ED 403 842   HE 029 887

AUTHOR   Noldon, Denise F.; And Others
TITLE   The Best and the Worst College Seniors' Experiences
                with Academics and Services. Research Report
                #10-96.
INSTITUTION   Maryland Univ., College Park. Counseling Center.
PUB DATE   96
NOTE   24p.
PUB TYPE   Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE   MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS   *College Students; Educational Counseling; Higher
                Education; *Participant Satisfaction; Qualitative
                Research; Sex Differences; *Student Attitudes;
                Student Characteristics; *Student Experience; Student
                School Relationship; Surveys; *Teacher Student
                Relationship; Undergraduate Students

ABSTRACT
                Survey responses of seniors (N=63) at a large Eastern
university on a questionnaire of their satisfaction with academic and
student services were evaluated. Faculty interaction was most
commonly reported as the best experience students had at the
university, and often included mention of specific faculty and
specific courses. The importance of positive interaction with faculty
was particularly evident for women. Overall, more than half of the
responses given related to student interaction with faculty. Bad
experiences related to faculty, advising, courses/classes, and
teaching assistants. Positive experiences with services tended to
vary by gender: men identified automated registration, computer
services, and athletics, while women identified academic-related
services, counseling, and health services. Both genders identified
parking and dining services as their worst experiences with services.
Results suggest that students would like more interaction with
faculty, a more supportive academic environment, and better delivery
of campus services. Five tables of data are included. (Contains 15
references.) (JLS)

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Office of Vice President for Student Affairs

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

College Park, Maryland

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COLLEGE SENIORS' EXPERIENCES WITH
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SUMMARY

Survey responses of a group of college seniors to questions about the academic

and student services were compiled and compared by. The importance of

positive interaction with faculty was particularly evident for women while overall, more

than half of the responses given had to do with student interaction with faculty. Overall,

responses tended be represent gender-typical choices (i.e. men indentifying athletics,

women identifying counseling services) in the type of services indicated by students.

Academic and student services implications are discussed and recommendations

made.

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INTRODUCTION

Illuminating the experiences of students who have matriculated to their senior year at an institution can provide us with insight about what factors contributed to their satisfaction with college and their overall development. In much of the literature on the development of college students it is suggested that students successfully perform a number of tasks that increase the likelihood of their satisfaction with college. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), Astin (1993) and Tinto (1987) among others point out that degree of involvement and integration into the institution will lead to greater persistence and satisfaction with their college experience. Most of this line of research identifies student interaction with peers and faculty as of primary importance in relation to their overall satisfaction with the college environment (Astin, 1993).

According to Bauer (1995) the stress on outcomes and accountability in today's higher education environment has made assessing students' academic and social experiences even more important. The complexity of today's college environments creates the possibility that students experience a range of satisfaction and dissatisfaction throughout their college careers. Often the concern about student satisfaction is focused on early college experiences which makes with the contribution of later student experiences a relatively unexplored phenomenon.

The quality of one's college experiences, as measured from an institutional perspective, is often thought of in terms of how many students matriculate and ultimately graduate. These traditional outcome measures associated with postsecondary education achievement, according to Arnold and Murphy (1994), mask

the actual college experiences of students in a number of ways. These researchers

pointed out that "even students who are successful by these criteria experience

debilitating college environments" and further, that these measures "often obscure the

complexity of interlocking environmental, personal, and developmental characteristics

affecting perceptions and achievement..." (p. 20). Non-traditional outcome measures

have also been helpful in identifying how students experience college. Sedlacek

(1996) noted a number of ways in which noncognitive variables are useful in designing

effective retention efforts. It is important, then, to consider a number of strategies in

order to understand how students experience the college environment. It is also

instructive to include other than traditional outcome measures in determining what has

provided challenge and support for students in their college experience.

Despite the targeted efforts to enhance overall student development, there is the

possibility that students will experience considerable stress as a result of the problems

they encounter. While some stress is expected, it is important to identify where

conditions may increase the amount of stress experienced by students. Also, it is

important to identify those experiences that have enhanced the college environment for

students.

