

Advising Matters: Report on the Initial Survey of Longitudinal Study Entering Freshmen Fall 2012

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Advising Matters is a multi-year institutional study of how students use and value advising services and resources on campus. Previous studies of undergraduate student experiences suggest that advising resources are important, yet disparate and uneven in utility and value. Through this study we hope to identify both formal and informal networks of information for student advising; to capture student perceptions of the quality of information provided from various advising resources; to learn what sources of advising information are most influential when students make various advising decisions; and to gather thoughts about how to improve advising.

The *Advising Matters* project includes a two-pronged approach. The baseline survey was a single snapshot view of the experiences of students over the course of their first year at UIC. The baseline survey was administered to students who entered in Fall 2011 and returned in Fall 2012. The longitudinal component is following the freshman class of 2012 over several years. The survey was administered during Fall 2012 to a sample of new first year students. This report is the first step in a longitudinal record of the advising experiences of the entering freshman class of Fall 2012.

Advising Defined

We focus on advising as distinct from academic support – that is, the myriad tutoring and learning centers available on campus. We limit the scope of the study to include the advising related to decisions about courses, major, and career; including course selection and scheduling. While we are limiting the scope of this study to this definition of advising, we acknowledge that students obtain information from multiple sources, sometimes cross referencing or triangulating information sources to come to decisions related to courses, major, and career. Consequently, the survey instrument was developed with this particular definition of advising in mind.

Survey Administration

The Instrument

This survey was designed as the initial view of the early advising experiences and interactions of the Fall 2012 New Freshman Cohort reflecting on their advising experiences as they entered their first year at UIC. The electronic survey was administered in the early fall of the students' first year (Fall 2012). The survey gathered students' reflections of concerns about college, sources of information; quality, and

value of information received. Student enrollment and academic performance data were collected from student records to supplement the survey data.

Specifically, the survey questions covered:

- General areas of concern as a new student on campus, including:
 - Learning their way around campus/Learning about available resources
 - Advising
 - Academic performance;
- the sources of information and mode of contact (electronic, paper, etc.) with the student prior to enrollment;
- Providing a value to the information received from each type of advising resource, specifically asking (each with a 5 point Likert scale response);
- Students were asked an open-end response question to end the survey: *Overall, what source of advising has most influenced your academic decisions at UIC? Why?.*

The Sample

The sample was drawn from the population of 3123 UIC undergraduates who entered as new freshmen in the Fall 2012 term. A total of 1200 randomly selected students were invited to participate in the survey. The sample represented all freshman-admitting undergraduate colleges (AHS, A & A, CBA, Education, Engineering, and LAS). The racial/ethnic distribution of the sample closely reflected the eligible student population racial/ethnic distribution. A total of 390 students completed the survey. The response rate overall was 33%. A detailed table of the eligible students, sample and respondents is found in table 1.

	<u>Population</u>		<u>Sample</u>		<u>Respondents</u>		<u>Response Rate</u>
	<u>Count</u>	<u>Distribution</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Distribution</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Distribution</u>	
A&A	177	6%	55	5%	18	5%	33%
AHS	98	3%	35	3%	13	3%	37%
CBA	262	8%	116	10%	32	8%	28%
Education	57	2%	18	2%	6	2%	33%
Engineering	327	10%	130	11%	28	7%	22%
LAS	2202	71%	846	71%	293	75%	35%
	<u>3123</u>		<u>1200</u>		<u>390</u>		<u>33%</u>
Afr Amer	253	8%	96	8%	32	8%	33%
Hispanic	951	30%	359	30%	122	31%	34%
Asian	809	26%	320	27%	98	25%	31%
Caucasian	896	29%	338	28%	106	27%	31%
Other	214	7%	87	7%	32	8%	37%

Survey Results

The survey was administered during a three week window beginning the fourth week of classes. The discussion outlined here offers highlights of the survey results. The full results in table format are found in Appendix A.

New Student Concerns

One of the goals of the survey was to gauge the level of concern around various aspects of the transition to college. Specifically, we asked:

As a new student at UIC, how concerned are you about each of the following:

- Learning my way around campus
- Learning to find campus resources
- Learning to use campus resources
- Choosing a major
- Choosing classes
- Ability to get into courses that I need
- Quality of instruction
- Approachability of faculty
- Course workload
- Quality of academic advising
- Access to advisor when needed
- Doing well in classes

Responses were listed on a five-point Likert scale from 'extremely concerned' to 'Not at all concerned'.

