

Academic Advising in Texas Public Institutions of Higher Education

A Summary of Findings from Five Years of Research

**Center for College Readiness
Division of Participation and Success
Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board**

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Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

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The mission of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board is to provide the Legislature advice and comprehensive planning capability for higher education, to coordinate the effective delivery of higher education, to efficiently administer assigned statewide programs, and to advance higher education for the people of Texas.

THECB Strategic Plan

Coordinating Board Philosophy

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board will promote access to quality higher education across the state with the conviction that access without quality is mediocrity and that quality without access is unacceptable. The Board will be open, ethical, responsive, and committed to public service. The Board will approach its work with a sense of purpose and responsibility to the people of Texas and is committed to the best use of public monies.

THECB Strategic Plan

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age or disability in employment or the provision of services.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Texas law mandates that "Each institution shall establish an advising program to advise students at every level of courses and degree options that are appropriate for the individual student" (TEC 51.306 [1]). This report examines results from the annual academic advising survey of public institutions of higher education conducted by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board for the 1993 through 1997 academic years.

The survey results indicate that institutions recognize academic advising as an important function of higher education, and not merely an activity peripheral to providing educational programs. For example, institutions consistently agreed that the mission of academic advising is to aid students in developing valid educational plans that are compatible with their life goals. Moreover, an increasing number of institutions have developed a written set of academic advising goals consistent with the stated mission of the institution.

Likewise, more institutions have implemented an institution-wide philosophical statement concerning academic advising that includes clearly defined goals as well as the expectations placed on advisors and students alike. Meanwhile, institutions have made academic advising services and facilities readily accessible to all students in all programs throughout the institution. In particular, many institutions asserted that their academic advising program assists minority students identify, prioritize, and meet their unique educational needs. The result is that more institutions are seeking ways to make student information available in the academic advising process. Still, the survey data suggests that there continues to be a need for improving access to information for supporting student academic advising. However, overall these findings support the state's desire to provide all the citizens of Texas access to and success in public higher education.

The five-year survey results also indicated that more academic advisors have become knowledgeable about and responsive to relevant civil and criminal laws related to their role and function in the institution. Many institutions reported that their academic advisors are well-informed and regularly updated about the obligations and limits placed upon the institution regarding academic advising by constitutional, statutory, and common law, external governmental agencies, and institutional policy. Most institutions maintain that their academic advisors systematically avoid helping students to circumvent institutional policies and regulations, which implies that more institutions are recognizing academic advising as an important element in ensuring institutional accountability and student success. A clear majority of institutions also reported that academic advisors confront students who circumvent institutional policies or regulations and refer them to appropriate agencies.

Almost all institutions believe that their academic advising program is responsive to the developmental and demographic profiles of the students served, which suggests that more institutions recognize the importance of considering the educational needs of the

students to guide academic advising. Almost all the institutions also asserted that their academic advising program helps students overcome skill deficiencies, which suggests that more institutions believe that their developmental programs are appropriate in helping students attain the knowledge, skills, and abilities to do college-level work.

In comparison, less than one-half of the institutions report that a program of regular and systematic research and evaluation exists within the academic advising program to determine whether the educational goals and needs of students are being met. Even fewer agree that funding is adequate to carry out the mission of the academic advising program.

**ACADEMIC ADVISING
IN TEXAS PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION
A SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM FIVE YEARS OF RESEARCH**

Introduction

Academic advising is defined as “a systematic process based on a close student-advisor relationship intended to aid students in achieving educational, career, and personal goals through the utilization of the full range of institutional and community resources” (Ender, Winston, and Miller; *Developmental Academic Advising*, 1984, pp. 18-19). It is a central element for a student's academic success, no matter how much, if any, developmental education is required.

The *Report on Academic Advising*, required annually by the Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP, established by Texas Education Code, Sec. 51.306), describes current practices in academic advising in Texas' public colleges and universities. Based on those reports, the study of academic advising in this document summarizes the major findings published from 1993 through 1997, and thereby provides an opportunity to assess the future direction of research in academic advising at Texas public institutions of higher education.

