

H1. Academic Advising

The school provides an accessible and supportive academic advising system for students. Each student has access, from the time of enrollment, to advisors who are actively engaged and knowledgeable about the school's curricula and about specific courses and programs of study. Qualified faculty and/or staff serve as advisors in monitoring student progress and identifying and supporting those who may experience difficulty in progressing through courses or completing other degree requirements. Orientation, including written guidance, is provided to all entering students.

- 1) *Describe the orientation processes. If these differ by degree and/or concentration, provide a brief overview of each.*

Undergraduate

Undergraduate New Student Orientation (for all BS degrees at GWSPH) occurs in August and January for fall and spring enrollees, respectively. New Student Orientation is in person and covers information relating to the major as well as opportunities to meet fellow majors. In-person drop-in hours are offered in the weeks surrounding the opening of registration to assist students with the process of course selection and registration. Students also are strongly encouraged to attend the virtual webinars and advising drop-in, which covers GWSPH-specific content, including registration. All GWSPH first-year undergraduate students enroll in PUBH 1010 First-Year Experience in Public Health, which requires students to map out their plans for degree completion. Students are encouraged to input their course selections in [Plan Ahead](#), a course-management tool that generates proposed course schedules based on course availability and likelihood of successful registration.

MPH@GW and MHA@GW

Our online master's students receive communications about orientation and registration prepared by GWSPH directly from 2U. When students are accepted into one of our online master's programs, they are randomly assigned a student success specialist from 2U, who welcomes them into the program, assists them with navigating the platform and reminds them about registration. Students in the online programs are also assigned a GWSPH academic advisor, who is a member of the GWSPH staff advising team. Students complete a series of virtual trainings to orient themselves on the 2GW platform as well as their program. Finally, a synchronous orientation is held four times per year prior to the start of each online term featuring the Senior Associate Dean for Academic, Faculty and Student Affairs, Associate Dean for MPH Programs, Assistant Dean of Student Services and an online MPH@GW academic advisor. This live orientation addresses program curricula, academic advising, school and university policies and any questions incoming students may have.

Residential Graduate

New residential master's and doctoral students are invited to an in-person orientation a few days before classes start. Hosted by the GWSPH Office of Admissions and Recruitment, the orientation introduces incoming students to degree requirements (e.g., DegreeMAP) as well as school and university resources. A tour of the main GWSPH building is also given. Current students host an informal panel to discuss the student experience and the (D)APEX and culminating experience/dissertation processes. After the school orientation, students split into groups based on departments and receive a departmental-level orientation. This orientation covers information about the department such as departmental resources and contacts. Starting in Fall 2023, the DrPH program hosted an orientation for residential and online students during the PUBH 8730 DrPH Immersion in Washington, DC.

- 2) *Describe the school's academic advising services. If services differ by degree and/or concentration, a description should be provided for each public health degree offering.*

General information regarding academic advising, including contact information, is available on the GWSPH website, which includes a [list of all advisors for each program](#).

All GWSPH students are expected to use [DegreeMAP](#) to monitor their progression toward graduation. DegreeMAP is an online advising and degree auditing system. It offers real-time mapping so when students add or drop courses in Banner, their progress toward degree completion is updated on DegreeMAP. GWSPH faculty and staff advisors guide students through their specific curricula and assist students with choosing electives, as applicable. GWSPH advisors also use DegreeMAP to ensure students have met the requirements for graduation.

Undergraduate

Undergraduate students at GWSPH are academically advised by three full-time staff in the school. Currently, students are assigned primary advisors alphabetically by last name, with one advisor being responsible for all BS-to-MPH joint-degree students. All advisors are cross-trained in all programs so students may reach out to another advisor if their primary advisor is not available. Students are informed of their primary advisor during Orientation, in an as-needed newsletter and on the advising Blackboard Community.

Advisors are available via email or by appointment (virtual or in person). Students are able to schedule and reschedule their own advising appointments using a [Calendly](#) link in advisors' email signatures. Students are expected to meet with their advisor during their first semester in the program. After each appointment, students are sent a survey where they can rate their satisfaction with the appointment and services offered.