Some research has shown differences in how men and women experience the

college environment (Baxter-Magolda, 1992, Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Fleming,

1984; Gilligan, 1982). Other differences may be due to cultural or racial variables,

student residence, or a host of nontraditional experiences (Chickering, 1974;

Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Sedlacek, 1987). As Astin (1993) noted, "Given the

considerable investment of time and energy that most students make in attending

college, their perceptions of the value of that experience should be given substantial

weight" (p. 273).

In the current study a group of randomly selected college seniors responed to a

series of questions about their best and worst college experiences. As Bauer (1995)

noted, the place at which a student is in their college year must be considered when

targeting educational programs. Programs that are beneficial for new students not be

best for students who have four or more years of college attendance. It is important

that student development educators focus on different temporal spaces in the college

experience along with attending to other aspects of student characteristics.

The overall purpose of the study was to provide feedback to academic and

student affairs administrators as to the range of experiences identified by students who

have spent a considerable amount of time at the institution. Based on the responses

and suggestions offered by students, the university can determine how to improve

academic and student services which may, in turn, enhance student satisfaction with

their institution.

METHOD

Procedure

A random sample of 155 seniors (77 males, 78 females)who entered a large

eastern university four years earlier were contacted and asked to participate in a brief

phone interview regarding their best and worst experiences at the university.

Of those contacted, sixty three seniors (32 males, 31 females) agreed to be interviewed

by phone regarding their best and worst experiences at the university, resulting in a participation rate of 42% for males and 40% for females. Since the anonymity of participants was guaranteed, no further information was collected from them regarding demographics (e.g., age, race/ethnicity, major, grade point average). Six female graduate students in counseling psychology or college student personnel programs were trained to conduct the phone interviews.

Measure

The telephone interview consisted of five questions: (1) what was your BEST academic experience at this university? (2) what was your WORST academic experience at this university? (3) what was your BEST experience with services at this university? (4) what was your WORST experience with services at this university? (5) if you could choose something to change at this university, what would that be, and why?

Phone interviewers were trained to ask the questions, to provide minimal clarification (e.g., if the student did not understand what "services" meant), to prompt for detailed responses, and to write the responses of participants as closely to verbatim as possible.

RESULTS

First, within the five questions, the recorded responses for all participants were grouped into categories. The responses of females and males were summarized separately although grouped into the same categories in order to observe gender similarities and differences. In some cases, participants indicated more than one response to a question. Each of the responses was entered under a category which

meant that some questions had a greater number of responses than participants. Second, the categories of responses were ranked in order from most to least frequently cited by participants. Finally, gender differences by categories were noted. Following are the analyses by interview questions.

What was your BEST academic experience at this university?

Thirteen categories were created to organize participants' responses to this question; these categories are shown in Table 1 with the most commonly given responses listed first.

For this question, the top three responses were represented by the responses: faculty interaction, course experience, and goal attainment/achievement. Other responses included: nothing, special academic programs, department involvement, being a teaching assistant, academic exploration, environment, academic advising, academic-related extracurricular activities, being tutored, and having classes in the same area.

Regarding faculty interaction, which was most commonly reported as the best experience students had at the university, many named a specific faculty person who had made an impression on them. In addition, specific courses were named as contributing to a best experience in that they were "interesting," "allowed for group interaction," and "drew up what we learned throughout the semester into one package." Achieving goals such as being "accepted into the business school," transferring to the university, and "receiving an outstanding student award" were the third most com monly

Table 1

Response categories for Question 1: What was your BEST academic experience at this university? (N=63)

Category	Number of responses		
	Males	Females	Total
Teaching/Instruction/Programs			
Faculty interaction	10	17	27
Course experience	6	2	8
Special academic programs	1	4	5
Departmental involvement	1	2	3
Teaching (as a teaching assistant)	0	2	2
Academic exploration	1	0	1
Environment	1	0	1
Academic Support			
Academic advising	1	0	1
Academic-related extracurricular activities	1	0	1
Being tutored	0	1	1
Other			
Classes in same area	1	0	1
Nothing, everything same	2	3	5
Goal attainment/achievement	7	0	7
TOTAL	32	31	63

reported responses for best experiences. Females were more likely to indicate faculty interaction as a best experience, and males more often responded goal attainment and or achievement as a best experience.