While the TASP Test seems to receive most of the public's attention, the program is much more than an exam. The program's essential elements are designed to enhance student success in higher education. It begins with the test as a diagnostic instrument, with required developmental education if a student does not pass one or more sections of the test. The advising component bridges these diagnostic and developmental education elements.

Background

The first report on academic advising was published in May 1989 under the title *Connecting Students With Success: Academic Advising and the Texas Academic Skills Program*. The report was based on a survey of Texas institutions of higher education. (That survey's summary results were reprinted in the 1993 *Report on Academic Advising*.) The Texas Academic Skills Council (TASC), the main advisory body for the TASP, established the following 10 objectives based on the 1989 survey results (*Connecting Students With Success*, page 11):

1. As a minimum, academic advising should be available to and required of all students before each registration.
2. Academic advising should facilitate identification and attainment of students' educational and career goals.

3. Academic advisors should make individual students aware of academic and other support services available on campus to assist students with problems they may face or to acquaint them with opportunities outside of class.
4. Academic advisors should help minimize student frustration and improve student performance by making students aware of institutional policies and procedures as they affect each individual.
5. Academic advisors should assist students in making choices about majors.
6. Academic advisors should assist students in making informed choices within major requirements.
7. Academic advising should be readily available to all students at times suited to the students' needs.
8. Academic advisors should be thoroughly informed about degree options and requirements, institutional policies and procedures, and student support services.
9. Academic advisors should have easy access to student records.
10. Academic advising systems should allow students to see advisors on a one-to-one basis.

The TASC then transferred the responsibility for the continuing appraisal of academic advising in Texas to the TASP Evaluation Committee, which was also responsible for reporting on the effectiveness of the TASP. This committee completed a second advising survey in February 1991. The survey asked the institutions to respond to eight descriptive questions regarding:

- Unique institutional characteristics;
- Primary responsibilities for advising regular students and developmental education students;
- When and how advising takes place;
- Whether the advising system is centralized, decentralized, or a combination of both;
- Formal training and evaluation of advisors;
- The advising system's major strength;
- The advising system's major weakness; and
- Action taken to address the system's major weakness.

Because of the open-ended nature of the survey, results were not published in their entirety but were kept on file for review. However, a summary by institution of the eight points was published in the 1993 *Report on Academic Advising*.

Fifteen survey items were included from the *Academic Advising Self-Assessment Guide* with permission of the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) for Student Services and Development Programs. The CAS was formed after a joint meeting of the American College Personnel Association and the National Association of Student

Personnel Administrators for “improving and advancing student development services and educational opportunities in post-secondary education institutions” (CAS Bylaws, 1979).

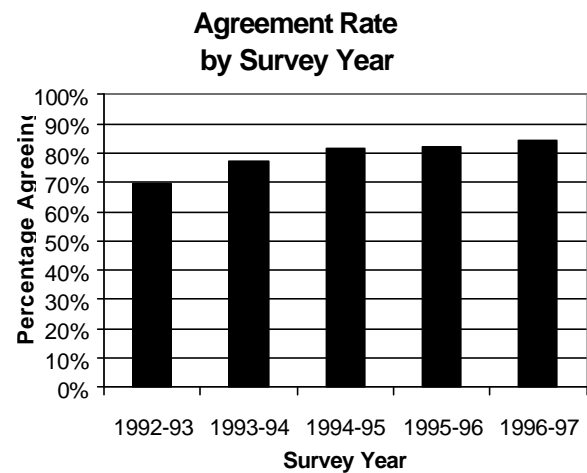
Results from the 15 survey items were also included in subsequent annual reports on academic advising for 1994, 1995, 1996, and 1997. The following is a summary of the major insights from these surveys across the five years of research on academic advising.

