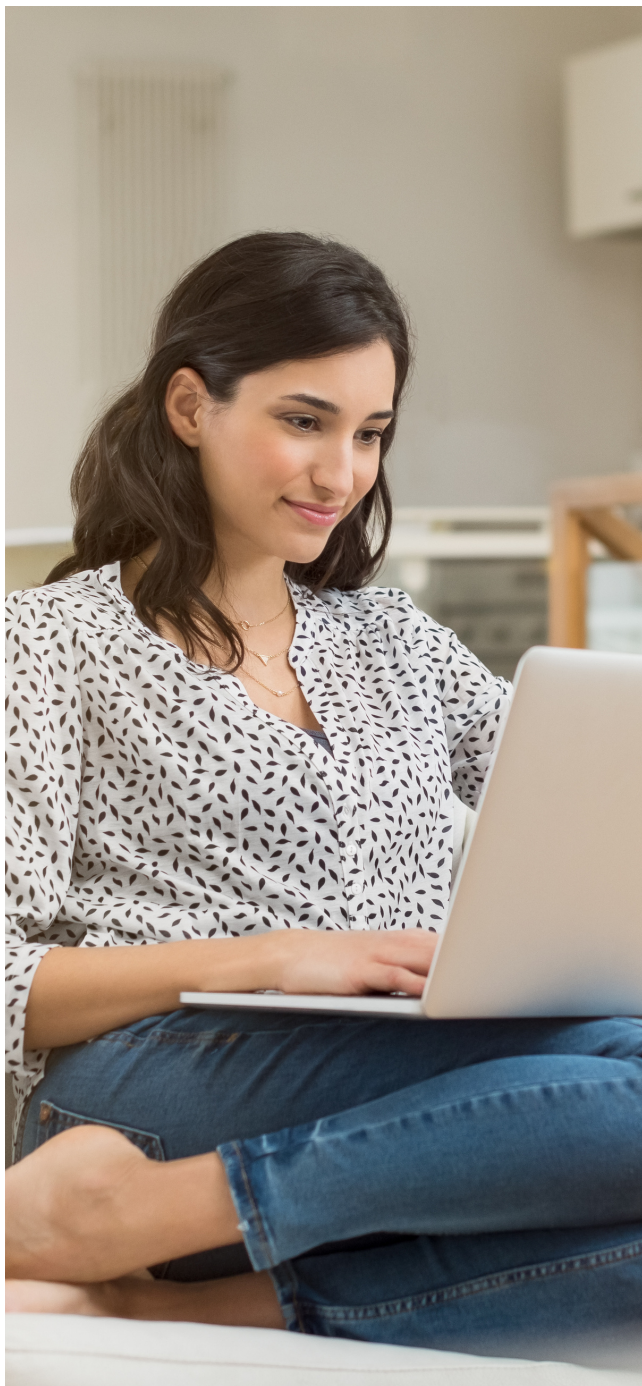# Online and Distance Education

Graduate Student Experience Survey 2021

Survey Overview

Arizona Online and Distance Education's first Graduate Student Experience Survey was developed in Spring 2021 to gauge student satisfaction and needs. The survey loosely modeled our biennial undergraduate student survey; topics mirrored our undergraduate version, but individual questions differed based on our graduate student audience. The graduate survey will be conducted biennially, similarly to the undergraduate student survey. However, each respective version will be interchanging every academic year, allowing us a two-year window to implement needed improvements. Topics included perceptions of program onboarding, program quality, access to course materials, work/family/life balance, and overall satisfaction with their experience through Arizona Online and Distance Education.

The survey was open from mid-April to early May, and students were encouraged to participate through a series of emails asking them to share their feedback. It elicited a response rate of 17% (N=505) and reflected student characteristics closely proportional to the entirety of the graduate student population (Appendix A). Results will be instrumental in prioritizing student needs as Arizona Online and Distance Education focuses on expanding their graduate program offerings.

The following summary will focus on the overall findings respective to the population of survey respondents. Breakout reports by campus or college are available on the last page in Appendix B for reference as needed.

