

# Student Satisfaction Survey - Financial Aid Office

October 2001

## Executive Summary

In October, 2001, the Financial Aid Office conducted a telephone survey to gauge the current level of satisfaction with our operations. Evaluations were on a scale of 1-5 (translated into letter grades for this summary).

## Students Give Financial Aid a 3.2 GPA

### GENERAL SATISFACTION

USU students continue to give high ratings to the Financial Aid Office. Satisfaction improved in nearly every area. Over 42% of students gave Financial Aid an A (up from 40% in 99 and 25% in 94). 82% give us an A or B (up from 78% in 99 and 65% in 94). Only 5% give us the equivalent of a D or F (down from 6% in 99 and 15% in 94). Translating the mean score into GPA, Financial Aid received an overall 3.18. This is up from a 3.1 in 99 and a 2.8 in 94.

When asked in an open-ended question for complaints about the Financial Aid Office, the majority of students didn't report anything they would change.

The continued improvement is largely due to a dedicated staff, who have the resources (organization, time, and equipment) to improve knowledge, skills, and service. Increased grant eligibility may have also made students more generous in their assessments. (More on this later.)

Our staff is by far our best asset. When asked what they liked best about the Financial Aid Office, the majority picked out the staff for praise, noting their knowledge, their courtesy, their willingness to help, their professionalism.

### COURTESY AND KNOWLEDGE OF COUNSELORS

Counselors continue to receive high marks in both courtesy and knowledge. 86 out of 100 gave counselors an A or B. Less than 5% in both categories gave them lower than average grades.

### COURTESY AND KNOWLEDGE OF GENERAL STAFF

Staff members are rated nearly as high as counselors. 85% gave general staff the highest two ratings in courtesy. 80% gave a first or second rating in knowledge. Less than 5% gave lower than passing marks. This is the highest area of turnover for our office. We recently hired three new people, who have done exceptionally well to score this high.

## SPEED OF SERVICE

Dramatic improvement. Over 74% us an A or B (up from 60% in 99 and 43% in 94). Over 9 out of 10 give us passing marks. Only 8% are dissatisfied (down from 14% in 99 and 28% in 94).

Students biggest complaints in open-ended questions are long lines at the beginning of the year, the cramped office, staff availability, all of which affect speed of service. We are addressing all of these areas in our compact plan.

Improved speed results from:

- Coordinated teams cut processing time in our office.
- Two staff members dedicated to running SIS have continually improved computer service and help the rest of the staff resolve potential problems proactively instead of waiting until students face a crisis.
- Ironically 100% verification speeds service by encouraging student accuracy on applications and by eliminating the back and forth necessary with limited selection. When given the choice of limited federal verification and treating all students alike with 100% verification, 85% chose 100% verification.

## PHONE ACCESS

No improvement here. 66% give us an A or B. 12% gave us a D or F (up slightly from 99). 32% of students report *never having tried* to access our office through the phone, reflecting the lower incidence of unsolved problems and the ready availability of other information sources.

## INFORMATION MATERIALS

64% of students rely on information provided by the staff or by printed materials. Internet use has grown dramatically. 22% report

using the Internet as their primary source of information (doubling the 11% figure in 99.)

42% found our informational materials very helpful. 92% found materials at least somewhat useful. Only 3 % did not find printed material useful. This is virtually unchanged from our last survey.

Open-ended questions reveal the need for even better communication. We will continue to improve our printed materials, hope to improve the system's Internet resources, and improve notification by using campus email.

## *Will we ever get a 4.0?*

Student satisfaction improved this past year as it has every time we have conducted this survey. We continue to improve our service to students with improved staff training, clearer materials, and automation. However, student perceptions are *highly subjective* and significantly influenced by factors outside our control. There will always be some dissatisfied students. Student perception of the fairness of the federal system and the type of aid received were strongly correlated with student satisfaction with the Financial Aid Office. This relationship is basically unchanged from past surveys.

## FAIRNESS and STUDENT SATISFACTION

Students exhibited a slightly rosier opinion of federal fairness in this survey. Grant amounts have increased and a smaller proportion of students received loans only (the ones least satisfied with aid). Probably as a result fewer students are dissatisfied with the **federal** system for awarding financial aid this year. Improved perception of the federal system probably gives us better scores as well because this perception colors student perception of office operations. In general the **less fair** students perceive the federal system is:

- the **lower** their satisfaction with our office;
- **and** the less knowledgeable and courteous students think staff and counselors are;
- **and** the slower service seems;
- **and** the worse they think phone service is!

No matter how good we become, as long as people think the system is unfair, we will probably never satisfy them.

## AID RECEIVED, GRADES and STUDENT SATISFACTION

Students receiving grants and work-study felt much better about our office than those receiving loans. (If we could give everyone a full grant, perhaps we could get a 4.0 after all.)

In general, students with higher GPAs are more satisfied with our office than those with lower GPAs.

## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The survey was given to a random sample of all current recipients of any form of federal aid in the last two weeks of October, 2001. The sample of 413 students gives us a 95% confidence level that results are + or - 5% of the views of all student aid recipients. Students were contacted by phone at home. The survey instrument is attached.