

Exploring the Role of Advising in Canadian Universities: Student's Advising Experiences at The University of the Fraser Valley

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Introduction

Advising has been slated as an integral part of Canadian student's post-secondary education. This is typically framed in terms of the positive relationship between the use of advising services and student success. American research on this relationship has identified advising as a critical component in student retention and graduation rates. This is a particularly important finding because student attrition rates in post-secondary institutions have endured for several decades.

Comparatively, very little is currently known about the state, role, and effects of advising in Canada's post-secondary institutions. Canadian advisor's knowledge and practice primarily relies on the theories, research, and findings of America's advising literature. Whether using an American knowledge-practice in a Canadian context is efficacious or an ineffective overgeneralization is unclear due to the lack of Canadian research.

Current knowledge about advising in Canada's post-secondary institutions gives mixed evidence about how integral it is for Canadian students:

- Research funded and published by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario has found that student awareness and utilization of support services available to them is low.
- Research by the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer has found that post-secondary institutions and advisors are confused regarding the roles of advising in supporting student's progression through their education. There is also a disparity in advisor training and development, advising delivery models, and use of technology for advising across institutions and years of experience.

The Current Study

Purpose

- Explore student's advising experiences at UFV.
- Provide recommendations to research and enhance UFV's advising services.
- Serve as a call to action for Canadian institutions, advisors, and practitioners to begin conducting advising research that is based in Canadian post-secondary institutions.
- Identify knowledge gaps and future directions for Canadian advising research.

Methodology

The current study was conducted at UFV and consisted of an online, mixed method survey covering five broad areas: 1) General advising; 2) Academic advising; 3) Career advising; 4) Faculty advising; 5) Knowledge transfer from school to occupation. A number of individual and demographic variables were also collected in order to identify any potential relationships to knowledge, use, and experiences of advising at UFV.

The survey was advertised by willing faculty and advisors to participants through student email and word-of-mouth. Sampling was done using a self-selection method, and students were able to participate in the survey for a period of two weeks.

51 (12 male and 39 female) students participated in the survey. The median age of participants was 22 years, with a range of 18 to 63 years. Participants came from all years of study and had a mean GPA of 3.2, with a range of 2.0 to 4.33. 44 participants completed the survey. Data from 7 participants who partially completed the survey was also included in the analysis.

