Findings from the Fall 2021 Student-Faculty Focus Group Study

This presentation is available at: http://go.hawaii.edu/VuN

Serina Makaiwa, OVCAA Secretary
Christi Palacat, Institutional Analyst, IRO
Dr. Rebecca Romine, Assessment Coordinator
Dr. Alan Rosenfeld, AVCAA
John Stanley, Director, IRO
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**Cost:** $3,600 (includes one topical module, $250 for a second) for Spring 2020 administration  
**Population:** Freshmen and Seniors  
**Benchmark results:** Yes  
**Pros:** Most widely used student survey in higher education  
**Cons:** Lengthy (>1 hour to complete), difficult to distill results, content validity brought into question, excludes sophomores and juniors

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**Cost:** $2,800 (+$350 for additional questions) for 2015 administration  
**Population:** Freshmen  
**Benchmark results:** Yes  
**Pros:** Widely used, unique in examining freshmen attitudes prior to starting classes  
**Cons:** Freshmen only, lengthy (> 1 hour), pre-entry administration so doesn’t look at interactions with faculty

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**Cost:** Fee was waived for Spring 2021 by survey vendor, Percontor  
**Population:** All undergraduates  
**Benchmark results:** Yes  
**Pros:** Branching approach to questions, survey can be completed in 7-10 minutes, optimized for smart phone use, content validity, all students  
**Cons:** New survey
• In Fall 2021, the Institutional Research Office (IRO) moderated four, one-hour focus groups, comprised of UH West O‘ahu students and faculty.

• The goal was to preserve the voice and perspectives of students and faculty on challenges identified from the 2020 NSSE and 2021 RISC student surveys.

• Campus stakeholders acknowledge qualitative data is a valuable complement to quantitative data generated from the NSSE and RISC assessments, helping to “close the loop”.

Objectives

• Gather in-depth, qualitative data on student and faculty perceptions of:
  1. Student-faculty engagement.
  2. Students’ challenges in balancing their education with their personal and work lives.

• Why focus on these two issues?
  1. Results from the 2020 NSSE survey (N=416) found students at UH West O’ahu rated the level of student-faculty engagement significantly lower than their peers at similar institutions.
  2. The 2021 RISC survey (N=735) found that work and personal issues were the top two challenges students said impeded their academic success.
Relevant Previous Research


• Four, one-hour focus groups administered in October 2021.
• Conducted over four days via Zoom.
• An average of four students and four faculty attended each focus group (N=35).
• A diverse group of participants were recruited (i.e., traditional and non-traditional students, neighbor island students, faculty from different fields).
• The IRO Director moderated each session using a consistent set of questions.
• The study was approved by the UH Data Governance Office (DGP 210825-1) and is exempt from IRB.
• Student consent forms were administered in advance.
Methodology

• Pre-session preparation
  • Familiarized participants with goals of the study, focus group agenda, and lines of inquiry.
  • Facilitated introductions of participants.
  • Reviewed ground rules and guidelines.
  • Recorded meeting on Zoom.

• Facilitation during meeting
  • Introduced/primed each focus group topic.
  • Facilitated discussion, probed, paused, reflected, observed non-verbal cues.
  • Concluded and acknowledged participants.
• Inferences from the findings of this study are limited to the focal institution and may not extend to other institutions with distinctly different students in terms of academic preparation, demographics, and educational aspirations.

• The analysis is restricted to 35 participants (20 students and 15 faculty) and may not represent the perceptions and sentiments of the campus community as a whole. The student participants may not represent the average student in terms of academic preparation, socio-demographic background, and educational aspirations.

• Faculty and student participants may have been overrepresented in some majors and underrepresented (or not represented) for other majors.
Data Analysis

• Transcription
  • Imported Zoom media into NVivo software.
  • Utilized NVivo’s automated transcription tool to convert audio to text.
  • Partitioned media into ‘timespans’ and made notes for each section.
  • Validated accuracy of text conversion for each timespan.

