Advising Interaction Notes Overview and Guide
University of Nebraska – Lincoln
Reviewed by Advising Coordinating Board, November 2017

Purpose of Interaction Notes - Interaction notes created by advisors and advising-related professionals are an important part of serving students and supporting both retention and graduation. There are a wide range of offices and roles using MyPLAN to make and/or view interaction notes, including academic advisors and career advisors/coaches, as well as staff from financial aid, education abroad, student affairs, honors, and more. While this document focuses on academic advisors and career advisors/coaches, there are common goals and benefits that span all contributors:

- Communication – Notes in a shared system enable advising and advising-related University professionals to communicate with one another to benefit the student.
- Rapport – Advisors who review past notes prior to a meeting gain background and context for a current interaction, which helps the relationship between student and advisor to grow and move forward.
- Accuracy – The "send copy of note to student" button in MyPLAN, allows advisors to provide a detailed record of the discussion and next steps recommended. Some advisors choose to write notes as if addressing the student.
- Accountability – A record of goals, referrals, and decisions helps both the advisor and the student confirm their understanding of an interaction, especially in cases where an exception is being sought.
- Institutional Record – Interaction notes beginning at NSE and continuing through graduation establish a record of interactions across the student's enrollment.
- Activity Tracking and Reporting – Varying processes and advising models make it difficult to assess advising activity by meetings alone. Using the notes as record of interactions (appointment, walk-in, or e-mail/phone) provides a common way to reflect advising activity of both students and advisors.

Interaction Notes and FERPA -Advising notes are part of a student's education record, and are governed by the applicable Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) regulations. FERPA is a federal law designed to protect the privacy of education records; to establish the right of students to inspect and review their education records; and to provide guidelines for the correction of inaccurate and misleading data through informal and formal hearings. You have a legal responsibility to protect student education records in your possession, which means you may not release information from the student record to a third party, including parents, without written consent from the student. For more information on FERPA and the written consent process, visit http://ferpa.unl.edu.

Best Practice Considerations on Note Content

- Describe, don't evaluate – Notes should reflect what happened in an interaction, and be as free as possible from judgement and interpretation by the advisor.

  No: *Student is unmotivated and needs to get it together.*
  Yes: *Student cited difficulties getting to class particularly in the morning.*

  No: *Student became disrespectful and belligerent.*
  Yes: *Student expressed frustration about the situation and raised her voice.*

  No: *Student hates the instructor for this course.*
  Yes: *Student expressed struggling in the course and has difficulty communicating with the instructor about her questions and progress.*

- Write as if your note will be read by others – While notes are helpful for you as you continue working with a student day to day, they are a critical way to communicate with others, and are used in a variety of situations and processes, including appeals and petitions. Your interaction notes will likely be read by other advisors and administrators, but in cases where an official request for access is made – by the student and/or their parents. Write your notes in a way that will help the student and your colleagues.

- <u>Make a note for all interactions</u> – Whether in person (appointment or walk-in), or by email or phone, the interaction should be documented. For e-mail interactions, add the full string as a note, and if there are multiple rounds of messages, use the "edit note function" to keep the most updated content at the forefront.
- <u>Use a meaningful subject line</u> – Especially for petition and appeal committees, when there are many notes, it is helpful to have broad topics referenced in the subject lines when looking for particular information. For example: "*Progress in POLS 100 and Late Withdrawal,*" or "*Graduation Check – Final Term Requirements*."
- <u>Summarize but be specific</u> - Reference each topic, question, recommendation and referral. Name dates and deadlines, courses, credits, and next steps, as well as possible consequences of not following recommendations.
- <u>Document follow-up needed</u> - If you want the student to stay in contact, or if the advice given is contingent upon something (processing of transfer credit, final selection of courses, changing major/minor, meeting with another professional), be specific about when, how and why you asked the student to get in touch.
- <u>When in doubt, consult</u> – Below are some suggestions for handling sensitive content, but anytime you are unsure about whether or how something should be included in the note, talk with colleagues, supervisors, or experts (college advising leader, Title IX, etc.) to get feedback.

Sensitive Information – While it is impossible to establish an exact and consistent approach to interaction notes when particularly sensitive or personal details are disclosed, generally, the institutional approach at the University of Nebraska is a moderate one. This means including enough information to reflect that a significant challenge, event, behavior, or perception is impacting academic progress, while still protecting student privacy. Best practices include:

- Paraphrase and/or omit specific details, but note something significant was disclosed.
  - *"The student came in to discuss progress in her courses, having missed a week due to health issues resulting in anxiety, and a lack of sleep and appetite."*
  - *"When I asked what steps the student had taken to resolve a grade issue in STAT 218, he expressed frustration and used profanity before leaving my office abruptly."*
- List the offices to which referrals were made, and reference timing when there is urgency or immediate action, to signal to others the nature and level of your concerns.
  - *"Based on our conversation, I suggested a meeting with CAPS, to which the student agreed. I phoned CAPS to see if they could see the student now, then walked the student to the meeting."*
  - *"Encouraged the student to seek guidance from Student Legal Services regarding an incident occurring over the past weekend."*
  - *"Explained my role as a Responsible Employee and invited the student to consult directly with a representative of the Title IX staff in Institutional Equity and Compliance."*
- When personal, medical, legal, or conduct information is disclosed, focus your notes on necessary steps to accommodate the issues for academic progress.
  - *"The student indicated having missed some classes here and there, then all of last week due to a personal issue that kept him in his hometown. He is already working with appropriate resources for this issue, and will spend the summer at home, so will not be taking any courses. "*
  - *"Explained that dropping a course may not eliminate consequences of a concern raised by a faculty member about a recent assignment. Suggested meeting with the faculty member to discuss the situation and next steps."*
- Omit comments about instructors or other University personnel unless they have a tie to academic progress.
  - *"The student believes there was a point/total error, and an unfair grade on the final paper. He reports talking with the professor in person, but not feeling attention was given to his concerns."*
  - *"The student asserted that another advisor provided inaccurate information resulting in missing a credit hour toward graduation."*