

The Code of Undergraduate Advising Responsibilities

Background¹

With approximately 40,000 undergraduate students pursuing degrees in over 160 different majors, Michigan State University (MSU) offers an array of academic opportunities to its students. One challenge associated with such a vast academic community is offering consistent academic advising that conforms to values of fairness, objectivity and impartiality.

MSU's advising infrastructure is a complex, matrix organization characterized by academic advisors with a variety of roles and backgrounds, including full-time professional advisors, faculty advisors (some with tenure; others without), program staff with advising responsibilities, and graduate and undergraduate advisors. A recent census of the MSU's colleges with responses from 10 of the 13 academic college provides a glimpse into the diversity of roles and structures in the advising system:

- 7/10 of the college reported advisor-to-student ratios of greater than 1:350; 4/10 reported ratios of greater than 1:500;
- 91% of advisors held 100% advising appointments, although only 65-90% of their job responsibilities were advising-related tasks as characterized by supervisors;
- Some of the additional responsibilities included: teaching, research, recruitment, outreach, admissions & enrollment management, curriculum development, education abroad, program assessment, DEI initiatives, student organization support and assessment.
- 2/10 colleges reported using faculty advisors where the percentage of time allocated to advising ranged from 7.5% in one college to 30-50% in the other.

A recent assessment of campus advising conducted by MSU's Assessment and Metrics Working Group indicates that the overall quality of advising on campus is strong. Students reported that advisors are largely accessible (71% of students report being able to meet with an advisor within one week of a request), knowledgeable (82% of students report that advisors are knowledgeable of university policies and procedures), and caring (72% of students report that advisors care about their academic success). Despite these positive findings, some respondents identified issues with accessing advising appointments, struggling to navigate the advising ecosystem with different types of advisors, and consistent maintenance of electronic records from these appointments.

Although the data indicate strengths in the advising system, university leadership set out to codify a set of advising responsibilities that reflect MSU's shared commitment to student success through excellence in advising and articulate a set of professional standards for the advising community on campus that parallels the institution's Code of Teaching Responsibilities. This effort articulates the institutional expectations for all advisors regardless of appointment type and structure as well as refine the expectations for the student-advisor relationship.

Responsibilities of Undergraduate Advisors

The principal purpose of advising is to guide students to successful completion of their undergraduate careers. Many activities may be involved however the primary advising functions are providing advice on university policies, course selection, enrichment opportunities and post-collegiate careers. Individual advisors may have the expertise to advise students on all of these matters or they may need to refer

¹ The background section is provided for context when considering the proposed code of responsibilities, but is not meant to appear in the final formal document.

students to other resources. With these premises in mind, the university's expectations for advisors are as follows:

Commitment to Student Success

Academic advising is a critical piece of MSU's commitment to the success of students. Advisors are responsible for supporting students in their personal, educational and professional growth. Connecting students to suitable majors is essential for student achievement. Advisors will identify appropriate campus resources, programs, policies, and procedures, making referrals as appropriate to support students preparing for post-collegiate life. It is the responsibility of advisors to stay up to date on information about available resources and connect with colleagues to build networks of support for students. Advisors will approach the advising of students consistently in terms of fairness, objectivity, and impartiality.

Knowledge and Implementation of University Policy

Advisors will provide accurate and consistent information to their advisees that conform to current requirements as outlined in Academic Programs and other relevant sources. They will ensure that their knowledge of MSU policies and procedures is up to date and will communicate changes to their advisees in a timely fashion. They will maintain awareness of majors and minors beyond their primary area of responsibility, including those in other colleges, to refer students to the appropriate departments or units for information on requirements and procedures. They will maintain awareness of non-academic support services to which students may need referral.

Timely Communication and Recordkeeping

Advisors will provide accurate and consistent information to student advisees that conforms to current requirements as outlined in Academic Programs. They will maintain electronic records of advising appointments, including specific course recommendations in the MSU-sanctioned system that is accessible both to the student and the advisor's supervisor. Advisors will be responsive to communications from students and initiate conversations to engage proactively with student advisees. Advisors will maintain the confidentiality of academic records in accordance with university policy and adhere to all FERPA regulations.

Degree Tracking

Advisors will provide students with accurate degree tracking information, including conducting degree requirement checks to track progress toward degree completion. They will assist students in identifying a realistic plan to complete their educational goals.

Advising Appointments

Advisors will provide students opportunities to schedule appointments consistent with unit-level guidelines. Advisors will cancel appointments only in cases of emergencies, notifying students of the cancellation and arranging to reschedule the session.

Responsibilities of Students in the Advising Relationship

Completion of Degree Requirements

Students are responsible for learning university, college and departmental requirements as published in Academic Programs. Although advisors provide important reminders and consultation on course progression and selection, students are ultimately responsible for completing the courses required by

degree programs. Any deviation from stated requirements requires written approval from an academic advisor, advising director, department chair or assistant/associate dean who oversees the program.

Use of Electronic Resources to Support Degree Completion

Students should use the available resources including the student portal to monitor academic progress, noting limitations for some unique programs. Any discrepancies between monitoring systems and Academic Programs should be addressed with advising staff immediately upon discovery.

Communication with Advisors

Students should read all university messages sent either electronically or by mail related to academic matters. Students are responsible for knowing and following guidelines or requirements communicated to them by these means.

Appeal of Advising Errors

Students should consult departmental/college organizational leaders for information on seeking relief in instances of advising errors that impact student progress to degree. Initial outreach with concerns related to academic advising should be directed first to unit administrators (e.g., department chair, director of advising) who have the ability to adjudicate and rectify any errors. If the matter remains unresolved, students should contact the Office of the Ombudsperson for additional support in seeking resolution.