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### Graduate Student Awareness of Student Services

Shayla Schumacher  
*Minnesota State University, Mankato*

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Graduate Student Awareness of Student Services

By

Shayla Schumacher

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

In

Sociology

College Teaching Emphasis

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Mankato, Minnesota

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Graduate Student Awareness of Student Services

Shayla Schumacher

This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student's committee.

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Chair, Dr. Sarah Epplen

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Committee Member, Dr. Paul Prew

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Committee Member, Dr. Kellian Clink

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## **ABSTRACT**

Studies have shown that student services aid in students' success while attending college, however many students may not utilize these resources or even know they exist. Furthermore, there is limited research on graduate students' awareness and usage of these services. Graduate students face different circumstances than other student populations yet may not access these beneficial resources. This study uses a mixed methods survey to examine graduate students' awareness and usage of student services at a state school. This study shows attending the university as an undergraduate student first contributes to a student's knowledge and usage of student services.

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

My thesis examines graduate student awareness of student services. Past research on student awareness of services has been somewhat limited, as it generally focuses on specific groups such as international or first-generation students. For the purpose of this study, I define student services as non-academic campus resources available to students while they are attending school. Common student services include the food pantry, student health services, counseling center, LGBT center, Women's center, etc. Academic resources such as tutoring or writing centers are not included in an effort to focus on non-academic student services.

Many students face barriers, often multiple barriers, in trying to access student services. This can include a lack of knowledge of available services, conflicts with scheduled availability, low expectations of getting support, lack of remote access, and stigmas around seeking help (Cheatham et al. 2021; Crawler and Fetzner 2013; Leong and Sedlacek 1986; Mau and Jepsen 1990; Perry et al. 2020; Russell, Thomson, and Rosenthal 2008). Resources such as counseling centers can be underutilized or not accessed by students due to wanting to avoid potential stigmas of getting mental health help, a lack of knowledge about the services, or a lack of culturally appropriate services (Leong and Sedlacek 1986; Mau and Jepsen 1990). Students may also not go to a food pantry in attempts to avoid stigmas, especially if it is in a visible or highly trafficked area. Students may also not utilize student services due to lack of online or remote access or not being able to go when they are open, especially if they have class or work another job during that time. Another major barrier is lack of knowledge (or awareness) of available services. If students are not aware of what resources exist, they cannot use them.

To help increase usage, student services may have to increase awareness. Studies have shown several outreach tactics that improve student experiences (Baranova, Morrison, and

Mutton 2011). This includes utilizing media channels (such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.), providing extensive customer training for staff, and providing orientations focused on student transitions to living on campus or at least away from home. Studies have also found that students often seek out help through referrals by authority figures, such as faculty/advisors or even upperclassmen or friends (Dietsche 2012; Hwang, Bennett, and Beauchemin 2014; Leong and Sedlacek 1986). Thus, it might be beneficial for student services to collaborate with departments and faculty directly to help increase awareness. Instead of learning about resources directly from these services, students may learn about them from conversations with friends or peers, or from looking on university websites and social media to learn about what is available to them. This research aims to better understand graduate students' awareness of student services.

Student Services in Higher Education is a massive industry with roughly 16 billion dollars spent on student services across public four-year institutions in 2018-2019 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics 2021b). However, while there is funding for a variety of services, not every student uses them or feels like they have access to them. Some of the most common challenges college students face include financial difficulties, food insecurity, and trouble finding housing (Freudenberg, Goldrick-Rab, and Poppendieck 2019; Nyland, Forbes-Mewett, and Hartel 2013). These challenges can have negative effects on a student's success. Studies have found that students who face food insecurity are more likely to have a lower grade point average, take longer to graduate, or are more likely to dropout (Maroto, Snelling, and Linck 2015; Martinez et al. 2020; Morris et al. 2016). Student services can be greatly beneficial to student success and can be especially effective for students who are academically or economically disadvantaged. Additionally, studies have shown that students who do use student services are generally satisfied with them and will continue to use them



(Ammigan and Jones 2018; Dietsche 2012; Yorgason, Linville, and Zitzman 2008). While these studies focus on undergraduates, or do not distinguish between undergraduates and graduate students, I set out to examine graduate students' experience with student services. What is missing from research on the variety of effective and beneficial services offered by universities, including MSU, is awareness and usage by graduate students.

Minnesota State University, Mankato (MSU), specifically, spent an estimated \$240 million in 2019-2020 to serve more than 14,000 students, including roughly 2,400 graduate students (Minnesota State University, Mankato 2021; Minnesota State University, Mankato 2022c). There are roughly 85 graduate programs, including master's degrees, graduate certificates, and specialist and doctoral programs. On its website, MSU broadcasts a "vibrant campus life" with more than 200 student organizations, including the Women's Center, LGBT Center, etc. Additionally, the university highlights that it has served more than 89,700 meals through the Campus Kitchen since 2005. However, despite this specific highlight, a study done in 2018 at MSU found that students at MSU are still facing a higher level of food insecurity than the national average, with only 36% of undergraduates reporting being food secure (Briggs et al. 2018:11). This study found that 54% of their respondents also faced some level of housing insecurity (Briggs et al. 2018:11). As I mentioned earlier, facing food and housing insecurity can have negative impacts on student's academic success, impacting retention rates. Existing literature has shown that lacking basic necessities and support is hard on the student and their potential for success (Briggs et al. 2018:11).

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

Pursuing higher education, whether at a two- or four-year institution can be a daunting task. Incoming students come from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences and have different resources to support them. Some, more than others, rely on student services to meet their basic needs and support them through their education. Student services, for the purpose of this study, is defined as non-academic campus resources available to students while they are attending school. They exist to support students in their personal and professional lives to help them succeed in school. Common student services include food pantries, student health/counseling centers, LGBT centers, Women's centers, Career centers, etc. Past research on student awareness of services has been somewhat limited, as it generally focuses on specific groups such as international or first-generation students. Studies have identified that student services are often underutilized and with most research focusing on undergraduate students.

### **Budget for Student Services**

In the 2018-2019 school year, it was estimated that degree-granting postsecondary institutions in the United States spent \$632 billion, with \$401 billion spent in public institutions (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics 2021a). Interestingly, private two-year and four-year institutions spend more on academic support, student services, and institutional support than public two-year and four-year universities. Public institutions spend the most on instruction (faculty) expenses (40% of their budget for two-year public institutions, and 27% for four-year institutions) (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics 2021a).

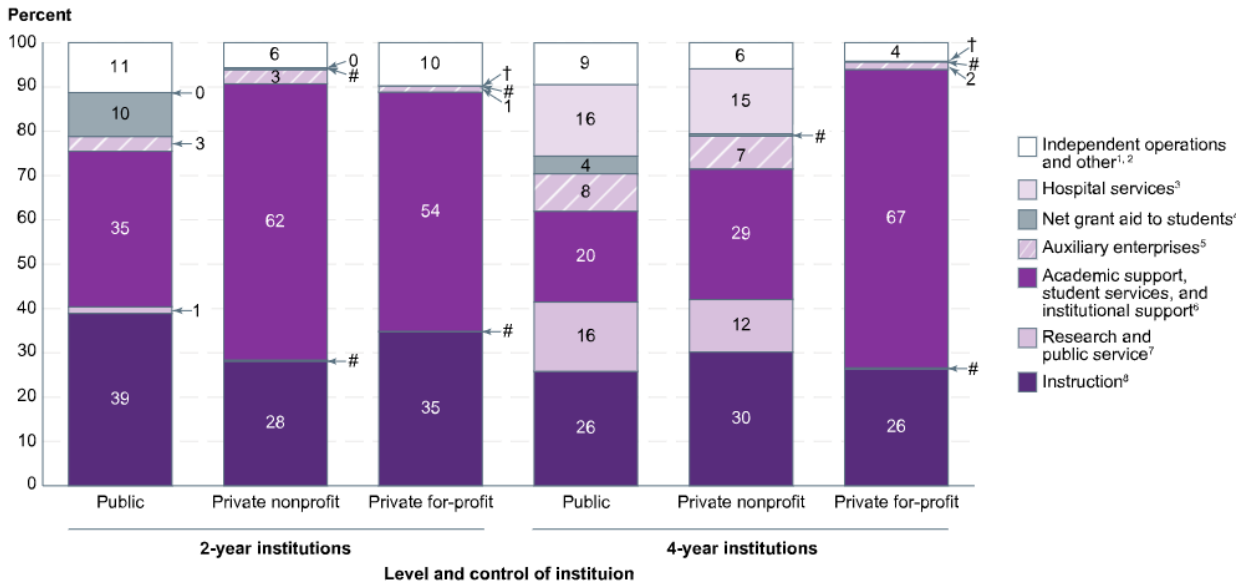


Figure 1: (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics 2021a)

The next highest spending category is the combined category of academic support, student services, and institutional support. Public two-year institutions spend 36% of their budget on this category and public four-year institutions only spend 27% of their budget on this category. This is much lower than private nonprofit and private for-profit institutions as they spend between 30% to 66% of their budgets on this expense category (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics 2021a). Overall public four-year institutions spending on student services has gone up roughly five percent each year since the 2009-2010 school year, with roughly 16 billion dollars being spent on student services across public four-year institutions in 2018-2019 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics 2021b).

### History of Student Services

Looking at the history of student services in colleges, it is understandable why it is a large portion of their budget. One of the first cases of student services existing in colleges was with the introduction of Normal schools in the mid-1800s (Remenick 2019). While the Normal

schools or “teachers’ colleges” were not as nearly as distinguished as traditional colleges, they existed to serve nontraditional students (Ogren 2003). The students who went to these Normal Schools were typically from nontraditional backgrounds; they were older, from lower socioeconomic classes, and because they had responsibilities outside of school (such as families and jobs), were typically part-time students (Ogren 2003). To support their nontraditional students, Normal schools had smaller-sized programs and classes, allowing them to build a sense of community and support (Bean & Metzner 1985). Organizations and extracurricular meetings would be held at atypical times (such as evenings and weekends), and some schools also honored “society work” where students could earn class credit through their personal lives, such as through paid work (Ogren 2003). Another period of change came from the Higher Education Act of 1965 which introduced the Pell Grant (formally known as the Basic Educational Opportunities Grant) as well as an increase of community colleges (Remenick 2019). These factors allowed universities to expand their student populations and compete in recruiting nontraditional students. In the 1990s, there was another wave of adaptations to accommodate online learners (Remenick 2019).

### **Benefits of Student Services**

As they have evolved, student services work to better support students and help them tackle challenges they face. Some of the most common challenges college students face include financial difficulties, food insecurity, and trouble finding housing (Freudenberg, Goldrick-Rab, and Poppendieck 2019; Nyland, Forbes-Mewett, and Hartel 2013). Food insecurity among college students have been associated with negative academic affects, and studies have shown that students who face food insecurity are more likely to have a lower grade point average, take longer to graduate, or are more likely to dropout (Maroto, Snelling, and Linck 2015; Martinez et

al. 2020; Morris et al. 2016). Some of the most common student services offered to combat food insecurity are food pantries, free meal vouchers, and emergency assistance funds (Freudenberg, Goldrick-Rab, and Poppendieck 2019). Students also experience large amounts of stress. Oswalt and Riddock (2007) found that respondents in their survey of graduate students reported high levels of stress, with 73.6% reported being very stressed. Causes of stress range from finances to jobs, to schoolwork, they also reported feeling stressed from loneliness, time-management, and academic issues (Oswalt and Riddock 2007).

Retention rates are related to overall campus experiences and therefore student affairs and services personnel, including counseling and career centers, residence halls, dining facilities, multicultural centers, and academic staff collaborate to address the needs of students and improve their experiences (Jones 2013 and Kuh 2005). Collaboration between academic and student affairs can be key for a student's success while in college. This is often done by having new student orientations and welcome weeks that allow students to explore student services while also learning about their academic career (Kuh 2005). Student affairs staff is often key to this collaboration where they are "partners in learning in developing a community of learners" and "an extension of the classroom" by providing support and guidance to students (Kuh 2005:166).

