

# **Enrollment Services**

## **Assessment of Student Preferences and Satisfaction with Services 2004 and 2005**

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In 2004 and 2005, CSUF students were surveyed\* to determine their satisfaction with services and programs offered by Admissions, Records and Enrollment (ARE), Financial Aid (FA), and University Outreach (UO), to explore their preferences for methods of contacting these Enrollment Services offices, and to determine if changes in business practices implemented following the 2004 survey findings increased their satisfaction.

One of the questions asked on the 2005 survey stemmed from the Enrollment Services staff questioning whether we were open during the right office hours. We were considering closing for the noon break. However, the survey findings showed that lots of students want to do business during that time, so the doors remain open.

Another question being considered was whether these offices could go paperless. We decided to ask students on the survey. Results showed that students want in-person, phone, e-mail and print communication from these offices, so we can't abandon paper.

In both years, students were very satisfied with enrollment services on our campus. More than 90% of undergraduates said the ARE staff were extremely courteous and more than 85% were satisfied with the courteousness of the Financial Aid staff. From 79% to 92% of students (differences exist by year and student category) were satisfied with ARE services and 81% to 96% were satisfied with services provided by the Financial Aid office. Overall, the surveys show that students are happy with our services and we let the staff know this all of the time.

### Admissions, Records and Enrollment (ARE)

In addition to those already mentioned, some of the most valuable findings from these surveys for ARE include the need to explore telephone options, need to revise the process for evaluating transfer credit, and processing of transcript requests.

According to the data, about a third of students say they get an answering machine when calling ARE and more than half are put on hold when the phone is answered by a staff person. One observation we noticed is that students frequently call ARE to ask about non-ARE issues. If we send someone we can't deal with somewhere else, students' questions are successfully answered only 50% of the time. These data tell me we need to explore our phone system. How do we make it more customer-oriented? One tactic we'll take is to train staff to send callers to the correct department. We're exploring new phone technology as well, for instance, an answering system that tells the caller the amount of time they will be on hold.

Survey findings are first discussed with the leads in each unit. Then the leads get together with lead staff in their department to reinforce the findings and get their feedback. Ultimately results are shared with individual staff members. One of the benefits of sharing the survey findings with staff is the feedback they offer. For example, when the data showed that many students who left a message were not called back, the staff questioned whether these students called after 5 p.m. when the office is closed and whether they left a phone number through which they could be

contacted. These kinds of questions allow us to further refine our data collection and dig deeper into our business processes.

Approximately 35% of calls to ARE are requests for transcripts. The amount of time it takes students to receive a transcript compared to their expectations of the time it should take is close. (In general, they expect to receive the transcript in four days and they receive it in six.) So, we're not doing badly here. Students can print out unofficial transcripts online anytime. However, if we outsourced transcript release to a third party, students could have an official transcript within 24 hours after their fees are paid. This may reduce the number of phone calls as well, which, in turn, could decrease the number of students who get an answering machine rather than a staff person when they call.

An ongoing issue has been the length of time it takes for students' transfer credits to be evaluated. The majority of undergraduate transfer students (79% in 2004 and 56% in 2005) expect their transfer credit to be evaluated before they enroll. The biggest change in our business processes has been a result of this finding. Between 2004 and 2005 we used Outreach staff to help the evaluation team evaluate transcripts. This allowed us to evaluate transcripts for about one-third of these students before their first semester. Prior to this change, no students received evaluations this early.

Starting Fall semester 2006, we require the transcript be submitted up front instead of allowing students to self-report their credits. This practice will facilitate faster and more accurate evaluation of transfer credit. Anticipated benefits of students getting their evaluation done before enrolling include:

- No need to do an exception admit
- Advisors enroll them in correct classes
- When it's time to graduate, students will know they have taken the right classes and their graduation will not be held up at the end.

### University Outreach (OU)

Throughout the recruitment process, prospective students tell us they like emails, snail mail, personal visit contacts and phone calls as methods of communications. It would be a mistake, therefore, to ignore or eliminate one of the avenues though we had considering doing just that.

The primary reasons for selecting Fresno State are location (68% to 76% depending on survey year and student category) and academic major (42% to 52%) and, increasingly, cost. We make sure students' reasons for selecting us are prominently displayed in our publications.

One cause for concern in the survey findings is that a higher percentage of students are visiting the campus on their own before enrolling (10% to 18% in 2004 compared to 24% to 29% in 2005). There was a corresponding decrease in the percentage of students who took the campus tour. What concerns us about this method of visiting for the first time is that we don't know if their experience was a positive one. At events such as Admissions Day and Preview Day, we can control the experience and hopefully make it a productive one for students. We can tell if it was because we include an evaluation in the event. When students show up on their own, we wonder about issues like signage. Is it effective? Do students find their way around? Do they get the answers they need?

### Financial Aid Office (FA)

Three years ago we got financial aid awards out in June, but we are seeing a high level of satisfaction since moving that to April. In January we e-mail students to give them four easy steps to receiving financial aid. We encourage them to apply now, and are therefore getting a lot more applications and aid awarded earlier. We must now concentrate on making sure the PeopleSoft system is functioning properly to disburse aid on time.

The time students spend waiting in line has been a source of student dissatisfaction. To address this issue, when lines get long, staff members work them. In doing so, we discovered that some students in line didn't have problems but just wanted the assurance that their financial aid would be forthcoming. Another issue that contributes to the length of the lines, and wait time, is that the federal government flags 20% of award recipients and requires them to bring in their tax return for verification. We clear them at the time they come in with their paperwork. This makes the time waiting in line longer, but we feel that dissatisfaction is offset by the service they're provided at the time, i.e., being cleared to receive their award on time. However, we do not yet have evidence related to time.

Another tactic we are trying this year is to target applicants who applied late last year. We sent them an e-mail to try to get them to apply earlier in the hope that if they get the paperwork done earlier, it will reduce the lines.

Telephone service is an issue in Financial Aid as well as ARE. One process we changed that has been beneficial is putting students up front on the phones to answer non-confidential questions such as what form to fill out. We know this has increased the degree to which calls are answered by a person rather than a machine but we do not yet have evidence of the extent to which callers recognize the difference. Also, as in ARE, we are exploring technology to improve service in this area.

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\*Surveys conducted via telephone by the Fresno State Social Science Research Laboratory, Dr. Ed Nelson, Director. Respondents included 600 students in 2004 and 800 students in 2005.