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YOUNG 
INVINCIBLES



Who Advises the Advisors?

YOUNG ADULT PERSPECTIVES ON ADVISING AT
MINORITY SERVING INSTITUTIONS

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 ADVISING
SUCCESS
NETWORK

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About the Advising Success Network

The [Advising Success Network](#) (ASN) is a dynamic network of national organizations partnering to engage institutions in holistic advising redesign to advance success for all students, including Black, Latinx/a/o, Indigenous, Asian, and Pacific Islander students and poverty-affected students. The network develops services and resources to guide institutions in implementing evidence-based advising practices. Since its formation in 2018, ASN has supported over 250 institutions in 30 states and created more than 50 open-source resources for practitioners and students. ASN is coordinated by NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, and includes partners Achieving the Dream, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, the Center for Innovation in Postsecondary Education, EDUCAUSE, NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising, the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, and Young Invincibles.

About Young Invincibles

[Young Invincibles](#) (YI) is a national advocacy and policy nonprofit organization amplifying the voice of young people in the political process at the local, state, and federal levels. We focus on issues affecting 18- to 34-year-olds, including higher education, health care, economic security, and civic engagement. YI has offices in Washington, D.C., California, Colorado, Illinois, New York, and Texas.

Note

The Advising Success Network, an initiative of NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, provided funding to support this project. The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of NASPA or its members. Publication of this information does not imply endorsement, agreement, or opposition to the views expressed. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information.





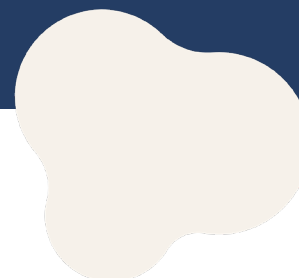
Executive Summary

This mixed-methods study examines undergraduate students' experiences with academic advising at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). Given MSIs' critical role in educating students from historically marginalized backgrounds, centering student voices is critical in understanding how advising structures, institutional contexts, and advisor-student interactions shape access, support, persistence, and success. Thus, this research study positions advising as a central equity mechanism within these institutions.

This research employs a mixed-methods design, marrying both qualitative and quantitative research methods to capture a comprehensive understanding of advising practices at MSIs. Quantitative data was collected via a nationwide survey (n = 202 undergraduates). Qualitative data was gathered through four listening sessions (n = 22 students) representing institutions across the United States. This allowed for a deeper exploration of students' lived experiences, perceptions, and recommendations related to advising.

Students reported high overall satisfaction with advising accessibility and cultural responsiveness. Advising was strongly associated with persistence and confidence, and academic decision-making. At the same time, advising at MSIs emerged as both a critical support system and a site of systemic challenge. Structural barriers – including understaffing, inconsistent information, rigid policies, and limited follow-up – often constrained the depth and relational quality of advising. Holistic and developmental advising practices emerged as the most impactful and effective, particularly when advisors integrated academic, career, and personal guidance.

Taken together, the survey findings and the listening session narratives point to an urgent need for institutional investment in advising at MSIs. Students consistently emphasized the need for increased advising capacity, clearer and more consistent institutional processes, and strengthened communication and follow-up practices to ensure advising is both accessible and meaningful. Beyond structural improvements, students called for a more robust cultural and equity-minded advisor training, as well as greater integration of advising with career and student support services. These changes were framed not as optional enhancements, but as essential reforms to ensure advising systems are equitable and support student persistence and success.





Background

Academic advising plays a critical function in directly shaping students' educational trajectories and impacts long-term, systemic outcomes in higher education. As one of the most forward-facing points of contact between students and their respective institutions, advising serves as a bridge between students to academic planning, institutional navigation, and access to necessary resources and support. Productive advising relationships have the ability to aid students in understanding critical degree requirements, making informed decisions about their educational futures, accessing campus services, and overcoming personal or academic challenges. Because of this, advising is widely recognized as a foundation of student success, linked to higher levels of retention, persistence, and overall satisfaction. For many undergraduates, particularly those with limited institutional knowledge of higher education, advisors are utilized as interpreters of institutional structures and advocates for their needs (Hawthorne et al., 2022).

Advising services are particularly critical for students from historically marginalized backgrounds, including poverty-affected, first-generation, and racially minoritized students (Almazar, 2021). These students often face systemic barriers in navigating the higher education landscape, many of which are tied to inequitable access to information, limited familiarity with academic systems, and institutional environments not designed to suit their needs. Therefore, advisors play a crucial role in ensuring that students successfully navigate their institutions and persist through academic challenges that may otherwise hinder their progress. When advising is effective, it helps level out these structural barriers. However, when it is inconsistent, inaccessible, or culturally misaligned, advising has the ability to exacerbate existing inequalities and negatively shape students' academic experiences.

Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) are uniquely positioned to serve certain demographics of students within the context of higher education in the United States. That positioning is mission focused for some designations of MSIs, specifically Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HCBUs), while for others it can be enrollment based like Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI). This is an important distinction for the purposes of this paper, as students in this study were predominantly from HCBUs or HSIs. As institutions of higher education dedicated to serving significant numbers of students from underrepresented racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, MSIs carry the responsibility of supporting students from these backgrounds, and providing them with the advising reinforcement needed for institutional navigation (Espinoza, 2024).

The title MSI is an official designation determined by the U.S. Department of Education, and is used to establish eligibility for federal funding and grant opportunities. There are many designations which include Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HCBUs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPIs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), Native American-Serving Nontribal institutions (NASNTIs), and Predominately Black Institutions (PBIs). Although research on advising for students of color is well established, advising at MSIs specifically remains

understudied. Much of the existing literature discusses support for students from marginalized backgrounds without examining the institutional contexts where the majority of these students are actually served. As a result, advising at MSIs is rarely analyzed as a distinct unit of analysis with its own challenges and opportunities for improvement (Mowreader, 2025). This presents an opportunity for further exploration into the distinctive patterns and strategies of advising within these institutions, and how students' firsthand experiences and narratives can contribute to broadening research on advising in higher education.



Problem Statement

Despite the central role that advising plays in student success, a limited understanding remains of how undergraduate students at MSIs experience advising services, and what can be done to improve their experience. Students often engage with advising systems that are constrained by limited advisor capacity, inconsistent communication structures, and institutional barriers that restrict timely access to support. These challenges can contribute to students feeling unsupported, lost within institutional processes, or disconnected from critical academic guidance (Mowreader, 2023).

Furthermore, there are a limited number of studies conducted at MSIs, which leads to insufficient research examining the specific institutional barriers that shape advising effectiveness at MSIs. Future studies could explore issues such as understaffing, inconsistent information, high caseloads, limited cultural competency, unclear advising structures, or bureaucratic hurdles within the MSI context. Without deeper insight into how these barriers manifest in the student experience, institutions risk overlooking structural factors that constrain student success. Likewise, little is known about the patterns, challenges, and successful advising practices that influence students' satisfaction and academic progress at MSIs.



Purpose of the Study

Young Invincibles is a national nonprofit, whose mission is to amplify the voices of young adults in the political process. We focus on issues of higher education, workforce development, health care, and civic engagement. To drive meaningful change in the structures and systems that shape these issue areas, we center young adult voices in our recommendations, ensuring they are represented in key stakeholder conversations. In higher education, student voice is a core tool we use to inform our recommendations.

The purpose of this study is to explore undergraduate students' experiences with advising services at Minority Serving Institutions. Specifically, this study seeks to identify the institutional factors that influence the effectiveness of advising, including both the barriers that hinder students' access to advising and the practices that support or facilitate student success. By examining the perspectives of students directly, this study aims to illuminate patterns, challenges, and successful advising practices that shape students' satisfaction, sense of support, and academic decision-making. The study is guided by the following research questions, derived from the central purpose of the project:

- What are undergraduate students' experiences with advising services at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs)?
 - Subsidiary question: What institutional factors influence the effectiveness of advising services in supporting student success?
- What patterns, challenges, and successful practices do undergraduate students experience when receiving advising services at MSIs?
 - Subsidiary question: How do the patterns, challenges, and successes students experience with advising services affect their satisfaction and academic success?



Significance of the Study

This study contributes insights to the field of higher education by providing mixed-methods research, in hopes that it will be utilized to strengthen advising practices at MSIs. Understanding how students experience advising and how certain institutional structures shape those experiences, can help institutional administrators and policymakers alike design more holistic, equitable, and student-centered advising systems.

This study offers practical implications for improving student success and institutional performance by highlighting the realities that students face when seeking advising support and illustrating where institutions may unintentionally create obstacles that hinder their progress. Additionally, the study contributes to broader conversations about retention, persistence, and degree completion in higher education by emphasizing advising as a key structural factor within MSIs. Findings from this research can also be used to support the development of culturally competent advising practices that promote equitable access to institutional resources and affirm students' diverse backgrounds, identities, and lived experiences.

Ultimately, this study addresses critical gaps in the literature and deepens the higher education field's understanding of advising within some MSI contexts. By centering students' voices, this study provides an opportunity to rethink advising systems in ways that strengthen support for the students MSIs are designed to serve.