What was your WORST academic experience at this university?

Seniors' responses to this question were grouped into 13 types of responses and four categories, although these categories were not identical to the categories from the previous question. Table 2 displays the categories: faculty/teaching departmental, academic policies, academic services, and other, with the most commonly given responses within each category listed first.

The four most frequently reported worst experiences for these respondents were related to professors, advising, courses/classes, and teaching assistants. Regarding professors, interviewees said that they had instructors who "didn't seem into teaching," who "counted attendance as part of the grade," or who "were horrible but had tenure." Others reported experiences with professors who were "rude," "sexist," or "narrow-minded."

Bad experiences with advising included being misled, receiving incorrect information from a dean, and finding out too late that a class was a prerequisite. Students who reported courses/classes as their worst experience stated that a course gave "too much information," was "strictly lecture," or had "TAs as teachers, not professors [as teachers]." More females indicated courses and teaching assistants as their worst experience at the university while males were more likely to report no worst experiences or bad experiences with the environment or academic policies.

Table 2

Response categories for Question 2: What was your WORST academic experience at this university? (N=63)

Category	Number of responses		
	Males	Females	Total
Teaching/Instruction/Programs			
Professor	8	10	18
Course/class	3	7	10
Teaching assistant	2	6	8
Academic performance	2	0	2
Academic Policies/ Support			
Advising	5	5	10
Academic policies	4	1	5
Transfer problems	2	2	4
Not accepted into program	1	0	1
Academic records	1	0	1
Special programs	1	0	1
Other			
None	5	2	7
Environment	5	2	7
TOTAL	39	35	74

Note: Some responses fit into more than one category; therefore, the number of responses is greater than the number of participants.

What was your BEST experience with services at this university?

The responses to this question could be grouped into 24 different types of responses which were grouped into the following categories: academic-related services, traditional student services, and other. These categories are shown in Table 3. Men tended to differ from women in the type of services they identified. Automated registration, computer services and athletics were top responses for men, while women indicated academic-related services, counseling and health services as the best type of service.

What was your WORST experience with services at this university?

There were 25 types of responses to this question which were organized into four categories: academic-related, traditional student services, other services, and other. Table 4 displays the categories and number of seniors' responses per category. Men and women both indentified parking as the top worst experience, though they differed on most of the types of responses with men. Men and women also expressed concern over dining services. The second highest response for men was no bad experiences, while fewer women had this response. Women again mentioned academic advising or faculty relations as a concern.

If you could choose something to change at this university, what would it be? (N=63)

Academic-related and policies were the most common type of responses indicated. A total of 21 types of responses were organized into four categories: academic related, policies (academic and administrative), student services and other (see Table 5). Again, women expressed more responses related to faculty and

Table 3

Response categories for Question 3: What was your BEST experience with services at this university? (N=63)

Category	Number of responses		
	Males	Females	Total
Academic-related services			
Registration (automated, advising)	6	2	8
Computer services	4	2	6
Academic services via dept./college	0	4	4
Library	1	2	3
Traditional student services			
Athletic/recreation facilities	3	1	4
Student activities	2	2	4
Dining services	2	1	3
Career services	1	2	3
Campus employment	2	0	2
Residence Life	1	1	2
Intramural program	1	0	1
Greek system	1	0	1
Athletic team	1	0	1
Financial aid	0	1	1
Dental services	0	1	1
Student Union	0	1	1
Other			
Had no contact with services	1	3	4
Shuttle	3	1	4
Commuter - services unavailable	3	0	3
Had no comment regarding services	1	2	3
General bad experience(s)	0	1	1
Student locater service	0	1	1
TOTAL	36	36	72