90%
Students likely to recommend Arizona Online and Distance to other graduate students

89%
Students who would still re-enroll with Arizona Online and Distance knowing what they know

Technology and Equpiment

61%
Chrome is the most popular browser while...

51%
...Windows is the most popular operating system

Over half of respondents used Chrome as their default browser to access the survey, showing an overwhelming preference for the browser. In second and third place were Safari and Firefox. Additionally, Windows was the most popular operating system on devices used to access the survey and directly followed by Macintosh. The remaining percentages showcased mobile operating systems on devices such as Android and iPhone, giving us an insight into what devices students were using to access their university email accounts.

73%
Students feel they have all the equipment needed to be successful in their coursework....

16%
... however, those who shared they needed additional equipment selected printers as the most popular response

Most participants believe that The University of Arizona Online and Distance Education provides all the software or applications needed in their coursework. However, participants who shared they needed additional software shared they needed Stata for statistical analyses. It is worth noting that students requesting Stata were all enrolled in the Master of Public Health or Doctor of Nursing Programs.

85%
Students who feel that the University of Arizona provides all the software or applications needed to be successful...

41%
...but, those who shared they needed additional software, shared they needed to purchase Stata

About two-thirds of respondents shared they had access to all the equipment needed for success in their coursework. Nonetheless, students who felt they needed additional equipment selected printers/printing as their top choice, followed by monitors as a close second.

> **I am older and realized the technology gap from my undergraduate and was not aware of Google Doc or Microsoft Share for group collaboration and editing. I never took an online class, so the beginning was a little overwhelming, and I had this sense of being one step behind.**
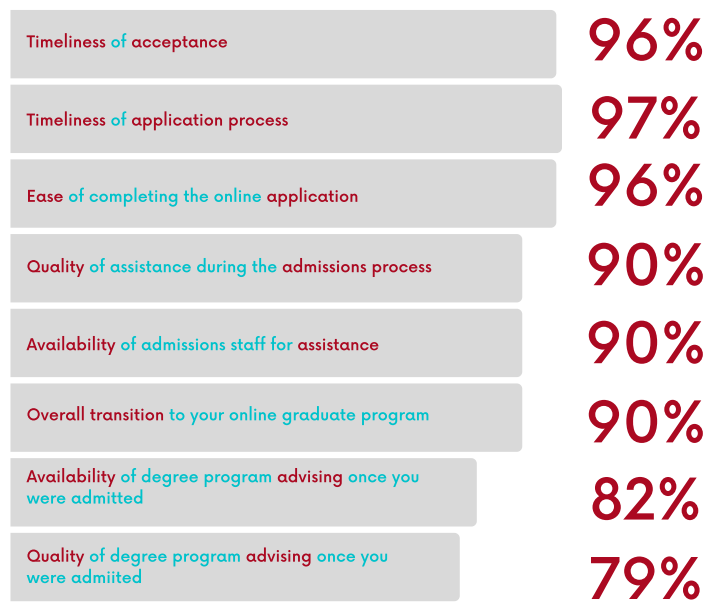
Through multiple open response questions in the survey, students suggested the need for more training in utilizing education technology tools (including D2L) as an integral part of the onboarding process.
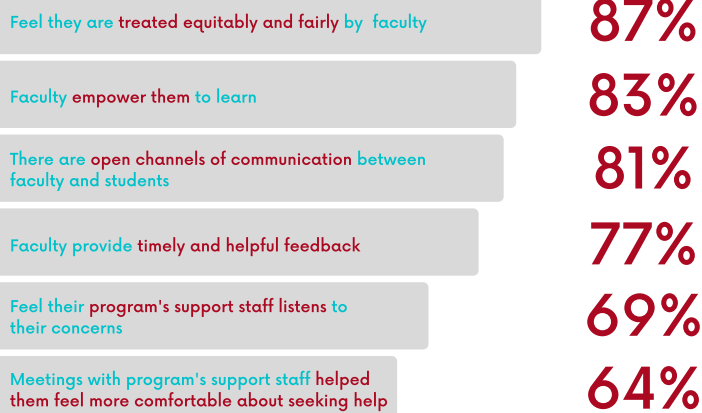
Recruitment and Admissions to Graduate Studies

Students rated their level of satisfaction through different phases of the admissions process. On average, students were the most satisfied with the timeliness of the admissions process and notification of acceptance. At the opposite end of the spectrum, students were the least satisfied with the availability and quality of program advising.