Literature Review

Advising in higher education is utilized by students to receive guidance on course selection, degree planning, and career pathways, as well as to access support and resources that enhance their overall academic success and personal development. Recognizing the pivotal role that advising plays in student outcomes – particularly its strong influence on student retention, satisfaction, and success, many MSIs have shifted their advising practices to include more proactive and inclusive approaches to better fit the needs of their minority and poverty-affected student populations.

Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) of higher education are characterized by federally established enrollment thresholds or specific institutional missions focused on serving minority populations that were historically excluded from higher education – reflecting their political and racialized nature. Throughout their history, MSIs have developed advising and support systems tailored to address the unique social, academic, and financial barriers faced by their students, often fostering close, culturally responsive relationships between advisors and students that are rooted in traditions of holistic student support and community uplift. This approach to advising emerged from the necessity to guide students who lacked access to the academic and social resources available at predominantly white institutions, making advising a cornerstone of student persistence and success (Rutgers, 2023; Garry 2023).

In the 2019-2020 academic year, 35% of all undergraduate students in the United States were enrolled in MSIs, where 68.08% of students enrolled at MSIs were students of color (United States Department of Education, 2020). Compared to non-MSIs, MSIs also enrolled a higher percentage of Pell Grant eligible students (46% vs. 39%) (United States Department of Education, 2020).

Although multiple advising practices are utilized to guide students through their journey in college, two approaches dominate the field: prescriptive advising, and developmental advising. Prescriptive advising is defined as advising sessions that are limited to discussing academic matters, such as selecting courses, registering for classes, and explaining degree requirements. Barbuto et al. (2011) described this practice as advisors giving students advice, and students listening and following suit.

Developmental advising is a holistic approach in which advisors view students as whole individuals, taking into account their backgrounds, experiences, and needs both inside and outside the institution to support their academic, personal, and career growth (Drake, 2011; Grites, 2013). This method also emphasizes a collaborative, ongoing relationship where advisors help students navigate challenges, set goals, and utilize a broad range of institutional and community resources to achieve their fullest potential (Drake, 2011; Grites, 2013). This approach emphasizes fostering a seamless, student-centered experience that recognizes and responds to the full spectrum of challenges students face inside and outside the classroom.

Research highlights that developmental advising is a common and well-received practice at MSIs (Harris, 2018). Williams et al. (2008) further describe this as “nurtured advising,” where advisors engage with students beyond formal academic settings, fostering a strong sense of care and support. This approach aligns with the Advising Success Network’s (ASN, 2021) call for holistic advising – advising that takes into account students’ academic, personal, and socio-economic backgrounds and experiences. Similarly, the Rutgers Center for Minority Serving Institutions (2023) notes that MSIs are increasingly implementing assessments to better tailor advising services to meet the diverse needs of their students.

Rutgers (2023) also describes how while advisors at MSIs are often tasked with recruitment and retention, many institutions view these advisors as educators who help students develop the skills necessary to navigate college life. Advisors provide targeted interventions to address challenges and facilitate connections between academic pursuits and opportunities both on and off campus. Research suggests that quality interactions between students and faculty members, staff, and peers at their institutions have an impact on retention rates, where effective advising has the ability to allow students to “discover their talents, purposes, and life goals among other aspects of self-discovery” (Bigger, 2005; Harris, 2018; Bustillos, 2012).

Current research from Rutgers (2023) reveals that although advisors at MSIs generally receive training to fulfill the basic functions of their roles, these training programs often lack comprehensive coverage of essential advising competencies (such as the NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising Academic Advising Core Competencies Model). Most notably, advisor preparation at MSIs tends to focus on informational and technological skills. Informational competency involves a deep understanding of institutional policies, procedures, resources, and academic programs, enabling advisors to provide accurate and timely guidance to students. Technological competency refers to the ability to effectively use institutional systems that manage key student data, such as course schedules, degree plans, and degree audits.

However, this focus on the technical and informational aspects of advising often comes at the expense of other essential areas. Conceptual competency – which encompasses knowledge of advising theories, frameworks, and philosophies – is not always emphasized in advisor training. Even more concerning is the limited attention given to anti-racism and equity-minded competencies. Anti-racism competence involves not only recognizing and addressing systemic inequities but also implementing advising practices that are intentionally designed to support students from marginalized backgrounds. Equity-minded advising requires advisors to be aware of their own assumptions and biases, to challenge institutional barriers, and to advocate for policies and practices that promote access and fairness for all students.

Given these gaps, it is increasingly important for MSIs to adopt holistic and proactive advising models. Such models go beyond transactional advising and instead address the full spectrum of students' academic, social, financial, and personal needs. To truly align advising practices with the expectations and needs of today's diverse student populations, MSIs must prioritize advisor training that includes cultural competency, developmental advising, and equity-focused frameworks.



Data & Methods

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to examine undergraduate students' experiences with academic advising at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). A mixed-methods approach was selected to capture both the breadth of students' advising experiences across institutions and the depth of students' lived experiences navigating advising systems. By combining quantitative survey data with qualitative listening sessions, this study was able to triangulate findings and develop a more comprehensive understanding of how advising structures, institutional contexts, and advisor-student interactions shape access, support, persistence, and student success at MSIs.

The quantitative component consisted of a nationwide survey designed to identify patterns in advising access, engagement, satisfaction, and perceived impact on academic persistence. The qualitative component consisted of listening sessions that allowed students to describe their advising experiences in their own words, elaborate on challenges and successes, and offer recommendations for improvement. Together, survey data illustrated general trends and common experiences, while listening sessions contextualized those trends and highlighted the nuances of institutional practices that are not always captured through survey measures alone.

This research design was particularly appropriate given the study's focus on MSIs, where advising experiences are shaped not only by individual advisor interactions but also by broader

institutional structures, resource constraints, and equity-driven missions. Centering student voices through qualitative methods ensured that the findings reflect students’ perspectives rather than solely institutional or administrative interpretations of advising effectiveness.

Participants

The target population for this study was undergraduate students currently enrolled at Minority Serving Institutions across the United States. MSIs include institutions federally designated as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), and other federally recognized MSI categories. The institutional sample includes representation from all federally recognized Minority-Serving Institution (MSI) categories, with the majority of institutions classified as HBCUs or HSIs. The institutional sample includes representation from all federally recognized Minority-Serving Institution (MSI) categories, with the majority of institutions classified as HBCUs or HSIs. Participants were recruited to ensure representation across class standing, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and institutional contexts.

The survey sample consisted of 202 undergraduate students. The sample was recruited through Young Invincibles’ young adult network and through contacts at key institutions and offered a \$25 incentive for their time. The sample reflected broad demographic diversity. Most respondents identified as sophomores or juniors, indicating substantial representation from students who had progressed beyond their first year and had multiple interactions with advising systems. Nearly seven in ten respondents identified as female, and over 60 percent identified as Black or Hispanic/Latino. A majority of respondents (76 percent) reported receiving Pell Grants, highlighting the significant representation of lower-income students within the sample. Approximately four in ten respondents reported working part-time while enrolled, and one in five reported household incomes below \$15,000. These characteristics align with national trends showing that MSIs disproportionately serve students from historically marginalized and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Survey participants

MSI Type	Percentages %
HSI	37%
HBCU	22%
AANAPISI	17%
PBI	6%
TCU	4%
ANNH	4%
NASNTI	3%
Uncategorized	7%

HSI - Hispanic Serving Institution
HBCU - Historically Black College or University
AANAPISI - Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions

Listening session participants

MSI Type	Percentages %
HSI	37%
HBCU	33%
AANAPISI	25%
PBI	3%

PBI - Predominantly Black Institution
TCU - Tribal College or University
ANNH - Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions
NASNTI - Native American-Serving Nontribal Institutions

Racial and Ethnic Identity Distribution of Survey Respondents	Percentages %
Black or African American	39%
Hispanic or Latino/a/e of any race	23%
White	18%
Two or more races	7%
Asian or Asian American	5%
Indigenous or Alaska Native	5%
Prefer not to say or non-reporting	2%
Other	1%

