

Institutional Analysis, Assessment & Reporting

How do Students View Advising? Results from the Fall 2010 Advising Survey

Background

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Every three years since 2004, the Advising Council has conducted a survey of undergraduate students' perceptions of academic advising. In the fall of 2010, the survey was conducted for a third time using many of the same items employed in 2004 and/or 2007. Readers interested in comparisons to prior years can find the report at the Institutional Analysis, Assessment, and Reporting webpage under "Reports" (Go to: [Research Report 2011-02](#))

All degree-seeking undergraduates (N=16,287) were invited to complete the on-line survey. A total of 5,167 took the survey for a response rate of 32%. Students who completed the survey were entered into a drawing for one of four \$500 certificates to the BSU bookstore.

All undergraduate students were surveyed rather than a random sample in order to be able to provide academic departments with a set of survey responses for their majors. Departmental results can be found by going to: [Survey Results](#) and then selecting the college and department of interest. A university-wide set of results is also available. Departments can also request a listing of suggestions given by their majors for improving the advising process from IAAR.

The purpose of this report is to discuss major findings from the survey. The results are presented under the following categories:

- Perceptions of the current advising system
- Meeting with an advisor
- Exchanging and using information
- Impressions of their advisor
- Advising without seeing an advisor

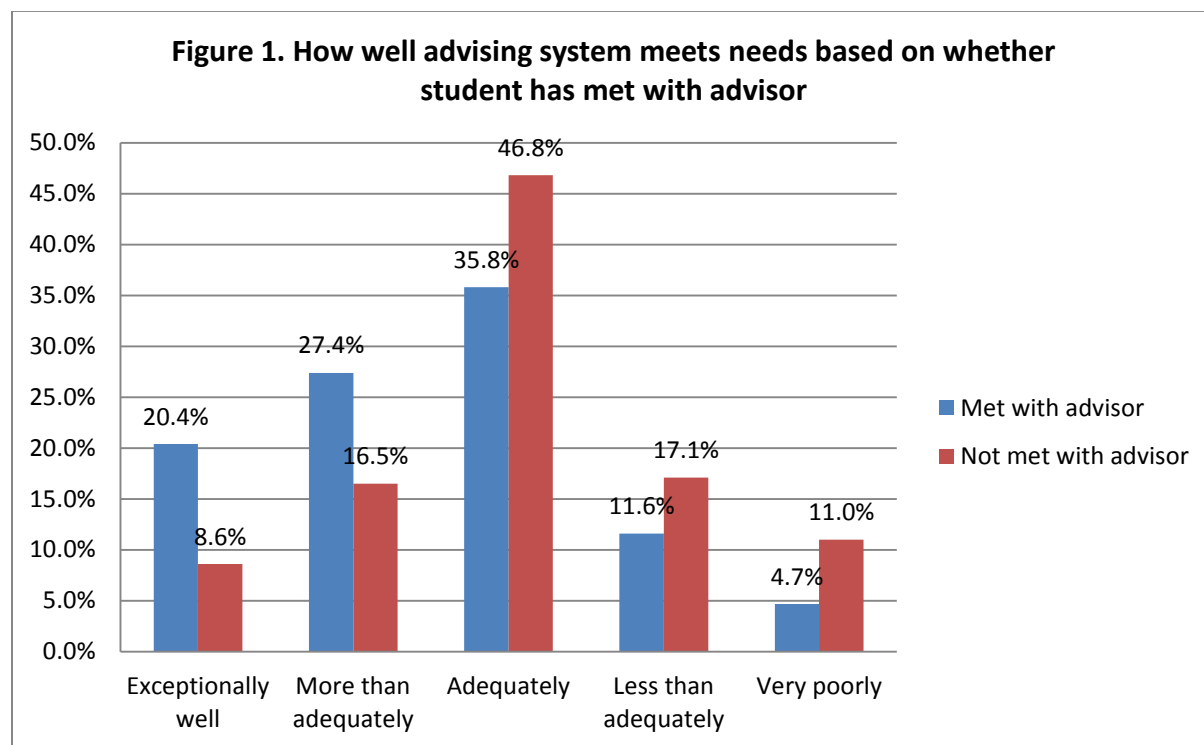
Perceptions of the Current Advising System

Students were asked about their perceptions of the current advising system through two questions: (1) a rating on the perceived effectiveness of the current system and (2) an open-ended question that asked students to identify one thing their department could do to improve advising.

