

Academic Advisor Survey 2012

- Report -

Report prepared for the Office of the Dean of Students by:

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Introduction

In 2012, the Office of the Dean of Students commissioned a study of academic advisors at McGill University¹ in an effort to help develop a comprehensive profile of academic advising at the undergraduate level. The survey was completed by employees (instructor, administrator, etc.) who performed some form of academic advising as part of their assigned tasks (this did not include staff who from time-to-time perform some informal academic advising)². Academic advisors were invited to provide feedback with respect to advising models, workload, tasks and thoughts about academic advising at McGill.

Methodology

The academic advisor survey was developed in consultation with the Academic Advisors' Forum Steering Group (AAFSG), the Subcommittee on Undergraduate Student Advising (SUSA) and the Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning). The survey included both closed and open-ended questions about advisors' roles, training and thoughts about how to improve academic advising at McGill University.

An email invitation with a link to the online survey was sent to 338 academic advisors in June 2012 on behalf of the Dean of Students. The confidential online survey was available from June to early September, 2012.

Respondent Characteristics

Overall, 110 out of the 338 academic advisors (or 33%) completed the survey. The distribution of academic versus non-academic respondents who perform academic advising at McGill was proportional to the sample, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1- Respondent/Sample Comparison (Academic vs. Non-Academic Staff)

	Academic Staff		Non-Academic Staff		Grand Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Respondents	78	71%	32	29%	110	100%
Sample	253	75%	85	25%	336	100%

Chart 1 presents the distribution of advisor type by primary appointment based on academic or administrator employment status. Over 70% of respondents were academics (60% Professors and 11% Faculty Lecturers) and 29% were non-academics; specifically, 21% whose primary duties involve academic advising and 8% who perform some academic advising duties.

For this report, Faculties were grouped into Humanities and Social Sciences Faculties and STEM Faculties (or Sciences, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Agricultural and Environmental Sciences). Chart 2 summarizes advisor type by these two Faculty groupings.

¹ The list of academic advisors was compiled by consulting each Faculty and was intended to be a complete list. We have since learned is that some key informants either did not provide subunit contacts and answered on behalf of their area, or they did not identify key people. During this pilot year, the creation of a preliminary list of academic advisors helped the University to create a comprehensive list.

² For the purposes of this initiative, the term 'academic advising-related tasks' includes the tasks described on this website: <http://www.mcgill.ca/students/advising/whatadvisorsdo>

Chart 1: Advisor Type: Academic or Administrator

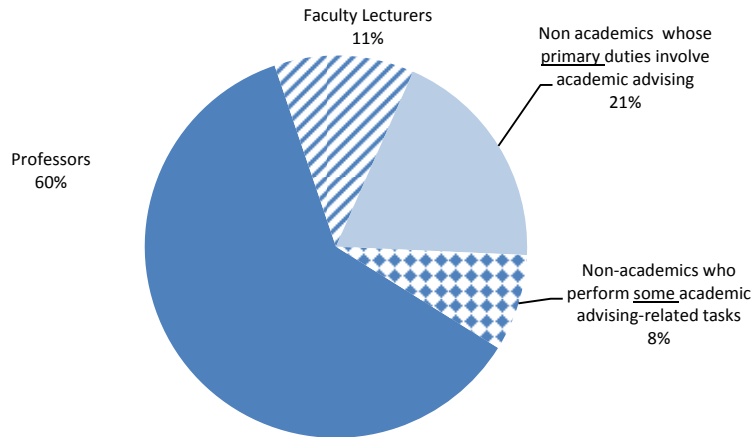
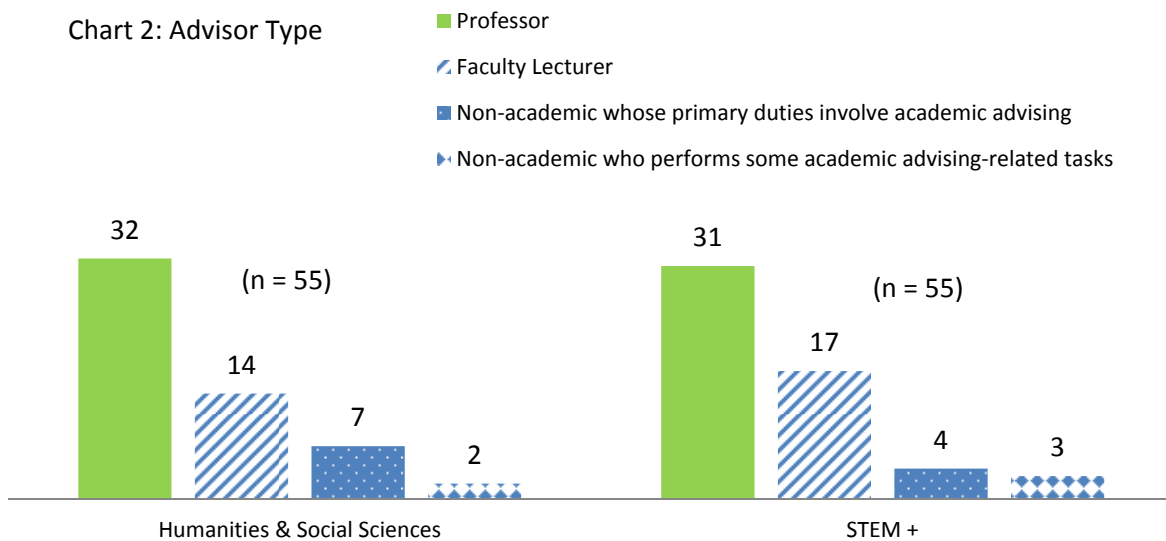