Figure 1: Gender Distribution of Survey Respondents

Gender Identification Distribution

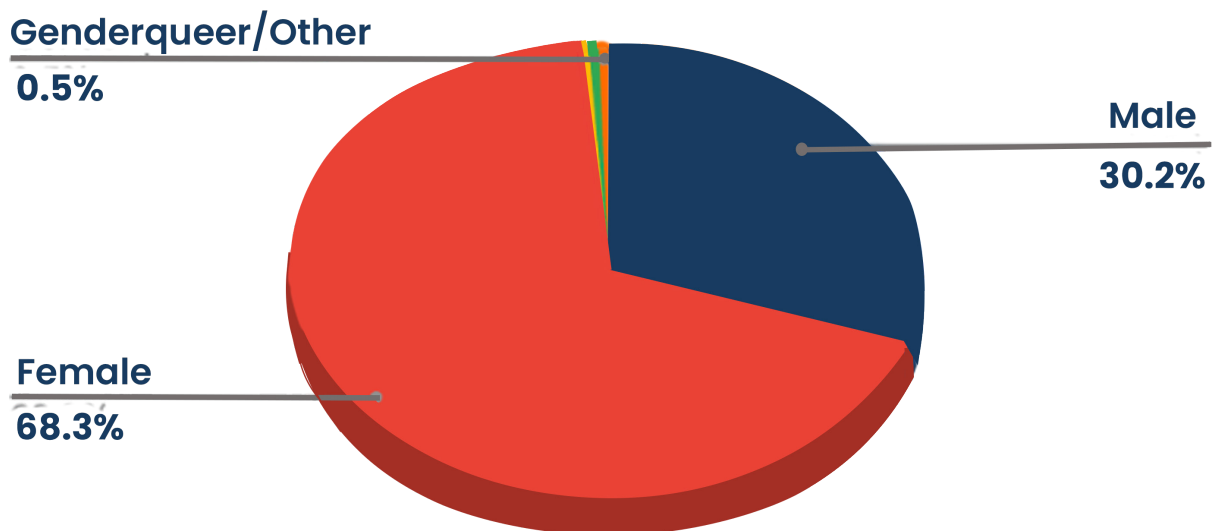


Figure 2: Grade Level Distribution of Survey Respondents

Undergraduate Classification (Class) Distribution

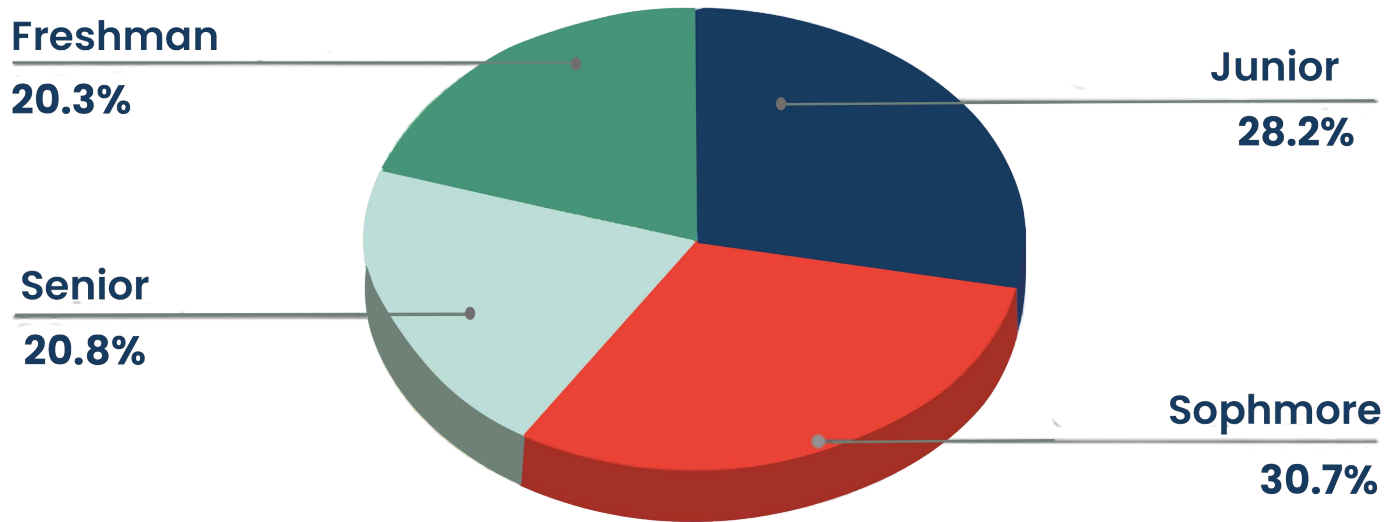
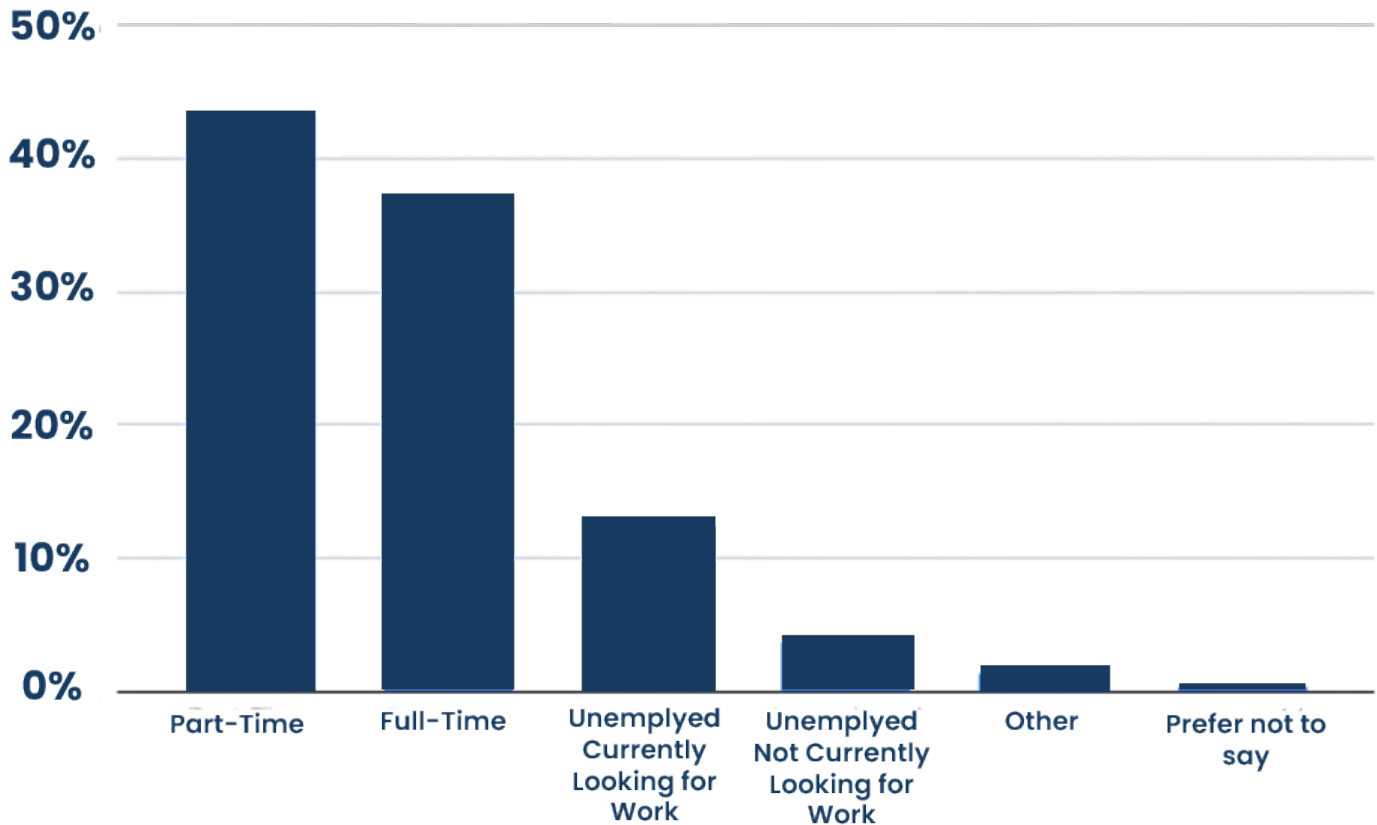


Figure 3: Employment Status Distribution of Survey Respondents



In addition to the survey participants, 22 undergraduate students participated in four listening sessions. These students represented a range of MSIs and brought varied experiences with advising systems. Students engaged in these controlled conversations, most often attended HCBUs, HSIs, PBIs, and AANAPISIs.). Among these, 7 were attending private institutions, while the remaining 15 were attending public institutions. Listening session participants included students at different stages of their academic careers and with differing levels of engagement with advising services. This qualitative sample allowed for deeper exploration of advising experiences, particularly those shaped by institutional barriers, advisor relationships, and access to campus resources.

It is important to note that the two participant groups were distinct. Individuals who participated in the listening sessions did not complete the survey, and survey respondents did not participate in the listening sessions. The samples were intentionally kept separate to strengthen the validity of the findings and to avoid potential bias that could arise if participation in one data collection method influenced responses in the other.

Data Collection - Survey

Survey data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed to undergraduate students enrolled at MSIs. The survey included a combination of Likert-scale questions, multiple-choice items, and select open-ended responses. Survey questions were designed to capture students' experiences with advising accessibility, frequency of advising interactions, session length, perceived advisor support, cultural responsiveness, communication and follow-up practices, and the perceived influence of advising on academic persistence and decision-making.

Likert-scale items allowed respondents to indicate their level of agreement with statements related to advising satisfaction, advisor accessibility, and perceived support during academic or personal challenges. Multiple-choice items captured information about advising frequency, format (in-person, virtual, walk-in), and awareness of advising-related initiatives. Open-ended questions provided respondents with opportunities to elaborate on their experiences or highlight specific challenges and positive practices not fully captured by structured items.

