

**Department of Minority Services and Programs**  
**Black Educational Support Team (BEST)**

*Evaluation Summary of Findings*

**Submitted by**  
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## **OVERVIEW/PURPOSE OF BEST**

The Black Educational Support Team (BEST) is responsible for orienting new, African American, first-year students to the University of Georgia campus life. A team of peer mentors serve as informational sources, peer counselors, referral agents, and assist incoming African American first-year students in becoming involved in activities outside the classroom. Also, BEST has an academic focus and provides leadership and programming in this area by having tutoring sessions as well as small and large career orientation sessions. BEST works to aid in the retention of African American first-year students. (Source: UGA Office of the Dean of Students).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The Director of Minority Services and Programs (MSP), Vanessa Williams Smith, commissioned the Student Affairs Assessment Office to conduct an evaluation of the BEST program and the BEST counselors. The original survey instrument was designed by the MSP Office, and recommendations and modifications were made by the Student Affairs Assessment Office. The evaluation was made available to students via the internet, and students had a three-week opportunity to participate in the evaluation. A total of 2 invitations went out to the BEST listserve, and 2 reminders were sent to students. In addition, Ms. Williams Smith told students about the evaluation during BEST meetings. A total of 46 students out of approximately 180 potential student participants completed the evaluation between November 16 and December 4, 2004.

The evaluation is comprised of both quantitative and qualitative elements, and a summary of the findings will follow. Quantitative data were gathered and calculated using a both SPSS and Microsoft Excel. Basic statistical analysis were performed. Qualitative data were reviewed and coded independently by 3 staff members in the Student Affairs Assessment Office. The codes were then “collapsed” based upon common themes.

## LIMITATIONS

While the web-based evaluation provided an opportunity for students to give anonymous feedback, there are some disadvantages associated with this evaluation format. We make the assumption that students in the BEST program have access to internet. While there are computers at various locations across campus, students may not be using the internet on a regular basis. In addition, the initial email solicitation that was sent was not sent from a UGA email account, thus had the potential to be filtered into students "Junk Mail" folders. Also, the second email solicitation was sent with a blank subject line. Students may have disregarded the email because their interests were not peaked.

A total of 46 students out of approximately 180 potential student participants completed the evaluation. All students on the BEST list serve were solicited, but we cannot guarantee that the respondents are representative of the entire BEST population. Due to limitations previously discussed, generalizing these findings to the entire BEST program might be inaccurate.

While the survey employed both qualitative and quantitative methods, it should be noted that quantitative data is limited to identifying relationships between two variables. Causal statements cannot be made or extrapolated from the data.

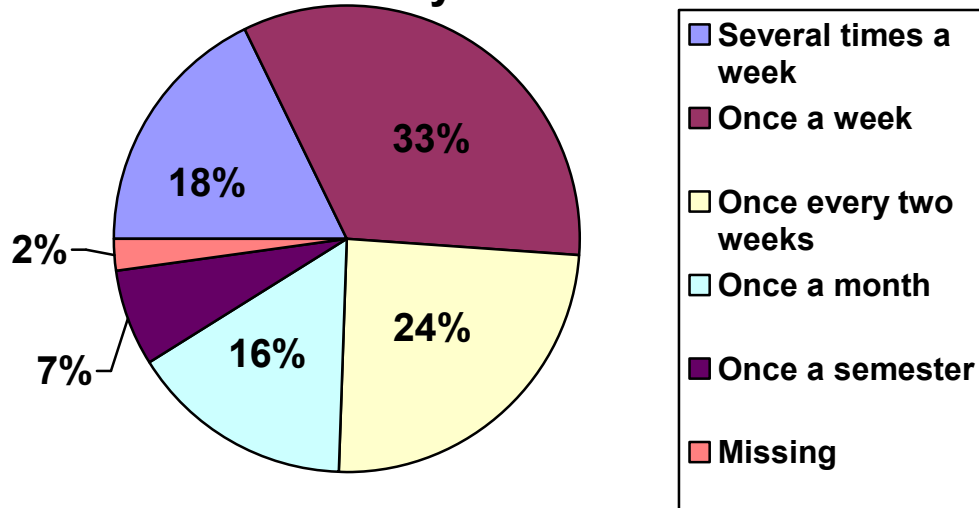
## OVERALL FINDINGS

The summary that follows includes both findings from qualitative and quantitative data. The charts below illustrate (a) how often participants were contacted by their BEST counselors, (b) students' perceptions about whether or not their counselor met their needs, (c) whether or not students recommend their counselors remain BEST counselors, (d) whether or not the students were "adopted" by another counselor (e) if students felt they benefited from their relationship with their counselors, and (f) whether or not they would ever become a BEST counselor themselves.

