

# 2026 NSSE Shorts: Academic Advising

## Open-Ended Comments Summary

In Spring 2026, a randomly selected half of the student body received a survey comprising two [NSSE Shorts](#) modules, one of which asked about their experiences with Academic Advising. Overall, 436 students (28% of those invited) responded to the survey. This report summarizes the comments<sup>1</sup> shared by 241 of these respondents to the question: “Regarding academic advising, who has been the most helpful and in what way?”

### Helpful Individuals

Though not all students answered both parts of the question, most comments did mention specific individuals (many by name):

- **170 (71%) referenced faculty**
  - Several said that advisors in their major were particularly helpful, but other students intentionally noted the valuable support they received from faculty who *weren't* assigned to advise them or were outside of their major.
- **60 (25%) referenced staff**
  - Academic Success Center, Piper Center, and TRIO SSS/SSSD staff were among those most frequently mentioned.
- **21 (9%) referenced peers or family members**
  - Interestingly, in another part of the survey friends and family ranked highly when students were asked how much they had been “helpful regarding [their] academic interests, course selections, academic performance, or future plans.” Students were most likely to say that friends or peers had been helpful (71% answered “quite a bit” or “very much”), while family members came in third (63%), after assigned academic advisors (69%).
- **A dozen students noted that some advisors they encountered were *not* helpful, or that there was no one who had been helpful with regards to academic advising.**

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<sup>1</sup> Aside from light editing to spelling and grammar and redactions of specific names, quotes shared here are copied verbatim. Many comments addressed more than one of the themes discussed in this report. Sometimes, just excerpts are shown to highlight a specific theme.

- “Honestly, my coach has been the most helpful, I have not received communication from my academic advisor since the beginning of the year.”
- “I think the student employees have been the most helpful as they are most in-touch with the modern student experience and still seem to care enough to provide real answers or at least support where older faculty tended to provide catch-all answers, or pass me off to another support member who will likely do the same thing.”
- “My specific academic advisor(s) at various points just had outdated information and provided more confusion than answers, prompting me to figure out everything on my own instead.”
- “It really depends on the academic advisor. I loved my first year, and she was very helpful. The second one I was placed with does not listen to me or my concerns.”

## Helpful Behaviors

Seventy respondents did not describe the specific ways that those in advising had been helpful. From the remaining 171 comments:

- **71 (42%) emphasized the importance of getting answers to questions** and/or being directed to particular resources or others who could help them.
  - “I meet with [my advisor] whenever I need help with basically everything and she always knows exactly what to do”
  - “External professors that I have sought out and asked questions with - shout out social work professors! (not even my major)”
  - “I would say that my teammates and friends have been the most helpful in academic advising because they have been through the same experience I have and they are able to help guide me and tell me what to do and not do”
  - “My academic success coach because I can go to her about any questions I have and she can either help answer my question or point me to who could better help me with my questions. “
  - “My advisor has been the most helpful. She is always available for me to chat with and will go out of her way to find answers to my questions if she doesn't know them.”

- “Regarding academic advising, my first advisor was helpful in getting me started and answering general questions as I adjusted to college.”
- “Above all, my DAC access specialist has been a savior, there for me at every turn and thus far always having done their best either to resolve an issue or help me to be more able to tackle it.”
- “[My staff advisor] is most definitely the reason I am still going. From financial trouble, finding mental health resources, to simply assisting with class schedule building she has helped me mature into a much better student over my time here so far. She has and will be instrumental into my process of completing my degree.”
- **58 (34%) talked about the importance of feeling like their advisor(s) cared** for them personally and took time to ask about various aspects of their life outside of classes.
  - “I think it might go without saying that my academic advisor herself has been the most helpful. Not only has she expressed interest in me as a person and not simply somebody she gets paid to see, but she also has put in a lot of effort into helping me with things such as figuring out if double-majoring is feasible for me.”
  - “[My professor] was always available to talk and came across as very genuine and caring. I talked to him about my personal life more than class content and he didn’t seem to mind at all.”
  - “My academic advisor because he takes the time to connect with me as a person and not just a student. He never judges and always genuinely wants to help in whatever way he can.”
  - “My Academic Advisor has been very supportive of me throughout the school year. Her patience, understanding, and care have created an environment that has helped me focus on learning academic skills in an approachable context.”
  - “[My professor]. Really appreciates who I am, wants to get to know me, asks how I’m doing as well as how my extracurriculars are doing, and helps me and supports me with resources to guide my journey.”
- **55 (32%) found assistance with the logistical side of advising** - choosing classes, keeping on track toward their major(s) and general academic goals, four-year planning - to be the most helpful.