Insights from the CAS Survey Items: 1993 - 1997 Reports

About the Organization of Academic Advising

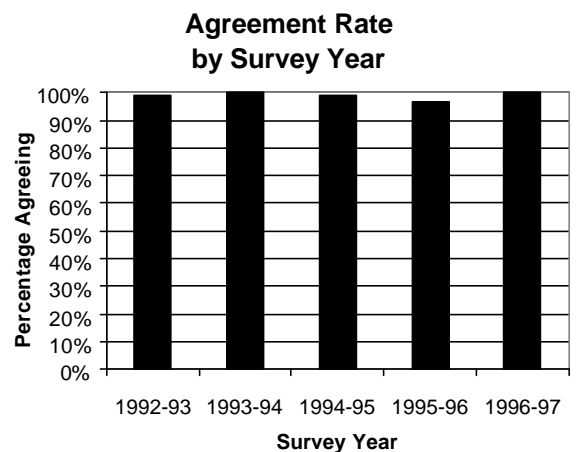
There exists a well-developed, written set of academic advising goals that are consistent with the stated mission of the institution.

About 85 percent of the 103 institutions in the 1997 survey responded that “*there exists a well-developed, written set of academic advising goals that are consistent with the stated mission of the institution.*” This response rate is an improvement from 69.5 percent with the same response in 1993, which implies that more institutions are recognizing academic advising as an important function of higher education, and not merely an activity peripheral



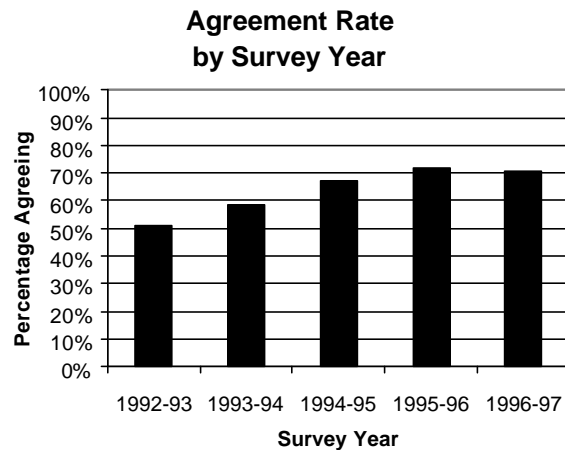
The mission of academic advising is to aid students in developing valid educational plans that are compatible with their life goals.

Institutions have consistently agreed over the five-year period that the “*mission of academic advising is to aid students in developing valid educational plans that are compatible with their life goals.*” For example, all of the 103 institutions in the 1997 study agreed with this mission of academic advising, compared to 98.8 percent of the 82 institutions that responded in the 1993 report.



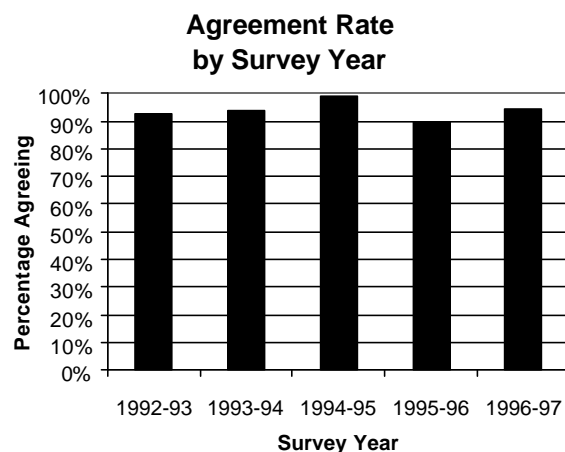
There exists an institution-wide philosophical statement concerning academic advising that includes clearly defined goals as well as the expectations placed on advisors and students alike.

From 1993 to 1997, the number of institutions that agreed that *“there exists an institution-wide philosophical statement concerning academic advising that includes clearly defined goals as well as the expectations placed on advisors and students alike”* increased by nearly 20 percentage points. Almost 71 percent of the 103 institutions in the 1997 survey reported that they had such a written philosophical statement, compared to 51 percent of the 82 institutions that responded in the 1993 survey. This finding also implies that more institutions are recognizing academic advising as an important function of higher education, and not merely an activity peripheral to providing educational programs.