Data Collection - Listening Sessions

In addition to the survey, four listening sessions were conducted to gather in-depth qualitative data. Listening sessions were semi-structured, meaning there were pre-designed questions, though facilitators have the opportunity to ask follow-up questions based on responses from participants. The goal of this structure was to encourage open dialogue among participants while ensuring that key topics related to advising experiences were discussed. Students were invited to reflect on their experiences accessing advising services, navigating institutional policies, communicating with advisors, and seeking support from other campus resources. Participants were encouraged to share both positive and negative experiences and to offer recommendations for improving advising systems at their institutions.

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods to identify patterns in advising access, engagement, and satisfaction. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for key variables, including advising accessibility, frequency of meetings, session length, and awareness of advising initiatives. Descriptive statistics were also used to examine student perceptions of advisor support, cultural competency, and the influence of advising on academic persistence.

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data from the listening sessions were analyzed using thematic analysis. Transcripts and notes from each session were reviewed to identify recurring patterns, shared experiences, and salient themes related to advising practices and institutional contexts. Initial open coding was used to identify broad categories. These codes were then refined and organized into higher-order themes that reflected the most prominent and consistent findings across sessions.

This iterative coding process allowed themes to emerge directly from students' language and experiences. Qualitative findings were used not only to illustrate survey trends but also to surface dynamics – such as emotional impacts, perceptions of institutional priorities, and informal coping strategies – that are often overlooked in quantitative assessments of advising.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were central to the design and implementation of this study. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation in the survey or listening sessions. Consent materials clearly explained the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and participants' right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process. Survey responses were collected anonymously, and no identifying information was linked to individual responses. Listening session participants were informed that their comments would be de-identified in all reporting, and any quotations used in findings were anonymized to protect participants' identities and institutions.

Data Limitations

Both the qualitative and quantitative data collection methods have limitations. There are variables that may have influenced the findings but were not captured in this study. These include students' urban or rural backgrounds and, in the case of the national survey, whether respondents attended public or private institutions of higher education. Future research could yield additional insights by disaggregating findings along these dimensions, allowing for a more granular analysis.

One limitation of the survey design relates to data assurance. While the survey was intended to sample only students attending federally designated Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), respondents self-selected as being enrolled at an MSI and self-identified their institutions. Upon cross-referencing the reported schools, a small percentage could not be verified with absolute certainty as federally designated MSIs.

Research Findings

Students reported high levels of advising accessibility and satisfaction, with most describing advisors as supportive and culturally competent. Advising was strongly associated with persistence, as many students indicated that advising influenced their decision to remain enrolled. Nonetheless, engagement frequency varied, sessions were often brief, and follow-up communication was inconsistent.

Survey Findings

Advising Accessibility and Satisfaction

Students reported high satisfaction with advising services overall. Nearly 89% agreed their institution provides the advising they need to be successful, and 97% described their advisors as somewhat accessible or very accessible. These findings reflect strong institutional commitment to student support and advising availability across Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs).

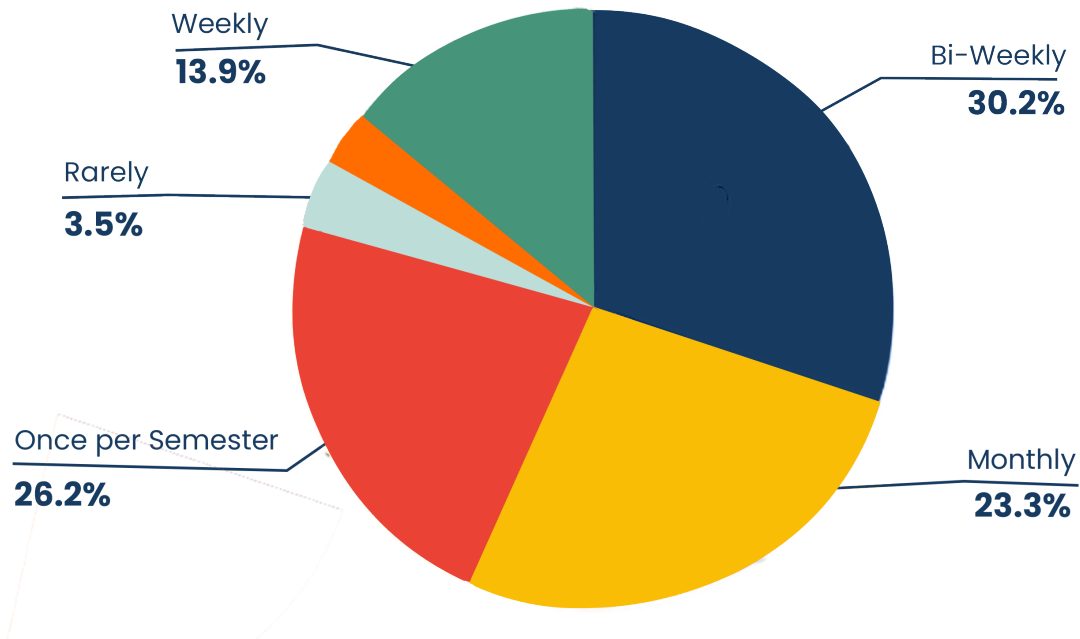
Advising Engagement Patterns

Despite high accessibility, engagement frequency and session length varied considerably. Only 14% of students met weekly with an advisor, while nearly one-quarter met just once per semester. Approximately 75% of sessions lasted 30 minutes or less, limiting time for in-depth academic or career discussions.



Figure 4: Frequency of Advising Sessions

How frequently do you meet with an advisor each semester?

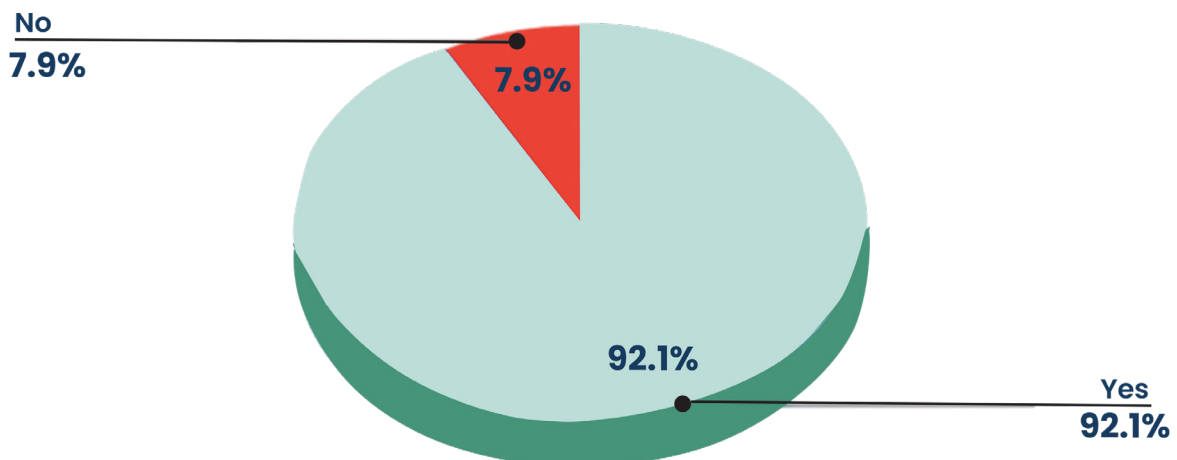


Advisor Support and Holistic Guidance

An overwhelming 92% of students reported feeling supported by their advisor during academic or personal challenges, and 85% said their advisor provided guidance beyond course selection. These results demonstrate that holistic, student-centered advising practices are prevalent within MSIs.

Figure 5: Support Provided by Academic Advising

Do you feel supported by your advisor when you're facing academic or personal challenges?

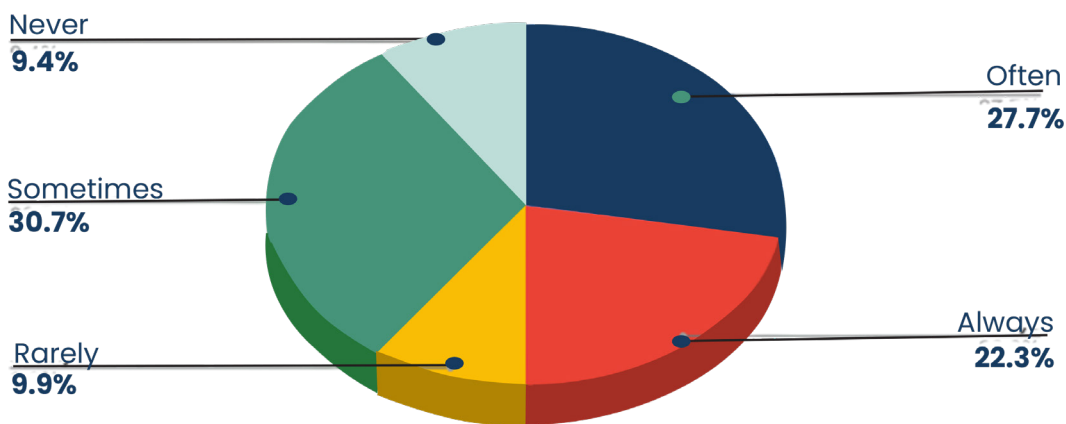


Communication and Follow-Up

While initial advising interactions were positive, only about half of students said their advisor “always” or “often” follows up after meetings. This indicates room for improvement in maintaining consistent, ongoing advisor-student communication.

