Overview

A significant fraction of Michigan State University faculty have appointments in more than one academic unit. Data from 2007 indicates more than one third of MSU faculty members have joint appointments. Such arrangements are highly variable: some are continuing tenure system joint appointments; some are split almost equally between academic units; others are for a small fraction of time in one academic unit with the other(s) as majority shareholders; others are for a limited period of time subject to renewal or not; occasionally, some are between academic units and administrative units, while others involve a mix of teaching, research or outreach duties and administrative responsibilities; finally, some are on an adjunct basis without pay. Fixed term faculty and academic staff also can be involved in joint appointments.

Joint appointments, long a hallmark at MSU, are likely to increase in the future. Benefits to the university are several: among others providing a method to encourage multi-disciplinary teaching, research and outreach activities, using the multiple talents of faculty in a variety of activities more efficiently than assigning tasks to multiple individuals and providing a receptive environment for the recruitment and retention of faculty attracted to cross disciplinary activities and assignments among other considerations.

As noted below, there are benefits of joint appointments to faculty as well. But the implementation of joint appointments is not without challenges, problems and frustrations. This commentary prepared especially for deans, chairpersons and directors includes suggestions to make joint appointments a success.

The information includes recommended best practices for deans, chairs and directors to consider. A second document, while revisiting some of the contents of the “Best Practices” also is included, as it provides comments and perspectives on joint appointments from a group of faculty with such appointments.
Best Practices for Managing Joint Faculty Appointments

Tenure system faculty at Michigan State University can be appointed in two or more departments, and in some cases two or more colleges. Such joint appointments offer a variety of advantages, but also pose challenges. The following are recommended best practices for administrators managing jointly-appointed faculty members.

1. A basic rule is that the myriad of details described below should be recorded and shared with all parties. Reliance on memory only is a sure recipe for disaster. The Office of Academic Human Resources requires a multiple appointment memorandum to consummate a joint appointment (copies available on the MSU Human Resources Website in the section entitled Hiring Information, Faculty/Academic Staff- General Information). Information required for this form is limited; other issues should be addressed in supplementary memoranda.

2. Unit administrators should work together, in advance of any joint appointment, on a plan of work that is mutually satisfactory to each department. It should be recognized that joint appointments work best when a faculty member’s expected research program jointly serves the needs of each department. Unit administrators should agree on productivity expectations, the format of the annual report of accomplishments, how accounting and other unit procedures are to be handled, etc. Duplication of reporting information should be avoided or minimized and reporting deadlines coordinated.

3. Unit administrators should work together in the recruitment/assignment process specifying information about startup packages, and as relevant spousal/partner support including the source of financial support and key contracts for advice and clarification. Units involved should be clear on what, or to what degree each will provide support e.g., basic staff support and supplies, computers and related IT support, contract and grant, indirect cost sharing, and parking options to assure access to all relevant academic units. Faculty development support programs in participating academic units and in the university should be shared.

4. Unit administrators sharing a jointly-appointed faculty member should meet together with the faculty member as a part of the annual performance review process, and general performance expectations should be clarified. Special consideration should be given to managing expectations for committee responsibilities and teaching so jointly appointed faculty are not overwhelmed with the demands of two or more departments.

5. Unit administrators sharing jointly-appointed faculty should consult with one another on market and merit salary adjustments, and coordinate nominations for market adjustments. Sufficient time for discussion and negotiation should be allowed. Deadlines for reappointment, promotion, and tenure actions should also be coordinated.

6. Unit administrators should clarify academic governance expectations e.g., committee assignments in participating academic units based on unit rules about percentage thresholds required for

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1 Adapted from a 2007 document prepared by the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, supplemented by comments made at a chairs/directors workshop in 2008.
2 In this document, department refers to any department, school or other academic unit appointing tenure system faculty, continuing academic staff and fixed term faculty/academic staff including those appointed with and without pay.
participation. University and college academic governance expectations and eligibility also should be clarified.

7. Unit committees involved in annual evaluation and in promotion and tenure decisions of jointly-appointed faculty members must be informed of the practices and procedures agreed to for individual cases. The committees must accept that documents may differ from unit procedures if those of the other unit are selected. Faculty should not be required to prepare two different set of documents simply to accommodate unit practices.

8. If a mentoring committee is an academic unit practice, non-tenured faculty members should have a single mentoring committee, with representatives from each department involved. If possible, at least one faculty member having experience with joint appointments should be included. If individual mentoring arrangements exist in participating units, cross communication and collaboration between mentors should be arranged.