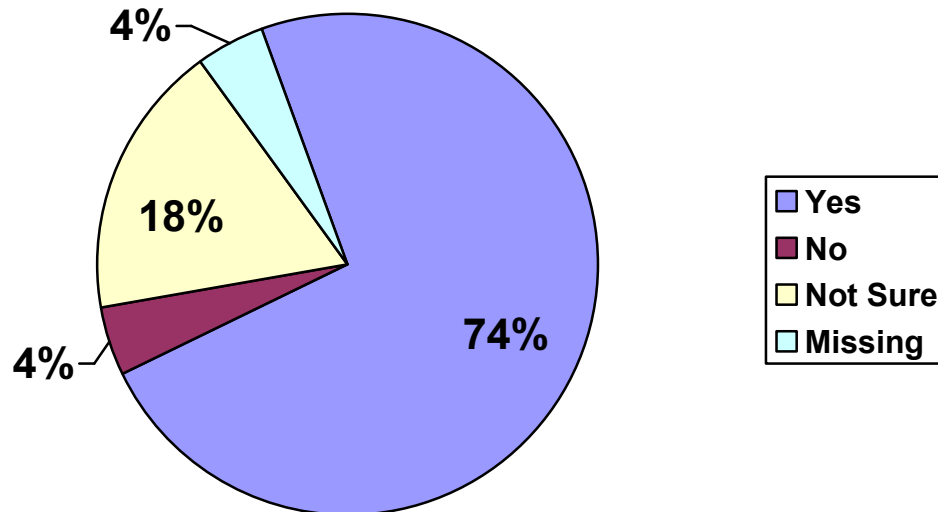
In addition to the quantitative aspects of the evaluation, students were also asked to describe components of the BEST program in their own words. Students were asked to describe (a) why they believed their counselors were available or unavailable to meet their needs, (b) if applicable, circumstances surrounding their "adoption," (c) why they believe they benefited or did not benefit from the relationship with their counselor, (d) what they gained/learned from their counselor, (e) if they would become a BEST counselor, (f) activities they participated in with their BEST counselors, (g) activities they would recommend or believe would be beneficial for the future, (h) what they gained/learned from the BEST program, and (i) any additional comments about the BEST program or their counselors. Findings are detailed in the following pages.

## FINDINGS CONCERNING COUNSELORS

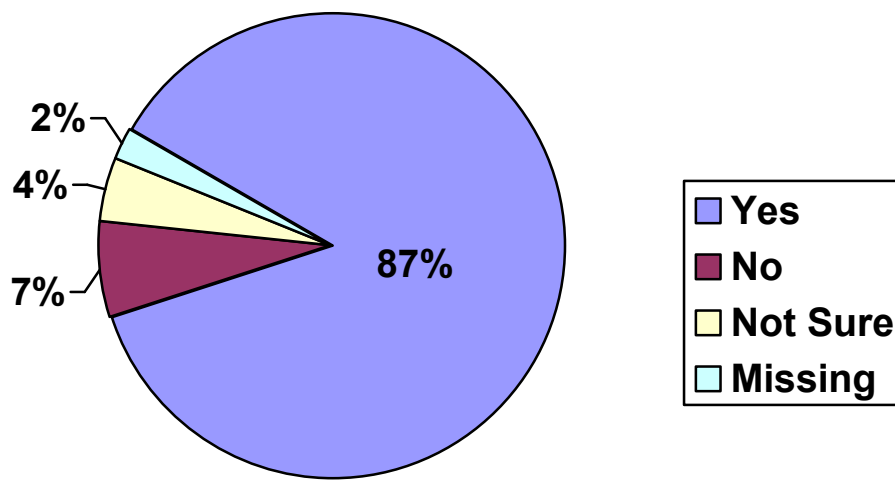
### Frequency of Contacts Made By Counselor



### Counselor Met Student's Needs



## Should Your Counselor Remain A BEST Counselor



### DISCUSSION OF COUNSELOR FINDINGS

Overall, the majority (74%) of participants felt that their counselors were available to meet their needs. Most students (25 responses) attribute this to the availability of the counselor. Many commented about the ability to see their counselors around campus and receiving emails and phone calls from their counselors.

