# THE EFFECTIVENESS OF OFF CAMPUS MULTI-INSTITUTIONAL TEACHING

CENTERS AS PERCEIVED BY STUDENTS\*

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#### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine and compare the perceptions of undergraduate and graduate students of a selected state university in Texas attending the Multi Institutional Teaching Center (MITC)/The University Center (TUC) or the main campus regarding the effectiveness of student services. As universities face limited resources and fierce competition, administrators are forced to respond to the changing environment by expanding their campus borders. As they expand, these institutions of higher education are expected to sustain their effectiveness in providing student services to survive the threats. This reality made this study significant and timely. The study examined five research questions which compared the perceptions of students attending the MITC/TUC to the perceptions of students on the main campus. The student services under study were admissions, advising, financial aid, and registration. The methodology, findings, and implications of this study can help to increase the knowledge of campus administrators and can assist them in making data-driven decisions where institutions of higher education look to expand their borders beyond their campuses.



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<sup>1</sup> http://ijelp.expressacademic.org

In order to respond to the changing demographics of the new millennium, the demands questioning the legitimacy of colleges and universities, Multi-Institutional Teaching Centers (MITC) or The University Centers (TUC), have provided an option for colleges and universities, expanding education beyond the borders of the campuses to off site venues with other higher education partners. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board ([THECB], 2004) defines these centers as a higher education center administered under a formal agreement between two or more public higher education institutions. A MITC may involve one or more private or public institutions. In addition, it has minimal administration with locally provided facilities (THECB). In fact, The University Center (TUC), categorized as a typical MITC located in The Woodlands, Texas, opened its doors in Fall 1997 with six partner universities. Such MITCs/TUCs allow universities the ability to pool resources and offer courses for returning or prospective students at off-campus locations. The MITC/TUC supports the needs of lifelong learners; however, the center does not award any baccalaureate, master, or doctoral degrees, as this is the particular responsibility of the partner institutions. The instructional focus is placed on full-time, part-time, or non-traditional type students who can schedule classes around the needs of work or family responsibilities (Thorogood, 1997).

#### 1 Statement of the Problem

Colleges and universities are facing challenges of the 21st century with limited resources. According to Neal (1988), "Today's challenges to colleges and universities bring with them new opportunities for cooperation" (p. v). With the increase of MITCs/TUCs in the past decade in Texas, institutions of higher education have increased the opportunities for non-traditional students to pursue degrees or certifications at locations where education might otherwise be limited. In fact, Johnston and Noftsinger (2004) found that: "Higher education will be able to meet society's needs-improving people's lives intellectually, economically, socially, and culturally-if it takes advantage of all appropriate opportunities" (p. 19). According to a Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) representative, Dr. Grover J. Andrews from The University of Georgia, "Off-campus students are entitled to receive the exact opportunities as the students on their main campuses and at no time are institutions of higher education supposed to make these students feel like second-class citizens" (personal communication, April 18, 2000). While providing these opportunities, according to Andrews, colleges and universities must make every effort to ensure that off-campus students are given similar student services as students on the main campus particularly in the service areas including: (a) admissions, (b) advising, (c) financial aid, and (d) registration processes. Recently, the increasing visits by top administrators from colleges and universities to TUC in The Woodlands, Texas, clearly indicate a tendency to expand campus borders to off-site venues. In fact, the focus of these visits has primarily addressed the effectiveness of MITCs, on individual partners, and on student services provided as indicated by Dr. Lewis C. Snell, Director - University Center, McLennan Community College, Waco, Texas (personal communication, April 19, 2007). However, because there has been minimal research evaluating the significance of MITCs/TUCs in the areas of student services including admissions, advising, financial aid, and registration, this research became essential and relevant.

#### 2 Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this case study was to examine and compare the perceptions of undergraduate and graduate students of a selected state university in Texas attending the Multi Institutional Teaching Center (MITC)/The University Center (TUC) or the main campus regarding the effectiveness of student services. The student services taken into consideration in the study were: (a) admissions, (b) advising, (c) financial aid, and (d) registration. This study demonstrated the effectiveness of student services provided off-campus.

