

School of Library and Information Studies
University of Alberta

Summary of the UAlberta MLIS Graduate Exit Survey 2020–2021

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Overview of MLIS Graduates 2020–2021

A total of 66 MLIS students graduated from the School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Alberta in the two academic convocations Fall 2020 and Spring 2021. All but two of them were enrolled in the course-based MLIS program. In the previous three academic years, convocants totaled 77, 82, and 61, respectively.

Since 2013, UAlberta MLIS students have been able to choose either of two teaching and learning delivery streams, on-campus or online. The 6th online cohort completed their MLIS programs this past Spring (online cohorts enroll in two courses per term while on-campus students can enroll in up to four).

Comparison of total enrolments in the two learning streams shows a gradual shift in School enrolment policy towards online delivery. Of the 221 students enrolled in both streams in all stages of the MLIS program as of September 2020, 74% were in the online stream. In the previous two years, they accounted for 77% and 66%, respectively, of MLIS enrolments. (Joint-degree students in the MLIS/MA in Digital Humanities program are combined with on-campus MLIS students for survey reporting.)

The School has been participating since the Fall 2015 convocation in the biannual Faculty of Education Graduate Exit Survey, a faculty-wide perceptions survey of all convocating graduate students that is typically conducted over a one-month period preceding each Fall and Spring convocation. The broad goals of the survey are to capture the program experiences and satisfaction levels of Faculty of Education graduate students with both their educational programs and student services.

Accordingly, the Graduate Exit Survey captures the perceptions of graduating students' educational experiences by means of two types of questions: fact-gathering demographic questions, with findings reported in percentage distributions; and perceptual questions, with findings reported through the qualitative mechanism of weighted averages of students' collective satisfaction or ascribed importance of a factor on 5-point Likert rating scales. The online survey platform is Survey Monkey.

The biannual survey supports two key priorities of the UAlberta School of Library and Information Studies: continuing international accreditation of the MLIS degree program by the American Library Association, and institutional transparency and community engagement. In addition to international accreditation, survey results also help to guide the School's future planning and educational directions, inform the School's recruitment and marketing strategies, and provide feedback to the larger local and international practitioner communities about the School's successes and effectiveness.

A total of 54 students in both learning streams graduated in the Spring 2021 convocation, with just over half participating in the Graduate Exit Survey (28 or 52%). In the Spring 2020 and the Spring 2019 surveys, the response rates were 44% and 61%, respectively.

For logistical reasons involving data download limitations with the survey platform, and because Fall graduating classes have typically been smaller than Spring convocations (20% to 30% of all convocants), this survey analysis focuses on those students graduating in each Spring convocation, with relevant comparisons to previous Spring convocations to provide trending context. Fall 2020 survey ratings on all MLIS program quality indicators were found to be similar enough to the Spring 2021 survey to warrant confidence in generalizing from the Spring survey findings alone in this report.



The Graduate Exit Survey asks graduating students to respond to 24 satisfaction metrics of interest to the UAlberta MLIS program that qualitatively and quantitatively attempt to capture their experiences and perceptions. (Joint-degree students in the MLIS/MA in Digital Humanities program are combined with on-campus MLIS students for survey reporting.) Satisfaction metrics focus on overall program, curriculum, and pedagogy, including major program impacts of COVID-19 (which was added to the Spring 2020 survey); program support services, facilities and resources; and program help in meeting personal goals. The Survey also asks demographic questions including enrolment by learning stream.

All told, on 22 of the 24 quality indicators of MLIS program experiences and perceptions, the Spring 2021 survey participants expressed greater satisfaction than their colleagues did the year before. Importantly, they were far more positive on the key “bottom line” survey indicator, *‘willingness to recommend the UAlberta MLIS program to prospective students’*: 85% said yes; the year before it was only 45%. On four other MLIS program quality indicators, graduates were also markedly more satisfied: course variety; availability and scheduling of elective courses; program help with specific job or career preparation goals; and, graduate program administration. Most of the improvements in overall ratings were due to greater satisfaction by on-campus graduating students.

A comparison of the two learning streams shows that, generally speaking, the Spring 2021 graduating students were as satisfied in one learning stream as in the other on almost every survey indicator of MLIS program quality and support services. The exception was the impact of COVID-19 on their programs. Some 46% indicated that COVID-19 had major program impacts (a noticeable improvement from the 60% the year before). At the same time, learning stream differences were dramatic. On the Spring 2021 survey, on-campus students were almost five times more likely than online students to say they experienced major program impacts from COVID-19; the year before they were only twice as likely to say so.


