

Proposal to Create a Code of Academic Advising Responsibility

March 31, 2015

Presented by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shannon Lynn Burton', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

---

Shannon Lynn Burton, Ph.D.  
Assistant University Ombudsperson  
Office of the University Ombudsperson  
Michigan State University

## Executive Summary

The quality and consistency of academic advising has been a concern at Michigan State University since the 1960s. Based on a review of the history and structure of academic advising at Michigan State University, as well as an assessment of trends related to academic advising standards and university policies and procedures, this proposal offers a new direction in establishing a baseline for academic advising at the institution by creating a “Code of Academic Advising Responsibility”.

- It has expanded since the 1960s to include professional academic advisors and faculty academic advisors. This expansion has created problems of consistency within the institution;
- Academic advising at Michigan State University is decentralized and complex composed of professional and faculty academic advisors who work in a variety of settings and have an array of training and/or education in relation to their role as academic advisors;
- The quality and consistency of academic advising has been an ongoing concern. There is no overarching statement in terms of academic advisor expectations;
- In the late 1990s and early 2000s efforts were made to assess student satisfaction with academic advising, but it was not systematic or consistent;
- Students admit that they rely on their academic advisors and while many see the same advisor time and time again, a number of students see multiple academic advisors in multiple units during their time at Michigan State University. There is no baseline for how students define quality academic advising or positive interactions;
- Academic advising spans a number of employment units who define the role of academic advisors differently, thus compounding how students experience "academic advising"

What is known about the national conversation on academic advising:

- It has become a defined field of practice since the late 1970s through the work of NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising;
- NACADA has established *NACADA's Statement of Core Values* (2005) to address the qualities of what academic advisors do and how they do it;
- The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education created the *CAS Standards and Guidelines: Academic Advising Programs* (2013) that address specific goals for quality and consistency;
- Advising practices at Michigan State University are not fully consistent with these national standards and values;
- Academic advisors at Michigan State University are not required to adhere to these standards or to the core values of academic advising. Many are not even aware of them.

These inconsistencies in the system and lack of standardized knowledge about the academic advising role lead to problems for undergraduate and graduate students. They do not understand their role in the academic advising relationship and in the academic decision-making process. By creating a “Code of Academic Advising Responsibility”, Michigan State University would be

lifting academic advising to the level of a valued instructional process within the university that is a shared responsibility among student and academic advisor. A “Code of Academic Advising Responsibility” would:

- Provide greater transparency in the academic advising role
- Create consistency among academic units that house professional and/or faculty academic advisors
- Create shared language around academic advising
- Increase student satisfaction with academic advising
- Allow students basic rights and responsibilities in the academic advising relationship
- Protect academic advisors from arbitrary action regarding roles and responsibilities
- Protect academic advisors from unrealistic expectations of students
- Raise professionalism of academic advising on campus

Proposed content of this “Code of Academic Advising Responsibility” would include:

- Curriculum Content
- Academic Requirements
- Degree Certification and Review
- Academic Advising Appointments
- Academic Advisor Accessibility
- Accurate and Timely Information and Communication
- Respect Privacy and Confidentiality
- Assessment and Evaluation

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
History of "Responsibility" at Michigan State University.....	2
History of Academic Advising at Michigan State University.....	2
Structure of Academic Advising at Michigan State University.....	6
The National Academic Advising Conversation.....	9
Why a "Code of Academic Advising Responsibility".....	11
The Process for Considering a “Code of Academic Advising Responsibility.....	12
A Start to the Conversation.....	13
Summary.....	15
Bibliography .....	16

## Introduction

In recent years, Michigan State University has made a concerted effort to establish a baseline for academic advisors by creating an online training module, as well as an online “Advisor Manual” for academic advisors. While these have been solid efforts to address concerns expressed in a variety of university documents over the years, the Office of the University Ombudsperson, as well as other offices, anecdotally report that students express concern over the quality of academic advising, discrepancies among units, as well as among academic advisors within the same unit. In terms of data to verify these concerns, in the last year, the Office of the University Ombudsperson received 66 contacts related to inconsistent or inaccurate academic advising. This number does not reflect those students who are not aware of the Office of the University Ombudsperson or those students uncertain as to where to address their concerns related to academic advising. Additionally, although the university conducted an assessment of academic advising satisfaction in 2005 (Hembroff & Clark, 2005) and the annual National Survey of Student Engagement conducted at Michigan State University asks questions regarding academic advising (both centered on undergraduate academic advising), there continues to exist no overarching systematic assessment process for evaluating the quality of academic advising on campus similar to the SIRS forms that students complete after finishing a course.

This problem is compounded by the fact that not all academic advisors are members of the NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising (NACADA) and may not adhere to the values or to the standards set forth by the *NACADA’s Statement of Core Values* (NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising, 2005) or the Council for Academic Standards in Higher Education’s *CAS Standards and Guidelines: Academic Advising Programs* (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2013). Additionally, there is (a) no requirement for academic advisors to pursue professional development, attend the available in-service trainings or reference the training/manual, (b) no mechanism to verify if a student is actually receiving quality academic advising, nor (c) options for students to grieve poor academic advising.

