

# Undergraduate Students' Perceptions of Academic Advising

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## Abstract

Academic advising is an essential element of a college system that can help students solve their academic problems and succeed in their academic and professional careers. Higher education institutions have used students' assessments to gauge teaching effectiveness and academic advising. The goal of this study was to seek students' input about academic advising and solicit suggestions to improve it. The specific objectives of the study were to conduct a decade-long assessment of students' perspectives of academic advising and to ascertain whether students' perceptions of academic advising differ by their demographic characteristics and academic years. The results of online surveys conducted from 2005 to 2013 show that, overall, the respondents were positive about academic advising services. The newer and female students tended to be more satisfied with academic advising than the older and male students. Respondents indicated the need to improve advising related to participation in volunteer and study abroad programs. Strengths and weaknesses of academic advising specific to the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (CANR) at Michigan State University are discussed here together with suggestions for improvements.

## Introduction

Academic advising is an essential element of a college system. Colleges offer academic advising to inform students about academic requirements, to help students find resources (educational and others) and to familiarize them with college cultures. Academic advising is also considered important for students' professional success. Drake (2011) states that advisors guide students to negotiate the higher education maze, to make effective and thoughtful decisions about their futures, to adapt their life skills to the new academic

world and to cultivate the academic skills and knowledge needed to succeed. Increasing student-faculty contact, encouraging active learning, exchanging prompt feedback and emphasizing time on task are some of the good practices of undergraduate education (Chickering and Gamson, 1987) that could be fostered through good academic advising. Examining how advising service is offered and how useful students perceive and find advising for their academic and professional careers is of interest to colleges, advisors and parents who are interested in their sons' and daughters' success. No one else could assess academic advising better than the firsthand consumers, college students themselves.

Soliciting students' input to improve college education is a common phenomenon. Research shows that students report their activities accurately and their judgments of educational experiences are consistent, reliable and valid (Higgins et al., 2002). Colleges can use students' perceptions of their academic experiences as indicators of college and departmental excellence in teaching and advising (Shrestha, 2009). Several studies show that students' retention in college is directly related to their experience in and satisfaction with academic advising (Noel-Levitz Inc., 2006). Students' dissatisfaction with academic advising, career counseling and job placement services has also been reported (Kotler and Fox, 1995; Saenz and Barrera, 2007). Examining results from an institutional perspective has been the focus of many past studies (Corts et al., 2000). Academic advising and mentoring, however, which make a significant contribution to students' academic and personal development, have not been fully examined.

This study is based on the theories on student development posited by Astin (1984), Tinto (1987) and Terenzini and Pascarella (1991). Astin (1984) argues

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that students' proficiencies (academic and other) depend on how they interact or are involved in college and how often they interact with faculty members. He argues that availability of faculty members, student affairs professionals and resources is essential for students to develop. Tinto (1987) stresses that students come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and they depart college when they do not feel at home at college or find college welcoming to them. Colleges must intentionally help those students integrate socially and intellectually with the culture of the college by creating opportunities for extracurricular activities, informal student interactions and faculty-student interactions. Thus, academic advising to students remains an essential component of college education.

Terenzini and Pascarella (1991) emphasize the need to assess the effect of faculty help and advising in students of various demographic backgrounds. Students' feedback on academic programs will help college administrators, department heads and faculty members design new courses, improve existing course curricula and implement academic programs effectively. Shrestha (2009) studied students' perceptions of advising at MSU with only a few years' data. To understand advising better, a study with a wider data range was deemed necessary. This study was conducted to fill these information gaps.

### Objectives

The overall purpose of this study was to assess students' perceptions about and solicit suggestions to improve academic advising in the CANR. The specific objectives were to assess the trends of academic advising in the CANR at MSU over the past nine years and examine students' perspectives of academic advising by their demographics and academic years.

