

Advising at Mason: Results from the 2003-04 Graduating Senior Survey

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I. Introduction

Senior students who graduated in summer 2003, fall 2003 and spring 2004 were directed to complete the Graduating Senior Survey online as they completed their online graduation application. Most students completed the survey online; for those who did not, the Office of Institutional Assessment sent them both email reminders and, when necessary, a letter and a paper version of the survey. In this academic year, 3312 graduates earned a total number of 3323 undergraduate degrees from Mason. Among them, 2924 completed the survey for a response rate of 88%. This rate is lower than the all-time high of 92% of last year. We suspect that a significant server break-down during fall 2003 contributed to the lower response rate.

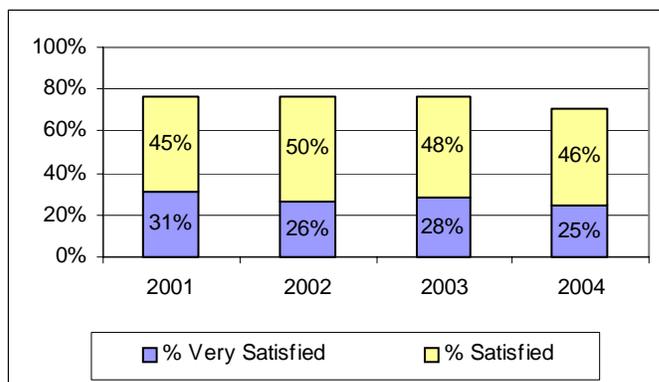
There are two major themes of the 2004 Graduating Senior Survey: *student satisfaction with academic advising and student gains in global understanding*. Advising questions were developed with the assistance of Dr. Stephen Greenfeld, former director of Student Academic Affairs. Questions regarding educational experiences and student satisfaction at Mason are also included in the survey. This *In Focus* is devoted to the survey results on academic advising. For other survey results, including the detailed information on college and program level results, please visit our website at <http://assessment.gmu.edu>.

The 2003-04 Graduating Senior Survey asked the students for their opinions on two major advising systems at Mason – “Advising in the Major” and “the Academic Advising Center.” The items on “Advising in the Major” have a response rate of 95%, whereas those on “the Academic Advising Center” have a much lower response rate (52%). The students who have never used the Academic Advising Center were asked to skip this section and thus were excluded from the analysis.

II. Advising in the Major – Highlights & Trends

Figure One shows student satisfaction with advising in the major from 2001 to 2004. Since 2001, the percentage of students being “very satisfied” has decreased from 31% to 25% in 2004. The percentage of students being “satisfied” has ranged between 45% and 50% during this period.

Figure 1. Student Satisfaction with Advising in the Major, 2001-2004



How Advising Works in the Major

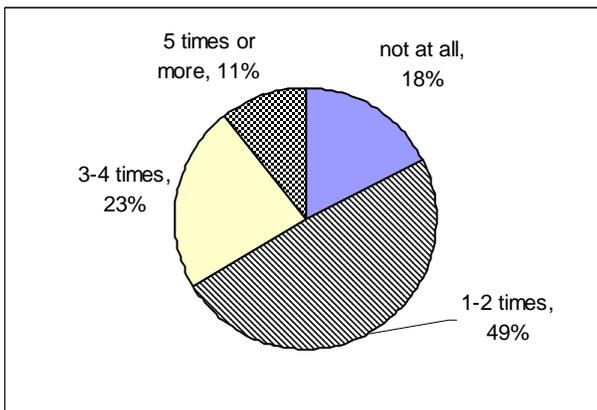
Advising happens in different forms in the students' major fields. Students were asked to indicate how advising works in their major. They were able to check more than one response. Forty percent say there is an advising office staffed by professional advisors in their major. Forty-six percent say they have an assigned faculty advisor; 19% say they have an assigned faculty advisor, but it is easy to change advisors; and 6% say they have an assigned faculty advisor and it is not easy to change advisors. Twenty-four percent can choose any faculty advisor they want. And 9% have some "other" systems for major advising.

