

# ACADEMIC ADVISING SURVEY REPORT

---

Department of Research and Advocacy

## INTRODUCTION

In December 2018, VP Academic Akanksha Bhatnagar spearheaded a survey on undergraduate attitudes toward academic advisors. The survey was distributed via faculty/department association networks and received 363 responses. As an incentive, respondents had the option to enter a draw for modest prizes. The survey used extensive logic piping to tailor questions toward students who had or had not used academic advising services, or who belonged to specific faculties. At most, a given respondent would have answered 12 questions. This low-burden survey design still allowed for a reasonably deep investigation of key issues around student engagement with academic advising services.

## COMPOSITION AND LIMITATIONS

The survey sample is not demonstrably representative of the undergraduate student body for three reasons.

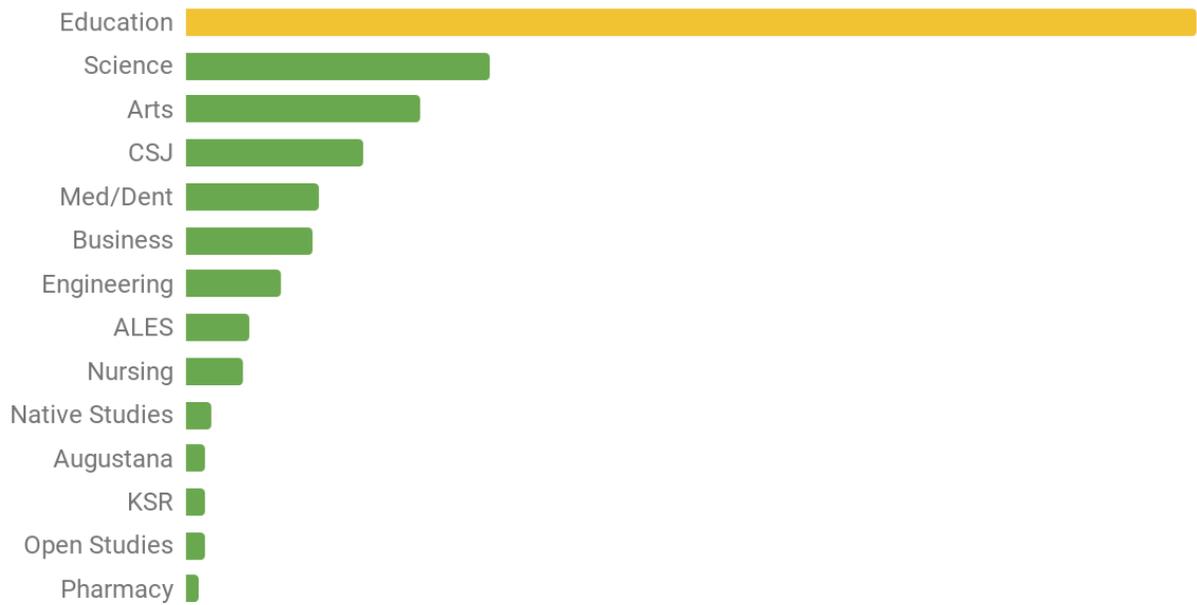
1. Where the student body tends to have more early-year students than upper-year, the bulk of this survey's respondents came from **later years**. (This is an advantage as it captures the experiences of more students who have spent years interacting, or not interacting, with academic advisors.)

What year of study are you in?



2. The survey did not ask for any demographic indicators (sex, racial/ethnic identity, etc.), so the data cannot differentiate between their experiences. **Further research** into diverse experiences with academic advisors would be valuable.
3. Students from the Faculty of Education made up **44%** of respondents.

