

2024 MSUM Graduate Student Advising Experiences Survey

Summary

The MSUM Graduate Student Advising Experiences Survey was developed by the MSUM Academic Advising Committee to gather feedback on graduate student experiences with academic advising in order to identify and address advising resource and training needs and support advising practice, moving forward. Respondents were asked for feedback on their preferences for connecting with advisors; perceived availability, knowledge, and expertise of their advisors; relational aspects of advising; frequency of advising topics; students' own advising behaviors and knowledge; experiences navigating multiple majors and supplemental advising; and overall satisfaction with advising.

All graduate students, both degree-seeking and non-degree-seeking, enrolled at MSUM in Spring 2024 had the opportunity to be included in this study (N = 917). A response rate of 12.6% was achieved, with 116 responses. Key findings and committee recommendations are summarized below.

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Respondent Demographics and Advising Experiences

- The percentage of respondents from various demographic groups was typically within 2-4 percentage points of the population demographic percentage (see Table 1)
- Master's degree-seeking students and women were overrepresented in the respondent population while non-degree-seeking students were under-represented
- 93.9% of respondents know their assigned advisor
- 75.7% reported having been advised this spring at the time they completed the survey
- Frequency of Advisor Contact:
 - 37.0% of respondents have contact with their advisor 2-3 times/semester
 - 39.8% have contact once/semester or only for registration
 - 15.7% have contact 4+ times/semester
 - 7.4% do not typically have contact with their advisor
- Preferred methods of communication (respondents could select all that apply):
 - 16.4% prefer in person appointments
 - 40.5% prefer video conference appointments
 - 78.4% prefer email
 - 9.5% prefer phone call

- How quickly does your academic advisor typically respond to questions?
 - 62.0% of respondents indicated their advisor responds to questions within 24 hours
 - 27.8% indicated their advisor responds within 2-3 days
 - 6.5% within a week
 - 2.8% longer than a week
 - 0.9% does not typically respond
- How do you typically take courses:
 - 78.4% primarily online
 - 10.3% primarily in person
 - 7.8% primarily hyflex
 - 3.4% a mix of online and in person

Table 1. Advising Survey Respondent Demographics and Population Demographics

Demographic	Respondent %	Population %
Admit Type		
Master's	78.5%	55.3%
Doctoral	6.0%	8.1%
Specialist	6.0%	9.8%
Non-degree (18 Online, Licensure, etc)	9.5%	26.8%
College		
Business, Analytics & Communication	4.3%	6.4%
Education & Human Services	72.4%	76.6%
Science, Health, & the Environment	17.2%	17.0%
Gender & Sexual Identity		
Woman	86.9%	71.3%
Man	12.1%	28.7%
Transgender/Non-binary	1.0%	Not available
LGBTQA+	11.3%	Not available
Straight (heterosexual)	79.2%	Not available
First Generation Status		
First Generation	33.6%	31.3%
Continuing Generation	37.1%	32.1%
Unknown	20.7%	36.6%
Pell Eligibility		
Pell Eligible	1.7%	0.3%
Non-Pell Eligible	98.3%	99.7%
Race/Ethnicity/Residency		
Domestic Student of Color	9.8%	11.2%
Domestic White Student	90.2%	84.1%
International Student	3.4%	0.9%
Unknown	N/A	3.8%

Demographic Differences in Results

Independent-samples t-tests and one-way analysis of variance were conducted to determine whether there are differences in survey responses based on student demographics. Analysis could not be conducted based on Pell eligibility or residency (domestic/international) due to the small number of respondents for each of these demographic groups. Overall, few significant differences were found among demographic groups regarding overall satisfaction, advisor availability, advisor knowledge, advising relationships, or advisee expectations and knowledge. The significant differences that were found are noted in each section below.

