Humanities (51.9%), about one-third of Fine and Performing Arts (34.3%) and of Woodring students (30.6%) used the Center, and only one fourth of Fairhaven students (27.8%) reported using it. Use by other majors lies between these extremes.

Satisfaction with The Academic Advising Center

As reported in Figure Seven, alumni were asked whether they had ever visited the Academic Advising Center seeking assistance in each of five areas, plus "other." In each case where individuals indicated that they had used the Academic Advising Center, they were also asked to evaluate whether they felt "very satisfied", "moderately satisfied" or "not satisfied" with the assistance they received. Responses are displayed in Figure Eleven.

FIGURE ELEVEN
SATISFACTION LEVELS AMONG STUDENTS WHO SOUGHT
ADVISEMENT FROM THE ACADEMIC ADVISING CENTER,
CONCERNING EACH TOPIC LISTED, CLASS OF '91



Satisfaction levels vary rather widely across students who sought advice on each topic. A significant portion of responses are "very satisfied" and "not satisfied" in each case. Indeed, for some types of advice, satisfaction is as high as with any aspect of the university. Yet satisfaction varies with the type of aid sought. Satisfaction is quite high concerning transfer course or GUR information (38.7% "very satisfied"), university policies (36.9%), and class scheduling/selection (32.3%). Students also report they are "very satisfied" (51.6%) with services received concerning specific "other issues" besides the five issues specifically listed in the questionnaire. When we turn to advisement concerning "pre-professional courses" and "choosing a major or other important life decisions," however, we find nearly twice as many reports of "not satisfied" (28% and 30%) as "very satisfied" (19%).

While interpretations of the patterns that emerge from Figure Eleven must be extremely tentative, it appears that satisfaction may be highest where the advice sought is most specific in nature (e.g., GUR information, university policies), and lowest where the information sought involves broad life planning (e.g., choosing a major or other important life decisions). This interpretation corresponds to that of national surveys of advising professionals. Advisors indicate that students often have expectations far exceeding the capacity of the advisor, a phenomenon especially likely to arise when students seek assistance with major life decisions. The case of advice concerning pre-professional courses is less clear; it may be that specific knowledge is lacking in this one case, or that this topic raises life planning issues. We will return to this possible interpretation after further analysis.

All those who reported that they were "not satisfied" with any of the advising they received from the Academic Advising Center were asked to indicate *why* they were not satisfied. This focus on problem areas stems from the desire of the Academic Advising Center to diagnose how to improve services in those cases where students were not satisfied.³ Of the 509 individuals in our sample who had visited the Academic Advising Center, 235, or 46.1%, said they were "not satisfied" with at least one of the types of services they received. Of these, 195 offered explanations, from which we identified 273 separate reasons for dissatisfaction. These are summarized in Table One, below.

Table One organizes comments into four basic categories dictated by the target of the comment being offered: qualities of the advice, of the staff, of the advising process, and of the facilities. Within each of these four categories, comments are organized on the basis of the particular critique directed toward each of these four targets.

The greatest number of complaints about the advising services received are in regards to the *advice* given. A total of 74.9% of all those who offered explanations for their dissatisfaction commented on the advice itself. Over one-fourth (26.4%) of all respondents reported that the advice did not offer new information and/or was not helpful. Another 20.7% stated that advice was confusing or vague, or given without being thought out. Further comments about dissatisfaction with advice include: advice provided no useful options (8.6%), the advice did not take into account the student's interests

³ A willingness to identify weak areas in order to improve them is always risky, but is at the heart of any self-renewing organization.

(7.9%), the student felt the information was incorrect or that they had been lied to (7.1%), the information was felt to be outdated (2.1%), and various other complaints too unique to categorize (2.1%).

TABLE ONE:

**REASONS GIVEN FOR DISSATISFACTION
WITH THE ACADEMIC ADVISING CENTER**

	<u>Percent of Responses*</u>
Comments About Advice	
Advice Didn't Help/No New Advice	26.4
Confusing/Vague/Advice With No Thought	20.7
Lack of Options	8.6
Didn't Consider Student's Interests	7.9
Wrong Information/Lied To	7.1
Outdated Information	2.1
Other Dissatisfaction Concerning Advice	2.1
Comments About Staff	
Lack of Knowledge	22.1
Didn't Listen/Didn't Care	7.9
Too Busy	5.7
Lack of Respect (Rude/Impatient/Condescending)	4.3
Other Dissatisfaction Concerning Staff	3.5
Comments About Process	
Cycled Through Departments	6.4
Other Dissatisfaction Concerning Process	3.6
Comments About Facilities	
	3.5
	----- 100%

* based on 273 responses by 195 individuals

Comments from 43.5% of dissatisfied students centered around the performance of *staff*, with lack of knowledge listed as the primary complaint in this area (22.1%). Some students also reported the perceptions that staff didn't listen/didn't care (7.9%), were too busy (5.7%), or lacked respect (4.3%). Comments about *process* include complaints that students were cycled through the departments (6.4%) and that they felt generally discouraged concerning the process of seeking advisement (3.6%). Finally, a few respondents are dissatisfied with the *facilities* (3.5%), indicating, for example, that there was lack of privacy during their visits.

