

# SURVEY OF ACADEMIC ADVISING AT WSU VANCOUVER

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

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## Background

- In Fall of 2007, the WSU Vancouver Retention Task Force developed a vision of Academic Advising describing the roles and contributions of students, advisors, and the institutional administration to that process.
- In order to determine how well our campus is currently meeting that vision and to assist in planning for possible improvements to the advising system, the Survey of Academic Advising was administered to a representative sample of students during the Spring of 2008.
- In addition to collecting demographic information from students, the survey also included measures to assess:
  - reasons why students seek advising;
  - methods students use to prepare for advising; and
  - their perceptions of the academic advising process at WSU Vancouver, their role in that process, and their advisor.
- The survey also included outcome measures assessing overall student satisfaction with WSU Vancouver and intentions to leave WSU Vancouver prior to graduation.

## Demographic Information

- The survey sample size was 451 students, representing 24% of the total undergraduate population.
  - 2 Running Start
  - 78 Freshmen
  - 68 Sophomores
  - 149 Juniors
  - 136 Seniors
  - 18 Other
- 58% of respondents were female; 42% male, corresponding to the undergraduate student population.
- 77% of respondents were Caucasian/White. 18% were racial minorities or multi-racial; 5% chose not to respond to this item. This represents a slight over-sampling of minority students.
- The modal age of students was 20-24 (49%). 24% were 16-19 years old; 13% were 25-29. The remaining 14% were 30+.
- 26% of respondents entered WSU Vancouver as a freshman; the remainder were transfer students.
- 95% of students had entered WSU in 2006 or later.
- Academic Majors:
  - Business: 66
  - Computer Science: 15
  - Education: 38
  - Engineering: 27
  - Human Development: 22
  - Liberal Arts: 182
  - Nursing: 3
  - Science: 66
  - Undeclared: 29
- 68% of the students were currently employed. On average, these students work 23 hours per week.

## Descriptive Information Regarding Advising Contact

- Primary source of academic advising:
  - 21% Student Resource Center
  - 25% Departmental Academic Coordinator
  - 43% Faculty Advisor
  - 11% Don't Know
- 83% of respondents could identify their academic advisor by name.
- Frequency of meetings with academic advisor:
  - 3% Never
  - 29% On an "as needed basis" (when questions arise)
  - 3% Once a year
  - 56% Every semester during pre-registration advising
  - 9% More than once a semester
- Method of Contact (*Note: percentages can add to >100% due to multiple options being checked*):
  - 89% In-person during one-on-one sessions
  - 3% In-person during group sessions
  - 30% Via email
  - 11% Via telephone
- Stability of Academic Advisor Assignment and Major:
  - 67% of all students have maintained the same advisor since enrollment at WSU Vancouver
  - 84% have maintained the same major since enrollment
    - Of those, 71% kept the same advisor
  - 16% have switched majors since enrollment

## Reasons for Seeking Advising

	Percentage Endorsing
Select courses for upcoming semester(s).	87
Go over my checksheet to identify my remaining university, college, and major requirements.	85
Get my advising hold lifted.	79
Evaluate my progress toward my academic and career goals.	76
Develop a plan to achieve my academic and career goals.	75
Identify academic/career goals.	61
Get information about potential career, graduate school, and/or internship opportunities.	47
Get information about specific classes or instructors (e.g., course content, which ones are harder vs. easier, etc.).	46
To discuss options when a problem or challenge arises (e.g., work, family, academic).	34
Get information about other campus resources (e.g., tutoring, counseling, disability services).	17
Other	2

## Preparation for Advising

The following lists activities that students report engaging in to prepare for advising sessions.

	<b>Percentage Endorsing</b>
Look at the course schedule and identifying courses to take in the upcoming term.	81
Access MyWSU to view registration time and holds	79
Think of questions to ask advisor	78
Identify academic and career goals.	73
Access departmental websites to view course requirements and scheduling information.	58
Read the course catalog to become familiar with university, college, and major requirements.	53
View Degree Audit Report (DARs report).	49
Other	4

## Perceptions about the Institutional Advising Process

Students were asked about their feelings regarding the advising structure and process at WSU Vancouver. Responses could range from 1 to 5 and were scored such that higher numbers reflect more positive attitudes toward the advising process. The mean across all students and items was 3.53. Students were most positive about the ease of accessing MyWSU, knowing who their advisor was, and the usefulness of checksheets compared to other aspects of the advising process. Students scored lowest on understanding the distinction between SRC Coordinators, Departmental Academic Coordinators, and Faculty Advisors. They also reported significantly more negative perceptions about the Degree Audit Report.

