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Students Speak Survey results highlight areas of improvement for student life

Kori Bowns
LAYOUT EDITOR

The 2015 Students Speak Survey was administered online by IIT's Center for Research and Service. The survey was emailed out to all IIT undergraduate and graduate students and allowed them to respond between October 26 and November 17, 2015. A committee of students identified university services that students interact most with and can give feedback on. The survey committee is also supported by Dr. George Langlois, the Executive Director for the Center for Research and Service as well as IIT's Leadership Academy.

The survey sought to determine students' satisfaction with 12 different "service areas," or facets of campus that students often interact with: Academic Advising, Community Affairs, Career Services, Dining Services, Facilities/Grounds, Financial Aid, Graduate College, International Center, Library, Residence and Greek Life, Student Government Association, and Student Bar Association. Compared to the previous school year's Students Speak Survey, the student response rate increased. In 2014, 39 percent of IIT students overall responded compared with 40 percent for 2015's survey. For each service area identified in the survey, respondents first determined whether they have used the service within the past school year. If the student answered that they had, a variety of questions were then posed to the reader. Across all of the service areas, a few common questions were asked about each one. These core survey items concerned whether the service provided a timely response to questions, treated students with respect, provided accurate information, and provided quality service. Then, each service had some customized questions as well as open-ended questions for students to give more specific feedback.

According to the Executive Summary of the Students Speak Survey released in January and made available for students to view on MyIIT, overall student satisfaction has improved. Across the survey results, undergraduate students tended to rate items lower than graduate students' ratings of the same items. One visible exception to this trend is in the service area of Student Government Association, where 11 percent of undergraduate respondents rated the service unfavorably across the common survey items compared to 18 percent of graduate students. The Executive Summary says that the "University Overall" category score increased 2 percent from 2014; this is a second consecutive increase since 2013. According to the summary, "The most favorably rated item (94 percent) asked students if they feel they are treated with respect by IIT staff. The least favorable item (73 percent) asked students if they feel like a valued member of the IIT community. The item that had the greatest positive change asked students if they feel safe on campus." This year, 85 percent of students positively responded when asked if they feel safe on campus; this is a 7 percent increase from the 2014 survey.

When comparing all of the service areas and the common questions that were asked about them, a few interesting statistics stand out. When comparing to data from the 2014 survey, only one service area had decrease in overall satisfaction among all students, Dining Services, which had an overall 2 percent decrease. All other service areas had an overall increase, had no change compared to last year's data, or were not a part of last year's survey. The service area with the greatest positive change was IIT's Career Services, with a 6 percent increase in overall satisfaction.

The Executive Summary also points out the individual survey items that had the highest positive response and highest negative response. 95 percent of respondents say that our library staff have treated them with respect, the highest positive response collected. Conversely, only 69 percent of students who responded say that Dining Services provided them with quality service.

