

BOILERCONNECT NOTES GUIDELINES

SPRING 2017

BoilerConnect represents an opportunity to work more closely with campus partners on behalf of undergraduate students. These guidelines, which will be reviewed annually, aim to provide a formal model for consistent note-taking across campus among multiple student support offices. Users of BoilerConnect may include academic advisors, faculty advisors, and other student affairs professionals.

Section I. Statement of Purpose

Purdue University collects and retains data throughout students' academic careers with the expressed purpose of facilitating students' educational development. This information is considered part of the students' educational records, regardless of electronic or paper format, and is stored in accordance with the guidelines and practices to follow.

The purpose of notes in a student's educational record is to document a student's individualized plan for academic success, personal success, and career development. Establishing consistent note-taking guidelines and practices across multiple student services offices and University personnel ensures a consistent process for documenting student experiences and needs.

BoilerConnect allows for an integrated, campus-wide academic advising and student services notes system. Rather than each student support office keeping independent notes, BoilerConnect makes academic advising and student support notes accessible to all those who work directly with students and have an educational need to review student information. BoilerConnect is intended to make paper notes unnecessary, although users can scan and attach documents within BoilerConnect. Benefits to widely accessible notes include improved communication, coordination, efficiency, transparency, and a more personalized student experience.

Notes provide an important documentation of academic advising and student support interactions, and the University requires student support staff to record notes consistently and accurately to ensure seamless records of students' needs and plans. This also enables a holistic approach to academic success, creating a critical, individualized connection between students and Purdue University's policies, opportunities, and resources.

Timely purposeful notes provide:

- A formal mechanism for sharing information among student support staff and students, including but not limited to: course and degree planning, alternatives/options, activities to complete, referrals, and documentation of official decisions.
- A network of continuous support for students, providing documentation of student navigation within the University and movement with and between student support staff, departments, campus services, and other institutional representatives.
- A vehicle for individualized support of relationships and connections with a student.
- Context of a student's experience to minimize repetition and redundancy among campus partners.
- Documentation of student interactions (face-to-face or via electronic mediums).
- Opportunities to document development and learning, as well as progress toward degree completion.

Section II. Privacy and Student Educational Records

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a federal law designed to protect the privacy of education records. In compliance with FERPA, Purdue provides [guidelines](#) for appropriately using and releasing student education records. FERPA intends that students' rights be broadly defined and applied. Therefore, consider students as “owners” of their education records and the institution as the “custodian” of those records.

Educational records include any record maintained by the institution that is related to the student (in any format or medium) with some narrowly defined exceptions:

- Records in the “sole possession of the maker” (e.g., personal files and notes used for memory aids. Caution should be exercised in creating private notes).
- Law enforcement records created by a law enforcement agency for that purpose.
- Employment records (unless the employment is based on student status). The employment records of student employees (e.g., work-study, wages, graduate teaching associates) are part of their education records.
- Medical/psychological treatment records (e.g., from a health or counseling center).
- Alumni records (i.e., those created after the student was enrolled).

Note that Purdue staff with access to student records must be FERPA-certified. Moreover, staff access to student records will be revoked in the event this privilege is misused. Students have the right to inspect and review their education records in their entirety and amend an incorrect record. To learn more about Purdue University practices, please review the [FERPA training materials](#).

Section III. General Content & Practice Guidelines

Notes are unbiased reports of a student’s experience and interactions with the University.

Prior to entering a note into BoilerConnect, assess how the note will contribute to the holistic record of a student’s academic, personal, and career pathway and what will maintain an appropriate level of disclosure.

The following section presents items for consideration and potential inclusion in notes. Not every item will apply to all circumstances or conversations; these are intended to be guidelines for determining what is necessary or appropriate for each interaction. When in doubt regarding appropriate note-taking, consult with your supervisor.

General Guidelines:

- Fact-based, descriptive notes help convey the unique dynamics of a student contact, or
- Narrative notes are encouraged for readability and nuanced circumstances, or
- Bulleted summaries are effective and can be readily skimmed in preparation for an appointment.

