

Sociology 1130—Higher Education Policy and Service: On Campus and Beyond
Education Secondary Capstone Project

**Tell Me About Your Peer Advising Fellow: Surveying First-Year Students on
their Peer-Advising Experience**

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Spring 2019

ABSTRACT

Evaluating the consistency and efficacy of advising programs in higher education is an critical aspect of producing more positive undergraduate student outcomes. This challenge is particularly important for large-scale advising programs, such as Harvard University's Peer Advising Fellows (PAF) program for first-year undergraduates. Despite overwhelming anecdotal evidence of PAFs' ability to make a positive contribution to the first-year experience, feedback mechanisms can still be improved. In response to current questions with the efficacy mid-year advising survey, I set out to identify the purposes and current challenges of the mid-year advising survey through expert interviews with administrators at the Harvard Advising Programs Office (APO) and researchers at the Bok Center for Learning, who also provided written feedback on the current survey tool. Additionally, I conducted focus groups with student leaders of the PAF program and PAFs at large to identify these issues and discuss potential solutions. I note three major findings. First, the PAF survey is created to be a formative tool but PAFs commonly see the survey as a evaluative tool. Second, PAFs want faster feedback mechanisms and more metrics for accountability within the program. Third, not all first-year students can articulate the responsibilities of the PAF clearly. These findings led me to make action-oriented recommendations to improve communication around the survey, hasten feedback delivery time, and facilitate first-years' understanding of the PAF role. Informed by the findings of my research, I worked to create a new modified version of the PAF survey and conducted preliminary testing on the survey's ease of use. Overall, this projects' findings will culminate in better understanding of the purpose of soliciting feedback and in the launching of a new survey tool in December 2019.

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William Wang

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Over the course of the spring semester, I conducted interviews and focus groups with expert higher education researchers, administrators at the Advising Programs Office (APO), and peer advising fellows (PAFs) for first year undergraduates to see how to improve the current mid-year advising survey. This project led me to create a modified survey that will hopefully develop better feedback mechanisms and help PAFs to reflect on their performance. Lastly, I tested this draft of the survey with first-year students. Below are the summaries of my key findings.



1. The Mid-Year Survey is a formative tool for reflection.

In this research, I learned the mid-year survey has been designed by the Advising Programs Office for PAFs to reflect on their performance. In essence, the survey is a formative tool that is supposed to help PAFs identify what is going well and what needs to improve. However, the PAFs often see the Mid-Year survey instead as an evaluative judgement on their performance. One action step we can take is to reinforce the communication around the survey and highlight the formative goals of the survey. We want to stress the importance for PAFs to reflect meaningfully on their performance and work on areas of improvement in the spring semester.

2. PAFs want faster feedback and more accountability.

The current system of one-on-one conversations to deliver survey feedback takes a long time for one administrator to handle. As a result, some PAFs feel like they receive the results of the mid-year survey too late into the spring semester to be able to make positive changes. Furthermore, many PAFs want more metrics to ensure more programmatic accountability. One proposed solution is for proctors to deliver survey results to the PAFs and facilitate reflection with the PAFs. Since not all PAFs may feel comfortable with this, we can ask PAFs to opt into this alternate way of receiving feedback to expedite the process.

3. The survey can educate first-year students on the responsibilities of a PAF.

In my conversations with first-years, it is surprising that not all first-years can articulate the responsibilities of a PAF clearly. Furthermore, the questions on the survey are so open-ended where it's hard to understand what respondents are thinking.

We can tackle these two issues by aligning our survey questions more with the internal PAF rubric. By increasing the level of specificity of these questions, respondents of the survey will get a sense for what is expected of PAFs and be empowered to use PAFs more as a resource.

INTRODUCTION:

When first-year students step foot onto Harvard University, they can find support networks in many places. These include academic advisors, residential proctors, and Resident Deans of Freshmen— all of whom are either faculty, graduate students, or administrators (Harvard College, 2018). However, 190 Peer Advising Fellows (PAFs) serve as one of the “first lines of defense” in a freshman’s advising network. PAFs are specially selected upperclassmen who are matched individually to 7-12 first-year students (also known as “PAFees”) who live in the same residential entryway. PAFs help first-years with the academic, social, and extracurricular aspects of transitioning to college and are expected to meet individually with each PAFee once a month. PAFs are also tasked with fostering a sense of community by working with residential proctors and co-PAFs to host weekly entryway study breaks.¹ Internally within the PAF program, a PAF rubric (see appendix) lists the responsibilities of a PAF in more detail.