The Executive Summary continues to analyze student responses and breaks down each service area to look at responses and determine ways the area can improve based on student's open-ended submissions. The entire summary can be viewed on MyIIT under the "Student Life" tab; some images from the Executive Summary are published alongside this article.
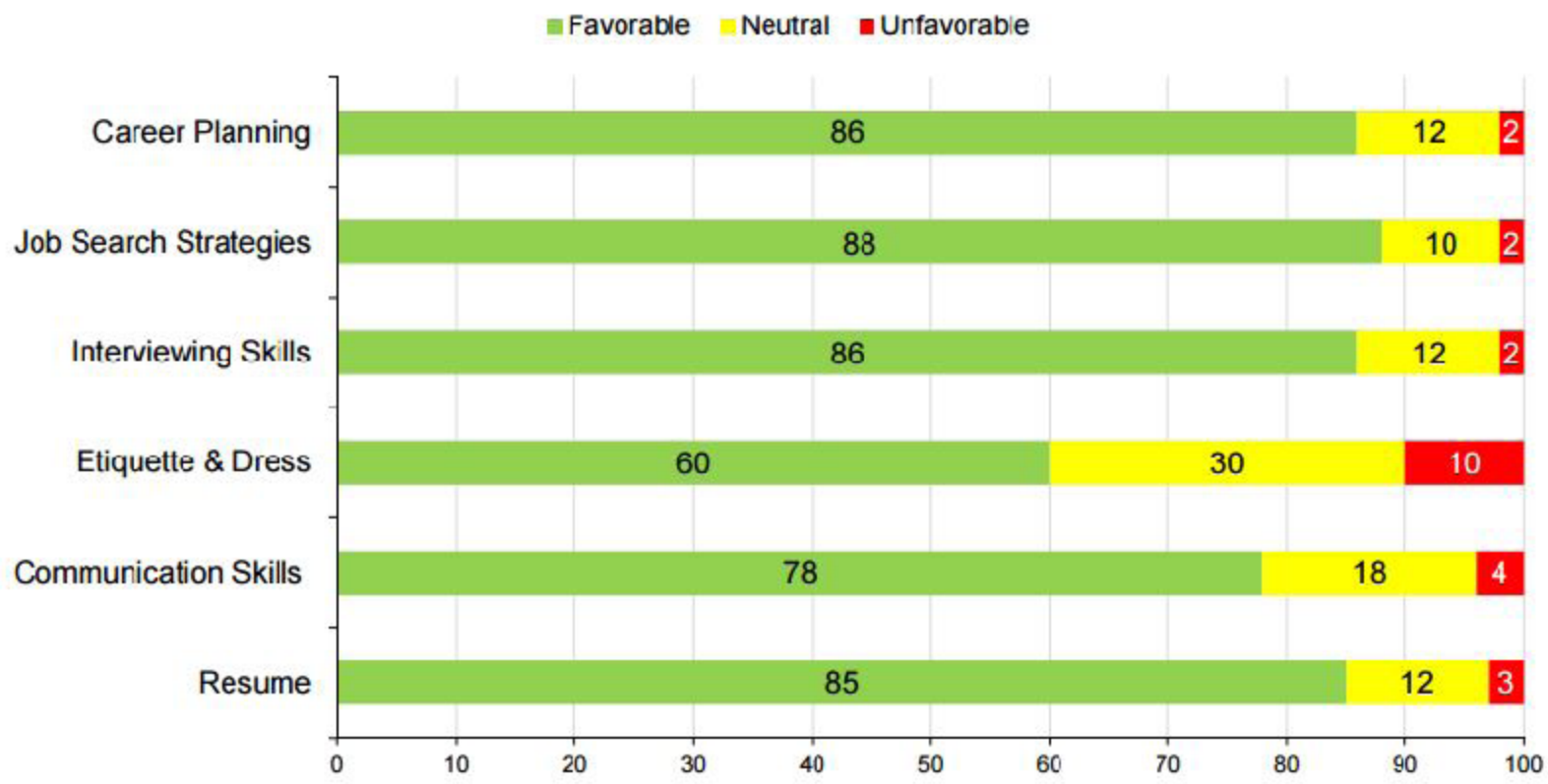
Academic Advising: Custom Items

How many times did you meet or communicate with your academic advisor during the Spring 2015 semester?
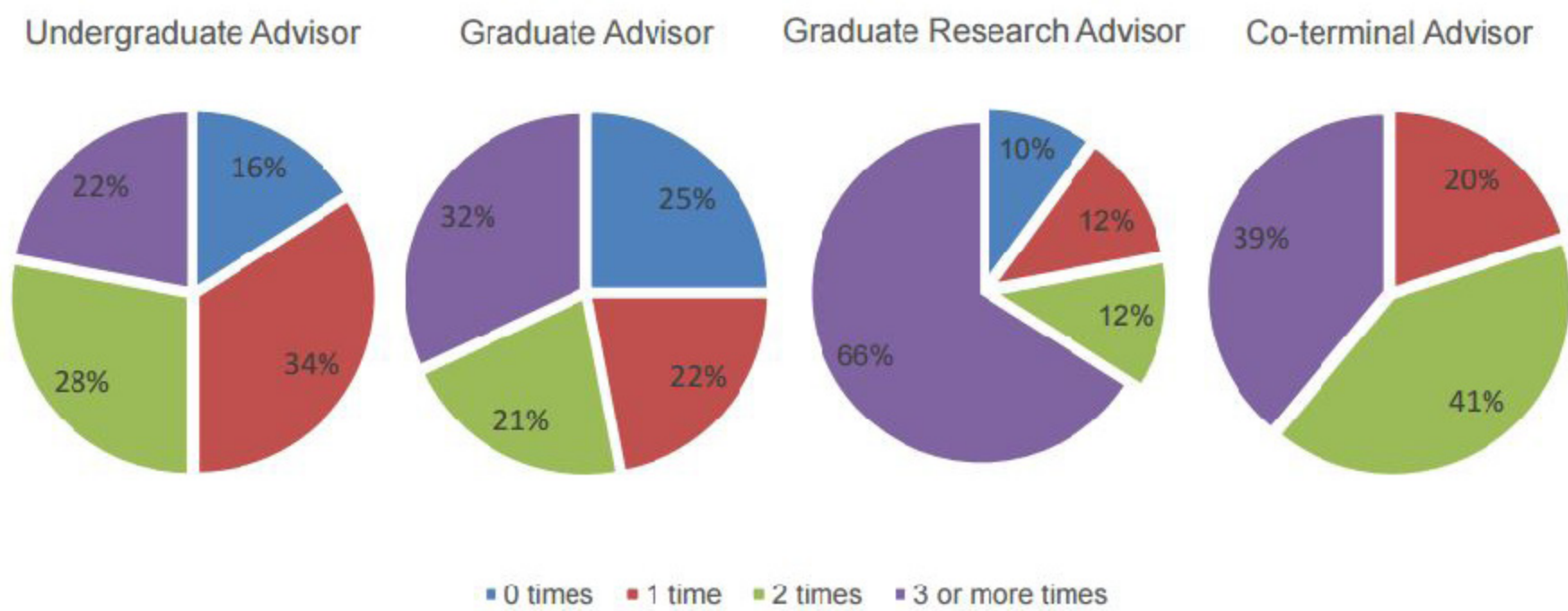
Career Services: Custom Items