Chart 2: Advisor Type



Identifying Peak Periods for 1-on-1 In-Person Advising

Respondents were asked to identify the periods of the year when they devote most of their advising time to 1-on-1 in-person advising, as opposed to other advising-related tasks. The following guide was presented to respondents in order to facilitate the main functions related to the academic cycle (e.g., orientation, add/drop, etc.):

Early summer = May 1 to July 15 / Late summer = July 1^h to August 31

Early fall = Before Thanksgiving / Late fall = After Thanksgiving

Early winter = Up to mid- February / Late winter = Mid-February to end of April

Table 2 summarizes the peak periods for 1-on-1 in-person advising.

Table 2 – Peak Periods for 1-on-1 In-Person Advising

<i>Academic Advising Activities (% - based on 110)</i>		Early Summer	Late Summer	Early Fall Term	Late Fall	Early Winter	Late Winter
Pre-arrival advising	n %	43 39%	51 46%	19 17%	4 4%	13 12%	11 10%
Orientation session(s) at McGill	n %	15 14%	45 41%	40 36%	5 5%	11 10%	7 6%
Advising before add/drop deadline	n %	5 5%	17 15%	78 71%	13 12%	52 47%	7 6%
Advising after withdrawal deadline but before final exams	n %	6 5%	7 6%	17 15%	50 45%	13 12%	41 37%
Pre-registration advising for in-course students (for upcoming terms)	n %	23 21%	28 25%	28 25%	28 25%	29 26%	53 48%

Annual Perspective on Advisee and Advising Sessions

The majority of academic staff advise up to 100 students in a typical academic year (85%), whereas 75% of non-academic staff advise over 200 students (Table 3). With respect to the number of academic advising sessions, the same trend appears with the majority of non-academic staff reporting over 500 sessions (66%) and academic staff reporting up to 200 (82%) – (Table 4).

Table 3 - Approximate number of advisees seen in a typical academic year (not counting repeat visits)

Students	Academic Staff	Non-Academic Staff	Total	
	n	n	n	%
Less than 50	48	3	51	48%
51 to 100	16	2	18	17%
101 to 200	7	3	10	9%
201 to 300	2	8	10	9%
301 to 400	0	3	3	3%
401 to 500	0	1	1	1%
501 to 1000	2	7	9	8%
1001 to 2000	0	3	3	3%
Over 3000	0	1	1	1%
Total	75	31	106	100%

Table 4 - 1-on-1 in-person advising sessions held a typical academic year (including repeat visits)

Sessions	Academic Staff	Non-Academic Staff	Total	
	n	n	n	%
Less than 50	42	3	45	41%
51 to 200	22	3	25	23%
201 to 500	5	7	12	11%
501 to 3000	3	14	17	15%
Unable to classify	6	5	11	10%
Total	78	32	110	100%

Time Devoted to 1-on-1 In-Person Advising

During peak periods, over 77% of advisors reported spending 51% or more of their time on 1-on-1 in-person advising, whereas outside of peak periods, 1-on-1 in-person advising drops to 37% (Table 5). Responding to email or phone inquiries are also highly prominent in the duties of academic advisors with 39% of advisors devoting the majority of their advising time during peak periods and 49% outside of peak periods (Table 6).