### Methods

The undergraduate students in the CANR at MSU were the population of interest for this study. This study used data obtained from online surveys of undergraduates in the CANR conducted from spring 2005 to spring 2013. The MSU Institutional Review Board approved the protocol for the study and deemed it exempt. The survey instrument for this study was developed by the Center for Evaluative Studies at MSU and was reviewed by the academic advisors within the CANR before data collection. The students' perceptions about academic advising were assessed by 10 statements measured on a Likert scale rating where 1 equated to "strongly disagree" and 5 equated to "strongly agree." The statements covered such aspects as advisor accessibility, advisor knowledge and helpfulness, encouragement of students in academic and professional growth and providing timely information for the successful education of students. Statements about academic advising were adapted from the student evaluation of advising form developed by Zimmerman and Mokma (2004). A Cronbach's alpha coefficient

calculated to determine the reliability of the survey instrument pertaining to items for academic advising was 0.93.

There were also open-ended questions in the survey asking students to write about the strengths and the weaknesses of academic advising and make suggestions to address the gaps.

The online survey was sent to all the undergraduate students registered for the spring semester each year from 2005 to 2013 during the last week of March and remained active until the end of April of the same year. Three follow-up reminder emails were sent along with a link to the survey within two weeks after the first survey was sent. As an incentive, survey participants were provided with a two-scoop ice cream coupon to encourage participation. The survey yielded an aggregate response rate of 24% which is typical to Internet survey with college students.

Various statistical procedures were employed to analyze and summarize the data. Besides descriptive statistics (frequency, mean and standard deviation), independent t-tests were calculated to determine the differences in students' perceptions by their gender, ethnicity, residence and residency status. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) (F-test) was used to determine differences between students' perceptions of advising by their academic years. The cut-off point for significance was set at 0.05.

### Results

A total of 4,875 CANR undergraduate students – freshmen (15%), sophomores (24%), juniors (42%) and seniors (19%)—participated in the online surveys. Males and females accounted for 35% and 65%, respectively. The majority (86.2%) of the respondents were white. The remaining 13.8% non-white students comprised Hispanics, African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans and others. More than half (57.2%) of the respondents were from suburban or urban areas and 42.8% of the respondents were from rural areas. Nine out of 10 respondents were in-state (Michigan) and 9.4% of respondents were out-of-state including international students. In general, respondents in this study were similar to the overall population of CANR students except for gender. The percentage of female students responding to this survey was slightly higher than the proportion of females in the population, so gender differences, if any, may need to be interpreted with caution.

#### Student Perceptions of Academic Advising

Overall, students reacted positively ( $4.14 \pm 0.96$ ) to the academic advising they received from their respective advisors (Table 1). The students' rating of academic advising in the CANR is above the undergraduates' ratings (3.34) of academic advising at the University of California, Davis (Hunziker, 1991). Nonetheless, there was a marginal drop in ratings of all aspects of academic