Note: Some responses fit into more than one category; therefore, the number of responses is greater than the number of participants

Table 4

Response categories for Question 4: What was your WORST experience with services at this university? (N=63)

Category	Number of responses		
	Males	Females	Total
Academic-Related			
Academic (instructor, advising)	1	4	5
Academic policies	2	1	3
Library	1	1	2
VICTOR computer system	1	0	1
Traditional student services			
Dining services	3	4	7
Residence Life	3	2	5
Health services	1	1	2
Career services	0	2	2
Scholarship problem	1	0	1
Alumni services/facilities usage	1	0	1
Other services			
Parking	7	5	12
Standing in line	1	3	4
Commuter - services unavailable	2	0	2
Billing	1	0	1
Administrative services	0	1	1
Other			
None	5	2	7
Had no contact with services	1	2	3
Rude staff	0	2	2
In-state residency paperwork	0	1	1
Lack of child care	0	1	1
Athletic event problem	0	1	1
TOTAL	33	34	67

Note: Some responses fit into more than one category; therefore, the number of responses is greater than the number of participants.

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Table 5

Response categories for Question 5: If you could choose something to change at this university, what would that be, and why? (N=63)

Category	Number of responses		
	Males	Females	Total
Academic related			
Faculty and teaching assistants	4	7	11
Classes/curriculum	5	5	10
Advising	2	2	4
Departmental issues	3	1	4
Student recruitment	0	1	1
Policies (academic and administrative)			
Parking	7	1	8
Registration process	3	1	4
Bureaucracy	1	3	4
General policies	0	3	3
Fees	2	0	2
Print accounts	2	0	2
Pluses/minuses on report cards	0	1	1
College policies	0	1	1
Graduation requirements	0	1	1
Summer school scheduling	0	1	1
Student Services			
Facilities	1	3	4
Residence Life	2	1	3
Transfer student issues	1	1	2
Extracurricular issues	2	0	2
Other			
Community/school spirit	1	2	3
No comment	1	0	1
TOTAL	37	35	72

Note: Some responses fit into more than one category; therefore, the number of responses is greater than the number of participants.

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teaching assistants while males had more concerns with departmental issues. Overall,

men and women would like more changes in the academic related areas, than the

student services area. Men and women were equally concerned with

classes/curriculum and advising.

Overall, in the polices categories, men would like to see more policy changes

than women, with the issue of parking emerging as an area that men in particular

would like changed. Women indicated little concern over parking and were generally

concerned with bureaucracy, general polices, and facilities. The overall responses to

this item indicated a wide range of individual concerns with general consensus about

change in the academic related areas, such as faculty and classes.

DISCUSSION

These results provide support for the importance of student-faculty relationships

in creating a satisfying environment for students. Overall, students indicated that their

best academic experiences most often involved positive experiences interacting with

faculty. This was particularly evident for women with more than half of them indicating

faculty interaction as their best academic experience. The importance of establishing

relationships for women has been addressed in the literature on student development

(Baxter-Magolda, 1989; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1982)

Student-faculty interactions also provided the context for the worst experiences for

students. More than half of the responses given by students indicated that their worst

experiences occurred with faculty, advisors, and teaching assistants or within courses

or classes. For this group of students, interactions within the academic environment

were most clearly shaped by encounters with those in teaching and advising roles.

In terms of student development, of critical importance is to students is frequent interaction with faculty (Astin, 1977; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Astin (1993) also stressed that "the characteristics and behaviors of the faculty also have important implications for student development" (p. 363). The creation of environments that engage students in both intellectual and interpersonal development is suggested by Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) is crucial for meaningful faculty student interaction.

It is important that faculty be made aware of the central role they play in enhancing students experience amd overall satisfaction within the college environment. Student affairs educators can be resources for faculty in developing effective strategies for enhancing the in and out of class development of students. By joining forces, both faculty and student affairs professionals can be collaborators in the overall development of students and eliminate assumption that intellectual development can be separated from other strands of development (Baxter-Magolda, 1992).