9. While jointly appointed faculty will generally have a single office in the lead unit, consideration should be given to providing some type of “home” space in the minority unit(s), especially if the units are distant from one another. This may be a laboratory or shared office space.

10. Particular issues arise when faculty are jointly appointed in two or more colleges. Under current practice, deadlines for salary recommendations and for submission of reappointment, promotion and tenure documents sometimes differ substantially. For unit administrators to cooperate effectively, it is critical that these deadlines be coordinated. Deans of colleges involved in joint appointments should consult with each other and reach mutually acceptable agreements for submission review materials and deadlines.

11. Contact arrangements for faculty to use if things are not going well in the joint appointment should be clarified. Options to explore renegotiation of unit assignments and the possibilities, if any, or terminating the joint appointment should be identified.
Over the last ten years, joint faculty appointments at Michigan State University have become increasingly common. The number of faculty appointed in two or more departments, and often in two or more colleges, continues to grow. Along with this growth has come an increased understanding of how managing a joint appointment can offer benefits and bring challenges. In particular, those faculty members who have successfully navigated this world of joint appointments can offer unique insights into the value of joint appointments as well as how joint appointments can make the faculty experience more difficult. With more and more new faculty positions being created as joint appointments across departments and colleges, the experiences of MSU faculty in joint appointments can provide suggestions for new jointly-appointed faculty and for administrators that could make the joint appointment more successful.

To be clear, not all joint appointments are created equally. Nor do all jointly-appointed faculty members treat their appointments the same. In what follows, the assumption is that a faculty member with a joint appointment chooses to embrace the joint appointment fully, becoming an active member fully in each of his or her departments. Clearly, this will not always be the case. More than one example exists of jointly-appointed faculty members who rarely interact with their minor departments (especially individuals with other 15-25% appointments in their minor departments). Yet, to the extent that faculty members with joint appointments are indiscernible from faculty who do not have joint appointments, then the question must be asked: what, and to whom, is the benefit of a joint appointment?

The discussion that follows recognizes that faculty with joint appointments must, by necessity, do some things differently from their colleagues who do not have joint appointments if they are to reap the benefits of joint appointments. However, doing things differently is not without cost. A second question, then, is could the benefits of joint appointment be available at lower cost to jointly-appointed faculty? It may also be reasonable to ask: How might benefits of a joint-appointment be made available to faculty who do not have joint appointments?

This material is derived from conversations among a group of faculty holding joint appointments. Beyond informal discussions held more broadly, a small group of individuals met specifically to discuss the opportunities and challenges associated with joint appointments. This is a summary of that discussion. These individuals hold appointments that, collectively, cross teaching, research and extension missions, in six departments and three colleges at MSU.

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3 This paper was prepared in 2007 by an ad hoc group of faculty holding joint appointments. Modest edits have been included. While many issues addressed are included in the “Best Practices” section, this essay is useful as it includes comments of joint appointment participants. The references to departments and chair persons are intended to refer also to schools and directors.
For Faculty Members with Joint Appointments

Examples of the rewards of joint appointment include:

- A jointly-appointed faculty member has more readily-accessible, potential research, outreach and teaching collaborators from the start.
- Participating in two departments offers different perspectives in terms of interacting with different faculties. A joint appointment offers exposure to a broader array of ideas and provides more opportunity for cross-fertilization in the work of jointly-appointed faculty, as well as in the work of faculty colleagues.
- An individual with a joint appointment can benefit from affiliation with different departments depending upon how any particular affiliation can open doors with potential collaborators, funders, audiences or stakeholder groups. If potential collaborators or external groups identify more closely with one department or the other, then affiliation with that department can be beneficial.
- A jointly-appointed faculty can bring the strengths of one department into the other department and help foster positive change or help one department avoid pitfalls experienced by the other department.
- Each department has its own strengths and weaknesses. There may be times when a jointly-appointed faculty member is unable to accomplish some goal or complete some task in one of his or her departments because of financial constraints, limited support staff availability, untenable administrative barriers, or limited availability of the department chair. In such cases, the faculty member may find more success in his or her other department.

A joint appointment is not for everyone. If an individual chooses not to do the extra work required to become fully integrated into each of his or her departments, then he or she is not likely to enjoy the rewards that such a position can bring.

For Department and College Administration: Recognition of Costs and Challenges of Joint Appointments

Without doubt, there are costs born by jointly-appointed faculty members that those with single-unit appointments do not face. Recognition of these costs by department, college and university administration is important. When faculty members with joint appointments are successful, it is easy for administrators to see only the benefits of joint appointments. Successes are visible and easy to point to. Costs are less visible and easily overlooked. Two significant costs include time taken away from academic pursuits and stress of job-related personal and professional pressures, especially for junior faculty.