This makes clear the need for a standardized set of expectations for academic advising programs at Michigan State University. As a result, with inconsistent training, varied university and department expectations, as well as a lack of transparency in the academic advising role for students, when a student is faced with an issue related to an academic advisor, or the academic advisor is at fault, many students receive the response that “It is the responsibility of each student to be aware of and understand University regulations as published” (Michigan State University, 2015a, para. 7). While this may indeed be the case, students are looking to their academic advisors as more than someone to assist with enrollment, but as someone to help them to navigate the bureaucratic structure of the university. The academic advisor’s role is significantly broader than it was in the 1970s when NACADA was founded (Grites & Gordon, 2009). Since that time, academic advising has become established as separate from the traditional faculty role at Michigan State University. Students are reliant on academic advisors to impart their knowledge and understanding of the curriculum. In an effort to provide students with academic advising rights and responsibilities, and to provide academic advisors with a comprehensive set of expectations for their interactions, the creation of a “Code of Academic Advising

Responsibility”, similar to the “Code of Teaching Responsibility” (Michigan State University, 2015d) is recommended. “A Code of Academic Advising Responsibility” would outline the University’s expectations for academic advisors for both graduate and undergraduate students; thus, reducing dissatisfaction among students and academic advisors, as well as, reducing inaccurate and inconsistent advice.

### **History of "Responsibility" at Michigan State University**

In 1967, when the first Ombudsman at Michigan State University, James Rust, took office, one of his first items was the creation of a “Code of Teaching Responsibility”. Rust (1969) called for this code as a result of

my observations and experiences as Ombudsman in this area of student-faculty relations, I have requested the Educational Policies Committee to study the possibility of preparing a set of recommendations, which would be most useful to new faculty members especially, concerning what is expected of them with respect to keeping office hours, cutting classes, informing students about the methods by which grades will be computed, permitting a student to look over his final examination and discussing it with him and observing the final exam schedule (p. 6).

Additionally, Rust felt that the key to these responsibilities was tying them to promotion and tenure for faculty.

This proposal was taken under consideration and the university established the “Code of Teaching Responsibility” in 1970. At that time, the defined field of academic advising as an independent profession and an activity in which students engaged was virtually non-existent, although in Rust's first annual report, he noted that academic advising also needed to be examined. As the “Code of Teaching Responsibility” has become engrained in the institutional culture over the past 45 years, students have come to use the “Code of Teaching Responsibility” when in conflict with a faculty member. As students have these expectations of instructors, so too are they coming to expect similar standards for academic advising. Many complaints the Office of the University Ombudsperson hear from students related to academic advising include not keeping appointments or office hours; not having appointment times available; confusion as to just what an academic advisor is supposed to assist with; and the unreliability of information from academic advising office to academic advising office. Rust noted in his 1970 report that the new code would "in the long run, do much to prevent conflict, misunderstanding, perhaps even hostility, between students and faculty members” (p. 4 ). A “Code of Academic Advising Responsibility” might serve a similar function between students and advisors at this stage in the university's history.

### **History of Academic Advising at Michigan State University**

Initially, academic advising was part of the faculty role at Michigan State University and was, on some level, covered by the “Code of Teaching Responsibility”, despite Dr. Rust's concerns outlined in his 1969 report citing academic advising at the institution as being "lackadaisical” (Rust, 1969, p. 15). As the role of academic advisor has been portioned out from the faculty role

and has been given to professional academic advisors, under the title of “Academic Advising Specialist”, the “Code of Teaching Responsibility” does not apply to them. This has led to varied expectations among students in terms of the academic advisor/advisee relationship and variations in academic advisor training and methods across the university. Additionally, students changing majors or transitioning from the Undergraduate University Division to their academic units for academic advising may notice inconsistencies in academic advisor responsibilities to students.

The earliest notation of policies related to academic advising found in Michigan State University Archives and Historical Collections is dated 1907 (Michigan State University, 1907). However distinctions from faculty and other roles on campus began to emerge in the 1960s. In 1966, the University's Educational Policy Committee recommended that there be a distinction between counseling and academic advising stating:

Academic advisement is a continuing process in which a student and a faculty member discuss possible options; first in the student's total educational program; second in specific curricular fields; and third, in potential careers, in order that the student might make more intelligent choices (Michigan State University, 1966).

Additionally, the university's second ombudsman, Dr. Carolyn Stieber also concurred with Dr. Rust's notes of academic advising being "lackadaisical" in her 1975 report to the President:

Advising in some departments is lackadaisical and even woefully inaccurate. This seems to be an even more acute problem for transfer students who tend to "fall between the crack" at MSU. As a group they seem the most uninformed and bewildered. I have discussed this with a number of individuals on campus, all of whom acknowledge the difficulty, but no one seems to know what to do about it (p. 1).