**Table 1. Responses about Student's Perceptions of Academic Advising.<sup>a</sup>**

|  | Year of Survey (N) |                |                |                |                |                |                |                |                |                              |
|--|--------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|------------------------------|
|  | 2005<br>(225)      | 2006<br>(495)  | 2007<br>(520)  | 2008<br>(779)  | 2009<br>(619)  | 2010<br>(516)  | 2011<br>(549)  | 2012<br>(561)  | 2013<br>(488)  | Nine- year average<br>(4765) |
|  | Mean(SD)           |                |                |                |                |                |                |                |                |                              |
| My major advisor is easily accessible.                                       | 4.19<br>(0.94)     | 4.22<br>(0.85) | 4.15<br>(0.99) | 4.08<br>(0.92) | 4.10<br>(0.88) | 4.26<br>(0.87) | 4.22<br>(0.91) | 4.32<br>(0.85) | 4.21<br>(0.92) | 4.19<br>(0.89)               |
| My major advisor gives me accurate information about degree requirements.    | 4.25<br>(0.86)     | 4.19<br>(0.85) | 4.25<br>(0.83) | 4.11<br>(0.90) | 4.13<br>(0.94) | 4.29<br>(0.81) | 4.25<br>(0.88) | 4.32<br>(0.84) | 4.29<br>(0.88) | 4.22<br>(0.87)               |
| My major advisor helps me with academic problems.                            | 4.10<br>(0.87)     | 4.03<br>(0.89) | 4.00<br>(0.97) | 3.94<br>(0.96) | 3.97<br>(0.97) | 4.13<br>(0.92) | 4.09<br>(0.96) | 4.13<br>(0.92) | 4.14<br>(0.91) | 4.05<br>(0.94)               |
| My major advisor refers me to helpful resources when I need them.            | 4.08<br>(0.88)     | 4.07<br>(0.87) | 3.99<br>(0.95) | 3.96<br>(0.92) | 4.00<br>(0.95) | 4.10<br>(0.88) | 4.11<br>(0.93) | 4.18<br>(0.87) | 4.14<br>(0.96) | 4.06<br>(0.92)               |
| My major advisor provides timely information on internship opportunities.    | 3.98<br>(0.92)     | 3.98<br>(0.90) | 3.84<br>(1.02) | 3.88<br>(0.92) | 3.97<br>(0.94) | 4.07<br>(0.92) | 4.08<br>(0.96) | 4.14<br>(0.88) | 4.05<br>(0.96) | 4.00<br>(0.94)               |
| My major advisor encourages me to participate in internships.                | 4.04<br>(0.88)     | 4.00<br>(0.87) | 3.89<br>(1.03) | 3.90<br>(0.96) | 3.94<br>(0.94) | 4.11<br>(0.89) | 4.11<br>(0.94) | 4.22<br>(0.83) | 4.12<br>(0.90) | 4.03<br>(0.93)               |
| My major advisor encourages me to participate in study abroad.               | 3.77<br>(0.92)     | 3.77<br>(0.91) | 3.70<br>(1.00) | 3.53<br>(1.02) | 3.59<br>(1.03) | 3.72<br>(1.01) | 3.84<br>(0.97) | 3.86<br>(0.99) | 3.85<br>(0.96) | 3.72<br>(0.99)               |
| My major advisor encourages me to participate in volunteer programs.         | 3.40<br>(0.91)     | 3.59<br>(0.96) | 3.52<br>(1.04) | 3.41<br>(0.98) | 3.43<br>(0.97) | 3.60<br>(0.98) | 3.69<br>(1.00) | 3.77<br>(0.97) | 3.72<br>(1.0)  | 3.57<br>(0.99)               |
| My major advisor shares information on career opportunities.                 | 3.99<br>(0.92)     | 3.97<br>(0.89) | 3.88<br>(1.00) | 3.84<br>(0.98) | 3.88<br>(0.95) | 4.01<br>(0.93) | 4.02<br>(0.97) | 4.17<br>(0.84) | 4.05<br>(0.95) | 3.97<br>(0.94)               |
| Overall, I am satisfied with the academic advising services I have received. | 4.21<br>(0.86)     | 4.19<br>(0.88) | 4.10<br>(0.99) | 4.00<br>(1.02) | 4.05<br>(1.00) | 4.22<br>(0.93) | 4.14<br>(0.97) | 4.27<br>(0.87) | 4.18<br>(0.96) | 4.14<br>(0.96)               |

<sup>a</sup>Scale: 1= strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither disagree nor agree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.