These costs arise from two principal sources:

- “managing up,” including keeping multiple administrators informed about the professional activities and insuring that professional activities meet multiple administrators’ expectations, and
- “managing across,” departments’ different administrative and cultural environments, including learning and working with two (or more) accounting systems, reporting
systems, governance systems, mentoring systems, annual evaluation systems and
tenure promotion and review systems.

In addition, a jointly-appointed faculty member may be penalized when annual salary merit increase and market adjustments are awarded in the salary support is split across departments. Different disciplines will have differing underlying salary structures, reflecting the markets for professionals in those disciplines. The base budgets of units differ, which will influence the availability of funds for salary increases. Salary structures differ across departments.

**Managing Up**

There are many situations where a joint appointment necessarily takes time away from a faculty member’s academic priorities as he or she struggles to deal with the issues that do not generally arise for faculty who do not have joint appointments. A substantial number of those issues involve department (and possibly college) administration. For example, a typical jointly-appointed faculty will have one appointment in a department that represents his or her home discipline and a second appointment in an interdisciplinary department or a department with programs that span multiple disciplines. It is not uncommon for one department chair to have limited knowledge about the priorities of the other department or, more significantly, for the non-disciplinary chair to lack understanding of the requirements for success within the faculty members’ discipline. In cases where this creates conflict for the faculty member, it falls to him or her to work with the two department chairs to reach an agreeable outcome. When the two department chairs disagree or, worse yet, maintain an antagonistic relationship then reaching a solution become difficult.

As another example, when the promotion and tenure processes differ across departments, it falls to the faculty member to help the two department chairs/school directors (and perhaps two departmental/school promotion and tenure committees) understand what is different. Additionally, the faculty member must navigate the two systems to reach a successful outcome in each department. If departmental priorities differ, satisfying one department’s requirements for promotion may or may not satisfy the second department. (Where joint appointments cross colleges, this situation can become even more complex.)

Not all departments, especially beyond the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, have an understanding of the role that Extension plays within the land grant mission. Placing a faculty member with a partial Extension appointment into a department that does not have a history of working in Extension can add additional complications. The department chair, as well as faculty colleagues, in the non-Extension department may not appreciate or value the scholarship of Extension.

Similarly, values and expectations about research outputs may differ, especially between disciplinary and interdisciplinary departments. Often, it will fall to the jointly-appointed faculty member to educate his or her chairs about the different types of research outputs that are, or should be, made available from his or her work. Departments may differ in their views of the relative importance of different types of outputs, e.g. journal articles, books, proceedings, encyclopedias, etc. Also, information about which journals are “good journals”
or which professional associates are “credible” often must be interpreted by the faculty member. There may also be differences – both quantitative and qualitative – about teaching and outreach – apart from Extension expectations.

Different departments (especially in different colleges) will have different histories with respect to funding lines. Some departments operate without any ties to the Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station (MAES) or Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) and rely solely on general funds. Traditionally, departments with MAES, MSUE and general fund (GF) lines have treated GF as the “teaching line”. Thus, MAES funding covers research, MSUE funding covers Extension and outreach, and GF covers teaching. However, more commonly, GF comes with research and outreach expectations in those departments without MAES or MSUE funds. As a result, a particular percentage of GF for a faculty member could well mean different expectations about teaching load across two departments.

This managing up – working with administrators to address disagreements and departmental management differences – comes at the expense of faculty member’s academic productivity, since it takes him or her away from teaching, research and outreach work. Also, especially for junior faculty, managing conflict with and among administrators can add to the personal and professional pressures of building an academic career. Experience with joint appointments suggests a number of ways in which these costs of managing up can be minimized.

1. Chairs of departments/ directors of schools with jointly-appointed faculty should help bear some of the costs of successful joint appointments. Chairs should initially agree, in advance of any joint appointments, that they will work with a new jointly-appointed faculty member to develop a plan of work that is mutually satisfactory to both departments. If this cannot be done for a prospective faculty member then the joint appointment may not be appropriate. Subsequently, the department chairs should be responsible for determining how the departments will report productivity. The jointly-appointed faculty member should not bear the burden of allocating his or her research, teaching or outreach products to one department or the other in a “what have you done for us lately?” context.