While PAFs make a tangible, positive impact for first-years every day, some challenges still persist within the program. For one, there is not a robust feedback mechanism for PAFs to be evaluated on their performance. First-years are asked to fill out an advising survey broadly on their first-year experience at the end of the fall semester. One section is devoted to the PAF. However, the quantitative aspects of the PAF survey are not often specific enough to diagnose potential issues with a PAF’s approach. Qualitative aspects of the PAF survey are not shared directly with the PAFs, which makes it difficult for PAFs to make concrete changes for the second semester. How can actionable feedback be delivered to the PAFs? How do we make sure that all PAFs are fully meeting their responsibilities? What are the goals of the PAF surveys, and how do we collect the right data that meets our stated goals?

Within the PAF program, eight student leaders are selected as “Eagle PAFs.” The Eagles are responsible for facilitating PAF training weekend, organizing monthly PAF Yard Meetings, and evaluating the PAF applicants. Moreover, the Eagle PAFs are in a unique position to initiate changes within the program. As the College considers

¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yE5PWwoE_3Y

potential changes to the mid-year advising survey in the 2019-2020 academic year, I see an opportunity to improve on the current version of PAF evaluations. In the coming months, we hope to seek input from Harvard's Advising Programs Office (APO), current PAFs, and first-years to identify the goals of the PAF evaluations and to create a survey tool that meets those stated goals. In this project, I conducted expert interviews with administrators at the APO and researchers at the Harvard Bok Center for Learning. Through focus groups with PAFs, I learned more about how PAFs personally use the mid-year survey results and identified areas for improvement. Finally, I modified the current version of the PAF survey and tested a new version of the PAF survey with first-year students to test ease of use.

Given the progress made in this research, we look forward to delivering a new survey tool in December 2019 for the Harvard Class of 2023. In the meantime, we hope to continue to iterate on a new version of the PAF survey and identify resources that can commit to helping the PAF program analyze this yearly data. With the completion of this project, we hope to deliver timely and action-oriented feedback to PAFs and continue building strong accountability metrics into the PAF program.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

The need to evaluate the consistency and efficacy of advising programs in higher education has long been established as an critical aspect of producing more positive undergraduate student outcomes (such as reduced student attrition) through good advising (Srebniak, 1988; Cook, 2009). The majority of higher education institutions has historically lacked formalized evaluation for their academic advising programs (Srebniak, 1988). The absence of surveys for understanding the student experience makes it difficult to determine how the institution can improve the student experiences or whether institutional goals for student development are met by the advising programs.

In recent years, however, there has been an increased focus on measuring the student experience through surveys. One of the more influential surveys on the undergraduate experience is the National Survey of Student Engagement (Klemencic,

2015). Student engagement can be defined as a sustained commitment to learning driven by student interest and institutional support through mentorship (Kuh, 2009). At its best, student engagement in higher education institutions can build long-term skills and “develop habits of the mind and heart that enlarge [students’] capacity for continuous learning and personal development” (Kuh, 2009). The NSSE seeks to measure the quality of higher education institutions through a comprehensive survey of undergraduate student intellectual activity and participation in institutional student development resources (NSSE, 2018). The founding principle of the NSSE focuses on measuring student engagement and improving institutional structures to support student engagement (Kuh, 2009). Given its wide reach across over 700 institutions, NSSE has often been cited as a national standard for surveying and improving institutional structures to support student learning (Klemencic 2015; NSSE, 2018).

Critics of the NSSE raise important objections to student surveys. Porter (2011) argue that researchers rely too much on face validity (whether a survey *appears* effective for measuring its stated question) and not enough on whether a survey accurately measures what it hopes to measure. Some common shortcomings of student engagement surveys include the inconsistent interpretation of survey questions by respondents, the inability of respondents to recall and report accurate information about themselves, and the presence of response biases based on social desirability or low sample size (Porter, 2011). When considering these shortcomings, it becomes difficult to determine whether surveys can in fact be used at all. To reconcile the debate around survey validity, Klemencic (2015) offers a set of quality standards for policymakers around survey building. Surveys should be designed for an explicit purpose that leads to institutional improvements, be delivered to the respondents as soon as possible, and be created with input from relevant stakeholders such as students and administrators. As we embark on our project of building an effective academic survey tool for first-year students, we acknowledge shortcomings that exist in survey tools and hope to reconcile some of these criticisms by following the recommendations set forth by Klemencic (2015).

