

**Academic Specialist Status & Promotion Policy**  
**College of Social Science**  
**April 2023**

**I. Introduction**

This document specifies the criteria and procedures used by the College of Social Science (SSC) and its affiliated units in reviewing applications for Academic Specialist Status, Reappointment and Promotion. It follows the university policy on the *Reappointment and Promotion of Academic Specialists* detailed in the Academic Specialist Handbook, particularly Appendix A, which is periodically updated and can be found here:

<https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/faculty-academic-staff/academic-specialist-handbook/index.html>

In the absence of specifically adopted guidelines, the College criteria for academic specialist personnel actions are drawn from the University’s standards.

**Overview of Specialist Appointments**

<b>Appointment Basis</b>					
Annual Year (AN)			Academic Year (AY)		
<b>Specialist Functional Areas</b> (one can have multiple)					
Research	Advising	Curriculum Development	Outreach	Teaching	Admin
<b>Statuses<sup>1</sup></b>					
Fixed Term	Continuing System (2, 3-year appointments)		Continuing Status (after completion of 2, 3 year appointments)		
<b>Ranks</b>					
Specialist			Senior Specialist		

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<sup>1</sup> By MSU policy, an academic specialist who is hired in the continuing system or who is moved from the fixed-term to the continuing system serves two three-year probationary periods. The first probationary period review is for reappointment. The second probationary review is for the award of continuing status. The probationary review is conducted during the Academic Specialist Review process in which the academic specialist and the unit submit Form on Progress and Excellence (formally Form C) to the College.

## Specialist Titles

Specialist - *Research* must either:

- 1) be designated as the PI on a research project, or alternatively
- 2) take a lead role on research projects (not as PI, but performing duties which require a doctorate degree).

Specialist – *Advisor* occupying at least 50% of the time

Specialist – *Curriculum Development* occupying at least 30% of the time

Specialist – *Outreach* occupying at least 30% of the time

Specialist – *Teacher* occupying at least 30% of the time

## II. Promotion & Status Change

Advancement is based on an individual's duties in their functional area(s) and depends on an appropriately weighted assessment of that individual in each area of responsibility per their Academic Specialist Position Description Form. The initial or subsequent appointment description (the Academic Specialist Position Description form) defines the basic area(s) in which the individual should devote energy and attention in career progression. Detailed descriptions of these areas are provided in the Academic Specialist Handbook in [Appendix A](#).

### A. Fixed Term to Continuing Status *or* Hiring into the Continuing System in SSC

Academic specialists may have appointments in either the fixed-term system or the continuing system. In the College of Social Science, continuing system academic specialists were historically linked to recurring funds in a unit's base budget. As budget cuts unfolded over the years, most units no longer had the ability to fund continuing system academic specialists with recurring funds. In light of this, the College no longer requires recurring funds to justify continuing-system appointments. The College does require a strong argument that funds (recurring or non-recurring) will be available to fund the position annually for at least the next decade.

Chairs/Directors who wish to post a continuing system academic specialist position or to move a fixed-term academic specialist to the continuing system must submit a funding plan to the College's Chief of Staff and receive approval from the Dean. Plans must provide a justification for a continuing, as opposed to fixed-term, appointment. In addition, the funding plan must include details of the unit's recurring and non-recurring budgets, and an explanation of how the position will be funded under one of these. If the plan is for funding salary under a non-recurring budget, the unit must present contingencies to cut other areas of the unit's budget to ensure the continuation of the academic specialist's salary should budgets tighten in the future. In other words, the Chair/Director must guarantee that the academic specialist's continuing system salary will be prioritized over all other non-recurring budget items.

### B. Reappointment in Continuing System

The initial appointment is for a probationary period of three years. The candidate may be reappointed for an additional probationary period of three years. A recommendation for **reappointment in the continuing system** is based on a review in the second year of the initial probationary period that demonstrates achievements in the academic specialist's functional

area(s). For reappointment, the candidate must provide satisfactory performance and consistent professional improvement and effectiveness at Michigan State University and in the College sufficient to demonstrate the promise of continued professional achievement and growth for the remainder of the individual's career as an academic specialist.