Preliminary Results

Figure 1. Student Awareness of Advising Services

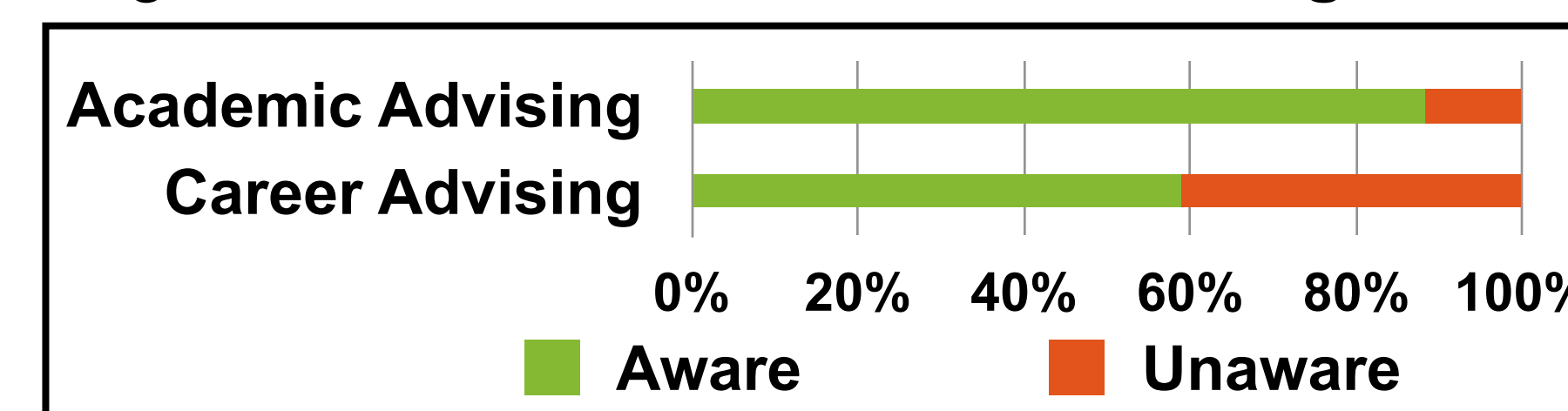


Figure 2. Student Use of Advising Services

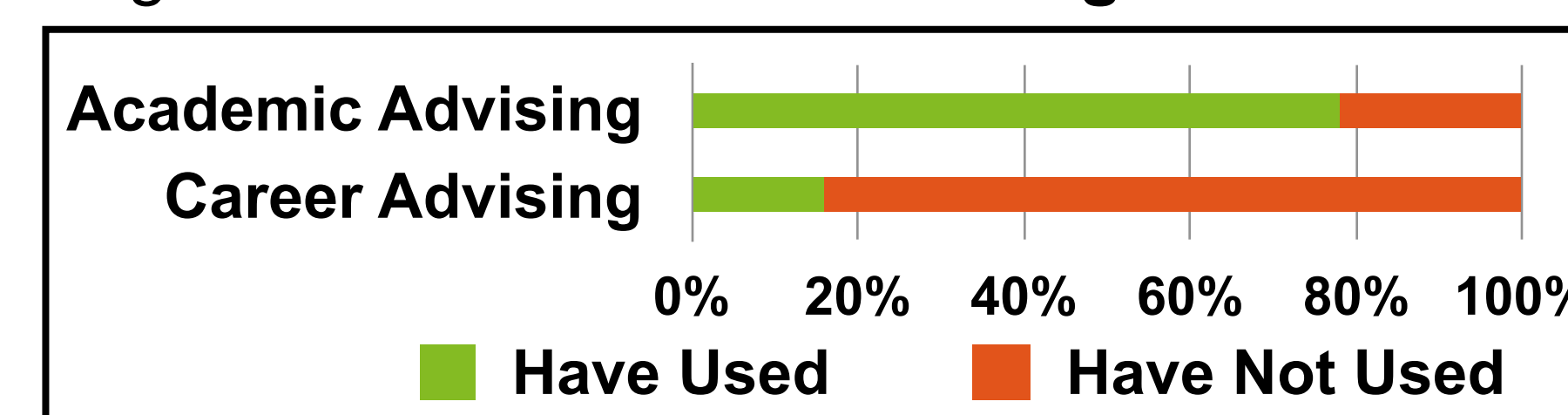


Figure 3. Face-to-Face Advising Availability

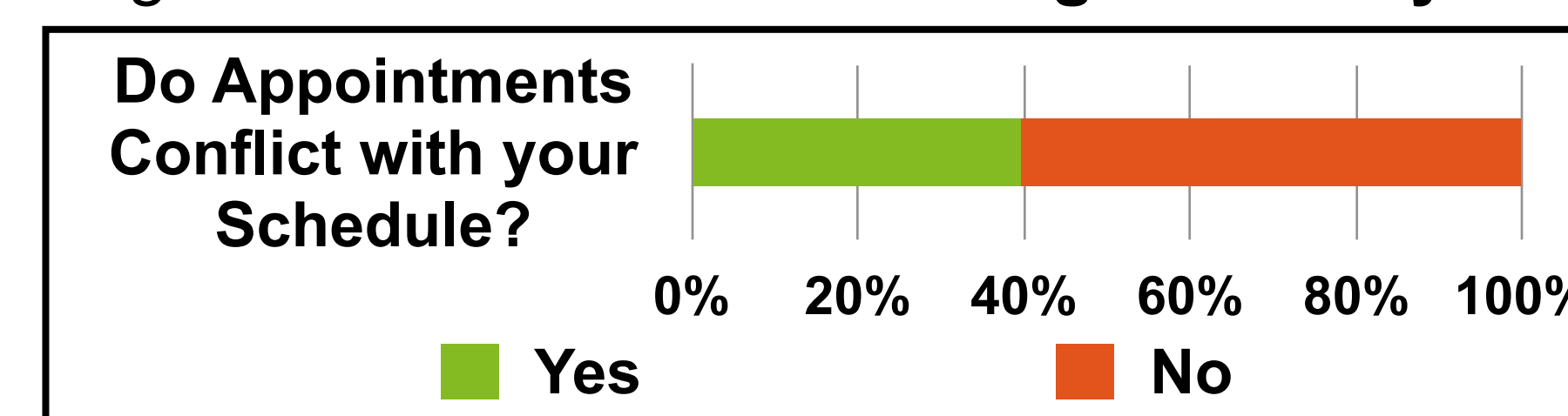


Figure 4. Student's Preferred Advising Style

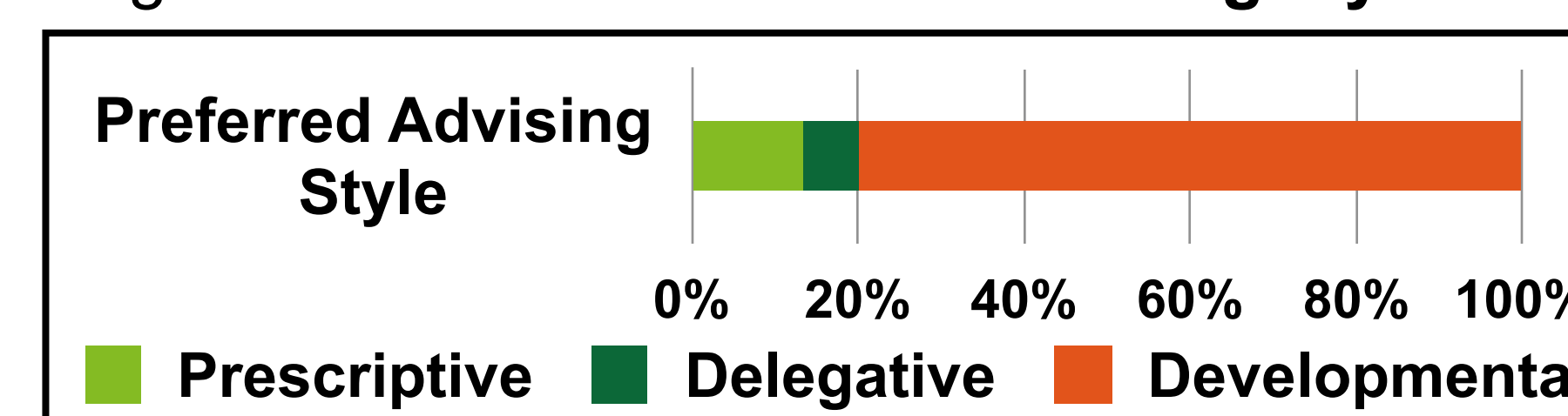


Figure 5. How Students Use Advising Services

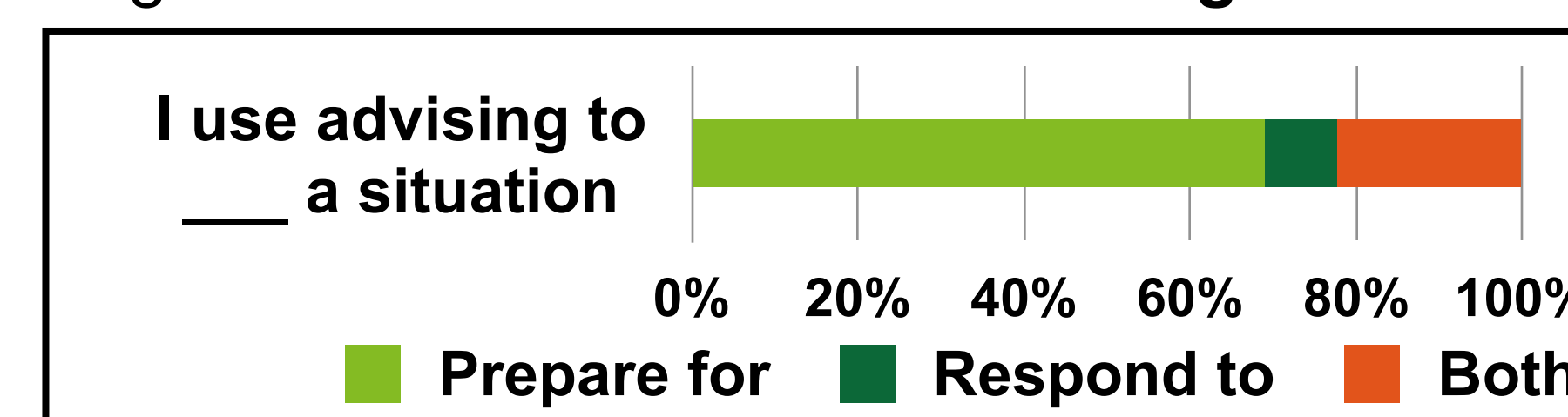
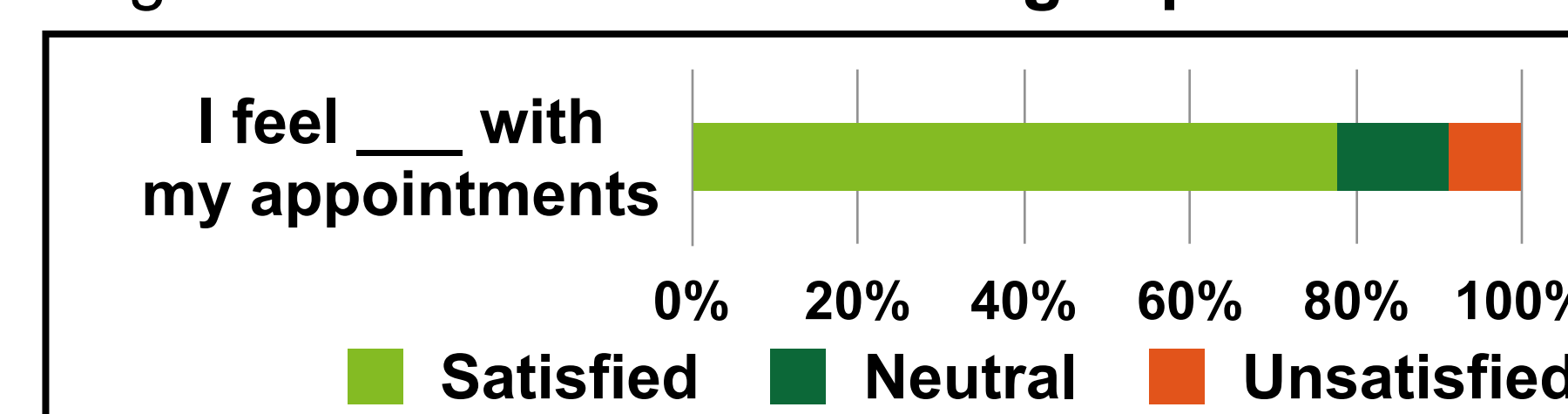


Figure 6. Face-to-Face Advising Experience



Discussion

It should be noted that the sample in this study may or may not be representative due to self-selection and a low sample size relative to UFV's student population. This study was intended to be exploratory and to serve as a point of reference for future advising research that could be conducted by Canadian post-secondary institutions. Based on the preliminary results, there were several notable observations:

- Most students in this study were satisfied with the quality and usefulness of face-to-face advising services. This might be related to how these students take a proactive and developmental approach to advising.
- Many students in this study find the current availability of face-to-face advising services unaccommodating. Students identified drop-in advising, hiring more advisors, and other hours of operation as potential improvements.
- Students also expressed a desire for alternatives to face-to-face advising. Email, an online chat system, and a Q & A webpage for common advising questions were offered as suggestions.
- 95% of students indicated that they would benefit from their advisor following up with them after appointments. Only 30% indicated that their advisors do follow up with them after appointments.
- Student use of career advising was very low at 16%. This was interesting considering the largely proactive nature of the sample. Comparatively, 62% of students indicated they had gone to professors for career advice. This is possibly explained by student's need for specialized career advice.