Not only do faculty and student affairs professionals have a role to play in creating a more supportive and problem free environment for students, administrators have a role to play as well. As Astin (1993) pointed out, of the many possible ways to ameliorate some of the problems confronting undergraduate education, institutional leadership stands out as a necessary first step to dealing constructively with these problems. This leadership can address the problem that many faculty have with balancing their research and teaching loads at large research institutions. More emphasis can be placed on teaching, mentoring, and advising so that the crucial

relationships sought by students are more accessible to them (Astin, 1993). Sedlacek (1996) also showed the value of having a strong support person in student retention.

Evident in responses for best-worst services was the wide range of services indicated by respondents. Automated services, including registration and computing labs, earned the greatest mention for best services provided and more men than women indicated positive experiences with these services. More women than men indicated counseling and health services while more men than women indicated athletic and recreational facilities as the best services. The gender-typical pattern of these responses was expected given the tendency of women and men to seek out certain types of services.

While some of these areas may not directly related to students' academic success, they can affect how students feel about the college environment. As was earlier pointed out earlier by Arnold and Murphy (1994), the quality of one's experience cannot only be measured by traditional means. A number of factors are responsible for creating a satisfying experience within college. It is important that services such as parking and dining be given their proper attention in order to provide students with better services.

Not surprisingly, academic issues were most often indicated as areas needing change. Again, this points to the importance of academic environments designed to enhance overall student development and satisfaction. Women were more likely to point out that issues relating to faculty and teaching assistants be addressed. Whether these relationships were good or bad, women mentioned them more often

than men which highlights the importance of establishing good relationships for women college students.   Policies and procedures, including parking, were areas most often indicated by respondents as needing to be changed. One way to make students feel better about policies is to seek student input to those policies and procedures affecting them. Student representatives can be placed on campus decision making bodies in order to have their concerns heard. This will likely increase students' satisfaction with the policies if they feel as if they can have input into the decision making process.

These findings indicate that the services that are provided on our campuses are important. For vast majority of these students, it was the "daily hassles" that provided the most frustration for them. The degree to which we can improve the delivery of services as well as make sure that the services we provide do in fact meet the students needs, the more likely we are to have a satisfied student. The tendency to be more concerned about the initial transition of students to college may be at the expense of following students through the system in order to gauge how students fare down the line.

That students were concerned about in-class experiences is also important. Faculty and staff in the academic areas of our institutions should be made aware of the need to engage students and provide them with a sense of continuity. Baxter-Magolda (1992) highlighed the importance of establishing continuity for students as a way to provide students with a support system, undergirded by faculty and staff, who both contribute to the development of students. That women over and over indicated faculty and teaching as areas of concern is especially useful information. As a group, this may

indicate that they are more affected by what does or does not happen in the context of the classroom. These findings also point to the importance of coordinating programs among different departments and divisions across campus. If students enjoy their classes but are unable to find adequate parking, their frustration may lead them to be less enthusiastic about their studies. As Baxter-Magolda (1992) encouraged us, our goal should be to desgin environments that promote student development "on the basis of jointly chose educational values and goals, student perceptions, and reactions" (p. 360). All too often, educators take on the role of using their expertise to develop programs and services but do not seek the student voice in their design.

Mitchell, Beardsley, and Sedlacek (in press) demonstrated the value of collaboration of a counseling center and an academic office. Research by the counseling center helped identify areas that needed attention by the deans's office and resulted in changes in their advisement system, focusing on the transition from the junior to the senior year.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) indicated that knowing when educational interventions will make a difference is a crucial factor in creating effective ones. Even though students in the present study gave responses at the end of their educational careers, their input can still provide us with information that will help us to intervene in ways that will enhance their experiences as well as to gain information that will help us to address potential barriers to a more satisfying college experience. This type of study has the potential for providing a snapshot of what may be lasting memories for students. To the degree that we can identify what is happening as students move

through the instituition, we have a chance to rectify and restructure our environments

such that the journey is a more satisfying and successful one

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