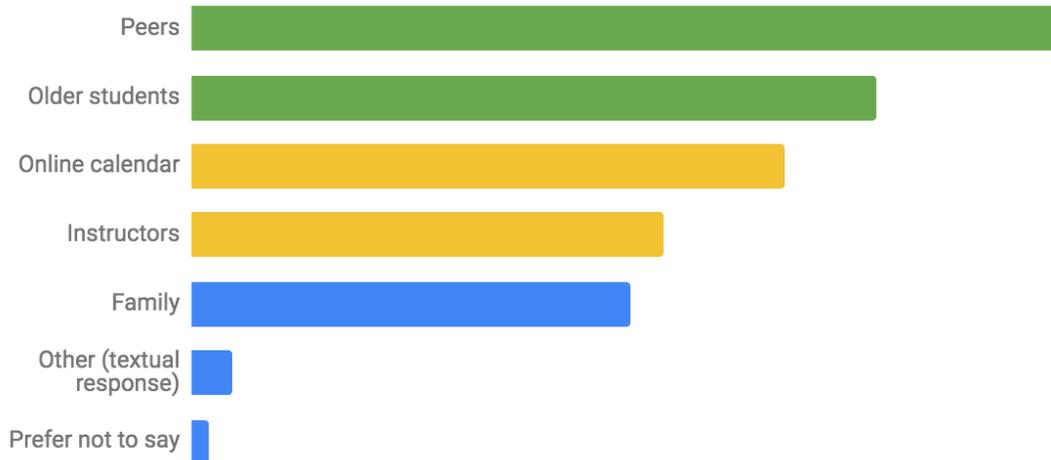
### What faculty are you currently enrolled in?



## QUESTIONS FOR ALL STUDENTS

What sources of academic advice have you consulted, other than an advisor? (Check all that apply)

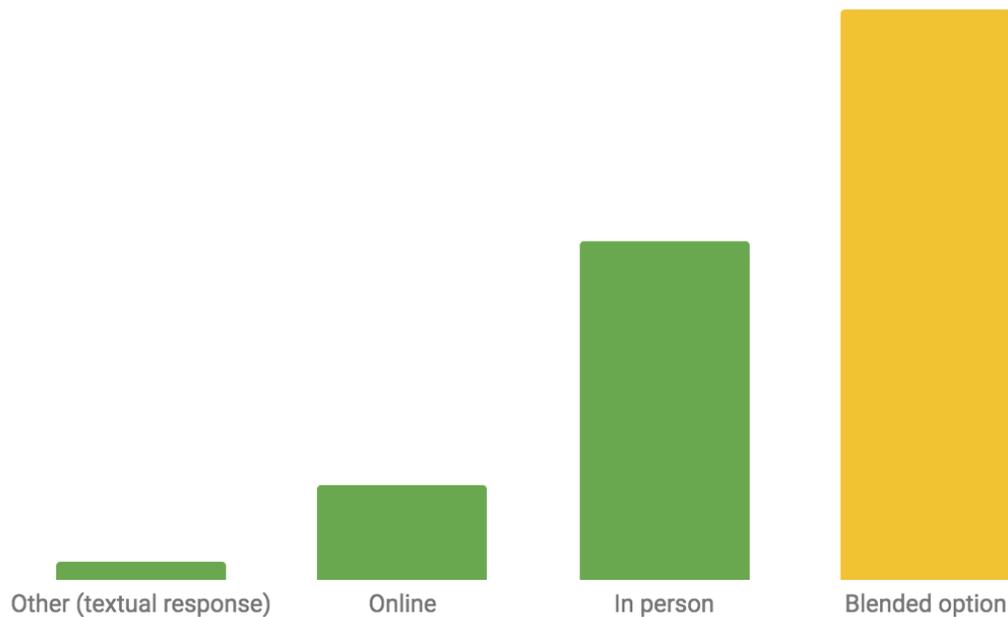
Green = student sources, gold = university sources



Respondents far preferred to consult other students for academic advice. The online University Calendar, however, was a popular resource. Notable responses:

- "Comparable programs from other universities."
- "Registration 101."
- "The program planner sheet provided enough information."
- "Past students."
- "Rate My Professors."
- "Reading university policy and procedures, but the language of these is really difficult to decipher. It's like reading a legal document."
- "Reddit."