**Table 2. Independent t-test Results of Academic Advising by Demographics.**

| Statements   | Male (n=1,638),<br>Female (n=3,058)    |                          |         | White (n=4,032),<br>Non-white (n=393) |                              |         | Rural (n=2,004),<br>Urban (n=2,688) |                          |         | In-state (n=4,247),<br>Out-of-state (n=443) |                                    |         |
|--|--|--------------------------|---------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------|---|------------------------------------|---------|
|  | M <sup>a</sup>                         | t value                  | p value | M <sup>a</sup>                        | t value                      | p value | M <sup>a</sup>                      | t value                  | p value | M <sup>a</sup>                              | t value                            | p value |
|  | My major advisor is easily accessible. | Male 4.16<br>Female 4.20 | 1.343   | 0.180                                 | White 4.20<br>Non-white 4.13 | 1.685   | 0.090                               | Rural 4.20<br>Urban 4.18 | 0.653   | 0.510                                       | In-state 4.20<br>Out-of-state 4.13 | 1.335   |
| My major advisor gives me accurate information about degree requirements.    | Male 4.20<br>Female 4.24               | 1.366                    | 0.170   | White 4.23<br>Non-white 4.18          | 1.226                        | 0.220   | Rural 4.21<br>Urban 4.24            | 1.044                    | 0.300   | In-state 4.23<br>Out-of-state 4.21          | 0.502                              | 0.620   |
| My major advisor helps me with academic problems.                            | Male 3.98<br>Female 4.08               | 3.500                    | 0.000   | White 4.06<br>Non-white 3.98          | 1.446                        | 0.150   | Rural 4.05<br>Urban 4.05            | 0.187                    | 0.850   | In-state 4.05<br>Out-of-state 4.01          | 0.976                              | 0.330   |
| My major advisor refers me to helpful resources when I need them.            | Male 4.02<br>Female 4.09               | 2.601                    | 0.010   | White 4.07<br>Non-white 4.03          | 0.963                        | 0.340   | Rural 4.07<br>Urban 4.06            | 0.567                    | 0.570   | In-state 4.07<br>Out-of-state 4.05          | 0.375                              | 0.710   |
| My major advisor provides timely information on internship opportunities.    | Male 4.04<br>Female 3.97               | 2.403                    | 0.020   | White 4.00<br>Non-white 4.00          | 0.015                        | 0.990   | Rural 4.00<br>Urban 3.99            | 0.290                    | 0.770   | In-state 4.00<br>Out-of-state 3.98          | 0.513                              | 0.610   |
| My major advisor encourages me to participate in internships.                | Male 4.07<br>Female 4.01               | 2.379                    | 0.020   | White 4.04<br>Non-white 3.95          | 1.986                        | 0.050   | Rural 4.04<br>Urban 4.02            | 0.433                    | 0.670   | In-state 4.03<br>Out-of-state 4.00          | 0.796                              | 0.430   |
| My major advisor encourages me to participate in study abroad.               | Male 3.67<br>Female 3.75               | 2.650                    | 0.010   | White 3.73<br>Non-white 3.67          | 1.194                        | 0.230   | Rural 3.73<br>Urban 3.72            | 0.257                    | 0.800   | In-state 3.71<br>Out-of-state 3.82          | 2.187                              | 0.030   |
| My major advisor encourages me to participate in volunteer programs.         | Male 3.49<br>Female 3.61               | 4.169                    | 0.000   | White 3.56<br>Non-white 3.60          | 0.730                        | 0.470   | Rural 3.54<br>Urban 3.59            | 1.496                    | 0.140   | In-state 3.56<br>Out-of-state 3.71          | 3.029                              | 0.000   |
| My major advisor shares information on career opportunities.                 | Male 4.01<br>Female 3.95               | 2.103                    | 0.040   | White 3.97<br>Non-white 3.95          | 0.467                        | 0.640   | Rural 4.00<br>Urban 3.95            | 1.768                    | 0.080   | In-state 3.98<br>Out-of-state 3.94          | 0.860                              | 0.390   |
| Overall, I am satisfied with the academic advising services I have received. | Male 4.13<br>Female 4.14               | 0.540                    | 0.590   | White 4.15<br>Non-white 4.06          | 1.801                        | 0.070   | Rural 4.14<br>Urban 4.14            | 0.168                    | 0.870   | In-state 4.15<br>Out-of-state 4.09          | 1.049                              | 0.290   |

<sup>a</sup>Scale: 1= strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither disagree nor agree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.

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advising services from 2007 to 2009 in the CANR at MSU. The lowest scores were found for statements pertaining to advisors' role to help students to participate in volunteer (3.57 ± 0.99) and study abroad programs (3.72 ± 0.99).

### Students' Perceptions of Academic Advising by Demographics

Students' perceptions of academic advising were analyzed by demographic characteristics. Independent t-test results revealed that female students felt more positively than male students about four statements on academic advising—advisors helping with academic problems ( $p < 0.001$ ), advisors referring to helpful resources when needed ( $p < 0.05$ ), advisors encouraging participation in study abroad program ( $p < 0.05$ ) and advisors encouraging participation in volunteer programs ( $p < 0.001$ ) (Table 2). Male students rated interactions with advisors more favorably in providing timely information on internship programs ( $p < 0.05$ ), encouraging participation in those internships ( $p < 0.05$ ) and sharing information on career opportunities ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 2).