Ammigan and Jones' (2018) study on satisfaction levels of undergraduate international students in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States found that students reported significant impact on their experiences from International Offices, dining facilities, and clubs and societies, with International Offices being the most beneficial (Ammigan and Jones 2018). Students who see the greatest benefits from using student services are those who are academically and economically disadvantaged (Ehrenberg and Webber 2010). Studies have

shown that students who use student services are both aware of them and are generally satisfied with them (Ammigan and Jones 2018; Dietsche 2012; Yorgason, Linville, and Zitzman 2008).

Specific programs such as Residential Life (living on-campus, in the dorms) can provide formative experiences for students, specifically undergraduate students (Kuh 2005). On-campus living can foster communities of both diverse and like-minded students, aiding them in their academic studies by encouraging engagement with faculty and other students, as well as on-campus activities and organizations. Learning communities are a popular service among various colleges, they allow students to live and collaborate with students in similar programs, encouraging student participation in campus activities and providing a support system of their peers, hall directors, and faculty (Kuh 2005). These communities may also encourage volunteering and service work in the community, allowing students to explore other areas and give back to the community (Kuh 2005).

Student services such as counseling centers are especially vital now in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Copeland et al. (2021) note that students may feel additional stress and toll on their emotional health as their routines and support systems were disrupted. They found that on average, students rated personal COVID disruption a 7.8 on a ten-point scale from “not at all disruptive” to “extremely disruptive” (Copeland et al. 2021). Overall, students’ mood and wellness dropped after COVID disruptions occurred, resulting in lower levels of exercise, nutrition, sleep, and hydration, and an increase in screen usage (Copeland et al. 2021). Another study also shows that the majority of students experienced some form of psychological distress during the early pandemic (Lee, Jeong, and Kim 2021). They also found that almost half of their respondents scored high enough to be recommended to seek out professional help for anxiety disorders (Lee, Jeong, and Kim 2021).

In the past couple of years, universities have changed their policies to allow for more online options, accommodation for new routines, and changes to student services disrupted students' routines and canceled some services. As students transition back to some sense of "normal," student services remain an important factor in their success at school. Student services exist to provide comfort and support for students. Services such as LGBT Centers aim to "heighten campus and community awareness of LGBTQIA concern and strive to ensure every individual has equal opportunity to learn, work, and grow in a supportive and safe environment" (Minnesota State University, Mankato 2022a). Other services such as Veteran Centers exist to "help you connect with other veterans and make a smooth transition to a successful college life" (Minnesota State University, Mankato 2022b).

### **Barriers to Accessing Student Services**

Many students face various, and multiple, barriers when trying to access student services. This can include low expectations of getting support, a lack of knowledge of available services, stigmas, and lack of remote access (Cheatham et al. 2021; Crawler and Fetzner 2013; Leong and Sedlacek 1986; Mau and Jepsen 1990; Perry et al. 2020; Russell, Thomson, and Rosenthal 2008). Not every student has equal access to student services. Another common barrier to success is lack of representation or finding support from people with similar identities (Strayhorn 2013). While LGBT centers may exist, they are often white centered, meaning queer students of color may not be comfortable reaching out and finding support there.

International students are one population that has been heavily studied in the hopes of aiding in their success while at school. Like many other student populations, some challenges international students face includes financial difficulties, difficulties in finding affordable housing, and safety and security concerns (Nyland, Forbes-Mewett, and Hartel 2013). While

student services at colleges often attempt to combat these difficulties, Ammigan and Jones (2018) found that international students were the least satisfied with the cost of accommodations in the United States. This could pose a barrier for students' overall success. If students are worried about the cost of living, it takes time and focus away from their studies. Additionally, they found that support services were the lowest rated experience in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Ammigan and Jones 2018).

When it comes to mental health, stigmas can prevent people from seeking out professional help. Stigmas may be internalized or may come from the public. Stigmas especially prevent racial and ethnic minorities from seeking help. For instance, Crowe and Kim (2020) found that Hispanic respondents had fewer positive attitudes towards mental health treatment compared to white respondents. People will refrain from seeking out professional help to avoid judgment or discrimination from others. People with mental illness may also develop psychological resilience where they may attempt to take back control or create a support network. People may take back control by talking about their mental health. This is especially seen beneficial in terms of attending therapy and learning skills to cope with their diagnosis (Huggett et al. 2018). However, taking control can be difficult as it can be hard to discuss private matters or determine who a student can trust (Huggett et al. 2018). Similarly, students may try to create a support network of their peers in attempts to overcome stigmas and take control of their mental health. These groups include other people who also experience mental health problems, as they are better able to discuss and support each other without feeling stigmatized (Huggett et al. 2018).

Resources such as counseling centers can be underutilized or accessed by international students due to wanting to avoid potential stigmas of getting mental health help, a lack of



knowledge about the services, and a lack of culturally appropriate services (Leong and Sedlacek 1986; Mau and Jepsen 1990). A study done by Kahn, Wood, and Wiesen (1999) found that the majority of college students in their study were aware that there was a counseling center but were unaware of what services were provided. Russell, Thomson, and Rosenthal (2008) also found the lack of knowledge resulted in about a third of Australian international students not utilizing the health services offered on campus. Of greater concern, half of respondents did not use the services because they did not know where to go (Russell, Thomson, and Rosenthal 2008). This suggests that student services need to ensure they are providing adequate and useful information, including location, hours, and a website, so students are able to adequately find and access these services.

Wanting to avoid stigmas may also mean students do not go to the food pantry on campus. Cheatham et al. (2021) suggests that students may feel stigmatized and shamed by going to a campus pantry located in a central, visible location. While services should be accessible, it may not be the most beneficial for them to be widely visible as students may feel uncomfortable being seen at the food pantry or at the counseling the center. Purdam, Garratt, and Esmail (2016) suggest that there are hidden costs of going to a foodbank. This can include a long travel/commute or perceived stigma and shame. Foodbank users may be perceived or perceive themselves to lack autonomy by being dependent on others, not having food options, or not being able to provide for their families (Purdam et al. 2016). People typically go to foodbanks once they are desperate, and only if other options are not panning out, such as not receiving enough benefits or welfare, having reduced work or pay, or being unemployed (Purdam et al. 2016). Foodbanks can also be seen as reassuring for people as they know they can get food if they need it (Purdam et al. 2016).

Childcare is a very important consideration, and possible barrier for student parents. Many rely on having childcare services on campus in order to be able to attend class, tutoring, extracurricular activities, etc. (Carlson 2015). A great way for colleges to help support these students is to provide childcare centers on campus with extended evening and weekend hours, allowing students to attend evening classes, activities, or study on campus (Kuh 2005).

### **Awareness of Student Services**

The lack of knowledge of available services is a major factor as to why students underutilize what resources are offered (Perry et al. 2020). If students are not aware of what resources exist, they cannot utilize them. Perry et al. (2020:614) suggests that “if universities make an effort to improve visibility of these programs, students will utilize more services, therefore improving graduation rates, and improving the university’s return on investment.” This lack of awareness results in low utilization of student services. Perry et al. (2020) asked both international and domestic students about their level of knowledge of student services. They found that roughly half of all students had awareness of what student services were offered to them (Perry et al. 2020). They also found that international students were less likely to be aware of available student services (Perry et al. 2020). They also found that only around 40% of students found the services they utilized to be “useful.” This could be due to a number of reasons including when they are available, lack of virtual option, and the inconvenience of location (Dietsche 2012; Ellis-Bosold and Thornton-Orr 2013; Perry et al. 2020; Roberts and Dunworth 2012).

Yorgason et al. (2008:175) found that 37% of their respondents in their study did not receive “adequate information to enable them to contact the mental health services,” one-third had not heard about these services, and about one-third had heard about them but did not know

any information. They also found that male students were less likely to have used the mental health services than the female students. Additionally, newer students or students who live off-campus were also less likely to know about these services or not have used them (Yorgason et al. 2008). Students reported several reasons for not using the mental health services, including not having enough time, lack of knowledge, embarrassment, or they did not think the services would help (Yorgason et al. 2008).

Fouad et al. (2006) examined student awareness of student services on campus. They found that nearly all respondents were aware of student health services as well as the benefits (free services, no insurance needed) but only 42% were aware of the counseling services. Their study also noted a difference between awareness and use. Suggesting that even though students may be aware of what services exist, they are not utilizing them or may be going elsewhere for support. Similarly, when graduate students were asked what other services, they would like to see at the health center, they reported wanting to see lower costs of services, more access and availability of services, and more alternative stress reduction activities (Oswalt and Riddock 2007).

Grim et al. (2021) discuss how people gather information through a typology of hot and cold information sources. Cold information sources are considered to be official information (like what a university distributes about its services), whereas hot information sources are considered to be more familiar, informal, and come from close relationships. There are also warm information sources, such as university faculty who have some level of relationship with the students and are able to pass along information and referrals (Slack, Hughes, and Davies 2014).

Cold information sources are formal sources, such as university websites and brochures, and are intended to reach a large number of people (such as college students) (Grim et al. 2021). This means the information is not often tailored to speak to individual students who may be coming from different backgrounds (first generation, international, nontraditional, etc.). Grim et al. (2021:10) learned that students found these sources “sometimes helpful” at least for “gaining initial awareness of campus-wide student success resources.” However, students reported that these cold information sources were not so helpful in troubleshooting issues, such as how to access or utilize these services (Grim et al. 2021). Additionally, students tend to forget cold information overtime. Meaning that even if they learn about a student service (like the career development center) during orientation or in the first couple of weeks of school, they may forget about it, or what it offers when they need it. Even so, cold information seeking is very common, with nearly all students seeking out cold information at some point in time, most typically via the internet (Grim et al. 2021; Head and Eisenberg 2009).

Warm information sources are the middle ground. Within a university, this would be like a student’s relationship with a professor or advisor (Grim et al. 2021). There is still some formality but there is a level of familiarity (Slack et al. 2014). This can also include pre-college programs such as admitted student days and orientations as they are geared towards making the incoming first-year students more comfortable (Grim et al. 2021). Grim et al. (2021) found warm information seeking to be the most common in their study as students most commonly turned to mentors and coordinators to help answer questions and seek support.

Hot information gathering is the most trustworthy source of information, as students have strong and familiar relationships with the source of the information (such as peers and those who have “shared identities”) (Grim et al. 2021:13). These hot information sources can often be seen

as the most helpful and trusted ways to find solutions to issues. Grim et al. (2021:14) also found that academic advisors have the ability to become a hot information source when they “(a) encouraged the student to approach them with any question at any time, (b) provided useful unknown information, and (c) promoted a student’s self-efficacy in both academics and campus navigation.”

There are several outreach tactics that have been proven to show improvement in student experiences. This includes the usage of media channels, extensive customer service training for staff, and orientations focusing on student transitions to living on campus (Baranova, Morrison, and Mutton 2011). Studies have found that students tend to seek help through referrals by authority figures (faculty and staff) and are more likely to use services if they have been referred (Dietsche 2012; Hwang, Bennett, and Beauchemin 2014; Leong and Sedlacek 1986). This suggests that it may be beneficial for student services to collaborate with departments and faculty directly when doing outreach to increase awareness. Additionally, Zhai (2004) found that international students may also go to their peers for help, which likely does not result in all their needs being met. Yorgason et al. (2008) found that students who knew about the available mental health services became aware of them through friends/peers, advertisements, and the internet.

Fouad et al. (2006) found that roughly half of student respondents were aware of the career services, and more than two-thirds were aware of the career fairs held. The most visible service is the career fair, also the most widely advertised. They found that students were less aware of the career center’s website, workshops, and resume and job search assistance (Fouad et al. 2006). Different groups of students may gather information differently. For example, first generation college students may rely on friends or the internet to gather information about their

college and their student services. Grim et al. (2021:3) found that students may need to gather information through supplementary sources because provided university information was “opaque or not culturally relevant.”