## How would you prefer to access academic advising?

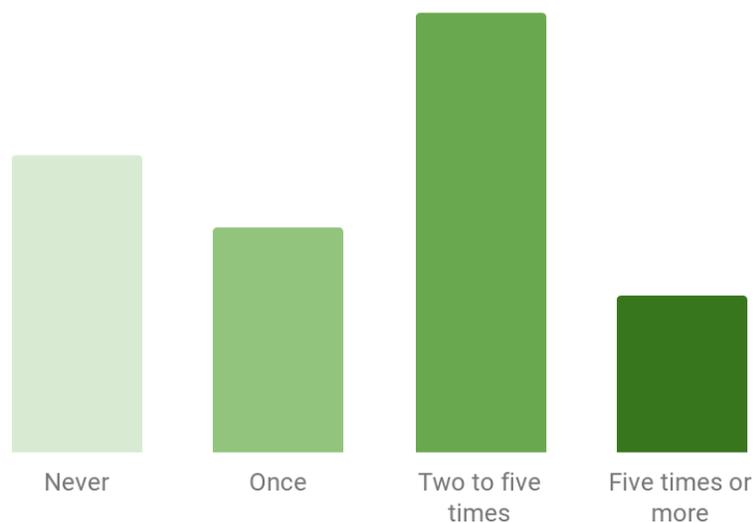


Notable textual responses included:

- "I would prefer if [specific advisor] knew what she was talking about."
- "Over the phone! It is very frustrating for students who are away on rural practicums to drive in a small window for drop-in appointment only."

The following question used logic piping to separate students who had met an advisor from those who had not. These two groups received divergent question sets.

## How many times have you met with an academic advisor since coming to university?

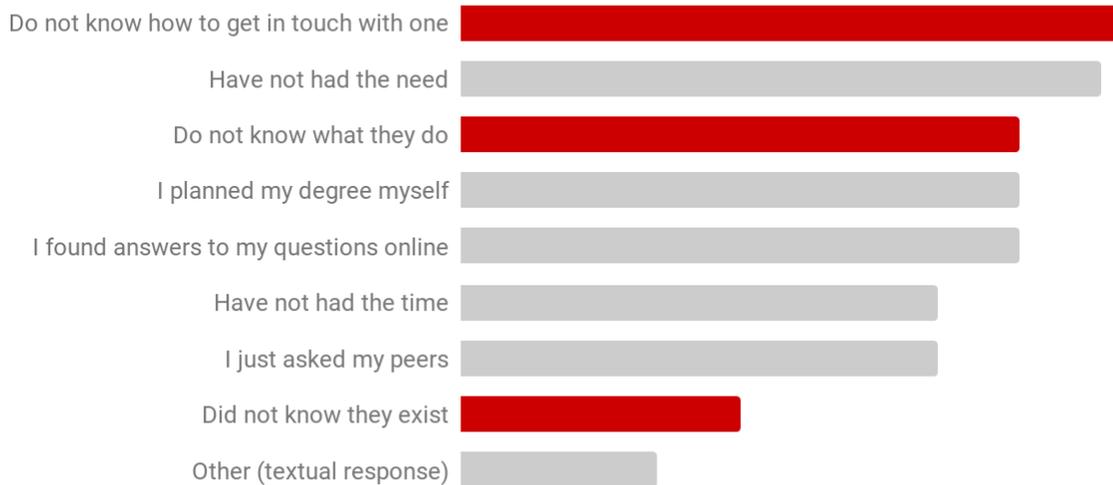


## HAVE NOT MET WITH AN ADVISOR

Obviously, students prize self-sufficiency and may not feel the need for academic advising services. Just as obviously, however, many students feel they **lack knowledge about advisors**: their role, how to access them, and even whether they exist.

Can you tell us why you haven't met an academic advisor yet?

n=96, choose all that apply



Noteworthy textual responses:

- [Education] "Extremely difficult to get a one-on-one session with an advisor."
- [Education] "Was unsure if my concerns were too small to warrant a meeting with an advisor."
- [Science] "As an honours student I am only allowed to see one advisor."
- [Arts] "They take a while to get back to emails so I found it difficult to arrange a time to meet."
- [Education] "I have tried to book multiple times but I find it almost impossible."
- [Engineering] "Online forums."
- [Education] "When I was in Arts I went multiple times and was turned away. Told to fill out online forms instead."

Several students also noted receiving useful information from academic advisors via **email**, so they did not need a meeting. This speaks to the pattern of interest in **blended** online/in person delivery options, as shown above.