	<b>Mean</b>
Accessing MyWSU is easy.	4.22
I know who my academic advisor is.	4.00
Checksheets listing the university, college, and major requirements are useful when planning for upcoming terms.	3.94
Advising sessions are long enough to address all of my advising concerns.	3.80
Accessing MyWSU provides me with useful academic advising information.	3.67
The advising process is easy to understand.	3.66
I understand the distinction between university (GER), college, and departmental (major) requirements.	3.65
I know who to contact to get different questions answered (for example, regarding financial aid, course planning, tutoring, career counseling, etc.).	3.35
Correspondence I receive prior to pre-registration advising clearly informs me how to sign up for academic advising before registering.	3.34
I understand why there are three separate layers of requirements (e.g., university, college, and major).	2.94
It is easy to read and understand my Degree Audit Report.	2.91
I know the difference between SRC Academic Coordinators, Departmental Academic Coordinators, and my Faculty Advisor.	2.45

(Note: Items within brackets do not significantly differ from each other.)

## Student Engagement in the Advising Process

Students were asked about their perceptions regarding their role in and contributions toward the advising process at WSU Vancouver. Responses could range from 1 to 5 and were scored such that higher numbers reflect more student engagement in the advising process. The mean across all students and items was 3.93.

	<b>Mean</b>
{ I am ultimately responsible for successfully completing my degree requirements at WSU.	4.39
{ I value the time and effort my advisor spends on me.	4.07
{ I set my academic and career goals after carefully considering my interests, values, and abilities.	3.98
{ I actively monitor my progress at achieving my educational and career goals.	3.97
{ I have clearly defined academic and career goals.	3.95
{ I prepare in advance for my advising sessions.	3.80
{ I seek out opportunities to further achieve my career and educational goals (e.g., by attending campus events, workshops, and networking opportunities).	3.22

(Note: Items within brackets do not significantly differ from each other.)

Students scored highest on recognizing that they were ultimately responsible for completion of their degree requirements. The next highest set of items reflected student initiation of identifying, setting, and monitoring their academic and career goal progress. Additionally, they appear to recognize the time and effort spent by their advisors throughout the process. Students scored lowest, however, on preparing for their advising sessions and seeking additional opportunities beyond the classroom to reach their goals.

## Perceptions of Current Advisor

Students were asked about their perceptions regarding their current academic advisor. Responses could range from 1 to 5 and were scored such that higher numbers reflect more positive perceptions of the advisor. The mean across all students and items was 3.68.

	<b>Mean</b>
{ My advisor treats me with respect.	4.26
{ My advisor cares about my educational success.	3.93
{ My advisor reviews my degree checksheet with me – clearly explaining my remaining requirements and how to fulfill them.	3.85
{ My advisor plays a key role in helping me efficiently complete my degree program (i.e., complete all requirements as quickly and accurately as possible).	3.59
{ My advisor assists me with identifying and achieving my educational and career goals.	3.57
{ My advisor has told me where to find information to help me complete my degree (e.g., MyWSU, Registrar’s website, departmental website).	3.55

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{	My advisor provides me with information (e.g., about graduate school, internship, and/or networking opportunities) that will help me achieve my career goals.	3.41
	I would approach my advisor for help if I were struggling academically.	3.39
{	My academic advisor has told me about tools and campus services (e.g., tutoring, career services, etc.) that can help me develop and achieve my academic and career goals.	3.39
	My advisor has explained the Writing Portfolio and “timed write” requirements to me.	3.38

(Note: Items within brackets do not significantly differ from each other.)

Students had the most positive perceptions about their advisor when asked whether they felt their advisor treats them with respect and cares about their educational success. Additionally, advisors appear to do a good job with the certain aspects of transactional advising (e.g., going over remaining requirements). However, advisors scored lowest on referring students to other resources critical to meeting their academic and career goals (e.g., networking, graduate school information, tutoring/career services, Writing Portfolio).

## Student Satisfaction and Retention

Students were asked about their satisfaction with WSU Vancouver and their intent to remain at WSU Vancouver until graduation. Responses could range from 1 to 5 and were scored such that higher numbers reflect higher levels of satisfaction and greater intentions to remain at the university.

### Student Satisfaction (Mean = 4.05 across all students & items)

	Mean	% Strongly Agree
{ I am happy to be a student at WSU Vancouver.	4.11	33%
{ I am confident that I made the right decision in choosing to attend this university.	4.07	35%
{ I am satisfied with the education I am receiving at WSU Vancouver.	4.03	29%
{ I would recommend WSU Vancouver to others considering going to college.	4.00	30%

### Retention (Mean = 4.20 across all students & items)

{ I am considering leaving college until I decide on a career. (R)	4.46	57%
{ I plan to graduate from WSU Vancouver.	4.32	50%
{ I find myself giving considerable thought to taking time off from college and finishing at a later time. (R)	4.16	47%
{ I am considering transferring to a different university. (R)	3.86	34%

(Note: Items within brackets do not significantly differ from each other. (R) indicates a reverse-scored item. Therefore, for those items, “%Strongly Agree” reflects the percentage of students who “Strongly Disagreed” with the item.)