One common way to expose incoming undergraduate students to student services is through first-year programs and seminars that introduce students to various resources and departments on campus (Kuh 2005). These classes aim to introduce new students to campus and help them navigate school, while also trying to prevent them from getting lost among the sea of people. Schools may also offer summer transition programs that give extra assistance to incoming students who may need a little help adjusting to college life (Kuh 2005). Other orientation efforts include having a welcome week where there are many events around campus to allow students to get acquainted with various departments and programs and to help them feel as though they belong (Kuh 2005). These efforts are generally only focused on undergraduate students, with separate orientations for graduate students. Polson (2003) recommends that student service staff be included in these events to help promote awareness of their services. One study noted that there was an “apparent disconnect between the availability of services and the level of outreach being done to promote awareness of these services” with graduate students (Greene 2015:507).

### **Support Systems**

The support of others is one of the most important factors in a student’s (including a graduate student’s) ability to complete their program (Greene 2015). Support can come from a variety of places, including family and friends, faculty and advisors, and student services (Greene 2015). Greene (2015) found that having support (especially having a supportive supervisor) was essential to continuing in a graduate program. However, despite this importance,

many graduate students feel isolated and alone while attempting to complete their program (Greene 2015). Support also comes from advising, something that graduate students, especially those classified as adult-learners (over 24 years old) may lack (Schroeder and Terras 2015). They found that graduate students in their study identified the importance of good advising, where students can trust the process of advising during their program, be seen as individuals, and have their advisors be readily available for them (Schroeder and Terras 2015). Support for their instructors and faculty is often considered “important” or “very important” to graduate students (Milman et al. 2015).

In a study done on graduate student perceptions of support, they found that participants were “generally not very familiar with programs and services offered” nor did they know what the role of each program was (Greene 2015:507). Instead of reaching out to student services on campus, many graduate students instead find their support within their department (Greene 2015). Milman et al. (2015) also found that a small number of graduate students utilized student services such as the counseling center, veterans’ office, international services, etc.

Graduate students also often face the specific barrier of funding, as those who receive funding are more likely to persist with their program, whereas those who do not are more likely to not complete it (Greene 2015). These financial barriers play a large role in the success of a student. If they do not have adequate funding, they may have to work another job, taking away from their classwork and resulting in taking longer to complete their program or even dropping out. However, if they have funding, they are less likely to have to work another job (or work less hours) and can focus more on their classwork and research.

Another significant barrier of accessing student services can be the lack of online or remote access (Crawler and Fetzner 2013). Online services not only benefit remote students but

also allow local students to access these services without needing to go to the physical location. Graduate students are also likely to be online learners and not come to campus often, meaning they can face unique challenges with getting support on campus. Students who take classes online have reported that their greatest need for support is in program guidance and assistance, which often comes from their advisor (Schroeder and Terras 2015). Another major need is immediately or timely responses and electronic communication from both their program and their advisors as they are the online students major link to the university (Schroeder and Terras 2015). Online graduate students place importance on their online community and view the ability to create connections and maintain interactions with others as “important” (Milman et al. 2015). Having these connections allow online students to gain support from others in a similar situation. Milman et al. (2015) found that having opportunities to connect with faculty and peers is especially important on micro-level, including topics related to coursework.

### **Minnesota State University, Mankato**

Minnesota State University, Mankato (MSU) had an estimated \$240 million operating budget for 2019-2020 to serve more than 14,000 students, including roughly 2,400 graduate students participating in more than 85 graduate programs including master’s, specialists, and doctoral programs (Minnesota State University, Mankato 2021; Minnesota State University, Mankato 2022c). MSU also highlights on its “Fast Facts” page, “a decade-long, dedicated response to hunger” through the Campus Kitchen which has served more than 89,700 meals since 2005 (Minnesota State University, Mankato 2022c). Additionally, MSU Mankato’s “vibrant campus life” has more than 200 student organizations, including a Women’s Center and LGBT Center (Minnesota State University, Mankato 2022c). Furthermore, MSU is identified as one of the “100 Best Campuses for LGBT students by The Advocate College Guide for LGBT



Students” (Minnesota State University, Mankato 2022c). Student services would fall under the department of Student Affairs at MSU where it “strives to provide excellent services and programs to support student learning... to create a student-centered environment that fosters student exploration, leadership, and the development of both big ideas and real-world thinking” (Minnesota State University, Mankato 2022d).

Other student services include the Campus Kitchen and Maverick Food Pantry. However, despite the work the Campus Kitchen has done, a 2018 study found that MSU undergraduate students are facing higher levels of food insecurity than the national average, with forty percent of undergraduate students surveyed experiencing “high or very high levels” of food insecurity, and 24 percent experiencing moderate levels (Briggs et al. 2018:11). Only 36 percent of their respondents reported being food secure (Briggs et al. 2018). They also found that undergraduate students who identified as Asian American or Black/African American experienced higher levels of food insecurity than other students (Briggs et al. 2018). In addition, the authors found that food insecurity can negatively impact a student’s academics, “39 percent did not perform as well academically as they otherwise would have, 20 percent missed a class, 16 percent opted not to join an extracurricular activity, 14 percent missed a study session, ten percent missed a club meeting, and three percent dropped a class” (Briggs et al. 2018;13). Students also responded that food insecurity also took a toll on their emotional and mental health (Briggs et al. 2018).

Additionally, their study found that 54 percent of their respondents had faced some level of housing insecurity in the last year (Briggs et al. 2018). There was also a significant correlation between food insecurity and housing insecurity, where 60 percent of respondents reported both (Briggs et al. 2018). 75 percent of students reported getting food from the grocery store and only 4 percent reported getting food from a food pantry or food shelf (Briggs et al. 2018). Since this

study, a second food pantry, the Maverick Food Pantry, has been introduced on campus to help feed students.

Graduate students at MSU were not included as part of the previous study, yet they make a significant population on campus. In Fall 2021, 2405 graduate students were enrolled at MSU, with 748 being full-time students and 1657 being part-time students (Minnesota State University, Mankato 2021). The age range among graduate students varies greatly between 19-55 plus. Roughly 26% of graduate students are between the ages of 21-24 years old, 41% between 25-34 years old, 21% between 35-44 years old, and 9% between 45-54%. Additionally, most graduate students (1781) are considered non-residents while only 623 (or 26%) are residents (Minnesota State University, Mankato 2021). My research question(s) are, to what extent are graduate students aware of the student services available to them at MSU, Mankato? What barriers are preventing them from accessing these resources?

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

### Design

This study examines individual graduate students and how they interact with student services. It also indirectly assesses programs and resources as it asks how graduate students use and feel about these programs. Data for this study is from an anonymous 33-question Qualtrics survey (see Appendix A). The survey was sent to graduate students at Minnesota State University, Mankato (MSU) to learn about their awareness, usage, and barriers to student services. The goal of this study is to better understand how graduate students are using student services and what are the potential barriers that are keeping them from accessing these services. An online survey was conducted to easily reach all graduate students at MSU and as a way to quantify and analyze all data gathered. A survey allows me to ask all graduate students at MSU, whereas other methods would not (Singer, 2004). The survey was approved by the Minnesota State University, Mankato Institutional Review Board.

### *Participants and Procedure*

I distributed the survey to graduate coordinators for each department to forward to their graduate students (see Appendix B) in October of 2022 (approximately half-way through the semester), giving new graduate students a chance to settle into school and become familiar with campus. A flyer with a QR Code and link to the survey was created and attached to the email to advertise the survey. Data was collected between October and December 2022. Any graduate student over the age of 18 who is currently attending MSU was eligible to participate in the survey. Data from those who do not meet this eligibility was discarded.

I specifically studied graduate students because they are often overlooked when researching student service usage at universities. Graduate students often rely on strong support

systems to help them through school (Schroeder and Terras 2015). However, they are typically not aware of what services are offered at universities (Greene 2015). There was consideration of including undergraduate students in the survey in order to compare graduate student awareness and usage to undergraduates. However, it was decided that this would take away from the focus on graduate students and their experiences in college.

## **Measures**

### *Quantitative Measures*

The independent variables include if the respondent attended MSU as an undergraduate and their race/ethnicity. The dependent variables include quantitative measures of whether respondents know about particular student services, how they learned about those services, how often they use them, and how important they are in completing their education. These variables are determined through a series of matrix tables and multiple-choice questions. One matrix table asks respondents how much they agreed or disagreed (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree) with statements on seeking out various student services on campus. Another asks if respondents know where certain services are, and how often they have used them and found them helpful. There is also a multiple-choice question asking how they learned about these services.

### *Qualitative Measures*

There are also qualitative measures examining what barriers and stigmas respondents face in trying to access services, as well as where they go for both informal and formal support. There are five open-ended question that allow participants to explain why they have or have not used some services and where they go for support and why. These questions allow for a deeper

analysis of what graduate usage of student services and how these services can better serve the graduate student population at MSU.

### **Data Analysis**

I use a mixed methods approach in my data analysis that uses both quantitative and qualitative analytic methods. Using both quantitative and qualitative analytic methods allow me to gain a stronger understanding and fuller picture of how graduate students learn and use resources on campus (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner 2007). Using mixed methods creates a more comprehensive, consistent, and valid idea of what graduate students know. This will aid in meeting the goals of my research project and answering my research question.

Eighty-six people started the survey with 69 people completing it. Most of the respondents were white and female, with only 14 being people of color, making comparisons between the populations somewhat difficult. I did attempt to diversify my respondent pool but that was not successful. Twelve respondents identify as male, three identify as non-binary, and three did not disclose their gender. Ages of the respondents range from 21 years old to 47 years old, with the average age being 26 years old.

### *Analysis*

I conducted both quantitative and qualitative analyses to best understand the data I had collected. Using Microsoft Excel, I conducted several t-tests to determine if there is statistical significance between the usage and knowledge of student services by if they attended MSU as an undergraduate and their race/ethnicity. In addition to the statistical analysis, I also conducted thematic analysis by coding the open-ended responses to the open-ended questions. Respondents' answers were coded using line-by-line coding then focused coding to identify the common themes in participants' responses to determine if there are similar reasons for where

students find support and what prevents them from using student services. Responses were also examined to determine if these populations have different sentiments and experiences about knowledge, use, and importance of student services.

Past research on student awareness of services has been somewhat limited, as it generally focuses on specific groups such as international or first-generation students. Graduate students are a unique group on campus. Many are considered nontraditional and/or did not complete their undergraduate degree at MSU. Additionally, they are more likely to attend remotely or stay within their own department/building on campus. This means that they may not be exposed to or aware of the many resources MSU has to offer them. This study will look at to what extent are graduate students aware of the student services available to them at MSU, Mankato and what barriers are preventing them from accessing these resources.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

Survey questions aimed to identify whether respondents know where to go on campus for specific help, the location of specific student services, how often they use various student services, and how helpful they found them. From the demographic information gathered, I determined that respondents' status as MSU alumni for undergraduate and their race/ethnicity may influence their knowledge and/or usage of student services. To determine if these different demographic factors contribute to graduate student knowledge and awareness of student services, I conducted several t-tests—statistical tests to compare means of two groups and determine if the difference is statistically significant or not. The data show that being an MSU Alum increases the likelihood of knowing where to go for support and using student services. The t-tests did not show a difference in the likelihood of knowledge and usage based on race/ethnicity.

Open-ended survey questions asked what prevents graduate student respondents from using student services, where they go for support, their support systems among their cohort and faculty, and what they consider to be the most important student service. Responses were coded using line-by-line coding and were grouped by themes. Comparisons were made between MSU alumni and non MSU alumni, and white and participants of color. Responses show that respondents overall feel like they have a strong level of support among their cohort and faculty, however students of color and those who do not come to campus report lower levels of support.