### **C. Reappointment/Awarding with Continuing Status**

A recommendation for awarding continuing appointment status must be based on five years of sustained, excellence in the functional area(s).

For reappointment, the candidate must provide solid evidence of consistent and persistent professional improvement and effectiveness at Michigan State University and in the College sufficient to demonstrate the promise of continued professional achievement and growth for the remainder of the individual's career as an academic specialist.

### **D. Promotion to Senior Specialist**

A recommendation for promotion to Senior Specialist must be based on a minimum of five years of excellent annual reviews in the assigned functional duties per the Academic Specialist Position Description form. The College will consider requesting exceptions to university policy for the timeline if an Academic Specialist has accumulated years of service from a similar position in another unit at MSU and demonstrated sustained excellence in that position.

## **III. College of Social Science Process for Review:**

The procedures that the College and its affiliated units will use for reviewing the reappointment of academic specialists, the awarding of continuing appointment status and promotion to senior academic specialist are issued annually from the Associate Provost for Academic Faculty and Staff Affairs (FASA). The College follows the guidelines set forth by FASA and has established these additional procedures (as long as they do not contradict the guidelines from FASA).

- A. **Timing-** The reappointment review takes place in the second year of appointment in the continuing system and the review for continuing status takes place in the fifth year. Applying to senior specialist can take place after the fifth year per Academic HR Policy.
- B. **Promotion Dossier-** must include the following:
  1. **Excellent Annual Reviews-** A sustained period (minimum of five years) of excellent annual reviews is required in the position immediately preceding the promotion review. The College will consider requesting exceptions to university policy for the timeline if an academic specialist has accumulated years of service from a similar position in another unit at MSU and demonstrated sustained excellence in that position.
    - a. **Annual Reviews-** Each year, during the required annual performance review, unit administrators should notify eligible academic specialists of the criteria for review and assess the academic specialist's progress in the context of the review timeline. The administrator shall provide a written copy of the annual review to the academic specialist. The administrator should also involve the individual in the drafting of any relevant memoranda of understanding (MoU) between units in the case of a joint appointment or joint assignment and

provide a copy with the signature of all parties of the resulting MoU to the College and the individual, so that it may be included in any future review materials.

2. **Specialist Position Description Form-** For each promotion review, the unit administrator will prepare and present a description of the candidate's assignment including the percentage of duties in their functional area(s) (i.e., any Academic Specialist Position Description forms associated with this position for the review period). This description will form part of the review portfolio and will be distributed to all individuals who evaluate the portfolio.
3. **Form on Progress and Excellence (formally Form C) & Evidence to be Shown in Form on Progress and Excellence (formally Form C)-** A completed University Form on Progress and Excellence (formally Form C) and other required materials as directed by MSU Academic Human Resources. Evidence of the following in Form on Progress and Excellence (formally Form C):
  - a. **Continual Elevation of Knowledge & Skills Appropriate for the Position:** evidence of this must be provided and, depending on the nature of the position, could include a record of regular participation in university sessions, advanced credentialing, and other documented professional development activities;
  - b. **Engagement with the Profession:** evidence of this must be provided and, depending on the nature of the position, could include a record of external professional development through presentations at state, regional, and/or national meetings/conferences; and/or participation in training/advanced credentialing related to the position;
  - c. **Effective Leadership Beyond the Unit:** evidence of this must be provided and, depending on the nature of the position, could include a record of excellence in College, University and/or external service, such as in impactful mentoring and committee service;
  - d. **Other Demonstrated Excellence in Specialist Category-** Demonstrated excellence in category of appointment, based on position description. For example, a specialist whose primary duties are research may be expected to have generated extramural funding and/or publications.
4. **Letters of support-**
  - a. **Award of Continuing Status or Promotion to Senior Specialist-** In the case of a review to award continuing appointment status and/or promotion to senior specialist, the unit must provide four review letters.
  - b. **Pool of Referees-** The candidate may suggest up to five potential referee names to the unit administrator. The unit administrator will choose two reviewers from the list and two from their own list. The unit administrator should consult with any additional related unit administrator should the academic specialist hold a joint appointment or assignment.
  - c. **Advising, Teaching, Curriculum Development-** For Academic Specialists in these functional areas, at least four letters of support solicited by the Chair/Director are required: one from someone within the unit who has worked directly with the academic specialist (for example, an associate dean, faculty member, or specialist supervisor), and three from peers of the