• Coding
  • Hybrid approach
    • Deductive: Began with a list of pre-defined codes derived from prior literature, attached codes to student/faculty comments.
    • Inductive: Created custom codes ad hoc as data were analyzed, based on common knowledge of the campus environment and student demographics.
  • Structured codes into meaningful themes (again, largely guided by prior literature).
  • Created sub-themes called “categories”.
  • Conducted a frequency count of codes, themes, and categories. Plotted treemap to visualize the structure of the content.

• Sentiment analysis
  • The automated sentiment analysis tool in NVivo performed inaccurately. IRO is currently working on manually coding sentiment for each comment.
## Findings – Topic #1: Student-Faculty Engagement

### Table 1a Data and codes/references generated

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Focus Groups</th>
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<td>Respondents</td>
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<td>Codes generated</td>
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### Table 2a Code category, ranking and frequency list of Focus Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Reference counts</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Theme groups</th>
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<td>Communication</td>
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Note: This treemap is for visual aid purposes only. The text is best read on a desktop computer or laptop screen.
Topic #1: Student-Faculty Engagement Findings

• *Communication* represented 69% of the total code references for Topic #1 and was the most frequently discussed theme.

• Students and faculty commented on three main issues: “Availability”, “Email”, and “E Ala Pono”

  • Student comments on instructor availability were generally critical of challenges staying online in Zoom after class to ask instructors questions.
  
  • One out of every three students reported that instructors’ email response time was too long, while two out of three reported response time was adequate.

  • Faculty and student comments were critical of the E Ala Pono progress updates. Both groups commented that the progress messages were “boilerplate” and should be more personalized. Students reported only receiving “kudos” messages and perceived these as having little motivational value.
• Resources represented 18% of the total code references for Topic #1 and was the second most frequently discussed theme.

• Students and faculty commented on two main issues: “Career Plans” and “Technology”

  • “Career Plans” was a category comprising a significant number of comments codified in both the Communication and Resources themes.
  • Students and faculty commented that career planning is usually embedded in the classes. Students reported having few career-planning conversations with faculty outside of the classroom.
  • Faculty commented that they assumed career planning conversations outside of the class is the undertaking of the Career Services Office.
  • Students and faculty reported challenges integrating resources/services from the Career Services Office with career planning discussions inside the classroom. The degree to which this was a challenge varied by student major.
  • Students reported that their home internet connection is too slow to support Zoom and would like availability of personal hotspots.
• Accommodation represented 13% of the total code references for Topic #1 and was the third most frequently discussed theme.

• Students and faculty commented on two main issues: “Office Hours” and “Availability”
  
  • Students reported that attending office hours on Zoom was more burdensome than attending in-person or having discussions after class.
  • Students reported office hours are often not listed on syllabi (or listed as “by appointment only”) or were not followed according to the time listed. Most students still reported being able to successfully schedule an office hour meeting with their instructors.
  • Several faculty recommended surveying students (or using “STAR Balance”) to determine the best time and method for office hours.
  • Several non-traditional students reported office hours typically do not work for their schedules.
  • Faculty reported that facilitating Q&A after class was more difficult, due to having to establish separate breakout rooms for each student for privacy purposes. Faculty reported that students often leave the waiting room due to the long wait.
• “So, in most cases for me, when I look at my syllabus for professors and instructors, it's usually appointments are created based on contacting them and letting them know the best time. So that actually might be the best way, it has been working for me.”

• “I remember, for my example, the professor did have a stated office hours, but because I couldn't hear back from him through email, I would say, Hey, can I meet with you during this time? Didn't get a response...”

• “Like every time I went to office hours, they were always there.”

• “I definitely miss that time at the end of class where you're cleaning up and students can just walk by and say, Oh, I have a, you know, I have a question...”