METHODS:

Overview of Research Methods

The action research for developing a survey tool has been a highly iterative process, and we anticipate more steps will be taken before the launch of the survey in December 2019. Per the recommendation of Klemencic (2015), we have kept all stakeholders (first-year students, PAFs, administrators from the Advising Programs Office) informed of the process and gathered input along the way. While the iterative process could theoretically take months to complete, two main goals were identified prior to the research.

1. First, we hoped to identify and explicitly state the goals of the PAF mid-year survey. Is the survey a formative or evaluative tool?
2. Second, we wished to construct a working draft of the PAF survey and conduct some testing on the survey's ease of use with first-years students.

I have used a combination of expert interviews with administrators and focus groups with the Eagle PAFs to draft an explicit stated purpose of the PAF evaluation. I conducted an on-the-record interview with Brooks Lambert-Sluder, the Assistant Director of the Advising Programs Office and the head of the PAF program on the purpose of the mid-year survey and current challenges around the survey. In addition, I conducted an off-the-record interview jointly with Jenny Bergeron, the Director of Educational Research and Evaluation at Harvard's Bok Center for Teaching and Learning and Qingyi Yu, a quantitative researcher at the Bok Center. The focus of the interview with Bergeron and Yu concerned survey-building and techniques of survey analysis. At my request, Bergeron and Yu also provided written feedback on the current version of the PAF mid-year survey after the interview.

Outside of expert interviews, I also conducted a series of focus groups with fellow PAFs to gain a sense of the perspectives around the strengths and weaknesses around the PAF survey. In particular, I conducted and recorded a focus group conversation with Eagle PAFs (n=4) to discuss how the PAF leadership uses the current survey tool and how a survey tool should be used. I also sought formalized input from current PAFs in

two separate focus groups (n=6, n =7) to learn the PAFs' general understanding of the purpose of the survey and test potential survey questions. These conversations in particular shaped my recommendations and helped me modify and create a new version of the PAF survey.

In the last portion of the survey, I personally solicited first-year students to fill out the survey at the dining halls. I decided against sending this survey out to e-mail lists of first-year students to avoid potential confusion around the purpose of my survey and to prevent conflicts with other survey initiatives at the Advising Programs Office. The primary purpose was to gather quantitative data on the amount of time spent on the survey and to ask for anonymous feedback on the clarity of the survey. It should be noted that the purpose of asking first-years to fill out this survey was not to gather data for PAFs to reflect on their performance; instead, the clarity and ease of use of survey were being tested. In some cases, the contents of conversations with first-years post-survey completion were recorded due to their pertinence in helping me to understand the first-years' conceptions about the role and responsibilities of their PAFs. While gaining the first-year perspective was not a direct stated goal when the research project began, this additional data point from first-years remains pertinent and exists within the spirit of keeping stakeholder input involved.

All on-the-record content was transcribed with the help of the online app otter.ai. The recordings were played alongside the otter.ai-generated transcripts and some corrections were made manually. In the listening process, the transcripts were labeled by their general content and themes. The underlying themes and commonalities were identified by analyzing the interview labels. For the purposes of direct quotation, I re-transcribed manually to ensure maximal accuracy. Filler words (such as "um", "uh", "like," and "yeah") were generally omitted in direct quotations for clarity reasons.

LIMITATIONS OF METHODS:

As a leader of the PAF program, I realize that I may inadvertently pressure other PAFs into joining my focus group. While I strove to counteract this by expressing that

participation in my research is voluntary and asking participants to fill out an informed consent form, I acknowledge that this could still be a challenge. Some selection biases may also be at play in the curation of focus groups. One particular focus group consisted of PAFs who missed monthly Yard Meetings and were asked to voluntarily join a focus group after participating in a mandatory make-up Yard Meeting. This group may not be completely representative of all PAFs given their seemingly lowered enthusiasm for the responsibilities of the PAF. However, I confronted this issue by attempting to foster a higher sense of enthusiasm and conducted some informal “icebreaker” questions before my focus groups began. This decision also could encourage all participants to speak how they truly feel about the subject.