In a memorandum dated May 24th, 1988, the responsibility of academic advisors did rise to a level of concern with the Council to Review Undergraduate Education (Michigan State University, 1988). This group made a number of recommendations related to improving academic advising at the university as they felt:

The importance of academic advising cannot be overstated... Sound advising can make the difference between a rewarding and a disappointing academic experience (para. 19).

Among other recommendations, two most directly related to the creation of a “Code of Academic Advising Responsibility”:

67. That the governance system, in consultation with the undergraduate assistant/associate dean's group, be charged with determining academic policy on advising, including setting goals for advisors and advisees, and formulating a code of advising responsibility (para. 25).

And:

70. That, in order to provide a coherent advising system, the Office of the Provost develop a process to coordinate existing advising services offered by all academic and support units (para. 33).

These individuals were familiar with the “Code of Teaching Responsibility” and seemed to feel that a similar document for academic advisors would have an impact on student success at the university. As time moved forward, the role of academic advising continued to be lauded in changes to the university curriculum. Academic advisors assisted with curriculum transitions in academic units, as well as the shift from quarters to semesters. During that time, there were some efforts to examine the satisfaction of academic advising among the undergraduate student body. In 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2001, Dr. Lee N. June, the then Assistant Provost for Academic Student Services and Multicultural Issues and Vice-President for Student Affairs and Services commissioned surveys to examine undergraduate student satisfaction with academic advising (Hembroff & Clark, 2005). This same survey was then again conducted in 2005 via a web survey to measure the consistency of academic advising over the previous decade. This survey indicated a number of key findings related to student expectations and their experiences with academic advising:

- Overall, 42% of the respondents indicated that they relied most on their academic advisors, while 19% claimed to rely most on the internet – very similar to the results in 2001 (p. iv).
- A somewhat lower percentage of respondents (78%) reported usually seeing the same advisor each time they get advising than was the case in 1998 and 2001 (81%) (p. iv).
- Roughly the same percentage of students reported having received academic advice from more than one advisor since enrolling at MSU (76%) as had reported doing so in 2001 (74%) and 1998 (73%)
  - Among those who had seen multiple advisors, 39% found the advice to be very consistent across advisors compared to 41% in 2001 and 38% in 1998.
  - Among those who had only seen one advisor, 73% said their advisor was very consistent – very similar to but slightly greater than the 71% found in 2001.
  - Both groups of respondents were less likely to judge the advice they received as very accurate in 2005 compared to 2001 (p. vi).
- Overall, regardless of source, 77% of respondents rated the quality of advising at MSU as excellent (29%) or good (48%) – somewhat lower than the 81% giving these ratings in 2001 and very similar to the 79% giving these ratings in 1998. (p. vi)
- 79% of respondents rated the quality of advising within the college/unit of the student’s major as excellent (37%) or good (42%) – somewhat lower than the 83% found in 2001 (p. vi).

When examined by College, the survey found that there were differences by colleges. Academic advisors were mentioned as the most relied upon source by 54% of the students in Human

Ecology and 48% of the students in Communication Arts and Sciences but only 27% in James Madison, 37% in Natural Science and 31% in Engineering (Hembroff & Clark, 2005, p. 6). The survey also outlines issues related to academic advisor accessibility, convenience and availability. While overall, the students in the 2005 seemed to rate academic advising as excellent or good, there were also high indicators that advice was inconsistent and when broken down by college, 38% claimed that the advice they received was consistent.

After the 2005 report on undergraduate academic advising, the university moved to participating in the National Survey for Student Engagement. This survey seeks to annually collect "information at hundreds of four-year colleges and universities about first-year and senior students' participation in programs and activities that institutions provide for their learning and personal development. The results provide an estimate of how undergraduates spend their time and what they gain from attending college" (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2015, para. 2). In the survey, the one question that asks about academic advising is relegated within "Indicate the quality of your interactions with the following people at your institution." Neither the question nor the survey assesses the impact or the quality and consistency of academic advising taking place at the institution. In the latest published data on Michigan State University available at [www.collegeportraits.org](http://www.collegeportraits.org), it indicates that 65% of seniors rated the quality of interactions with academic advisors to be positive, but it is not clear on what factors this was based and the results for seniors on the last survey were from a 10.5% response rate (College Portrait, 2015). However, if taken at its face value, it appears that student satisfaction with academic advising has declined since the 2005 report on undergraduate academic advising produced by Michigan State University.

However, despite these intermittent surveys and brief concerns raised regarding the quality and consistency of undergraduate academic advising at Michigan State, there has been no standard set for academic advisors, whether professional or faculty to measure their performance and the history of academic advising seems to indicate that the purpose and skill of academic advising has been a contested issue since its inception. That said, the Graduate School at Michigan State University did create "Guidelines for Graduate Student Advising and Mentoring Relationships" (Michigan State University, 2004). However, these guidelines are guidelines and not something that a student may use as a basis for appeal if they are met with inconsistent or inaccurate academic advising. These will be discussed further later in this proposal.