#### 3 Significance of the Study

While institutions of higher education are being challenged with limited resources, continuous threats of legitimacy, and fierce competition, they may not realize that their very existence may be jeopardized in the

new millennium. As found by Matthews (1997), "The roll of dead American campuses grows each year, little noticed, little mourned" (p. 234). Today's colleges and universities are forced to make every effort to sustain their quality and respond to their changing environment. If institutions make a commitment to expand their borders beyond their campuses via MITCs/TUCs, these institutions should make an effort to provide the same campus services including admissions, advising, financial aid, and registration processes to students attending off-campus sites. For example, Sam Houston State University (2005) reported that 40% of its students who attend a MITC/TUC may never set foot on their main campus until the day they are ready to graduate; therefore, bringing these services to the student is significant. As a result, colleges and universities need to find ways to bring services to these students or risk losing them to other universities because "the new market power of students rests in their decisions of whether they want to attend college and if so, which college to attend" (Raines & Leathers, 2003, p. 160). In fact, the term the student as customer has been the central focus of higher education since it was first coined in 1980 by Riesman. With this reality, colleges and universities need to learn more about the perceptions of student services in order to stay competitive and respond to the threats of the 21st century. The findings of this study could help increase the knowledge of campus decision makers and assist them in making data-driven decisions where MITCs/TUCs are concerned so that institutions of higher education survive during rapidly changing times as they expand their borders beyond their campuses.

#### 4 Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine and compare the perceptions of undergraduate and graduate students of a selected state university in Texas attending the MITC/TUC or the main campus regarding the effectiveness of student services. All five research questions were based on the two interconnected theories, CPT and the theory of formal organization. These five research questions were formulated to: (a) examine the effectiveness of the services perceived by students; and (b) compare the effectiveness of the institution from the perception of the student consumer:

- 1. Is there a statistically significant difference in the perception of admissions services received by students attending the MITC/TUC as compared to students attending the main campus?
- 2. Is there a statistically significant difference in the perception of advising services received by students attending the MITC/TUC as compared to students attending the main campus?
- 3. Is there a statistically significant difference in the perception of financial aid services received by students attending the MITC/TUC as compared to students attending the main campus?
- 4. Is there a statistically significant difference in the perception of registration services received by students attending the MITC/TUC as compared to students attending the main campus?
- 5. What are the perceptions of student services received by students attending the MITC/TUC or the main campus?

The purpose of this case study was to examine and compare the perceptions of undergraduate and graduate students of a selected state university in Texas attending the MITC/TUC or the main campus regarding the effectiveness of student services as presented in Figure 1. In this study, the student services taken into consideration were: (a) admissions, (b) advising, (c) financial aid, and (d) registration.

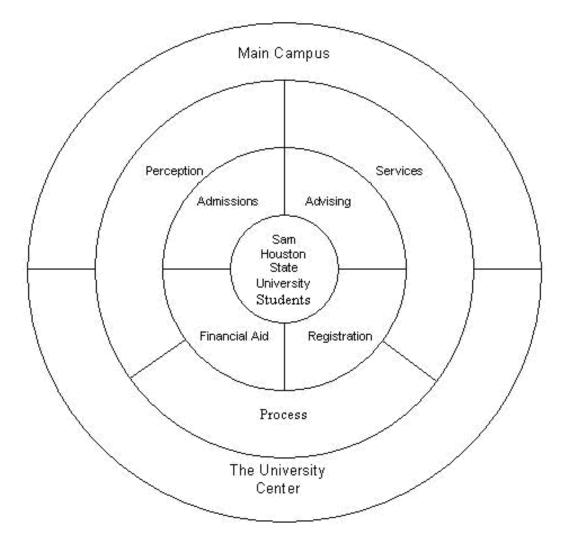


Figure 1

Figure 1. Pictorial of overall study.

As there were scarce empirical data on MITCs/TUCs, this study became unique. The existence of MITCs/TUCs have been on the rise as part of a growth tactic of an institution and as a result, the findings of this study could contribute to making sound decisions regarding MITCs/TUCs. The data will provide the decision makers of MITC/TUC partner institutions with reliable information as they expand their campus borders. With these findings, the administrators could manage their knowledge, support their strategic goals, particularly the vision of their institutions, and minimize their risks as they expand and increase innovation (Back, Enkel, & Von Krogh, 2007). By basing decisions on empirical data, decision makers would not only reduce threats to their existence during economically trying times but also prepare the institutions to improve their present efficiencies, future performances, and successes (Enkel, Gurgul, & Rumyantseva, 2007) as they continue to expand their campus borders.