- *“She always emailed us and informed us of all types of events, and she always emphasized the fact that we could always call her if we needed anything. She is also friendly and very welcoming when we are around each other.”*
- *“There was an understanding that If I needed anything that she was available for assistance.”*

In addition to availability, many students (15 responses) commented on the helpfulness of a counselor being informed about issues on campus and in the BEST program.

- *“My best counselor informs me in advance of all Best’s activities.”*
- *“My counselor was very informative about events and things going on around campus. She always offers to help us or give us advice. I know she is involved in other activities as well, but she is doing a great job as my counselor!”*

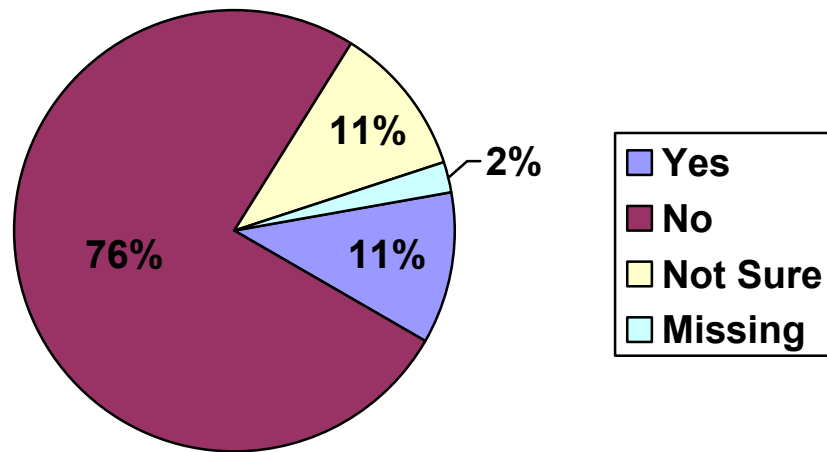
Four percent of the students noted that the counselor was not available to meet their needs. The common theme that emerged from these comments was that the counselor and the student had little or no interaction.

- *“My counselor never attempted to gather my group together to do any activities and hardly ever sends out info about what is going on in BEST. Everytime [sic] I saw her on campus, never did she ask me how I was doing or how’s school. She just wasn’t very open.”*

Another student noted that s/he was too busy to interact with his/her counselor.

## FINDINGS CONCERNING "ADOPTION"

### Where You "Adopted" by Another Counselor

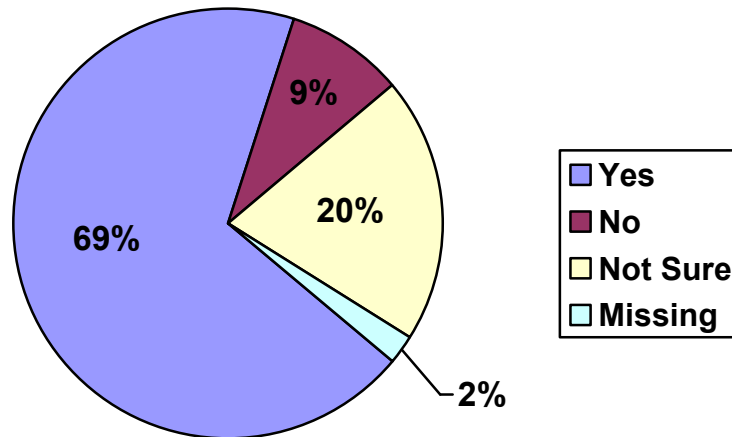


As can be seen, only 11% of participants (or 4 students) identified that they were adopted by another BEST counselor. Reasons attributed to the adoption were either the student had prior knowledge of the counselor or the counselor was the counselor for one of the student's friends.

- *"She was my friend's counselor, so I began hanging out with them."*
- *"The person who adopted me had already been like a big brother to me so he would invite me over when he was having programs for his best students."*

## BENEFITS FROM COUNSELOR

### Did You Benefit From Your Relationship with Your Counselor



The majority of students (69%) indicated that they believed they benefited from their relationship with their counselor. Most (25 responses) indicated that the positive benefits were related to the fact that they felt their counselors were available to help meet their needs.

- *“I believe that I have benefited positively from my relationship with my BEST counsellor [sic] because I know that if I ever need anyone to depend on in any situation that my BEST counsellor [sic] will always be there to help me no matter what.”*
- *“My counselor is a good person[,] and I love talking to her. Even though she may have been busy some times, she still made an effort to see how I was doing.”*
- *“There was someone that knew what I was going through as a minority freshman student here at a predominately white school.”*

Other students who felt they benefited positively stated that their counselors provided them with encouragement (7 responses) or helped them navigate the campus successfully (6 responses).

