

Student Satisfaction Survey  
Financial Aid Office  
October 15, 2003

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## Executive Summary: Student Satisfaction High, Continues To Improve

Student satisfaction with the Financial Aid Office continues to improve. Mean ratings have increased from 3.61 in 1994 to 4.28 today (out of a possible 5).

Nearly half of all students give the Financial Aid Office a 5 (the highest possible rating). Over eight in ten give us a 4 or higher.

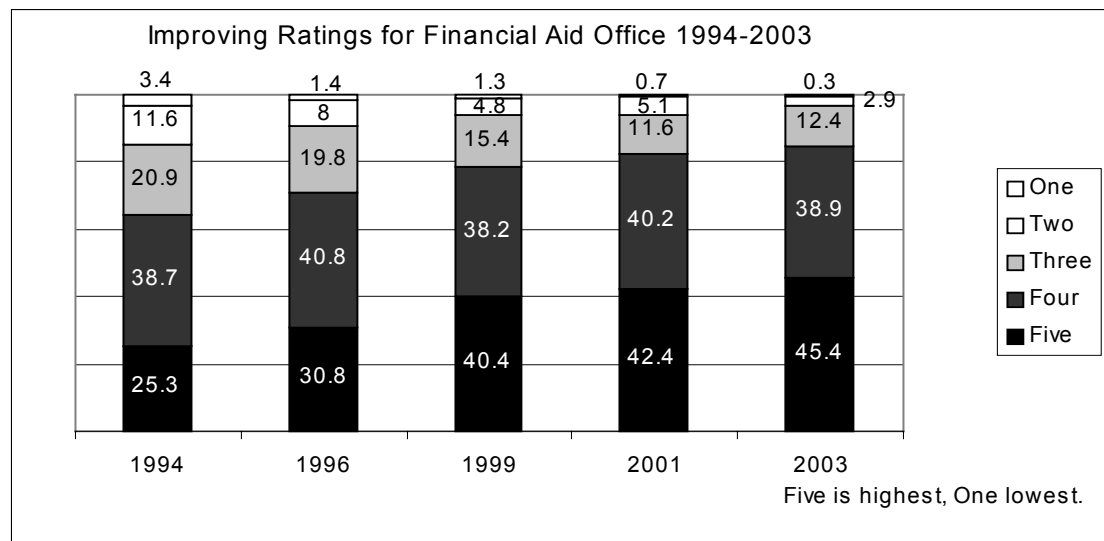
Our greatest asset continues to be an outstanding staff. Students particularly note their courtesy and helpfulness.

Student satisfaction with the speed of service dipped slightly this year. For most students, the process was, in fact, faster. Students selected for verification were the most displeased with the speed of service.

Student complaints about lines dropped dramatically due to our efforts to handle peak periods. Phone access improved.

Demand for electronic services balloons. 40% of students list it as their primary source of information, three times the number in 1999 when we first asked the question.

Student perceptions are *subjective* and significantly influenced by *factors outside our control*. Least happy students think the federal system is unfair, have lower GPAs, receive loans instead of grants, and are selected for verification.



### Recommendations:

#### **Adopt a New University Email Policy**

To enhance communication and decrease university costs, university email accounts should be assigned to students when they are accepted.

#### **Continue to “Disintermediate” Financial Aid Processes**

Implement Banner so students can complete most business electronically.

## Quick Facts – Financial Aid Office

We help fund two-thirds of USU's studentbody, disbursing over \$65 million in aid:

- \$20 million in grants,
- \$1.5 million in work-Study,
- \$29 million in student loans,
- \$13.5 million in scholarships,
- \$1.4 million in off-campus resources.

We help place 5-6,000 students in jobs each year, issuing  
22,000 on-campus job referrals (over 2,000/week in August).

We fund and train over 90 America Reads and America Counts tutors working in 12 Cache Valley schools.

Seven counselors, five information specialists, and 3 ½ processors handle 15,000 students.

We handle 500 calls/week in August and September and a higher number of office visits, fielding over 1200 phone calls on the first day of the semester.

We solve student problems before they even know they have them, have developed over 35 systematic reports to ferret problems out.

We foster a culture of continually improving service. Since 1994, student satisfaction has grown each time it is measured (biannually).