Methodology

The sample of this study consisted of undergraduate and graduate students of the selected state university

in Texas attending a MITC/TUC or the main campus. They were enrolled in a total of 117 classes/packets returned for the Spring 2007 semester which included 83 classes from the MITC/TUC and 34 classes from the main campus as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1 Sample for the Study – Evening Classes, Spring 2007

Day	TUC Number of Evening Classes	TUC Number of Packets Returned	Main Campus Number of Evening Classes	Main Campus Number of Pack- ets Returned
Monday	28	25	13	11
Tuesday	29	22	13	8
Wednesday	27	20	15	7
Thursday	26	16	16	8
Total	110	83	57	34

Table 1

Note. The classes were based on the university's Spring 2007 schedule.

The purposive sample included three criteria for determining classes from both locations, the MITC/TUC and the main campus: (a) students working toward their bachelors, masters, or doctoral degrees; (b) students attending evening classes on Monday through Thursday from 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. as indicated in Table 2; and (c) students attending classes in majors which have received approval from The University Center Council to be offered at the MITC/TUC. These majors consist of eight undergraduate and 16 graduate from the five colleges: (a) the College of Arts and Sciences, (b) the College of Business Administration, (c) the College of Criminal Justice, (d) the College of Education, (e) the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. In addition, the factual information provided from the survey instrument of students attending these multi-institutional teaching facilities represented demographic data which included students from bachelors, masters, and doctoral degree programs.

Table 2 Classification Levels for the Study – Spring 2007

StudentClassification	Main Campus	The UniversityCenter
Freshman	1	53
Sophomore	33	356
Junior	157	163
Senior	206	311
GraduateDoctoral	9629	14610
Total	522	1,039

Table 2

Note. The data represent completed surveys by the university students.

The total number of surveys completed by MITC/TUC students yielded results almost two to one as compared to the total number of surveys completed by students attending the main campus. This result was derived from additional evening classes being taught at the MITC/TUC beginning Monday through

Thursday from 5:00 pm to 9:00 pm as compared to the evening classes being taught at the main campus on the same days and times.

The survey consisted of three sections. The first section of the survey instrument collected demographic data by means of items one through nine. The demographic data consisted of student class level, gender, college of major, place of study, age, national origin, employment, and annual income to provide additional information. Although the information was not of decisive importance, these data were obtained to interpret the results of the research questions. The second and third section of the survey instrument was designed to answer the five research questions of this case study. Items 10, 11, 12, and 13 addressed research question one. Items 14, 15, 16, and 17 addressed research question two. Items 18, 19, 20, and 21 addressed research question three. Items 22, 23, 24, and 25 addressed research question four. Items 29 and 30 addressed research question five.

#### 5 Reliability and Validity

Prior to administering the survey, it was essential to establish the face validity of this survey instrument. Face validity was defined as the "extent to which casual, subjective inspection of a test's items indicates that they cover the content that the test is claimed to measure" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003, p. 625). The face validity of the survey instrument used for this data collection was achieved by: (a) feedback from the subject matter experts, and (b) feedback from the students taking part in the pilot study. Then, regarding reliability, a pilot study was administered to one undergraduate and one graduate class at the MITC/TUC and the main campus. We included 17 MITC/TUC and 25 main campus students who provided the internal consistency for this survey by utilizing "Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ) a reliability coefficient for an instrument requiring only one test administration" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993, p. 549). As stated by Gall et al. (2003), this method was widely used for computing test score reliability. In addition, "A pilot study involves small-scale testing of the procedures that you plan to use in the main study, and revising the procedures based on what the testing reveals" (Gall et al., p. 50). To increase the reliability of my study, Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) was used to test the internal consistency of the survey instrument within each student service. The main campus' Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) measure varied from .842 to .878 while the MITC/TUC Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) measure varied from .764 to .902. Table 3 presents the internal consistency measurements of the survey instrument within each student service.