Figure Two: How Advising Works in the Major (Check ALL that Apply)



On a separate question, 37% of students said that the advising system in their major was not clear to them. Despite this, a large majority (82%) said that their advisor could almost always be reached by email.

Figure Three: How often Students Met with their Advisors in the Past Year



How often Students Meet with their Advisors in the Major

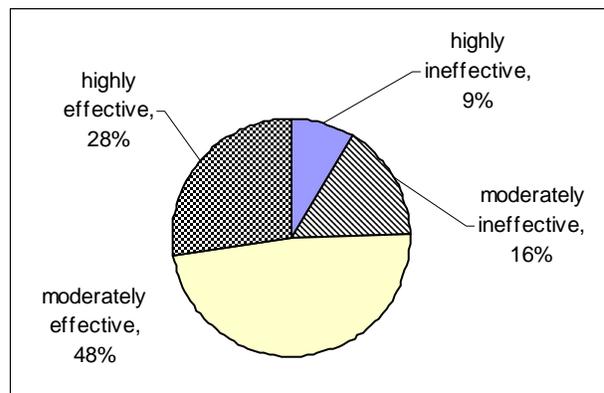
Students were asked to report how often they saw their major advisors during the past year. Almost half of the students said they saw their advisors 1-2 times in the past year, 23% said 3-4 times, and 11% said 5 times or more. However, 18% of the graduating seniors did not meet with their major advisors during their last year at Mason.

Eighteen percent of the graduating seniors did not meet with their major advisors during their last year at Mason.

Overall Effectiveness of the Advising System in the Major

Overall, 76% of the respondents rate the advising system in their major as "moderately effective" (48%) or "highly effective" (28%). One out of four students rate it as "moderately ineffective" or "highly ineffective."

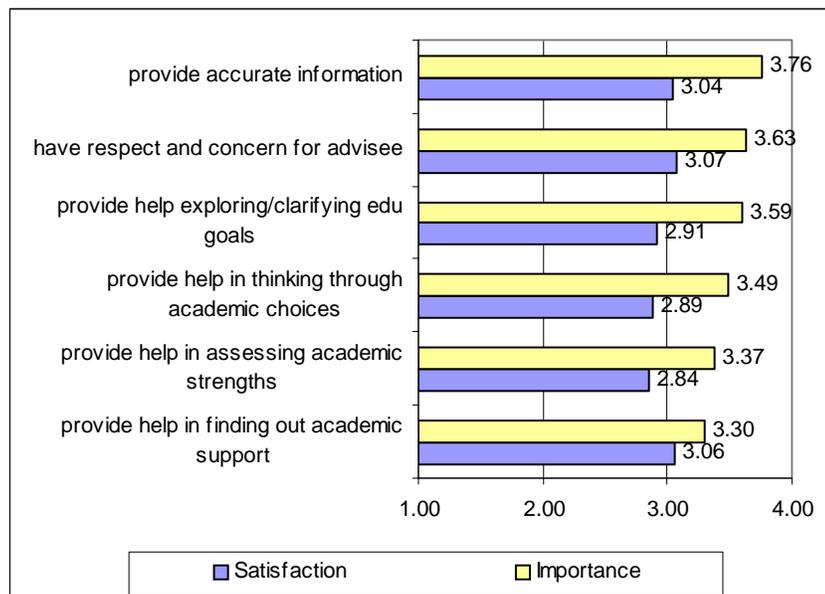
Figure Four: Overall Effectiveness of the Advising System in the Major



Importance and Satisfaction Ratings

Students think the most important task of a major academic advisor is “to provide accurate information about academic requirements and choices,” followed by “to have respect and concern for advisee” and “to provide help exploring/clarifying educational goals.” The students are most satisfied with the following two aspects of their major advisors: “having respect and concern for advisee” and “providing help in finding out about academic support at Mason.” The students are the least satisfied with the advisor’s help in “assessing academic strengths” – 28% of them are either “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied.” If a student has to see different advisors or if an advisor has too many advisees, it is hard for an advisor to assess an individual student’s academic strengths and weakness in a short period of time.