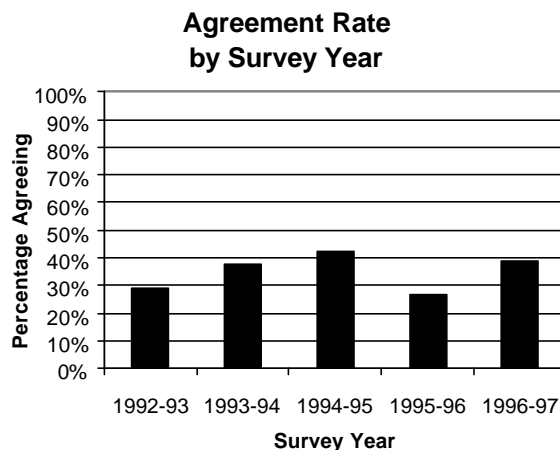
Academic advising services and facilities are readily accessible to all students in all programs throughout the institution.

A relatively high percentage of institutions (over 90) consistently stated over the five-year period that *“academic advising services and facilities are readily accessible to all students in all programs throughout the institution.”* The finding supports the state’s desire to provide access to and participation in public higher education for all the citizens of Texas—not only to a select few.



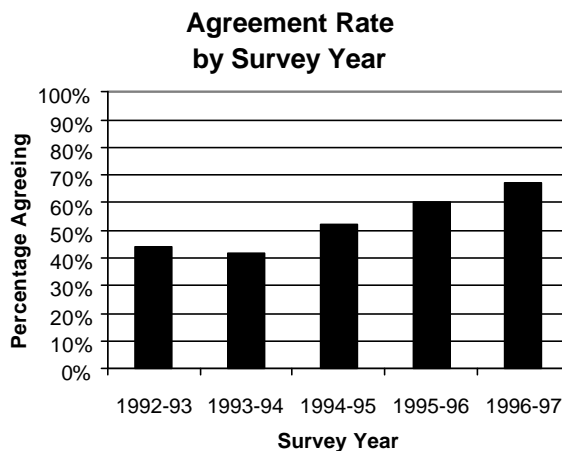
Funding is adequate to carry out the academic advising program's designated mission.

Only 39 percent of the 103 institutions in the 1997 survey agreed that *"funding is adequate to carry out the academic advising program's designated mission"*, up almost 10 percentage points from the 1993 survey (29.3). While more institutions believe that funding is adequate, the response data also indicates that almost two-thirds of institutions in the 1997 survey believe that funding for academic advising is still not sufficient.



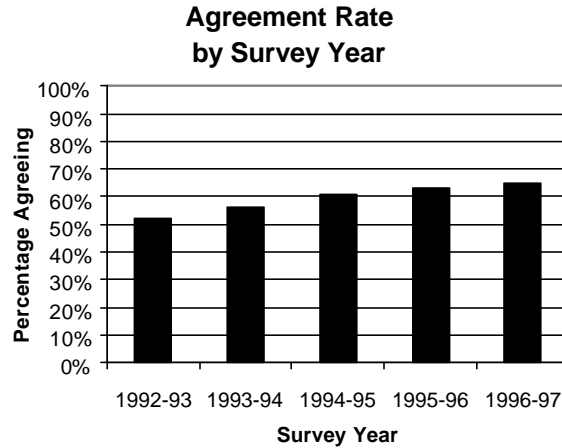
Academic advisors are knowledgeable about and responsive to relevant civil and criminal laws related to their role and function in the institution.

More institutions are becoming aware of how civil and criminal laws relate to their institution. Only 43.9 percent of the 82 institutions in the 1993 survey agreed that *"academic advisors are knowledgeable about and responsive to relevant civil and criminal laws related to their role and function in the institution."* But by 1997, about 67 percent of 103 institutions agreed with this statement - an increase of over 23 percentage points across the five-year period.



Academic advisors are well informed and regularly updated about the obligations and limitations placed upon the institution regarding academic advising by constitutional, statutory, and common law, external governmental agencies, and institutional policy.

