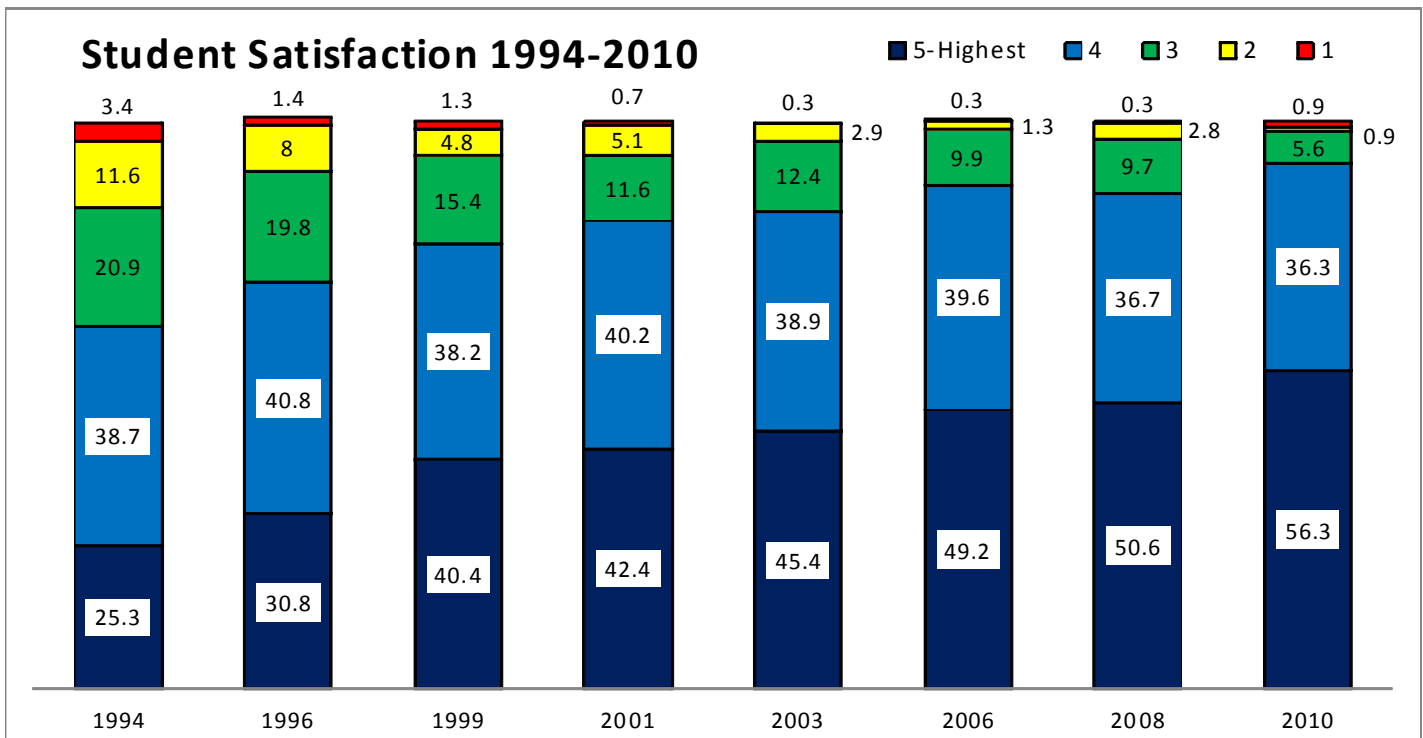


# Student Satisfaction Survey – Financial Aid Office

## Fall Semester 2010

### Executive Summary: Student Satisfaction Continues to Increase

- As the chart below illustrates, student satisfaction with the Financial Aid Office continues to be very high. Well over half of all students (dark blue bars) give the Financial Aid Office the highest possible rating – more than double the proportion when this survey was first taken in 1994. Nine in ten give us the two highest ratings (blue tones). Mean ratings have increased from 3.61 in 1994 to 4.46 today (out of a possible 5).



- Student satisfaction with the speed of service decreased marginally since the last survey. We expected a big drop in this area as a result of record numbers of applications and radical federal changes in the federal student loan program. Student satisfaction with telephone access did not improve. Given the record-breaking call volume this summer, it is surprising this rating did not decrease significantly.
- Our greatest asset continues to be the outstanding staff. Students particularly note our friendliness and helpfulness.
- In spite of the recession, students report they are managing the financial burdens of school reasonably well. 64% of aid recipients say meeting educational expenses is manageable or somewhat manageable. Students reported working less and relying less on credit cards.