Table 3 Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) Internal Correlation Coefficients Regarding Student Services

	Cronbach's Alpha $(\alpha)$	Cronbach's Alpha $(\alpha)$
Student Services	MC	TUC
Admissions	.862	.874
Advising	.878	.764
Financial Aid	.869	.902
Registration	.842	.876

Table 3

Note. The data represent the internal correlation coefficient of the survey instrument within each student service.

We consulted with and identified a total of five subject matter experts consisting of administrators and faculty members who were experts in the structure of MITCs/TUCs to receive feedback regarding the draft form of the survey instrument. The process of developing the survey instrument consisted of four steps. First, the five subject matter experts were contacted by phone to determine their willingness to assist me. All five subject matter experts responded positively and an interactive face to face meeting time was set up to

go over the purpose of this study and the research objectives (Gall et al., 2003). Second, the subject matter experts were asked to review and modify the questions in this survey instrument. Third, the experts were asked to consider each question for face validity and content validity. Fourth, the experts provided feedback regarding the survey instrument which helped configure the semantics on each individual item of the survey. As a result, a 30 item survey instrument was designed with the help of this subject matter experts. The final version was utilized to collect data which were required to answer this five research questions.

Results

Quantitative data results indicated that of the four student services which included admissions, advising, financial aid, and registration, there was no statistically significant difference between the perceptions of the two groups of students attending the two campuses of the selected state university in Texas. On the other hand, the qualitative data results indicated that financial aid services appeared to be the only student service which was not effective based on the perceptions of students attending the selected state university in Texas at the main campus.

#### 6 Research Question One

The first research question stated: Is there a statistically significant difference in the perception of admissions services received by students attending the MITC/TUC as compared to students attending the main campus? A t test was used to compare the perception of admissions services received by main campus and MITC/TUC students attending a selected state university in Texas. The critical t value was associated with an alpha level of .05 (df = 1,040, p < .05). The test results indicated there was no statistically significant difference of admissions services perceived by students attending a selected state university in Texas at the main campus and the MITC/TUC as indicated in Table 4. There was a medium effect size for admission services being received from students attending a selected state university in Texas at the MITC/TUC (.74) and the main campus (.76) (Cohen, 1988).

Table 4 One-Sample t Test - Admissions Services

	df	t	Sig.	MD
Admissions Processing	1040	1.178	.239	.056
Admissions Feedback	1039	.148	.882	.008
Application Process	1039	.918	.359	.049

Table 4

Note. p < .05.

#### 7 Research Question Two

The second research question was: Is there a statistically significant difference in the perception of advising services received by students attending the MITC/TUC as compared to students attending the main campus? A t test was used to compare the advising service variables. The critical t value was associated with 1,040 degrees of freedom (df) and an alpha level of .05 (df = 1,040, p < .05). The test results indicated there was no statistically significant difference of advising services perceived by students attending a selected state university in Texas at the main campus and the MITC/TUC as indicated in Table 5. To meet the expected standard, there was a medium effect size for advising services being received from students attending a selected state university in Texas at the MITC/TUC (.58) and the main campus (.77) (Cohen, 1988).

Table 5

One-Sample t Test - Advising Services

	df	t	Sig.	MD
Advising Processing	1040	018	.985	001
Advising Availability	1040	189	.315	.071
Helpful Advising	1039	1.006	.850	013

Table 5

Note. p < .05.

#### 8 Research Question Three

The third research question was: Is there a statistically significant difference in the perception of financial aid services received by students attending the MITC/TUC as compared to students attending the main campus? A t test was used to compare the financial aid service variables. The critical t value was associated with 1,040 degrees of freedom (df) and an alpha level of .05 (df = 1,040, p < .05). The test results indicated there was no statistically significant difference of financial aid services perceived by students attending a selected state university in Texas at the main campus and the MITC/TUC as indicated in Table 6. Financial aid services yielded a medium effect size for students at the main campus (.76) while the MITC/TUC (.81) students yielded a large effect size from students attending a selected state university in Texas.

Table 6
One-Sample t Test - Financial Aid Services

	df	t	Sig.	MD
Financial Aid Process	1040	814	.416	052
Counselor Availability	1039	346	.730	022
Helpful Financial Aid	1040	.102	.919	.007

Table 6

Note. p<.05.