The topic of most concern was **doing well in classes** – 70% of the students indicated that this was an area about which they were *extremely concerned* or *concerned*. The other topics of most concern included: **choosing classes** and **course workload** (both 58%), followed by **quality of academic advising**, **ability to get into courses that I need** and **quality of instruction** (56%, 54% and 50% respectively). A total of 47% of the students indicated they were *extremely concerned* or *concerned* about **access to advisors when needed**.

PreEnrollment Guidance

The survey solicited information on sources of pre-enrollment advising contact with students. The survey specified the topic of academic advice in the period prior to Summer Orientation (all students meet with a college advisor during summer orientation). The sources of advising included academic colleges, faculty and staff from 17 campus resource units (see table 2 for the complete list).

- 80% of the students reported some type of contact with their college,
- 68% interacted with a faculty member, and
- 67% had personal contact with a staff member from at least one of the 17 support services units.
- 26 respondents (7%) reported **no contact** with any UIC college office (including Honors College), any of the support units or any faculty member.

The survey asked students to specify the mode of interaction from a list: *Email, Social media, Phone, Face-to-face meeting, Other* or *No contact*. The most frequent mode of interaction is email, followed by face-to-face meetings – across the units and colleges.

Family and Informal Networks

Family and informal networks are a vital resource to incoming students. Specifically, the survey asked about advice received from ‘Family member(s)’, ‘Friend(s) from UIC’, ‘Friend(s) not from UIC’ and ‘High school teacher/counselor’. Ninety-eight percent of the students reported that they turned to at least one of the family or informal networks prior to enrolling at UIC (post-admission, before orientation). Over 90% of the students indicated they sought advice from family members and a high school teacher/counselor. Of those who sought advice from family members, 52% reported that the individuals were extremely or very helpful. This figure is 44% for ‘Friends from UIC’ and 39% and 27% for ‘High school teacher/counselor’ and ‘Friends not from UIC’ respectively.

TABLE 2: Support Services Listed in Survey

Support services and resource offices include a range of academic and student support units on campus. In some instances, (e.g., AAAN, LARES), the offices provide academic support with ties to college advising networks. In other instances, (e.g., Career Services, Disability Resource Center), services are related to specific types of academic support. In general, the units may provide advice on general academic topics.	
ACE – Academic Center for Excellence	GPPA - Guaranteed Professional Program Admissions
AAAN – African American Academic Network	LARES – Latin American Recruitment and Educational Services
AACC - African American Cultural Center	LCC – Latino Cultural Center
AARCC - Asian American Resource and Cultural Center	NASP - Native American Support Program
Athletics	President’s Award Program
Career Services	Project Chance
Disability Resource Center	UHP - Urban Health Program
Gender & Sexuality Center	Trio Program
	Women's Leadership and Resource Center

Students' Responses to Open-Ended Questions

The final question on the survey asked students, *Overall, what source of advising has most influenced your academic decisions at UIC? Why?*. A total of 331 students completed the short-answer question. The responses were then coded into 30 categories that fell under eight themes. Categorized broadly, the responses included:

- 80 (24% of the respondents) indicated that *an advisor from a college advising office or academic department* was most influential;
- 36 students (11%) reported that *staff from one of the academic support offices or associated staff*;
- 58 (18%) said *family*;
- 28 (8%) said *friend(s)*;
- 26 (8%) said *a high school teacher or counselor*;
- 25 (8%) students said they *advised themselves*;
- 2 students indicated *a professional in their intended field* was most influential;
- 31 (9%) reflected on a *process*, rather than an individual (e.g., on-line, in-person, etc.);
- 45 responses (14%) were not useable because the comment did not address the question asked.

In response to the question of *why the source of advising was most influential*, 235 of the students mentioned *access regarding general advising to answer questions and assist with academic decisions*. In some instances, students provided multiple reasons. Responses were coded to capture the multiplicity of reasons named:

- 69 mentioned assistance with *choosing classes, laying out program courses, course workload, and assistance in getting the classes they needed* (46 of those responses were in regard to assistance from academic advisors, orientation advisors, or student support staff);
- 65 mentioned advising related to *choosing a major*. 19 of those responses were in regard to advisors or student support staff, 16 regarding friends and family, 9 regarding high school counselors, 9 regarding self-advising, and 7 regarding orientation staff;
- 13 students mentioned *learning about campus resources*, and how to use resources.