### **MSU Alumni vs. Non-MSU Alumni**

#### *Knowledge and Usage*

In comparing whether attending MSU as an undergraduate factor into knowledge and usage of student services, the t-test showed significance in the differences between those who are MSU Alumni and those who are not ( $P=.00 < .05$ ). T-tests also showed significant difference

between MSU Alumni and Non-MSU Alumni responses on the knowledge and the location of various student services ( $P=.00 < .05$ ), usage of services ( $P=.00 < .05$ ), and whether they found them helpful ( $P=.00 < .05$ ). As shown in Figure 2, MSU Alumni are more likely to know where to find student services compared to non-MSU Alumni. MSU Alumni were more likely to agree with knowing what service to go to, they were more likely to use student services more often, and they were more likely to find them helpful.

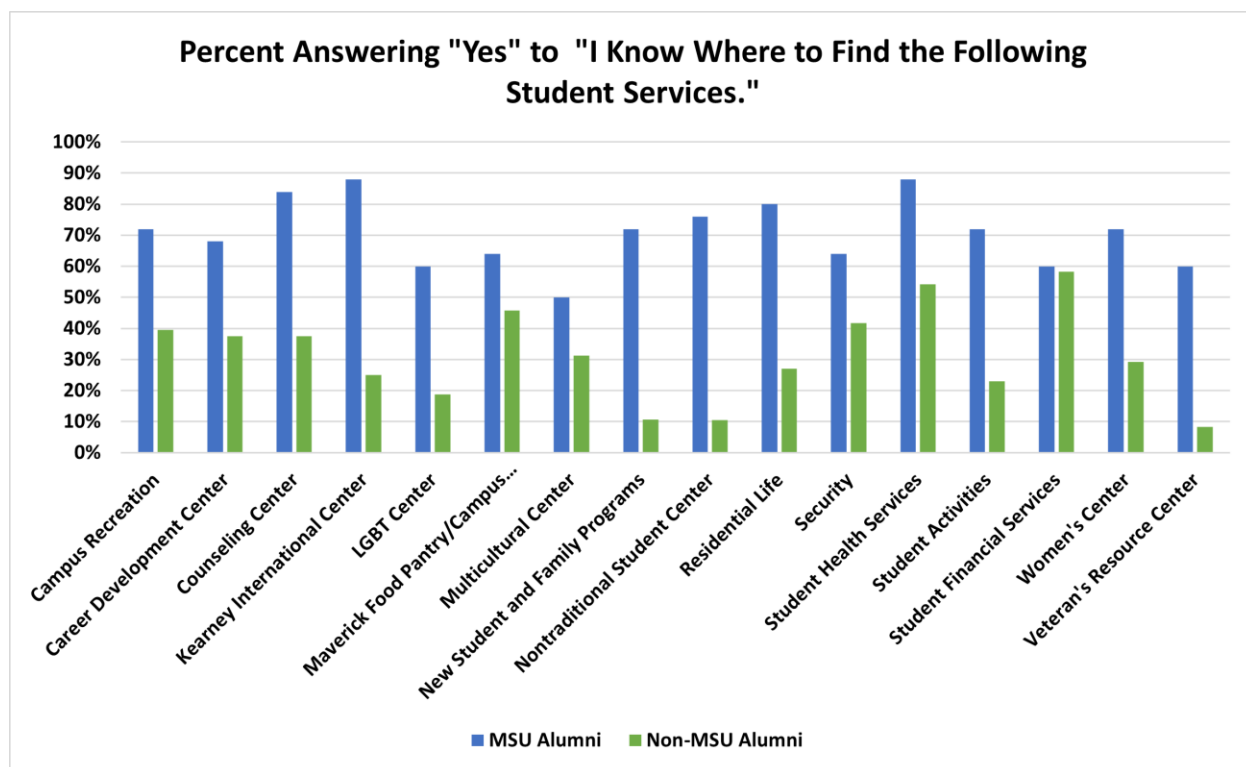


Figure 2: Percent Answering "Yes" to "I know Where to Find the Following Student Services."

When it comes to advertising and learning information about student services, both MSU Alumni and non-MSU Alumni find out from similar sources. Some of the more popular sources of information are classmates/peers, faculty/advisors, the University website, and bulletin boards, posters, etc. Sources such as family and other (MavLife, social media, etc.) are not very popular among non-MSU Alumni. This could be that MSU Alumni are more likely to have family that has also attended MSU and/or be utilizing MavLife or following MSU services on social media.



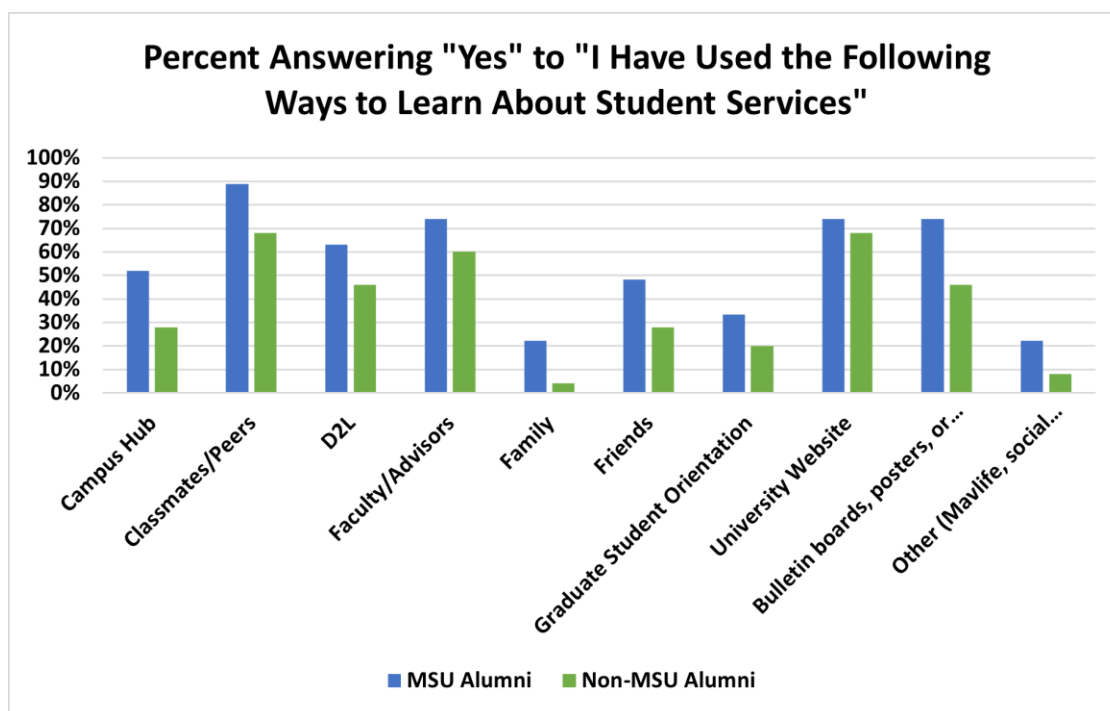


Figure 3: Percent Answering "Yes" to "I Have Used the Following Ways to Learn About Student Services"

### Support Systems

When comparing MSU Alumni and Non-MSU Alumni and who they are most likely to reach out, the percentages are relatively similar (see Table 1). Only one respondent named a student service other than the Counseling Center (Multicultural Center) so therefore I grouped that with professors/advisors. Both MSU Alumni and Non-MSU Alumni rely most heavily on friends/family and professors/advisors. However, Alumni are more likely than non-alumni to seek support from the Counseling Center, while non-alumni report leaning on classmates for support more than their alumni peers. Support from faculty and cohort of other graduate students was also examined.

Table 1: Who are You Most Likely to Reach Out to?

	Professors/ Advisors	Classmates	Counseling Center	Friends/ Family	Outside Resources
MSU Alumni	35%	4%	13%	61%	13%
Non-MSU Alumni	26%	13%	4%	52%	4%

\*Percentages do not add up to 100% as not every respondent responded to each question, and some listed more than one answer.

Digging a little deeper, Table 2 compares how MSU Alumni and Non-MSU Alumni report having a weak or strong support system among their cohort. MSU Alumni were less likely than non-Alumni to report their support systems among their Cohort as weak (22% compared to 33% non-Alumni) and more likely to report their support systems as strong (61% compared to 50% non-Alumni). One respondent who is not a MSU Alumni reported having a “moderately weak” support system among their cohort as they “commute from a long distance and don’t have the same connections that rest of the cohort seems to.” Another reported having weak support as they “live out of state and don’t talk with [their] classmates outside of class” (non-MSU Alum). Most have feelings of strong support, MSU Alum reported, “we have a group text that is very responsive with answering questions and concerns. Everyone is open to helping each other out.” Similarly, a non-MSU Alum responded with feelings of strong support saying, “we encourage one another’s success and make time for socialization outside of class.” Taken together, these responses suggest that, with some exceptions, the graduate student cohort is widely recognized an important source of social support, with distance being cited as a potential barrier to that support.

Table 2. Weak or Strong Support System Among Cohort			
	Weak	Moderate	Strong
MSU Alumni	22%	13%	61%
Non-MSU Alumni	33%	7%	50%

*\*Percentages do not add up to 100% as not every respondent responded to each question, and some listed more than one answer.*

In terms of faculty support, MSU Alumni and non-MSU Alumni were similar in percentages, but non-MSU Alumni were more likely to say they have weak support (17% compared to 9% MSU Alumni). Given that alumni may have had prior relationships with faculty, it is not surprising that they report greater support from faculty than non-alumni who did not

have those prior relationships to build upon. As Table 3 shows, well over half of both groups report strong support among faculty, but non-alumni are nearly twice as likely than alums to find that support weak.

Table 3. Weak or Strong Support System Among Faculty			
	Weak	Moderate	Strong
MSU Alumni	9%	22%	65%
Non-MSU Alumni	17%	15%	54%

*\*Percentages do not add up to 100% as not every respondent responded to each question, and some listed more than one answer.*

One respondent stated that they “don’t feel like [they] can go to faculty for any problems that aren’t directly tied to schoolwork” (non-MSU Alum). Some respondents were more indifferent about the support faculty can provide, such as one non-MSU Alum who said “I feel like I have an ok support system with faculty. Most of them want to listen, but do not have the time or resources to do so.” On the other hand, many respondents reported strong support systems such as a MSU Alum who stated that “professors are more than willing to help students succeed.” Another said they have “the most supportive faculty in the world. Always flexible, patient, understanding, and truly give the feeling that they care for us as people FIRST” (non-MSU Alum). Regardless of where graduate students did their undergraduate studies, most recognize faculty as vital to their support network.

### *Barriers*

Despite the vast number of student services available to graduate students, many students do not take advantage of them. This research aims to identify what the barriers are to learning about and/or using these student support services. From Figure 4, we can see differences what barriers prevent MSU Alumni and non-MSU Alumni from seeking out student services.

