

**Guiding Principles for Academic Advising
Middle Tennessee State University
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Context

More than 80 academic advisors in eight colleges serve approximately 22,000 students at MTSU. Deans of each respective academic college oversee the work of advising centers, which establish best practices and processes for the delivery of academic advising services. This decentralized advising model provides the flexibility needed to meet the needs of students and encourage innovation. MTSU is committed to ensuring universal student access to quality academic advising services. Accordingly, all colleges and advising centers adhere to the “guiding principles” defined herein. While there is likely some overlap with faculty advising, the information below pertains directly to college advisors working through college-specific advising centers, rather than faculty advisors working through departments and programs.

Academic Advising Vision Statement

MTSU maintains a well-trained team of data-informed advisors whose professionalism and resourcefulness create a culture of trust among all student success stakeholders. Advisors support students by establishing rapport and open lines of communication, encouraging critical thinking about academic and professional goals, and promoting understanding of their education. Advisors also represent MTSU in all of their work, both on and off campus.

MTSU Academic Advising Guiding Principles

Relational Competency

Trust. Advisors are student-centered, responsive, sincere, and encouraging. They are also a reliable resource for accurate information. These traits and commitments foster trust, leading to a collaborative relationship that cultivates student self-efficacy.

Communication. Advisors communicate clearly, thoroughly, and professionally, welcoming follow-up questions to mitigate ambiguities. They engage in regular outreach across a variety of media.

Empathy and emotional intelligence. Advisors seek to understand the context in which students and colleagues request assistance. They approach interactions in good faith and with an attitude of empathic understanding, asking questions and withholding judgment to promote a positive relationship.

Service. Advisors effectively address students’ immediate needs (e.g., urgent or time-sensitive matters), long-term concerns (e.g., academic progress towards a degree), and transactional requirements (e.g., forms and signatures). They guide and coach students with patience, respect, and encouragement throughout the interaction.

Ready Access

Timeliness. Advisors respond to student questions as soon as possible, typically within normal business hours. If an advisor is out of the office or occupied during peak advising times, they create succinct and informative automatic e-mail replies informing others of their status and when students can expect a response. When a student's inquiry involves extended research, the advisor acknowledges the student's question(s) and indicates an expected response time.

Appointments & walk-ins. Individual, in-person appointments are the standard by which students typically meet with advisors, but advisors are also available via email and phone. In the case of walk-ins, advisors serve the student by: a) meeting with the student as though they had a scheduled appointment, and/or b) helping the student schedule a future appointment, reassuring the student that their concerns will be addressed in a timely manner, and providing their advisor's contact information.

Institutional Awareness

Policies & procedures. Advisors demonstrate an operational understanding of the institutional policies and procedures affecting students including, but not limited to, access to educational records; privacy of information; academic calendar and student registration; general education and degree requirements; learning support; limitations on enrollments; class attendance; grade appeals; and other policies, as needed.

Departmental expectations. Advisors serve as representatives of the college and understand what their college and academic departments/programs expect from students. Advisors address student notions about what is required of them in terms of aptitude, attitude, and commitment. Specialized, up-to-date knowledge in these areas may come from advisors' regular contact with department chairs and faculty, where feasible.

Curricular knowledge. Advisors actively support the integrity of the curriculum, and maintain a deep understanding of course and program requirements germane to their advising caseload. They inform students about curricular design and its goal to produce competent and qualified graduates. Advisors uphold departmental and institutional policies and practices on matters including course transferability, prerequisites, and substitutability as well as general degree requirements.

Resources. Advisors provide students with current information about useful and relevant campus resources, and maintain up-to-date knowledge of (and contact information for) key campus offices. When advisors are not aware of pertinent resources, they know where to refer students for additional information.

Continuous Improvement

Training & development. To fulfill the vision of becoming a nationally recognized student success thought, practice and results leader, academic advisors stay abreast of best practices and

developments within the field. Just as they encourage students to take ownership of their academic success and become life-long learners, advisors take responsibility for their professional development and performance. This includes attending training and workshops; serving on committees; and/or actively participating in state, regional or national conferences. This may also include regular communication with departmental faculty leadership, where feasible, to ensure that faculty and college advisors are communicating current (and similar) information to students.

Expectations & Outcomes

Documentation. MTSU's community of academic advisors remains connected and collaborative, utilizing technologies like Navigate and DegreeWorks. Advisors keep detailed documentation on their advising interactions, including academic challenges and achievements; professional and academic interests; short and long-term goals; changes to major or minor curricula; advisor scheduling recommendations; and other relevant information, as needed.

Setting expectations. Upon first meeting the student, advisors clarify student responsibilities; the role and purpose of academic advising; appointment time restrictions; acceptable forms of communication; and advisors' expectations of students. Advisors encourage students' active participation, collaboration and accountability. As a result, students are obligated to keep scheduled appointments; arrive ready to engage their advisors through informed discussion and decision-making surrounding curricula, course selection, and other important elements of the advisor-student relationship; and maintain a mature, professional, and thoughtful demeanor in all advising interactions.

Student outcomes. Advisors undertake all of the above in an effort to empower students to:

- Craft a coherent educational plan based on assessment of abilities, aspirations, interests, and values;
- Use complex information to set goals, reach decisions, and achieve those goals;
- Assume responsibility for meeting academic program requirements;
- Cultivate intellectual habits that lead to a lifetime of learning; and
- Behave as citizens who engage in the wider world around them.¹

¹ NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising. (2006). NACADA concept of academic advising. Retrieved from <https://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Pillars/Concept.aspx>