• “…solutions for different methods for faculty and instructors to provide communication with students may be the way because we've moved to a virtual world and it seems a little bit even easier to pick up the phone, to have students dial in via Zoom, or even have a chat going on so that students can feel like they're understanding what's going on in the class.”
“I've had I feel like from my experiences when I tend to fall behind in classes or whatever, I've had more professors who will kind of just do you know the E Ala Pono progress update. And I get like a stock email from academic advising and that's kind of all I hear from it.”

“Particularly when you think about like one of the most important things that professors can do is feedback about what a student is doing correctly or incorrectly, and that feedback comes from assessments. So, whether it's a formative or summative assessment, if you're just getting like good work in a smiley face from a professor that's not considered authentic assessment, it's not actually good. It's great that you get it, but it's not a positive.”

“I've actually reached out to pretty much all of the Business lead instructors to find out what I need to do and what my options are as far as when I graduate. And it was really helpful and that helps me narrow down what classes I need to take. And it was really quick. When I asked them, they all got back to me within a couple of days.”

“[Career planning] hasn't been happening that much this past couple [of semesters]... Yeah, it's more so with the counselors, and you kind of got to go in and make the effort.”

“...I'm in a field that I have access to contacts and I want to make sure that our students get the resources that they need during their degree program and as a faculty contact, for a program, I kind of feel like it's an onus on me to make sure that they know the lay of the land with job procurement, graduate school, so on and so forth.”

“So, like I was saying, I don't have internet. I have to run down the street to McDonald's or in Chinatown, where I am now in somebody's office. So that's a big barrier for communication.”
Findings – Topic #2: Work and Personal Challenges

Table 1b Data and codes/references generated

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Table 2b Code category, ranking and frequency list of Focus Groups

<table>
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Topic #2: Work and Personal Challenges Treemap

Note: This treemap is for visual aid purposes only. The text is best read on a desktop computer or laptop screen.
• Family/personal/home setting represented 69% of the total code references for Topic #2 and was the most frequently discussed theme.

• Students and faculty commented on three main issues: “Academic Support”, “Institutional Support”, and “Financial Issues”

• Students commented that they could be better supported academically if assignment deadlines were occasionally extended.
• Faculty suggested that periodic check-ins are a helpful way of connecting with students and provide opportunities to check-in on their well-being.
• Students and faculty acknowledged the need for a childcare facility on campus.
• Students expressed a need for more wifi-enabled devices and personal computer rentals to support off-campus learning.
• Several students asked for reductions in textbook costs and more OER materials used in classes. Other students commented that student government implemented a zero-textbook initiative, however several students reported being unfamiliar with this initiative.
• Work represented 31% of the total code references for Topic #2 and was the second most frequently discussed theme.

• Students and faculty commented on three main issues: “Academic Support”, “Institutional Support”, and “Financial Issues”

  • Most students reported that class times and modalities were abundant, allowing them to work full-time. A smaller number of students expressed a need for more evening/weekend classes.
  
  • The vast majority of students reported working one or more jobs. When asked how the institution could better support students in balancing work and school, students asked for more flexibility with assignment deadlines (with recognition that not every assignment deadline can be extended in reality).
  
  • Students employed in on-campus jobs reported that they are allowed flexibility in work hours (i.e., “student first, employee second” mantra).
  
  • The majority of students reported working one or multiple jobs in order to finance school and personal expenses.
• “And also, part of the solution would be professors having maybe like more lenient due dates. Like, for example, I had one class who the professor, wanted everything due on Thursday, and I worked nine to five Monday through Friday. And that made it really challenging trying to get everything in on Thursday. So maybe having weekend due dates.”

• “I am on the flexible side because I find that my students are often, you know, if there's a student who's not turning in an assignment and it stretches out, I immediately know there's a problem there, so I reach out to them.”

• “I'm not having enough time because of work and family demands and distance learning, even though it is possible to balance and get good grades. I feel like it makes it challenging as a student personally to really learn in-depth the topics that I learned in class and retain them, which I wish that I got to or that I'm able to because it would be useful in grad school and really being prepared for grad school.”