Areas students want improvement & development (Overall) …

Images Courtesy of Illinois Tech Students Speak Committee; View Additional Images on Page 5

RHA Housing meeting covers Ethernet expansion, laundry machine maintenance, and more

Soren Spicknall
TECHNEWS WRITER

On Valentine's Day evening, while many were out with their significant others, the Executive Board of Illinois Tech's Residence Hall Association gathered with a group of Floor Reps, RAs, and other interested residents to discuss housing in their first themed General Body Meeting of the semester. With Housing Committee Chair and RHA Vice President Khadijah Nesbitt presiding, the hour-long meeting covered a slew of current topics in the Residence Halls ranging from those that require a single maintenance request to a few that will require many semesters of negotiation to even begin implementation. Open input on all topics (and indeed, on any housing-related topics of participants' choosing) was encouraged, and a number of new issues were brought to light for RHA to act on in partnership with Residence and Greek Life.

At the beginning of the meeting, a few basic factual topics were immediately covered. Nesbitt and the entire RHA board took questions about summer housing and fall room reservations, and covered the costs of each room type that will be available during summer. One of the key points of discussion was a clarification that a meal plan is currently required to be able to live on campus over summer, and another point made was that summer housing residents will be moved to Gunsaulus and SSV due to planned work in all MSV halls.

Moving on from structured slides, the discussion turned to open feedback and suggestions for RGL. James Thomas, RHA's staff advisor, was on hand to collect feedback in person in addition to discussing it at later meetings with the RHA Executive Board. First up, the prospect of changes to Illinois Tech's cable television package was brought up, with an emphasis on adding an online streaming option for students to use. While this idea was extremely popular, it was acknowledged that adding that feature would require a reduction in channels to equalize costs, and the present group wasn't prepared to definitively name any channels that could be readily removed from the school's current subscription. RHA members encouraged RAs to seek feedback from their residents on the issue, and will be using their own methods to gather input as well.

Next, the conversation turned to the seemingly perennial confusion over what issues in the Residence Halls call for a maintenance request, and what other options are available to address problems that fall outside the scope of a maintenance request. Specifically, RHA Executive Board members and Thomas both reiterated that laundry machine breakdowns are handled by Mac Gray through a separate ticket system, and that students who notice a broken machine should file a maintenance request with Mac Gray, not with the University. Additionally, heating concerns were brought up, leading to a discussion of the grounds for an "emergency" maintenance procedure. This emergency procedure consists of informing Community Desk Assistants of an immediate problem, which can include an actively flooding bathroom or (during winter months) a broken heating unit. CDAs are supposed to act promptly on emergency issues, and RGL occasionally calls in unscheduled maintenance workers to deal with those issues on weekends and other unstaffed hours.

Finally, following the maintenance request discussion, the group tackled the recurring desire among certain students to have upgraded and expanded Ethernet in the Residence Halls. OTS has been focusing on improving the reliability of its Wi-Fi in recent years, and has stated that they would not expand or repair Ethernet infrastructure in the Residence Halls because such an effort would distract from their focus on wireless infrastructure. However, as a result of feedback gathered through RHA and the Students Speak survey, Residence and Greek Life has opened talks again with OTS about the possibility of upgrading and maintaining those wired connections.

Because all the current Ethernet connections in the Residence Halls use the old CAT3 standard, any changes to Ethernet would require each building to be completely re-wired for CAT5 in an operation that would take place over summer break. This would involve large costs in buildings that are only scheduled to be in use for about eight more years, though that doesn't necessarily mean it couldn't be done with enough student pressure. However, because Gunsaulus is one of the buildings that will be occupied for summer housing this year, it likely wouldn't receive the upgrade until next summer at the earliest. Work like this requires long-term conversation and coordination between multiple offices and funding from the university's administration. For that reason, changes are made in a very deliberate, planned fashion to meet various legal and fiscal standards. RHA has heard from many people that Ethernet should be expanded, and is continuing to push RGL to continue their conversation with OTS and make it happen.

RHA has a number of upcoming General Body Meetings this semester which will focus on specific themes like this one. The March 6, March 27, and April 17 meetings will all have a theme, such as on-campus dining or RHA-curated events, and all residents will have the opportunity to voice their opinion and use the organization to create positive change. All residents are technically Residence Hall Association members, and the organization exists to effectively communicate residents' concerns to RGL.