Overall, 44% felt that the current advising system met their needs "exceptionally well" or "more than adequately." An additional 38% thought the current system "adequately" met their needs. As shown by Figure 1 below, students who had received advising were more likely to feel the advising system met their needs compared to those who had not met with an advisor.

To get a better handle on the many open-ended comments given in response to the question about identifying one thing that their department could do to improve advising, a small group

from the Advising Council was formed to read the comments. A coding system was developed by the group and then groups of comments by college were assigned to the coders for review and coding. Table 1 below describes the coding system used.



The largest number of comments (about 20%) involved the availability of advisors. Examples of comments included:

- My adviser always seems to be gone when I need him. But I'm glad the ___ Department got a student adviser. He was very helpful and knowledgeable.
- The department of ___ was difficult to contact. They weren't at my orientation. So, I decided what classes I needed on my own. When I came here, I tried to set up an appointment immediately. No one contacted me for a month. Their emails and notes said they were still gone for the summer. However, when I was finally able to meet with someone. I was helped more than adequately.
- The only thing that is hard is working with schedules. Everyone has different schedules it is hard to find a time to sit and talk, but no matter what you do it is always going to be like that, so I think that the advisors do very well in their attempts to meet with students.
- It was very difficult to contact anyone or get a response but once I eventually did they were very helpful
- Provide the email and times my advisor can meet and phone number, not just the name of advisor.
- Make it easier to get in touch with advisors. I understand that there are 20,000 students but each student should be assigned an advisor. Before I came to Boise State I had several questions and I was unable to contact anyone and they didn't make it obvious who I was supposed to contact.

Table 1. Coding of Advising Comments

Abbreviation	Code Name	Includes any comment that:	Percent of all comments
REQ	Required advising	Implies “forcing” a student into an advising session of any kind	3 %
OUT	Outreach to advisees	Discusses proactive communication with students, either at the departmental or individual advisor level	14%
ASSN	Advisor assignment	Discusses assignment of students to advisors or consistency of advisor across advising sessions	12%
RATIO	Advisor/student ratio	States a need for more advisors	3%
AVAIL	Availability/ accessibility of advisors	Discusses office hours, advisor location, response to e-mails, etc.	21%
SK-K	Advisor skills – knowledge	Discusses things an advisor should know <u>from a student perspective</u> , even if it’s something the advisor should refer elsewhere	16%
SK-I	Advisor skills – interpersonal	Discusses how the advisor should act (e.g., interested, not rushed)	6%
CAREER	Career advising	Discusses anything about careers for the majors or gaining job skills. Note that a comment where the student says that their advisor should know more about potential career would be coded here instead of SK-K	2%
MAT	Advising Materials	Focuses on materials used in advising, not the knowledge needed by an individual advisor	4%
POS	General positive comment	Implies everything is fine	13%
NA	Not advising	Doesn’t really discuss an advising issue (e.g., papers should be returned more promptly in my history class)	4%
OTHER	Other	Has content that doesn’t fit any of the above categories	2%

The second area that generated the largest number of comments (16%) was the **knowledge levels** of the advisors. Many of the comments focused on providing accurate information, especially for transfer students. Others suggested training to improve advising. Examples which fell under this category included:

- I have regularly seen my advisors since starting in 2007. At the beginning I was assured I was on track, yet since my junior year I have been redirected several times and received different information each time. Consequently, I was told I am eleven credits short and had to take additional summer classes in order to graduate in spring of '11. I was told again I was fine if I did this yet when I met with yet another advisor before registering for spring, I was told I am lacking diversity credits. Needless to say I have been very frustrated in trying to get a straight answer. I feel each of the advisors in my department did not understand fully all the rules and regulations since their main

purpose is a professor not advisor. I feel there should be a person in each department whose main responsibility is advising students. To ensure that the quality of the information is accurate and up to date.

