



## Tip Sheet: Considerations for Consulting and Outside Work for Academic Specialists

This guidance document is intended to assist unit leaders, supervisors, and Academic Specialists in understanding and applying University [policy](#) related to consulting and outside work. It provides a framework for evaluating outside activities in a manner that balances individual professional engagement with the University's mission, operational needs, and compliance obligations.

### Key Takeaways

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- It is the responsibility of the Academic Specialist to discuss consulting and outside work with their supervisor before engaging in the activity.
- Outside work is permissible when it does not interfere with assigned University duties, as determined by the supervisor and/or unit leadership.
- Approval is required when there is a potential conflict of interest or commitment, as identified by the supervisor and/or unit leadership.
- Responsibility for review begins at the unit level.
- Documentation is strongly recommended, even when work is approved.
- No outside work may compromise the university's interests, resources, reputation, or violate university or unit policies.

### Definitions

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- **Conflict of interest:** A potential conflict of interest happens when an individual's outside relationships or work outside of the university affect, appear to affect, or have the potential to affect their professional judgement or obligations and responsibilities to the university.
- **Conflict of Commitment:** A potential conflict of commitment happens when an individual's external relationships or outside work activities could interfere or compete with the university's educational, research, or service missions or with **that individual's time and effort to fulfill university expectations, obligations, and/or willingness to perform** the full range of responsibilities associated with their university position.

A conflict of commitment can also include obligations to improperly share information with an entity outside of the university or obligations to withhold information from the university.

### Factors to Consider and Evaluate

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Typically, activities that make up consulting/outside work are performed as an individual and not directly related to your institutional responsibilities. Examples include speaking engagements, short-term advisory work, serving as an expert consultant, professional association work, project-based assistance, writing/editing/reviewing. These activities are limited in scope and time.

When determining conflict of interest and/or conflict of commitment, consider the following:

- Does the external entity do business with or seek funding from MSU?
- Does the individual have authority over decisions that could affect the external entity?
- Could the activity reasonably be perceived as influencing university decisions?
- Will university resources, data, students, or confidential information be used?
- Does the activity occur during normal work hours?
- What is the impact on the individual's responsiveness, availability, or performance?
- Does the activity create an expectation of ongoing engagement?
- Will the time commitment for this outside work interfere with my institutional responsibilities?

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, a conflict may exist. Seek guidance from the Office for Faculty and Academic Staff Affairs.

### Dual Appointment Considerations

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If the outside work resembles employment rather than consulting (e.g., ongoing role, defined responsibilities, compensation structure), the [Dual Appointment Policy](#) (section 4.5.10) may apply. In such cases:

- An exception may be necessary
- Final approval rests with the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Staff Affairs
- A written agreement is required

### Approvals, Documentation and Oversight

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Consider developing an approval path on these matters.

Situation	Action
No conflict identified	Unit leader may approve
Potential conflict of interest	Consult FASA
Dual or overlapping roles	Review Dual Appointment Policy
Complex or high-risk activity	Escalate to FASA

While a formal university form is not currently required for Academic Specialists, documentation (developed at the unit level) should include:

- Description of the outside activity
- Duration and time commitment
- Determination regarding conflicts
- Any conditions or limitations imposed
- Date and approving authority

*Documentation should be retained at the unit level.*

Approved outside work should be:

- Reassessed if duties, scope, or time commitment change
- Reviewed during annual evaluations if relevant
- Reconsidered if performance concerns arise

*Approval may be withdrawn if conflicts emerge or expectations are not met.*