

The UMass Amherst Graduate Student Advising Experience

Summary of Findings

The Graduate Student Advising Survey is a web-based survey developed by the Office of Academic Planning and Assessment (OAPA) and the Student Assessment, Research, and Evaluation Office (SAREO) in consultation with representatives from the Graduate School, the Office of Institutional Research, the Department of Educational Policy, Research, and Administration (EPRA) in the School of Education, and the Northeast Alliance for Graduate Education and the Professoriate (NEAGEP). It was administered by SAREO to all UMass Amherst graduate students in spring 2006; approximately 2,400 (50%) of these students completed the survey. This research was supported by the Dean of the Graduate School at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

- Almost all graduate student respondents have at least one faculty advisor: 97% of doctoral students and 92% of master's degree students reported that they have one or more faculty members they can turn to for advice or guidance.
- Those students who report they have no faculty member they can turn to for advice or guidance tend to give varied reasons for the lack of connection (e.g., technically having an advisor but not feeling able to turn to that person; stating a lack of need for an advisor; departmental failure to assign an advisor). These students tend to be isolated in other ways as well. They are more likely to perceive a lack of support from their departments generally, including support structures for degree progress, faculty commitment to advising, and peer collegiality.
- Overall, doctoral students report being satisfied with the quality of advising they receive from their primary advisors, with over 80% of both U.S. and international students agreeing either strongly or somewhat that their primary advisor fulfills the advising role to their expectations.
- When compared to students in doctoral programs, those in master's degree programs have lower levels of satisfaction in their advisor's performance within the advising role, the professional guidance and support given to them by their advisors, and the process they went through in selecting an advisor. Still, the majority of master's students report satisfaction with various aspects of their advising experiences, with over 70% of both U.S. and international students agreeing strongly or somewhat that their primary advisor fulfills the advising role to their expectations.
- Graduate students' advising experiences and satisfaction levels also vary by their academic disciplines (as reflected by their school/college affiliation). Among other things, this suggests the important roles that disciplinary and programmatic culture play in shaping students' advising experiences.
- International students, both master's and doctoral, overall show higher levels of satisfaction with various aspects of their advising experiences when compared to their U.S. peers, in two areas: satisfaction with their advisors' performance in the advising role and the degree of professional guidance offered by their advisors. Additionally, international master's students rate their program faculty's commitment to advising higher than do U.S. master's students.
- Online, off-campus and Video Instructional Program (VIP) master's students who have advisors express higher levels of satisfaction with their advisors' role performance than do on-campus master's students and hold a higher opinion of the level of commitment to advising that is shown by the faculty members in their programs.

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