Overall Satisfaction

- Respondents reported a mean level of agreement of **3.94** regarding overall satisfaction with academic advising at MSUM, with 72.6% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing they are satisfied
(scale: Strongly Disagree = 1; Disagree=2; Neutral = 3; Agree = 4; Strongly Agree = 5)
 - Strongly Disagree: 12.3%
 - Disagree: 3.8%
 - Neutral: 11.3%
 - Agree: 22.6%
 - Strongly Agree: 50.0%
- There were no significant differences in overall satisfaction between student groups

Key Themes Regarding Overall Advising Experiences:

Respondents indicated they find the following aspects of advising to be **most beneficial**: (N=74)

- Accessibility and responsiveness: availability for appointments and questions, timely responses (26 responses)
- Advisor knowledge and guidance: provides accurate, helpful guidance about courses and degree requirements (20 responses)
- Personalized, caring support: personalized guidance; caring and supportive advisors; flexibility and understanding of student lives (17 responses)
- Future planning: focus on graduation and career goals and timelines (15 responses)

Respondents made the following **suggestions for improving** academic advising: (N=61)

- No suggestions (37 responses)
- Improve prescriptive advising: provide clearer, more accurate guidance on academic requirements, course availability, and future planning (9 responses)
- Increased contact: additional or regular meetings/contact with advisors (7 responses)
- Individual feedback points also included the following requests:
 - Discuss post-graduation career opportunities (2 responses)
 - Receive notification when an advisor assignment is made or changed
 - Pair students with an advisor with similar research interests

Advisor Availability & Knowledge

- Respondents reported consistently high levels of agreement with all advisor availability and knowledge statements

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements based on your experiences with your assigned academic advisor at MSUM. (Strongly Disagree = 1; Disagree=2; Neutral = 3; Agree = 4; Strongly Agree = 5)	N	Mean	SD
The availability of my academic advisor is currently meeting my needs	103	4.40	.922
I am able to meet with my advisor in a modality that works for me (i.e., in person, online, via phone, etc)	103	4.63	.741
It is relatively easy to make an appointment with my advisor	103	4.50	.803
I am given the time I need during my academic advising appointment(s)	102	4.51	.767
My advisor is knowledgeable about the requirements for my degree.	103	4.66	.761
If my advisor does not know the answer to one of my questions, they make the effort to connect me to someone who does.	103	4.52	.778
My advisor is a good source of accurate information regarding academic policies (e.g., add/drop, grading, holds, academic standing, etc)	103	4.53	.884
My advisor has provided me with accurate information regarding graduation requirements	103	4.56	.859

Advising Topics Frequency

- The most frequently discussed advising topic was academic goals and progress toward those goals while lower frequencies were reported for career/professional development opportunities or resources for well-being
- Students of color reported significantly higher frequency of discussing *academic goals and progress toward those goals* than white students

Thinking about academic advising, about how often has your advisor discussed the following with you? (Never = 1; Rarely = 2; Sometimes = 3; Often = 4)	N	Mean	SD
My academic goals and progress toward those goals	103	3.32	.982
Career opportunities and/or appropriate professional development opportunities in my field of interest	102	2.99	1.048
Resources for my well-being (health, counseling, financial guidance, etc.)	103	2.59	1.150

Relational Aspects of Advising

- Respondents reported consistently high levels of agreement with all advisor relationality statements

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements based on your experiences with your assigned academic advisor at MSUM (Strongly Disagree = 1; Disagree=2; Neutral = 3; Agree = 4; Strongly Agree = 5)	N	Mean	SD
My academic advisor cares about my success as a student.	103	4.53	.790
My academic advisor encourages me to contact them when I need help.	103	4.61	.717
My advisor listens closely to my concerns and questions, whether they are academic, professional, or personal.	103	4.46	.926
My academic advisor refers me to other resources at MSUM when needed	103	4.36	.948

Advisee Expectations and Knowledge

- Respondents reported high levels of frequency of attending advising meetings prepared and keeping appointments made with their advisor
- Respondents reported high levels of agreement regarding *understanding how to use eServices and knowing what is required to complete their degree in the timeframe identified*
- White students reported significantly higher levels of agreement with the statement, *I know how to use eServices to enroll each semester*, than students of color
- Lower levels of agreement were reported regarding *having a close connection to a faculty member and being aware of resources available to aid in transition from graduate school to career*
- College of Business, Analytics, & Communication (CBAC) students reported significantly lower levels of agreement with the statement, *I know how to access, utilize, and interpret my Plan of Study*, than Education & Human Services (CEHS) or Science, Health, & the Environment (CSHE) students
- CBAC students reported significantly lower levels of agreement with the statement, *I am aware of resources available to aid in my transition from graduate school to career*, than CSHE students