academic specialist outside the unit. It is encouraged that the unit obtain a letter from a peer outside MSU.

- d. **Research, Outreach-** For academic specialists whose primary duties are research or service/outreach. At least four letters of support solicited by the Chair/Director: one from someone within the unit who has worked directly with the academic specialist (for example, an associate dean, faculty member, or research/outreach collaborator), and three from peers of the academic specialist outside the unit. At least two of the peer letters must be submitted from peers outside MSU and who can assess excellence in this area of research or service /outreach.
5. **Written Statement-** A written statement (up to two single-spaced pages) by the academic specialist is required. The statement is the specialist's opportunity to elaborate on anything not included in the required statement in Form on Progress and Excellence (formally Form C).
6. **DEI-** In addition to any requirement by the Academic Specialist Handbook or Form on Progress and Excellence (formally Form C), a DEI statement written by the Academic Specialist addressing their contributions to diversity and inclusion advancing MSU's commitment to inclusive excellence is required.

### C. Review Committees

1. **Unit Level Review-** Following Sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2 of the Academic Specialist Handbook, a unit review committee will be established to advise the unit administrator about reappointment, award of continuing appointment status, or promotion of the academic specialist. The unit should ensure that the review committee is composed of individuals knowledgeable about the position under review and the Academic Specialist Appointment System and should include at least one academic specialist. An academic specialist from outside the unit can be appointed, if necessary, with a voice but no vote. The committee may also include faculty, members of other academic personnel systems, or University support staff members. The academic specialist under review must be provided an opportunity to confer with the review committee before it provides advice to the unit administrator regarding reappointment, promotion or award of continuing appointment status.

**CSS College Committee.** Each promotion case will be reviewed by the College Promotions Committee for Fixed Term Faculty and Academic Specialists, supplemented as described below. The Review Committee chair will inform the Academic Specialist under review of the committee composition and will provide the opportunity for the Academic Specialist to confer with the committee in the form of a presentation about accomplishments before it concludes its deliberations. Confering with the committee is not required. The Review Committee members will review all materials, meet to discuss them, and make a recommendation to the Dean of the College.

**Advising/Teaching/Curriculum Development (Undergraduate Level) -**  
The chair of the Review Committee will be the Associate Dean for Academic

and Student Affairs. If the Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs is not a member of the College Promotions Committee for Fixed Term Faculty and Academic Specialists, the committee will be expanded to include them.

**Advising/Teaching/Curriculum Development (Graduate Level).** the chair of the Review Committee will be the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies. concludes its deliberations. If the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies is not a member of the College Promotions Committee for Fixed Term Faculty and Academic Specialists, the committee will be expanded to include them.

**Research/Outreach-** The chair of the Review Committee will be the Associate Dean for Research. If the Associate Dean for Research is not a member of the College Promotions Committee for Fixed Term Faculty and Academic Specialists, the committee will be expanded to include them.

### **Appendix A: Suggested Timeline**

Some units may choose to align the academic specialist review process with their other review promotion review processes, which would entail a materials submission deadline the previous spring. If the unit does not do this, then please follow the timeline below. All units must clearly communicate a materials submission deadline in advance, so as to allow the candidate enough time to gather materials and put the dossier together.

