

Student Counseling Bureau
1984 Needs Assessment Summary

Introduction

From January through the summer of 1984, a committee* in the Student Counseling Bureau undertook a project to obtain data on the nature and extent of student concerns or problems as perceived by students themselves and others in the University community.

This project, the Needs Assessment Project, involved a survey which asked questions about concerns or problems, as well as about utilization of or attitudes toward Student Counseling Bureau services. The data from the survey were to be used to assess the need for current services, to suggest revision, replacement, or addition of services, and provide ideas about new ways in which services may be delivered. The data were also to be used to provide information on student concerns for University personnel and offices other than the Student Counseling Bureau.

A similar study had been done at the Student Counseling Bureau in 1969 - 70. This previous study indicated that students had come to the Bureau primarily for vocational counseling and help with their academic skills. Also, utilization questions on this study survey indicated that there was a need to make the Bureau more visible to students and also help with personal matters that interfere with education as well as academic matters. The Student Counseling Bureau staff wanted to know in part

*
Dr. Dorothy Loeffler - Project Director
Dr. Harriett Haynes - SCB Staff
Elizabeth Rengel - Research Assistant
Mary Volk - Project Coordinator
Debra Wilkin - RSSC Staff

whether 14 years later students would have similar or different perspectives on the Student Counseling Bureau services, and what specific concerns students have today.

Method

An unusual aspect of the 1984 Needs Assessment Survey was the tapping of not only the student population, but also faculty, staff who primarily work with students, administrators, and Campus Ministry workers.

Two forms of a survey questionnaire were developed. Each contained the same wording for the 68 items on the questionnaire which identified concerns students are likely to have. These items were selected from a large item pool compiled by the staff from pre-existing surveys of this nature, and from the staff's own experiences with students. The survey forms were piloted and minor modifications were made before the survey itself was carried out.

As mentioned earlier, there were two groups surveyed. The first was students. One thousand and six student names and addresses were randomly selected by computer from the population of students registered on the Twin Cities campuses during winter quarter 1984. The population excluded Continuing Education and Extension students. The total population that quarter was 43,377. Although we were relying on the random selection procedure to insure representativeness, we also assessed the student sample and found we had representation by gender and college. These were the only two variables for which we had population values we could employ for the chi-square goodness of fit tests.

Of the 1,006 students, a total of 629 or 62.5% responded to the survey. It is our understanding that this response rate was more than

acceptable under current conditions in which students and faculty are being surveyed on a frequent basis.

We analyzed the characteristics of responding versus non-responding students, and found that there were some differences. For example, women responded in a larger proportion than the men who sent survey questionnaires, although there were more men in the sample as there are in the student population. The respondents tended to have higher GPA's than non-respondents. The proportion of respondents from General College, CLA, Education, and the Medical School tended to be lower than those from the other colleges. The lowest response rate was from General College, while the highest response rate was from Home Economics. Class standing was also a variable: sophomores and adult special students were more likely to be found amongst the non-respondents, while professional students amongst the respondents.

The second group of participants in the survey were the non-student members of the University community: faculty, staff, and administrators, as well as the Campus Ministry workers, who are not employed by the University but work with the students. The faculty sample represented lecturers, instructors, and professors of all ranks from a population of 3,072. A random sample of 296 faculty names were selected from the Central Addressing System Services Office lists.

Again, a chi-square goodness of fit test was used to evaluate the representativeness of the faculty sample, this time for college appointment. This test indicated that the faculty sample was representative of the faculty on the basis of college appointment.

It has already been noted that the staff group of the sample consisted of University staff whose job titles suggest they spend large proportions of their time with students: such as "Student Personnel Worker," "Advisor," and "Counselor."

The administrators were individuals with the titles of "Dean," "Director," or "Vice President." As there are relatively small numbers of these staff and administrators, all who could be identified in these categories were included in the study. Finally, the Campus Ministry workers was a very small population; only 29 were identified and all were included in this study. The response rates for these non-student groups were 45.3% for faculty, 74.8% for staff, 54.5% for administrators, and 44.8% for Campus Ministry Workers.

General Results

The 68 items on the survey questionnaire were grouped into four concern categories: career, academic and study skills, relationship, and personal. Subjects were to rate their own level of concern for each of the 68 items on a 1 to 5 rating scale from "Not a concern" to "Very much a concern." The non-student subjects were also given an option to respond if they didn't know whether an item was of concern to students.