Students who believed areas of the admissions process could use improvement suggested dedicated program advisors as part of their onboarding. The importance of having a "go-to" person to help locate resources, navigate university systems, and help provide answers to questions as they settle into the program was highly resonated. Recurring suggestions also pointed towards the need for more robust program orientations before starting classes, as students continuously mentioned wishing they would have had more formal introductions to systems, tools, and other students before starting their first semester.

Timeliness of acceptance	**96%**
Timeliness of application process	**97%**
Ease of completing the online application	**96%**
Quality of assistance during the admissions process	**90%**
Availability of admissions staff for assistance	**90%**
Overall transition to your online graduate program	**90%**
Availability of degree program advising once you were admitted	**82%**
Quality of degree program advising once you were admiited	**79%**

Faculty and Staff Interactions

Feel they are treated equitably and fairly by faculty	**87%**
Faculty empower them to learn	**83%**
There are open channels of communication between faculty and students	**81%**
Faculty provide timely and helpful feedback	**77%**
Feel their program's support staff listens to their concerns	**69%**
Meetings with program's support staff helped them feel more comfortable about seeking help	**64%**

Students generally reported being satisfied with faculty interactions. Overall, students believe their professors are subject matter experts who are passionate about the topics they teach. However, there were two main areas of improvement students suggested regarding course delivery. The first was a need for a faster turnaround time for email responses. Students mentioned that the accelerated nature of the seven and eight week course model elevated the need for timely feedback. Secondly, students suggested more recorded lectures to supplement their learning by not relying on self-teaching through modules.

Faster response times from program support staff were also the main suggestion that students shared. Students felt that it was hard to locate staff members who could answer program processes and procedures. Comments regarding the lack of email responses and follow-ups were pertinent, pointing towards a dire need for academic advising in the graduate space to assist students through their program.


> " Some more clarity during the process would be nice. Some ongoing reassurance that I'm headed in the right direction and that I have everything I need to graduate on time (i.e. an advisor). "

Student Connectivity

Across various open response questions, students mentioned the need to connect with other students - underscoring the importance of peer interaction to our online and distance graduate student populations. The most popular subtopic within student connectivity was the desire to meet degree program peers before their first semester. Other important subtopics worth mentioning were the interest in online clubs, events, and networking events. Supplementarily, respondents were also asked to select the social media platforms in which they are currently active. Knowing that the three most popular platforms are Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn, we can strategically create additional platforms for student interaction and incorporate them into existing virtual student communities.

Top Social Media Platforms

68%	63%	61%
Facebook	Instagram	LinkedIn
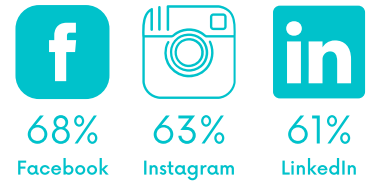
> " I wish there were events orchestrated online for members of the graduate school from different programs to support and collaborate. As a student in the school of nursing, I've always felt very separated from other departments, and the "university" feel is lacking. "

> " I cannot tell you how many events I would have attended if there were an online option. I do not live in Tucson, so I missed out on every event that was offered only in person on campus. I felt more excluded and obstructed from the graduate community with every email invitation to this or that event. "

Only slightly over half of our student participants found the level of connection they seek to other students, even though most participants selected that they believed The University of Arizona Online offers platforms for student interaction. Student comments helped further contextualize that different programs, professors, and students utilize various platforms of online interaction, which adds challenges to finding consistency.

Every survey respondent selected that they checked their university email account at least once a week, with the majority checking it daily. In light of these statistics, students shared that nearly all of the emails received were irrelevant to them as off-campus learners. Students asked for options to unsubscribe from mailings, as sifting through emails made it difficult and cumbersome for them to filter out important information.

100% of students selected they check their university email account at least once a week...

