

Student Perceptions of Advising Practices in the UW-Superior Online Elementary Education Program

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ABSTRACT

In an effort to improve advising practices in the online Elementary Education program at UW-Superior, students were asked to provide their perceptions, both positive and negative, of their advising experiences. Most students reported mostly positive interactions with their advisor(s), but areas for improvement were identified.

Overview and Context

- In the ELED program at UWS, 75% of students take their classes entirely online.
- The purpose was to understand what students are experiencing to improve advising practices for online students, which could lead to greater retention. Students filled out a qualitative Qualtrics survey, and 2 students participated in further focus groups.
- Approximately 60 ELED majors participated in the study; 37 reported to take their classes 100% online, while 23 reported taking their classes on-campus or hybrid. 50/60 were advised by the DOE faculty/staff, and 54 students identified as women.

Results

Transfer Issues/Mistakes

- Mistakes: 5 DL, 1 OC
- Transfer Issues: 7 DL, 4 OC
- *"When I asked if information for my transfer had been approved I was assured that was and it NOT BEEN!"*

Positive Experiences

- *"the advising staff is here to help me and they will go above and beyond to do so."*
- Friendly: 10 DL, 12 OC
- Knowledgeable: 11 DL, 4 OC
- General Positive/Nothing Wrong: 23 DL, 14 OC

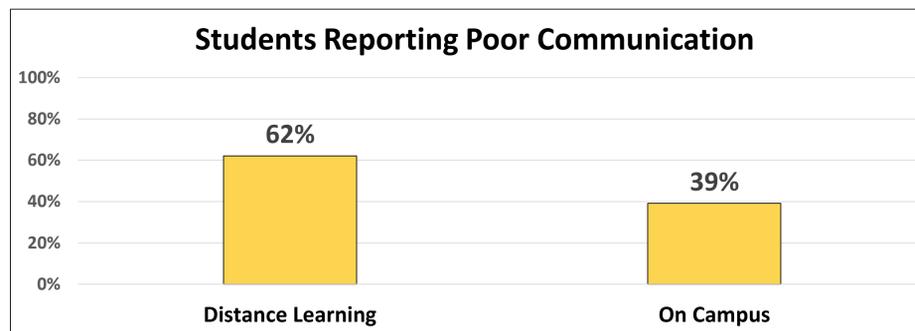
Distance Learning Only – Multiple Advisors

- 6 DL Students, 0 OC students
- *"I have had several different advisors over the course of three years. It is hard to build rapport and feel supported when this role is constantly changing."*

On-Campus Only – Tuition Confusion/Issues

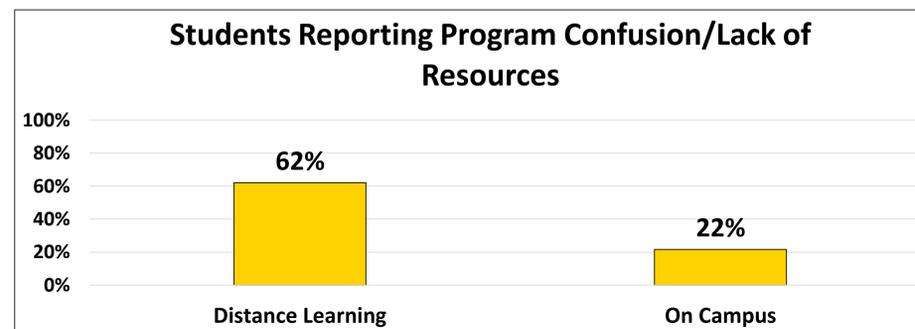
- 7 OC students, 0 DL students
- *"I signed up for several wrong classes (online charged at the campus rate vs. distance learning classes)."*

Results



Communication

- Good Communication: 9 DL, 4 OC
- *"The interactions have been great. I am an older student and have been made to feel like I belong here. I get responses back quickly no matter how trivial the question may be."*
- Communication Issues: 23 DL (62%), 9 OC (39%)
- *"Miscommunications with previous advisors lead me to having to take extra courses."*



Lack of Information/Resources

- Program Confusion/More Resources: 23 DL (62%), 5 OC (21%)
- *"Access to an outline of requirements including projects and field experiences for the TED program."*
- ePortfolio Confusion: 4 DL, 4 OC
- *"I wish I had had more guidance with the e-portfolio process. In my time we changed from D2L to Canvas and resources have been tricky to locate at times. There has also been several changes to the program that I wish would have been communicated to me directly."*

Discussion

- Overall, on-campus and distance learning students had similar answers to all questions, particularly about transfer concerns and positive experiences.
- Compared to on-campus students, distance learning students reported more communication issues, such as delayed responses, more program confusion, and frustration with multiple advisors.
- On-campus students reported confusion over how classes were charged and expressed frustration over the difference in tuition between class types.
- Distance learning students reported more frustration with multiple advisors.

Implications

- Many students across both modalities reported being confused about program deadlines, ePortfolio, and testing requirements, though distance learning students seemed to have more problems, which is possibly related to the poorer communication reported by distance learners.
- The lack of face to face conversations between both students and staff plus the heavy reliance on email may be to blame.

Action Steps

- Program outlines with deadlines and requirements should be created for the ELED program, especially for distance learning students, to guide students through the program with less confusion.
- Communication standards should be set for all advisors so all students are experiencing better communication from their assigned advisor.

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