In recent years, the university is making strides to standardize academic advising. However, these fall short of developing standards of behavior that both academic advisors and students can use as a measuring stick. With the advent of technology and the formation of formal training for academic advisors including Academic Advising In-Services, the "Advising Manual", and academic advisor training available on the Registrar's website, there are pieces in place to train academic advisors. However, these tools are available to academic advisors only. Please note that the "Advising Manual" is unable to be cited as the rest of the materials in this document as only those authorized have access. There exists no transparency in the system for students and the ways in which these tools and opportunities are used vary from college to college, unit to unit and academic advisor to academic advisor. This is further compounded by the structure of academic advising at the university.

## Structure of Academic Advising at Michigan State University

The academic advising system at the university is a shared split model as defined by King (2008, p. 245). While many large research one institutions fall under this model, it does have a number of pros and cons when working with students and their understanding of the academic advising process. The shared split model of academic advising divides advising between an academic advising office, such as the Undergraduate University Division, and the academic subunits, such as the academic advisors located in the individual colleges/units. Students initially receive academic advising in the Undergraduate University Division and then move to their subunit once they reach 60 credits. In these subunits they may be advised by either professional academic advisors or faculty academic advisors. King (2008) notes that students often received academic advising from a trained academic advisor with the skills to advise at-risk students in this model, but there is a need for “close coordination between the advising office and the academic units” (p. 246). Additionally, this model calls for close attention to the transitioning of students from one academic advisor to another. At Michigan State University, while the Electronic Student Academic Folder (ESAF) does allow for some coordination among academic advising units in keeping communication lines clear, there appears to be very little in terms of structure to assist students in the transition between academic advisors and in consistency between academic advising units.

In terms of structure, students also encounter different types of academic advisors within the system. Some students are advised by professional academic advisors, while others are advised by faculty academic advisors. Self (2008) notes “Professional academic advisors are generally employed to devote the majority of their workday to meeting directly with students to address academic curriculum requirements, college policies and procedures, and general student development and success issues” (p. 269). This falls in line with how Michigan State University defines the role of the Academic Advising Specialist in the *Academic Specialist Handbook* (Michigan State University, 2015b, Section A.5.1.1):

The academic advising category includes individuals who provide advisement on course options and other academically related matters. These academic specialists have responsibilities in an academic department, school or college or in a unit that services University-wide populations (e.g. Supportive Services, Undergraduate University Division, Honors College). These persons typically:

- Provide advice on course and curriculum selection;
- Monitor students’ programs;
- Recommend certification for graduation;
- Maintain contact with advisors in other units;
- Provide incidental information on the relationship between course selection and career options;
- Refer students, when necessary, to other units in the University for assistance with educational, career, and personal concerns;
- Participate in activities devoted to the retention of students with University programs;
- Provide assistance and guidance to students reentering programs;
- May be involved in instructional activities associated with classes, labs, and seminars;

- Participate, as required by the unit, in professional development activities on and off campus, including conferences, workshops, and seminars to enhance the ability and knowledge to perform as an advisor;
- Participate in department/school, college and University level committees;
- Make a significant professional contribution by making scholarly presentations, present papers, lectures or workshops on campus or beyond related to academic advising or training;
- Assume leadership roles involve the coordination, supervision and training as academic advisors.

However, as noted previously, the standard of academic advising is not the same across units and the involvement of professional academic advisors within the academic unit varies, as does the culture of academic advising among units which further complicates the quality of academic advising that students receive.

Other units on campus do not utilize professional academic advisors. These units have students see faculty academic advisors. When faculty members advise, it is oftentimes only a portion of their responsibilities within the institution. Their roles include research, teaching, and service. Depending on the academic unit, academic advising responsibilities either fall under teaching or research and may or may not be part and parcel of the promotion and tenure process. As a result, their investment in quality academic advising from academic unit to academic unit may vary thus further contributing to the wide range of experiences students encounter. Additionally, in the case of faculty academic advisors, the system of advisement is left to the determination of the academic unit which again points to the lack of transparency and consistency related to academic advising roles on campus. The *Faculty Handbook* has the following outline of academic advising for faculty (Michigan State University, 2015e, Section V):

Each department shall develop a system of advisement of students within the context of the structure of the college and/or department consistent with the following:

1. Academic advising is a responsibility of faculty, but the division of responsibility (for example, relative emphasis on graduate versus undergraduate advising, number of advisees per faculty member, etc.) should be determined through mutual agreement between faculty and deans and/or department chairpersons in each college and/or department.
2. Excellence and effort in advising are to be recognized by chairpersons and deans, as well as by the provost, as an integral part of the faculty member's assignment.
3. Procedural provisions are to be made at the departmental and college level for the availability of academic advisors at times in addition to those scheduled for enrollment and registration.
4. Students are responsible for studying and knowing University, college and department requirements as stated in the catalog. They shall also prepare tentative academic plans for review by their academic advisors.
5. With efficient use of faculty and student time as prime considerations, all administrative offices involved in enrollment and registration should continue to develop improvements in the process,

Procedures developed by colleges for the guidance of faculty involved in student advising are available in college offices.