2. Chairs of departments/ directors of schools sharing a jointly-appointed faculty member should meet periodically, at least once per year, with that individual. Joint consultations for the annual review process would be optimal, since the faculty member would only need to schedule one meeting and would not be put in the position of relaying and interpreting his or her conversation with one department chair to another department chair. In preparation for this meeting, the faculty member will be asked to prepare documents summarizing his or her accomplishments for the year. The two department chairs should have an advance agreement about the format of those materials, so that the faculty member does not have to produce two different sets of documents. This kind of joint meeting will also enable the faculty member to express concerns about misunderstandings between chairs or about how differences in departmental management styles may be impacting his or her productivity.
3. A dean who encourages joint faculty appointments bears the responsibility of understanding and helping to minimize faculty-born costs of managing up. The dean also bears the responsibility of ensuring that the antagonism between department chairs/school directors does not threaten the success of the jointly-appointed faculty member. The dean and the department chairs should establish an understanding that the jointly-appointed faculty member has an open invitation to share problems with the dean and seek assistance with resolving the problems. (Of course, this suggests an alternative is also needed for faculty who are appointed in more than one college with deans who disagree.)

4. The costs of managing up will never be eliminated, but regular communication between the faculty, department chairs, and dean(s) can make the costs more visible and create an environment in which minimizing the costs is possible.

Managing Across

Faculty with joint appointments must manage numerous differences between their different departments, beyond just those arising from differing administrative styles and philosophies of department chairs. Colleagues, including faculty, staff and students, often do not understand the responsibilities and constraints faced by a faculty member who is effectively managing a career across two (or more) academic units. A joint appointment means, at a minimum, participating in two (or more) departmental governance systems. Participating in departmental faculty meetings and retreats for two departments. Serving on departmental committees for two departments, and providing guidance for undergraduate and graduate students majoring in multiple programs across two departments means at least twice as much attention to institutional maintenance as compared to a faculty member who is appointed in only one unit. Jointly-appointed faculty may be perceived by their colleagues as “never around”, when in fact they are simply meeting responsibilities in another place.

A joint appointment means participating in multiple systems for tenure and promotion review. Different departments conduct the review and evaluation process in different ways. The structure, roles and levels of involvement of departmental tenure and promotion committees can differ widely from one department to the next, meaning that an individual faculty member who is being considered for promotion will interact with faculty colleagues in varying ways during the review process. Faculty in some units will look for certain types of outputs to be given emphasis in review materials, while other units may place emphasis on other types of outputs and activities. Expectations of faculty colleagues in disciplinary departments will differ from expectations of faculty colleagues in interdisciplinary departments.

Different departments operate with different accounting systems. While all departments are subject to university rules for accounting, differences will arise in terms of who completes paperwork, how accounts are managed and by whom, how invoices and reimbursements are handled and by whom, and the level of staff support provided to faculty in these areas. A jointly-appointed faculty members may be faced with navigating multiple systems with or
without staff support. Simply keeping track of which accounts are managed in which department requires extra effort. Staff in one unit will not complete paperwork for accounts managed in another unit, so jointly-appointed faculty often spend extra time shepherding paperwork through departmental, college and university systems.

Departmental and college systems for processing grant paperwork can differ widely. If one unit (department or college) makes the process easier, this creates an incentive for a jointly-appointed faculty member to use that unit for submitting and administering grants, risking animosity in the department/school or college.

**Colleagues and Joint Appointments**

As noted above, quite frequently, the specifics of and expectations for those faculty holding joint appointments are not known or appreciated by faculty colleagues in both departments. While the jointly-appointed faculty have a role in explaining and elaborating joint appointment specifics, the role of the department chairperson is especially important in explaining and sharing joint appointment procedures and details. Regular discussion of these matters – especially at time of appointment- with department advisory councils helps to share information and dispel rumors. In settings where such information is not widely known, jointly appointed faculty comment frequently about recurrent colleague concerns:

- X appears to have a lighter teaching load than full time colleagues.
- Scholarship expectations – impacted by a mix of academic unit requirements – is less demanding than for full time colleagues.
- Laboratory or research support is similar to full time appointees, although specific unit applicable productivity is or appears to be lower.
- Committee assignments and graduate student supervision are not shouldered equitably by joint appointees.
- Reappointment, promotion and tenure standards appear less demanding for jointly appointed faculty based on perceptions of joint unit crafted review procedures which differ from those of the separate academic units.
- Merit salary adjustments are perceived as inequitable as joint unit procedures appear at best different, or at worst inequitable.

All of these topics do involve differences from individual unit practice but information sharing and discussion involving a chair leadership role can reduce prevent needless misunderstandings.

