

Results from the GNYC! CUNY Advisor Survey

“...there is a definite need for advisors who are not only trained, but who are able to serve as role models and advocates for students.”

Quote from an advisor at CUNY senior college

Introduction

Graduate NYC! is a collaboration among the City University of New York (CUNY), the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE), the New York City Office of the Mayor, and a range of external partners delivering college readiness and success services citywide. The initiative is funded by a three year grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Graduate NYC! conducted a survey of professional staff members at CUNY, whose primary duty is to deliver advisement services to students, over a four-week period in summer 2011.

The survey was sent to approximately 299 staff members across CUNY, and 172 individuals responded (56%). The survey collected information in the following areas: training, utilization and communication, practice and structure, access to information, developmental education, and job satisfaction. Most respondents work at community colleges (53%), while 41% work at senior colleges and 6% at comprehensive colleges. Almost half work in academic advisement centers (46%); other respondents were split among special programs and other student support offices including admissions. Sixty five percent of respondents have a Master's degree, most commonly in Psychology, Social Work, or Counseling (34%) and 73% of respondents had experience advising students prior to their current job.

Some respondents did not answer every question, so please note that percentages reported are based on number of respondents who answered a given question. Survey data will be used, together with information in the Graduate NYC! CUNY Advisement Catalogue, to make recommendations to enhance advisement resources and services to better serve students. The purpose of this Executive Summary is to outline the key findings of the survey and implications. For full survey results, please contact GNYC! at graduatenyc@mail.cuny.edu.

Training and Professional Development

Most respondents have received training or attended professional development (PD) in advisement, and feel confident in their work as an advisor. Respondents feel most prepared to advise students around the registration process (81% feel well prepared) and feel least prepared to advise students around financial aid (36% feel well prepared) and internships (31% feel well prepared). Most respondents (72%) received training at their college in preparation for advising students, and 82% rate the quality of that training as good or excellent.

The majority of respondents also report having the opportunity to participate in ongoing PD (79%). Of those who attended in the last year, 62% attended at least 2-3 PD events. The most desired topic for PD is strategies to serve at risk students (72%).

Utilization and Communication of Advisement Services

Most respondents believe that the majority of students take advantage of advisement services at their college. Approximately 85% of respondents think that students know where to go for advisement. Approximately 70% of respondents believe that over half of students use advisement services. When asked about why students do not use advisement services, 55% of respondents said that students know about services, but do not take the initiative to use them. Also, 74% of respondents believe that at least some portion of the student body uses electronic advisement tools (e.g., Degree Works).

When asked how they think advisement systems are communicated to students, 80% identified the college website, and 79% said through email. When asked how they think advisement systems are communicated to staff, 68% of those who responded said through email, and 53% believe that it is communicated to faculty during faculty meetings.

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Advisement Practice and Structure

Respondents were asked to rate the delivery of advisement by their departments or programs, and to suggest changes to both practice and structure that would improve student success. Respondents rated their departments highest in providing advisement regarding degree requirements (90% said above average), and registration process (87% said above average). Departments were rated the lowest in providing advisement around internships (24% said below average) and financial aid (17% said below average).

Approximately 77% of respondents feel that advisement should be mandatory for all students. The most commonly identified juncture that respondents think is important for advisement is upon entry into a college for both freshman and transfer students (26%). When asked to describe strategies they have found especially useful in supporting student success, the most common answer given was, using a developmental advising approach (49%), which includes rapport-building, open and consistent communication, and treating students as individuals. Of suggestions offered to improve advisement services, the most common response was hiring additional advisement staff (18%).

Access to Information

Respondents reported that they are able to access up-to-date information that pertains to student advisement to varying levels, depending on the topic area. Almost all respondents (98%) can access information on degree requirements, 75% can access information on developmental education requirements and course sequences, 74% can access information about transfer policies and process, but only 48% can access information about financial aid.

Most respondents believe the following systems/tools to be up to date: Degree Works (63%), College catalogue (70%), their specific program's webpage (76%), and their college's website (80%). When asked how they are notified about policy changes that affect student advisement, the most common answer was that they are notified by email about changes in degree requirements (50%), transfer/articulation to senior colleges (42%), and financial aid (45%). Respondents are most often notified about changes to developmental education requirements during staff meeting (36%) or by their supervisor (35%). Approximately 20% of respondents said they are not notified about changes to developmental education requirements or transfer/articulation to senior colleges.

Developmental Education Advisement

Overall respondents are fairly confident in advising students regarding developmental education requirements and course sequences. Fifty two percent of those who responded said very confident and only 8% were either unconfident or very unconfident. Of the advisors who responded to the question about how well their college communicates to students about developmental education requirements and course sequences, 75% believe that communication is average or done very well. Of the advisors who responded to the question asking how well they think students understand developmental education requirements the most common answer was that students have an average understanding (49%). Of the advisors who responded to the question about how well advisors themselves understand developmental education requirements at their colleges, the most common answers were excellent (41%) and good (29%).

Job Satisfaction

Most advisors who responded to this survey enjoy their work and feel respected. Almost all respondents enjoy their work (96%), and the majority feels well respected by students (88%), well respected by colleagues (88%), and well respected as an advisor within their department, program, or division (86%). Although most advisors have positive experiences as an advisor, only 48% feel that there are opportunities for advancement in advisement or student support services at their college.

Recommendations

Based on the results of this survey and with support from the GNYC! CUNY Advisement Catalogue, we make the following recommendations, which are dependent on resource availability and college leadership support:

- Make advising mandatory for all students, especially at key junctures such as registration and upon transfer to a senior college.
- Commit more personnel resources to student advisement to allow for expansion of successful advisement strategies.
- Increase opportunities for advisors to participate in professional development, especially around strategies to support at-risk students and financial aid advisement.
- Improve communication of policies and policy changes to advisors, especially concerning developmental education requirements.
- Although the majority of respondents felt that their colleges/programs' websites are up to date, the GNYC! CUNY Advisement Catalogue suggests otherwise. We recommend that colleges/programs' review their own websites on a regular basis to assess whether content is accurate and comprehensive and presentation is accessible to students. We also recommend that colleges/programs' review other CUNY colleges/programs' websites to gather ideas for promising practices, content and presentation.
- Convene Advisement Center Directors regularly to share best practices; inclusion of senior student affairs and academic affairs leadership would be ideal to support potential expansion of successful practices across the University.
- Conduct a faculty advisor and student survey to gain a more complete understanding of advisement across CUNY.
- Periodically survey CUNY advisement professionals in order to stay up to date on interests, concerns and needs across the University.