- November 1** Chairs/Directors should send a notification to the College Budget and Human Resources Office by the first Friday of November if they have received a request for a promotion review. The notification should include the name of the specialist and a short statement about years of service and sustained excellence in the position.
- December 1** Establish unit review committee  
\*If teaching is a portion of the candidate's job description, candidate teaching portfolio due; Conduct teaching observations  
Unit administrator requests referee letters if needed for review
- January 1** Candidate's full dossier due to unit administrator
- February 1** Unit review committee forwards recommendation to unit administrator
- March 1** **College Deadline** – Unit Administrator forwards Reappointment/promotion materials and recommendations to Dean's office via [SSC.HR@msu.edu](mailto:SSC.HR@msu.edu). The dossier should be in a single PDF document for each candidate with book marking in the order defined by FASA's guidelines.
- April 1** SSC.HR sends candidate's full dossier to college review committee
- April 15** College review committee forwards recommendation to Dean (cc SSC.HR)

**May 1**      **Human Resources Deadline** - Reappointment/promotion materials and recommendations due to Human Resources (from Dean's office)

Specialist notified of decision shortly after the decision.

**Appendix B: Characteristics and Responsibilities of the Academic Specialist** (taken from Academic Specialist Handbook Appendix A)

### **ADVISING**

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 serves 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 within 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, both 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 involving the coordination, supervision and training of new academic advisors.

Examples of materials that might be submitted as part of a dossier in support of the advising portion of a dossier include: workshop, conference, or any other presentation materials or publications (of all kinds related to advising), awards, materials developed in support of advising activities, materials developed in connection with any committee work, evidence of leadership in area, any other materials that are related to advising that would help the committee to understand the quality, scope, and breadth and depth of contributions in this area, evidence of collaborative work with other areas of the College or campus, evidence of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)-related work in this area, evidence of other leadership activities in this area.

## TEACHING

The academic specialist in this category is involved significantly in providing instruction for credit in classes, labs, seminars, practica and clinical settings. In general, the goals of any teacher should include the following:

- to promote the intellectual maturation and honesty of the student;
- to promote the mastery of the material by the student;
- to provide appropriate testing and evaluation to allow the student to measure his or her mastery of the material;
- to promote the understanding by the student of how the material relates to the discipline, the profession, society, the world and the universe;
- to promote an appropriate climate for diversity in the classroom and other instructional settings;
- to increase the teacher's mastery of the subject material and the level, breadth and depth of topics taught.

Specifically, the academic specialist or teacher may perform one or more of the following duties:

- teach/assist in teaching credit courses involving classes, labs, seminars, lectures, demonstrations, etc.;
- supervise/train/evaluate students in a practicum or clinical setting;
  - supervise/train/evaluate teaching assistants and other instructional staff;
- provide continuity over time and assist in the resolution of inquiries and problems, especially in courses involving a large number of faculty and staff;
- participate actively and effectively in the development of curriculum and course content;
- consult with others within the University on matters such as advising and curricular development;
- provide cognitive area outreach to K-12 educational system;
- demonstrate leadership abilities, i.e.,
  - has influence on teaching programs and curriculum of the department, school or college;
  - may be the lead teacher in team teaching;
  - may supervise, train and evaluate other teachers.
- represent the academic unit in curriculum, instructional or governance issues;
- make scholarly contributions in relevant cognitive areas and/or in pedagogy;
- make significant contribution to the advancement of the profession and is so recognized by professional peers.

Examples of materials that might be submitted as part of a dossier in addition to the above specified portions of a Teaching Portfolio include: evidence of participation in high-impact, co-curricular activities, materials in support of Honors Options and other similar additional teaching responsibilities, teaching awards, materials in support of teaching related research or creative scholarship, workshop, or conference presentations whether on-campus or for professional organizations, materials related to committee service, materials developed in support of teaching or assessment, other similar teaching-related activities, evidence of collaborative work with other



areas of the College or campus, evidence of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)-related work in this area, evidence of other leadership in area.

