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## Award-winning adviser helps students find their paths

By Liz Lent

For students, college is an investment, one designed to put them on a path to a bright future. As an undergraduate adviser in Oakland's business school, Meaghan Cole helps guide students to that future with caring, compassion and skill.

For her work, Cole earned the 2016 NACADA Outstanding New Advisor Certificate of Merit recipient in the Academic Advising – Primary Role category. NACADA, a national academic advising association, honors individuals and institutions making significant contributions to the improvement of academic advising. Cole earned the recognition for new advisers.

Cole's award came as no surprise to Debbie Lengyel, director of business school advising services. "I've worked in higher education for 30 years and Meaghan is one of the most student-centered people I've known," she says. "Meaghan is the kind of person who wants to make sure that students are doing well and getting what they need. Her students really love her."



*Meaghan Cole received the 2016 NACADA Outstanding New Advisor Certificate of Merit in the Academic Advising – Primary Role category.*

In fact, student input factored into Cole's nomination. Accounting major Chloe Zeabari wrote, "I worked with (Cole) during orientation where she floated in the room, helping out every transfer student. I know that Meaghan will be able to help me with anything, and I am lucky to have a wonderful adviser like her."

For Cole, the joy in her job comes from helping others find the path to success. "My number one priority is to my students," she says. "My goal is for them to love OU but also to be gainfully employed in something they love when they graduate."

With that goal in mind, Cole spends time with each student to define what that dream job might look like. Some students are reluctant to pursue that dream, fearing it may not be attainable. "They'll think it's not feasible, but I'll say, 'Let's look at it,'" Cole says.

Cole sees a broad range of students, underscoring the diversity of the OU experience. "I see students fresh out of high school and others are 60 years old," says Cole. "We approach each student holistically and base our approach on what they need."

Business school advisers engage students through one-on-one meetings, spending time with everyone who seeks their assistance. "More than 4,000 student appointments come through our doors each year," says Lengyel. "Our advisers meet with students to help them with course planning, deciding on a major, addressing academic difficulties or personal issues."

Cole actively supports business students beyond her work in the advising office. She works with students in the b-school's Living Learning Community, assists student leaders in developing and expanding student organizations, and coordinates the business scholarship process.

Her passion for helping extends to her colleagues. She spearheaded professional development opportunities for her peers and initiated the first-ever mentorship program to help the next generation of advisers through the annual Michigan Academic Advising Association conference.

"As her supervisor, I can tell you that nothing ever slips through the cracks with her. She is truly one of the most productive people I've met," says Lengyel.

For Cole, the reward comes in seeing her students find the success they envisioned at the start of their journey. "I've witnessed students graduating and it's so rewarding," Cole says. "I've been fortunate to forge some really strong relationships with students. I've served as a reference when they applied for positions. I've heard from them when they've received the internships they wanted or landed their dream job. While the ultimate goal is graduation, along the way, I want them to grow and learn and see who they can become."