Figure Five: Mean Importance and Satisfaction Ratings of Different Aspects of a Major Academic Advisor (on 1-4 scales)



Student Comments on Advising in the Major

About 10% of the respondents provided their comments about advising in their major. Several students expressed their satisfaction for having a helpful and caring advisor. However, the majority of the comments are negative. The students are especially dissatisfied with advising in the major in the following areas:

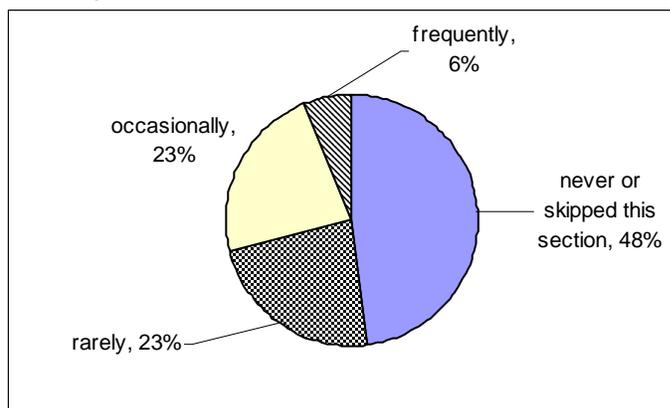
- **Students are not informed of how advising works in their major/department.** Some students alleged that “I never received advising for my major.” “My advisor left [during] my second year and I was not assigned a new one. I was not aware until my 4th year that I could request a new one.” “I have no idea how advising works in my major. I just picked a person that I contacted as needed.”
- **Students are not assigned a new advisor after the initial one left Mason.** “I was never notified that my advisor changed positions and was never reassigned a new advisor.”
- **There are not enough advisors in the major/department.** “There are not enough advisors for the amount of students. I have never seen an advisor in a good mood since I’ve been there.” “... advising [is] impossible to get, Dr. [XX] was always swamped with students.” “There is only one advisor, and she is not easy to reach.” “... never have I talked to an advisor in my major. I felt they were too busy to deal with the students directly.”
- **There is a mismatch between a student’s major and the faculty advisor’s field.** “I had a Health Science advisor, which was unhelpful to me as a Nursing major.” “Although I was assigned an advisor, he told me that he was incompetent in my field so I just went to the head of my department for all of my academic advising.”
- **The advisors are not available.** “A faculty advisor is assigned to you but is unreachable and unresponsive.” “Fulltime working students have difficult access to advising services.”
- **The advisors are not helpful.** “A faculty advisor is assigned, but provides no information.” “When I entered, Dr. [XX] was out due to illness and his secretary advised new students. She caused me to ‘waste’ 9 credits through her clear incompetence.”
- **Advising for transfer students is not satisfactory.** “As a transfer student, I did not have a specific faculty advisor until the summer before my senior year. Prior to that point, I had to see the general major advisor. I would have liked to have one faculty advisor for my entire college career at Mason.”
- **Some students are not satisfied with seeing different advisors each time.** “You never get the same person twice.” “I would have liked to have one advisor and not met with many. I always had to describe my situation and felt unsure each time I left, so I met with several and sure enough, I received several different answers.”

III. The Academic Advising Center

Students Use of the Academic Advising Center

On the survey, students who have NEVER used the Academic Advising Center are directed to skip all the questions in this section. As Figure Six shows, a total of 48% of students either skipped this section or said they had never used the Academic Advising Center. Among all students, 23% “rarely” used it, 23% “occasionally” used it and the remaining 6% “frequently” used it. In the student comments, several students said they were “not aware this center existed, so [they] have never used it.” We also found that some students (especially students from School of Management) mistook the “university” Academic Advising Center as the advising office in their department or school and answered accordingly.