Figure 6: Frequency of Follow-up Communications

My advisor follows-up with me outside of our scheduled meetings:

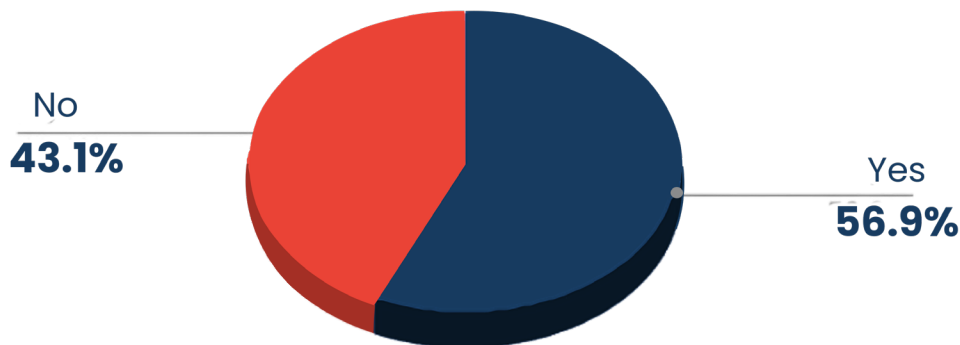


Specialized and Culturally Responsive Advising

More than half (57%) of respondents participated in specialized advising programs (e.g., mentoring or peer advising). Additionally, 88% agreed that advisors are culturally competent and prepared to support a diverse student population – an important strength of advising at MSIs.

Figure 7: Cultural Responsive Advising Participation

Have you participated in any specialized advising programs?



Challenges, Awareness, and Retention

Although 97% of students did not report difficulties accessing advising, nearly 29% faced challenges navigating advising services, though this may seem like a contradiction, these are defined as different interactions with the advising system. Awareness of advising initiatives was mixed (47% aware, 35% unaware). Notably, 65% said advising influenced their decision to remain enrolled, and 84% were likely or very likely to recommend advising services - underscoring advising's strong connection to student satisfaction and retention.

Figure 8: Challenges Seeking Academic Advising

Have you experienced any challenges when seeking advising services on campus?

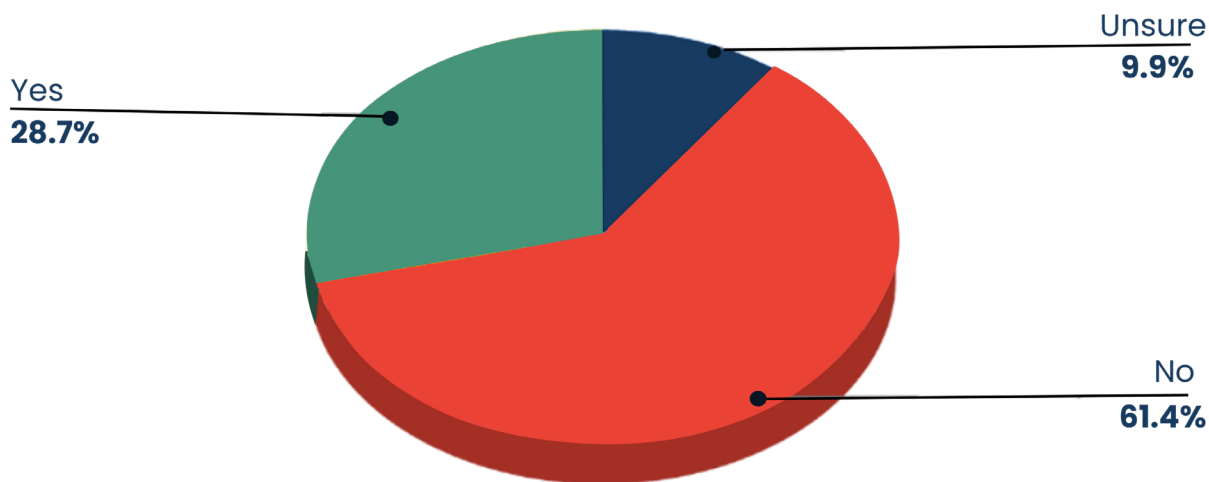
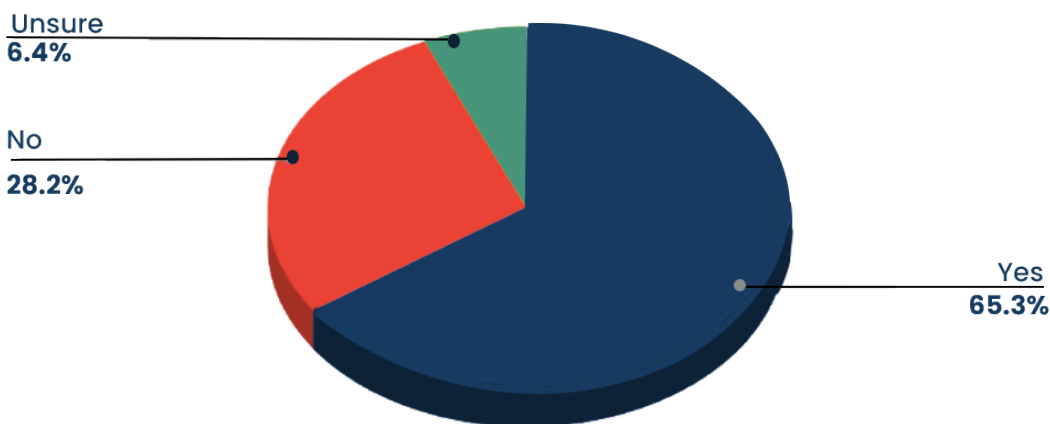


Figure 9: Advising's Impact on Retention

Retention: Has your advising experience influenced your decision to remain at your current institution in any way





Listening Session Findings

Structural and Institutional Barriers:

Across the listening sessions, many students described persistent difficulties in accessing advising services, creating barriers to timely and meaningful support. Scheduling appointments was characterized as confusing and burdensome due to a lack of clarity about procedures, limited appointment times, or user-unfriendly online portals. As a participant remarked, because their advisor was responsible for so many students,

“it is kind of hard to be fitted on her schedule.” Others echoed this frustration, “like scheduling with my advisor, can be very difficult,” and “I do have to wait a couple of days to get my appointment with my advisor.”

While some students described positive relationships with their advisors once they were able to meet, for some, the challenge was even more acute: one participant noted that despite being in their second year, they had never met with their advisor, which prevented them from engaging in long-term planning. Students also pointed to inflexible scheduling systems that limited their ability to meet advisors when needed. One described,

“what you do is just go into like a certain website and just pick the one who has an appointment available. They’re usually pretty booked up... it’s a lot of people that you have under them.”

For others, location and transportation made in-person meetings a challenge. One student said, “My problem used to be location. So being able to meet with somebody in person was hard because I don’t have a car, and I used to live far away.”

These structural barriers, large caseloads, long wait times, and severely limited availability, were seen as undermining students’ ability to build meaningful relationships with advisors, access reliable guidance, and navigate institutional policies with confidence, contributing to feelings of stress, frustration, and being unsupported. For many participants, the inability to access advising on a regular basis exemplified the ways in which institutions signalled to students that their progress was not a priority.

Inconsistent Information:

Compounding these issues, students often encountered inconsistent or contradictory information across different departments and rigid policies that shaped their advising experiences. Several students expressed frustration with receiving conflicting guidance, which left them uncertain about what courses or policies applied to their degree progress. One participant recalled,

“One counselor will say one thing, another counselor will say another thing, and because of that, I’ve had to stay an additional year that I didn’t even need to do.”

Others underscored how damaging even one misleading interaction could be, as

“it only just takes that one advisor to mislead you for you to completely lose track of everything.”

Students also noted inconsistencies in advising practices that made their system feel unpredictable. One explained,

“our system is a mix between walk-in and appointment only... sometimes they’ll be like, ‘don’t come here, I don’t have time,’ and other times they’ll be like, ‘yeah, stop by whenever.’

Some described being required to meet with advisors simply to unlock registration, even when they felt it was unnecessary. One student said

“Honestly, if it wasn’t for the fact that my major requires me to go to my advisor and get a PIN before I can register, I probably wouldn’t go as often.”

Others highlighted the stress caused by broader institutional rules tied to advising and enrollment, such as financial holds. As one student expressed,

“If you don’t have your bill paid off by August first, they’re taking your housing from you and giving it to somebody else... those institutional policies place a strong hold on students.”