Lastly, my biases about how an effective PAF should behave may play a role as I begin research. This issue might also present itself in that I conduct a focus group with Eagle PAFs, a population of extremely dedicated PAFs who could carry a different perspective than the general PAF population. I believe that by seeking input from all stakeholders (in particular, other non-Eagle PAFs), I will be able to reduce the effect of personal biases as a leader. This issue led me to talk PAFs at large and gave me new insights that shaped the research findings.

FINDINGS:

While the qualitative data from the interviews can range in opinions, I have identified three major findings by analyzing interview and focus group transcripts for thematic commonalities. Following each major finding in this paper, I make recommendations that can address the problems identified in the findings. First, the PAF mid-year survey is a formative tool intended to help PAFs reflect on their performance. Second, the results of the survey feedback could be delivered sooner and PAFs want a more robust feedback mechanism to hold themselves accountable. Third, the roles and responsibilities of a PAF are not always clear to first-year students, whose views of the PAF program are often shaped by their personal PAFs instead. The last section of the findings will be used to justify the modifications made to the current PAF

survey, including the introduction of a brand-new question. The discussion and conclusion section will be devoted to discussing preliminary testing results of the modified survey and future directions of research.

1. The Mid-Year Survey is a formative tool for reflection

First, I have identified the purpose of the mid-year survey. The PAF survey is a formative tool created to help PAFs reflect on their performance and identify areas of improvement for the spring semester. New PAFs are required to meet with Lambert-Sluder (the administrative head of the PAF program) to receive the quantitative summary of survey responses and the redacted qualitative comments from first-year students. Veteran PAFs receive the quantitative summary of survey responses by e-mail, and opt in to meet with Lambert-Sluder, who reads the redacted qualitative comments from first-year students out loud. According to Lambert-Sluder, the mid-year survey is “really valuable” because it pushes PAFs to reflect in a way that would not have occurred otherwise. “I think the one of the best functions of the survey is a forcing function for reflections on a PAF’s experience this year,” he said. “There is an expectation that PAFs reflect with me, but also on their own and with other people around how their first semester as a PAF went.” This sentiment of reflection is matched by comments from focus group participants. One Eagle PAF said that she solicits feedback from her co-peer advisors and proctor but doesn’t always get her PAFees’ perspective. “I use the mid year survey as a way that I can get honest, thorough feedback on how I’m doing as a PAF and how PAFees are reading our relationship, in addition to how I’m reading it,” she said. Another Eagle PAF said that the experience of getting feedback made him reflect on the importance of his role and served as a “wake-up call.” He said, “By seeing the numbers on that sheet and hearing the comments that my PAFees are writing, it just makes me realize how much this is affecting someone else.” Other PAFs in different focus groups also brought out many examples of how they self-reflect in the context of the mid-year survey.

However, many more PAFs often see the survey more as an evaluative tool that’s being used to judge their performance. This mismatch between the

administrator's stated purpose and the PAFs' perceived purpose of the survey is particularly evident in the experiences of new PAFs. New PAFs often describe the experience of meeting with Lambert-Sluder to receive survey results as "stressful" or "scary." For example, one new PAF described her experience meeting with Lambert-Sluder as "stressful," saying that "Going into the meeting with Brooks [Lambert-Sluder], it felt like a test— a meeting with my boss." This sentiment was echoed by another veteran PAF, whose perception of the survey as a evaluative tool has evolved. "Last year as a sophomore, I was stressed about Brooks [Lambert-Sluder] giving me the feedback because it felt like an evaluation and like I was nervous about it," the veteran PAF said. The difference in how the results are interpreted by new PAFs (as an evaluative tool) and by administrators and veteran PAFs (as a reflective tool) led me to make the first recommendation: *The PAF program should strengthen the communication, especially to new PAFs, around the purpose of the mid-year advising survey.* In practice, this action step would involve drafting an email specific to the PAFs in conjunction with outreach efforts from Eagle PAFs to their new PAF mentees and communication during monthly Yard Meetings about the purpose of the survey.