## **CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT**

The curriculum development category includes individuals who plan courses or curricula. Usually such responsibilities are undertaken by individuals appointed in colleges, departments, and schools. These persons typically:

- participate and, as relevant, provide leadership in the planning and development of curricula, academic programs, and individual courses;
- participate in the development of instructional materials;
- evaluate research relating to impact of various curricula and instructional techniques on student learning;
- undertake literature reviews, compilation of bibliographies, and assist in gathering up-to-date information and analysis for inclusion in courses and academic programs;
- gather and evaluate curricula and course materials from other institutions to assist in curricula planning and development efforts;
- participate in the development and evaluation of student testing and the evaluation techniques and procedures;
- participate, as required by the unit, in professional development activities, both on and off campus, including conferences, workshops, and seminars to enhance abilities and knowledge in the area of curriculum development;
- make a professional contribution by making scholarly presentations: present papers, lectures, or workshops on campus or beyond related to curriculum development and planning;
- assume, as relevant, leadership roles involving the coordination, supervision, and training of curriculum development specialists;
- represent the unit and college in curriculum planning/development deliberation;
- participate in departmental/school, college and university-level committees.

Examples of materials that may be submitted as part of a dossier in the area of curriculum development may include: instructional or assessment materials that have been developed, evidence of participation in high-impact, co-curricular activities, awards, materials in support of teaching and learning related research or creative scholarship, workshop, or conference presentations whether on-campus or for professional organizations, materials related to committee service, other similar curriculum-related activities, evidence of collaborative work with other areas of the College or campus, evidence of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)-related work in this area, other evidence of leadership in area.

## **RESEARCH**

The academic specialist appointed in this functional area facilitates scholarly research activity of a national and international stature appropriate for a premier land-grant, AAU university. These individuals perform as an independent investigator or in a lead role on research projects, including developing grant proposals and directing the research project with the designation as principal investigator, co-principal investigator or investigator, and/or in performing position responsibilities which require a terminal degree. Individuals in this category typically:

- promote an appropriate climate for creativity/diversity in the research or creative activity setting;
- promote and adhere to intellectual and scholarly honesty;
- conduct independent research or creativity activity as a (co-)principal investigator or is involved in joint research/creative projects on a (co-principal) investigator basis;
- may participate in, manage, operate, and/or maintain instrumental facilities, laboratories, computer systems or bureaus conducting research and/or providing service to a wider audience of researchers or artists within the unit, the University, external agencies, or the general research community;
- contribute significantly to the design and execution of experiments and research/creative projects;
- analyze and interpret data;
- contribute directly and indirectly to the research and creative activity goals and efforts of the unit and/or other University units, external agencies or other external clients;
- may consult with, collaborate with, supervise, train and otherwise support faculty, students, and other clients in the pursuit of research and creative endeavors;
- attract and manage, both individually or in concert with others, resources, i.e., people, funding, materials, etc., necessary to the operation of the individual research or creative project or the research/creative support facility;
- author (or co-author) books, manuscripts, reports and other scholarly instruments reflecting the output of individual research/creative projects and/or research/creative service facilities;
- may serve on graduate student guidance committees;
- present seminars, lectures, papers, posters, etc.;
- present performances, productions, exhibits, events, and/or showings
- may serve as reviewer, editor for journals or other publications;
- may serve as a consultant in the professional field;
- play a key role in securing funding for research/creative activities and equipment;
- is well known and respected outside of Michigan State University and has established a sustained record of important contributions to research proposals, reports, papers, monographs, books or other publications, performances, productions, exhibits, events, and/or showings.

Examples of materials that may be submitted as part of a dossier in the area of curriculum development include: evidence of conducting and overseeing research /creative projects, of applying for internal or external funding/grant proposals, of publications, performances, productions, exhibits, events, and/or showings, and other related scholarly/creative activities from the evaluation period; evidence of participation in, organization of, or leading of research/creative activities (e.g., conferences, performances, exhibits) on or off campus, or in professional organizations and the general research community, evidence of student or faculty/academic staff support or mentoring, of laboratory supervision, of undergraduate or graduate committee service, of honors or awards. Additional materials that might be included are: evidence of outreach, including dissemination of research findings such as conference presentations, guest lectures, workshops, other, and pertinent creative or research-related outreach, evidence of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)-related work in this area, evidence of collaborative scholarly work with other areas of the College or campus, or other leadership in this area.