White students perceived advisors' encouragement to participate in internships more positively ( $p = 0.05$ ) than non-white students did. No differences were found between rural and urban students in their perceptions of academic advising. Out-of-state students' perceptions about advisors' encouragement to participate in study abroad ( $p < 0.05$ ) and volunteer program ( $p < 0.001$ ) were more positive than in-state students' were. Though non-significant, in-state students had a higher overall rating on academic advising.

### Students' Perceptions of Academic Advising by Academic Years

Freshmen tended to hold more positive and different perceptions about academic advising services than seniors (Table 3). As students climb the academic ladder, their ratings of academic advising tend to decline. Freshmen rated academic advising higher than seniors on each of the following statements: my advisor gives me accurate information about degree requirements ( $p < 0.01$ ), my major advisor helps me with academic problems ( $p < 0.01$ ), my major advisor encourages me to participate in study abroad ( $p < 0.001$ ) and, overall, I am satisfied with the academic advising services I have received ( $p < 0.01$ ). Although non-significant, seniors' rating of advisors providing timely information on internship opportunities was the highest (4.04 ± 1.0). Juniors and seniors shared similar reactions to academic advisors' encouragement of participation in internships (4.05 for each).

## Discussion

College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (CANR) undergraduate students are generally satisfied with the academic advising services they received from the college over the past nine years, but they wanted more support and encouragement from their major advisors about participation in study abroad and volunteer programs. Except for advisors providing accurate information about degree requirements, however, perceptions to all other advising services saw a marginal decline from 2007 to 2009, though students' perceptions of academic advising were still positive. The perceptions improved again from 2010. What exactly led to the decline in perceptions of advising is not clear, though this could have been a reflection of the change in academic administration in the college within this period.

Among the four demographic traits tested, residence (urban, rural) was the only trait where students had the same overall perception ratings to academic advising. Regardless of residence, students maintained similar attitudes toward academic advising services.

**Table 3. Responses on Students' Perceptions of Academic Advising by Academic Year.**

| Statements   | Academic status (N):   |  | Mean | F value | p value  |
|--|--|--|------|---------|----------|
|  | freshman (735), sophomore (1,129), junior (1985), senior (907) |  |      |         |          |
| My major advisor is easily accessible.                                       | Freshman   |  | 4.23 | 1.208   | 0.305    |
|  | Sophomore  |  | 4.20 |         |          |
|  | Junior   |  | 4.19 |         |          |
|  | Senior   |  | 4.15 |         |          |
| My major advisor gives me accurate information about degree requirements.    | Freshman   |  | 4.33 | 5.010   | 0.002**  |
|  | Sophomore  |  | 4.23 |         |          |
|  | Junior   |  | 4.21 |         |          |
|  | Senior   |  | 4.17 |         |          |
| My major advisor helps me with academic problems.                            | Freshman   |  | 4.15 | 3.975   | 0.008**  |
|  | Sophomore  |  | 4.05 |         |          |
|  | Junior   |  | 4.03 |         |          |
|  | Senior   |  | 3.99 |         |          |
| My major advisor refers me to helpful resources when I need them.            | Freshman   |  | 4.12 | 2.286   | 0.077    |
|  | Sophomore  |  | 4.08 |         |          |
|  | Junior   |  | 4.05 |         |          |
|  | Senior   |  | 4.01 |         |          |
| My major advisor provides timely information on internship opportunities.    | Freshman   |  | 3.96 | 1.058   | 0.366    |
|  | Sophomore  |  | 3.98 |         |          |
|  | Junior   |  | 4.00 |         |          |
|  | Senior   |  | 4.04 |         |          |
| My major advisor encourages me to participate in internships.                | Freshman   |  | 3.97 | 1.873   | 0.132    |
|  | Sophomore  |  | 4.01 |         |          |
|  | Junior   |  | 4.05 |         |          |
|  | Senior   |  | 4.05 |         |          |
| My major advisor encourages me to participate in study abroad.               | Freshman   |  | 3.85 | 9.865   | 0.000*** |
|  | Sophomore  |  | 3.76 |         |          |
|  | Junior   |  | 3.70 |         |          |
|  | Senior   |  | 3.60 |         |          |
| My major advisor encourages me to participate in volunteer programs.         | Freshman   |  | 3.61 | 2.594   | 0.051    |
|  | Sophomore  |  | 3.57 |         |          |
|  | Junior   |  | 3.59 |         |          |
|  | Senior   |  | 3.49 |         |          |
| My major advisor shares information on career opportunities.                 | Freshman   |  | 3.93 | 0.410   | 0.746    |
|  | Sophomore  |  | 3.98 |         |          |
|  | Junior   |  | 3.97 |         |          |
|  | Senior   |  | 3.97 |         |          |
| Overall, I am satisfied with the academic advising services I have received. | Freshman   |  | 4.21 | 4.393   | 0.004**  |
|  | Sophomore  |  | 4.17 |         |          |
|  | Junior   |  | 4.13 |         |          |
|  | Senior   |  | 4.05 |         |          |