As noted previously, the Graduate School at Michigan State University did develop "Guidelines for Graduate Student Advising and Mentoring Relationships". This document was created to improve upon the experience that graduate students have with quality research/scholarship. Tangentially, it does address expectations for academic advising related to academic requirements and linking it to learning outcomes. These guidelines were developed after eight months of discussion in 2003-2004 by the Research Mentoring Task Force. Again, the focus of the document was "to emphasize quality research/scholarship" and "to highlight effective faculty mentoring of graduate students and postdocs about research and scholarly integrity is of fundamental importance for ensuring quality research/scholarship of all disciplines" (Michigan State University, 2004, p. 2). Additionally, this document recognizes faculty working in the academic advising role and does not account for professional academic advisors that may have graduate student academic advising responsibilities. The "Guidelines for Graduate Student Advising and Mentoring Relationships" outline the following responsibilities for faculty academic advisors (p. 5):

- Ensuring that graduate students receive information about requirements and policies of the graduate program
- Advising graduate students on developing a program plan, including appropriate course work, research or creative activity, and on available resources
- Advising graduate students on the selection of a thesis or dissertation topic with realistic prospects for successful completion within an appropriate time frame and on the formation of a guidance committee
- Providing training and oversight on creative activities, research rigor, theoretical and technical aspects of the thesis or dissertation research, and in professional integrity
- Encouraging graduate students to stay abreast of the literature and cutting-edge ideas in the field
- Helping graduate students to develop professional skills in writing reports, papers, and grant proposals, making professional presentations, establishing professional networks, interviewing, and evaluating manuscripts and papers
- Providing regular feedback on the progress of graduate students toward degree completion, including feedback on research or creative activities, course work, and teaching, and constructive criticism if the progress does not meet expectations
- Helping graduate students develop into successful professionals and colleagues, including encouraging students to participate and disseminate results of research or creative activities in the appropriate scholarly or public forums
- Facilitating career development, including advising graduate students on appropriate job and career options, as well as on the preparation of application materials for appropriate fellowship, scholarship and other relative opportunities
- Writing letters of reference for appropriate fellowship, scholarship, award, and job opportunities
- Providing for supervision and advising of graduate students when the faculty advisor is on leave or extended absence

These requirements outlining academic advising in the *Faculty Handbook* have not been updated since they were approved by the Academic Council on February 8, 1966 and do not take into account how the field of academic advising has changed or the shifts in academic advising culture on Michigan State's campus. Looking at the expectations of professional academic advisors as outlined in the *Academic Specialist Handbook* and expectations of faculty academic advisors as outlined in the *Faculty Handbook* also highlights the differences in expectations among academic advising units on campus and the difficulty students have in navigating the academic advising system with inherent inconsistencies built into the system. Finally, the "Guidelines for Graduate Student Advising and Mentoring Relationships" developed by the Graduate School are an attempt to rectify the issues related to academic advising at the graduate level. However, this document, as guidelines, lacks the ability to be enforced and whether or not academic advisors working with graduate students adhere to these is not tracked. Additionally, the "Guidelines for Graduate Student Advising and Mentoring Relationships" cover a wide scope of what an ideal academic advisor could look like for graduate students. Creating a "Code of Academic Advising Responsibility" would create an overarching expectation for academic advising among faculty academic advisors, professional academic advisors, academic units and students.

### **The National Academic Advising Conversation**

On a national level, within the last ten years, the field of academic advising has also recognized the need for standards through the creation of *NACADA's Statement of Core Values* (NACADA, 2005) and the *CAS Standards and Guidelines: Academic Advising Programs* (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2013). *NACADA's Statement of Core Values* outlines six areas of core responsibility. However it provides guidance only and has no "teeth" in relation to student rights on individual campuses. The *CAS Standards and Guidelines: Academic Advising Programs* list out twelve areas to examine the quality of academic advising programs. However, here again there are no "teeth" in relation to student rights on individual campuses. The *CAS Standards and Guidelines: Academic Advising Programs* (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education , 2013) seek to:

affirm the importance of advising within the academy and acknowledge the impact that advising interactions have on individuals, institutions and society... It provides a framework to guide professional practice and reminds advisors of their responsibility to students, colleagues, institutions, society and themselves (p. 1).

The *CAS Standards and Guidelines: Academic Advising Programs* (AAP) (2013) state that "AAP must develop, disseminate, implement, and regularly review their missions. The mission must be consistent with the mission of the institution and with professional standards. The mission must be appropriate for the institution's student populations and community settings. Mission statements must reference student learning and development (p. 5)."