A. When to Document

BoilerConnect notes are most useful when entered during, immediately after, or within 24 hours of an appointment or interaction and are immediately viewable within the system. Timely recording helps document important details accurately and maximizes the ability of campus partners to act with purpose, clarity, and timeliness in meeting the needs of a student.

B. What to Document

General Guidelines

Enter notes with the understanding that content may be viewed by others who have an educational need to know, in accordance with FERPA.

What:

1. Relevant contact with a student or relating to a student, including appropriate details and dates of interaction.
 - a. Examples of interactions: telephone conversations, emails, drop-in appointments, pre-arranged meetings, and no shows.
 - b. Document communications outside of appointments that are relevant to the student's academic record (e.g. a reminder about how to access/utilize systems such as myPurduePlan; a phone call about how to withdraw from a course; a question regarding an Academic Regulation).
2. Notes should aim to communicate:
 - a. When and why the student sought help.
 - b. Steps taken to address the student's concerns.
 - c. Relevant information the student shared during the interaction.
 - d. Advice and recommendations shared.
 - e. Follow-up actions the student or staff member will take, or referrals to other support areas.
 - f. An overall summary of what was discussed as it relates to the student's academic plan of success.
3. Include any discussion in which a student chooses either to adopt or reject a recommendation you have made. Note the student's stated opinions or decisions pertaining to recommendations made during a current or prior appointment (adoption or rejection). Also include any possible consequences shared with the student.
4. Document contacts from other student support staff or parties if they have a bearing on career or degree progress. Phone conversations, notes, or e-mails to and from third parties may be included. This could include correspondence from parents, faculty or colleagues, such as referrals and questions.
5. If handouts are provided to the student, consider making a note stating the purpose and name of handout.
6. Always be sure to check your notes for accuracy before saving them.
7. Summary Reports (appointment based) may be saved and edited at a later time. BoilerConnect's "Notes on Student" may not be edited by the author once saved. A change request will be required and approved by a designee of the Office of the Provost.

C. How to Document

Only include facts and observations for effective documentation. Refrain from opinions, speculations, diagnostic language, and personal emotions. It is acceptable to note what the student reports.

1. Notes based in fact will include observable pieces of information for documentation.
 - a. Notes changes in behavior through observation of student actions, dress, speech, emails, etc.
 - b. Describe behaviors that indicate what a student may be feeling – "Student was unable to stay seated during advising meeting" or "Student did not maintain eye contact."
 - c. Describe student behaviors and their impact on the student support staff member – "The student spoke in an angry tone."

- d. Describe symptoms rather than diagnose or evaluate, ex. “Student displayed slurred speech, loss of coordination and an inability to follow our conversation,” to describe someone you may think is intoxicated.
 - e. Record relevant statements made by the student, for example, “Student stated ...”
2. Subjective information in notes may be interpreted differently by different people. Including opinions, speculations and emotions in notes can result in unintended consequences and/or harm to a student.
 - a. It is inappropriate to speculate regarding a student’s motivations, concerns or abilities, or label a student’s personality based on behavior (ex. “She was a bully and rude in the meeting”).
 - b. It is inappropriate to make statements that diagnose student health or well-being (ex. “Student was drunk” or “Student seemed anxious/depressed”).
 3. It is appropriate to provide information that will enable a campus colleague to contextualize the student’s circumstance and the related advice offered.
 - a. If pertinent to understanding the context of an interaction, students may be directly quoted.
 - b. Document discussions of University policies and academic regulations.
 - c. Avoid jargon and uncommon abbreviations or acronyms.
 4. If you speculate about an outcome/impact of an action or decision, be clear with the student (and in your note) to acknowledge the hypothetical nature of your conversation. Make no overt promises if you cannot guarantee the result.