Table 5 - Estimate of percentage of advising related tasks represented by 1-on-1 in-person advising

		Up to 25%	26-50%	51-75%	Over 75%	Missing	Total
During peak periods	n	3	20	37	47	3	110
	%	3%	18%	34%	43%	3%	100%
Outside of peak periods	n	22	41	16	24	7	110
	%	20%	37%	15%	22%	6%	100%

Table 6- Estimate of percentage of advising related tasks represented email or phone inquiries

		Up to 25%	26-50%	51-75%	Over 75%	Missing	Total
During peak periods	n	21	43	32	11	3	110
	%	19%	39%	29%	10%	3%	100%
Outside of peak periods	n	25	25	38	15	7	110
	%	23%	23%	35%	14%	6%	100%

Time Spent with Advisees per Session

The average advising session during peak periods is between 6 to 30 minutes. Time per session time varies by employment status, with 45% of non-academics reporting spending 6-15 minutes and 54% of academic staff reporting spending 16-30 minutes per session during peak periods (Table 7). Outside of peak periods, both academic and non-academic staff reported sessions in the 16-30 minute range.

Table 7a-Approximate time typically spent with each advisee during a single in-person advising session

<i>During peak periods</i>	Academic Staff		Non-Academic Staff		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Less than 5 minutes	2	3%	3	10%	5	5%
6 - 15 minutes	27	35%	14	45%	41	38%
16 - 30 minutes	42	54%	11	35%	53	49%
31 - 45 minutes	6	8%	3	10%	9	8%
46 - 60 minutes	1	1%	0	0%	1	1%
Total	78	100%	31	100%	109	100%
<i>Outside of peak periods</i>	Academic Staff		Non-Academic Staff		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Less than 5 minutes	1	1%	1	3%	2	2%
6 - 15 minutes	17	23%	6	20%	23	22%
16 - 30 minutes	44	59%	20	67%	64	61%
31 - 45 minutes	8	11%	3	10%	11	10%
46 - 60 minutes	5	7%	0	0%	5	5%
Total	75	100%	30	100%	105	100%

Additional Functions and Tasks

Tables 8 and 9 summarize advising-related functions and tasks that academic advisors are responsible for in addition to 1-on-1 in-person advising. More than half of respondents indicated that they were responsible for functions ranging from communications (76%) to supervising and/or training staff or students (57%). With respect to tasks, close to 90% of advisors reporting being personally responsible for course and program/ selection changes and 77% for study away, exchange and transfer credits (Table 9).

Table 8- Additional Functions Responsible for in a Typical Academic Year

	Academic	Non-Academic	Total	
	n	n	n	%
Communications (e.g. internal correspondence with students and/or staff; letters of reference, communications with high school or CEGEP counsellors)	59	25	84	76%
Teaching and/or research	71	2	73	66%
Information about post-undergraduate choices (career advice / guidance)	51	19	70	64%
Supervision and/or training of staff or students	45	18	63	57%
Student records	32	27	59	54%
Scholarships	34	14	48	44%
Timetabling / Class scheduling	26	22	48	44%
Advising graduate students (as a Graduate Program Director)	11	1	12	11%
Advising graduate students (as a Graduate Program Coordinator / Secretary)	7	8	0	0%

Table 9- Additional Tasks Responsible for in a Typical Academic Year

	n	%
Course and program selection/changes	98	89%
Study away, exchange and transfer credits	79	72%
Recruitment and/or Open House	73	66%
Committees (e.g., planning, follow-up)	72	65%
Departmental orientation	67	61%
Graduation	67	61%
Development or updating of academic resources (e.g., departmental handbook for undergraduate students, checklists, etc.)	61	55%
Extensions, deferrals and supplemental work or exams	61	55%
Internships and field studies	58	53%
Course and University withdrawals	53	48%
Intra-and-inter Faculty transfers	49	45%
Permit overrides	49	45%
Academic Standing	48	44%
Faculty orientation	36	33%
eCalendar	36	33%

Opinions Regarding Optimal Level of Academic Advising

Academic advisors were asked to provide their opinions regarding their unit needs in order to achieve an optimal level of academic advising. The most popular items included; additional staff devoted to academic advising (47%), more time for 1-on-1 in-person advising (35%), additional training (35%) and a different academic advising model (24%) – Table 10.