When one looks at the roles of both professional and faculty academic advisors as outlined in the previous section, there exists no reference to student learning and development in expectations

and it seems as though the role of academic advisor is nearly regulated to that of enrollment and registration alone. Additionally, as the role of academic advising for faculty academic advisors at Michigan State University has not been updated since 1966, there has not been a regular review of the mission of advising at Michigan State University.

In noting the role of the student in the process, Michigan State University states that the student is “responsible for studying and knowing University, college and department requirements as stated in the catalog” (Michigan State University, 2015a, para. 7). However, if one were to look at the requirements as the content of a course, how is a student to know the requirements without someone teaching it to them? In the *CAS Standards and Guidelines: Academic Advising Programs*, it does not state that the student is required to know the requirements, but that “the ultimate responsibility for making decisions about educational plans and life goals rests with the individual student” (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2013, p. 7). The *CAS Standards and Guidelines: Academic Advising Programs* outlines academic advising as a “shared responsibility” (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2013, p. 7). So, just as a student learning course materials is a shared responsibility requiring faculty to teach the curriculum and the student to learn, so too is academic advising. The *CAS Standards and Guidelines: Academic Advising Programs* (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2013) state:

Programs and materials associated with the AAP must:

- Promote student learning, development, and personal growth to encourage self-sufficiency
- Support students, on an ongoing basis, as they establish and evaluate their educational, career and life goals
- Assist students in identifying the realistic timeframe to complete their educational goals and support their efforts
- Provide current and accurate advising information
- Raise awareness of institutional and community resources and services for students
- Clarify institutional policies and procedures for students
- Monitor academic progress and direct students to appropriate resources and programs (p. 7)

The *CAS Standards and Guidelines: Academic Advising Programs* also outline a number of other points related to the program of academic advising as it relates to academic advisor professional development, referrals, etc. In terms of organization and leadership (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2013, p. 8):

To achieve student and program outcomes, Academic Advising Programs (AAP) must be structured purposefully and organized effectively. AAP must have:

- Clearly stated goals
- Current and accessible policies and procedures
- Written performance expectations for employees

- Functional work flow graphics or organizational charts demonstrating clear channels of authority

It also states that “specific advisor responsibilities must be clearly delineated, published, and disseminated to the campus community” (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2013, p. 10). Academic advisor responsibilities at Michigan State University are not clearly disseminated and vary from unit to unit; thus, student expectations are often confounded and misplaced given that there is no university-wide standard. The *CAS Standards and Guidelines: Academic Advising Programs* also recommend that AAP “must publish and adhere to statements of ethical practice and ensure their periodic review by relevant constituencies (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2013, p. 12).” While these values and standards are in place for academic advising programs at Michigan State University to live up to, there exists nothing that holds academic advisors to these standards. However, the field of academic advising has made a clear statement about what academic advising should be since NACADA's inception in 1977 (Grites & Gordon, 2009). Academic advising is now seen as an “essential element in the success and persistence of postsecondary students” (Klepfer & Hull, 2009) and has been defined as a factor in persistence by a variety of studies. Creating an institutional “Code of Academic Advising Responsibility” would cement Michigan State University's reputation as a leader in the field of academic advising and further outline its importance as a foundational piece of student success.

### **Why a “Code of Academic Advising Responsibility”**

A “Code of Academic Advising Responsibility” offers a number of positive outcomes for the institution on a variety of levels. As the national conversations on degree completion expand, academic advising is becoming a more examined activity. Establishing a “Code of Academic Advising Responsibility” would reinforce the value placed on academic success and retention at the university and reinforce the six initiatives of Bolder by Design (Michigan State University, 2015c).

- Enhancing the student experience through expanding how they learn;

It would enhance the student experience by lifting professional academic advising to the level of an instructional process at the institution in the eyes of students, as well as faculty and staff. It would also build consistency in this teaching and learning process by providing a consistent transparent baseline of expectations for students, as well as academic advisors and make academic advising less about enrollment and registration in the eyes of the students and more about facilitating their discussions and decisions regarding academic, personal and career plans.

- Strengthen stewardship by nurturing people, especially students and setting forth expectations for advisors;

It would allow academic advisors, whether professional or faculty, to transform their roles into leadership and mentoring roles for students that builds upon the curriculum and the learning outcomes that the institution has set forth. It would also allow Michigan State University to stand

out as a leader in the academic advising community as one that values academic advising and its impact on students.

- Advance our culture of high performance by elevating the quality of effectiveness of academic advising.

It would provide a baseline for assessment among academic advising units on campus and provide a space for more consistent academic advising practices to occur. There would be a shared vocabulary and common language around academic advising and its role for supporting student success and retention. Finally, it would increase student satisfaction, increase student retention and allow students to have basic rights and responsibilities when it comes to the academic advising relationship.