#### 9 Research Question Four

The fourth research question was: Is there a statistically significant difference in the perception of registration services received by students attending the MITC/TUC as compared to students attending the main campus? A t test was used to compare the registration service variables. The critical t value was associated with 1,040 degrees of freedom (df) and an alpha level of .05 (df = 1,040, p < .05). The test results indicated there was no statistically significant difference of registration services perceived by students attending a selected state university in Texas at the main campus and the MITC/TUC as indicated in Table 7. There was a medium effect size for registration services being received from students attending a selected state university in Texas at the MITC/TUC (.77) and the main campus (.71) (Cohen, 1988).

Table 7

One-Sample t Test - Registration Services

	df	t	Sig.	MD
Registration Process	1039	.077	.938	.004
Registration Availability	1040	1.864	.063	.109
Helpful Registration	1040	785	.433	047

Table 7

Note. p<.05.

#### 10 Research Question Five

The fifth research question was: What are the perceptions of student services received by students attending the MITC/TUC or the main campus? Since the nature of this question was qualitative, qualitative data were collected and analyzed by means of survey items 29 and 30. These items corresponded to the overall perceptions of student services being received by students attending the MITC/TUC or the main campus of a selected state university in Texas. A summary of these results appears in Table 8.

Table 8 Qualitative Results

Student Services	Positive	Negative	Contradictory	Neutral	Total
TUC Admissions	454	85	34	17	590
MC Admissions	303	23	12	14	352
TUC Advising	266	224	64	50	604
MC Advising	150	133	52	15	350
TUC Financial Aid	147	149	29	217	542
MC Financial Aid	92	104	18	95	309
TUC Registration	290	102	32	12	436
MC Registration	158	66	27	9	260
TUC Perception	516	82	127	6	731
MC TUC Perception	87	44	41	187	359
TUC MC Perception	284	111	132	115	642
MC Perception	285	34	28	6	353

Table 8

Note. Quantifying textual data which were tallied and reported in frequencies indicating four types of students' response.

**Implications** 

In order for institutions to achieve successful student consumerism, universities as formal organizations need to consider their effectiveness for continued existence (Barnard, 1948; Raines & Leathers, 2003). Since the findings of this study resulted in no statistically significant differences in the perception of student services for students attending the main campus or MITC/TUC, they imply the support for these theories because students continue to enroll in classes at both facilities. In fact, enrollments at both locations, the main campus and the MITC/TUC, reached all time highs. For example, the main campus had an enrollment of over 16,000 students for the Fall 2007 semester. Although the MITC/TUC enrollment numbers are included in the 16,000 students, their enrollment alone was over 2,800 students for the Fall 2007 semester.

One of the most important implications of this study was the development of a model, using an established and tested methodology, which universities can use to access the effectiveness of student services. The model consisted of both quantitative and qualitative techniques.

In addition, this case study involved a process of identifying effective student services measured by means of student perceptions, resulting in a valid and reliable model for assessment. As stated by Freed

and Klugman (1997), "Since quality is based on the perception of those served by the institution" (p. 6), the outcomes of this case study could be part of the quality principles and practices in higher education by providing a model of success regarding student services. These results could be utilized by university campus administrators when constructing a plan for the effective development and delivery of quality education for undergraduate and graduate students through strategic planning as well as when looking to expand beyond their campus borders to become a partner within a MITC.

Also, as part of the internal forces, the administrators, deans, chairs, faculty, and staff at a selected state university in Texas continue the university commitment of providing services to students attending the MITC/TUC. In turn, these services help in achieving SACS recommendation of students receiving the exact opportunities regarding student services at the MITC/TUC as the students on the main campus. For example, the departments send representatives to the off-campus site for information and registration programs which occur three times throughout a fiscal year. These students can get everything done from applying for admissions to taking their picture for their university ID card. Furthermore, the advising offices provide services by sending advisors every other week during the Fall and Spring semesters to advise students on their degree plans for early registration. The effectiveness of this organization in providing these services to off-campus and main campus students brings about the positive perception of the service as filling the want or need of the student/consumer according to the CPT model. This positive perception from students in turn continues to increase enrollments at the university. Students continue to begin or return to this selected state university in Texas because of the commitment to satisfying or anticipating the needs of the customer through communication, the willingness to serve, and the common purpose. As summarized by Curtoys (2003): "Our effectiveness as providers of a service will, sooner or later, be adversely affected if the personal motives of all of us, faculty and students alike, remain unsatisfied" (¶ 6). In the end, with these two interconnected theories, the methodology, and the findings, this study will help to increase the knowledge of campus decision makers and assist them in making data-driven decisions where institutions of higher education look to expand their borders beyond their campuses.