• “I wish I could just go to the library and just study over there at times. But our community library, you have to be vaccinated. And the other, I'm over on Moloka‘i, so then our school library is like only has a limited amount of space and computers here. So, it's just very limited in a lot of ways, and it's just trying to find how you can just adjust to everything.”

• “And if there's like more instructors that can use open-source textbooks, that for sure has helped me a lot. When it's got the IDAP, I have to opt out and then I'm stuck because I need the book for the class. But then there's no book on reserve at the library that they can scan to me, or there's no books available, used books that I can afford to buy.”

• “Something that has benefited me personally is the free textbooks that you can rent at the library implemented by the student government. That was really cool. Just little things like that makes the living easier.”
• “I think childcare would be a great element, if possible, to add to UH West O‘ahu.”
• “I think that childcare was something that was mentioned on campus, but never implemented. I think that could help a ton of people.”
• “My student was talking about her kids at home. Every time I meet with her, she's always apologizing that she can't focus on her research papers she's writing because she was in charge of childcare that day. And of course, she has no reason to apologize.”
• “I'd like to share that, it is extremely difficult for some people who, especially in these islands where you know the cost of living is so high.”
• “And I saw this notification that said, like basic needs [survey]...and I'm not sure how that's going. But if there is like options for like resources [I would be interested].”
• “As far as a solution...is there any CARES Act that we can give to students who possibly, I don't know what's left with the CARES Act for each campus, I know some campuses have more. Maybe that'll help take away some of the pain.”
• “When I first got into UH West O‘ahu, I've heard from students [PII redaction] that there are students who are working two, three, four or five, sometimes even five jobs. You see students working so hard and they still cannot make it. But I see like students, for example, they'd have to go without food.”
• “So, coming from someone who works 40 hours a week, while doing school full time, 15 credits. For the past three years, it was very challenging. I'm not going to lie.”

• “One of my friends, they're putting themselves through college while working two full-times maybe part times, but she's just exhausted at the end of the day and so like school seems impossible.”

• “I had a student tell me two weeks ago that he had to quit his job [PII redaction] because his class work was suffering and because he just had too much to handle.”

• “Our advisors are really understanding, and they really encourage that we work as students first and then like everything. So at least our workload isn't as stuffed as compared to other students who don't work on campus. So honestly, I actually like working [on campus] because it has that flexibility, especially with hours and workloads, that kind of works well around my student schedule.”
Final Takeaways

- The logistics of the online learning experience has challenged the degree to which students and faculty are able to engage after and outside of class.
- Students reported office hours are often not listed on syllabi (or listed as “by appointment only”) or were not followed according to the time listed. Most students, however, reported being able to successfully schedule an office hour meeting with their instructors.
- There does not appear to be a cohesiveness between the career planning activities embedded in classes, and resources offered by the Career Services Office. The need for more integration varied between Divisions.
- Many students reported a lack of sufficient internet bandwidth at home to support online learning. Access to personal hotspots was a common ask of students. One participant noted that the institution is offering more hotspots, supported by CARES fundings, but few students were aware of the initiative.
- There were criticisms from students and faculty about the effectiveness of the progress update messages broadcasted through the E Ala Pono early intervention initiative.
- A substantial number of students in the focus groups were not familiar with the zero-textbook initiative.
- Both faculty and students reported the need for a childcare facility on campus.
Next Steps

• Present the findings of this study to:
  • The Academic Leadership Council (February 7, 2022)
  • Chancellor’s Senior Staff Meeting (February 16, 2022)
  • Chancellor’s Division Chair and Directors Meeting (February 16, 2022)
  • Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Staff Meeting (March 1, 2022)
  • ASUHWO Student Government (TBA)
  • WSCUC ARC Accepted Presentation (April 20 – 22, 2022)

• Complete a sentiment analysis to supplement this content analysis.
Questions

uhwoiro@hawaii.edu
https://westoahu.hawaii.edu/academics/institutional-research/