- I do not like how there are student advisors. They give different information from the faculty. I think everybody needs to be on the same page. It is the most frustrating thing for a student to have a question and seek out advice from someone and be told two completely different answers by advisors.
- Know information on the teacher education program. Secondary education students are supposed to get their advising through the major department offering the degree, and yet most of those departments are not familiar with the specifics of the education portion of the degree. A student pursuing one of these degrees has to try to go to the College of Education to request information, and usually gets sent back to their department. It is very frustrating.
- I think that the faculty at BSU needs to understand that the students who are new or transferring don't understand how to add classes here. They need to be more available to help with all the questions that come up while picking classes and be able to clearly tell that particular student what exactly he or she needs to be enrolling in.
- Have more training so that staff is better equipped to answer questions accurately instead of assuming that something is correct.

The third area involved student comments/suggestions on developing more active **outreach** strategies to students. Comments in this area included:

- Maybe make it so that there is better communication between the advisor and student. My whole first semester here I had no idea that I even had an advisor.
- I think that asking the advisors to briefly contact all the students they are advisors to would improve the quality of advising. Right now I feel that most people don't know the best way to contact their advisors or even feel comfortable doing so. If each advisor sent out a mass email to all their students at the beginning of the semester just saying "hi" and explaining the best way they can be contacted students such as myself would be more likely to take advantage of having an advisor.
- Have small seminars to explain to students studying to become teachers about all the applications, tests, etc. they need to take and when. I was completely unaware that I had to apply to the teaching program until someone pointed it out to me.
- Send an email out to all students within the department who don't have an advisor and have them come to a large meeting where someone from the department talks about advising and introduces the advisors. Then, the students know who their advisor is and can make contact with that person.
- Be more active, usually it's students who have to take the initiative, or an assignment forces them to. Most people don't realize what an adviser can do to help

The fourth area involved the **assignment of advisors** to students. Examples of comments under this area included:

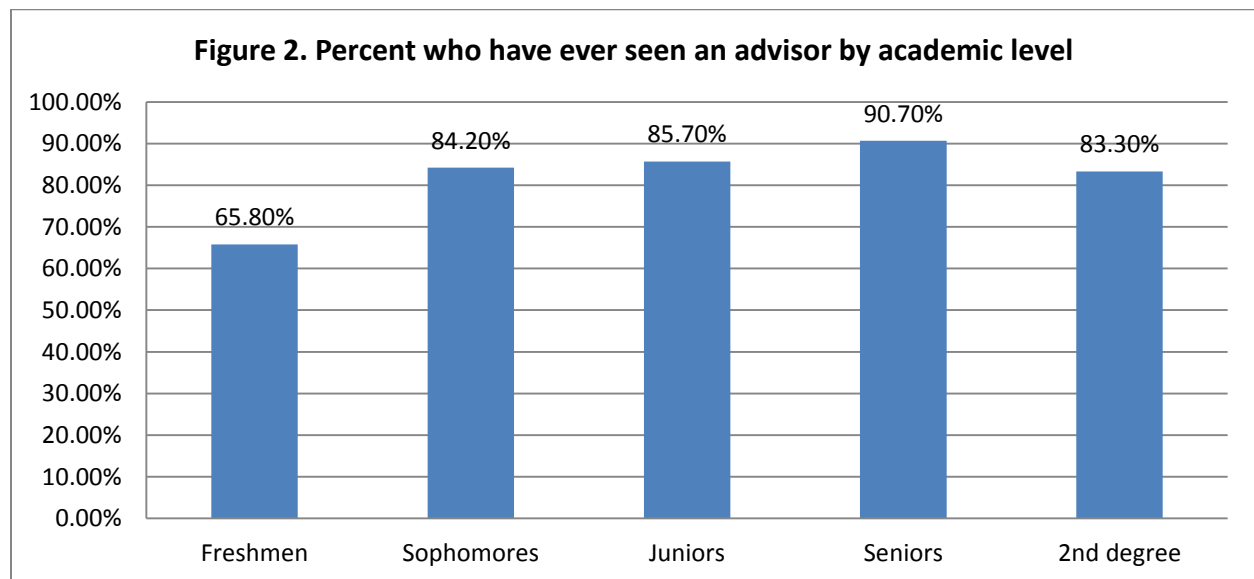
- Having switched majors three times and after a frustrating experience with the academic appeals process, I would recommend that an advisor be assigned to each student based on their major choices. Additionally, students should be required to meet with their adviser before each semester in order to assess their progress and make adjustments accordingly. This also adds an element of accountability to new students, which I think would do wonders for the success rate at B.S.U.

