Utica University and Student Support Offices

Sociology & Anthropology Department
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Student Introduction

- Trinity Bailey
- Junior Sociology & Anthropology Student
- Social Work Career Goal
- Volleyball & Crochet

Student Introduction

- Emma Sheldon
- Junior Sociology and Anthropology Major

Project Introduction

Over the semester, we have had the opportunity to study the different student support offices at Utica University.

We found that there are many services offered to students, and that students that use these services experience benefits such as higher GPAs and graduation rates, less mental stress, and a better overall experience at Utica University.

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Intro to Spring Research

Utica Support Offices

At the start of our research with Professor Blouet and Professor Klepinger this sprinig, we knew we wanted to do research within the University itself. We wanted to expand on our realities as first generation & low income students. This led us to focus on the student support offices at Utica, which was the cornerstone for the rest of my work throughout the fall semester.

Research Question

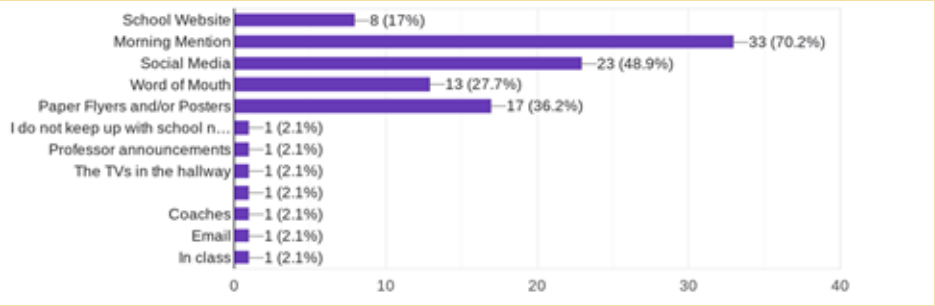
How do different departments of Utica University interact with students, and what impact does this have on the students?

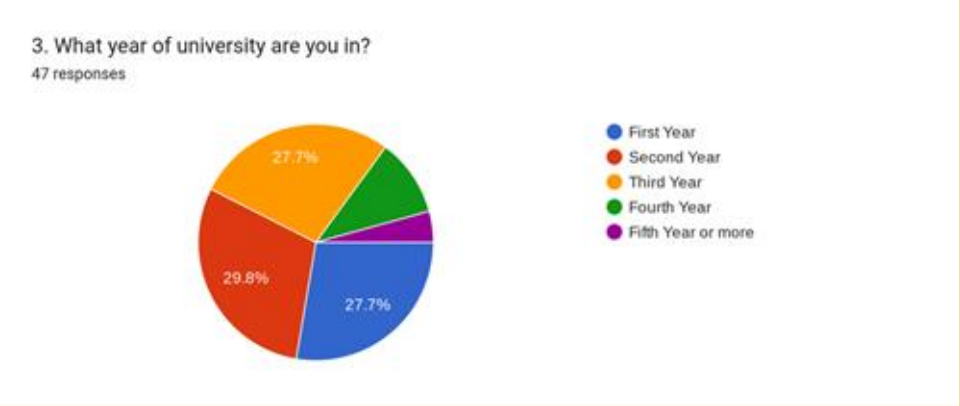
Secondary education can seem extraordinarily difficult to navigate, let alone succeed in for many students, specifically students that come from disadvantaged backgrounds. With this in mind, these institutions have a duty to make education more accessible to their students and attempt to offer education in an equitable manner.

We have also examined the purposes, functions and perceived significance of Utica offices amongst the student population. We conducted a series of two interviews each for three different departments: Young Scholars, TRIO, and Student Success. For each office, we had an introductory meeting, which was followed by a more in-depth interview. Our survey, which was only open to current Utica students, collected 47 responses.

Survey Demographics

- 47 students total responded to our survey.
- 20 were men, 26 were women, 1 was nonbinary.
- All were between 18 - 25
- 29.8% second years, 27.7% first and third years, 10.6% fourth years, 4.3% fifth year or more
- 70.2% (33) respondents keep up with UU news through the Morning Mention. Social media was in second place, with 48.9% (23), followed by paper fliers/posters with 36.2% (17).