**Managing Across Problems and Challenges**

This managing across – working with faculty colleagues, governance systems and accounting systems in more than one unit – also comes at the expense of the faculty member’s productivity, since it takes him or her away from teaching, research and outreach work. Experience with joint appointments suggests a number of ways in which these costs of managing across can be minimized.
1. In some academic units at MSU, a formal mentoring system establishes a faculty mentoring committee for each new faculty member. Some units use these mentoring committees more effectively than others. A strong mentoring committee can be particularly important for jointly-appointed faculty. First, a jointly-appointed faculty member should have only one mentoring committee, and it should be comprised of faculty members from each of the departments/schools. Second, mentoring committee should, if possible, include at least one faculty member with experience in a joint appointment or keen understanding of what joint appointments involve. The mentoring committee can play an important liaison role, helping faculty colleagues in each unit understand the unique challenges associated with a joint appointment. If the system relies on individual mentors in each unit, communication between mentors is important.

2. While space resources can be tight, providing a jointly-appointed faculty member with office space in each of his or her academic units can be extremely valuable, both to the faculty member and to his or her colleagues. Splitting work time between offices can make a jointly-appointed faculty member more available to colleagues in each department/school. Offices provide space for meeting with graduate students and colleagues. If a day is to be spent in one unit because of faculty meetings and other activities, a space for working between meetings can help jointly-appointed faculty avoid unproductive periods of limbo.

Certainly, managing two office spaces can be challenging. A faculty member has a critical set of resources (reference materials, datasets, teaching materials, etc.) that generally resides in one location. Moving those material around isn’t logical, so the use of one office or another may well depend upon a particular task or project that is underway, involving resources in that office or colleagues in that department/school.

There are some examples on campus of a unit providing a single office space to be shared by jointly-appointed faculty members who have minor appointments in that unit. This is one approach to realizing the benefits of two offices that also minimizes some of the challenges, although space availability is a challenge. However, this approach is more appropriate for faculty with only a 20-30% appointment. As the minor split approached 40-50%, then a greater presence may be expected in the minor department and having two working offices becomes more important.

3. Agreement between department chairs about how the promotion and tenure review process will be handled for a jointly-appointed faculty should be shared with his or her faculty colleagues, and especially the faculty promotion and tenure committee, in each department.

4. Agreement between department chairs about committee responsibilities of a jointly-appointed faculty member should be shared with his or her faculty colleagues, especially the departmental governance committee (Department Advisory Committee, Faculty Advisory Committee, etc.).
5. While reconciling accounting systems that differ across units may be problematic, this is a transaction cost that department and chairs need to understand.

The Salary Issue

Experience suggests that faculty with joint appointments face unique challenges with respect to eligibility for salary increases. Some of these challenges arise because of simple market forces. Different disciplines/fields will have different competitive salary structures. For example, computer science faculty will be paid more than philosophy faculty, reflecting competition between universities and private sector firms to hire the best computer scientists. Less such competition exists for philosophers. If a faculty member is jointly appointed in two departments with substantially different salary structures, then one chair might be reticent to agree to a particular merit or market adjustment that continues to push the faculty member’s salary above the department average.

Even if department chairs understand the difference in salary expectations for different disciplines and agree that a faculty member should not be penalized because of a joint appointment, chairs may still find it difficult to agree on merit and/or market adjustments at raise time. If one department has a fairly large salary base and the other department has a small salary base, then a given raise will represent a larger percentage of the total raise pool available to be allocated by the chair of the smaller department. In that case, the chair of the smaller department may be unwilling to agree to a particular raise amount because the rest of the faculty in his or her unit are affected to a greater degree than the rest of the faculty in the larger department.

Unique situations at Michigan State University create problems for a jointly-appointed faculty member who would, in the absence of a joint appointment, be considered for a given merit or market adjustment. In general, nominations for market adjustments to salary come from departments. By policy, the Provost limits the number of nominees by college and under college practice each department may be required to nominate a limited number of faculty members for market adjustments. This raises two issues. First, if two department chairs agree to nominate a joint-appointed faculty member, that nomination counts twice – of the limit available to each department. That means that between the two departments, a smaller total of nominations can be put forward. Second, if a chair has a faculty member with only a 30% appointment in his/her department, the chair may be less favorably inclined to nominate that faculty member for a market adjustment when a faculty member with a 100% appointment could be nominated instead.

Each of these salary issues, as well as other issues described, can effectively be addressed by University, College and Department administration. As pressure to increase the number of joint appointments at MSU continues, disincentives for faculty to accept joint appointments will be problematic. MSU and its academic departments should be competitive in attracting the strongest candidates for open positions. This
means that a joint position needs to be a reason for a job candidate to choose MSU, not a reason to eliminate MSU from his or her list of opportunities.