2. PAFs want faster feedback and more accountability.

Second, I found that there are challenges in delivering feedback in a timely manner in the current system and many PAFs demand more feedback on their performance. Due to the time demands of the individual one-on-one meetings with every PAF, it can take 60 to 65 hours for Lambert-Sluder to deliver all the survey results to the PAF constituency. Coupled with other demands for the Advising Programs Office, the survey results are often not delivered completely until mid-March. Even in these circumstances, some PAFs fall through in the cracks. For example, one new PAF from the focus group revealed that she had difficulty rescheduling her meeting with Lambert-Sluder since the meeting slots filled up quickly. Eventually her time conflict early on in the semester made it difficult for her to get the results quickly. After she decided to not return as a PAF in mid-March, getting the survey results was unfortunately no longer a priority. "It would have been really nice have different options

[to receive feedback],” she said. While this anecdote is not be representative of all PAF experiences, Lambert-Sluder independently expressed his willingness to work around student schedules and identified timely delivery of survey feedback as a potential area of improvement in the current system.

In addition to the timeliness of feedback, PAFs generally want a more robust feedback mechanism to hold themselves accountable. In particular, PAFs participating in focus groups said that the PAF program needs more accountability measures. Many PAFs responded strongly in the negative to the idea that the PAF program had enough accountability. One senior PAF who wanted more accountability in the PAF program expression frustration with stories of PAFs who do not meet frequently with first-year students. She said, “Most of us did this job because we love this job... for [some PAFs] to not have met their PAFees for this entire year... is an abuse of this stipend, the spirit behind this program, and also an abuse in the fact that these kids deserve to have an experience and a place at Harvard that makes them feel heard and welcomed.” The passionate response of this particular senior PAF resonated with other PAFs who felt like they are meeting the responsibilities of a PAF while other PAFs had failed to do so. Another veteran PAF stated that it was difficult at times to keep co-PAFs accountable to the responsibilities of a PAF, saying that “It’s really hard to hold your peers accountable. I don’t think it happens in practice.”

In line with creating a more robust feedback mechanism, PAFs also identified current issues with the qualitative feedback that is delivered to them. In the current system, Lambert-Sluder reads the redacted qualitative feedback to the PAFs in one-on-one meetings, which made it difficult for some PAFs to act on the feedback. Many PAFs expressed a desire to keep the redacted qualitative feedback and some PAFs stated that it was difficult to act on the feedback because they either can’t remember every detail of the comments that was read to them or they were unsure how to act on specific criticisms when the source is anonymous. However, Lambert-Sluder stated that preserving anonymity is one of the key components of the survey. “I think it would be hard to imagine the first-year students being as honest, if they imagined [the

data] gets shared directly to whoever they're talking about, instead of offering some critical feedback," he said.

While it might be difficult to reconcile all the current challenges (timely delivery and qualitative feedback issues) of the PAF survey, I make the following recommendations to mitigate the issue. *Entryway proctors should deliver survey results to the PAFs and facilitate reflection with the PAFs, if both PAFs and their proctors opt into this alternate form of survey delivery.* Given their training in preserving confidentiality, proctors can redact and deliver the qualitative feedback to the PAFs in their entryway team with a high degree of professionalism. This process would improve the feedback delivery system and reduce workload for administrators at the Advising Programs Office in a few ways. First, given the relatively closer contact between PAFs and proctors, it would be easier to schedule time and expedite feedback delivery for PAFs to reflect on their performance. Second, giving proctors PAF feedback data gives PAFs the chance to review the qualitative feedback multiple times (something that is not possible in the current system) while keeping proctors informed about the performance of the PAFs. Third, the reflective exercise between PAFs and proctors can facilitate a longer-term, sustained conversation throughout the spring semester about ways to improve as a PAF; such a luxury is not afforded under the current system where an one-off conversation occurs with Lambert-Sluder. However, this system is without potential flaws. PAFs participating in focus groups acknowledged that not all PAFs have strong relationships with their proctors that is conducive to a productive conversation. This is true especially in cases where PAFs have strained relationships with their proctors. One veteran PAF said, "I think I wouldn't have loved my sophomore year proctor to talk to me about that feedback at the time, just because we had a difficult relationship." To mitigate this issue, I suggest that having PAFs and proctors both opt-in to this pilot survey delivery program can ensure that both stakeholders feel comfortable with the process and willing to engage in such a conversation.