Figure Six: How often did students use the Academic Advising Center?

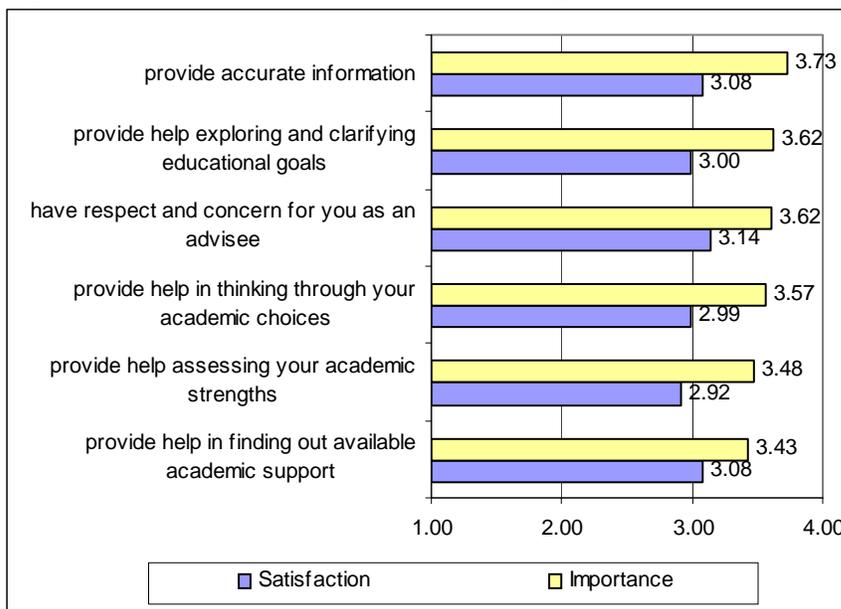


Overall, 23% of the graduating seniors occasionally used the Academic Advising Center and only 6% frequently used it. The students (48%) who have never used the Advising Center were excluded from the following analysis.

Satisfaction and Importance Ratings

The students who have used the Academic Advising Center think it is most important for an advisor in the Advising Center to provide accurate information, help explore and clarify educational goals, and have respect and concern for the advisee. Those are the same expectations students have for a faculty advisor. Student satisfaction ratings of the advisors in the Center are slightly higher than their ratings of faculty advisors, especially in the areas of “providing help in thinking through academic choices” and “providing help exploring/clarifying educational goals.” Again, “assessing your academic strengths” is the least satisfied aspect.

Figure Seven: Mean Importance and Satisfaction Ratings of Different Aspects of an Advisor in the Academic Advising Center (on 1-4 scales)



Student Experiences with the Academic Advising Center

Most of the students who have used the Advising Center are very satisfied with it. One student said it is “very organized, and informative, and attentive to the advisee.” Sixty percent of the students either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that they usually saw the same advisor (see Table One). About 42% agreed with the statement “I never knew which advisor I would see.” Seventy-four percent felt it was easy to make an appointment with an advisor and 79% felt they had received the help they needed from the Academic Advising Center.

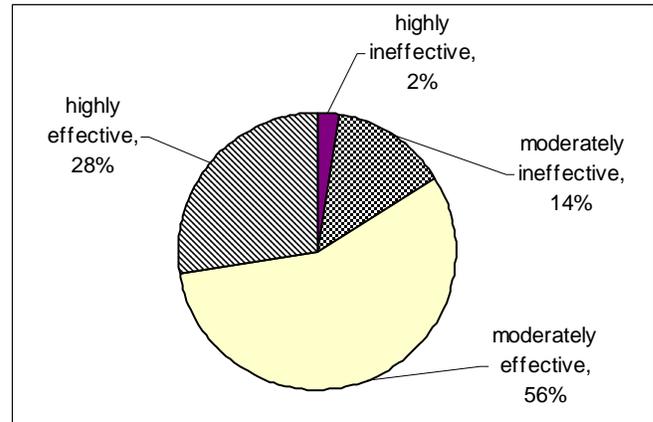
Table One. Student Experience with the Academic Advising Center

	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
I usually saw the same advisor.	25%	35%	32%	9%
I never knew which advisor I would see.	15%	27%	37%	21%
It was almost always easy to make an appointment with an advisor.	22%	52%	20%	6%
Overall, I felt I received the help I needed.	24%	55%	17%	5%

Figure Eight: How would you rate the effectiveness of the Academic Advising Center?