MPH@GW and MHA@GW

Online master's students are academically advised by full-time GWSPH staff (six for MPH and one for MHA). Students are randomly assigned advisors upon matriculation into the program. Advisors provide students with individualized academic support and assistance in building their MPH@GW plans of study. At the start of the first term, academic advisors email their new advisees to introduce themselves and encourage students to reach out. Advisors are available via email or by virtual appointment. Students can schedule and reschedule their own advising appointments using a Calendly link in advisors' email signatures (<https://calendly.com/>).

MPH@GW students are expected to meet with their advisor during their first two terms in the program, and advisors provide students with a plan of study based on their expected time in the program (decided on by the student at time of enrollment). MPH@GW students are also required to meet with their advisors in preparation for the APEx (unlike in the residential MPH program, MPH@GW advisors guide students through the practicum aspect of the APEx; see [Criterion D5](#)). MPH@GW advisors also have access to a 2U-specific version of Salesforce, which acts as an advising bridge between 2U student success specialists and GWSPH academic advisors. The program allows specialists to record personal information about students, making it accessible to GWSPH advisors.

The MHA@GW program is much smaller, and the advising needs are slightly different. Students rely on one GWSPH academic advisor and one student success specialist, who collaborate via email to ensure continuity in support for students. Additionally, the MHA@GW does not have any elective options, so advising appointments are optional.

Residential MPH and MHA

Students in the residential MPH and MHA programs are academically advised by program directors and/or departmental faculty/staff. Assignment of an academic advisor varies by program. For example, the MPH in Epidemiology (about 100 students) splits primary academic advising duties alphabetically between two faculty members. Other programs, like the MPH in Health Policy (about 125 students) has nine primary faculty advisors evenly splitting the academic advising duties. In both cases, other departmental faculty may provide ancillary informal academic advice to students but receive no official recognition or FTE coverage. In larger programs like those in the Department of Global Health, the original assigned advisor (usually the program director) may assign students to another designated departmental faculty member based on students' interests. The Department of Prevention and Community Health provides an Academic Advising Guidance document for students and faculty (see ERF > Criterion H > Criterion H1 > H1.4: Advising materials_sample).

All MPH academic advisors provide guidance on selecting appropriate elective courses and identifying an APEx relevant to career goals. Students are also connected with a member of the departmental practice team, who oversees them on the APEx, and with a faculty member, who guides them through the culminating experience.

MS

Students in the MS programs are academically advised by program directors or departmental faculty. Students are automatically assigned an academic advisor upon matriculation. Advisors guide students on curriculum changes, elective selection, academic progress and preparation for graduation.

DrPH

Students in both the residential and online DrPH programs are academically advised by a DrPH faculty member assigned at matriculation. Generally, the academic advisor guides the student during the entirety of their DrPH program. The academic advisor is responsible for assisting the student in connecting with professionals in their career fields.

PhD

Students are assigned to a faculty advisor after admission to the program. Faculty advisors guide the student in the development of a coursework plan, identification of research opportunities, participation in professional/leadership development and implementation of the dissertation. Students are generally required to meet with their advisors at least once per semester in addition to an annual progress review. Students may change advisors during the program if the new advisor is also affiliated with the student's program. The faculty advisor typically becomes the dissertation chair committee member, though it's not required.

Advanced Support

An advisor who is concerned about a student may seek additional support from their program director, department (vice chair) or one of the assistant/associate deans at the school (appropriate to the student level). Escalated requests for advanced support are usually handled by the Assistant Dean for Student Services, who provides guidance on a variety of academic concerns relating to course withdrawals, financial aid, failing grades, graduation and more.

Any GW community member (faculty, staff, student, faculty, parent) may submit a [CARE Referral](#) as a safe and centralized way to express concerns about a student. All submissions are reviewed by a multidisciplinary CARE Team, which connects students to appropriate and personalized resources and services.

- 3) *Explain how advisors are selected and oriented to their roles and responsibilities.*

Undergraduate

Undergraduate advisors are full-time staff at GWSPH under the supervision of the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Education. While these are entry-level positions, most advisors have earned a master's degree or are working toward one.