\*\* and \*\*\* significant at  $p = 0.01$  and  $0.001$ , respectively, using one-way ANOVA test.

Male students rated academic advising lower than female students and most of the differences, except for two statements, were statistically significant. This finding supports Russel et al.'s (2008) stand that students' perceptions of advising differ by gender. Our finding is also consistent with that of Sax et al. (2005), who reported more frequent and positive interactions between female students and faculty members. Our results differ from those of Afshar and Dhiman (2008), however, who reported that female students' ratings on academic advising were lower than those of their male cohorts.

In the MSU study, younger students tended to be more positive about academic advising than older students and there were more young female students than male students in the CANR. This could be the reason for higher ratings of advising by female students.

White students perceived academic advising more positively than non-white students. This finding is not consistent with Strayhorn (2008), who found that African American high achievers were more satisfied with academic advising experiences than white students.

Students who live close by their families and friends while at college -- for example, in-state students -- may opt out of study abroad (Li et al., 2013) because the perceived costs of attending study abroad outweigh the perceived benefits. Students' understanding of volunteer programs could be similar. Colleges need to make extra efforts to encourage these students to join study abroad and volunteering programs. These could be the reasons that in-state students' ratings were lower to study abroad and volunteering programs.

Though the difference was not significant, in-state students felt more positive toward all advising services except those about study abroad and volunteering. It is possible that in-state students are more knowledgeable about the college, the college cultures and the courses than out-of-state students and they are more affirmative about the academic advising. Students coming from out-of-state and from out-of-country have to overcome several challenges. It is a huge transition for students to start college life in a completely new country or a new state. Some students may even experience sociocultural shock and the biophysical environment may be strange and unwelcoming for others. It takes time for them to adjust to the college culture. Advising services offered by colleges to freshmen and especially to out-of-state/international students become crucial for their smooth transition to college life. Orientations through student organizations also can be invaluable to new students to help them learn about and get acquainted with the college systems.

Students' perceptions of advising about participation in study abroad improved over the years, from 3.77 in 2005 to 3.85 in 2013. The higher ratings on study abroad may be attributed to MSU's good reputation for study abroad programs. The rating on volunteer programs also improved, from 3.40 in 2005 to 3.72 in 2013. Ratings on study abroad and volunteering were lower throughout

the study period than ratings on other variables, however. These findings suggest that the CANR needs to organize more informational meetings and provide more support for study abroad and volunteer programs.

Freshmen were more positive about academic advising than seniors and these findings are consistent with those of Afshar and Dhiman (2008) and Hester (2008). However, our findings contradict those of Russel et al. (2008), who reported no differences in perceived satisfaction with academic advising by class levels. Soria (2012) reported that the satisfaction of freshmen with college staff/advisors is positively predictive of their retention in college. High quality academic advising negatively influences students' attrition (Metzner, 1989). Positive ratings of academic advising by freshmen indicate a reduced attrition vis-a-vis increased retention of students in the college.

To examine the academic advising services in the CANR further, students were asked to write about strengths and weaknesses of academic advising and make suggestions to improve this service. Some of the strengths of academic advising that students mentioned are good communication between advisors and advisees, advisors were accessible, advisors were flexible and advising helped students get internship opportunities and prepared them to get jobs after graduation. Students felt the need for advisors to have up-to-date information to share with students.