Such inconsistencies deteriorated students’ trust not only in individual advisors but in institutional systems as a whole, and participants recognized that mistakes could extend their time to graduate, create unexpected costs, and delay their career trajectories. Students’ reflections highlight that when institutional processes are fragmented, the costs of error fall disproportionately on those least able to absorb them.

Understaffing and Impact on Advising:

Students also identified systemic understaffing as a key barrier hindering the availability and quality of advising. Many indicated that the limited number of advisors relative to the student body created a sense of competition for access. One participant reflected,

“A lot of my troubles with advising come from the fact that I’m in such a large university that serves like a ton of people. So it always feels like I’m in some kind of rat race trying to compete” for attention.

Another student said plainly,

“my institution... our admin is very overworked. I generally don’t think we have enough [staff]. Even advisors, people in the bursar’s office, financial aid – stuff like that. We don’t have enough.”

Even when walk-in systems were available, students described long wait times. One shared,

“walk-ins were semi-helpful... but I did have to wait hours because it got really busy.”

For many, advising systems felt reactive and stretched thin, where advisors’ large caseloads often resulted in short, generic meetings that lacked personalization and individualized guidance. And although students were able to sympathize with their advisors’ workloads, they expressed frustration at sessions that felt rushed, impersonal, or disconnected from their lived contexts. Students emphasized that while they understood the structural pressures advisors faced, the consequences of those pressures still left them without the depth of support they needed or the ability to make timely academic decisions. Many recognized that institutional understaffing was not the fault of individual advisors but rather a systemic problem that institutions needed to address directly.

Holistic Advising:

Despite these barriers, students were clear about what they valued when advising worked well. Holistic advising – approaches that take into account a student’s full academic, personal, and career trajectories, was seen as the most effective. Advisors who practiced this type of support were seen as reliable sources of encouragement, guidance, and opportunities. One participant described,

“I felt better coming out of an advising session when the person I was talking to pulled up my information, and we went through it for what I was specifically doing rather than addressing general information.”

Students stressed that advising should go beyond course selection, encompassing career aspirations, enrichment opportunities, and personal development. Advisors who acknowledged students’ broader lives and aspirations, and incorporated career resources and real-world opportunities into their guidance were described as particularly impactful. As one student shared,

“He encouraged me to apply for the honors program – that’s how I’m getting more scholarships in.”

Another explained,

“I remember once we had spoken about my career aspirations. He provided guidance based on students he’d had in the past. Having someone tell me the different options in the career path I wanted to pursue was really helpful.”

Others emphasized how advisors introduced them to programs and networks that opened new doors to external opportunities and mentorship. As one student explained,

“The personal advisor I received introduced me to a program in the CUNY system that helped me remain on track to my bachelor’s. It was because of her advisory that I made the decision [to stay on track], and she pushed me to keep going.”

Competence:

Throughout their reflections, students underscore how the competence and approach of their advisors play an enormous role in determining educational outcomes. At their best, advisors were described as holistic, culturally-aware guides who supported not only academics but also personal growth and career planning. In these cases, students credited advising with life-changing outcomes, such as persisting in school, securing financial support, or gaining confidence in their career direction. However, experiences were uneven: some students encountered advisors who lacked cultural competency, gave inconsistent or inaccurate information, or offered minimal support, while overlooking important requirements. One student expressed concern that their advisor seemed unprepared to address their academic needs, noting that they

“did not know absolutely anything” about the guidance being sought. The student was in the advisor’s room for “just three minutes because it was frustrating – I wanted advice, but he didn’t know anything about my courses.”

Students also raised concerns about a lack of cultural competency from their advisor. For some, this meant advisors failed to understand or acknowledge their identities. An advisor went as far as telling a student that they

“look very ambiguous,” inappropriately asking “What are you ethnically? Do you ever just make it simple and choose one of them?”

When the student responded back with their explanation, the advisor said:

“that doesn’t make sense – it doesn’t work that way” – minimizing the student’s multiracial lived experience.

Others described the challenges of working with advisors who could not relate to their first-generation or immigrant experiences. A Nigerian and immigrant student stated that because

“a lot of my advisors were white, they wouldn’t really understand some of the places I’m coming from.”

Students called for more intentional and ongoing cultural competency training, noting that current efforts often felt “performative” or outdated.

These contrasting experiences highlight how advisor competence can either empower students or create additional barriers to success. Gaps in competence and cultural understanding can leave students feeling unseen, unsupported, or even alienated. In contrast, when advisors shared cultural backgrounds or demonstrated cultural awareness, students reported stronger relationships and more relevant support.

Beyond academic planning, many students described that being able to share personal experiences made them more confident in seeking guidance for academic matters. For some, advising was transformative; as one student affirmed,

“If not for an academic advisor, I don’t think I’m going to earn this height of success that I’ve had, especially in my previous semester.”

Students consistently emphasized that the relational dimension of advising, the ability to foster confidence, self-efficacy, and a sense of belonging, was just as important as receiving accurate academic information. In this sense, advising was not simply about technical navigation but about shaping the confidence and persistence that sustain students through challenges.

Communication and Relationships: Importance of Clear and Responsive Communication:

Students consistently emphasized that communication is central to effective advising, shaping both the accessibility of support and the quality of relationships with advisors. Those who received timely email replies or who were able to meet in person reported stronger relationships and greater confidence in their decisions. In contrast, a lack of responsiveness left students anxious and unsupported. Often, frustration with communication began with student-initiated communication, without a response from the advising office. One participant described,

“I can’t come on or I can’t meet with her, and she doesn’t really respond to emails. And my other advisor doesn’t respond to emails. So it’s been hard to get in contact with them. And that has really been a struggle for me.”

Students highlighted that even when meetings occurred, they were often rushed or constrained by time limits, leaving little room for depth. As one student explained,

“Access to advisors is very unfortunately inconsistent.”

Another described the frustration of unresponsiveness:

“I remember one time I sent him an email, and then he didn’t respond... when I went in person he said, ‘well, you’re here now,’ which felt dismissive and a little rude.”

Several reflected that they felt like a task to be completed rather than a whole person to be understood. They emphasized that effective communication was not only logistical but relational: advisors who were patient, approachable, and empathetic fostered trust, while those who appeared hurried or dismissive discouraged further engagement.

Peer Support & Networks:

In the absence of reliable communication with advisors, students frequently turned to peers for guidance. Friends, older students, or informal peer advisors were described as accessible sources of information about course selection, financial decisions, or navigating bureaucratic hurdles. One student explained,

“I think friends are probably the best support you’ll have. I talked to seniors, and they give you so much advice about what to do financially, what to do socially, class-wise, what teachers not to take, what to take.”

One respondent describes receiving positive peer support through involvement with various student organizations when stating,

“I got to be a part of luckily some great student organizations on campus that I was able to like, meet people who have done my major, or gone through the same things that I’m going through, and can point me in the right direction.”

While such peer networks helped fill gaps, students were also clear that peers could not substitute for the expertise and institutional authority of professional advisors. Many suggested that peer advising programs could be strengthened and formalized as a complement to professional advising, especially in the context of chronic understaffing. In this way, students demonstrated a nuanced understanding of advising ecosystems: they valued peer-to-peer support but also recognized its limitations.

Integration of Campus Resources:

Students also discussed the importance of other campus resources, including financial aid, career services, and mental health support. While they recognized the value of these offices, many described them as underutilized due to lack of awareness or inconsistent communication – where students often lose out on critical support for success. Several participants only learned about certain services late in their academic careers, and others reported receiving contradictory advice across different offices. Nonetheless, when such resources were accessible, students described them as highly beneficial. In building connections outside of traditional forms of academic advising, students are able to gain access to a different form of advising that can feel more personal and meaningful. One participant explained,

“I feel like my career counselor has been really helpful to me, like thinking about my future, getting internships. They always send me opportunities I could apply to, and it’s really helped me in my journey throughout college.”

For some, these services provided the individualized attention they were unable to secure from advising offices. Others emphasized that alternative offices such as health or counseling services met needs that traditional advising could not, suggesting the value of a more integrated and holistic support structure across institutions.

Student Persistence & Resilience:

Across all of these reflections, students emphasized that advising profoundly shaped their confidence, independence, and persistence. Effective advising relationships empowered students not only with accurate information but also with the confidence to take ownership of their academic journeys. For those who often felt isolated or overwhelmed, this independence was invaluable. Yet even in the absence of reliable advising, students demonstrated resilience. As one student shared,

“Oh, maybe I’ll try and figure it out myself, or I’ll go to somebody else rather than my advisor.” Another reflected, “It kind of builds grit and resilience... Unfortunately, I had to go through all these different avenues to find out what would be best for me. In the long run it made me more educated... it definitely made me more determined.”

While students found ways to persist, they were clear that this resilience developed out of necessity, not because institutional systems had adequately supported them. In fact, for many, the resilience they developed was framed as a bittersweet outcome: evidence of their strength, but also of the systemic barriers that forced them to rely on it.