Sincere appreciation to all survey participants for helping inform the UAlberta SLIS mission to achieve professional excellence for the public good.

**Graduate Exit Survey, UAlberta MLIS Program
 Graduating Student Satisfaction Metrics
 Spring Convocations, 2016–2021**

This table compares key indicators of MLIS program quality and satisfaction as reported by graduating students in both learning streams for the Spring convocations 2016–2021. Marked¹ differences in satisfaction between the latest two survey years, Spring 2021 and Spring 2020, are indicated with a directional arrow  or .

The “Bottom Line” Indicators of Satisfaction with Academic Program Experience

Would recommend UAlberta MLIS program to prospective students

	2016 Spring	2017 Spring	2018 Spring	2019 Spring	2020 Spring	2021 Spring
Yes	85%	82%	86%	88%	45%	85% 

Overall program experience

	2016 Spring	2017 Spring	2018 Spring	2019 Spring	2020 Spring	2021 Spring
Average satisfaction rating (scale 1=very dissatisfied; 5=very satisfied)	4.0	3.7	4.2	4.1	3.0	3.7

Key Indicators of Program Quality and Satisfaction with Educational Experience

Quality of instruction

	2016 Spring	2017 Spring	2018 Spring	2019 Spring	Spring 2020	2021 Spring
Average satisfaction rating (scale 1=very dissatisfied; 5=very satisfied)	3.9	4.0	4.2	4.5	3.5	4.1

¹ For the purposes of analysis, an important magnitude of variance between figures in this report is designated as “marked.” Such differences are defined as a threshold minimum of: a) 20 or more percentage-points for nominal-level questions generating descriptive statistics, and, b) 1.0 or greater on ordinal questions yielding weighted average 5-point Likert scale ratings. In addition, some large-scale differences almost attain the threshold variance and are also designated as “marked” differences (0.9 on the Likert scale and 18 percentage points on the nominal scale). These magnitudes are somewhat arbitrary thresholds and may be considered noteworthy but not an implied claim of (tested) statistical difference. The report avoids the use of terms denoting statistical significance: Formal statistical analysis has not been applied to the data.

Quality of elective courses

	2016 Spring	2017 Spring	2018 Spring	2019 Spring	2020 Spring	2021 Spring
Average satisfaction rating (scale 1=very dissatisfied; 5=very satisfied)	3.7	3.9	4.2	4.2	3.6	4.0

Opportunities to learn and grow

	2016 Spring	2017 Spring	2018 Spring	2019 Spring	2020 Spring	2021 Spring
Average satisfaction rating (scale 1=very dissatisfied; 5=very satisfied)	4.0	4.0	4.1	4.1	3.4	3.9

Quality of required courses

	2016 Spring	2017 Spring	2018 Spring	2019 Spring	2020 Spring	2021 Spring
Average satisfaction rating (scale 1=very dissatisfied; 5=very satisfied)	3.4	3.5	3.9	4.2	3.4	3.7

Availability and scheduling of required courses

	2016 Spring	2017 Spring	2018 Spring	2019 Spring	2020 Spring	2021 Spring
Average satisfaction rating (scale 1=very dissatisfied; 5=very satisfied)	3.2	3.2	3.8	3.0	3.6	3.7

Appropriateness of course requirements

	2016 Spring	2017 Spring	2018 Spring	2019 Spring	2020 Spring	2021 Spring
Average satisfaction rating (scale 1=very dissatisfied; 5=very satisfied)	3.7	3.3	3.6	3.8	3.2	3.7

Career relevance of courses

	2016 Spring	2017 Spring	2018 Spring	2019 Spring	2020 Spring	2021 Spring
Average satisfaction rating (scale 1=very dissatisfied; 5=very satisfied)	3.7	3.5	3.8	3.8	3.0	3.7

Quality of scholarly experience

	2016 Spring	2017 Spring	2018 Spring	2019 Spring	2020 Spring	2021 Spring
Average satisfaction rating (scale 1=very dissatisfied; 5=very satisfied)	3.9	3.9	4.1	4.1	2.9	3.7

