Student Information Survey Results Report

Student Relations Committee 2010-2011

Background: The Student Information Survey was sent out to a possible universe of 10,418 students in the Spring of 2010 and garnered 1334 responses—a 12.8% response rate.

Question 1: Are you aware Rowan University has a student handbook?
- Of the 1334 respondents to Question 1, 85.8% of all respondents answered in the affirmative.

Question 2: What is your first preference for how the Rowan student handbook is made available?
- Of the 1326 respondents to Question 2, 58.6% of all respondents preferred access via Rowan’s webpage.
- The percentages ranged from a high 78.3% for ages 31 to 35 and a low of 55.7% for ages 17 to 21.
- The next highest selection was for print access with 35.6% of respondents preferring this format. It should be noted that 38.28% of students, ages 17 to 21, selected this option.

Summary of written responses: There were 35 responses in the text box. Students appear to have no objection to online; however, they do note that the current version of the student handbook is not searchable. Four students said they would prefer a downloadable and searchable PDF that would help them focus on what they need to know. Four other students observed that the student handbook made the student planner bulkier and less user friendly; they suggested putting the handbook in another place—most suggested online.

Question 3: What is your second preference for how the Rowan student handbook is made available?
- Of the 1318 respondents to Question 3, 44.9% of the overall respondents preferred print access as their second preference while 35.58% of overall respondents selected web access as their second preference. Although not a strong third preference, it should be noted that 11% of respondents selected a flash drive.
- Options of CD or “Other” were negligible in their selection with no overall preference higher than 5.7%. Note, though, that ages 31-31 (17.3%) and over 35 (13.8%) would consider using a CD.

Summary of written responses: There were 40 responses in the text box. Although some students appeared to repeat their responses to Q2, emailing the PDF to students was the clear winner with 14 responses out of the 40. The next highest response was six for a printed version and six for a
webpage version. Although anecdotal and with such a small response rate which cannot be generalized, it would appear that students prefer print and internet distribution with a targeted email preferable to only a webpage presence.

Questions 4 -10: Please answer questions 4 through 10 using this question: “Where do you frequently obtain most of your Rowan University student information?”

**Please note that Questions 4-10 are not in rank order of preference but rather answered independently from other questions. It was set up as a binary response because the banner system could not accommodate all of the choices in this question. Percentages are not to be interpreted as a rank order.

- Website: Of the 1326 respondents to Question 4, 96.4% use the Rowan website. There was no significant difference between age groups ranging from 17 to 35+
- Printed Material: Of the 1325 respondents to Question 5, 57.8% of all respondents access information via print
- Other Rowan students: Of the 1317 respondents to Question 6, 77.9% students stated they also receive information from other students. It is interesting to note that 83.7% of students ages 17-21 were the highest percentage of users of this method.
- Rowan emails: Of the 1323 respondents to Question 7, 85.8% get information from email. It is interest to note that the strongest showing was ages over 35 for this method (91.8).
- Social Networking Sites: Of the 1324 respondents to Question 8, 48.3% gathered information from this method. The highest percentage (53.7) was from the 17-21 age group while the lowest was ages 35+ (23.29).
- The Whit: Of the 1323 respondents to Question 9, 21.4% gained information through The Whit. No more than 11% of students ages 26 and above used this as a resource while approximately 23% of students ages 17 – 25 used this technique.
- Rowan Faculty/Staff: Of the 1321 respondents to Question 10, 76% stated they frequently obtain information from faculty and staff.

Question 11: What other method of communication would you like Rowan University to use to communicate with current students? Please specify in comments box.

Background: Rather than giving students a list to check, the Committee felt that open-ended responses from students themselves would provide for a deeper and richer examination of their communication preferences—495 of the 1334 respondents made specific suggestions. Please note that responses do NOT add up to 495 because if a student suggested email AND printed communication, that student’s response was counted under both categories. The total number of
responses categorized was 544. As in most surveys of this sort, there were some students who did not take the question seriously, and those responses have been noted as “Frivolous.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rowan does a good job, NA, Don’t care, don’t know, no suggestions</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text messages</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard copy, flyers, signs around campus</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific suggestions (1or 2 suggestions)</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media-Twitter, Facebook</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone/Radio</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snail mail</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty, Staff, Coaches/Other Students</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home/personal email NOT Rowan email</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face meetings</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate via Blackboard</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billboards</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-Line chat forum</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whit</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podcasts</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teleconference</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SGA</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frivolous responses</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Requested information targeted to them. As noted above, commuters and graduate students for the most part made this suggestion.

*There were a few comments regarding the newly instituted practice of online billing. Students were afraid that they would miss critical information if it was not mailed to them. One student complained that he had a hold on his account and didn’t know it. Another was afraid of identify theft and didn’t want this information online. One student suggested sending a text and an email before bills were due if the system was going paperless.

*Students also complained about Registration noting that they didn’t know the dates and often had to find them out from the other students. A few suggested texting them the dates.

**Summary:** It should be noted that the largest category (141) was a combination of those students who said they thought Rowan did a good job or that the question was not applicable. Students who said they didn’t know or didn’t care or had no suggestions to improve communication were also counted in this category. If the area was left blank, they were not counted; they were counted only if their response approximated what was outlined in this category. Still the notion
that most students think we are doing a good job with communication is notable. This does not mean that we couldn’t be doing a better job.