Online Accessibility:

Positive examples of walk-in options, early registration, and flexible support include making services accessible to various students’ needs. Two respondents have found advising services to be accessible when provided with virtual options. One respondent reports

“being able to meet with your advisor online has been a game changer for me. When I started school at a community college, you had to go in person, and being that, I work full time and haven’t always been in the neighborhood of my campus, being able to have those meetings that set up my paths were kind of difficult. But it’s nice that you can do that online.”

Having access to online advising options can work better for students with various responsibilities and schedules. Another respondent shares this sentiment when stating:

“I’m not required to meet with her, though it’s strongly encouraged. I tend to meet with her at least twice a semester at the beginning to like, plan my classes, and at the end to review if anything went wrong and see how to game plan for the next one. And mine’s at least all virtual, so it’s very accessible for me.”

In having different formats – whether in-person, online, or walk-in hours – students expressed benefits from having flexible and accessible advising options that best fit with their responsibilities and schedules.





Summary

Taken together, the listening sessions illustrate that advising at MSIs functions simultaneously as a critical support and a site of systemic challenge. Moreover, students experience a tension in their relationships with academic advising that reflects contradictions within the findings. When advisors are accessible, well prepared, and culturally responsive, they can have a transformative impact on students' academic trajectories and sense of belonging. Conversely, when advising systems are under-resourced, inconsistent, or disconnected from students' lived realities, the burden shifts onto students to navigate higher education largely on their own.

These findings suggest that advising can be successful for students when appropriate conditions are in place. Students' reports of advising as both successful and inaccessible indicate that these experiences are not mutually exclusive, but instead depend on specific contextual factors. For example, students identified virtual advising options as more approachable than other formats. In this context, a student's advising experience may have been effective and satisfactory, yet would have felt more accessible if it had been offered in a virtual setting. Similar dynamics help explain other findings that appear contradictory; rather than being mutually exclusive, they reflect the complexity of students' advising experiences.

Students' voices point clearly to solutions: expand advising staff, streamline and clarify institutional policies, ensure consistent training across advisors, strengthen communication practices, and integrate advising with broader career and student support services.

More broadly, these findings reinforce the need to situate advising reform within the larger equity mission of MSIs. While cultural background was not a dominant theme across sessions, students generally expressed indifference regarding whether their identities were acknowledged in advising. Aside from a few negative experiences and the specific needs of international students, most participants in our sample did not view cultural considerations as central to their advising experiences, suggesting that this dimension was less salient than structural and relational factors. Students in these institutions are often navigating intersecting challenges: being the first in their families to attend college, working long hours, and/or balancing family responsibilities alongside coursework. Advising in these contexts cannot be reduced to technical course scheduling; it must be understood as a comprehensive support mechanism that affirms students' intersecting identities and experiences, connects them to resources, and builds the confidence necessary for persistence. Institutions that invest in advising are therefore not only improving student satisfaction but also advancing broader goals of retention, graduation, and equity.



Discussion

This study examined advising experiences at Minority Serving Institutions through survey data and student listening sessions. Findings reveal a complex and paradoxical advising landscape: while students reported high satisfaction with advisors and recognized advising as critical to persistence, they simultaneously encountered structural and organizational barriers that limited meaningful engagement. This tension suggests that advising at MSIs functions as both a critical source of student support and a site where institutional inequities are reproduced. Importantly, advising outcomes were shaped less by individual advisor intent and more by institutional capacity, policies, and systems.

Importantly, students did not interpret advising challenges as a reflection of advisor indifference or incompetence alone. Rather, they demonstrated a nuanced understanding of the institutional conditions under which advisors work, often expressing empathy for advisors while still critiquing the systems that constrained meaningful engagement. These findings align with prior research indicating that advising effectiveness is shaped less by individual advisor intent and more by organizational capacity, institutional design, and policy decisions. In this way, the study contributes to the advising literature by centering student perspectives and highlighting how institutional structures mediate advising outcomes at MSIs.

Structural and Institutional Barriers

Across the listening sessions, students consistently attributed their difficulties and challenges in navigating higher education to institutional systems rather than individual advisor behaviors. One of the most persistent barriers that emerged was scheduling appointments, whether it was accessing appointments because of overbooked advisors, unclear scheduling systems, or the lack of compatible times with student's work and family commitments. These issues reflect the broader pressures that MSIs face, including high student-to-advisor ratios and resource constraints. While students were empathetic towards their advisors, they also recognized that these institutional barriers permeated into practical effects, and how long wait times, inconsistent availability, and confusing scheduling portals impeded their ability to make timely academic decisions.

Students also shared deep frustrations with inflexible institutional policies that tied advising procedures to enrollment or course access. For example, policies requiring PINs for registration, mandatory meetings, or strict deadlines with tuition payments, added stress for students, and in the most extreme cases, delayed graduation. This shows a broader disconnect between institutional expectations of students, and their lived realities. When advising is constrained by rigid systems, students bear the disproportionate burden of navigating institutional bureaucracy, especially those who are balancing full-time work, caregiving, commuting, or financial hardship.

The structural barriers identified in this study align with prior research, highlighting how institutional organization often determines whether advising is accessible, equitable, and responsive to students' needs. At MSIs, which are more likely to enroll first-generation, Pell-eligible, or historically marginalized students, scheduling barriers limit students' capacity to engage meaningfully with advising, and subsequently, their institution.

Understaffing Impact on Advising

Students across all the listening sessions underscored the negative effects of understaffing, noting that limited staff created stressful conditions for both students and advisors. A consequence of systemic understaffing is that advisors are unable to provide the level of individualized and tailored support that students need, creating a reactive environment, rather than a preventive approach. Participants noted that understaffing permeated across other departments, such as financial aid and their bursar's office, building tension. This understaffing contributes to rushed advising appointments, underpreparedness, generic conversations – inhibiting advisors from being able to build meaningful relationships with students. Even when advisors are reported to be well-intentioned and skilled, students feel how the constraints affect their ability to engage in personalized and developmental advising. These findings reinforce the idea that advising quality is inseparable from advising capacity. When caseloads are too large, even the most passionate and committed advisors cannot make up for institutional failures.

Advisor Competence, Consistency, and Cultural Responsiveness

The findings highlight diverse discrepancies of advising approaches and competence levels across MSIs. Some students encountered highly-knowledgeable and well-equipped advisors who engaged with their full academic records, anticipated needs, and offered concrete guidance about opportunities and pathways. Others described advising experiences with advisors who were unfamiliar with their degree requirements, were unprepared for meetings, or were able to provide them with relevant support. Some students reported receiving conflicting advice or inaccurate information from different departments, sometimes resulting in significant academic setbacks.

Though uneven, cultural competency and relatability emerged as an important and pertinent dimension of advising effectiveness. While some students did not care for identity alignments, others emphasized that relatable advisors – those who understand their backgrounds, immigrant experiences, or racial identities – enhanced trust and communication. Instances where advisors made insensitive comments about students' racial or cultural identities highlight the need for stronger equity-minded training, especially for advisors that engage with larger populations or marginalized students. Students also noted that current cultural competency efforts often felt “performative,” suggesting a need for ongoing institutional commitment to equity development, rather than one-off efforts. These patterns show the need for advisor preparedness beyond procedural knowledge, including development advising practices, cultural competency, and relationship building. Consistency, accuracy, and cultural responsiveness are essential to ensure that advising supports, rather than undermines, student progress.

Holistic Advising and Support for Academic, Personal, and Career Goals

Despite the challenges described above, students were also very clear about what effective advising looks and feels like for them. Holistic advising was consistently described as the most impactful form of support. Students valued advisors who reviewed their full academic history prior to meetings, connected them to relevant opportunities and resources, and also provided encouragement during moments of uncertainty. Advising that centered the whole student's context, rather than simplifying their experience to their caseload, aligned with

student's desire to have a sustained and collaborative partnership with their advisor, rather than the relationship feeling like a transactional interaction. Participants shared that holistic advising boosted their confidence and helped them navigate complex decisions. These findings parallel prior scholarship demonstrating that developmental and holistic advising practices are effective and welcomed at MSIs, where their unique student populations often face intersecting pressures related to identity, socioeconomic status, and institutional navigation.

Another facet that remained salient among students was career and financial advising. Students described this type of support as essential to their trajectory. Many students not only rely on advisors for course guidance, but have the expectation that these relationships will result in knowledge of fruitful opportunities, such as internships and scholarships to pursue. At the same time, gaps in communication between advisors, financial aid, and career services limited the accessibility of these resources.

Communication, Responsiveness, and Relationship-Building

Communication surfaced as a central component of advising quality across all four sessions. Students consistently stressed how clear, responsive, and ongoing communication with advisors was important to them. Their perceptions of accessibility and support was shaped by the micro interactions, such as timely email exchanges, consistent follow-up, and the ability to meet in the manner most accessible to them.