TRIO Overview

- Mission
- Origins
- Who Is Served
- Services Offered

TRIO

Interview

Goals

Address structural inequalities faced by disadvantaged students
Assist students in navigating the “hidden curriculum”
Develop relationships with students

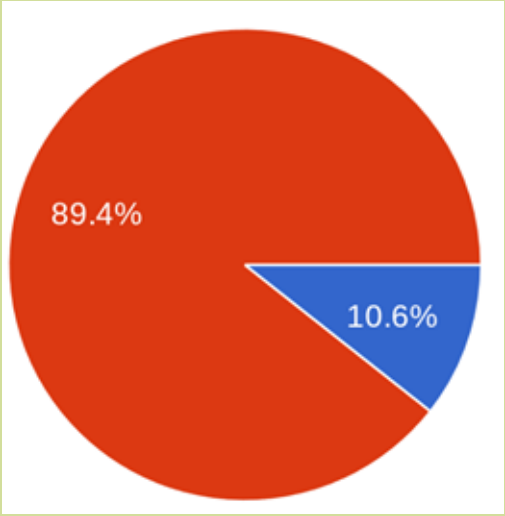
Challenges & Obstacles

Battling students financial barriers indirectly
Uncertainty surrounding funding & sustainability
Inconsistent student engagement
Flexibility in communication methods

Benefits & Opportunities

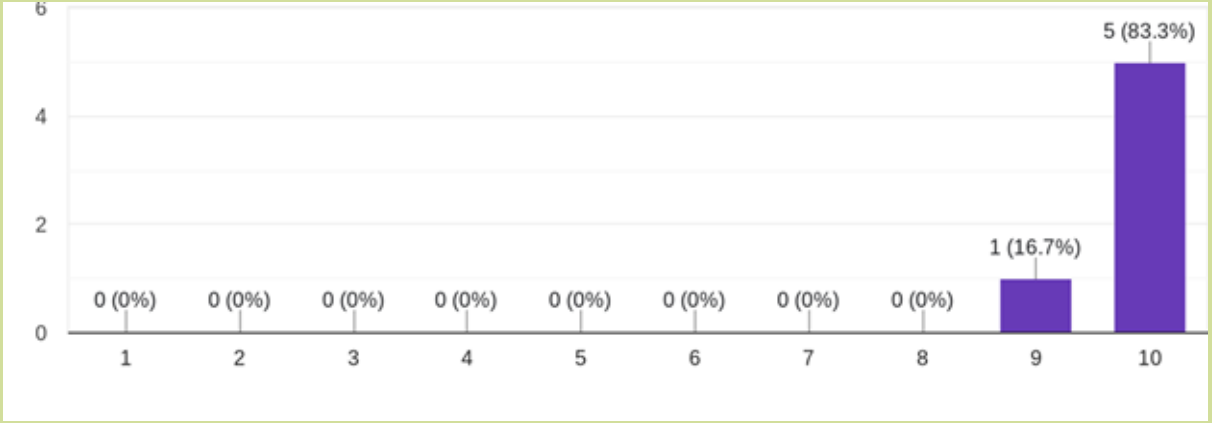
Students have assistance in navigating the “hidden curriculum”
Establishing connections & personal relationships within faculty
Outlet to discuss issues to others that understand

TRIO Student Survey



Recall
Interacting With

Red = No
Blue = Yes



Ratings of Experiences

"They help with classes such as tutoring, they help with mental health, fafsa, just checking in when you need help"

"I don't believe I have heard of this organization before."

"They helped me get a loaned laptop, gave me a referral for grad school, allows me access to someone to ask my questions, and make sure im on track to graduate."

Young Scholars Overview

- Origins
- Purpose
- Who is Served
- Services Offered

Young Scholars

Interview

Goals

Guiding highschool students on the best path post graduation
Assist students in navigating the “hidden curriculum”
Break down barriers preventing students from pursuing secondary education