One potential counter-argument is that Eagle PAFs, as student-leaders of the PAF program, should deliver the survey results to PAFs instead of proctors, who bear

the risk of being overworked. In the focus groups, PAFs expressed mixed views around this proposed system of feedback delivery by student leaders. Some PAFs said that they survey feedback delivered by Eagles to returning PAFs as a “beneficial” system, while other PAFs saw this proposed system as “potentially hurtful.” One Eagle PAF in favor of having Eagles delivering survey responses to other peers noted that this system will likely result in more timely feedback delivery and “would be more beneficial to returning PAFs if they did have a one on one meeting with an Eagle PAF.” However, another Eagle said that in such a system, the peer relationship between Eagle and other PAFs will become strained. She said, “If I were the person receiving that negative feedback, I would definitely not want it from a peer or from someone who's also a student at the college.” Given this broad spectrum of opinions, I decided to refrain from making the judgement on this issue, and instead I sought to focus on the issue identified in all focus groups— timely survey delivery. Involving some proctors can ameliorate this issue without presenting some of the peer relational challenges that had been articulated across focus groups.

3. The survey can educate first-year students on the responsibilities of a PAF.

Third and lastly, I found that first year students were often unsure about roles and responsibilities of a PAF. As a result, first-year students’ view of the PAF program can be often shaped by their personal PAF. Many PAFs recalled in focus groups that they were confused as first-year students about the responsibilities of a PAF. For example, one current veteran PAF did not realize that PAFs were supposed to meet individually with students once a month until she went through PAF training. She said, “I remember being surprised that I was supposed to meet so frequently with my PAF. Had I known that, my interactions would have been different.” The lack of understanding of the PAF role can not only be problematic for first-year students who are unaware of the resources available to them, but also be an issue for new PAFs who were not aware of the full range of PAF responsibilities when they applied as first-year students. One veteran PAFs said that she was unsure of the PAF role as a first year student, and carried some of that uncertainty with her as she started her PAF role as a sophomore. “It was never really made explicitly clear to me, besides study breaks, what PAFs are

supposed to be doing,” she said, “I ended up making for myself what I thought was a good amount of time to meet and a good amount of time to reach out to [my PAFees].” This sentiment is also backed by comments from first-year students today. One student who tested out the new survey tool said, “Coming into the year I think the PAF versus friend distinctions were not totally clear.”

We see an opportunity to inform first-year students about the responsibilities of a PAF through the midyear survey. I make the following recommendation: *The PAF program should align the mid-year survey questions with the internal PAF rubric and help first-year students understand the role of a PAF through completing the survey.* Based on the written feedback of Jenny Bergeron and Qingyi Yu (expert researchers at the Bok Center for Learning) on the current iteration of the survey, it seems like a stronger integration of PAF rubric and survey is not only possible, but necessary to measure the outcomes the PAF program seeks.² Bergeron and Yu in particular pushed for more specificity on almost all of the current questions asked in the mid-year survey. I worked to integrate their suggestions with additional input from the PAFs themselves. In practice, I would include survey questions such as “How many times have you met with your PAF individually?” and follow-up questions, such as “If the number of meetings was 2 or less, please elaborate.” Many PAFs responded positively to potential addition of this question. In fact, one PAF had originally recommended this question about number of individual meetings during one focus group. This general approach of asking specific questions with specific follow-ups would allow the PAF program to indirectly demonstrate its expectations of PAFs to first-year students. As first-year students fill out the survey, the integration of more specific questions aligned with the PAF rubric will hopefully allow students to get a better sense of the responsibilities of a PAF.

In line with adding specificity, I have also decided to increase the spread of the PAF survey. Currently, the questions in the PAF survey follow a Likert rating scale with four options (Strongly Disagree/ Disagree/ Agree/ Strongly Agree), which decreases variability in responses. As one PAF stated, “It was great to see the numbers, but also

² Given Bergeron and Yu’s desire to remain off the record, I have made the decision to not directly quote from their written feedback on the current Mid-year survey tool.

the standard deviations were pretty small and I don't really know how valuable the quantitative information is." To ameliorate this issue, I decided to add a fifth option, "Neither agree nor disagree" on the rating scale, per the suggestion of Bok Center research specialists. This additional option can increase the variability in responses, adding more meaning to the numbers behind the survey. Moreover, this change can help students who feel ambivalent to express their feelings without funneling students into either positive (Agree/ Strongly agree) or negative (Disagree/ Strongly Disagree) options.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION:

In this research, we set out to identify the goals of the PAF mid-year survey and to construct a working draft of a new version of the PAF survey. Throughout the process, I sought input from administrators, Eagle PAF leaders, PAFs, expert survey researchers, and first-year students. We were successful in both goals and made additional findings that heightened our understanding of the survey tool.