In general, students appear to be fairly satisfied with being a student at WSU Vancouver and feel confident that they chose the right university for them. Intentions to remain at WSU Vancouver also appeared positive, with 70-80% of students expressing a moderate to strong intent to remain.

## Analyses by Current/Intended Major

There were statistically significant differences by major in perceptions regarding their current advisors, their overall satisfaction with WSU Vancouver, and their intentions to remain at the university. While numerically there are small point differences between the top-performing majors and the lower-performing majors, these differences are nonetheless statistically significant and can perhaps lead to an initiation of discussions in programs where improvements could perhaps be made in order to reach the vision of academic advising at WSU.

Perceptions of Current Advisor	Satisfaction with WSU Vancouver	Retention Intentions
Humanities (4.28)	Human Development (4.57)	Sociology (4.65)
Human Development (4.02)	Sociology (4.45)	DTC (4.44)
DTC (4.02)	Anthropology (4.33)	Human Development (4.38)
Computer Science (3.91)	Humanities (4.33)	Psychology (4.35)
Anthropology (3.90)	Criminal Justice (4.32)	Social Sciences (4.32)
Business (3.87)	DTC (4.27)	Public Affairs (4.31)
History (3.87)	Social Sciences (4.17)	Business (4.31)
Biology (3.84)	History (4.15)	Anthropology (4.29)
English (3.71)	English (4.05)	English (4.27)
Engineering (3.66)	Business (4.04)	Humanities (4.24)
Public Affairs (3.58)	Education (3.99)	Biology (4.23)
Undeclared/Undecided (3.40)	Biology (3.95)	Education (4.19)
Psychology (3.34)	Psychology (3.92)	Criminal Justice (4.18)
Social Sciences (3.34)	Engineering (3.89)	History (4.15)
Sociology (3.30)	Computer Science (3.78)	Computer Science (4.13)
Criminal Justice (3.27)	Undeclared/Undecided (3.53)	Engineering (3.90)
Education (3.21)	Public Affairs (3.53)	Undeclared/Undecided (3.63)

(Note: Only majors with a sample size of  $N > 5$  were included in the analyses. Students were counted in a major if they identified that major as their current or intended major regardless of where they were receiving their advising, i.e., SRC, Academic Coordinator, Faculty Advisor. Similarity in bar gradients reflects statistically similar scores across the like-colored majors.)

## Analyses by Source of Academic Advising

There were statistically significant differences in the perceptions that students expressed regarding their advisors, their overall satisfaction with WSU Vancouver, and their intentions to remain at the university depending on the source of their academic advising (e.g., SRC, academic coordinator, or faculty advisor).

Additionally, these groups reported significant differences in how they prepare for advising and why they seek advising; specifically, students with faculty advisors report more reasons for seeking advising and more preparatory activities compared to students who receive advising from other sources.

Students were most engaged in the advising process when they reported receiving advising from Departmental Coordinators or Faculty Advisors.

Not surprisingly, students who could not identify their advisor had more negative perceptions of the institutional advising process and their "current advisor". However, this was not related to intentions to leave WSU Vancouver.

Source of Advising	Perceptions of Advising Process	Student Engagement in Advising	Perceptions of Current Advisor	Satisfaction with WSU Vancouver	Retention Intentions
Faculty Advisor	{ 3.64	{ 4.05	{ 3.77	{ 4.21	{ 4.31
Dep't Academic Coordinator	{ 3.63	{ 3.94	{ 3.74	{ 4.11	{ 4.26
SRC	{ 3.51	{ 3.78	{ 3.67	{ 3.77	{ 3.91
Don't Know	{ 3.04	{ 3.78	{ 3.18	{ 3.92	{ 4.17

(Note: Groups within brackets do not differ significantly from each other.)

## Analyses by Transfer vs. Freshman Entry

Students who entered WSU Vancouver as freshmen (rather than as transfer students) reported fewer preparatory activities prior to advising and being less engaged personally in the advising process (e.g., by defining their career goals, seeking out developmental opportunities, etc.). Additionally, these students reported lower satisfaction with WSU Vancouver and greater intentions to leave the university.

It is important to note, however, that these differences appear to be explained more by the students' class standing rather than their transfer vs. freshmen-entry student status. Sufficient data from the sophomore sample allowed for direct comparisons of transfer students (N = 34) and freshmen-entry students (N = 32). Among this sub-sample, there were no differences on any of the variables of interest based on whether they first entered WSU Vancouver as freshmen or transfer students.