From the perspective of academic advisors, it would create a standard by which to compare their performance across the university to better serve the university's students, allow them a platform to advocate for their importance to the university and to the curriculum, and provide a means to create universal assessment of academic advising. The “Code of Academic Advising Responsibility” may even allow academic advising units to assess their needs in terms of student/academic advisor ratio and resources. The “Code of Academic Advising Responsibility” also offers protection from arbitrary action by administration in the definition of their roles and job duties and unrealistic expectations from students. The “Code of Academic Advising Responsibility” would raise the level of professionalism and culture of academic advising at Michigan State University by making a statement that it is a valuable institutional instructional component.

### **The Process for Considering a “Code of Academic Advising Responsibility”**

To begin a campus-wide dialogue about the development and implementation of a “Code of Academic Advising Responsibility”, it is recommended that a task force appointed by Provost June Youatt or her delegate be formed consisting of:

- One representative from Undergraduate Assistant/Associate Deans (UGAAD)
- One representative from Graduate Assistant/Associate Deans (GAAD)
- One representative from Associated Students of Michigan State University (ASMSU)
- One representative from Council of Graduate Students (COGS)
- One representative from the Office of the University Ombudsperson
- Two front-line academic advisors (One professional academic advisor and one faculty academic advisor)
- Two at-large members

This Code of Academic Advising Responsibility Task Force would begin meetings in August of 2015 and report out with their initial draft by November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015. Each member of the task force would then take the draft to their constituencies for review and comment until December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015. At that time, the draft would be revised taking into consideration the comments with a final draft presented January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016. It is strongly encouraged that the “Code of Academic

Advising Responsibility” then go through an approval process similar to the “Code of Teaching Responsibility”.

### **A Start to the Conversation**

In an effort to facilitate the dialogue of the “Code of Academic Advising Responsibility”, the following suggestions are made:

#### 1. Curriculum Content.

Academic advisors shall be responsible for ensuring that the content of their advising sessions is consistent with the program descriptions approved by the University Committee on Curriculum and the University Council as outlined in Academic Programs. Academic advisors shall direct academic advising activities toward the fulfillment of degree completion and shall evaluate student performance in a manner consistent with degree completion.

#### 2. Academic Requirements.

Academic advisors shall be responsible for providing students with a copy of their departmental handbook and degree completion requirements at the start of the student's academic program within that specific unit.

#### 3. Degree Certification and Review.

Academic advisors shall be responsible for informing students, in a timely manner so as to enhance learning, of the requirements for graduation. Academic advisors shall be responsible for assessing a student's progress based on announced criteria. Academic advisors shall notify students of degree progression at a minimum the summer before the student's projected graduation date so the student has time to discuss their degree progression and address any issues that arise.

#### 4. Academic Advising Appointments.

Academic advisors are responsible for maintaining academic advising appointment schedules and notifying students in advance of changes to said schedule, or alternate options for meeting their academic advising needs.

#### 5. Academic Advisor Accessibility.

Academic advisors shall be responsible for being accessible to students and therefore shall keep office hours. Office hours should be scheduled at times convenient to both students and academic advisors with the additional option of mutually convenient prearranged appointments for students whose schedules conflict with announced office hours. Each academic advising unit shall determine the minimum number of office hours

for academic advisors in that unit. In addition to office hours, academic advisor accessibility through e-mail and other means is encouraged.

#### 6. Accurate and Timely Information and Communication.

Academic advisors shall provide relevant and timely information related to changes in degree programs and academic requirements. Academic advisors shall also keep accurate records of all student/academic advisor interactions whether via e-mail or in-person via the Electronic Student Academic Folder (ESAF).

#### 7. Respect Privacy and Confidentiality.

Academic advisors are responsible for maintaining student records in a confidential manner and respecting student privacy.

#### 8. Assessment and Evaluation.

Academic advisors shall be evaluated on an annual basis by their unit administrators to assess whether the standards of academic advising are being met. Each academic advising unit shall determine what the assessment shall look like.

The following suggestion is also made regarding how the “Code of Academic Advising Responsibility” would fit within current hearing board structures. Again, this is in line with procedures of the “Code of Teaching Responsibility”:

#### Hearing Procedures

1. Students may register complaints regarding an advisor's failure to comply with the provisions of the Code of Academic Advising Responsibility directly with that academic advisor.
2. Students may also take complaints directly to academic advising units' chief administrators or their designates. If those persons are unable to resolve matters to the student's satisfaction, the student must submit a written, signed statement to the chair of the hearing board of the department/school within which the violation is alleged to have occurred (see SSR Article 7 III. A. and B.) A copy of any complaint transmitted shall be sent to the academic advisor. A written report of the action or recommendation of such groups will be forwarded to the student and to the academic advisor.
3. Students wishing to appeal an academic advising unit action or recommendation may do so as outlined in *Student Rights and Responsibilities at Michigan State University*, *Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities*, or *Medical Student Rights and Responsibilities*.