Most students (99) thought email was the best way to communicate; however, their responses varied from “emails are best” to “Email is preferred as long as it is important information. The Rowan Daily announcements frequently contain information that is not relevant to my academic success or interests. This is bad because not only does it clutter my inbox, but it also renders the announcements as a less useful way of communicating important information because I automatically assume they do not contain valuable information and therefore do not read them.” Students suggested tailoring emails to their interests and not sending out such long emails where it is difficult for them to decipher what is important to them. Special populations, such as graduate students and commuting students, also suggested sending information that is more relevant to their relationship to the institution (for instance, graduate students reported being tired of receiving emails obviously meant for undergraduates, and commuters expressed a need to find out more about things that interest them as opposed to resident students—for instance parking lot information rather than information about residence life.

Eighty-four students called for an increase in text messaging or suggested phone apps for text messages from the University as a way to improve communication. These students reported a decrease in using their email accounts and an increase in their cell phone usage. They also highlighted that they would like to receive important information like deadline dates for Registration and information on when their bills are due by text.

Of the 43 students who preferred the web as their main method of communication, most of them complained that the information is often outdated or conflicts with other information they have heard. As one student noted, “The website would be ideal as long as we could be assured that everything is accurate and updated. Even the Daily Rowan Announcements would be better suited on a dedicated page of the Rowan website that would also mark those events on a global calendar, so students who just want to see what events are coming and when will have a quick and easy way to do this.”

Although most students preferred electronic communication, 37 students decried the lack of printed material and signage around campus announcing upcoming events and deadlines. They suggested that posters and flyers should be more in use around campus because they often miss the emails announcing various campus events and deadlines. This group wanted printed material in addition to electronic information. Another 23 students suggested using Social Media such as Facebook or Twitter to keep in touch with them.

Finally, students for the most part took this survey seriously and made some suggestions to improve communication with them. There were 36 comments/recommendations that could not be categorized because they were statements that contained several variables.

**Question 12:** How often do you check your Rowan email?

- Of the 1226 respondents to Question 12, 85.6% check their email daily. 90.2% of students age 17-21 check it daily while 68.5% of students 35+ check it daily.
**Question 13:** I am aware that Rowan communicates essential information through my Rowan email account.

- Of the 1191 respondents to Question 13, 97.2% answered in the affirmative.

**Question 14:** I don’t check my Rowan email regularly, but I have my auto-forward set.

- Of the 1214 respondents to Question 14, only 20.9% answered in the affirmative with percentiles of the age variable ranging from 16 to 35%.

**Summary:** Not surprising, emails are the most accepted form of communication among all respondents regardless of age. The younger respondents (17-25) most regularly checked their Rowan emails on a daily basis and a majority of the 31+ respondents also checked their emails daily. The 31+ respondents, though, also checked their emails weekly reflected at a 30.4% rate. The auto forwarding of emails to other accounts was not a common practice regardless of age. However, the older respondents (ages 31-35) who were graduate students were the highest percentage of respondents (34.8%) who used auto-forward set not the younger undergraduates.

**Question 15:** My age is between:

- 17 – 21 60.3%
- 22- 25 24.4%
- 26 – 30 7.5%
- 31 – 35 1.9%
- 35 and over 6%

**Question 16:** Full or Part-Time Status

- 88.1% of the respondents consider themselves full-time students with percentages ranging from 99% (17 – 21) to 34.2% (over 35)
- 11.9% of all respondents consider themselves part-time students with percentages ranging from 65.7% (ages 35 and over) to 95% (ages 17-21).

**Recommendations**

1. Most students are aware that there is a student handbook; however, most of them claim that it is difficult to search. Several students suggested a searchable PDF file for the webpage.
2. Most students thought a searchable PDF file emailed to them would be good way to communicate the contents of the student handbook.
3. Remove the student handbook from the academic planner. It is too bulky.
4. Students see the web as a primary means of communication, but updating the information and removing conflicting information needs to be a priority if we are serious about directing students to the web.

5. Although students rely on technology for most of their information, several students requested more information in print, such as flyers, upcoming information in the Whit, and bulletin boards on campus with up to date information.

6. Many students complained about the number of emails they receive from Rowan and suggested that segmenting those emails might increase their readership (for instance, send emails pertaining to resident students to resident students only and not commuters).

7. Students also claimed that they are more accessible through their phones and requested texting rather than email. (Of course, the University has a policy of only texting emergency messages to students, but the data suggests that perhaps a parallel system where students can opt-in to receive text messages in addition to emergency messages may be more helpful to them than email.) This parallel text system should be explored.

8. Many students are unaware that they can forward their Rowan email to a personal email account. Perhaps publicizing how to forward their university email on the student website as well as during the Freshman and Transfer Orientation Programs will help increase student awareness of the forwarding email process.

9. Students suggested texting them about important University processes. For example, several students mentioned that a text to remind them when registration starts or when their bills are due would be welcome. Some suggested developing phone apps for registration and billing.

10. Although this only got one mention, we are including it because we thought it was a good idea: a student suggested hiring a person to run a Help Hotline for students. The Committee thought this Help Hotline could be directed by a well-informed secretary who would also work with well-trained student workers. This would be a telephone only operation, but students could call in with their questions much like they do to the Support Desk when they have questions about technology.

**Conclusion**

It would appear that since most of the communication suggestions involve technology, Rowan University needs to incorporate multiple electronic methods. This would probably involve setting up a communications plan with a checklist that would include multiple methods of reaching students.

**Acknowledgements**

The 2010-2011 Student Relations Committee wishes to acknowledge the contributions of the previous year’s Student Relations Committee as well as the work of Rich Meyers and his colleagues in E.I.S. for incorporating the survey into the Banner system and producing the raw data for this year’s subcommittee (Francesca McClay, Nanci Paparo, and Pat Alexy Stoll) to analyze.