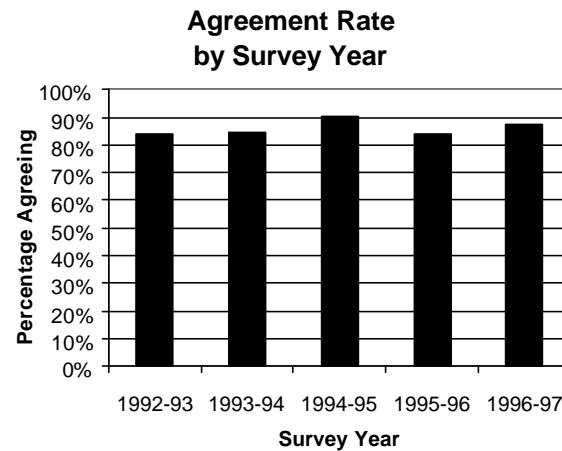
Complementing the findings above, about two-thirds of institutions (65) reported that *“academic advisors are well-informed and regularly updated about the obligations and limits placed upon the institution regarding academic advising by constitutional, statutory, and common law, external governmental agencies, and institutional policy.”* Slightly over one-half (52) of the 82 institutions in the 1993 survey felt that academic advisers were well-informed and kept updated on legal matters regarding academic advising.



About the Process of Academic Advising

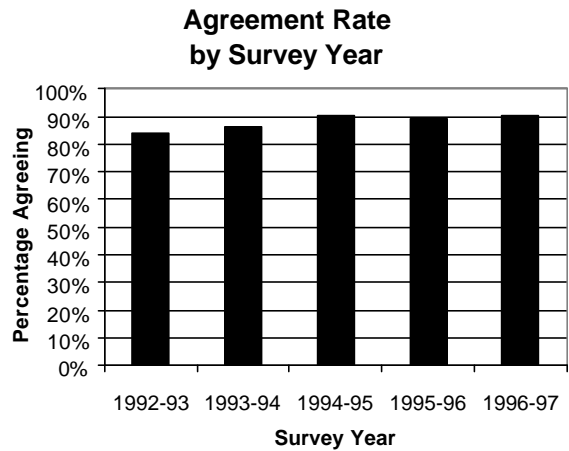
The academic advising program assists minority students to identify, prioritize, and meet their unique educational needs.

A relatively high percentage of institutions (86) consistently responded over the five-year period that *“the academic advising program assists minority students to identify, prioritize, and meet their unique educational needs.”* For example, 87 percent of the 103 institutions in the 1997 survey believed that their advising program was beneficial to minority students in these areas.



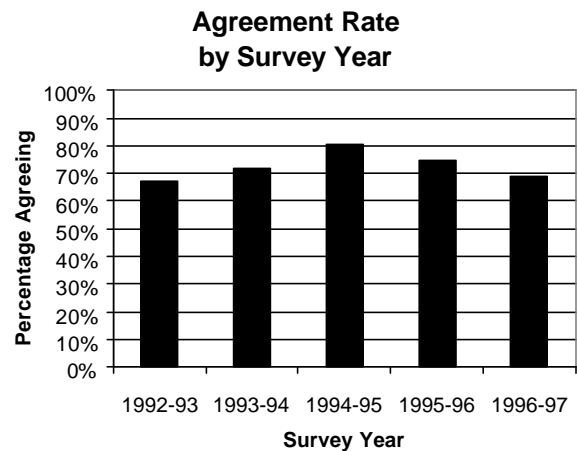
Academic advisors have easy access to and review data about individual students' educational needs, performance, aspirations and problems.

About 90 percent of the 103 institutions in the 1997 survey agreed that *“academic advisors have easy access to and review data about individual students' educational needs, performance, aspirations, and problems.”* This agreement rate is a moderate improvement from the 1993 survey (84.1), which implies that more institutions are seeking ways to make this student information available in the academic advising process.



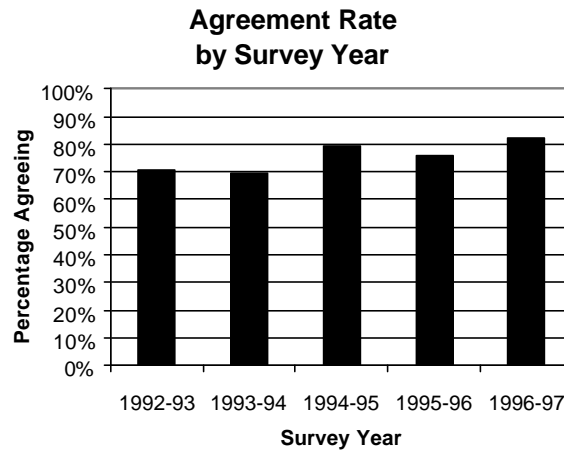
Instructional faculty have easy access to and review information about their students' current levels of reading, writing and mathematics proficiencies.