We examined whether the nature of the comments explaining dissatisfaction differed depending on the type of advice students sought. Differences were modest, but some do exist.

- In the area of greatest dissatisfaction, seeking help choosing a major or with other life decisions, students somewhat more often reported they got no help or that their interests were not taken into account, but less often reported that the staff did not show them respect. This finding is consistent with the earlier interpretation that broad, life planning questions are the most difficult for the Academic Advising Center to respond to. Compared to others, these students were slightly less often negative about the staff, complaining instead that they did not receive useful information. Nine out of ten (90.2%) of these individuals referenced inadequacies of the advice itself and 21% pointed to a closely related factor, lack of knowledge on the part of the staff.

- When dissatisfaction resulted after a visit to discuss pre-professional programs, the reported reason was somewhat more often that staff lacked knowledge or that staff were busy or did not care. While these differences are too small to make much of, they hint that these students felt somewhat excluded in the sense that staff were not trained to answer their questions or did not care about the types of questions they bring. This may reflect the priority given pre-professional programs in the university.

- No differences are noticeable among students who visited for other reasons. In addition, the number of people offering comments falling into most categories is remarkably similar regardless of what type of advice the dissatisfied student had sought.

What Explains Who is Satisfied and Who is Not?

We performed an analysis of which individuals were most satisfied with their advising, similar to that reported for which individuals used advising. The difference between the two analyses is that we have almost no ability to predict satisfaction on the basis of personal background, educational trajectories, or attitudes. People who earned higher GPAs and those who valued higher education "to learn a great deal" rather than "to obtain a degree" were more satisfied with advising services. We know from other analyses, however, that these same individuals tend to be more satisfied with all aspects of higher education.

The fact that we cannot explain relative satisfaction with reference to factors other than the direct exchange between student and advisor reinforces the validity of the satisfaction ratings themselves and of the reasons students offered to explain low ratings. None of the usual personal characteristics appear to have predisposed students much toward giving positive or negative ratings. This means that *presumably*, satisfaction ratings emerged directly from each advising experience, without respect to the characteristics of the student.

Concluding Notes

Satisfaction with advising, as with anything else, results from the interplay of what is expected and what is received. We find a correspondence between national surveys of advisors (ACT) and student satisfaction with advising at Western. Both identify the most complex life decisions as the cases in which advisors are least likely to satisfy students' expectations. It may be unrealistic to expect advisors to deal effectively with such multifaceted issues. Perhaps, instead, advisors should seek to orient students to a variety of resources they can use to work through such questions for themselves. Perhaps ways can be found for academic advisors to provide more effective assistance with such decisions--perhaps not. What is clear is that advising on relatively clear-cut, routine matters is highly satisfactory to Western students, while advising on more complex matters or issues where for any reason the advisor is judged not to have adequate knowledge to share, satisfaction is low.

While this report touched only briefly on faculty advising, it is worth concluding with the note that students are less satisfied with departmental/faculty advising than with the Academic Advising Center. It may be that this lower satisfaction stems from students' expectation that faculty can assist them with complex life decisions. Alternatively, it may be that faculty are less well trained for specific questions of organizational policy. Our surveys do not give us this information. What is clear, however, is that academic advising often misses the mark, at least as defined by the consumers, students, no matter what the source of the advice.

References

- Astin, Alexander. *Achieving Educational Excellence*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1985.
- Crockett, D. S., Habley, W. R., and Coward, S.C. *The ACT National Survey of Academic Advising*. Iowa City, IA: American College Testing Program, 1987.
- Daigle, Stephen L., and William P. Stock. *Student Needs and Priorities Survey, California State University, Fresno, Spring 1989*. Fresno, CA: California State University, Fresno, 1990.
- Hunziker, Celeste M. *Advising at UC Davis - 1990. A Report of Student Opinions*. Davis, CA: California University, Davis, Office of Student Affairs Research and Information, 1991.
- Koerin, Beverly B. "Improving Academic Advising: Strategies for Change," *NSPA Journal* V 28 # 4 (1991): 323-327.
- McKinney, Charles W., and Mark Hartwig. "A Comparative Study of Student and Academic Department Personnel Perceptions of Academic Advising at the University of California, Santa Barbara." *College and University* v 56 n3 (1981): 264-282.