## **SERVICE/OUTREACH**

The academic specialist appointed in this functional area facilitates service/outreach activities of state, regional, and national stature appropriate for a premier land-grant university. While the service/outreach mission of this University originated in the area of agriculture and the mechanic arts, this emphasis now has broadened to encompass fields such as health, human relations, business, communications, education and government, and extends to urban and international settings. The individual appointed in this category typically:

- effects and promotes the transfer of information, knowledge and expertise from the University to the general public;
- is committed to leadership and excellence in the delivery of technical and educational information and knowledge to off-campus clientele;
- promotes an appropriate climate for diversity in the service/outreach settings;
- develops independent projects/programs or is involved in projects directed by others;
- consults with, collaborates with, supervises, trains and otherwise supports faculty, students and other clientele in the development of service/outreach programs;
- may manage, consult, direct, operate or maintain diagnostic facilities, laboratories, computer systems or bureaus conducting research, and/or providing services to external agencies and the general public;
- authors resource materials, technical fact sheets, reports, manuals, computer programs, manuscripts, books and other educational publications on technology and/or applied research for distribution to the public;
- presents non-credit seminars, lectures, workshops, training, etc. for off-campus client groups;
- writes grants, individually and cooperatively, and manages resources, i.e., people, funding, materials, etc. necessary to carry out service/outreach programs and projects;
- may serve as reviewer for grants and publications and/or editor for newsletters and other publications;
- disseminates to students/professionals/clientele groups relevant research findings and technical information for practical application;
- conduct needs assessment studies and applied research with the ability to work out appropriate solutions for the people and groups involved;
- may be a liaison with, respond to requests from, and/or develop cooperative programs with other universities, agencies and organizations as well as the general public;
- provides program leadership and coordination in the development, execution, monitoring, evaluation and reporting of service/outreach programs;
- assumes significant roles in peer group organizations and professional societies;
- obtains recognition within the University, college, professional groups.

Examples of materials that may be submitted as part of a dossier in the area of service/outreach may include: materials in support of service/outreach activities on-campus, in the local or regional areas or beyond, evidence of collaborative work with other areas of the College or campus that work in service/outreach, materials in support of service/outreach related research or creative scholarship, workshop, or conference presentations whether on-campus, in the community, or for professional organizations, materials related to committee service, evidence of

diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)-related work in this area, evidence of collaborative scholarly work with other areas of the College or campus, or other leadership in this area.

### **ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITY**

An individual appointed in the Academic Specialist Appointment System, in accordance with the Guidelines for Specialist Placements, may also serve in administrative roles related to their functional assignments as an academic specialist. This may involve significant responsibilities in promoting and contributing to the efficient and effective management of the applicable unit or program with the related responsibility of attracting and managing resources, funding, material and/or people to achieve unit/program goals and to maintain administrative accountability. The individual with an appropriate assignment as an academic specialist in one or more of the three previously designated functional areas may be assigned such administrative duties with a relevant title in addition to designation as an academic specialist or senior academic specialist. Examples of such titles could be Assistant to the Dean/Chairperson/Director, Coordinator, plus other relevant academic administrative titles. As is the case for other academic unit administrators, as relevant, such administrative assignments may involve an annual appointment basis and the assignment of an administrative salary increment.

Examples of materials that may be submitted as part of a dossier in the area of administrative responsibility may include: evidence of supportive work on or leadership of new administrative initiatives, materials in support of related scholarship, workshop, or conference presentations whether on-campus, in the community, or for professional organizations, materials related to committee service, evidence of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)-related work in this area, evidence of collaborative administrative work with other areas of the College or campus, or other leadership in this area.