About 67 of the institutions in the 1993 survey reported that *“instructional faculty have easy access to and review information about their students' current levels of reading, writing and mathematics proficiencies.”* This agreement rate increased in the 1994 and 1995 survey (71.9 percent and 80.4 percent, respectively) but declined in the 1996 survey (75%) and further declined in the 1997 survey (68.9%). The TASP exemption standards were lowered and in full effect during the 1996 and 1997 time periods, which means that fewer first-time entering students were assessed for reading, writing, and math skills. As a result, less information was available for supporting student academic advising.



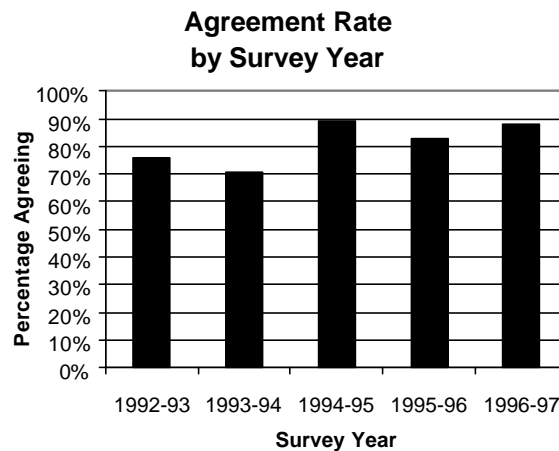
Academic advisors systematically avoid helping students to circumvent institutional policies and regulations.

Approximately 83 percent of the 103 institutions in the 1997 survey indicated that their “*academic advisors systematically avoid helping students to circumvent institutional policies and regulations.*” This response rate is an improvement from the 1993 survey (70.7), which implies that more institutions are recognizing academic advising as an important element in ensuring institutional accountability and student success.



Academic advisors confront students who circumvent institutional policies or regulations and refer them to appropriate agencies as necessary.

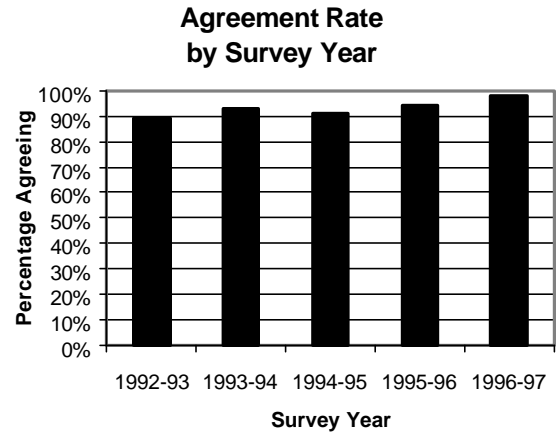
Likewise, about 88.3 percent of the institutions in the 1997 survey reported that “*academic advisors confront students who circumvent institutional policies or regulations and refer them to appropriate agencies*”, up 12.9 percentage points from the 75.6 percent agreement rate in the 1993 report.



About the Effectiveness of Academic Advising (Self-Evaluative)

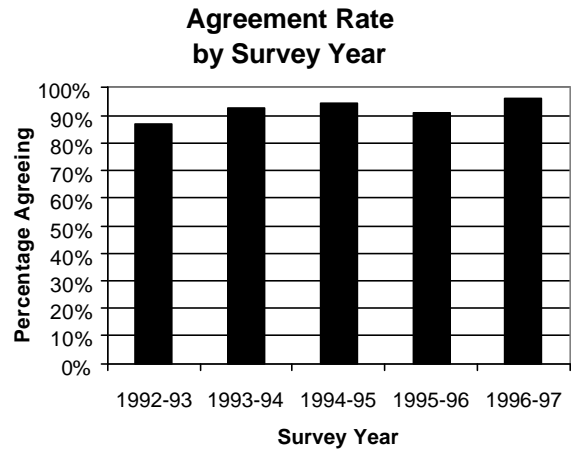
The academic advising program is responsive to the developmental and demographic profiles of the students served.