Please indicate about how often you engage in the following advising activities. (Never = 1; Rarely = 2; Sometimes = 3; Always = 4)	N	Mean	SD
As an advisee, I bring my Degree Audit Report and/or Plan of Study to my advising meeting(s)	81	3.15	1.014
As an advisee, I make appointments to see my advisor	82	3.22	.903
As an advisee, I keep appointments I made with my advisor	77	3.87	.440
As an advisee, I attend my advising appointments prepared with questions and ideas	79	3.75	.518

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: <i>(Strongly Disagree = 1; Disagree=2; Agree = 3; Strongly Agree = 4)</i>	N	Mean	SD
I know how to access available resources at MSUM to meet my personal, academic, and career goals	107	3.18	.627
I know how to use eServices to enroll each semester	107	3.61	.509
I understand exactly what is required to complete my degree in the timeframe I have identified	107	3.42	.659
I have a close connection to one or more faculty members in my major	107	2.97	.863
I know how to access, utilize, and interpret my Plan of Study	107	3.13	.802
I am aware of resources available to aid in my transition from graduate school to career	107	3.03	.829

Multiple Program & Supplemental Advising

Multiple Program Advising

- 2.6% (N = 3) reported having more than one program for which they have multiple advisors
- Primary challenges reported included navigating an uninformed and nonresponsive advisor; the graduate dashboard was difficult to navigate with more than one degree program; and finding time to meet with multiple advisors was personally difficult
- Support that would help navigate multiple programs included an active, engaged advisor; allowing multiple programs and advisors in the grad dashboard; and using learning platforms consistently across courses

Supplemental Advising

- 9.5% (N = 11) reported receiving supplemental advising from someone other than their assigned advisor
- Sources of supplemental advising included:
 - Another faculty member not assigned to them: 63.6%
 - Grad Studies staff member: 36.4%
 - Peer: 9.1%
- Supplemental advising contacts were identified by:
 - Website: 18.2%
 - Referred by advisor: 36.4%
 - Took a class from them: 45.5%
 - Fellow student recommended: 9.1%
- Reasons for seeking out supplemental advising included being concerned about lack of responsiveness or knowledge from assigned advisor, advisor was on sabbatical, alternate contact showed interest in supporting them as an individual, and experiencing difficulty with the graduate dashboard

Academic Advising Committee Recommendations

In light of the above findings from the Spring 2024 Student Advising Experiences survey, the MSUM Academic Advising Committee recommends the following:

Prescriptive Advising Recommendations

Prescriptive advising components (i.e., Plan of study development, course selection guidance, degree requirements, navigating systems and policies) remain critical to students' overall advising experience.

- Ensure all students receive proactive communication regarding advisor assignments or changes

- All advisors are strongly encouraged to complete the Advisor Certification training program prior to receiving advisee assignments or as identified in professional development plans to support ongoing development
 - Strengthen graduate student support component of Advisor Certification
- Systematically use the Plan of Study (or an alternate long-term planning tool) for all graduate students to support students making timely progress toward graduation and increase advising time allocated to career and academic goal discussions and personalized support
 - Ensure Plans of Study are readily available to students and advisors by using a centralized, accessible tool, such as the Graduate Dashboard
- Integrate Graduate Dashboard training for all degree-seeking graduate students in advising or curriculum

Advising as Personalized Support

In light of the value graduate students placed on personalized support in advising, the desire for more contact with advisors, and the predominant attendance modality being online for graduate students, it is recommended that intentional connections be made in support of enhancing student success, sense of belonging, and retention.

- Consider balancing heavy advising loads to enhance personalized connection and support for graduate students
- Provide intentional focus in advising communications and meetings on the following:
 - Resources for wellbeing available to graduate students, both in person and online
 - Career and professional development guidance including discussions of resources to support transitions from graduate school to career