



SURVEYING STUDENT OPINIONS

The Campus Assessment Working Group (CAWG) was created in 1996, linked to the University of Maryland's Continuous Quality Improvement Council. CAWG is charged with developing a campus "culture of evidence" in which data and assessment play a key role in campus decision making. CAWG is led by Vice President William "Bud" Thomas and draws together individuals across all divisions of the university. See <http://www.inform.umd.edu/cqi/Umcpcqi/Cawg/> for more information on CAWG.

Introduction

The Assessment of Campus Experiences Subgroup (ACES), a sub-committee of the Campus Assessment Working Group (CAWG), administered three student opinion polls during the 1997-98 academic year, representing an effort to take the pulse of the campus on various specific issues. The surveys are intended to respond to requests made by others and use "convenience samples" to get opinions from commuters and residence hall students at all class levels. ACES complements the CAWG Studies of Entry Subgroup, which focuses on students new to Maryland (including both freshmen and transfer students), and the Completions subgroup, which focuses on graduating seniors and new alumni.

Sources of Information

The surveys were conducted at the "Good Morning, Commuters!" program on Wednesday mornings in the Stamp Student Union, and on pre-identified residence hall floors during the same week.

Experiences with Teaching Assistants, requested by the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) team on Teaching TAs to Teach: 354 respondents, October 1997.

Advising, requested by the Continuous Quality Improvement Team on Advising for the College of Life Science and the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences: 277 respondents, March 1998.

Perceptions surrounding lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues, requested by the President's Commission on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Issues: 237 respondents, April 1998.

Experiences with Teaching Assistants

The Teaching Assistants (TA) Survey was designed so that students responded to items describing their experiences with the "best" TA on one side of the questionnaire, and the same items describing their experiences with their "worst" TA on the other.

The "best" TAs were rated uniformly high in all aspects.

The "worst" TAs were *not* uniformly low; they were rated highly in some areas and poorly in others.

"Best" and "worst" TAs were similar with respect to some characteristics:

- Knowledge of subject matter
- Preparation for class
- Availability during office hours
- Consistency and fairness of grading
- Expectation of students to attend class

The characteristics which showed the biggest differences between "best" and "worst" TAs were:

- Ability to give clear and understandable explanations
- Communicate clearly about the subject
- Respected by students
- Is someone students could approach for help with a non-academic problem

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Academic Advising

This poll was intended to find out where students obtained advising information and its completeness, as well as availability of study skills information.

Most had assigned advisors; some did not know.

Had assigned advisor:	68%
Did not have assigned advisor:	20%
Did not know:	13%

Students stated that they were more likely to consult advisors about university requirements, major requirements and supporting classwork than other types of issues.

Family and friends contributed a great deal to the decisions of students. A large percentage of students made decisions on their own, without seeking advice from anyone.

Choosing a major

Consulted no one:	40%
Consulted an academic advisor:	25%
Consulted family and/or friends:	25%

Choosing electives

Consulted no one:	32%
Consulted academic advisor:	29%
Consulted friends and/or family:	24%

Seeking study skills assistance

Assistance from friends:	10%
Assistance from advisors:	10%
Assistance from EDCP instructors:	9%

Students who indicated that they had no assigned advisor were far more likely to make decisions alone, particularly regarding:

- Completion of academic program
- Course sequence planning
- Selection of electives
- Exploration of career opportunities related to major

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Issues

This poll was commissioned by the President's Commission on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Issues to assess UM's current campus climate.

Demographics

59% Female 42% Male

92% Heterosexual 3% Gay/Lesbian 3% Bisexual
2% Questioning/uncertain

Know one or more persons who describe themselves as

Gay/Lesbian 80%

Bisexual 62%

Questioning/uncertain 40%

Familiarity with UM initiatives and policy

UM Diversity Initiative

30% None 18% Much/very much

Non-discrimination policy

41% None 26% Much/very much

Only 36% reported having had in-class discussions about LGBT issues; when they did they reported them as generally positive:

2% of respondents felt them to be "derogatory."

56% – "non-judgemental"

42% – "supportive"

80% reported out-of-class discussions; these were described more negatively:

20% of respondents felt them to be "derogatory."

45% – "non-judgemental"

30% – "supportive"

There were reports of negative out-of-class experiences.

Respondents witnessed/experienced:

anti-LGBT jokes/slurs 54%

refusal of peers to associate with LGBT persons 23%

verbal harassment or threats 20%

anti-LGBT graffiti 16%

pressure to remain silent 8%

physical confrontation/assault 6%

threats of exposure 4%

pressure to leave housing 3%

A general summary suggests that students responding to this poll do not perceive campus as LGBT-friendly, despite efforts by the Diversity Initiative and concerned faculty and staff.