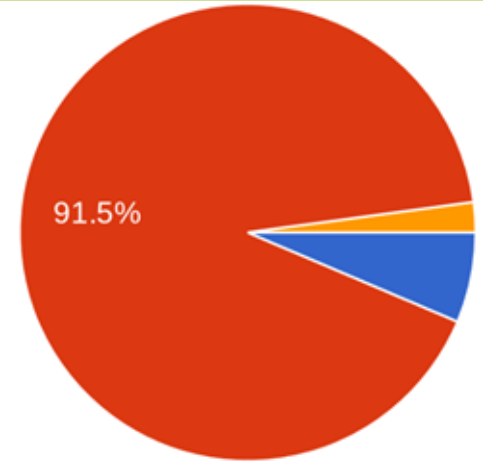
Challenges & Obstacles

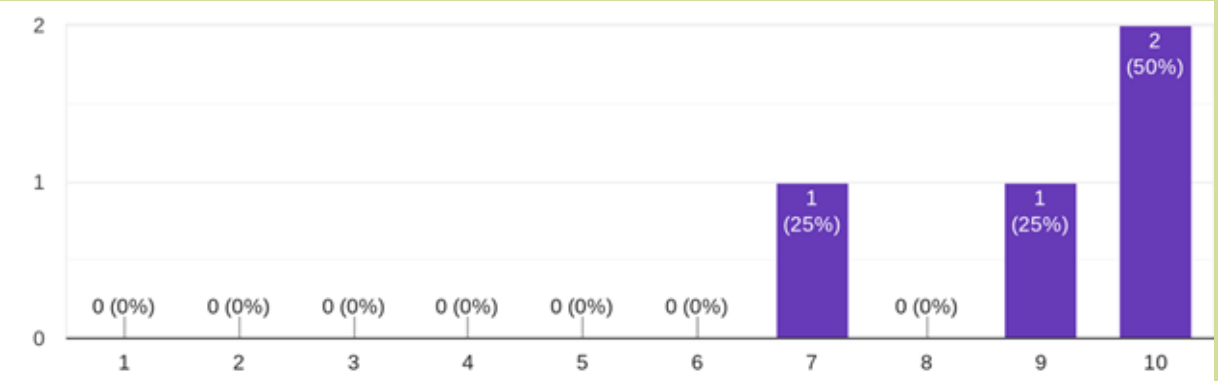
Battling students lack of access to transportation
Impacted by participating schools resources, decisions and rules
Dependent program
Flexibility in communication methods

Benefits & Opportunities

Students have a comprehensive system of support
Establishing connections & personal relationships within the community
Ability to explore different options for post grad ex. university, military

Young Scholars Student Survey





Student Experience Ratings

Have you received support?
Blue = Yes
Red = No
Yellow = Not Sure

"I don't know much about this one, but I believe it was targeted towards students before they enroll in the university/are not college aged. I would assume it is a kind of financial aid program."

"When I was in high school, this program was of a great resource to have for many students, myself including. The amount of help and guidance from this program has helped many of their

Student Success Overview

- Origins
- Purpose
- Who is Served
- Services Offered

Student Success

Interview

Challenges & Obstacles

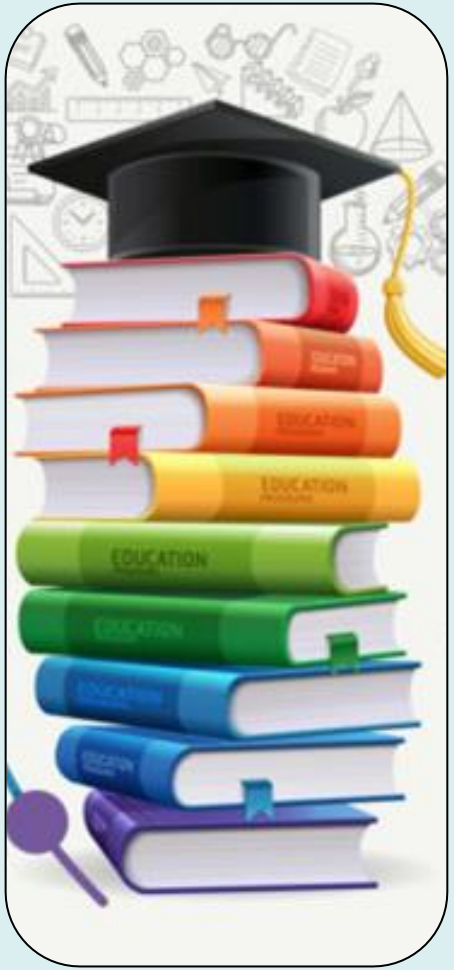
- Student Success relies on students reaching out when they are in need
- Student Success gets very busy at the beginning and end of semesters
- High caseloads for success coaches
- Limited time per student