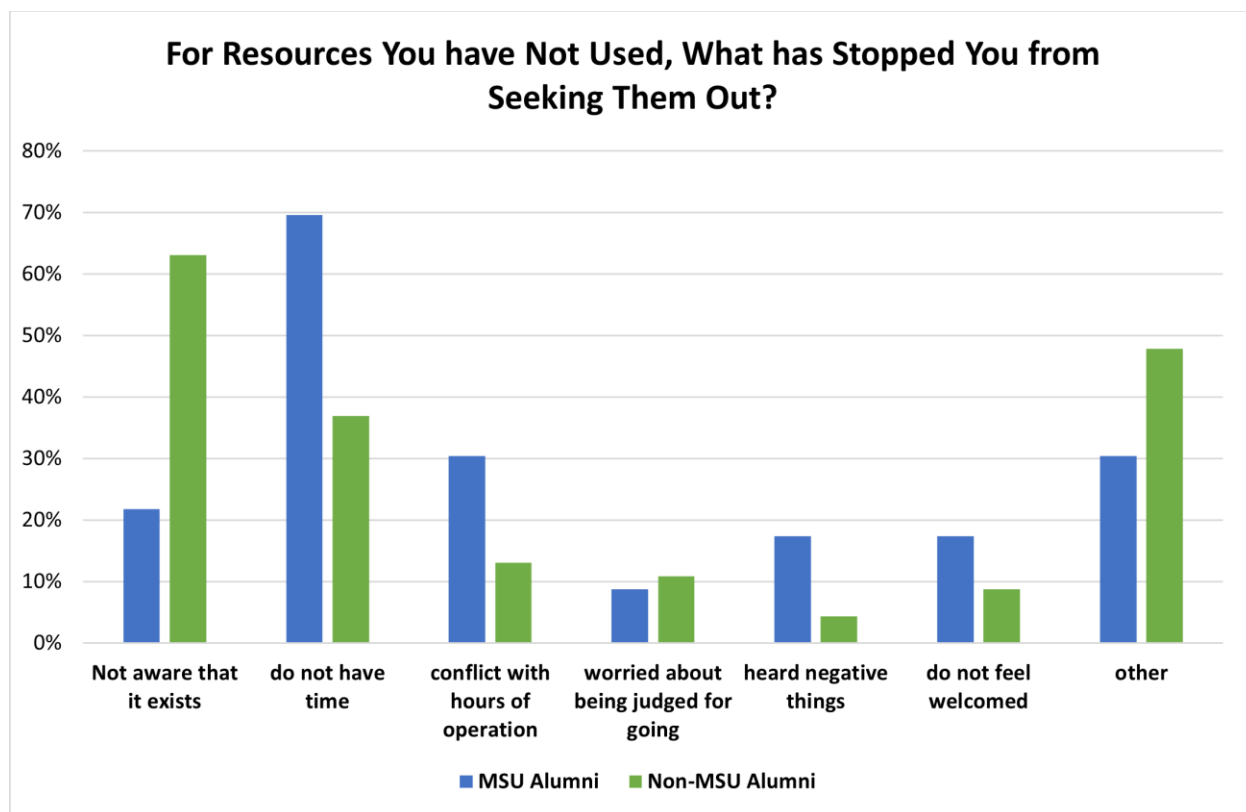


Figure 4: Responses to “For resources you have not used, what has stopped you from seeking them out?”

Non-MSU Alumni are more likely to not have the awareness of a student service, which was also shown with the t-tests above. They may also not be utilizing them because they are worried about judged for going. They are also more likely to have another barrier than MSU Alumni. These barriers include, feeling like it does not apply to them, “not interested, being an “online learner,” or not knowing where it is. MSU Alumni are more likely to not utilize student services because they feel like they do not have the time or that they have conflicts with the hours of operation. They may also not go as they have heard negative things about these services or feel as though they are not welcomed.

Comparing MSU Alumni with non-MSU Alumni, in Table 4, those who did not attend MSU as an undergraduate were more likely to express dissatisfaction with the lack of advertising and outreach (9% and 15% respectively). One non-MSU Alum requested “circulation of information through email and faculty,” another suggested that student services, “send out emails

at the beginning of the semester showing on [a] map where on campus they exist and what they offer along with times they are open.” Non-MSU Alumni also asked for specific graduate student events or programming from various services (11%), whereas those who did attend while in undergraduate school did not request those services (0%). One non-MSU Alum said they should “maybe host some more graduate student-only events as I feel unwelcome to participate in activities/events that are for “all” students, but really, it’s mainly undergrad students that they are appealing to.” Another expressed similar sentiments stating, “most services heavily favor undergrads, and I don’t really want the undergrad experience again” (non-MSU Alum).

Table 4: How Could Student Services Better Serve Your Needs?

	Graduate Orientation	Operational	Advertising/ Outreach	Events Specific to Graduate Students	Not used/ Unsure
MSU Alumni	0%	22%	9%	0%	13%
Non-MSU Alumni	7%	11%	15%	11%	7%

*\*Percentages do not add up to 100% as not every respondent responded to each question, and some listed more than one answer.*

However, MSU Alumni (22%) were more likely to report issues with operational aspects compared to non-Alumni (11%) and all respondents (14%). One MSU Alumni stated that student services should “expand hours of availability- [when] having a 9-4 job it’s hard to get to these places when they are open.” Another stated they should have “more flexible hours, online/virtual resources, targeted resources for nontrad/grad students rather than just undergrads” (MSU Alum).

Table 5. Most Important Student Service

	Counseling/ Student Health Services	Financial Aid/ Campus Hub	Campus Rec	DEI	LGBT and Women’s Center	Food Pantry	Other	None
MSU Alumni	43%	4%	4%	17%	13%	9%	9%	0%
Non-MSU Alumni	30%	7%	9%	0%	4%	9%	7%	20%

*\*Percentages do not add up to 100% as not every respondent responded to each question, and some listed more than one answer.*

Both MSU Alumni and non-MSU Alumni responded with reporting the Counseling Center and/or Student Health Services being the most important service. As Table 5 shows, MSU Alumni were more likely to report valuing services such as DEI offices (17%) and the LGBT and Women's Center (13%), compared to non-Alumni (0% and 4% respectively). It is important to note that of those who are MSU Alumni, five (or 17%) reported a race/ethnicity other than white. Therefore, it can be inferred that these five respondents most likely stated DEI offices as most important. 20% of non-Alumni reported no student services compared to 0% of Alumni. This reinforces the argument that Alumni are simply more familiar with the services available on campus.

## **Race/Ethnicity**

### *Knowledge and Usage*

Looking at race and ethnicity the t-tests found no significance between white and people of color's answers to the four questions about knowledge and usage of student services. Regardless of race/ethnicity, respondents are about equally likely to know what service to go to ( $P=.94 > .05$ ), where they are located ( $P=.70 > .05$ ), how often they use them ( $P=.55 > .05$ ), and how helpful they found them ( $P=.53 > .05$ ). Therefore, this study shows that someone's race/ethnicity is not a strong factor in the knowledge and/or usage of student services.

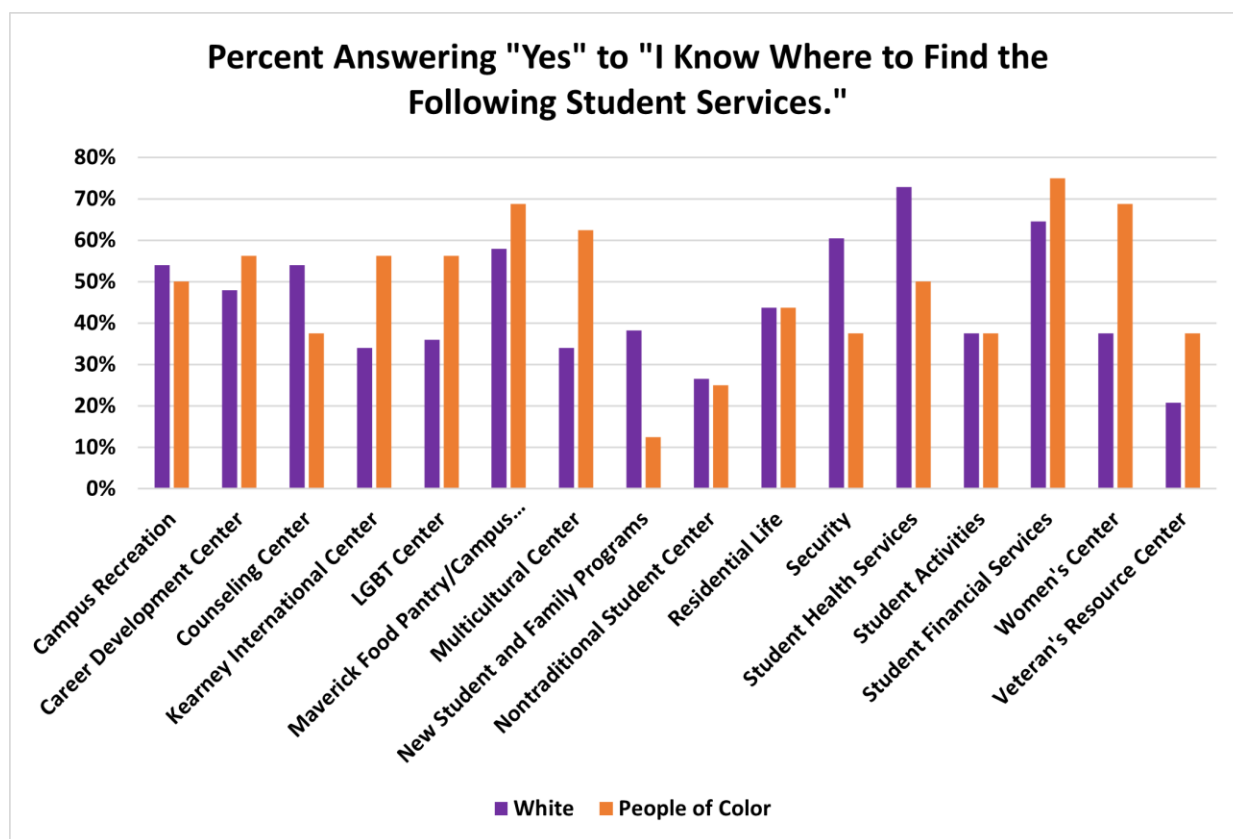


Figure 5: Percent Answering "Yes" to "I know Where to Find the Following Student Services."

When it comes to advertising and learning information about student services, both white and people of color find out from similar sources. Some of the more popular sources of information are classmates/peers, faculty/advisors, the University website, and bulletin boards, posters, etc. Sources such as family are less popular among respondents of color. This theme will be discussed further in the following section.

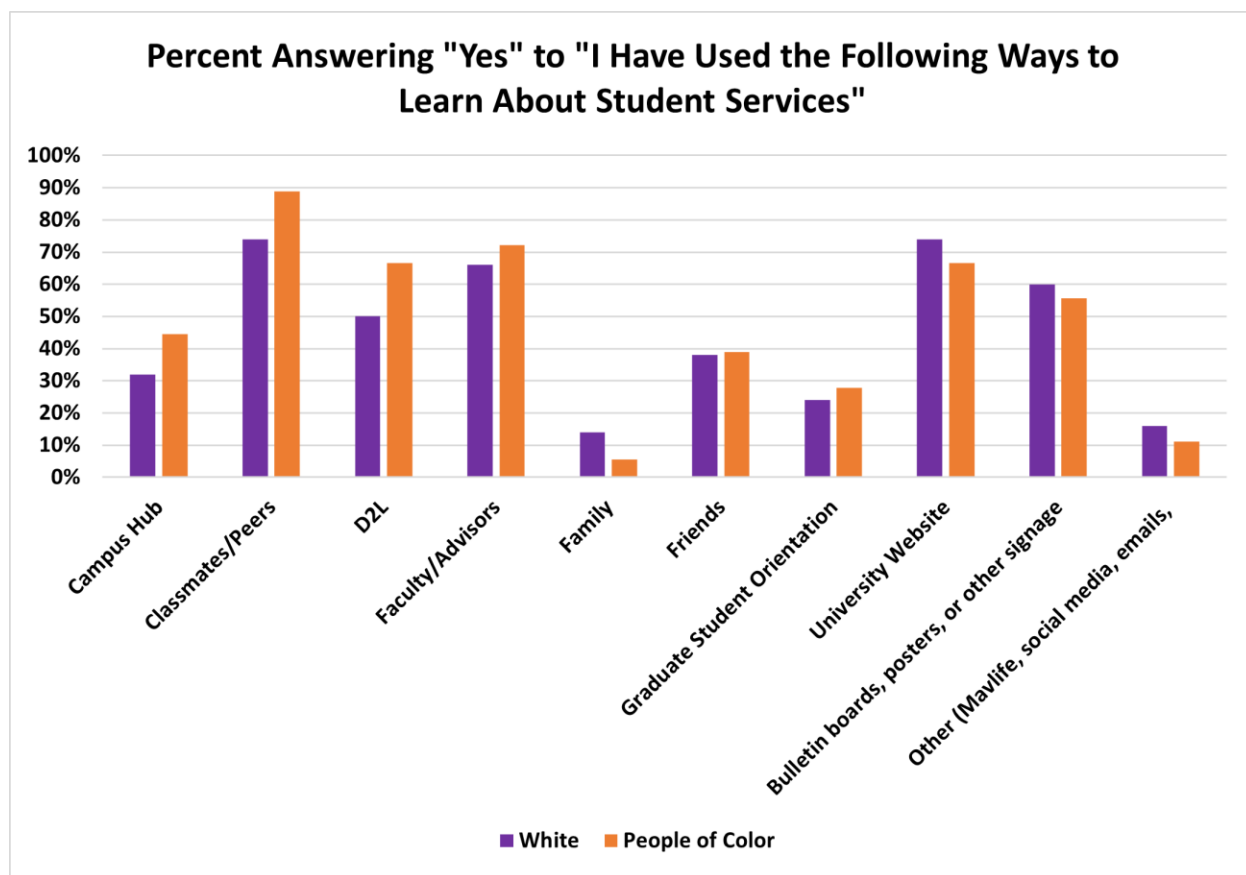


Figure 6: Percent Answering "Yes" to "I Have Used the Following Ways to Learn About Student Services"