72% ...with about two-thirds reporting they check their email account daily

60% Students who found the level of connection they seek to other students

students shared over many different occasions that they would like the option to

UNSUBSCRIBE

from emails that are not pertinent to online and distance campus learners

Home, Family, and Career

Students answered questions regarding their relationships at home. Over half of respondents selected that they were married, making it the most common relationship status. The second most common was single, with about a quarter of respondents selecting the option. A third of our student population also reported having dependents at home. The vast majority of these students selected children as their dependent type, although elders and dependents with disabilities were also present. In addition to responsibilities at home, half of our students also reported working more than 40 hours a week. Given these statistics, we can understand why students selected managing their time has been the most challenging transition since starting their graduate program.

The three most prevalent sources of funding education were self-funded through their household income, employer tuition discount or reimbursement program, and student loans. However, each student's percentage of each option varied, and most students choose a combination of two or more. The most prominent employer providing tuition discounts or reimbursement benefits that students were utilizing was The University of Arizona.

16%
Military Connected

38%
Dependents at Home

52%
Married

49%
Work _more_ than 40 hours a week

65%
Study between 6-20 hours a week

> The online program is extremely flexible, and has allowed me to be successful in my academic pursuits without compromising life at work or at home.

Through a series of open response questions, we asked students to share what their career intentions were past graduation and how this degree would help them get there. Most students shared that they were obtaining this degree to open opportunities for advancement in their current field, whether at their current organization or exploring options at others. Thus, students were looking for the degree and the practical skillset to help them advance professionally. Conversely, most of the remaining students selected that they were hoping to make a career change to the career field of their current degree program. These students were also looking for applicable skillsets that would help them transition to their career of choice.

25%
Looking for a career change post graduation

44%
Looking for advancement in their current field

Next Steps

Student feedback from the biennial survey is key to initiating functional changes to improving the student experience. Following data collection and reporting, Arizona Online and Distance will be submitting an internal document with proposed recommendations based on three key considerations: cost of implementation, reach across campuses, and academic impact. The department will be monitoring the proposed recommendations in collaboration with key stakeholders during the two-year window before the next iteration of the survey.

Appendix A:

Survey Respondents and Survey Demographics

The table below summarizes the survey response demographics compared to the student population at Arizona Online and Distance (Spring 2021). A column for main campus statistics for the same term has also been added for demographic comparison across campuses.

	ODCE Survey Respondents N = 505	ODCE Graduate Population N = 3,043	Main Campus Graduate Population N = 5,559
Campus			
Online	96%	95%	-
Distance	4%	5%	-
College			
College of Architecture	2%	1%	2%
College of Agriculture and Life Sciences	<1%	1%	5%
College of Education	7%	9%	10%
College of Engineering	11%	11%	10%
College of Fine Arts	-	-	4%
College of Humanities	-	-	3%
College of Law	12%	9%	8%
College of Medicine	-	-	3%
College of Nursing	13%	15%	2%
College of Optical Science	1%	3%	4%
College of Pharmacy	-	-	1%
College of Public Health	7%	7%	4%
College of Science	-	-	15%
College of Social and Behavioral Science	15%	15%	14%
Eller College of Management	29%	24%	6%
Graduate College	3%	4%	9%
Gender			
Male	39%	44%	53%
Female	61%	56%	47%
Unknown	<1%	<1%	<1%
Ethnicity			
African American or Black	3%	5%	2%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	2%	2%	2%
Asian	4%	7%	4%
Hispanic or Latinx	16%	20%	18%
Non-Resident/International	<1%	<1%	22%
Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian	<1%	<1%	<1%
Two or More Races	3%	4%	3%
Unknown/Other	8%	7%	5%
White	64%	55%	44%

Appendix B:

Breakout Reports by College and Campus

To view individual reports based on campus or college, please utilize the links below.
Note: Breakout reports do not include most open-ended responses.

Overall
- Online and Distance

By Campus
- Online
- Distance

By College
- College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
- College of Architecture, Planning, and Landscape Architecture
- College of Education
- College of Engineering
- College of Law
- College of Nursing
- College of Optical Sciences
- College of Public Health
- College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
- Eller College of Management
- Graduate College

For questions, please reach out to:

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