



Mending the Broken Circuits



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Research Questions:

How can we map strengths or assets in the Oakes communication system, as well as gather insights into the barriers or “broken circuits” between students and staff?

How can we help Oakes Advising more effectively reach Oakes students, and help Oakes students gain more power, agency, and access to resources?



Methodology & Sources for Research

METHODS

- BACKGROUND RESEARCH
- OAKES ADVISING SURVEY
with guidance from Sara Radoff
- INTERVIEWS/FOCUS GROUPS
with student leaders (NA's, Peer Advisor)
Oakes affiliates & staff (Residential & Advising)

SURVEY COLLECTION SITES

- Online Survey
- Friends
- Oakes Senate Town Hall
- Oakes Cafe
- CMMU 102
- Dorms/Apartments
- Email



How is advising an asset, and a barrier at the same time?

- Priority is first year's -> drifting of other years
 - Orientation goals: 1. Build a trusting relationship with students 2. let them know that we are a resource for them.
 - UCSC Colleges App offered for 1st time this year, but only to 1st years. (download it here: [Guidebook, mobile app](#))
 - upperclassmen get faded away
- Advisors are seen/used as “Caseworkers”
 - They provide a “...**space** for just listening, to **hear** what is going on, and then **identifying** the specific people across campus who might be an important resource and support system for them”
 - “I so strongly believe that it is that human to human connection that our students need.”



If you don't seek it, you won't get it...

*Obtained from “UCSC Oakes College Survival, Zine Project College Life.”

How can information be sent out to students without overly communicating them?

Solution:

The Oakes advising office conducted a survey to analyze how students prefer to be communicated.

Why this solution?

- Because the advising office wants to know if students prefer being notified about resources through social media or somewhere else.

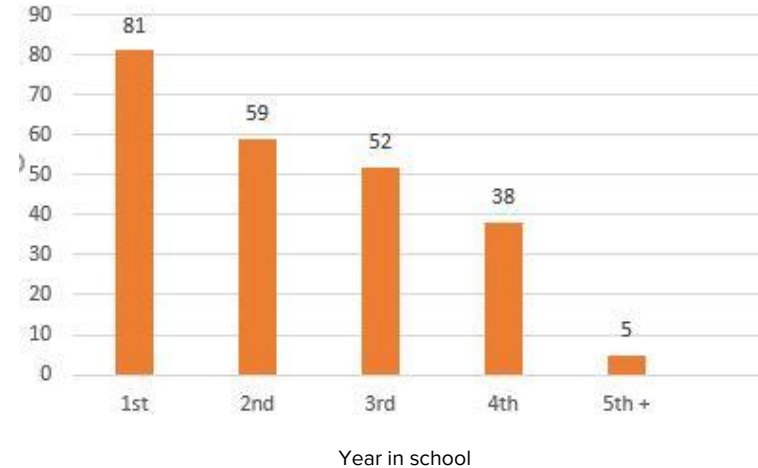


“we have a lot of different ways to support the first year students but 2nd year student we’re like go and be free. With our continuing students we do not support them well enough and we also need to be on point with them.”

-Coordinator for Residential Education

of Participants

Total: 235



“... one problem is students are overly communicated to, it is an information overload.”