### Support Systems

In the comparison between who white and people of color are most likely to reach out to, the results show a large difference (see Table 6). White respondents are far more likely to reach out their friends/family (62%) compared to respondents of color (29%). On the other hand, respondents of color are more likely to reach out professors/advisors for support (50%) compared to white respondents (24%). The results show the same trend among first generation and non-first-generation respondents. First generation respondents are more likely to seek out support from professors/advisors (52%) and less likely from friends/family (40%) compared to non-first-generation students (33% and 65% respectively). Additionally, 54% of respondents of color are also first-generation students. The difference between white and people of color is possibly due to more respondents of color being first generation students and therefore their



friends/family may not have gone to college and may not be a strong support system for college-related issues. As of academic year 2015-16, students of color (except Asian students) are more likely to be first-generation students than white students (RTI International 2019). Table 6 shows that students of color are most likely to reach out to the professors, while friends and family are the people white students are most likely to reach out to for support.

Table 6. Who are You Most Likely to Reach Out to?

	Professors/ Advisors	Classmates	Counseling Center	Friends/ Family	Outside Resources
White	24%	6%	8%	62%	10%
People of Color	50%	14%	14%	29%	0%

*\*Percentages do not add up to 100% as not every respondent responded to each question, and some listed more than one answer.*

Table 7 shows the percentage of white and people of color's responses to having a weak or strong support system among their cohort and faculty. Worthy of note, respondents of color equally reported having a weak or strong support system (43% each). This suggests that students of color are either having relatively good or relatively bad experiences within their cohort. This is concerning, as students who feel they have weak support from cohort members may miss out on opportunities for academic or social support that white students may take for granted. Students who feel they have a weak support system may also be more likely to feel isolated and externalized from their cohort.

Table 7. Weak or Strong Support System Among Cohort

	Weak	Moderate	Strong
White	24%	12%	54%
People of Color	43%	7%	43%

*\*Percentages do not add up to 100% as not every respondent responded to each question, and some listed more than one answer.*

White respondents were less likely to report their support systems among their Cohort as weak (24% compared to 43% people of color) and more likely to report their support systems as strong (54% compared to 43% people of color). One respondent stated, "I am the only person of

color... very uncomfortable and they try to support but I don't think they know how" (person of color). Another said, "I don't really know anyone except people I have had in class. And those people I have had little interaction with and only during class or on discussion boards" (person of color). Some reported more moderate levels of support stating, their "cohort is very small, but we reach out to each other," or that "contact with group members is sporadic at best" (white respondent). Still the majority reported strong support from their cohort, "we are all trying to hold each other up, especially in stressful times" (white respondent) and that they "all go through the same situations which they can all help each other" (person of color).

Another important group of social support for graduate students is the faculty in their programs. Both white students and students of color were most likely to feel strong support from faculty. However, as Table 8 shows, the difference between white students and students of color feeling the support from faculty was weak was noteworthy: students of color are almost twice as likely as whites to report weak support from faculty, similar to the support among the cohort.

Table 8. Weak or Strong Support System Among Faculty			
	Weak	Moderate	Strong
White	12%	18%	60%
People of Color	21%	14%	57%

*\*Percentages do not add up to 100% as not every respondent responded to each question, and some listed more than one answer.*

When it comes to faculty support some feel very supported (60% white respondents and 57% respondents of color), such as a white respondent who identified their support as strong, "I have had zoom meetings with each of my professors so far and it has helped me feel more connected to the campus." One respondent of color stated they have strong support from faculty because "they know the campus and will vouch for us and our needs." However, some view the support from faculty as lacking, such as a respondent of color, "I feel very comfortable within the DEI offices, but other than that, I feel like MSU is still lacking in making a comfortable and

safe space for students of color.” A white respondent who reports weak support stated, they have experienced “delayed responses, no career development,” and that they are “not a priority.” One white respondent reported a moderate support system saying, “I feel as though some of them are extremely approachable and one or two make me feel as though I cannot come to them with questions without being judged.” A respondent of color similarly reported a more moderate feeling of support saying, “My advisor has been helpful with schedule building but I’m not sure if I can go to him for other things.” This suggests that some students may face some barriers regarding feelings of judgement for going to faculty for support.

### *Barriers*

I also wanted to learn about what barriers to accessing resources on campus students face. If students know about the resources available to them, but do not use them, what explains that discrepancy? Figure 7 shows differences in what barriers prevent white and people of color from seeking out student services. White respondents were the only ones who reported not feeling welcomed at student services and were also more likely to report not being aware that a service exists. Respondents of color were more likely to report not having time or having conflicts with the hours of operation or that they were worried about judgement or had heard negative things about the service.

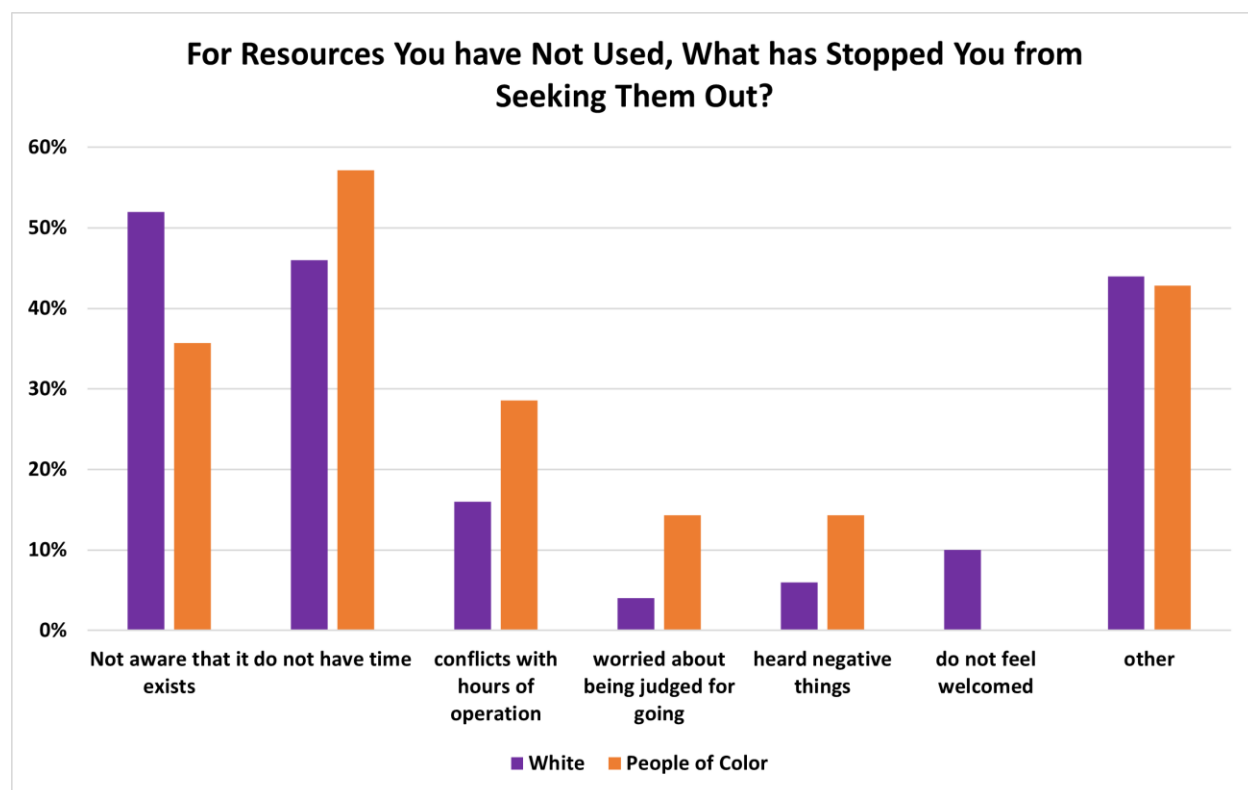


Figure 7: Responses to “For resources you have not used, what has stopped you from seeking them out?”

When looking at race/ethnicity, we see respondents of color (21%) are more likely to face challenges surrounding operational aspects of services compared to white respondents (14%). This is consistent with the findings in figure eight. White respondents (12%) asked for specific graduate student programming whereas no respondents of color (0%) requested this. One stated student services should “make it known on their respective pages that these services and extracurricular things such as intramural sports and esports are open to not just undergrads but grad students as well” (white respondent). White respondents also reported wanting graduate student orientation as they did not go through one and, as one noted is “likely why I don’t have familiarity with where to find most resources.”

Additionally, one respondent of color also requested in-person orientation so that “students can know what resources are available. Most times students will not go seeking out these resources unless we know that it is available to use.” One respondent of color reported

feeling “unsure about how to approach certain offices,” and another responded by saying that student services should “learn basic customer service, empathy, and human service skills. Some are very rude!” Another requested more accessibility stated that “directions and time hours [be] sent out or made accessible” (person of color).

Table 9. How Could Student Services Better Serve Your Needs?

	Graduate Orientation	Operational	Advertising/ Outreach	Events Specific to Graduate Students	Not used/ unsure
White	4%	14%	12%	12%	10%
People of Color	7%	21%	14%	0%	7%

*\*Percentages do not add up to 100% as not every respondent responded to each question, and some listed more than one answer.*

It is important to note that regardless of these differences, both white students and students of color had little experience using these services, as Table 9 shows. However, in Table 10 we see that white respondents (2%) were less likely to report DEI offices as being the most important compared to respondents of color (21%). They were also less likely to reply with the LGBT Center and the Women’s Center (2%) compared to respondents of color (21%). White respondents (42%) were more likely to report the counseling/student health services compared to respondents of color (21%). For people of color, services that fall under Diversity, Equity and Inclusion are more important than they are for white respondents.

Table 10. Most Important Student Service

	Counseling/ Student Health Services	Financial Aid/ Campus Hub	Campus Rec	DEI	LGBT and Women’s Center	Food Pantry	Other	None
White	42%	4%	10%	2%	2%	4%	4%	16%
People of Color	21%	7%	0%	21%	21%	14%	0%	14%

*\*Percentages do not add up to 100% as not every respondent responded to each question, and some listed more than one answer.*

While comparing the possible differences between those who are or are not a graduate assistant on campus, the t-tests showed there is a significant difference when it comes to

knowing where to go ( $P=.01 < .05$ ), where they are located ( $P=.02 < .05$ ), and how often they are used ( $P=.00 < .05$ ). However, there is no statistical significance in terms of how helpful respondents find the services ( $P=.09 > .05$ ). These t-tests show that being a graduate assistant on campus does impact the knowledge and/or usage of student services, however it does not impact in if the respondents found the service helpful.