# Survey Analysis

## GENERAL SATISFACTION INCHES HIGHER

The Financial Aid Office continues its steady improvement in service to USU students. General satisfaction improved over the high level of two years ago. **56% of students gave Financial Aid a 5, the highest rating possible.** 93% gave us a 5 or 4. Fewer than 2% give us a 2 or 1. Mean ratings have increased from 3.61 in 1994 to 4.46 in 2010.

When asked in an open-ended question what they liked least about the Financial Aid Office, 65% of students either said they wouldn't change anything or didn't know anything they would change.

## STAFF IS INVALUABLE

When asked what they liked best about the Financial Aid Office, the overwhelming majority singled out the staff for praise. The staff receives high marks in both courtesy and knowledge. 95% gave them a 5 or 4 in courtesy. 88 % rated staff knowledge a 5 or 4. Less than 2% gave them low scores (2 or 1) in either category. **The two words most commonly used to describe office staffers continue to be "helpful" and "friendly."** Other comments include: "knowledgeable, goes the extra mile, welcoming, care about students, fantastic people."

## SPEED OF SERVICE, PHONE ACCESS STEADY IN SPITE OF INCREASED BURDEN

**Record-breaking applications and unprecedented phone volume this past year made it sometimes difficult for students to get assistance.** It is therefore somewhat surprising that 75% of students still give us the highest two ratings – virtually unchanged since 2008. Perceived speed of service slipped negligibly from a mean of 4.28 to 4.23.

The transition to Direct Loans was responsible for a wave of student questions during the summer of 2010. Poorly-designed federal programs such as ACG and SMART, which require time-consuming manual review, expire in 2011. But the extensive review required by year-round Pell will make speed of service an ongoing concern.

## DIFFICULTY OF APPLYING

58% of students think applying is on the easy side (20% thought it very easy). This is a new question, so we can't analyze trends, but difficulty is a continuing concern. The federal government continues to complicate the process even as they talk about simplification.

## PERCEPTION OF FEDERAL FAIRNESS

**Students are generally inclined to view the federal aid system as fair.** 82% of students felt the system was at least somewhat fair. 18% view the system as somewhat unfair or very unfair. Student perceptions of fairness strongly correlate with satisfaction with the Financial Aid Office (see below).

## *Why we don't dazzle everyone (even though we keep trying!)*

Student satisfaction with the Financial Aid Office continues to inch up, in spite of record challenges. However, a dramatically increased work load was reflected in stagnant speed of service and accessibility ratings, which did not improve.

Student perceptions of the Financial Aid Office are, of course, *subjective*. Students across all class ranks, ages, GPAs, and locations (Logan vs. RCDE) shared similar opinions of our service. However, student with different perceptions of the fairness of the federal system did view us differently – in ways not always reasonable. Students who see the system as unfair might be expected to have lower overall satisfaction. However, their dissatisfaction with the federal system leads them to also report

- that the staff is less knowledgeable and courteous;
- that service seems slower;
- **and** that phone access is poorer!

Speed of service and phone access ratings were also negatively affected by perceived difficulty of applying, whether or not a student was verified, how well students felt they could cover costs, and the types of aid received. (If a student received an ACG or SMART grant, their perception that service was slower was justified because of the built-in delays in these programs.)

## STUDENT FINANCES

2008 was the first year we took a look at general student finances. In 2010, we were interested in seeing the impact of the intervening recession. We were pleased, and somewhat surprised, to see that students seem to be handling their financial burdens reasonably well. While expenses have increased, aid has also increased. The number of students receiving Pell grants and the dollar amount of grants have both increased dramatically.

**64% of aid recipients say meeting educational expenses is manageable or somewhat manageable.** This is up from 61% in 2008. The rest are having some difficulty covering costs; 6.2% (down from 9%) report finding the expense very unmanageable.

**USU students report decreased credit card use/balances.** USU students generally mirrored national norms on the use of credit cards in 2008. In 2010, fewer reported having them and more of them pay their balances monthly. 39% (up from 34%) report having no credit cards. 9% (down from 11%) say they have three or more cards. 41% (up from 34%) pay monthly balances in full. 19% (down from 25%) carry a balance over \$1000.

**Students working fewer hours.** 75% of students (down from 83%) report working while in school. 40% (down from 50%) work over 20 hours per week.

Only 16% rely on financial help from parents, less than 4% rely on relatives or friends. Half of aid recipients are married. 25% of recipients have children; 4% are single parents. 62% of single parents with more than one child understandably found covering costs at least somewhat hard to manage.