Analyses of the data have been largely descriptive, using means and standard deviations and some tests of significance to identify differences on items among groups of respondents.

We started by looking at overall levels of concern across the survey as a whole and across the four categories. When we averaged the ratings students gave to the 68 items on the survey questionnaire, we found that

the overall level of concern was 2.14 on the 1 to 5 rating scale. This corresponds with the designation "Somewhat of a concern."

When we looked at the average level of concern for each of the 4 categories, we found that the highest expressions of concern were for the career concern items, which received an average rating of 3, corresponding to "A moderate concern." The items in the academic category were second in the overall level of concern at 2.25. Finally, items in the relationship and personal concerns categories averaged out as being in the "Somewhat of a concern" range at $\frac{1.79}{2.02}$ and $\frac{2.02}{1.79}$ respectively.

When we looked at the top 10 concerns for all students who responded to the survey, concerns about jobs after graduation and career issues stand out. Six of the 10 top items were clearly of this type. One of the items, "Identifying and planning specific goals for my life" certainly can be considered to relate to careers, while "Managing my time," "My financial situation," and "Getting better grades," reflect current rather than future concerns in students' lives. Looking at the various career concerns items amongst the top 10, it appears that students are concerned about their skill levels in career exploration, planning, and obtaining employment in the future.

When we compared the students' rankings of the questionnaire's categories with those based on perceptions of faculty, staff, and administrators, there is a concordance in identifying career concerns as primary among students in general. The Campus Ministry workers on the other hand, rated career concerns as third. We attribute this to a likelihood that in their contacts with Campus Ministry workers, students

are emphasizing and perhaps seeking help with personal and relationship concerns. It is also of interest that the staff group ranked personal concerns over academic concerns. Again, it is likely that this reflects a difference in the types of concerns students express to staff who work with students in the various advising, counseling, and other service offices.

What stands out in comparing the overall responses of students with those from non-students is that the faculty, staff, administrators, and Campus Ministry workers tend to rate the levels of student concern higher than the students themselves rated the concerns. For example, the top concern of students in general, "Getting a job after I graduate" has a mean rating by the student respondents of 3.42 on the 5-point scale, while the average rating of that item by non-student respondents is 4.46 on the 5-point scale. Even removing the Campus Ministry workers responses from a summary of non-students' responses, the non-students' mean ratings are substantially higher than those of the students themselves. A few other notable points: the non-student group rated students' financial situation as of much higher concern than students did. The Campus Ministry workers' top 10 list also includes some items students rated much lower: "Anxiety about tests or exams" and "Coping with anxiety, stress or fear."

Finally, to wrap up this section of the general results from the survey, we will discuss data from the utilization section of the questionnaire.

In response to the question asking students if they have enough information about counseling services on campus, over half, 64.4%

responded "no." Furthermore, over half indicated they didn't know about the Student Counseling Bureau, and only 16.9% had ever used Student Counseling Bureau services. And of those who indicated they had used Student Counseling Bureau services, and this includes the range of services including the Reading and Study Skills Center and Services to Disabled Students, over 90% said they would recommend the Student Counseling Bureau to others. (A dissatisfied 10 students indicated that they would not recommend the Student Counseling Bureau to others.)

Thus it appears that awareness and visibility of counseling services, including those available from the Student Counseling Bureau, remains a problem on this campus. This problem persists over time despite the listing of those services in the various written materials students receive, such as the catalogs and the telephone directories.

We asked the non-student participants in the survey slightly different questions about utilization of the Student Counseling Bureau services. We asked them if they had ever referred a student to the Student Counseling Bureau, and of those responding, slightly more than 60% indicated they had. Slightly less than half were interested in some sort of consulting with the Student Counseling Bureau through workshops, written materials or individual meetings.

These results suggest to us that there remains an audience for outreach services to both students and non-students on the University campus.

Specific Results

In addition to looking at the results of the survey to get a sense

of the concerns of students as a total group, we looked at the results of students by various characteristics. Foremost among these characteristics were gender, age, GPA, race or ethnicity, and class ranking.