Course-based program advisor support

	2016 Spring	2017 Spring	2018 Spring	2019 Spring	2020 Spring	2021 Spring
Average satisfaction rating (scale 1=very dissatisfied; 5=very satisfied)	n/a	3.8	3.8	3.9	3.9	3.6

Variety of course offerings

	2016 Spring	2017 Spring	2018 Spring	2019 Spring	2020 Spring	2021 Spring
Average satisfaction rating (scale 1=very dissatisfied; 5=very satisfied)	3.0	3.0	3.3	2.6	2.0	3.1 ↑

Availability and scheduling of elective courses

	2016 Spring	2017 Spring	2018 Spring	2019 Spring	2020 Spring	2021 Spring
Average satisfaction rating (scale 1=very dissatisfied; 5=very satisfied)	3.0	2.9	3.2	2.2	1.9	3.1 ↑

Key Indicators of Satisfaction with Support Services and Program Resources

Library resources, access, and tutorials

	2016 Spring	2017 Spring	2018 Spring	2019 Spring	2020 Spring	2021 Spring
Average satisfaction rating (scale 1=very dissatisfied; 5=very satisfied)	4.6	4.5	4.6	4.6	4.5	4.3

eClass, other online learning support

	2016 Spring	2017 Spring	2018 Spring	2019 Spring	2020 Spring	2021 Spring
Average satisfaction rating						
- Online learning stream	4.4	4.5	4.5	4.4	4.1	4.1
- On-campus learning stream	3.9	3.9	3.9	4.1	4.0	4.1
(scale 1=very dissatisfied; 5=very satisfied)						

Technology support²


	2016 Spring	2017 Spring	2018 Spring	2019 Spring	2020 Spring	2021 Spring
Average satisfaction rating						
- Online learning stream	3.5	3.7	4.5	4.2	3.9	3.9
- On-campus learning stream	4.1	3.4	3.7	3.7	3.6	3.3
(scale 1=very dissatisfied; 5=very satisfied)						

Course registration

	2016 Spring	2017 Spring	2018 Spring	2019 Spring	2020 Spring	2021 Spring
Average satisfaction rating (scale 1=very dissatisfied; 5=very satisfied)	4.4	3.9	4.0	4.1	3.5	3.7


² This question was asked of survey participants in each learning stream but not collectively, on the basis that student experience with technology support might differ markedly between streams.

Graduate program administration

	2016 Spring	2017 Spring	2018 Spring	2019 Spring	2020 Spring	2021 Spring
Average satisfaction rating (scale 1=very dissatisfied; 5=very satisfied)	4.2	3.9	4.3	4.6	2.7	3.6  ³

Indicators of Satisfaction with Program Help in Meeting Personal Goals

Program help with specific job or career preparation goals

	2016 Spring	2017 Spring	2018 Spring	2019 Spring	2020 Spring	2021 Spring
Average satisfaction rating (scale 1=very dissatisfied; 5=very satisfied)	4.1	3.6	4.1	4.0	3.0	4.1 

Program help with further career and professional development goals

	2016 Spring	2017 Spring	2018 Spring	2019 Spring	2020 Spring	2021 Spring
Average satisfaction rating (scale 1=very dissatisfied; 5=very satisfied)	4.1	3.9	4.4	4.1	3.3	4.0

Program help with career change goals

	2016 Spring	2017 Spring	2018 Spring	2019 Spring	2020 Spring	2021 Spring
Average satisfaction rating (scale 1=very dissatisfied; 5=very satisfied)	3.9	3.7	3.9	3.9	3.4	3.9

Program help with personal and intellectual enrichment goals

	2016 Spring	2017 Spring	2018 Spring	2019 Spring	2020 Spring	2021 Spring
Average satisfaction rating (scale 1=very dissatisfied; 5=very satisfied)	4.3	4.2	4.3	4.2	3.7	3.8

³ Some large-scale differences almost attain the threshold variance and are also designated as “marked” differences (0.9 on the Likert scale and 18 percentage points on the nominal scale).

COVID-19 Major Program Impacts (new 2020)⁴

	2020 Spring	2021 Spring
Yes	60%	46%

⁴ This hastily-created binary question (yes/no) was inadequately tested to be able to capture in a meaningful way a phenomenon as complex as the impact of COVID-19 on students' programs; a Likert-style approach that included a 'not applicable' option would have produced more representative and nuanced results; its placement within the survey structure was also inadequately considered. – *author*