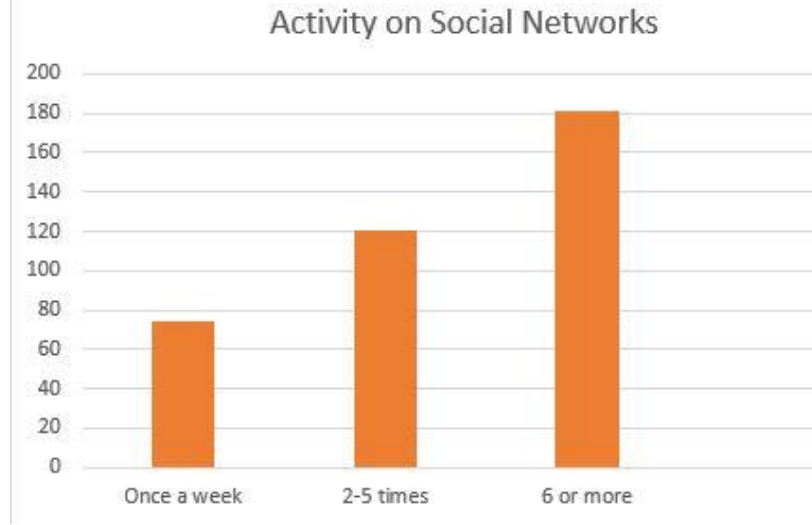
-Oakes Staff



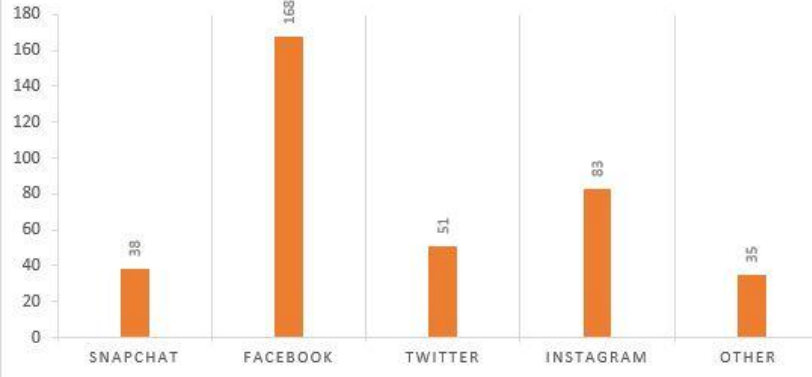
Is Social Media a Student Asset?

Personal vs. Academic Life

- “...students do a **great job of accessing technology**, especially because of social media. Your **life revolves** around your phone, computer, etc”. -Oakes Student
- 181 students said they use social networks 6 times or more a week



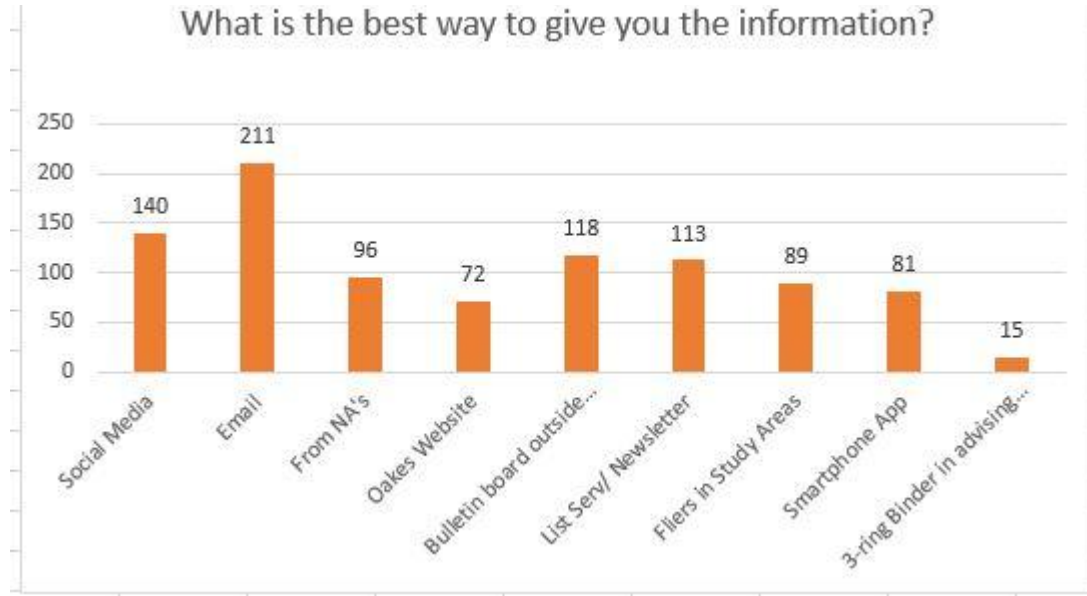
SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS WHERE STUDENTS WANT TO RECEIVE ACADEMIC INFORMATION



- Advising thinking of using social media:
 - Facebook could be good [to distribute information to students]... a Facebook page because then we could just post like 50 posts without bombarding students notifications
 - vs.** students receiving [up to 50] emails. -Oakes Staff
- But... Students are communicating yet not within the university
 - **Personal life = better communication**
 - **Academic life = lack of communication**
 - **1 in 5*** students do not want this connection

*=According to survey data.