## Predictors of Student Retention

Perhaps the most noteworthy finding from the departmental-level data above is the lack of a significant relationship between perceptions of one's academic advisor and student retention intentions ( $r = .08$ ). Similarly, academic advisor perceptions are only modestly correlated with overall satisfaction with WSU Vancouver ( $r = .25$ ). However, as would be expected, overall satisfaction is highly correlated with retention ( $r = .75$ ).

A similar pattern is found when looking at the individual-level data. Positive perceptions of one's academic advisor is moderately correlated with overall satisfaction ( $r = .41$ ), but is less correlated with retention ( $r = .21$ ). Overall satisfaction is correlated .50 with retention. Thus, when accounting for the variability in student retention, academic advising only explains 4% of that variability, i.e., of all the reasons why students might intend to leave, academic advising plays a very small role.

A more sophisticated hierarchical linear regression analysis was performed in order to further explore predictors of retention. Demographic characteristics including gender, age, class standing, freshmen vs. transfer status, and race were entered in the first step, followed by student engagement in advising, their perceptions of the advising process and their academic advisor; and, concluding by entering overall satisfaction in the final step.

Age and transfer status were significant predictors of retention, such that older students ( $\beta = .12$ ) and those transferring from other colleges ( $\beta = .23$ ) were more likely to stay at WSU Vancouver. When the advising variables were entered in Step 2, only student engagement was

a significant predictor, such that students who were more engaged in the advising process and the development of their own academic/career goals had greater intentions to remain ( $\beta = .20$ ). Notably, neither perceptions of the institutional structure of advising ( $\beta = .04$ , *ns*) nor perceptions regarding one's academic advisor ( $\beta = .08$ , *ns*) were significant predictors of retention intentions. Finally, after entering overall satisfaction in the last step, overall satisfaction was the best predictor of retention ( $\beta = .39$ ); age was no longer a significant predictor ( $\beta = .06$ ) and student engagement in advising decreased to  $\beta = .12$  ( $p < .05$ ).

Thus, as was seen at the departmental level, while advising perceptions are modestly related to overall student satisfaction, they do not appear to have a significant direct impact on student retention. Follow-up analyses broken down by class did not reveal any different findings (i.e. the pattern of results are the same for freshmen as they are for other groups of students).

## Conclusions & Recommendations

The data from the Student Advising Survey provide insight into mechanisms for improving the advising system and processes at WSU Vancouver. Specifically, the institutional structure and advising practices could be improved by:

- clarifying the distinction between and relationships among SRC, Departmental Academic Coordinators, and Faculty Advisors.
- better conveying to students the rationale for General Education Requirements and how these differ from College and/or Major requirements.
- providing an orientation to the Degree Audit System and how to interpret one's DARS report.
- providing clear and easily accessible information indicating who to contact to get different questions answered (e.g., regarding financial aid, course planning, tutoring, career counseling, etc.).
- corresponding with students in a timely fashion to provide information regarding how to access pre-registration advising.

Students, while generally expressing high levels of engagement in the advising process, should be encouraged to:

- prepare more in advance prior to pre-registration advising in order to optimize their advising sessions
- seek out opportunities to further achieve their career and educational goals (e.g., by attending campus events, workshops, and networking opportunities).

While academic advisors in general already appear to be providing the academic guidance outlined in the Vision of Academic Advising, there are certain areas where they could become more closely aligned with the goals of that vision. Specifically, advisors could consistently:

- orient students to online information available via MyWSU, the Registrar, and departmental websites
- provide students with timely information that will help students achieve their career goals (e.g., regarding graduate school, internships, and/or networking opportunities)
- inform students about tools and campus services (e.g., tutoring, career services, etc.) that can help them develop and achieve their academic and career goals.
- explain the Writing Portfolio and "timed write" requirements to students early and often.
- encourage students to approach their advisor for help if they begin to struggle academically

Based on the departmental (i.e., major) analyses, there are some units that appear to conduct advising very well and others that may wish to re-examine their advising practices to become more closely aligned with the newly developed Vision for Academic Advising at WSU Vancouver (available at: [www.vancouver.wsu.edu/ss/src/generaladvising.html](http://www.vancouver.wsu.edu/ss/src/generaladvising.html)). The data from the Advising Survey should also be made available to individual departments so that they can conduct more fine-grained analyses specific to their department in order to identify particular areas where they might focus their efforts.

Finally, given the charge of the Retention Taskforce, it was important to ascertain the extent to which advising is related to student intentions to remain at WSU Vancouver. Based on the empirical data, there appears to be little evidence that advising has a direct or significant impact on retention. However, advising is related to overall student satisfaction, which in turn is correlated with retention. Therefore, while advising may not have a direct impact on retention, it may have an indirect impact via its effect on overall student satisfaction.

## Acknowledgements

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Departments or units wishing to conduct additional exploratory analyses of the survey data should contact Tahira Probst at [probst@vancouver.wsu.edu](mailto:probst@vancouver.wsu.edu).

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