- “[My advisor] has been extremely helpful, listening and making recommendations based on my goals and plans, and helping me plan out courses even when I switched to a major outside her field. She is very empathetic and enthusiastic and made me feel heard.”
- “[My advisor]; knowing how busy the Music Education degree path is, having her help me create a 4-year plan has made me feel a lot more confident and comfortable with my future at and beyond St. Olaf.”
- “In terms of academic advising, my advisor and success coach has been the most helpful by being there and helping me plan out my college life and reach all the requirements for my major.”
- “My academic advisor has been incredibly helpful regarding my four year plan and is very knowledgeable about what places to reach out to, online or in-person about course requirements and how to help me find the path for success within my four years at St. Olaf.”
- “Talking with profs in their office hrs is the most helpful. If I'm not sure about registering for a class, I'll go to that prof's office hrs and ask questions.”
- **46 (27%) discussed preparing for their future** after college and the support they received from those in an advising capacity.
  - “The most helpful aspect has been figuring out my options in terms of careers. They have broadened my perspective on where I could be successful.”
  - “My advisor has been very helpful in planning out my time here at St. Olaf and figuring out options for after graduation. Additionally, the Piper Center in general has been very helpful with providing opportunities throughout college and setting me up for post-grad.”
  - “My academic advisor and the professors in my majors/concentrations have been the most helpful, since they have a broad understanding of the possible paths to take post-grad. A lot of my professors are very clear in the fact that they encourage exploration, failure, and risks in the professional world. They communicate the importance of trying things out very well.”
  - “Academic success coach. When trying to figure out what I want to be and what best matches and aligns with my long term goals and guiding me to the right resources like the career advising.”

- “My advisor has been very helpful. He pointed me towards marketing and business related fields, which helped me determine some of my career interests.”
- **31 (18%) valued guidance in exploring different interests** or learning about opportunities.
  - “[My staff advisor], he's helped me find what's right for me and has given me helpful advice, and a handful of the social work professors have been helpful when I wasn't sure on what to major and was debating on what to do.”
  - “My academic advisor, as I've met with her for the past four years. She's been able to see my interests develop and provide me with specific recommendations based on her close understanding of my aspirations.”
  - “My first-year seminar professor and assigned academic advisor was incredibly helpful in helping me navigate my first year on campus and figuring out which major was best for me.”
  - “Overall, positive classroom experiences and invested professors have made my academic pursuits enjoyable experiences that expand outside of the classroom and into my journey of figuring out who I am and what I want to do with my life with a strong support system of professors to guide me along the way.”
- **Finally, 26 (15%) mentioned the importance of advisors who were available** and responsive when they needed support.
  - “Both of my advisors have been extremely helpful! Always ready to help and responded quickly to any emails/concerns.”
  - “[My professor] has been the most helpful to me. She's always available to answer any questions I might have about academics, the future, scientific research, or anything else I may wonder about.”
  - “My academic advisor has been the most helpful as I have set meetings with them where we can discuss things and they are very available to me.”
  - “My academic advisor has been the most helpful. She is always enthusiastic about meeting with me and will discuss whatever I am curious/concerned about.”