

What Student-Faculty Interactions Do NU Students Find Most Positive/Meaningful?

Meaningful student-faculty interactions have been found to be a key ingredient for quality learning and student success in higher education. In *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter*, Kuh and his colleagues identified accessible and responsive faculty, academic advising, and undergraduate research as some of the most important aspects of these interactions.

In this analysis, we use data from the *Undergraduate Exit Survey* to identify the most positive/meaningful interactions graduating students had with faculty members during their undergraduate studies. We use data from an open-ended question that asked students to describe a positive/ interaction they had with a faculty member. Typically, this question yields 80 to 100 usable comments.

Table 1 displays the top five themes that emerged from graduating students' descriptions of positive/meaningful interactions with faculty members, along with the ranking and percent of comments associated with each theme.

Table 1. Undergraduate Students' Experiences at NU: Top Five Positive/Meaningful Interactions with Faculty, by Graduating Class (2015-2017)

	Ranking of Theme, by Graduating Class			Percent of Comments, by Graduating Class		
	2015	2016	2017	2015	2016	2017
Academic advising	3	1	1	12%	27%	35%
Working with faculty on projects (capstone, research, etc.)	1	3	2	21%	22%	26%
Out-of-class interactions/social outings with faculty	2	2	5	20%	26%	5%
Psychological/personal support by faculty	NA	4	3	NA	11%	24%
Faculty Assistance with graduate school applications and recommendations	3	NA	4	13%	NA	7%

Note: Analyses are based on 80 to 100 usable open-ended comments received per year. Only the top five themes are displayed. Source: Undergraduate Exit Survey 2015-2017 (administered by Institutional Research, Office of the Provost, NU)

We found that academic advising ranked in third position for the class of 2015 and first position for the classes of 2016 and 2017, in terms of positive/meaningful student-faculty interactions. Along with academic advising, student-faculty collaboration on research, capstone and other types of projects has been among the three most positive/meaningful interactions between students and faculty since 2015. Other most positive/meaningful experiences include interaction with faculty out of class (including social outings), psychological and personal support received from faculty, and faculty assistance with graduate school application processes.

In sum, interactions that occur between students and faculty outside the classroom environment contribute (significantly) to shaping a positive academic experience among undergraduate students. These interactions are to be encouraged and stimulated by departments, schools, and the University. Providing faculty with incentives to spend time with students outside of class, encouraging students to interact with faculty, and having physical space that facilitates informal faculty-student interactions are among recommended practices.

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