First, I found that the primary purpose of the PAF mid-year survey is to force PAFs to reflect and self-evaluate their performance in the fall semester. However, PAFs— especially new PAFs— see this survey feedback mainly as an evaluative tool used to judge performance. I recommend that this mismatch be addressed through a multi-pronged communication approach that should hopefully reduce stress around the mid-year survey. Outside of identifying the primary goals of the PAF survey, I also saw a secondary goal to use the survey to inform first-year students of the PAF responsibilities. Based on reflections of current PAFs and first-year students, I learned that the PAF role and responsibilities is not always made completely clear. I hope that better alignment of the survey questions with the PAF rubric, combined with follow-up questions, can help us with this issue.

Second, we produced a first working draft of the mid-year survey by modifying the current mid-year survey to produce better alignment between the questions and the internal PAF rubric. Based on preliminary testing of the survey tool, I have confidence

that the survey tool is clear and easy to use. Eight random, anonymous first years tested the survey tool, with an average completion time of 1 minute 17 seconds (see Appendix). Based on the time it took to use the new survey, I can state with fair confidence that the new questions will not pose issues in terms of completion. Students who completed the survey were asked follow-up questions about the clarity of the survey. No students found an issue with the wording of the survey; no students in this test trial found clarity issues with a new question asking students to fill out the number of times they have met individually with their PAF. While I expect to iterate on this survey tool even more with the Eagle PAFs and administrators at the Advising Programs Office, I expect that the new survey created in this project will set the foundations for this initiative. The last steps in this process after this research project would be identifying individuals or organizations who can take on the task of analyzing the survey data and preserving the privacy of survey data. Lastly, we should work to communicate to higher-up administrators to generate buy-in for a modified survey tool. Although this process may prove difficult, the framework established by this research can prove persuasive in those goals.

This research had also brought unanticipated findings to light. PAFs identified the timeliness of survey feedback delivery as a challenge and an area of improvement, something that I did not anticipate. In response to this challenge, I workshopped solutions in focus groups with Eagle PAFs and other PAFs, concluding that proctors (previously not considered as stakeholders) can alleviate some of the time lag in situations where both PAFs and proctors opt in to allow proctors to deliver the survey data. Further research involving proctors' attitudes around the mid-year survey and delivering survey results should be explored.

Ultimately, the project helped to identify the primary goals of a mid-year survey and brought in stakeholders to consider current issues in the content and delivery PAF survey results. I identified a difference of attitudes between PAFs and administrators that we can work to address. Through this project, I also produced a working draft of a new survey that can be launched in December 2019. Overall, this project will hopefully

allow the PAF program to communicate better on the formative goals of the survey, to hasten the delivery of survey results, and through more specific survey questions, to create more accountability within the PAF program.

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Appendix

Modified Survey Questions

Strongly Disagree / Disagree / Neither Agree nor Disagree / Agree / Strongly Agree

1. As an advisee: I felt that I needed advising this term.
2. As an advisee: I made the most of the advising opportunities made available to me this fall.
3. I encountered academic difficulties this term.
4. How many times have you met individually with your PAF this semester? Select a number. Elaborate if the number is 2 or less.
5. I responded in a timely manner to my Peer Advising Fellow's outreach efforts.
6. I feel comfortable turning to my Peer Advising Fellow when I need help or have a problem.
7. My Peer Advising Fellow encourages me to think about my interests, and helps me identify ways to pursue them at Harvard.
8. My Peer Advising Fellow shares tips to help me think about how to balance my academic and extracurricular commitments.
9. My Peer Advising Fellow refers me to other resources every meeting and follows up after conversations as necessary.
10. My Peer Advising Fellow actively engages all students in the entryway and creates a sense of community.
11. My Peer Advising Fellow encourages me to think broadly about my intellectual path(s) at Harvard.
12. Overall, my Peer Advising Fellow is making a positive contribution to my first year.

Distribution of Time to Survey Completion by First-Year students (measured by qualtrics)

https://harvard.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8f6yrDRV2P1KSjj

Respondent #	Time to survey completion	Respondent #	Time to survey completion
1	0:33	5	0:39
2	3:09	6	0:40
3	1:05	7	0:47
4	1:26	8	2:01