Looking at students first on the basis of gender: The women respondents in the study expressed a higher level of concern on the average than the men students. When we ran tests of significance on the responses of men and women students by survey item, we found 20 items had statistically significant differences. Among those items on which the men students indicated a higher level of concern than women were: Item 24 "Completing assignments on time," Item 32 "Starting and maintaining a conversation." Item 35 "Having others emotionally dependent on me," Item 40 "Coping with family conflicts" and Item 50 "Being shy."

Among the items with a statistically significant higher level of concern for women students were: Item 8 "Knowing how to look for and get a job after I graduate," Item 44 "Being treated differently because of my gender," Item 45 "Experiencing sexual harassment," Item 46 "Identifying and planning specific goals for life," Item 47 "Making decisions and solving problems," Item 51 "Feeling self-confident," Item 52 "Behaving more assertively," Item 53 "Coping with anxiety, stress or fear," Item 54 "Getting a clearer picture of who I am," Item 57 "Liking myself," Item 65 "Dealing with anger (my own or someone else's)" and Item 66 "Dealing with sexual abuse or assault." For some items, like the last one, there is a significant difference by gender, but the level of concern for women as a group was very low, only 1.37, and for men it was 1.15.

Despite the differences in ratings of concern for individual items,

when one looks at just the top 10 items for men and women students each list consists of the same items, although there is a slight variation in the ordering of items.

When students were grouped by age, the levels of expressed concern decreased as the students' ages increased. This can be seen in the contrast between the youngest group of students, 18 to 20 years of age, whose mean rating of concern across all the items is 2.30 while the mean rating of students 36 years of age and older is 1.80. This pattern of declining concern can also be seen in the level of concern expressed across each of the concern categories.

When one looks at the top 10 list for each of the age groups, again the same items are present, although the age group top 10 lists differ to some degree in the inclusion of certain items and the relative ranking of others. For example, Item 19 "Getting better grades," is of the highest concern to the 18 to 20-year-olds. Item 5 "Making a mistake in choosing a major or career," is found on the list for this group but not on the others' list.

There were no noticeable differences in the lists of students 21 to 23 and 24 to 26 years old, while the 27 to 29-year-olds' list includes Item 53 "Coping with anxiety, stress or fear."

The 30 to 35-year-old groups' list includes Item 52 "Behaving more assertively," while the 36 and older group's list includes Item 25 "Improving my memory." Still, the latter's 2.34 mean rating for this item is low, slightly below the mean rating for the item by students in general.

Students with higher GPA's also tended to express lower levels of concern. As might be expected, students in the 1.0 to 1.9 GPA group expressed a high level of concern for Item 19 "Getting better grades." In fact, all of the items on the top 10 list for this group, as well as for students in the groups with GPA's in the range of 2.0 to 2.4, were rated at more than level 3 "A moderate concern."

On the other hand, the top 10 items students with GPA's of 2.5 to 3.4 are just around 3 on the 5-point scale.

Students in the GPA range of 3.5 to 4.0 have a lower expressed level of concern, but their list of top 10 items contains some items not found on the top 10 lists of the other GPA groups. These items include Item 53 "Coping with anxiety, stress or fear" and Item 31 "Developing or maintaining satisfactory relationships."

When students were grouped by racial or ethnic background into the numerical minority versus majority (the latter having identified themselves as white, non-Hispanic,) students in the numerical minority tend to have a slightly higher level of concern on the average.

This higher level of concern is particularly noticeable in the average response to the items in the relationship category. When looking at the top 10 concern tables for these two groups of students, one finds the same top 10 concerns.

However, some differences in means obtained for individual items are outstanding. For example, Item 67 "My financial situation," approaches the rating of 4 on the 5-point scale for the minority students. Item 19 "Getting better grades" is also of greater concern for these students.

When we ran tests of significance on the item means for these two groups, we found 18 items show statistically significant differences. In each case, students in the numerical minority rated the items as having a greater level of concern for them than did the majority students. Among the items are 9 "Dealing with a current job-related crisis," 14 "Dealing with an academic crisis," Item 17 "Anxiety about tests or exams," Item 23 "Following lectures and taking notes," Item 26 "Working with my academic advisor," Item 39 "Dealing with my children," Item 43 "Being treated differently because of my race or ethnic background" and Item 62 "Coping with a physical ailment or disability." It is important to note that several of the students in the minority group reported disability conditions.