Final observations

This report reflects the first *Advising Matters* interaction with these students as part of the longitudinal examination of the freshman cohort of 2012. The survey was launched during the fourth week of the fall term. Most of these students had participated in summer orientation, registered for classes, and then a few weeks later began their tenure as an undergraduate at UIC. For some students, their UIC enrollment is a watershed for their family as a first generation college student; and for others their relationship with UIC is deep with family and friends preceding them. Ultimately, it is important to understand that regardless of the circumstance, this perspective of the cohort is an early profile of their concerns, expectations and interactions with the academic systems. It serves as a basis for further examination in focus group interviews and subsequent surveys of their experiences.

This report serves to inform the campus, and particularly, the advising community of the areas and topics of concern as students begin their studies. In addition, these results inform us of the types and number of interactions that students have with the campus community prior to their enrollment. And finally, the survey highlights the people and the factors that influence students' early enrollment and academic decisions at UIC.

APPENDIX A:

Longitudinal Survey 1 - New Freshmen: Summary of Responses - part 1						
QUESTION: As a new student at UIC, how concerned are you about each of the following:						
		Extremely Concerned/ Concerned	Moderately concerned	A little concerned/ Not at all Concerned		
Learning way around campus		31.4%	19.3%	47.9%		
Locating campus resources		41.2%	27.5%	30.6%		
Learning to use campus resources		43.5%	29.0%	32.9%		
Choosing a major		48.8%	22.9%	37.5%		
Choosing classes		57.9%	24.8%	24.8%		
Ability to get into courses that I need		53.7%	19.4%	26.6%		
Quality of instruction		50.8%	21.8%	31.3%		
Approachability of faculty		46.5%	28.4%	34.6%		
Course workload		57.8%	32.1%	19.5%		
Quality of academic advising		46.1%	24.0%	32.7%		
Access to advisors when needed		48.6%	27.0%	33.0%		
Doing well in my classes		70.5%	17.7%	16.7%		
QUESTION: In the time between your admission to UIC and summer orientation, what types of personal contact did you have with advisors in the UIC colleges listed below. You might have had contact to discuss general academic topics, such as course enrollment, academic majors, or academic requirements, or for some other reason. (Each student may indicate multiple contact types.)						
Advisor from:	Email	Social Media	Phone	Face-to-Face meeting	Other	# Respondents from each college in total
A&A	25	3	8	10	4	18
AHS	45	7	17	15	4	13
CBA	32	8	8	13	7	32
Educ	22	4	5	9	2	6
Engin	35	6	9	12	3	28
LAS	173	23	52	93	24	293
Nursing	29	5	4	12	4	{across colleges}
Honors	97	11	22	40	16	{across colleges}
QUESTION: In the time between your admission to UIC and summer orientation, what types of personal contact did you have with any UIC faculty members to discuss general academic topics, such as course enrollment, academic majors, or academic requirements, or for some other reason?						
	Email	Social Media	Phone	Face-to-Face meeting	Other	
Faculty	224	24	82	114	13	

Longitudinal Survey 1 - New Freshmen: Summary of Responses - part 2						
QUESTION: In the time between your admission to UIC and summer orientation, what types of personal contact did you have with any UIC staff members from the offices listed below to discuss general academic topics, such as course enrollment, academic majors, or academic requirements, or for some other reason? (Each student may indicate multiple contact types.)						
Staff Members	Email	Social Media	Phone	Face-to-Face meeting	Other	No Contact
ACE	45	2	4	18	7	294
AAAN	42	13	14	22	8	303
AACC	19	1	1	6	3	329
AARC	52	4	4	9	5	292
Athletics	47	11	11	15	11	290
Career	76	4	7	24	5	258
Disability	17	1	3	4	2	331
Gender & Sexuality	29	1	2	11	7	308
GPPA	47	1	12	16	10	297
LARES	74	8	20	50	13	266
LCC	33	1	5	11	7	308
NASP	9	5	1	1	3	338
PAP	71	11	14	34	10	274
CHANCE	30	1	5	10	5	312
UHP	24	0	1	5	4	316
TRIO	13	0	4	4	3	336
WLR/CAN	23	2	1	4	7	322
QUESTION: In addition to campus resources, sometimes students seek advice from informal networks such as family and friends. Please indicate how helpful(if applicable) the following people were in making decisions about course selection and /or major?						
		Extremely Helpful/ Very helpful	Moderately helpful	Slightly helpful/ Not helpful at all		
Family Member		52.0%	22.8%	25.3%		
Friend(s) from UIC		43.9%	29.9%	26.1%		
Friend(s) not from UIC		27.0%	30.0%	43.0%		
High School Teacher/ Counselor		39.3%	29.2%	31.5%		