D. Types of Information

Personal Student Information

1. Include notes that will facilitate a personal relationship with the student or help with reference letters or scholarship applications. This might include personal interests, hobbies, travel, etc. This may also include accomplishments, awards and other types of recognitions.
2. Document student involvement and engagement in clubs, service, etc., and/or employment.
3. Note opportunities suggested to or queried by the student seeking to augment in-class learning and engagement (e.g. volunteer experience, leadership experience, internship).
4. Document attributes disclosed by the student that may assist with reference letters or scholarship letters and add value to the student-staff relationship and future interactions (e.g. student’s interests, aspirations, involvement, or experiences, etc.).
5. Document any personal information shared that may impact a student’s ability to be successful and will contribute to student support staffs’ holistic understanding of the student (for additional guidance on documenting sensitive information, see section IV).

Academic Information

1. Include relevant information regarding student’s progress toward degree goals, prerequisites, or major components.
2. Comment on recommended courses or alternative courses discussed and how those courses will likely affect progress toward degree completion and/or major exploration.
3. Note transitions [e.g. Change of Career Objective (CODO); change of catalog term; transferring in/out of Purdue; course withdrawal; withdrawal from the University; decision to take a leave of absence].
4. Degree exceptions and substitutions must be, first and foremost, documented in myPurdue Plan, including why and on what basis they were approved/implemented, as well as who approved the exception (if approval was needed).
 - o Exceptions and/or substitutions may be included in BoilerConnect.
 - o Exceptions and/or substitutions are not part of a student's academic record unless they are done in myPurduePlan.
5. Note reminders for future term considerations.

Career Information

1. Include relevant information regarding students' progress toward career goals (myCareer Plan content, internships, shadowing, jobs, etc.)

Attachments

Student support staff are encouraged to add value by attaching documents that are pertinent to a student's academic, personal, and/or career success. Examples of attachments that may be included:

1. Award letters
2. Emails
3. Forms, ex. 23As, Form 23s, etc.
4. Letters of recommendation (except in cases where students may not view, ex. medical school recommendations)

Section IV. Areas of Concern & Increased Sensitivity

Exercise caution when documenting topics that contain sensitive subject matter. Examples include: disability; religious, and/or political affiliation; perceived or disclosed sexual orientation or identity; medical diagnoses; mental health information or diagnoses; or information that could be potentially damaging to a student if mishandled.

Note that some student support staff may have an educational need to document sensitive student information. Thus, the following are intended as guidelines for determining what is necessary or appropriate for each interaction. When in doubt regarding appropriate note-taking, consult with your supervisor. Student support staff may also consider explaining the purpose of the notes to the student and asking students' permission before documenting specific sensitive information in BoilerConnect.

1. When recording information, conversations, or referrals of a highly personal or sensitive nature, exercise care with the language employed. Report information in the context of a student's academic experience with relevant facts only.
 - a. Focus on steps already taken or steps that are necessary to address the circumstance (i.e. Student disclosed working with a mental health provider).
 - b. Do not diagnose, assess, or offer judgment on the student or circumstance.
 - c. Never assume, interpret diagnoses or make judgments based on notes entered into BoilerConnect by another party.
 - d. Note that mental health information may become dated or irrelevant, which amplifies the importance of avoiding diagnostic terms.
 - e. It is necessary to document referrals made on a student's behalf to other offices on campus. When referencing referrals that may be sensitive in nature [i.e. Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) or the Disability Resource Center (DRC)], support staff may consider asking a student's permission to document the referred organization, although this is not required by FERPA.
2. Personal and/or sensitive content, reported to you by the student, may include:
 - a. Medical/mental health concerns
 - b. Legal problems
 - c. Relationship problems
 - d. Sexual orientation, gender identity and expression
 - e. Family concerns
 - f. Conflicts with specific instructors
 - g. Students' individual financial information

3. Students who share information about their gender identity, including preferred names and/or preferred gender pronouns, should be asked their express permission for this information to be included in BoilerConnect notes. Upon initial meetings with students, support staff may also consider introducing themselves along with their own preferred pronouns to help create a more welcoming and inclusive environment.
4. When students report symptoms indicative of a disability, staff may request students' express permission for this information to be included in BoilerConnect notes.
5. If recording a student's comments about coursework, perceptions, experiences, etc., enter a note indicating that a student "reported," "stated," or "expressed" a concern.
6. Student comments regarding instructors should be carefully evaluated to determine if they merit being included in the notes. If comments have a strong tie to a student's degree progression, they can be included. Documentation of such information may identify a pattern of behavior or decision-making that may be helpful in supporting the student.
7. When a concern arises regarding inclusion of information in the student record, consult with your supervisor.