One student wrote: "...they [CANR departments] have a very strong, supportive and eager to help faculty and advising program.... The advising program is also very helpful, they are constantly sending out emails about job offerings and internships." Other respondents wrote: "She [advisor] was willing to be flexible to allow me to take certain classes that I was interested in and was always very encouraging."; "He [advisor] is so helpful and really gets to know his students so that he can direct them correctly in course selection and internships. He has really helped me find out what I want to do after graduation...." Some students expressed strengths of academic advising, such as: "The adviser ... is extremely helpful to the students and always makes sure that we have all the information she gets about internships, scholarships, etc..."; "The advisors are very helpful.... They also give a lot of advice and information regarding internship opportunities. They work hard to help ensure you are ready for a career after college and that you have a job." These experiences of students support the concept that effective academic advising helps students connect with the people (Swanson, 2006), become involved in research, find internships and secure jobs after graduation. Along the same line, a freshman wrote: "I am just a freshman here and I already have an internship with one of the largest companies in the world, you can't get that anywhere else. The connections I have gained and will gain before graduation will help me when I enter the workforce here in about 3 years. The strengths of this College are the ability to get involved with hands-on research that actually has an impact, the



## Undergraduate Students' Perceptions

*ability to gain connections in the field and the experience level of those teaching our courses."*

Some of the weaknesses of academic advising that students mentioned included: advisors are unorganized, they do not have up-to-date information, advisors are very busy, advisors do not communicate well to students and advisors are unwelcoming and non-responsive. Few students shared dissatisfactions with academic advising, such as, *"Sometimes...the advisers are burnt-out from their classroom responsibilities and do not have any desire or energy to put towards advising students and building relationships with them...some advisors would much rather handle things over e-mail than meet face to face... this leads to communication errors and misinterpreted questions/answers."* Other weaknesses students mentioned are: *"There has been countless times where I have sent emails regarding classes and have gotten no response. This is not just her fault; every time I meet with her in person, her phone and computer are blowing up with calls. It's not fair to her or the students to spread advising so thinly. I have not met a satisfactory adviser at MSU in the past four years ... has come as close to it as anyone will, but if she continues to be spread so thinly, students will continue with less guidance than needed."* Two problems mentioned here are unwillingness of the advisor himself/herself and unpreparedness of the college to effectively mobilize its human resources. This highlights the role of college management in academic advising.

Respondents offered a number of suggestions to improve advising: promoting effective teaching and advising in college, having more than one advisor available for each degree program, reaching the freshmen more and helping them with their problems, more communication between students and advisors and effective delivery of messages, use of e-mails and websites in communication and regular evaluation of academic advising services.

### Summary

Undergraduates were positive about academic advising and the ratings on all academic advising services have been improving. However, respondents differed in their perception of advising by gender, residence and academic year, with female, in-state and freshmen students feeling more positive about advising. Respondents also indicated that advisors needed to be organized and communicate more frequently with the students. Further, they felt a need for better advising about study abroad and volunteer programs, which could help them prepare for jobs. These results lead to the following recommendations.

First, colleges should strengthen the advising services promoting study abroad programs. Academic advisors could articulate the benefits of participating in study abroad program and provide information on various programs. They could offer orientation programs providing information about the types of study abroad programs offered, possible sources of funding for study abroad

and the programs with the best fit for their academic majors.

Second, volunteering enriches students' job exposure and work skills and so helps students attain their career goals. Volunteering can also enhance networking with employers and other stakeholders. Low ratings on advising about opportunities for volunteering suggest that college management may need to explore ways to promote volunteerism. It may help find organizations that accept student volunteers and encourage students to connect with these organizations.

Third, colleges should explore further to understand why males, non-white students and seniors were less positive about advising. Advisors may need to schedule additional follow-up meetings with these students to ensure adequate academic advice. To remain current with the students' advising needs and improve advising, colleges may need to evaluate their advising services periodically. Fourth, advisors should be interested in and committed to understanding their advisees' needs and be prepared to advise students accordingly. We urge colleges to recognize and sustain advising services of their faculty members. Colleges can solicit advisors' inputs about and suggestions to improve academic advising. Increased communication between students and advisors would also bolster advising.

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