- *“Because I have learned about getting around campus from my counselor, and she admits that things get hard but she taught me to handle everything as it is.”*
- *“He was definetely [sic] there for me in my time of need! When I couldn’t find my classes during the first week of school[,]l he was there for me!”*
- *“She contributed to my awareness of helpful people on campus.”*

Of the 9% of students who indicated they did not benefit from the relationship with their counselor, 100% of the responses indicated that the counselor was not available.

- *“I feel like I haven’t been mentored or helped out at all. My counselor has not made her presence known for me to benefit positively.”*
- *“Because the only contact I had with my counselor was at the beginning of the year. We have had no other communication.”*

## LEARNING FROM COUNSELOR

Overall, 88% of responses indicated students learned something from their counselors. The most common responses were that counselors had given them motivation/inspiration (26% of responses) and educational advice (21% of responses).

- *“I have learned that although you will go through hard times at first, there is always a way through those hard times in teh [sic] end.”*
- *“Well, [my counselor] taught me to ask older students questions about professors and classes BEFORE drop/add is over!!”*
- *“I have learned to follow through with my commitments and perform everything with excellence.”*
- *“She has taught me some tips on choosing classes.”*
- *“[I learned] the bestways [sic] of being successful in at UGA.”*

Other responses included learning time management skills (5% of responses) and the importance of getting involved on campus (7% of responses). Ten percent stated the student gained friendships/relationships from their BEST counselors.

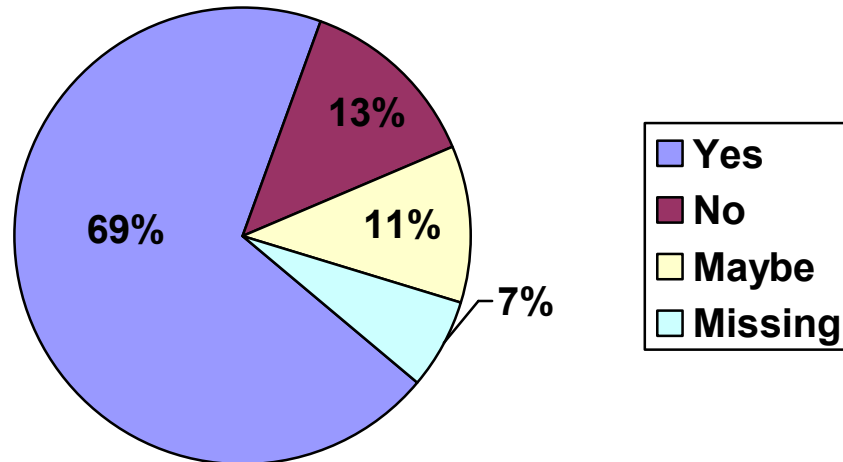
- *“Being on my own for the first time, it was great to have someone help you cope with that instead of having no one here to turn to. Only one other person from my school came to UGA so it was nice to have someone who I could turn to [...].”*
- *“I have learned to balance my time so that I can make good grades and get involved in activities throughout the school.”*
- *“[My counselor] has taught me how to be a better leader, showed me some effective study habits, and introduced me to some of the fun activities on campus.”*

Several students (22%) indicated they had not learned anything from their counselors. Most did not elaborate on why they felt they had not learned or gained anything, but one student stated:

- *“[I learned] Nothing really, she is just REALLY cool.”*

## BECOMING A BEST COUNSELOR

### Would You Become A Counselor



The majority, 69%, of participants indicated they would potentially become BEST counselors. There were numerous reasons given for their motivations to become counselors, and they included wanting to become a role model for other students (17 responses), a desire to give back to the BEST program (9 responses), and wanting to build relationships or meet new people (5 responses).

- *“Yes I will, because I enjoy helping others learn and become accustomed to new situations. I enjoy being involved and giving back to the community. Sounds hackneyed, but it's true!”*
- *“Yes, I would like to give Freshman an opportunity to have an upperclassmen who would be able to support them educationally and emotionally.”*
- *“Yes. Because I personally enjoy helping others in need of my help, and also because it would help promote unity within the BEST organization.”*
- *“I would love to be a BEST Counselor because I would love to help those who have been in my shoes. College is huge transition and having someone there to help you along the way is comforting.”*

Of the students who responded “no” or “maybe,” most stated (7 responses) they felt like they would not have the time necessary to devote to being a counselor.