Students also cited poor communication, such as delayed responses or rushed meetings as contributing to a feeling of being dismissed or invisible to their advisors. On the other hand, strong relationships fostered trust, motivation, and academic confidence. Students felt most seen when their advisors took the time to listen to their concerns, responded thoughtfully, and jointly collaborated on academic planning. These relational dynamics highlight advising as an effective practice, not only a technical service.

When advising failed, students turned to peers as a means to fill gaps in communication and guidance. Peer advising, through either formal or informal mechanisms, helped students navigate course selections, financial decisions, and institutional norms. Students appreciated peer networks, but they also emphasized that peer advising should be used to complement, not replace, professional advising. This finding shows the importance of creating integrated advising ecosystems that leverage both professional and peer expertise.

Institutional Resources and Support Services

Beyond advising offices, participants emphasized the critical role that services such as financial aid, career services, mental health support, and student organizations played in student's ability to persist. Despite this, many services were described as underutilized due to inconsistent communication, limited visibility, or staffing shortages.

Many students described learning about important resources later in their academic careers, wishing they would have been made aware of opportunities earlier. However, when resources were accessible and effectively communicated, students described them as highly beneficial and sometimes even transformative. These findings suggest a need for more integrated communication strategies across campus units and clearer pathways for students to access support.

Positive Examples of Flexibility and Accessibility

Despite widespread structural challenges, students were explicit about the changes they wanted to see in their institutions to make advising more accessible such as walk-in appointments, flexible scheduling, virtual meeting options, and opportunities for early registration. These practices can be especially valuable for students with demanding work schedules, long commutes, or limited transportation access. Virtual advising in particular was described as “a game changer,” enabling students to fit advising into their schedules with more ease. To participants, this flexibility signals institutional care and responsiveness, demonstrating that advising systems can be designed to affirm student’s realities rather than further complicate them.



Recommendations and Implications for Institutional Reform:

Across the sessions, students were clear that advising meaningfully shapes their confidence, fosters independence, builds academic persistence, and contributes overall well-being. Effective advising experiences help students build self-efficacy and encourage them to pursue academic opportunities they might not have otherwise considered. Conversely, barriers or negative interactions prompt students to question their place within the institution, rely on informal networks, or navigate systems independently out of necessity rather than empowerment.

Students also articulated clear suggestions and recommendations for institutional improvement, including expanding advising staff, improving communication workflows, increasing cultural competency training, strengthening integration with career services, and improving consistency across advising practices. These recommendations were not presented as optional enhancements but as essential reforms to ensure equity in student support.

Increase Advising Capacity

Students consistently identified limited advising capacity as a major barrier to meaningful support. Large caseloads, limited availability, and long wait times constrained the depth and quality of advising interactions and contributed to frustration and disengagement. Institutions should, in the short-term, especially under financial constraints, conduct a gap analysis to identify breaks in capacity, particularly during high-traffic periods such as registration. Once these gaps are identified, advising offices can reallocate staff during times of high demand, expand walk-in, or add virtual advising hours. Longer-term planning should focus on systemic changes like additional staffing or peer advising programs. As one student emphasized,

“Yeah, so definitely, I would say, just a larger advising staff. That’d be great. Improving the flow of communication.”

Expanding advising capacity would allow for more frequent, proactive engagement and reduce the reliance on reactive or transactional advising models. The Boyer 2030 Commission Report, *The Equity\Excellence Imperative*, recommends a ratio of one advisor for every 250 students (Boyer 2030 Commission, 2022). While some institutions may face structural challenges in meeting this standard, there are low-cost, and in some cases, no-cost, strategies to address advisor capacity in the long run. Institutions should develop peer advising systems to leverage students seeking professional experience while supporting advising office operations. With foundational training, peer advisors can handle routine, high-volume questions, allowing full-time advisors to focus on more complex student needs. Peer advisors should also receive the same equity-focused, culturally responsive training as full-time staff to ensure holistic and inclusive advising practices.

Standardize and Clarify Advising Processes

Inconsistent information and unclear advising-related policies emerged as significant sources of stress and mistrust for students. Participants described receiving contradictory guidance across advisors and departments, leading to delayed graduation, unnecessary coursework, and financial strain.

Institutions should work to standardize advising processes, clarify scopes of practice, and streamline policies related to registration, degree planning, and student holds. In the short-term, institutions should foster working relationships between advising, career services/professional centers, financial aid, and academic departments to ensure protocols and guidance are aligned across all student systems. These systems should also develop a shared referral pathway so crossunit collaboration is more synergized. Joint workshops or shared advising tools are useful resources that can be utilized between institutional systems.

Clear, consistent systems reduce the risk of misinformation and place fewer burdens on students to navigate fragmented institutional structures. The Advising Success Network has an established framework called [SSIPP or Sustained, Strategic, Integrated, Proactive, and Personalized framework](#) (Community College Research Center, 2019). This could be the operational standard for all institutions, and would address many of the challenges students' vocalized during our study. The framework ensures students are supported with advising that is holistic in strategy, integrated with other student systems, and proactive in outreach.

Strengthen Communication and Follow-Up Practices

Effective communication was repeatedly identified as central to positive advising experiences. Students expressed a need for clearer expectations around advisor responsiveness, follow-up after meetings, and ongoing engagement throughout the academic term. Institutions should establish shared standards for communication and follow-up, ensuring that students receive timely responses and continued support beyond initial advising appointments.

While many advising models recommend prompt responses to student inquiries, the absence of a clear definition of "prompt" can lead to inconsistent practices, particularly in advising units that are over capacity. When crafting policies for advising staff, institutions should clearly define response-time expectations; a response window of no longer than 48 hours is recommended (Purdue University College of Science, n.d.). As an additional strategy, institutions may consider expanding the use of peer advisors to address routine or lower-complexity questions. This approach can meet students' immediate needs while freeing advising staff to focus on more complex concerns. Strengthening communication workflows can help students feel seen, supported, and confident in their academic decisions.

Expand Equity-Minded and Culturally Responsive Training

While many students described positive advising experiences, others highlighted gaps in cultural competency and equity-minded practice. Some students felt misunderstood or minimized by advisors who lacked awareness of their cultural, first-generation, or immigrant experiences. Students emphasized the importance of both increasing cultural diversity among advising staff and ensuring that all advisors engage in continuous professional development. As one student shared,

"I'm a woman of color, and most of my advisors throughout my college career have been male and white. So just having someone that does understand a little bit about the background that you come from would be helpful in regards to creating that relationship."

Another noted the need for ongoing learning, stating,

"I think just refreshing their mindsets every year, like as the climates change, being able to learn."

Institutions should invest in regular, sustained training focused on developmental advising, cultural responsiveness, and equity-centered frameworks. There are numerous equity-minded frameworks and culturally responsive training models available to support the professional development of advising staff (NACADA, Advising Success Network, or the campus DEI office). Many of these resources are freely available and can be readily implemented by advising offices. These trainings often include self-assessment tools that help advisors reflect on their cultural sensitivity and competency, as well as role-playing scenarios that prepare advisors to work more effectively with students from diverse backgrounds (Advising Success Network, n.d.).

For institutions that prefer to outsource training, partnerships with local or regional external organizations can be a cost-effective option. Advising offices may collaborate with nearby institutions to host shared equity-focused training sessions for advising staff, particularly in regions with high populations of historically marginalized or underrepresented students. Cost-sharing models reduce financial barriers and expand access to meaningful professional development opportunities.

A meaningful starting point for institutions of higher education would be to require mandatory, annual equity-focused or culturally responsive training for advising staff using existing free or low-cost resources. Simultaneously, this training should be embedded in the onboarding process for new hires in the advising office. To assess the effectiveness or impact on student advising satisfaction, institutions should administer a survey and use the findings to inform future investments in advising professional development.

Integrate Advising Ecosystems Across Campus

Students also emphasized the importance of stronger integration between advising and other campus support services, including career services, financial aid, and peer advising programs. When these services operated in silos, students often missed out on critical resources or received inconsistent guidance. Institutions should adopt a more coordinated advising ecosystem that aligns academic advising with career development, financial support, and peer-based resources. Strengthening these connections can ensure that students receive holistic guidance that supports both their immediate academic needs and long-term goals.



Conclusion

The findings of these two concurrent studies illustrate that, under the right conditions, academic advising has a profound impact on students at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). The critical questions that institutions, higher education practitioners, and researchers must now confront are how these conditions can be intentionally created and how they can be sustained over time. The recommendations presented in this report offer meaningful and actionable next steps, particularly within the context of persistent funding constraints, by emphasizing low- and no-cost strategies that institutions can implement immediately.

At the same time, maximizing the long-term impact of advising at MSIs will require continued research, dialogue, and institutional commitment to broader systemic change. Focusing exclusively on short-term solutions risks reinforcing a higher education landscape that normalizes inadequate resourcing for advising, despite clear evidence from this study that advising functions as a critical lever in supporting the persistence and success of students from historically-marginalized and underrepresented backgrounds. Advancing equity at MSIs therefore requires not only incremental improvements, but sustained investment in advising systems that are adequately resourced, strategically designed, and grounded in the lived experiences of students.





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