Finally, looking at class standing, it appears that in general, undergraduates have higher levels of concern than graduate and professional school students.

When the top 10 items are examined for each group of students by class, some differences stand out. "Getting better grades" Item 19, is the top item for freshmen, and it remains at a level of concern above the moderate level for sophomores and juniors. However, this item is not found on the top 10 lists of seniors, graduate students, professional school students or adult special students. Item 67 "My financial situation" is more than a moderate concern for undergraduates but less than this for graduate, professional, and adult special students. On the other hand, Item 53 "Coping with anxiety, stress, or fear" appears among the top 10 items for graduate and professional students.

In addition to the groups just discussed, students were also grouped by some other characteristics.

For example, we looked at students who had transferred into the University as opposed to those who had not. No substantial differences were found between those two groups of students.

We also looked at the data from students reporting handicaps. Our conclusions about these data are tentative, for among the handicapping conditions students reported there were some of a social rather than physical character, such as financial disadvantage. Even so, it is to be noted that students who consider themselves handicapped in some way have a higher level of concern about their financial situations, and also include Item 53 "Coping with anxiety, stress or fear" and Item 10 "Concentrating on my studies" among the items on their top 10 list.

One of the groups of students we were particularly interested in is the students who may be considering leaving the University. To identify these students, we grouped together those who responded to Item 11 "Questioning whether to continue at the University" with level 4 or 5 on the rating scale. Leading the top 10 list for this group of students is Item 3 "Identifying a career goal and acceptable alternatives." This item is rated as 3.90 on the 5-point scale and exceeds the 3.25 mean response of the total student group. In fact, all the top 10 items for this group of students are rated at a level of concern greater than 3.5. The top 3 items on their list are related to decision-making and there is only one item related to academic concerns, and that is Item 19 "Getting better grades."

Written In Responses

In addition to the 68 items on the questionnaire, space was provided for students to write in additional concerns, and for other comments. Some students who were older indicated they would have answered the questions differently at an earlier point in their academic lives. Some students talked about their concerns as being spiritual in nature. Several addressed feelings of being discriminated against or treated differently on the basis of age due to being older than the stereotypical 18-22 college student. Others addressed discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Some students noted concerns such as nuclear war, capitalism, world hunger, social violence, the character of our government, environmental concerns, and various political concerns.

And a number of comments addressed frustration in dealing with the University and what they identified as the "University bureaucracy," and the impersonal nature of the University.

Several students indicated that they preferred to address their problems off campus through other resources, including pastoral or religious counseling, and several stated quite clearly they preferred "working through problems with friends" or taking care of their problems by themselves.

The non-student participants in this survey also wrote in comments. Several of the comments were quite specific, identifying as foremost concerns such as how to pay for college, how to manage work in college, and how to manage money and debts.

Faculty wrote in concerns which students did not mention, including living with and getting along with roommates and living away from home, as well as characteristics that they see among students such as a lack of responsibility and respect, or feelings that someone else will take care of them, and students' expectations that they will be told what to do. In some cases the faculty seemed to be aware of the problems of older than average students, as reflected in this comment: "returning to school as an adult learner and having to shift from professional to student roles."

Also, faculty seemed to be quite aware of students' frustrations with the University system. Several comments were also made about students' concerns about nuclear war, and the quality of life.

To sum all this up, it appears from our analyses to date of the data that the participants in our survey, both students who reported on their own concerns, and the non-student participants who were reporting their perceptions of student's concerns, seemed to perceive the relative importance of concern categories similarly. That is, that the concerns of students are largely in the areas of career, and secondarily in academic skills. This is consistent with the findings of the 1969-70 survey.

Given the fact that faculty, staff, administrators, and Campus Ministry workers were reporting their perceptions on the basis of a nonrepresentative group of students with whom they each have contact, it is understandable that their ratings of students' concern level for particular problem areas were higher than the students' own reports. Several of the non-student participants indicated they were responding

to the survey on the basis of the small number of students with whom they have closer contacts, rather than students in general. The difference we found between the self reported ratings of students and ratings based on perceptions of others support the idea that it is important to ask individual students about their concerns, using sampling techniques which permit generalizations to students in general. In addition, it is reassuring to find that non-students are accurately perceiving the types of concerns students have at this time.