We do all this while complying with volumes of federal regulations and successfully passing annual audits.

## Survey Analysis

### GENERAL SATISFACTION

The Financial Aid Office continues its steady improvement in service to USU students. **Nearly half of all students (45%) gave Financial Aid a 5, the highest rating possible.** 84% gave us a 5 or 4; fewer than 4% give us a 2 or 1. Mean ratings have increased from 3.61 in 1994 to 4.28 in 2003.

When asked in an open-ended question for complaints about the Financial Aid Office, approximately 60% of students didn't report anything they would change. Complaints about lines have almost disappeared. Those praising us for having no lines or short lines outnumber the few who complain about long ones.

The 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. **The two words most commonly used to describe office staffers are "helpful" and "friendly."**

### COURTESY AND KNOWLEDGE OF COUNSELORS

Counselors continue to receive high marks in both courtesy and knowledge. 90% gave counselors an 5 or 4 in courtesy. 86 % gave their knowledge an 5 or 4. Fewer than 4% in both categories gave them a 2 or 1.

### COURTESY AND KNOWLEDGE OF GENERAL STAFF

Staff members are rated nearly as high as counselors. 89% gave general staff the highest two ratings in courtesy. 81% gave a first or second rating in knowledge. Fewer than 4% gave them a 2 or 1.

### SPEED OF SERVICE – HOW TO IMPROVE

**Satisfaction dipped here.** Only 69% gave us a 5 or 4 down from 74% in 2001 (though still well ahead of the 43% who gave us those marks in 1994). 9% are dissatisfied (up from 8% in 2001, but well down from 14% in 99 and 28% in 94). Speed of service and staff availability were the most frequently volunteered complaints; however fewer than 5% of students made these observations.

Ironically, we received a lower rating on speed of service when the majority of students no longer have to complete verification. Since we no longer verify every student; for most students the process was, in fact, faster. However, for those selected for verification, the process is unavoidably slower. These students were the most displeased with the speed of service.

Student complaints about long lines and staff availability dropped dramatically. Our efforts have clearly made a difference. We install an additional phone line during peak processing time and staff it with counselors taking turns. (We received over 1200 calls to the main line on the first day of school.) We built extra stations on the front so everyone in the office (including the Director and Associate Director) can service the lines of students during the crunch. No student waited in line for more than fifteen minutes on the busiest day of the year. We also hired a half-time staffer to be on the front during our peak hours year round and instituted a back-up schedule to help cover the front desk when staff is short.

More important than servicing students who come in or phone are our efforts to reduce their need to contact us at all. We have made significant progress in this effort over the years; the overwhelming majority of students go through the process without needing personal intervention. Our constant monitoring solves most problems before students are even aware of them.

Internet use has grown dramatically. **39% reported using the Internet as their primary source of information** (up from 22% in 2001 and 11% in 1999), **but University email policy is not keeping up with student needs.** The University needs to adopt a new email policy to enhance communication and decrease costs. Email addresses should be **assigned to students when they are accepted** and university publications should establish student email accounts as the university's official channel of communication. Currently 10-50% of students (graduate students the higher number) do not have valid email accounts and students' USU email addresses are not currently stored on SIS where they are accessible to staff.

We have used email effectively to improve service to students. Two years ago, we initiated a series of email warnings to students about fee payment. This has significantly reduced the number of students who lose their classes. However, the students who often need it the most (new students) do not yet have valid accounts. (In fall of 2003, we tried to notify 1500 financial aid and scholarship recipients that they still had a balance due and that they would lose their classes. 300 students never received that warning because they did not have valid email accounts; 243 students were purged.)

With a new USU email policy, the Financial Aid office can further reduce a student's need for staff intervention. More and more, students wish to complete their business online. The current SIS does not adequately support electronic award notification and acceptance. Through the business process analysis for Student and Financial Aid modules, we will implement as many electronic processes as possible.

### *Will we ever get a 5?*

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. Cross-tabulating the data reveals that student perception of the fairness of the federal system, student GPA, verification status, and the type of aid received were strongly correlated with student satisfaction with the Financial Aid Office.

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 5 after all.) Students with higher GPAs tend to be more satisfied with our office than those with lower GPAs. And, 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 completely.