How do students want to receive information?



- Input on student's attitudes toward email and other modes of communication
- Students prefer to receive information through online and social media instead of physical advertisement (flyers, posters, etc.)
- *“Academic Advising emails seem **more credible** than a FB page”*

"...this campus lacks a coordinated communication strategy."

-Oakes Advisor

Communication



"I think communication is a form of representing yourself, and forming your identity. Once you put that out there, people are able to perceive you."

-Oakes Student

"Communication means being able to have a conversation that is open and honest. I think it can be difficult to have those conversations, especially when there's lines of difference.."

-Oakes CRE

"some of the lack of communication [from the university] is intentional, or at least it feels that way"

-Oakes Student

"Communication is not something that is clearly taught at the university... It's a crucial thing...a lot of things could be sorted out if people knew how to communicate better..."

-Oakes Student

Communication Assets Overview

During interviews with staff and students, we found a myriad of assets for overcoming barriers and strengthening communication in Oakes:

Community bonds between students

Willing and open staff; desire to communicate

Oakes students and staff aware of barriers

Student leaders who bridge students and staff

Communication valued by staff and students

Outdoor spaces as potential meeting spots



Communication Barriers Overview

During interviews with staff and students, we discovered three different locations of barriers to communication, each with its own individual factors:

Factors Affecting Students Directly

- Overloaded with responsibilities
- Over-communicated
- Ill-prepared but don't get help

Factors Affecting Staff

- Understaffed, stressed
- Power differentials perceived and felt

Factors from Campus Admin

- Willful mis-communication /hide resources
- Lacking cultural competence

↓ Factors affecting students directly

↓ Factors affecting staff directly

↓ Factors authored by campus admin

Power differential between students and staff

Students overloaded with activities

Willful lack of communication

Students over-communicated to



Students ill-prepared ; don't ask for help /don't know its there

University not culturally sensitive

Challenges Facing an Oakes Student

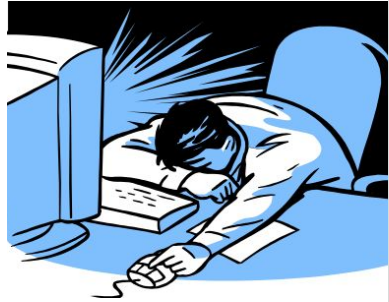
Departments understaffed and stressed

Issues Facing Oakes Students

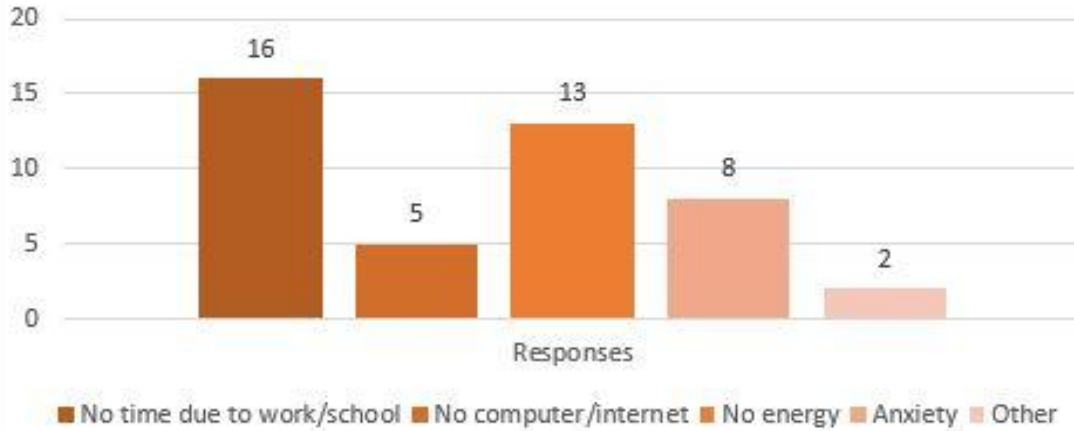
1. *Students do not have the appropriate set of skills to navigate the institution and ensure success.*
2. *Students are constantly bombarded with emails from various offices at UCSC & do not know how to use/develop a system where they can manage the emails they receive.*
3. *Students at Oakes are given new adult responsibilities & are more concerned with supporting themselves, than communicating with Oakes Staff/Advising.*