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Appendix

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/HELM/Additional.htm

## A Study of Student Services

The purpose of my case study is to evaluate the effectiveness of student services as perceived by Sam Houston State University students attending The University Center in The Woodlands, Texas, as compared to the perception of students attending the main campus in Huntsville, Texas. The student services to be evaluated are (a) admissions, (b) advising, (c) financial aid, and (d) registration.

Section I – Demo	ographic Informat	tion			
Please place an "X	" in the appropriate b	oxes below pert	aining to your s	tatus.	
1. Indicate your cur					
	opnomore van	ior Senior	Graduate	Doctoral	
Indicate your ger     Male	nder: Female				
10000	Market Commencer				
3. Indicate the colle	☐				
College of	College of Business	College of	College of	College of Hum	anities Undecided
Arts & Sciences	Administration	Criminal Justic		& Social Scie	
4. Indicate your pla	ace of study:	_	_	_	
SHSU Main Ca		The Univer	sity Center	Both C	ampuses
Huntsville, Texas		The Woodla	inds, Texas	SHSU	& TUC
5. Indicate your cur					
18 or below	19 to 26	27 to 35	36 to 45	46 and above	
6. Indicate your Na			U / TT		
White	Black	American In Alaskan Na		nic Asian/Pacif Islander	
Non-Hispanic	Non-Hispanic				
7. Indicate your wo	urk schadula:				
0 hours/	1-5 hours/	6-12 ho	ours/	13-20 hours/	21+ hours/
week	week	wee		week	week
			i i		
8. Indicate your em	ployment: (If emplo	yed, answer all t	hree questions.)		_
a) Employed	Not Employed	b) On-Car	mpus Off-Ca	ampus On and	Off Campus
			l i		
c) Full Time	Part Time				
	nual Household Inco		4		
Less than	\$10,000 to	\$35,000 to	\$60,000 to	\$100,000 to	\$150,000 or
\$10,000	\$34,999	\$59,999	\$99,999	\$149,999	More

Figure 2

#### Section II - Student Services

Below are a series of statements and a question regarding your perception of student services related to admissions, advising, financial aid, and registration. Please place an "X" and fill in the lines provided based on your experiences with SHSU services. The five levels of agreement / disagreement are as follows:

SA - Strongly Agree

A - Agree

N - Neither Agree nor Disagree

**D** – Disagree

SD - Strongly disagree

4 1 MARKET AND A 1 1 MARKET AND	
Admissions:	SA A N D SD
10. The SHSU admissions process met my needs.	
11. I received feedback regarding my application in a timely manner.	
<ul><li>12. The application process time (till receiving an acceptance letter) was handled in a timely manner.</li><li>13. Overall, what is your perception on SHSU's admission services?</li></ul>	
Advising:	SA A N D SD
14. The SHSU advising process currently offered by SHSU met my needs.	
15. The advisors were available to me when needed.	
16. I received helpful advisement.  17. Overall, what is your perception on SHSU's advising services?	
Financial Aid:	SA A N D SD
18. The SHSU financial aid process met my needs.	
19. The financial aid counselors were available to me when needed.	
20. I received helpful financial aid advisement.     21. Overall, what is your perception on SHSU's financial aid services?	

Figure 3

Registration:	SA A N D SD
22. The SHSU registration process met my needs.	
23. The registration system was available to me when needed.	
24. I received helpful registration advisement. 25. Overall, what is your perception on SHSU's registration services?	00000
Section III – Additional Information	SA A N D SD
26. If Sam Houston State University was not available at	
The University Center, I would take classes in Huntsville.	
27. I prefer taking classes at The University Center through SHSU.	
28. I prefer taking classes at the main campus in Huntsville, Texas.	
29. Overall, what is your perception of SHSU services at The University Center?	

Thank you for participating in this study.

Figure 4