A. Mandatory Reporting Guidelines

Use extreme discretion with any notes made and do not promise confidentiality to the student.

1. Child Abuse, Sexual Harassment/Sexual Violence (Title IX), and other legal issues are under the mandatory reporting law. Any notation within BoilerConnect regarding such violations should follow the stated guidelines regarding highly personal or sensitive matters.
 - a. Purdue University employees who are "mandatory reporters" under Title IX are subject to mandatory reporting of any instance of discrimination or unfair treatment on the basis of sex or sexual harassment. For more information review the [Purdue Title IX compliance guide](#).
 - b. Indiana law requires that ALL persons over the age of 18 must report suspected child abuse or neglect to the police or Child Protective Services. Faculty and staff may also report such suspicions to his or her supervisor (or other designated person) who then also becomes responsible to report. Reporting to a supervisor or other designated person does **not** relieve an individual of his or her obligation to report. If you suspect or witness child sexual abuse on campus, you must report it to the police and/or the local child protective services. For more information review the [Purdue Title IX compliance guide](#).
 - c. [The Office of Institutional Equity](#) handles both Informal and Formal Complaints of discrimination and/or harassment.
 - i. If a student reports an incident of specific faculty behaviors or classroom incidents that include the student's perceived harassment or discrimination, such disclosures should be shared with supervisors and appropriate University officials. BoilerConnect notes should not include names or any identifiers. (e.g. "student disclosed something about instructor, and consulted with supervisor.")
 - ii. If you offer an option to a student of including their statement in their student record, and the student declares that they want information included, make note of it. (e.g. "student wants it noted that...")

QUICK GUIDE

DO:

- Enter notes with the understanding that content may be viewed by others who have an educational need to know, under Purdue's FERPA policy.
- Assess how a note will contribute to the holistic record of a student's academic, personal, and career pathway and what will maintain an appropriate level of disclosure.
- Enter notes during, immediately after, or within 24 hours of an appointment or interaction. Timely recording helps document important details accurately and maximizes the ability of campus partners to act with purpose, clarity, and timeliness in meeting the needs of a student.
- Use fact-based, descriptive, narrative and bulleted notes as appropriate to help convey the unique dynamics of a student contact.
- Refrain from including opinions, speculations, and personal emotions.
- Provide information that will enable a campus colleague to contextualize the student's circumstance and the related advice offered.
- Describe symptoms rather than diagnose or evaluate, ex. "Student displayed slurred speech, loss of coordination and an inability to follow our conversation," to describe someone you may think is intoxicated.
- Document contacts from other student support staff or parties if they have a bearing on career or degree progress. Phone conversations, notes, or e-mails to and from third parties may be included.
- Exercise care with the language employed when recording information, conversations, or referrals of a highly personal or sensitive nature. Report information in the context of a student's academic experience with relevant facts only.
- Request students' express permission to include certain sensitive information in BoilerConnect notes, such as preferred gender pronouns or symptoms indicative of a disability.
- Consult with your supervisor when a concern arises regarding inclusion of specific information in the student record.
- Check your notes for accuracy before saving them.

DON'T:

- Do not promise confidentiality to the student.
- Do not use jargon and uncommon abbreviations or acronyms.
- Do not make overt promises if you cannot guarantee the result. If you speculate about an outcome/impact of an action or decision, be clear with the student (and in your note) to acknowledge the hypothetical nature of your conversation.
- Do not maintain personal files about students outside of BoilerConnect.
- Do not speculate regarding a student's motivations, concerns or abilities, or label a student's personality based on behavior (ex. "She was a bully and rude in the meeting").
- Do not diagnose, assess, or offer judgment on the student or circumstance. Likewise, readers should never assume or interpret a diagnosis based on another support staff member's BoilerConnect notes.
- Out of respect for students' privacy, avoid reviewing students' personal information unless you have an educational need to know or are assisting a student directly.