Overall Effectiveness of the Academic Advising Center

Of all the students who have used the Academic Advising Center, 28% rate it as “highly effective” and 56% rate it as “moderately effective.” Only 2% of the students rate it as “highly ineffective.”



Student Comments on the Academic Advising Center

- One student suggested **making academic advisor meetings mandatory**. “If it were possible, mandatory Academic Advisor meetings should be enforced during the senior year. It helps to define goals and dreams after college.”
- **Working students expect longer office hours**. “It was not always easy to get an appointment at a convenient time for part-time students with full-time jobs. Tuesday evenings until 7 or 8 pm was not sufficient sometimes.”
- **Some students prefer to have an assigned advisor**. “It would be better if every student was assigned an advisor. That way the student would feel that there is a personal relationship between him/her and his/her advisor. Rather than being like an automated answering machine.” “Although there are time constraints and scheduling problems, having an assigned advisor would benefit students by allowing the relationship between advisor and student to grow and benefit through experienced interaction. It was somewhat frustrating to see different advisors while being unable to specifically schedule a single one. It would be worth it to see one advisor with a limited schedule for appointments rather than coming in and just seeing whoever was available. It felt very unfamiliar and time consuming to restate things over and over to get advising.”
- **Students sometimes don’t know which advisor to see, the major advisor or the one at the Center**. “Sometimes meeting my major advisor was difficult and when I would go to the Academic Advising Center, they would send me back to my major who was unavailable at the time needed.” “There is a lack of consistency in the Advising Center. I was assigned an advisor in the Center, but switched to the head of my department after the advisor told me that he wasn’t ‘well-versed in that specific major.’ I think that the system is a bit convoluted and somewhat inefficient.”
- **Transfer students need information about the Academic Advising Center**. “I came from a Community College and did not know the opportunities and activities provided by a University until I was almost graduated... I could have really used information about Campus Life. I felt very lost and didn’t always know what to ask, and besides that, was often too embarrassed to ask.”

Appendix One: College Level Mean Report

Table 1. How important are the following characteristics of a major academic advisor? (1-4 scale: 1=very unimportant; 4=very important)

Mean Ratings of Importance	CAS	CEHD	CNHS	CVPA	SITE	SOM	GMU
Provide accurate information about academic requirements and choices	3.79	3.79	3.81	3.79	3.66	3.74	3.77
Provide help exploring and clarifying educational goals	3.61	3.71	3.64	3.64	3.49	3.56	3.59
Provide help in finding out about academic support available at Mason	3.30	3.33	3.35	3.20	3.23	3.32	3.30
Provide help assessing your academic strengths	3.37	3.50	3.47	3.42	3.30	3.37	3.37
Provide help in thinking through your academic choices	3.50	3.68	3.53	3.52	3.39	3.48	3.49
Have respect and concern for you as an advisee	3.64	3.80	3.68	3.69	3.49	3.59	3.63

Table 2. How satisfied are you with the following characteristics of a major academic advisor? (1-4 scale: 1=very dissatisfied; 4=very satisfied)

Mean Ratings of Satisfaction	CAS	CEHD	CNHS	CVPA	SITE	SOM	GMU
Provide accurate information about academic requirements and choices	3.07	3.13	2.97	2.85	2.92	3.05	3.04
Provide help exploring and clarifying educational goals	2.93	3.21	2.89	2.85	2.79	2.92	2.91
Provide help in finding out about academic support available at Mason	3.07	3.25	3.07	2.90	2.97	3.09	3.06
Provide help assessing your academic strengths	2.87	3.10	2.85	2.73	2.78	2.82	2.84
Provide help in thinking through your academic choices	2.90	3.17	2.95	2.76	2.80	2.87	2.89
Have respect and concern for you as an advisee	3.10	3.27	3.02	3.01	2.94	3.05	3.07