The university mandates all new undergraduate advisors to complete a series of training modules on federal guidelines (e.g., FERPA), university policies and advising systems. Regular meetings with university advisors and GWSPH program directors and leadership keep GWSPH advisors up to date with the latest policy and curricular changes.

MHA@GW and MPH@GW

Online master's advisors are full-time staff at GWSPH under the supervision of the Associate Dean for MPH Programs (MPH@GW) and the Director of the Executive Master of Health Services Administration Program (MHA@GW). These advising positions are considered more senior-level advising roles, and hires are expected to have higher education experience and/or experience with customer service or student crises. 2U provides 2GW platform training to online advisors. Advisors receive guidance about elective options and latest policy and curricular changes from MHA@GW and MPH@GW leadership and MPH@GW concentration leads.

Residential MPH, MHA, MS, DrPH and PhD

Academic advisors are program directors or qualified primary instructional faculty and, in some cases, dedicated staff. These advisors are provided with an annual program guide with the latest curricula and are updated with any policy and curricular changes during departmental meetings. Additionally, advisors rely on their practice and research experience as well as support from GWSPH staff and peers when guiding students. Students in doctoral programs have an academic advisor in addition to their dissertation chair.

- 4) *Provide a sample of advising materials and resources, such as student handbooks and plans of study, that provide additional guidance to students.*

See ERF > Criterion H > Criterion H1 > H1.4: Advising materials_sample.

- 5) *Provide data reflecting the level of student satisfaction with academic advising during each of the last three years. Include survey response rates, if applicable. Schools should present data only on public health degree offerings.*

As previously stated, the Graduation Survey experienced extremely low response rates in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Students are normally incentivized to complete the survey to gain tickets to Commencement. In 2020 and 2021, in-person Commencement was canceled.

Undergraduate

Starting in Fall 2022, advisors emailed students a survey link through the Calendly system after each advising appointment. The link is to a Google Forms survey containing both quantitative and qualitative questions about students' perceptions of the advising appointment (see ERF > Criterion H > Criterion H1 > H1.5: Advising satisfaction for a copy of survey). The quantitative questions were on a five-point Likert scale with 5 representing high satisfaction and 1 representing low satisfaction with the statement.

	2022 Average (N)	2023 Average (N)
Was your advisor prepared for your meeting?	4.8 (40)	4.8 (38)
Was your advisor knowledgeable?	4.8 (40)	4.8 (38)
Was your advisor courteous and professional?	4.9 (40)	4.9 (38)
Was your advisor genuinely interested in you?	4.9 (38)	4.8 (38)
What overall rating would you give to your advisor?	4.8 (39)	4.8 (38)

Qualitative comments included:

- [The academic advisor] provided me with such good advice, thoroughly answered questions I asked him, and sent me a great email after our meeting to summarize what we talked about. I am very impressed by the guidance and support I received from him because I did not get that from my previous advisor. I look forward to working with him throughout my time here at GW Milken.
- You[r] follow-up email with notes, reminders, and resources was excellent and so helpful!! Thank you!
- [The academic advisor] assisted with all my needs and helped answer all my questions and was very helpful throughout the whole session! I feel very prepared for the upcoming registration process and next semester. The meeting notes he sent at the end of the session were also sooo [sic] helpful for me.
- The feedback after the meeting was extremely helpful and resourceful. [The academic advisor] made me feel like he was supportive and understanding.
- Super friendly and approachable, definitely helped my thought process.
- I always love my advising sessions because I feel that [the academic advisor] actually cares about my success and is able to provide specific feedback about courses since he also went through the same curriculum.
- Very thorough and thoughtful and gave helpful advice and feedback. Definitely my best experience meeting with advising during my time at GW.

In addition to data on specific meetings with advisors, all undergraduate students are surveyed at the time of graduation about their overall satisfaction with academic advising at GWSPH. Data from the last three years are highlighted below. All questions were on a five-point Likert scale with 5 representing high satisfaction and 1 representing low satisfaction with the statement. In contrast to the surveys collected directly after advising meetings, the Graduation Survey indicated much lower satisfaction with undergraduate academic advising.