- *“No, because I am too busy with academics.”*
- *“I woul [sic] like to[,] but I am often so busy that it may not be benifical [sic] to others.”*

## ACTIVITIES

Students describe a wide variety of activities they participated in with their BEST counselors. The most popular activity mentioned was participating in the BEST Potluck with counselors. Seventeen students mention they either prepared dishes together or they simply attended the Potlucks with their counselors. In addition to the Potlucks, 13 students mentioned that they had dined (either at lunch or at dinner) with their BEST counselor. Eight students mentioned working at a concession stand during the football season with their counselor. The overwhelming theme that emerged from the responses is that the activities that students participated in with their counselors are largely social in nature.

- *“Her planned Movie Night, 2 out of 3 BEST Pot-Luck Dinners, One trip Down Town Athens on a Saturday night.”*
- *“During the first month of school, [my counselor] had a get-together at her apartment along with her roommate and fellow BEST counselor. They cooked for us, we watched a movie, and really had a great time. I met the other people in my group.”*

Only 3 of the respondents mentioned participating in an activity that was educational or academic.

- *“She had some events at her home and/or the homes of other counselors (dinner, study sessions, movie nights, etc) and she always makes sure that we know about BEST events (ie: meetings and potlucks [sic]).”*

Other activities mentioned include attending a religious service with a counselor (1 response), counselor providing transportation (2 responses), and attending a program called *Expressions* with a counselor (2 responses).

## RECOMMENDED ACTIVITIES

The emerging theme for the recommended activities is that activities should allow counselors and students to have more interaction to foster relationships. The recommended activities include social (36% of responses), educational (14% of responses), and religious (3% of responses) activities, but the underlying theme was that students and counselors need to spend more time together. Eleven percent of the responses indicate a desire for activities that promote interaction between the counselors and students.

Similar to the actual activities that students participated in with their counselors, students predominately recommend social activities.

- *“activities that help the whole group get to know each other; bowling, movies, potluck, etc.”*
- *“Bowling, skating, or a movie night would be fun.”*

Students also identify educational activities that would be beneficial.

- *“going over advisement sessions”*
- *“study groups, meetings on campus.[sic] i.e. lunch”*

One student even suggests a Dawg Camp for BEST students to help them get involved prior to arriving on campus.

## LEARNING FROM BEST PROGRAM

Forty-five out of the forty-seven students who answered this question (96%) responded they had gained/learned something through their participation in the BEST Program. Of these students, slightly over 30% note that BEST provided them with the opportunity to gain a social network of other African American students on campus.

- *“I learned how to get involved with other African Americans on the UGA campus”*
- *“I learned a lot about a lot of people who look like me. I also gained a sense of belonging to the university.”*
- *“It has helped me meet other black students at UGA and form friendships. I don't live in the high rises so it is hard to meet other black students, and get involved with the school. BEST helped me do that.”*
- *“BEST is a good way to bring the minority community together. I [sic] is hard to find minorities on campus but BEST makes easy to get to know other minorities.”*
- *“I have gained a greater since of black pride despite being on a white campus.”*

In addition to gaining a sense of community at UGA, students also indicate they learned how to get involved on campus through BEST.

A couple of students indicate they gained educational advice and motivation/inspiration.

- *“the bestways [sic] of being successful in at UGA.”*
- *“That we are all in the same situation together, and that we must do what we can to help eachother [sic].”*

Only one respondent feels like s/he not gained/learned anything from BEST. This respondent did not elaborate on his/her response.

## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Most of the comments are positive about the BEST program and BEST counselors and reiterate findings from earlier questions.

- *“I have enjoyed the events the BEST program and my counselor have provided for me.”*
- *“I love being in the program, but most of all I love my counselor. She is down to earth and I'm glad she was my counselor.”*
- *“The BEST program is essential for minority freshmen, and I really hope that this program continues in the future.”*
- *“I am so glad a program like BEST exists. Keep it up guys!!!”*

A few respondents offer suggestions on how the program could be improved. These suggestions include offering more programs/events, improving the dissemination of information, and increasing the number of male counselors.

Of particular concern are two specific participants. One student noted that his/her counselor should not be rehired. Another student indicated that s/he “still hates” UGA despite his/her involvement in the BEST Program.