Table 10 – Q: In your opinion, what would your unit need to achieve an optimal level of academic advising? Select all that apply.	n	%
Additional dedicated academic advising staff	52	47%
Additional time for 1-on-1 in-person academic advising	39	35%
Additional office space	14	13%
Redesigned office space	14	13%
Additional training	39	35%
Different academic advising model	26	24%
Other (e.g., additional clerical support, more advisor support at Service Point with specialized training, better online resources, fully stocked library of University catalogues)	23	21%

In addition, academic advisors were asked “*In an ideal world, what would academic advising in your unit look like?*”

The major themes raised include:

- More advisors and support staff
- More consistent training
- Better advising tools
- Increase online resources (e.g., approvals)

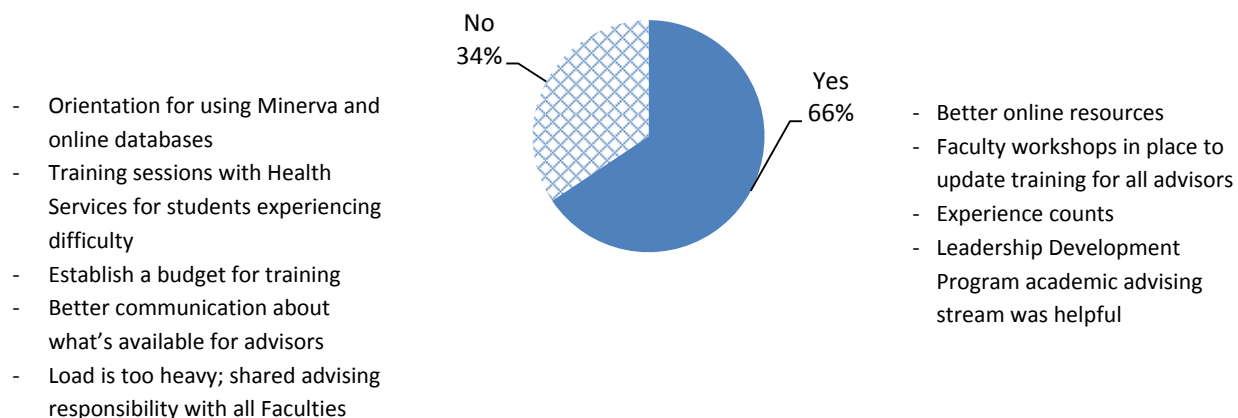
Professional Development for Academic Advisers

Overall, non-academic staff reported higher rates of participation in advising-related professional development (Table 11). Chart 3 indicates that 34% of respondents reported that their academic advising training needs were not being met. The main suggestions for improving training include: orientation for using online tools, better communication about what is available and establishing a budget for training initiatives.

Table 11 - Academic Advising Related Professional Development Activities Participated in

	Academic	Non-Academic	Total	
	(n =78)	(n=32)	n	%
McGill Leadership Development Program (prior to the development of the Academic Advising stream)	2	6	8	7%
McGill Leadership Development Program (Academic Advising stream)	3	10	13	12%
National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) workshops or activities	2	14	16	15%
Canadian Association of University and College Student Services (CACUSS) activities	1	3	4	4%
Other academic advising-related professional development activities (e.g., NACADA, CACPUQ, Faculty sessions, student services sessions)	10	6	16	15%
None of the above	55	7	62	56%

Chart 3 –Responses Related to Academic Advising Training Needs Being Met



Academic Advising Challenges

The main challenges for academic advisors and/or academic advising at McGill raised by respondents include:

- Workload
- Lack of resources
- Time
- Better training
- Poor communication about program updates and other relevant information for advisors
- Complex academic programs
- Dealing with complex cases relating to health and mental health issues

Respondents were also invited for additional comments about academic advising at McGill University. The most common themes raised by advisors:

- Recognition for contributions to student success made by advisors
- Advising should remain a Faculty responsibility
- Need for better online tools to help advisors
- Better communication with Service Point
- Clear websites for students to navigate program information online
- Dedicated resources for pre-arrival advising
- Establish forum for advisors to share best practices and network

Summary

Who performs academic advising duties at McGill University?

Academic advising is performed by a variety of employment groups at the University. The majority of respondents were academics (60% Professors, and 11% Faculty Lecturers) and 29% were non-academics, specifically, 21% whose primary duties involve academic advising and 8% who perform some academic advising duties.

What do academic advisors do?

Academic advisors reported devoting the majority of their time to 1-on-1 in-person academic advising during peak periods, with sessions ranging from 6 to 30 minutes. The majority of academic staff who perform advising duties advise up to 100 students in a typical academic year or up to 200 sessions, whereas 75% of non-academic staff advise over 200 students, representing over 500 sessions.

In addition to 1-on-1 in-person advising, advisors reported responding to email or phone inquiries and engaging in a variety of functions and tasks, for example, communications, supervising and/or training staff or students, course and program/ selection changes, study away, exchange and transfer credits.

What improvements could be made to academic advising at McGill University?

The greatest challenges reported by academic advisors include workload, lack of resources and time for 1-on-1 in-person advising and better communication about program updates and relevant information for advisors. When asked to provide suggestions for how to improve academic advising at McGill University, respondents identified the need for additional staff, consistent training, better advising tools and the increased use of online resources.