- Get the word out about advising more. I am a psychology student and was not assigned an advisor, so the whole system is sort of unclear to me. I did not find the peer advisors helpful to me.
- It would be great if it were possible to stay with one adviser consistently, so that communication would be more efficient, but other than that I found it very helpful!
- Actually assigning an advisor to a student when the year begins and their major is declared. I still don't have an advisor assigned to me and I don't know how to get one. I've talked to an advisor but I don't not have one assigned to me. And it took a lot more work than it should have for me to even talk to that one advisor.

With the exception of the “Positive” category, no other categories contained 10% or more of the comments so are not discussed here. Academic departments who are interested in the suggestions made by their majors for improving the advising process can contact this author to receive a listing of comments.

Meeting with an Advisor

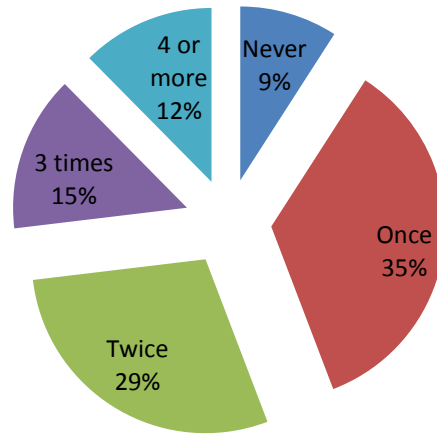
A large majority of students (82.5%) have met with an advisor at least once. As expected, freshmen were least likely to have met with an advisor (see Figure 2). There were no differences in the percentage who had met with an advisor based on transfer status.



Most students were just getting to know their advisors with 53% indicating that they had had their current academic advisor less than a year; only 15% had had their current advisor more than two years.

It appears that most students who meet with an advisor once will continue to seek advising. As shown by Figure 3 below, over 90% of students who had ever met with an advisor also had met with the advisor within the last year. A majority of students met with their advisor several times throughout the year.

Figure 3. Over the past year, how often did you discuss advising issues with an advisor?



Exchanging and using information

Students can exchange information with their advisors in a variety of ways. As shown by Table 3 below, formal individual appointments are still the most frequently used way to exchange advising information, followed by e-mail. Though social media and chat/IM were added to this survey as new ways to exchange information, so far it has been used very little as part of the advising process.

Students were also asked about the tools they used themselves as part of the advising process as well as tools used by the advisor with them. As shown by Table 4, the degree or major checklist is the foremost advising tool used by both students and advisors, closely followed by the catalog.

Table 3. Ways students exchange information with their advisors

	Count	Percent checking that category
How do you and your advisor exchange information? (check all that apply)	Scheduled individual appointments	3146 73.9%
	Scheduled group appointments	129 3.0%
	Dropping by the office	1386 32.5%
	E-mail	2675 62.8%
	Telephone	606 14.2%
	Social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook)	25 .6%
	Chat or instant message	27 .6%
	Don't exchange information	273 6.4%
	Other	132 3.1%

Table 4. Tools used by students and their advisors as part of the advising process

	By the advisor	By the student
Tools used as part of the advising process (check all that apply)	Catalog (either paper or on-line)	57.4% 81.7%
	Academic Advising Report in BroncoWeb (under Academic requirements)	48.0% 61.6%
	Degree or major checklists	74.8% 83.6%
	Finish in Four checklists	11.8% 12.6%
	Information from departmental web pages	20.3% 32.4%
	Other	3.7% 4.5%
	None	7.3% 1.3%

Impressions of their advisor

Students who indicated that they had been advised were also asked to rate their advisor on a variety of areas using a “strongly disagree” to a “strongly agree” scale where larger numbers indicated more agreement (see Table 5). In general, students seemed quite satisfied with their advisors. The two items with the lowest mean ratings—“encourages me to talk about myself and my college experiences” and “helps me explore careers in my field of interest”—still only had 20% of students disagreeing with the item. Only 15% of students indicated that they would NOT recommend their advisors to other students.