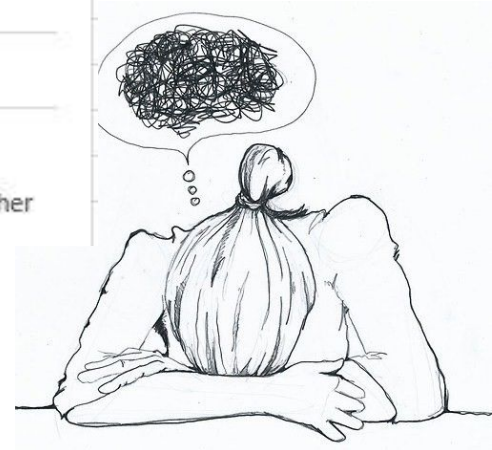
What are students limitations to view email?



At times when you've become overwhelmed and avoided your e-mail, which of these factors felt like the most insurmountable problem for you?



Top 5 sources of stress:
change in sleeping habits, vacations/breaks and **increased workload** (Ross, Niebling, & Heckert, 1999)





Factors affecting staff directly



Factors authored by campus admin



Staff concerns for students

University not culturally sensitive

Willful lack of communication

Departments understaffed and stressed

Power differential between students and staff

Students overloaded and over-communicated; Hard to reach them

Students ill-prepared; Don't ask for help or don't know it's there



Challenges Facing Oakes Staff

Issues Facing Oakes Staff

1. *Lack of staff here at Oakes, too many students to look over & staff is already stressed and worn too thin to do more.*
2. *The existence of power differentials exists amongst staff and students here in Oakes & makes it difficult for development of sincere and human relationships with students.*



Overall Campus/ Administration Issues

1. *There is a vast amount of resources offered to UCSC students, but sometimes students aren't aware of them. When students do find them, there are loopholes they must jump to obtain it.*
2. *A lack of cultural competence in and out of Oakes College. Many students do not feel comfortable sharing and speaking about certain topics in the fear people will not fully understand where they are coming from.*



confusing
ineffective inconsistent
excessive weak
lacking
informative
murky consistent
underdeveloped
irrelevant

Student's feelings in relation to email, communication, and resource access.

What should *happen next?*

Proposal for what should be done.
Based on data...



Building on current assets:

- “one of the **biggest challenges**[:]... **not enough of us** to truly serve our population and our students.”- Oakes Staff
 - Hiring more staff, additional peer advisor
 - Newsletters
 - “I’d prefer bullet points or varying fonts and sizes to **catch my attention and make it interesting.**”
- **Building on bonds** between students & staff
 - “... need to build a **human connection** with students & have them see we’re here to help”
 - make NAs build a connection with students
- Have peer advisors in dorm buildings or train NAs
- ***Publicize** workshops advisors hold in dorm lounges
 - Make available for all, not only specific building



Building new assets...

- Make modes of communication **credible**
 - **Students need academically- and professionally-oriented modes of communication so they can be trained to use them late**
 - **Using social media unhelpful in the long run; email, with proper training, preferred**
- Make use of outdoor spaces at Oakes
 - Lawns provide spaces to hold events where staff can be accessible to passing students
- Additional preparation for students:
 - Students need help and to be given skills they need to succeed
 - Life skills class; skills to succeed in college
 - High-school to college transition
 - How to check and send email

Next Steps...

For the next group of researchers we leave these suggestions:

1. Center upon one aspect of our findings and look further in depth into that specific topic (e. g. Students, Oakes Staff or Administration)
2. Get more student input! Hold focus groups to find out what students actually feel about Oakes, communication, etc.
3. **WE ARE YOUR ASSETS!** If you need any help, don't be hesitant to ask for it!