MSU Alumni and graduate assistants are understandably more likely to be familiar with campus because they either have been here longer and/or work across campus. The t-tests support this as these populations have a significant difference in understanding and usage compared to their counterparts. The t-tests showed no significant difference between white and people of color's responses to knowledge and usage. However, regarding race and ethnicity, there were differences how many white respondents rely on their friends/family compared to people of color. Respondents were more likely to report having a weak support system among their cohort compared to their faculty support. However, overall, respondents reported high levels of support both among their cohorts and among their faculty. Finally, when it comes to barriers, operational barriers, with time and hours of operation being the most common, is the largest category. Other significant barriers include lack of awareness of services, worried about being judged, or heard negative things about the services.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

One of the most important findings showed that regardless of popularity in awareness or knowledge of a service, respondents were more likely to never use that service than use it even once. This data suggests that even though some respondents do utilize services such as Student Financial Services, Student Health Services, Maverick Food Pantry, etc., many more go through their graduate program without receiving support from a student service on campus. Possible reasons for this include lack of marketing/outreach done as well as shortcomings in the operations of these services. These two categories made up over 50% of responses when participants were asked how student services could better serve their needs. Interestingly, wanting more marketing/outreach was a common response (24%); only 28% of respondents have used some sort of marketing materials; bulletin boards, posters, D2L, social media, etc., to learn about services on campus.

However, despite marketing materials being one of the highest forms of learning about student services, respondents who identified marketing as weakness specifically asked for more emails introducing various services. Less than 3% of respondents reported using social media and/or emails for information. Additionally, my study shows that there is a significant difference in the level of knowledge between those who did and did not attend undergraduate at MSU. Since MSU Alumni are more likely to be aware of and utilize student services, it suggests that they learned about these services during their undergraduate career, not while attending as a graduate student. Based on this, student services should consider including more email marketing in their promotion efforts towards graduate students.

Another major barrier to utilizing student services is shortcomings in the operations of these services. Thirty one percent of participants reported wanting some level of improvement

within the operations of student services, including expanding hours, having better locations, and more online resources. Furthermore, 35% of respondents reported not going to student services because either they do not have the time, or the service is not open when they are available. Lack of flexible hours has been cited as a common barrier in related studies and this study shows it is one of the biggest barriers as well. I recognize that it can be challenging to balance hours of operation and when students want access to the services, but student services might consider expanding their hours or offering more flexible times for those students who work full-time jobs and/or are only on campus in the evenings or weekends.

Previous studies have suggested that students of color and other underserved students (such as First-Generation students) may have a different relationship with student services and may be more hesitant to seek them out (Crowe and Kim 2020; Grim et al. 2021; Leong and Sedlacek 1986; Mau and Jepsen 1990). While awareness and usage might be low overall, it is not significantly lower for these two populations, showing that student services are doing an adequate job in reaching out to underserved populations. One limitation with my study is the low number of students of color who participated. Therefore, while there may not be statistical significance between white and respondents of color and First-Generation and non-First-Generation students, their comments support the idea that students of color have different experiences with student services.

Having a strong support system is especially important to graduate students as these years can be difficult. Respondents heavily rely on friends, family, professors, and classmates for support, with little using student services (and only using the Counseling Center at that). This, along with the high levels of feelings of a strong support system among cohorts and faculty, suggest that graduate students may not be looking at student services for support. Further



research would need to be done to see why this is, but part of it may have to do with high levels of unawareness that these services could support them. This study supports previous research done of faculty being one of the most common places students go for help and support (Grim et al. 2021). Since graduate students are more likely to rely on their cohort and/or faculty for support, it is important that Departments are ensuring their faculty are aware of student services so they can point their students to them.

### **Recommendations**

Research looking at the relationships between graduate students and student services has been somewhat limited. This study contributes to literature on this topic, specifically from a sociological standpoint by looking at support systems. When it comes to student services, graduate students can be a population that is overlooked, as supported by some of my respondent's answers. This study has shown that students services can make advancements in terms of reaching graduate students and showing them that these services are for graduates too. Considerations for student services include expanding their marketing and outreach to include emails and information directly related to/addressing graduate students. Additionally, providing additional training for staff on working with students, creating more flexible hours of operation, and/or providing more online resources that can be accessed outside of normal business hours could help increase usage among graduate students.

Additionally, the support that graduate students rely on most according to the research presented here is among faculty and peer cohorts. Providing departments with training and guidance on the student support services may facilitate greater knowledge and use of them. Faculty could also be encouraged to be aware of the great role they play in supporting students

and be offered training in how to better meet the needs of students, how to build relationships within cohorts, and so on.

### **Limitations**

This study faced several limitations. First, I had a very limited sample size which also lacked in representation of different demographics. There are roughly 2400 graduate students at MSU Mankato, and only 86 students started my survey, with only 69 people completing it. Additionally, most respondents were white (50) and female (51). With a small sample size, it makes it hard to accurately represent students of color and nonfemale students. While efforts were made to attempt to increase diversity among respondents, they did not prove successful. Additionally, this survey was only sent to graduate students from one university, limiting results and conclusions to this specific school. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to graduate student populations across many different schools.

Another limitation was only surveying graduate students, meaning I was not able to compare knowledge and usage to undergraduate students. The decision to only survey graduate students was intentional, as I wanted to focus on this population of students as little research has been done on this specific topic. Nevertheless, it does limit what conclusions can be drawn. Finally, after conducting data analysis, I think it would have been useful to ask specific questions on whether respondents attended a graduate student orientation, what they learned during orientation, and whether they are working while in school (not as a graduate assistant). This would have would have provided more insight on whether programs are offering orientation and if students are learning about services offered during it. It also would provide insight on how much students are working and how that influences usage of student services.

## **Directions for Future Research**

In addition to having larger and more representative sample, future research could be focused on what changes can be made so graduate students feel like they can use student services. This study established that there is a lack of knowledge of services, but it also raised questions on different operational aspects and lack of support from these services to graduate students. Further research could analyze what could be adjusted that would positively impact graduate students' experiences. Researchers could also study why graduate students do not consider student services as part of their support systems and how that could be improved. Additionally, conducting more qualitative research such as in-depth interviews may also provide further insight on graduate student's experiences with student services and how they utilize them. In-depth interviews may be particularly useful in understanding support systems and how graduate students value support from their friends/family, faculty/advisors, peers, and student services.

Throughout my six years pursuing higher education (three- and one-half years of undergraduate, two years of graduate), I have relied on countless sources of support. Through conducting this research, I feel fortunate to have had a strong support system through my partner, friends, peers, faculty, supervisors, student organizations, and student services. I, myself, fall into the group of MSU Alumni and graduate assistant, allowing me access to valuable knowledge and past experience with many student services. Through working in student government, on committees, and as a graduate assistant, I have seen many firsthand accounts of graduate students feeling lost and unsure of where to find support while navigating a stressful and rigorous academic program. My goal with this thesis is to make an impact on my community and I hope that my results do just that. When it comes to student services and programming, graduate

students may be overlooked but they are a valuable part of the campus community and need and deserve the support offered by these services. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the university to ensure they are supporting their graduate students and help them feel a sense of belonging and support to help them succeed.

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**APPENDIX A:**

**Survey instrument- As exported from Qualtrics.**

# **Student Services Awareness**

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## **Start of Block: Informed Consent**

Q2 You are invited to participate in a research study on the awareness of student resources by graduate students at Minnesota State University, Mankato. This research is being conducted by Shayla Schumacher, Masters' of Arts: Sociology student at Minnesota State University, Mankato under the supervision of Sarah Epplen, Associate Professor of Sociology at Minnesota State University, Mankato. The purpose of this research is to understand to what extent graduate students are aware of resources available to them while they attend Minnesota State University, Mankato.

To participate in this research study, you must be –

- At least 18 years old
- Currently a graduate student at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

This study has been approved by the Minnesota State University, Mankato Institutional Review Board (IRBNet Id Number: 1966425).

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato, and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. If you begin to participate but then decide that you would like to stop, you can exit the survey at any point without penalty or loss of benefits. To exit the survey, simply exit the page altogether by clicking the X at the top of your browser.

Data will be gathered through a Qualtrics survey and it will take no more than ten minutes to complete. There are no benefits from participating in this survey. The risks you will encounter as a participant in this research are not more than experienced in your everyday life.

As with all forms of electronic communication, it is possible that your privacy may be compromised. If you would like more information about the specific privacy and anonymity risks posed by online surveys, please contact the Minnesota State University, Mankato IT Solutions Center ([507-389-6654](tel:507-389-6654)) and ask to speak to the Information Security Manager.

Because you have been invited to participate in this research study, you have a right to a copy of this informed consent page. You can simply print this page for your records, or if you would

prefer to receive a copy by email or mail, please contact Shayla Schumacher at shayla.schumacher@mnsu.edu or Sarah Epplen at sarah.epplen@mnsu.edu.

If you have any questions about this research study, contact Shayla Schumacher at shayla.schumacher@mnsu.edu or Sarah Epplen at sarah.epplen@mnsu.edu. If you have any questions about participants' rights and for research-related injuries, please contact the Administrator of the Institutional Review Board at [507-389-1242](tel:507-389-1242).

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Q3 Before proceeding with the survey, please confirm that you have read the information above.

- ☐ I have read the informed consent page for this research study. (1)
- 

Q4 Please also confirm that you are 18 years of age or older.

- ☐ I am 18 years of age or older. (1)
- ☐ I am not 18 years of age or older. (2)

*Skip To: End of Survey If Please also confirm that you are 18 years of age or older. = I am not 18 years of age or older.*

-----

Q5 Participation in this research study is voluntary, as I describe above. You have the right to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Now that you have read all of the above information and confirmed that you are 18 years old or older, please choose one of the following –

- ☐ I agree to participate in this study. (1)
- ☐ I do not wish to participate in this study. (2)

*Skip To: End of Survey If Participation in this research study is voluntary, as I describe above. You have the right to dec... = I do not wish to participate in this study.*

End of Block: Informed Consent

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Start of Block: Knowledge

Q6 "I know where to go on the University campus if..."



	Strongly agree (8)	Somewhat agree (9)	Neither agree nor disagree (10)	Somewhat disagree (11)	Strongly disagree (12)
"I have questions about resources to help me when I cannot afford food." (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"I want to participate in recreation activities." (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"I am looking for career help." (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"I want mental health help." (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"I have questions about resources for international students." (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"I have questions about resources for LGBTQ+ students." (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"I need an emergency grant." (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"I have questions about resources for nontraditional students." (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

"I am looking  
for lost and  
found." (10)



Q7 "I know where to go on the University campus if..."

	Strongly agree (8)	Somewhat agree (9)	Neither agree nor disagree (10)	Somewhat disagree (11)	Strongly disagree (12)
"I have questions about on-campus living." (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"I have questions about resources for racial minority students." (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"I am looking for resources for women." (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"I am looking for information on accessibility resources." (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"I need medical help." (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"I have questions about getting involved in extracurricular activities such as intramural sports or registered student organizations." (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
"I have questions about financial aid." (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

"I am looking  
for resources  
for sexual  
assault." (8)

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

"I have  
questions  
about  
resources for  
veterans." (9)

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

End of Block: Knowledge

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Start of Block: Finding Information

Q8 I have used the following ways to learn about student services at MSU. (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Bulletin boards, posters, or other signage around campus (10)
  - ☐ Campus Hub (1)
  - ☐ Classmates/Peers (2)
  - ☐ D2L (3)
  - ☐ Faculty/Advisors (4)
  - ☐ Family (5)
  - ☐ Friends (6)
  - ☐ Graduate Student Orientation (7)
  - ☐ University Website (8)
  - ☐ Other (9) \_\_\_\_\_
-

Q27 Do you know where to find the following student services?

	Yes, I know where it is. (1)	No, I don't know where it is. (2)	I did not know we had this service. (3)
Campus Recreation (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Career Development Center (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Counseling Center (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Kearney International Center (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
LGBT Center (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Maverick Food Pantry/Campus Cupboard (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Multicultural Center/Oasis (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
New Student and Family Programs (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nontraditional Student Center (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Residential Life (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Security (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student Health Services (12)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student Activities (13)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student Financial Services (14)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Women's Center (15)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Veteran's Resource  
Center (17)

C

## End of Block: Finding Information

## Start of Block: Usage

Q10 How often have you used the following student resources?

