

Assessment of Guidance/Counselor Programs: Some Help from a National Study

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The public demand for accountability in all educational programs mandates the assessment of counseling and guidance programs. Assessment of such programs can be a difficult task, however, because of the potentially confidential nature of counselor/student interactions and the absence of a national data base. The findings of one national study of student attitudes toward their school counseling programs are presented here.

A NATIONAL STUDY conducted recently at the University of Michigan asked seniors a series of questions about how frequently they used the guidance and counseling programs within their schools, and how helpful the sessions were. This article reports the findings of that study in the hope that they may be useful to principals conducting program assessment in the area of counseling and/or guidance.

The data* were drawn from a recent study of youth conducted by researchers at the Institute for Social Research. In their study, "Monitoring the Future: A Continuing Study of the Lifestyles and Values of Youth," researchers annually

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*Percentages may not equal 100 percent because of rounding errors and because the authors collapsed categories of responses to simplify the presentation. For example, the two questions relating to frequency of contact each had seven response categories on the original questionnaire.

Readers who would like more complete information concerning the response categories and/or the corresponding percentages for the five questions reported on in this article are invited to write: Monitoring the Future, 2030 Institute for Social Research, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48109.

survey more than 17,000 seniors from approximately 130 public and private high schools. Students are carefully sampled to be representative of the United States.

Questionnaire items cover a broad spectrum of personal and societal issues. Several items deal specifically with the students' perceptions of the quantity and quality of counseling services available through their high schools. Reported here are student responses to four questions:

- "How many times this school year have you seen a counselor individually?"
- "How many times this school year have you seen a counselor as part of a group of other students?"
- "Would you have preferred to see a counselor more or less often than you have during the past year?"
- "How helpful have your sessions with a counselor been for you?"

Student responses were analyzed both in total and for differences on five factors: sex; region of the country (NE, NC, S, W); college plans (yes, no); race; and drug use.

In addition, the data from a follow-up survey one year beyond high school are presented for one final question:

- "How helpful were your high school counselors in getting you into a job, college, or other schooling you were seeking after high school?"

Findings and Implications

To the question, "How many times this school year have you seen a counselor individually?" more than half (53.7%) of the seniors reported seeing a counselor individually three or more times. Another one-third (34.8%) reported individual counselor contact once or twice during their senior year. Only 11.5 percent reported that they had not seen a counselor during their last year in high school. Thus, the vast majority of seniors (88.5%) reported having seen a counselor one or more times during their final year in high school.

Seniors were also asked how frequently they had seen a counselor as part of a group of students. Fifty-three percent reported no group counseling during their senior year. Another 30.8 percent reported seeing a counselor once or twice during their senior year as part of a group of students, but only a few students (16.2%) reported frequent group counseling (three or more times) during their senior year.

Group counseling, while not a frequent practice, does increase the total number of counselor-senior contacts. Among the 11.5 percent of the seniors who did not see a counselor individually during their final year in school, nearly one-third reported seeing a counselor as part of a

group. Thus, 92 percent of the total sample saw a counselor either individually or as part of a group sometime during their senior year in high school.

Were there differences between the groups of students who used the services, and did these differences effect the frequency of their contacts? Our analysis of the data indicates differences between groups only in relation to college plans and race. Seniors who planned to attend four-year colleges after graduation had more frequent counselor contacts than students who did not plan to attend four-year colleges. (See Table 1.)

Table 1: College Plans

<i>Frequency of Individual Counselor Contacts</i>	<i>Plan To Attend</i>	<i>Do Not Plan To Attend</i>
3+ times	63.0%	44.3%
1 or 2	29.3%	40.7%
No times	7.7%	15.0%

Black students surveyed made more frequent use of counselors during their senior year than did white students. (See Table 2.) This trend becomes more pronounced when the category "three or more times" is expanded. While only 4.5 percent of the white students surveyed reported frequent individual contacts with a counselor (11 or more contacts during their senior year), 12 percent of the black students surveyed reported 11 or more individual contacts.

Table 2: Race

<i>Frequency of Individual Counselor Contacts</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>
3 or more times	52.4%	61.1%
1 or 2 times	36.5%	24.9%
No times	11.0%	13.9%

Satisfaction with Counselor Contacts

Seniors were asked how satisfied they were with the number of counselor contacts they had had. The majority (52.9%) felt that they had just about the right amount of contact with the counselors. Of those who were dissatisfied, about one-third (32.3%) said they would like more contact, while only 13.8 percent said they would like less. This was true of college-bound as well as non-college-bound seniors. Only when the responses were viewed by race did any differences occur: 56 percent of the white students reported sufficient counselor contact, and 32 percent wished more; on the other hand, 35 percent of the black students reported sufficient counselor contact, while 50.3 percent said they wished

more. The black students in the sample not only tended to report more frequency of counselor contacts during their senior year, but indicated that they would prefer more.

The data suggest that the guidance and counseling needs of about half of the high school seniors sampled were being met. It is interesting to note that while college-bound seniors tended to make more frequent use of the counseling system, they did not seem to do so at the expense of the non-college bound seniors.

Finally, seniors and graduates were asked to evaluate the quality of the counseling they had received. When seniors were asked, "How helpful have your sessions with a counselor been for you?" slightly more than one-third (36.7%) reported that the services were very helpful, slightly fewer than one-third (27.1%) reported that the services were somewhat helpful, and slightly more than one-third (36.2%) reported that they were of little or no help. This holds true for all categories of students until their responses are analyzed by race. While about one-third (34.0%) of the white students reported their sessions with the counselor to be very helpful, well over half of the black students (51.3%) reported this level of satisfaction. (See Table 3.)

Table 3: Satisfaction by Race

	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>
Very helpful	34.0%	51.3%
Somewhat helpful	28.1%	22.8%
Little or no help	38.0%	26.3%

As no attempt was made to determine the type of counseling service sought, or even the goals of the counseling/guidance programs in the schools where seniors were surveyed, no clues are available as to why more black seniors than white seniors would report that the counseling services they received were very helpful.

Follow-up Study

An important feature of "Monitoring the Future" is the follow-up effort. For six years following graduation a sampling of the original respondents are mailed a questionnaire. One of the questions asked on the follow-up questionnaire is, "How helpful were your high school counselors in getting you into a job, college, or other schooling you were seeking after high school?" The authors realize that post-graduate placement may or may not be a goal of any given counseling program. Nevertheless, when members of the class of 1976 were asked this question one year after graduation, nearly one-third (31.8%) responded that the counselors were "Not at all helpful," while only 9.4 percent rated them as "Very helpful." (See Table 4.)

Table 4: Helpful in Post-graduate Placement

Not at all helpful	31.8%
Slightly helpful	26.0%
Moderately helpful	16.4%
Quite helpful	16.4%
Very helpful	9.4%

When students were grouped according to sex, no appreciable differences resulted—29.2 percent of the males and 33.4 percent of the females reported the service *not at all helpful*, while 9.2 percent of the males and 9.5 percent of the females reported it *very helpful*. There were no differences in this follow-up measure of perceived helpfulness between students attending and those not attending college, nor between blacks and whites.

The data provided by the study can be particularly useful to high school principals who wish to compare their guidance/counseling program to programs nationwide. It is important, however, that principals view the results relative to the goals and objectives of the programs in their schools and the clients of their programs. A departure from the national average may simply indicate that a school is meeting its own goals and/or is appropriately meeting the needs of its student body.

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