

Starfish Contact Notes
Principles and Guidelines

Definition and Purpose of Contact Notes:

Contact notes documenting student meetings are a core element in providing cohesive and codified service to students. All notes and information contained within Starfish are part of a student's official university record and can be requested by the student at any point during their tenure at Johns Hopkins University and after graduation. In order to keep Starfish appropriate and relevant to a student's academic progress at JHU, there are important things to keep in mind with the contact notes. These notes should be descriptive but concise in nature, serving several purposes, including:

1. Building a network of continuous support for students, the information in the notes provides a map of student progress for advisers and other University staff who may work with the student. It also allows for a holistic approach to individual progress as students move between advisers, majors, departments, schools and other service offices.
2. Documenting student interactions including in-person meetings, phone conversations, email messages, or other electronic mediums.
3. Giving advisers context and history that allows them to focus on key issues for students rather than repeating or revisiting the same information each visit.
4. Providing a map of students' individual curricular development and learning. Contact notes can also be valuable in noting or documenting patterns of individual student behavior.
5. Providing historical information on student progress and official communication for advisers or administrators. This can include federal or state data reporting, or the review of an individual student question or issue.

Definition of a Student Record According to FERPA:

Notes are governed by the applicable Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) regulations. These guidelines do not address treatment records governed by HIPAA.

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 or formal hearings. You have access to student educational data to perform your job duties and you have a legal responsibility to protect student education records in your possession. What this means is that, in general, you may not release information from the student record to a third party, including parents, without written permission from the student.

Legally, all information we maintain about a student that contains personally identifiable information (e.g. name, id, SSN) is considered part of the educational record.

Guidelines and Considerations When Creating and Maintaining Notes

1. Keep current on updating student contact notes; letting time pass can mean a loss of important details.
2. Narrative notes are helpful and readable, but concise, bulleted statements and/or summaries are also very effective and often make it easier to scan the notes in preparing for an appointment.
3. The content of an advising or other note will be different, but the concerns and standards for privacy, sharing and confidentiality are the same. Stay current on and abide by FERPA.
4. Consult with supervisors or the Starfish administrator if there is a question about what to include in a contact note or summary.
5. In email and personal communication with colleagues regarding students, use the same standards as for contact notes. Editorial comments should not be offered.
6. Speed note categories should always be used to help define what the student meeting addressed, which may or may not be the same as what the student initially indicated as the reason for the meeting.

Content and Information to Include in Contact Notes

Notes should include:

1. Summaries of student meetings relevant to student progress toward their degree.
2. Information that will aid you and colleagues in helping the student on their degree path. Degree routes may include significant detours like a medical leave of absence, military service, transfer or even suspension. Good notes help support the transitions of leaving and returning.
3. Information that will help colleagues understand the student's situation as well as advice given.
4. A focus on facts and events. Use descriptive comments to summarize conversations and interactions.
5. Describe when, where and why exceptions have been made for a student's particular course of study.
6. Any discussion in which a student chooses either to adopt or reject a recommendation you have made, along with possible consequences for the student of not following advice given.
7. Referrals to campus or community offices or services or names of staff should be as complete as possible so that other staff can interpret who/what was shared.
8. Action item requested/required of the student and the follow-up timeline.
9. Notes that will facilitate a personal relationship with the student, or help with reference letters or scholarship applications. This might include personal interest, hobbies, travel, etc.
10. Notes or emails to and from third parties, if they have bearing on degree progress.
 - a. This could include parents, faculty or colleagues where referrals have been made or questions were directed for help or clarification.
 - b. Information about those contacts can be shared with the student if they seem relevant, but advisers are not obligated to notify the student that the information has been added to the student's record.

11. When professional judgment suggests that you provide an analysis of a situation that goes beyond simple reporting facts and details, comments should be grounded in fact and reflection. Focus on observation and reaction, rather than accusation. For example, “The student spoke in an angry tone that made me uncomfortable” rather than “She was a bully and rude in the meeting.” Or “The student spoke in an angry tone that made me uncomfortable” rather than “She was a bully and rude in the meeting.”

Recording Sensitive Information

1. When recording information about referrals or conversations of a sensitive or very personal nature, care should be exercised with the language used. Keep the record fact-based, strictly fact based, using the standard of if the note was read aloud to the student, you would be comfortable with the facts, tone and evaluation of the situation presented.
2. When the student discloses specific information regarding disabilities or health related matters, focus on necessary steps that need to be taken to accommodate the situation. Do not diagnose but report the facts: “Student reported that she has Seasonal Affective Disorder and has a hard time getting up in the winter. We talked about this and encouraged her not to take early morning classes in the spring semester.”
3. If you ever have any doubt about a note you are entering, please contact your supervisor or the Starfish administrator for guidance.