	2021 Average (N)	2022 Average (N)	2023 Average (N)
A professional advisor encourages me to take advantage of opportunities that might enhance my GW experience.	3.7 (9)	2.8 (113)	2.6 (120)
A professional advisor is available when I need to meet with him or her.	4.5 (10)	3.5 (117)	3.5 (120)
A professional advisor is knowledgeable about degree requirements, prerequisites, elective options, and other things related to the academic experience.	3.9 (10)	3.3 (119)	3.2 (120)
A professional advisor provides guidance on how I can develop my personal, academic, and/or professional goals.	3.7 (10)	3.0 (117)	2.9 (120)

A professional advisor responds to my questions in a timely manner.	4.4 (10)	3.7 (118)	3.7 (120)
A professional advisor takes the time to get to know me.	3.2 (10)	2.4 (115)	2.3 (120)
How would you rate your overall advising experience with professional advising?	3.8 (10)	2.8 (119)	2.6 (120)

In the comments section, a number of undergraduate students reported having multiple academic advisors (as many as five advisors in four years), which contributed to their lower satisfaction with advising. Other students noted inconsistent advice from (multiple) advisors, being told the “wrong” thing and not being made aware of important deadlines as reasons for lower scores.

MPH (Residential and Online)

The MPH programs assess students’ overall satisfaction with advising through the Graduation Survey distributed at the time of graduation. Data from the last three years are highlighted below. All questions were on a five-point Likert scale with 5 representing high satisfaction and 1 representing low satisfaction with the statement.

	2021 Average (N)	2022 Average (N)	2023 Average (N)
Quality of academic advising and guidance	3.5 (30)	3.4 (431)	3.6 (410)
Quality of academic advising and guidance by faculty advisor	3.8 (27)	3.5 (412)	3.7 (410)
Quality of academic advising and guidance by professional academic advisor	3.4 (27)	3.5 (422)	3.7 (410)

No qualitative comments on the Graduation Survey related to academic advising.

In 2023, an additional question asking students to reflect on their overall satisfaction with academic advising was added to the Graduation Survey. This question was on a four-point Likert scale with 4 representing high satisfaction and 1 representing low satisfaction with the statement.

	MPH (residential and online) Average (N)	MS (public health only) Average (N)	PhD (public health only) Average (N)	DrPH Average (N)
Satisfaction with academic advising	3.0 (410)	2.8 (15)	3.8 (6)	2.7 (9)

MS (Public Health Only)

The MS programs assess students’ overall satisfaction with advising through the Graduation Survey distributed at the time of graduation. Data from the last three years are highlighted below. All questions were on a five-point Likert scale with 5 representing high satisfaction and 1 representing low satisfaction with the statement.

	2021¹⁰² Average (N)	2022 Average (N)	2023 Average (N)
Quality of academic advising and guidance	N/A	4.5 (4)	3.1 (15)
Quality of academic advising and guidance by faculty advisor	N/A	4.8 (4)	3.5 (15)
Quality of academic advising and guidance by professional academic advisor	N/A	4.8 (4)	3.3 (15)

No qualitative comments on the Graduation Survey related to academic advising.

PhD (public health only)

The PhD programs assess students' overall satisfaction with advising through the Graduation Survey distributed at the time of graduation. Data from the last three years are highlighted below. All questions were on a five-point Likert scale with 5 representing high satisfaction and 1 representing low satisfaction with the statement.

	2021 Average (N)	2022 Average (N)	2023 Average (N)
Quality of academic advising and guidance	3.8 (4)	4.5 (6)	4.5 (6)
Quality of academic advising and guidance by faculty advisor	3.8 (4)	4.7 (6)	4.7 (6)
Quality of academic advising and guidance by professional academic advisor	3.8 (4)	4.8 (5)	4.7 (6)

No qualitative comments on the Graduation Survey related to academic advising.

The Office of PhD/MS Programs conducted a survey of current PhD students in May 2022. Within the survey, students answered questions related to academic advising (see ERF > Criterion H > Criterion H1 > H1.5: Advising satisfaction).