Benefits & Opportunities

- Course registration & general academic planning assistance
- Skill-based workshops
- Mental health & disability support

Impact of Covid-19

- Different intensity of work expected by professors
- Establishing connections & personal relationships within the education setting
- Volume of college workload is unmanageable



The Effects of Power and Inequality on Disadvantaged Students

In Fabio Rojas *Theory for the Working Sociologist,* concepts of power and inequality have historically affected opportunities for students that are minorities and people with intersecting identities. Rojas' discussion links the theory of power and inequality to the experiences of students with disadvantages. This discussion highlights why there is a need for programs like TRIO, Young Scholars and Student Success not just at Utica but nationally, in order to level the playing field.

Interpersonal Relationships Increased Benefits for Disadvantaged Students

In the article *Applying the Family Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation Model to the Study of First-Generation College Students,* the importance of relationships between disadvantaged students and faculty at university is examined. Without reliable relationships with faculty, disadvantaged students usually do not feel important, safe, or respected on campus. Disadvantaged students often report “their families not fully comprehending the pressures of college life” (LeBouef et. al. 2025, 7). With a lack of support, students tend to ask for help, or access necessary resources needed to continue secondary education at lower rates (LeBouef et. al. 2025, 8). Without these relationships, disadvantaged students often face polarization.

Interpersonal Relationships Increased Benefits for Disadvantaged Students

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With this polarization comes a plethora of problems faced by students when attempting to finish their degree. The article *College student polarization, social connections, and mental health. Journal of American College Health* goes into depth on the impact of recent struggles faced by students such as the Covid-19 pandemic, social media and the current political climate. These struggles have led to increased polarization and decreased interconnectedness amongst college campuses nationally. This polarization has serious consequences including elevated levels of psychological distress, depression and anxiety (Reynolds et. al. 2026, 89). Interestingly, students with higher socioeconomic status report feeling "greater social ease" in comparison to their disadvantaged peers (Reynolds et. al. 2026, 93). As discussed above it is incredibly important for disadvantaged students to have access to connections on campus, or the problems associated with polarization will be heightened. This demonstrates the need for TRIO Student Support Services at Utica and nationally.

Literature Review
Key Theme 3

Benefits of Higher Education Intervention

Benefits

- Higher GPAs and graduation rates
  - In a study using 6 years of data, Grillo and Leist find that a more time spent on academic support is associated with higher GPAs and graduation rates.
- Better school/life balance
- Better at managing stress
- Expanded skill sets and Increased confidence
  - Sneyers and De Witte found that academic preparation was a key factor in long-term success for university students.

Literature Review
Key Theme 4

Communication is Key

- In interviews with both Young Scholars and Student Success, communication was discussed as an important aspect of these programs and support services.
- Staff cannot act on what they do not know, so students have to express their needs in order to receive comprehensive support. In addition, communication between departments, offices, the university as a whole, and students plays an important role in university functions and activities.
- The COVID 19 pandemic had an immense impact on current university students. In an article examining the impact of quarantine on adolescent communication skills, Breaux et al. found that this led to increased suicidal ideation and depression, decreased social competence, and increased social anxiety.
- This can cause students to be uncomfortable with reaching out or using support services.
- Furthermore, a study by Swanson and Cole found that academic validation is an important predictor of student success: students who feel welcome and like they matter on campus have overall more positive experiences, including GPAs. In this study, mentor-student relationships, like the ones present between Success Coaches and students, were the primary form through which students received academic validation.
- Overall, communication plays an important role within and between Utica University, its support offices, and its students. Increased communication, especially from students, can have clear benefits.

Project Findings & Suggestions

- There are many student support services and resources at Utica University. Students who use these services regularly experience benefits such as higher GPAs and graduation rates, expanded skill sets and improved academic confidence, and improved school/life balance.
- These offices work to break down barriers to success in university, including structural, social, and academic barriers.
- Challenges these departments face include high workloads, navigating complex systems, and inconsistent engagement.
- The communication methods used by these departments are also based on flexibility to meet students where they are at when they are in need.
- Overall, students who have interacted with these offices have had positive experiences.

Questions

THANK YOU

Professor Blouet & Professor Klepinger

Dr. Elizabeth Briody

ACRN

Interview Participants

Student Survey Participants

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