Response frequencies (1994 - 2010)

**1. On a scale of one to five, with 5 being the highest and 1 the lowest, how satisfied are you with the service you receive from the financial aid office?**

	mean rating	5 (high)	4	3	2	1 (low)
2010:	4.46	56.3	36.3	5.6	0.9	0.9
2008:	4.34	50.6	36.7	9.7	2.8	0.3
2006:	4.36	49.2	39.6	9.9	1.0	0.3
2003:	4.26	45.5	38.9	12.4	2.9	0.3
2001:	4.18	42.4	40.2	11.6	5.1	0.7
1999:	4.11	40.4	38.2	15.4	4.8	1.3
1996:	3.80	30.8	40.8	19.8	8.0	1.4
1994:	3.61	25.3	38.7	20.9	11.6	3.4

**On a scale of one to five with 5 being the highest and 1 the lowest how would you rate the following aspects of the financial aid office:**

**2. courtesy of staff**

2010:	4.66	70.4	25.1	4.2	0.3	0.3
2008:	4.55	62.8	30.5	5.5	1.2	0.0
2006:	4.50	61.5	27.8	10.1	0.3	0.3
2003:	4.40	53.9	34.6	9.9	1.3	0.3
2001:	4.28	49.4	36.2	9.4	3.2	1.7
1999:	4.22	48.2	35.3	9.8	4.0	2.7
1996:	4.12	41.5	37.5	13.7	5.7	1.7
1994:	3.99	38.1	35.0	17.5	6.3	3.1

**3. knowledge of staff**

2010:	4.42	55.4	32.8	10.2	1.2	0.3
2008:	4.30	50.3	34.3	11.0	4.1	0.3
2006:	4.17	38.0	44.6	14.5	2.2	0.7
2003:	4.10	32.9	48.4	15.2	3.0	0.5
2001:	4.12	38.3	41.3	15.6	3.5	1.3
1999:	4.04	35.2	41.6	16.9	4.6	1.8
1996:	4.00	33.9	41.9	16.1	6.6	1.4
1994:	3.75	25.4	40.5	21.8	8.5	3.9

**4. speed of service**

2010:	4.23	43.8	39.6	13.7	1.8	1.2
2008:	4.28	44.8	40.8	12.1	1.7	0.6
2006:	3.99	38.1	31.5	22.8	6.3	1.3
2003:	3.93	33.2	35.8	23.5	5.6	1.9
2001:	4.00	34.7	40.1	17.6	5.9	1.7
1999:	3.70	24.7	37.0	24.7	10.6	3.1
1996:	3.47	19.8	30.4	32.0	12.7	5.2
1994:	3.26	18.1	25.4	28.6	20.6	7.3

**5. telephone access**

	mean rating	5 (high)	4	3	2	1 (low)
2010:	4.15	45.7	29.7	19.3	4.1	1.1
2008:	4.12	44.0	32.0	18.1	3.1	2.7
2006:	3.87	35.6	30.7	23.1	6.7	4.0
2003:	3.90	32.8	34.3	26.1	5.2	1.5
2001:	3.82	32.4	33.1	22.7	7.9	4.0
1999:	3.89	37.6	29.8	21.3	6.4	5.0
1996:	3.76	36.5	28.5	17.0	10.1	8.0
1994:	3.60	33.5	23.9	22.0	10.0	10.5

**6. On the whole, would you say the way the federal government awards financial aid is:**

	very fair	somewhat fair	somewhat unfair	very unfair
2010:	30.5	51.8	13.4	4.3
2008:	25.1	52.6	17.8	4.4
2006:	26.6	55.8	12.4	5.1
2003:	34.7	51.5	11.7	2.2
2001:	31.4	51.9	13.2	3.4
1999:	28.3	50.7	18.5	2.4
1996:	18.6	52.5	23.8	5.1
1994:	24.1	55.8	14.7	5.4

**7. With 5 being very easy and 1 being very difficult, how would you describe the process of applying for and getting student financial aid? (question asked this year for first time)**

	(very easy) 5	4	3	2	1 (very difficult)
2010:	19.6	38.0	31.2	8.9	2.4

**10. When you include the financial aid you receive, please describe your and your family's ability to cover the cost of attending USU. Costs include tuition & fees, books, transportation, and your living expenses. Would you say covering the cost is:**

(1) very manageable (2) somewhat manageable (3) somewhat hard to manage (4) very hard to manage

2010:	18.9	45.6	29.3	6.2
2008:	17.6	43.9	29.6	8.9

**SURVEY METHODOLOGY:** Survey was taken October 4-8, 2010 from a random sample of all current recipients of federal aid. The sample of 339 students gives us a 95% confidence level that results are + or - 5.2 % of the views of all student aid recipients. Students were contacted by phone at their preferred phone number.