## HAVE MET WITH AN ADVISOR

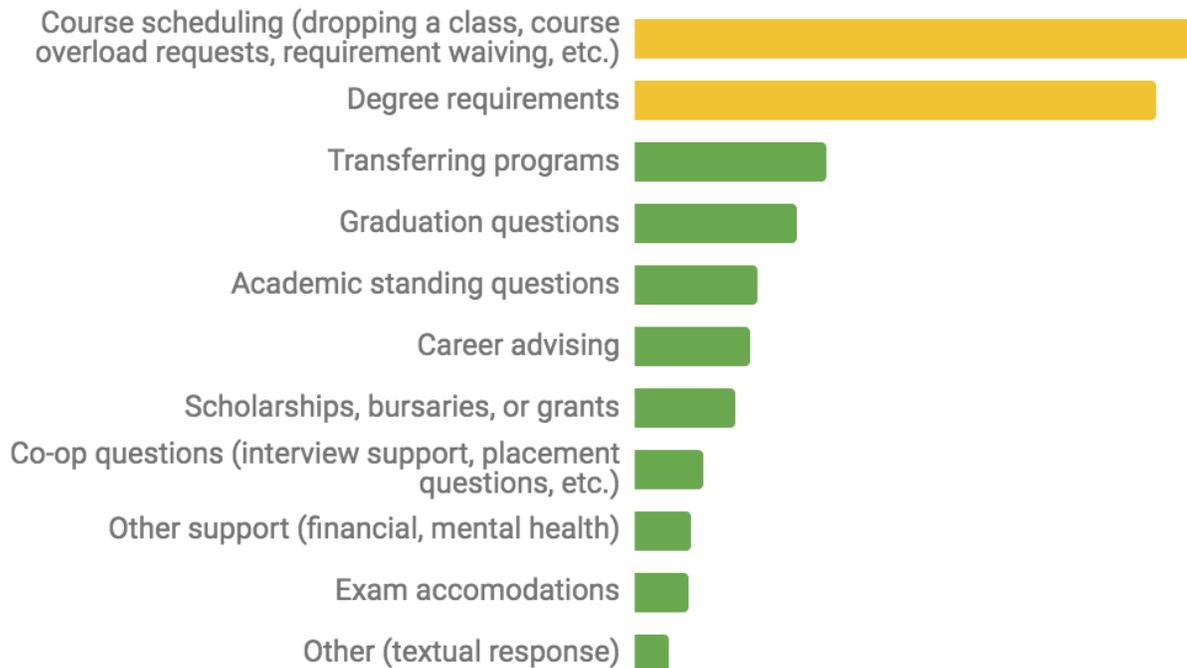
Roughly **one on four** respondents had met with an academic advisor at some point during their time at the University of Alberta.

Of those, the majority asked for help with **course scheduling and degree requirements**. These patterns indicate that many students are comfortable approaching their academic advisors for granular, semester-by-semester progress in their programs.

We would suggest that academic advisors should encourage more students to come in for help in underrepresented areas where students tend to ‘muddle through alone.’ **Career advising**, for example, is an area where academic advisors should be able to offer well-publicized and substantive support. The same is likely true for financial aid.

### Why did you access an academic advisor?

(n=267, choose all that apply)



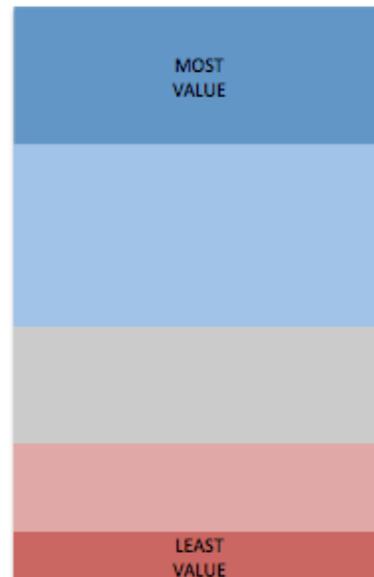
It seems clear that, of the students who do meet with academic advisors, **the majority find value in the experience and feel welcome in the advisor's office.**

However, **one in four** of them report feeling the experience was not valuable, and **one in five** felt unwelcome in their advisor's office to one extent or another.

The 'undecideds' should be an issue of special interest and concern. Of the students who meet with advisors, **one in four** selected a midpoint between 'most value' and 'least value.' **One in five** selected a similarly lukewarm midpoint for how welcome they felt in the advising office.

We believe these results should inform a conversation of **performance improvement** in academic advising for undergraduates, particularly in the Faculties of Education, Science, and Arts, whose students were heavily represented in the survey sample.

### How much value did you find in speaking with your advisor?



### How welcome did you feel in the advisor's office?