Such complaints must normally be initiated no later than the middle of the semester following the one wherein alleged violations occurred. Exceptions shall be made in cases where the involved academic advisor or student is absent from the University during the semester following the one wherein alleged violations occurred.

In addition to the above suggestions, there should be a process in place for students to request a new academic advisor in situations where the trust cannot be repaired and it is clear that continued involvement between academic advisor and student would impact student success retention negatively. Additionally, ways to address true "academic advisor error" on the part of a student's academic program should be evaluated.

As one can see, the above suggestions were based on those outlined for those involved in the instructional process under the "Code of Teaching Responsibility". This is meant to be a start to the conversation as to just what might be considered baseline expectations across the institution.

### **Summary**

In summary, creating a "Code of Academic Advising Responsibility" will need to be examined thoroughly before its creation and implementation. However, such a code could provide a wide array of benefits to the university, its academic advisors, and its students. These benefits include, but are not limited to, a standardized set of expectations for academic advising programs, greater transparency in the academic advising role; consistency among academic units that house professional and/or faculty academic advisors; shared language around academic advising; increased student satisfaction with academic advising; basic rights and responsibilities in the academic advising relationship for students; protection from arbitrary action regarding roles and responsibilities for academic advisors, protection from unrealistic expectations of students and raise professionalism of academic advising on campus.

## Bibliography

- Center for Postsecondary Research. (2015). National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Retrieved from <http://nsse.iub.edu/>
- College Portrait. (2015). Michigan State University College Portrait. Retrieved from <http://www.collegeportraits.org/MI/MSU>
- Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education. (2013). CAS Standards and Guidelines: Academic Advising Programs. Retrieved from <http://standards.cas.edu/getpdf.cfm?PDF=E864D2C4-D655-8F74-2E647CDECD29B7D0>
- Grites, T.J., & Gordon, V.N. (2009). The history of NACADA: An amazing journey. *NACADA Journal*, 17(2), 41-55.
- Hembroff, L.A. & Clark, K. (2005). Undergraduate Academic Advising at M.S.U.: Report of the 2005 Survey. East Lansing: Michigan State University.
- King, M.C. (2008). Organization of academic advising services. In Gordon, V.N., Habley, W.R., Grites, T.J. & Associates. *Academic Advising: A Comprehensive Handbook (2nd Ed.)*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Klepfer, K., & Hull, J. (2012). High school rigor and good advice. Setting up students to succeed at a glance. Retrieved from <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Staffingstudents/High-school-rigor-and-good-advice-Setting-up-students-to-succeed#sthash.yizFgECO.dpuf>
- Michigan State University. (1907). Advising 1907-1946. Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Records. Policy Compilations 1850 – 1960, Box 319, Folder 47, Michigan State University Archives & Historical Collections, East Lansing, Michigan
- Michigan State University. (1966). Academic Advising, University Committee on Academic Policy Records, Box 1049, Folder 32, Michigan State University Archives & Historical Collections, East Lansing, Michigan
- Michigan State University. (1988). Council to Review Undergraduate Education: Opportunities for Renewal. Retrieved from <http://acadgov.msu.edu/historical-reports/crue/table-contents>
- Michigan State University. (2004). Guidelines for Graduate Student Advising and Mentoring Relationships. Retrieved from <http://grad.msu.edu/researchintegrity/docs/guidelines.pdf>
- Michigan State University. (2015a). Academic Programs. Retrieved from <http://www.reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/>

- Michigan State University. (2015b). Academic Specialist Handbook. Retrieved from <http://www.hr.msu.edu/documents/facacadhandbooks/academicspecialist/>
- Michigan State University. (2015c). Bolder by Design: Six Imperatives. Retrieved from <http://bolderbydesign.msu.edu/six-imperatives/>
- Michigan State University. (2015d). Code of Teaching Responsibility. Academic Programs. Retrieved from <http://www.reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Print.asp?Section=514>
- Michigan State University. (2015e). Faculty Handbook. Retrieved from <http://www.hr.msu.edu/documents/facacadhandbooks/facultyhandbook/index.htm>
- NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising. (2005). NACADA statement of core values of academic advising. Retrieved from the *NACADA Clearinghouse of Academic Advising Resources* Web site: <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Core-values-of-academic-advising.aspx>
- Rust, J. (1969). Annual Report of the University Ombudsman. East Lansing: Michigan State University.
- Rust, J. (1970). Annual Report of the University Ombudsman. East Lansing: Michigan State University
- Self, C. (2008). Advising delivery: Professional advisors, counselors and other staff. In Gordon, V.N., Habley, W.R., Grites, T.J. & Associates. *Academic Advising: A Comprehensive Handbook (2nd Ed.)*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Steiber, C. (1975). Annual Report of the University Ombudsman. East Lansing: Michigan State University.