[illegible]





Q12 If you have used these resources, how helpful have you found them?

	Haven't Used (1)	Not Helpful (2)	Somewhat Helpful (3)	Helpful (4)	Very Helpful (5)
Campus Recreation (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Career Development Center (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Counseling Center (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Kearney International Center (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
LGBT Center (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Maverick Food Pantry/Campus Cupboard (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Multicultural Center/Oasis (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

---

Q13 If you have used these resources, how helpful have you found them?

	Haven't Used (1)	Not Helpful (2)	Somewhat Helpful (3)	Helpful (4)	Very Helpful (5)
Nontraditional Student Center (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Residential Life (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Security (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student Activities (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student Financial Services (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student Health Services (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Veterans Resource Center (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Women's Center (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Usage

Start of Block: Barriers

Q14 For resources you have NOT used, what has stopped you from seeking out these student resources at MSU? (Select All That Apply)

- ☐ Not aware of what exists (1)
  - ☐ Do not have time (2)
  - ☐ Are not open when you are available/no flexible hours (3)
  - ☐ Worried about being judged for going (4)
  - ☐ Heard negative things about a resource (5)
  - ☐ Do not feel welcomed (6)
  - ☐ Other (7) \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Q28 How could student services better serve your needs?

\_\_\_\_\_

End of Block: Barriers

---

Start of Block: Support

Q29 If you are struggling, who are you most likely to reach out to?

\_\_\_\_\_

Q31 How has COVID-19 impacted the way you have found support?

\_\_\_\_\_

Q45 Do you feel you have a strong or weak support system among your cohort? Please explain why.

---

Q46 Do you feel you have a strong or weak support system among faculty? Please explain why.

---

Q47 Which student services are most important to you? Please explain.

---

End of Block: Support

---

Start of Block: Demographic

Q16 What type of Program are you in?

☐ Terminal Masters (1)

☐ Doctorate (2)

☐ Graduate Certificate (3)

☐ Other (4) \_\_\_\_\_

Q42 Are you a graduate assistant on campus?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

☐ Other (3) \_\_\_\_\_

Q17 Did you attend MSU as an undergraduate?

---

Q33 When did you start your graduate program?

---

Q18 What year is your expected graduation?

---

Q20 How do you attend class?

☐ In-Person (1)

☐ Online (2)

☐ Hybrid (3)

Q21 What are you living arrangements?

- ☐ On-campus (1)
  - ☐ By yourself (2)
  - ☐ With parents (5)
  - ☐ With roommates (6)
  - ☐ With spouse/partner (7)
  - ☐ With dependents (8)
- 

Q48 Are you a caregiver for someone else?

- ☐ Yes (1)
  - ☐ No (2)
- 

Q22 Please select the option that best describes your current enrollment at MSU Mankato.

- ☐ Full-time Student (1)
  - ☐ Part-time Student (2)
  - ☐ Other (3) \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Q34 Are you an International Student?

- ☐ Yes (1)
  - ☐ No (2)
-

Q23 What is your primary race or ethnicity?

- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native (1)
  - ☐ Asian (2)
  - ☐ Black or African American (3)
  - ☐ Latino or Hispanic (4)
  - ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (5)
  - ☐ White or Caucasian (6)
  - ☐ Prefer not to Answer (7)
  - ☐ Other (8) \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Q24 What is your gender?

- ☐ Male (1)
  - ☐ Female (2)
  - ☐ Non-binary (3)
  - ☐ Prefer not to Answer (4)
  - ☐ Other (5) \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Q35 What is your sexual orientation?

\_\_\_\_\_

---



Q25 How old are you?

---

Q36 What is your relationship status?

- ☐ Single (1)
- ☐ Married (2)
- ☐ Long-term Relationship/Live with Partner (3)
- ☐ Widowed (4)
- ☐ Divorced (5)
- ☐ Other (6) \_\_\_\_\_

Q37 Are you a first generation student?

- ☐ Yes (2)
- ☐ No (3)

Q38 Are you deaf, or do you have serious difficulty hearing?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Q39 Are you blind, or do you have serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

---

Q40 Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, do you have serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

---

Q41 Do you have serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs?

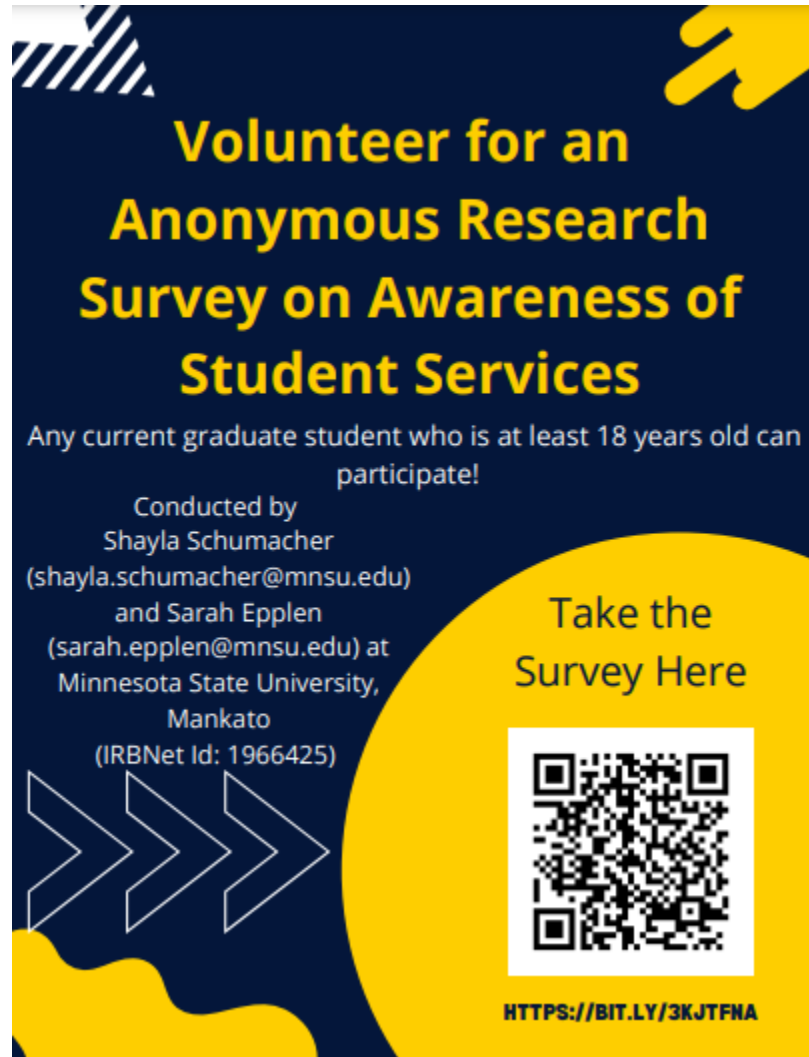
☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

End of Block: Demographic

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**APPENDIX B**  
**RECRUITMENT MATERIALS**




**Volunteer for an  
Anonymous Research  
Survey on Awareness of  
Student Services**

Any current graduate student who is at least 18 years old can participate!

Conducted by  
Shayla Schumacher  
(shayla.schumacher@mnsu.edu)  
and Sarah Epplen  
(sarah.epplen@mnsu.edu) at  
Minnesota State University,  
Mankato  
(IRBNet Id: 1966425)

Take the  
Survey Here



[HTTPS://BIT.LY/3KJTFNA](https://bit.ly/3KJTFNA)

Dear Graduate Coordinators,

My name is Shayla Schumacher, and I am a graduate student in the Department of Sociology here at MNSU. I am writing today to ask for your help in publicizing my research study, "Graduate Student Awareness of Student Services" (IRBNet Id Number: 1966425) along with Sarah Epplen as the Principal Investigator. I am trying to reach as many graduate students as possible. Participation is completely voluntary, and it involves filling out an online survey that should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

If it is easiest, you can simply forward this email to students or to professors to share or if you prefer, you can also share the following blurb with them. I have also attached a flyer that you can forward or post as well. Additionally, I would be willing to visit a graduate seminar course to advertise my study.

**Individuals who are at least 18 years old and are current graduate students at MSU, Mankato are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Shayla Schumacher ([shayla.schumacher@mnsu.edu](mailto:shayla.schumacher@mnsu.edu)) and Sarah Epplen ([sarah.epplen@mnsu.edu](mailto:sarah.epplen@mnsu.edu)) at Minnesota State University, Mankato (IRBNet Id Number: 1966425). The study examines to what extent students are aware of student resources available to them at MSU, Mankato. Participation is voluntary and will involve completing a 10-15 minute survey. Find the survey at: [https://mnsu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_6gpYZV1QeHDyYQu](https://mnsu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6gpYZV1QeHDyYQu)**

Thank you so much for your help! This research study has been approved by Minnesota State University, Mankato's Institutional Review Board. However, if you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to let me know.

Sincerely,

*Shayla Schumacher*  
Graduate Student  
Department of Sociology  
Minnesota State University, Mankato  
Mankato, Minnesota 56001

## APPENDIX C

### INFORMED CONSENT

#### Graduate Student Awareness of Student Services

IRBNet Id Number: 1966425

#### Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a research study on the awareness of student services by graduate students at Minnesota State University, Mankato. This research is being conducted by Shayla Schumacher, Masters of Arts: Sociology student at Minnesota State University, Mankato under the supervision of Sarah Epplen, Associate Professor of Sociology at Minnesota State University, Mankato. The purpose of this research is to understand to what extent graduate students are aware of resources available to them while they attend Minnesota State University, Mankato. ***To participate in this research study, you must be –***

- ***At least 18 years old***
- ***Currently a graduate student at Minnesota State University, Mankato***

This study has been approved by the Minnesota State University, Mankato Institutional Review Board (IRBNet Id Number: 1966425).

Participation in this research study is completely ***voluntary***. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato, and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. If you begin to participate but then decide that you would like to stop, you can exit the survey at any point without penalty or loss of benefits. To exit the survey, simply exit the page altogether by clicking the X at the top of your browser.

Data will be gathered through an anonymous Qualtrics survey, where no identifying information will be gathered, and it will take no more than ten to fifteen minutes to complete. The survey is a combination of quantitative (close-ended questions) and qualitative (open-ended questions). It will look at the graduate student awareness of student services by determining their knowledge about what is offered, if they have used them, and what barriers prevent them from doing so. There are no benefits from participating in this survey. The risks you will encounter as a participant in this research are not more than experienced in your everyday life. There may be a risk of privacy violations if the survey is taken in a public location.

As with all forms of electronic communication, it is possible that your privacy may be compromised. If you would like more information about the specific privacy and anonymity risks posed by online surveys, please contact the Minnesota State University, Mankato IT Solutions Center (507-389-6654) and ask to speak to the Information Security Manager.

Because you have been invited to participate in this research study, you have a right to a copy of this informed consent page. You can simply print this page for your records, or if you would prefer to receive a copy by email or mail, please contact Sarah Epplen at sarah.epplen@mnsu.edu.

If you have any questions about this research study, contact Sarah Epplen at sarah.epplen@mnsu.edu. If you have any questions about participants' rights and for research-related injuries, please contact the Administrator of the Institutional Review Board at 507-389-1242.

**Before proceeding with the survey, please confirm that you have read the information above.**

**Y      I have read the informed consent page for this research study.**

**Please also confirm that you are 18 years of age or older.**

**Y      I am 18 years of age or older.**

**Y      I am not 18 years of age or older.**

**Participation in this research study is voluntary, as I describe above. You have the right to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Now that you have read all of the above information and confirmed that you are 18 years old or older, please choose one of the following –**

**Y      I agree to participate in this study.**

**Y      I do not wish to participate in this study.**