Table 5. Advisor evaluation item responses and means

My advisor:		strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	strongly agree	Mean rating
Is a good listener	N	185	119	470	1370	1943	4.17
	%	4.5%	2.9%	11.5%	33.5%	47.5%	
Respects my opinions and feelings	N	201	98	504	1383	1881	4.14
	%	4.9%	2.4%	12.4%	34.0%	46.3%	
Is available when I need assistance	N	241	242	740	1521	1337	3.85
	%	5.9%	5.9%	18.1%	37.3%	32.8%	
Provides a caring, open atmosphere	N	202	155	581	1362	1742	4.06
	%	5.0%	3.8%	14.4%	33.7%	43.1%	
Checks to make sure we understand each other	N	208	213	654	1418	1550	3.96
	%	5.1%	5.3%	16.2%	35.1%	38.3%	
Provides me with accurate information	N	249	221	519	1336	1733	4.01
	%	6.1%	5.4%	12.8%	32.9%	42.7%	
Refers me to other sources where I can obtain assistance	N	222	270	712	1244	1503	3.89
	%	5.6%	6.8%	18.0%	31.5%	38.0%	
Encourages me to assume an active role in planning my academic program	N	200	175	629	1297	1706	4.03
	%	5.0%	4.4%	15.7%	32.4%	42.6%	
Allows sufficient time to discuss issues or problems	N	234	212	628	1384	1577	3.96
	%	5.8%	5.3%	15.6%	34.3%	39.1%	
Encourages me to talk about myself and my college experiences	N	293	507	1029	1039	1058	3.53
	%	7.5%	12.9%	26.2%	26.5%	26.9%	
Helps me explore careers in my field of interest	N	329	449	1022	996	1062	3.52
	%	8.5%	11.6%	26.5%	25.8%	27.5%	
Seems to enjoy advising	N	256	216	778	1258	1527	3.89
	%	6.3%	5.4%	19.3%	31.2%	37.8%	
Is a helpful, effective advisor whom I would recommend to other students	N	339	260	676	1062	1697	3.87
	%	8.4%	6.4%	16.8%	26.3%	42.1%	

Advising without an Advisor

The 17.5% of students who indicated that they had NOT met with an advisor were directed to a series of questions that asked how they got information without meeting with an advisor, what tools they used as part of the self-advising process, and reasons they might meet with an advisor in the future.

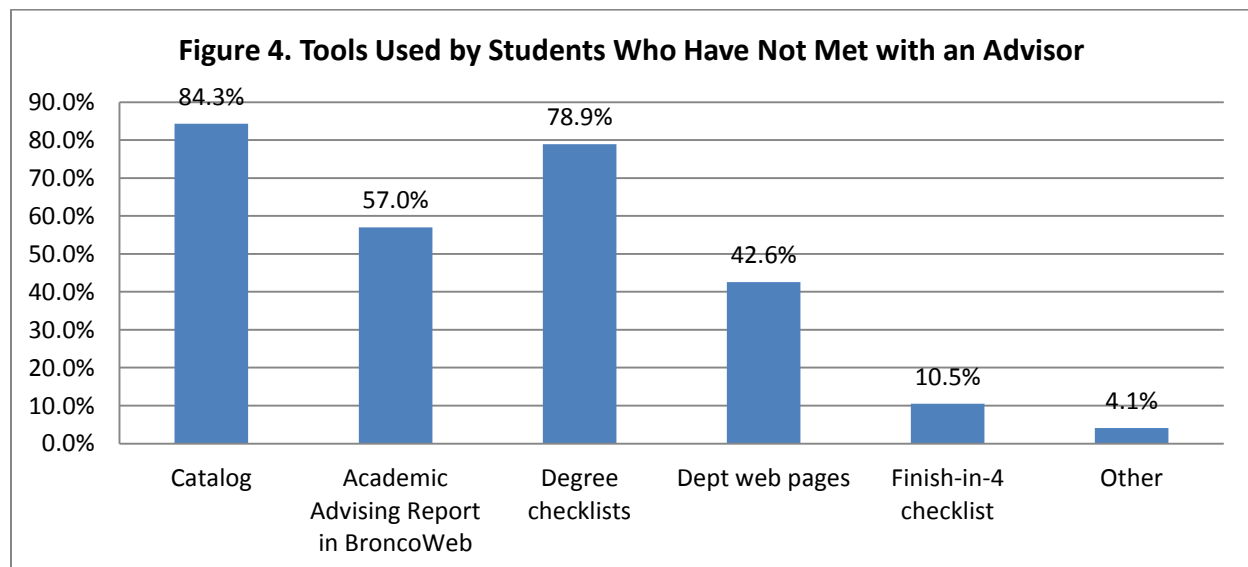
As shown by Table 6 below, students who self-advised mainly relied on the web and printed material. In addition, over half talked to other students, though only 20% talked to faculty. Very few felt that they did not get the information they needed in order to advise themselves.