Almost all (98) of the 103 institutions in the 1997 survey agreed that their “academic advising program is responsive to the developmental and demographic profiles of the students served.” This agreement rate is a moderate improvement from the 1993 survey (89), which implies that more institutions recognize the importance of considering the educational needs of the students to guide academic advising.



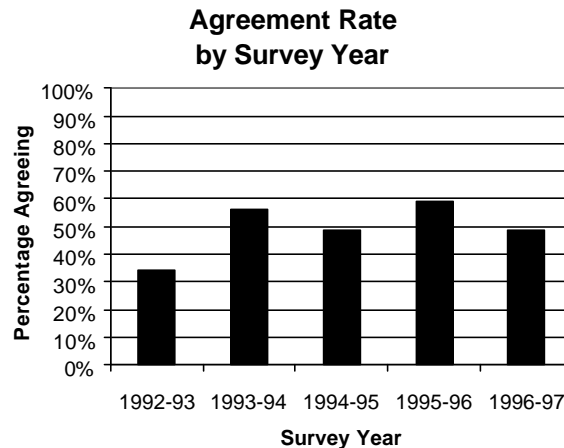
The academic advising program assists students to overcome skill deficiencies.

Almost all (96) of the 103 institutions in the 1997 survey agreed that their “academic advising program assists students to overcome skill deficiencies.” This agreement rate is also a moderate improvement from the 1993 survey (86), which implies that more institutions believe that their developmental programs are appropriate in helping students attain the knowledge, skills, and abilities to do college-level work.



A program of regular and systematic research and evaluation exists within the academic advising program to determine whether the educational goals and needs of students are being met.

Less than one-half (49) of the 103 institutions in the 1997 survey reported that *“a program of regular and systematic research and evaluation exists within the academic advising program to determine whether the educational goals and needs of students are being met.”* This agreement rate is a moderate improvement from the 1993 survey, in which only one third of institutions reported the existence of a regular and systematic research and evaluation program



SUMMARY

Texas law mandates that "Each institution shall establish an advising program to advise students at every level of courses and degree options that are appropriate for the individual student" (TEC 51.306 [I]). This report examined the results from the annual academic advising survey to public institutions of higher education conducted by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board for the 1993 through 1997 academic years.

The survey results indicate that institutions recognize academic advising as an important function of higher education, and not merely an activity peripheral to providing educational programs. For example, institutions consistently agreed that the mission of academic advising is to aid students in developing valid educational plans that are compatible with their life goals. Moreover, an increasing number of institutions have developed a written set of academic advising goals consistent with the stated mission of the institution.

Likewise, more institutions have implemented an institution-wide philosophical statement concerning academic advising that includes clearly defined goals as well as the expectations placed on advisors and students alike. Meanwhile, institutions have made academic advising services and facilities readily accessible to all students in all programs throughout the institution. In particular, many institutions asserted that their academic advising program assists minority students identify, prioritize, and meet their unique educational needs. The result is that more institutions are seeking ways to make student information available in the academic advising process. Still, the survey data

suggests that there continues to be a need for improving access to information for supporting student academic advising. However, these findings overall support the state's desire to provide all the citizens of Texas access to and participation in public higher education—not only to a select few.

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Almost all institutions believe that their academic advising program is responsive to the developmental and demographic profiles of the students served which suggests that more institutions recognize the importance of considering the educational needs of the students to guide academic advising. Almost all the institutions also asserted that their academic advising program assists students to overcome skill deficiencies, which suggests that more institutions believe that their developmental programs are appropriate in helping students attain the knowledge, skills, and abilities to do college-level work.

In comparison, less than half of the institutions report that a program of regular and systematic research and evaluation exists within the academic advising program to determine whether the educational goals and needs of students are being met. Fewer still agree that funding is adequate to carry out the mission of the academic advising program.