	Very Satisfied % (N)	Somewhat Satisfied % (N)	Neither % (N)	Somewhat Dissatisfied % (N)	Very Dissatisfied % (N)
How satisfied are you with the academic advising you have received in your PhD program from your academic advisor?	36.11% (13)	36.11% (13)	13.89% (5)	5.56% (2)	8.33% (3)
How satisfied are you with the mentorship you have received in your PhD program from your PhD research mentor(s)?	58.06% (18)	12.9% (4)	9.668% (3)	9.68% (3)	9.86% (3)

DrPH

The residential DrPH program assesses students' overall satisfaction with advising through the Graduation Survey distributed at the time of graduation. Data from the last three years are highlighted below. All questions were on a five-point Likert scale with 5 representing high satisfaction and 1 representing low satisfaction with the statement.

¹⁰² There were no MS graduate respondents in 2021.

	2021 Average (N)	2022 Average (N)	2023 Average (N)
Quality of academic advising and guidance	4.2 (5)	4.6 (7)	2.9 (9)
Quality of academic advising and guidance by faculty advisor	4.4 (5)	4.7 (7)	3.0 (9)
Quality of academic advising and guidance by professional academic advisor	4.4 (5)	5.0 (6)	3.5 (9)

No qualitative comments on the Graduation Survey related to academic advising. No data are available for the DrPH@GW program as it started in fall 2023.

- 6) *If applicable, assess strengths and weaknesses related to this criterion and plans for improvement in this area.*

Strengths

- All residential and online students are assigned an advisor at the time of matriculation. Advising assignments are communicated to students in multiple ways including direct outreach from faculty and staff advisors, email communications, and on the school [advising page](#) on the website.
- With access to Insight, a data management system that provides dashboard highlights on course enrollment, class sizes, grades and more, academic advisors can meet student needs.
- The 2U student success specialists provide “white-glove service” to online students. They follow the student throughout their degree of study, proactively reaching out to students and encouraging them to finish the degree. Oftentimes, the student success specialist is the first point of contact for students who are struggling and need an empathic ear.
- Online students also complete 2U-implemented satisfaction surveys using the NetPromoter methodology. Students rate their satisfaction with the 2U student success specialists, GWSPH academic advisors, the LMS and technologies provided by 2U and overall satisfaction with the program. Results and trends are shared by 2U, as appropriate.
- Across programs and degrees, the advising framework is designed to support and meet the needs of our students. Students are also encouraged to reach out to any faculty or staff member who shares common academic and professional interests. At the doctoral level, students are intentionally assigned to faculty who can support their research (PhD) and/or practice-based (DrPH) interests.

Challenges

- Advising models vary by program type. For example, the MPH@GW program exclusively has staff academic advisors, while the Department of Epidemiology has two faculty members who act as primary academic advisors for students for MPH in Epidemiology students. Therefore, solutions to challenges may need to be program specific.
- GWSPH, like many schools across the country, has had significant turnover in our advising staff as well as staff who have needed to take extended personal leave, particularly in our MPH@GW and undergrad programs. Such vacancies and absences likely impair continuity in advisors and advising communications. Furthermore, GWSPH is bound by the salary bands set by the university for staff positions, which also contribute to a difficult hiring and retention environment for staff advisor positions.

Future Plans

- As programs continue to grow at GWSPH, additional advisors are needed. We are adjusting the undergraduate advising team structure to ensure better continuity for students. Specifically, GWSPH plans to hire a lead advisor for the undergraduate program, who should provide more stability than we have had in recent years.
- In 2023, academic advising satisfaction rates dipped among MS and DrPH students. The DrPH program is building a team of faculty to better support the student growth in this program, which will likely lead to higher satisfaction rates. The MS program will be closely monitored over the next two years to determine what adjustments may be needed.
- President Granberg has identified undergraduate academic advising as a key area of concern across the university. As a result, undergraduate academic advising will likely undergo improvements in the next few years. GWSPH hopes to see a new compensation policy that will assure more stability in staffing advisors.