Table 3. How important are the following characteristics of an advisor in the Academic Advising Center? (1-4 scale: 1=very unimportant; 4=very important)

Mean Ratings of Importance	CAS	CEHD	CNHS	CVPA	SITE	SOM	GMU
Provide accurate information about academic requirements and choices	3.75	3.65	3.81	3.72	3.64	3.72	3.73
Provide help exploring and clarifying educational goals	3.63	3.63	3.70	3.65	3.52	3.60	3.62
Provide help in finding out about academic support available at Mason	3.45	3.53	3.51	3.35	3.39	3.41	3.43
Provide help assessing your academic strengths	3.51	3.40	3.53	3.41	3.41	3.44	3.47
Provide help in thinking through your academic choices	3.60	3.65	3.61	3.55	3.51	3.53	3.57
Have respect and concern for you as an advisee	3.66	3.63	3.56	3.69	3.48	3.58	3.62

Table 4. How satisfied are you with the following characteristics of an advisor in the Academic Advising Center? (1-4 scale: 1=very dissatisfied; 4=very satisfied)

Mean Ratings of Satisfaction	CAS	CEHD	CNHS	CVPA	SITE	SOM	GMU
Provide accurate information about academic requirements and choices	3.12	3.15	2.93	2.86	3.06	3.08	3.08
Provide help exploring and clarifying educational goals	3.04	3.21	2.95	2.89	3.01	2.94	3.00
Provide help in finding out about academic support available at Mason	3.10	3.20	3.11	2.94	3.01	3.09	3.08
Provide help assessing your academic strengths	2.92	3.15	2.99	2.84	3.02	2.87	2.92
Provide help in thinking through your academic choices	3.01	3.35	2.98	2.95	3.02	2.96	2.99
Have respect and concern for you as an advisee	3.17	3.37	3.08	3.12	2.98	3.13	3.14

Appendix Two: College Level Frequency Report*

Table 5. How often have you seen your major advisor this past year?

	CAS	CEHD	CNHS	CVPA	SITE	SOM	GMU
5 times or more	11%	41%	10%	15%	9%	8%	11%
3-4 times	23%	31%	18%	27%	23%	22%	23%
1-2 times	48%	20%	41%	51%	49%	57%	49%
not at all	19%	8%	31%	8%	20%	13%	18%

Table 6. How would you rate the advisory system in your major?

	CAS	CEHD	CNHS	CVPA	SITE	SOM	GMU
highly effective	31%	46%	25%	19%	18%	24%	28%
moderately effective	45%	35%	43%	55%	54%	54%	48%
moderately ineffective	15%	10%	18%	18%	15%	18%	16%
highly ineffective	9%	8%	14%	8%	13%	5%	9%

Table 7. How often did you use the Academic Advising Center?

	CAS	CVPA	CEHD	CNHS	SITE	SOM	GMU
frequently	5%	5%	8%	5%	3%	10%	6%
occasionally	20%	16%	16%	15%	14%	37%	23%
rarely	21%	19%	18%	21%	24%	29%	23%
never	53%	59%	58%	58%	58%	25%	48%

Table 8. How would you rate the effectiveness of the Academic Advising Center?

	CAS	CEHD	CNHS	CVPA	SITE	SOM	GMU
highly effective	30%	45%	21%	12%	27%	27%	28%
moderately effective	56%	45%	57%	63%	55%	57%	56%
moderately ineffective	13%	5%	19%	22%	10%	15%	14%
highly ineffective	2%	5%	2%	3%	8%	2%	2%

*Note: columns do not add to 100% due to rounding.

*This In Focus and earlier editions of this publication can be found at our website,
<http://assessment.gmu.edu>*

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