Table 6. How students who have not met with an advisor get the information they need

	Count	Percent selecting
How do you get the information you need without meeting with advisor? (check all that apply)	I talk to faculty members	171 19.5%
	I talk to Boise State staff	157 17.9%
	I talk to other students	452 51.5%
	I talk to my family and friends	275 31.4%
	I look on the web	584 66.6%
	I look at printed material (e.g., catalog, department information, etc.)	590 67.3%
	I don't get the information I need	100 11.4%
Other:	78 8.9%	

This group of students was also asked specifically about the tools they used to support their self- advising. As shown by Figure 4 below, a large majority used the catalog (paper or on-line) and degree checklists as part of their self-advising process. However, only 57% confirmed their progress using the Academic Advising Report available in BroncoWeb.

Students were also asked to select all of the reasons that they might meet with an advisor in the future. As shown by Table 7, almost three-quarters indicated that they might see an advisor to check on their academic progress or to check on meeting the requirements for graduation. There were no other reasons selected by more than half of the group. Only 3% felt that they had no reason to meet with an advisor.



Summary

This survey was completed by 32% of all undergraduates who were invited to take it. Students generally felt that the current advising system met their needs with 82% responding that the system was adequate or more than adequate to meet their needs. Students who had met with an advisor were more positive about the system compared to students who had not seen an advisor.

When asked to comment on one thing their department could do to improve advising, the largest number of comments indicated that the availability of advisors could be improved. In addition, some students felt that their advisors should be more knowledgeable academic advising issues. A number of students suggested more active outreach in communication efforts regarding advising as well as better assignment of students to advisors.

Most students (82.5%) had met with an advisor at least once; typically these meetings had occurred in the past year and on multiple occasions. Students most often exchanged information with their advisors through scheduled individual appointments, though over 60% used e-mail. Degree or major checklists, the catalog, and the Academic Advising Report on BroncoWeb were most frequently used by both students and their advisors as part of the process.

Table 7. Reasons students who have not met with an advisor might meet with one in the future

	Count	Percent selecting
	642	73.3%
	423	48.3%
	150	17.1%
	259	29.6%
	252	28.8%
	644	73.5%
	343	39.2%
Select the reasons you might meet with an advisor in the future:	157	17.9%
	114	13.0%
	232	26.5%
	259	29.6%
	177	20.2%
	401	45.8%
	300	34.2%
	126	14.4%
	25	2.9%
	25	2.9%

Students were generally happy with their advisors. Only 15% currently had an advisor that they would not recommend to others.

Students who had not ever met with an advisor (17.5% of respondents) also seemed fairly happy with the status quo. Only 28% felt the current system was “less than adequate” or “poor” in meeting their advising needs. In addition, only 11% indicated that they were not getting the information they needed through sources other than meeting with an advisor. Most students who had not been advised got their information by looking at printed material and on the web. Over half talked to other students as a form of obtaining information, but only 20% talked to faculty.