

The Role of the Advisor

All Registered Student Organizations (RSO's) are required to have an advisor. It is an honor to be asked by a student organization to serve as their advisor as it indicates the students' respect and trust in you. Being an advisor also carries some responsibilities to the organization. This website has been prepared to assist you in understanding and fulfilling these commitments.

Just as RSO's vary in their purposes, objectives and activities, the role and function of the advisor will vary within each organization.. However, you are required to sign the organization's registration papers, and, in doing so, you have expressly consented to support the organization in its endeavors and agree to provide leadership guidance to the officers as needed.

While all groups will vary in their expectations and needs, some guidelines to all advisors apply in all situations. One important role for the advisor is to act as a resource for the organization. Your experience in planning and organizing, as well as your broader knowledge of the university community, gives you an expertise to share with the student leaders in your organization. You cannot be expected to know all University policies and procedures, nor can you be expected to have all the answers to all the students' questions. You can, however, provide significant directions to students to help them get things done within the University community.

Before you agree to become an advisor, you should become familiar with the purpose and structure of the organization. Reviewing the organization's constitution and by-laws, information about the activities of the group and the roles(s) you can assume within the group.

Choosing an Effective Style

1. As an advisor you play an active and vital role in the student organization with which you are working. Ideally the advisor is a resource and consultant to group teaching students human and organizational development skills, while students maintain responsibility for the program. However, there are three important factors that drastically affect the advisors freedom to choose a style. In order to be truly effective, the advisor must adapt a style to fit the situation. The factors affecting styles include:
2. The college's expectations: Be familiar with this section of the website, so that the responsibilities you have accepted are clear.
3. The student's expectations: The relationship that you have with the student leaders can be a positive one if you are able to choose a style in compliance with the students expectations. For example, do the students expect you to strongly influence decisions about the organizations' events, or to do "go-fer" work such as putting up posters? On the other hand, students may expect you to spend some time training and developing their leadership skills so that they can become more competent and responsible. Remember that expectations may change when new students take office – so be adaptable!

4. The level of the students' development: This is measured by their programming expertise, commitment to the organization, ability to take responsibility for their own action, and interpersonal skills. At the beginning of the year, students will be less mature but they will progress as they develop knowledge, skills and experience in programming and human relations. The following chart outlines four states of student development, and the appropriate role for the effective advisor to take.

Student's Development	Advisor's Role
Students demonstrate low levels of commitment to the organization, programming skills, and responsibility for their actions.	Driving Force. Results are more important than the way the job is done.
Students demonstrate increasing programming skills, interest, commitment, and responsibility. More student involvement and participation in decision making.	Teach leadership skills and start relinquishing programming responsibilities.
Students demonstrate competency in programming skills and a continued increase in commitment, plus a willingness to take responsibility for their own actions.	Instruction focused on group and leadership skills rather than programming skills
Students demonstrate a high degree of competence in programming and group skills, a strong commitment to the group.	Frequency of contact with the group decreases. Contribute wisdom of past experiences.

Guidelines for Advisors

- Attend all general and executive meetings.
- Explain university policy, relevant to the discussion, to the officers and depend upon them to carry it out through their leadership.
- Serve as a parliamentarian for the group to facilitate well-run meetings.
- Speak up during discussions when you have a relevant information and believe the group is likely to make a poor decision.
- Be quiet during general meetings unless called upon.
- Meet and discuss with executive committee to state opinions or what you feel is best for the organization.
- Take an active part in formulating the goals of the group.
- Initiate ideas for discussion when it will benefit the group.
- Be one of the group except for voting and holding office.
- Attend all group activities
- Check all official correspondence before it is sent
- Get a photocopy of all official correspondence
- Inform the group of infractions of their bylaws, codes, and standing rules
- Keep the group aware of its stated objectives when planning events
- Mediate interpersonal conflicts that arise when necessary
- Be responsible for coordinating the attendance of leadership skills workshops
- Have the group set clear expectations of the advisor

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- Have the advisor set clear expectations of the group
- Let the group work out its own problems, including making mistakes and “doing it the hard way.”
- Insist on evaluation of each activity by the students responsible for planning it.
- Take the initiative in creating teamwork and cooperating among the officers’ group.
- Let the group thrive or decline on its merits; do not interfere unless requested to do so.
- Represent the group in any conflict with members of the college staff.
- Be familiar with the University facilities, services, and procedures (as listed in the policies and procedures) which affect group activities.
- Take an active part in the orderly transition of responsibilities of all group records between old and new officers at the end of the year.
- Make sure that the organization stays within the organizational constitution.

Working with Student Leaders

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The student organizations which are most attractive and regarded by students to be the most successful are generally those which have the best and most interested advisors. Even if the general membership never sees the advisor, an effective working relationship with the officers will result in maturity and continuity within the organization from year to year.

Studies and professional experience prove that individuals are more likely to succeed in any endeavor when they clearly understand their goals and responsibilities and have the authority to execute their plans. Too often student leaders are pushed into office with no experience and no knowledge of their responsibilities. These individuals become victims instead of leaders and leave the organization feeling frustrated and exhausted with no intention of ever taking a leadership role again!

An organization’s advisor can be most helpful by showing the officers how to be effective managers of people and resources. To assist this process an advisor should:

1. Meet with officers regularly to know what programs are being planned, to answer questions and offer suggestions, and to help solve problems;
2. Provide support to the officers by encouraging them in their endeavors, advancing their leadership role to general membership, and promoting the organization’s activities within and outside the membership;
3. Insure that a meaningful officer orientation takes place after new officers are elected and help the newly elected move into their positions smoothly.

We offer the following checklist as suggested material for orientation sessions:

- a. Purpose of Orientation – According to the constitution, what is the purpose of the organization? Are the leaders goals and objectives in line with that purpose?
- b. Officers Duties – What specific tasks are the responsibility of each officer?

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- c. Organizational Structure – Are there standing committees which perform certain duties and need appointment? What are the qualifications and obligations?
- d. Records and Reports – Does the organization have an archive or scrapbook? Are there reports required by the college or national organizations?
- e. Organizational Practices – If dues are charged, how are they collected and receipted? Where are funds deposited (Bank, Appropriations, Other)? How often does the organization need to meet? How are these meetings run?
- f. Student Association-Funded Organizations – Are all officers aware of the Appropriations policies? Is the treasurer aware of the financial policy of the group and do they have access to the groups budget? Has a representative been chosen to attend SGA Forums?
- g. Officer Expectations – As the advisor, what do you expect from the officers? In turn, what *can* they and *do* they expect from you?

Programming Checklist

Of course student organizations want to have successful programs and activities, or the organization has no functional purpose for which to exist. Once the following questions can be answered honestly, your program is ready to be successfully implemented.

1. What are the interests and needs of the people that you want the program for? (asses via surveys, brainstorming sessions, suggestion box, informal chats, etc)
2. Is everyone supportive of the program or activity? Be sure that officers have consulted membership for their ideas and suggestions.
3. Have responsibilities been delegated to utilize members of the organization? Deadlines should be set.
4. What is the date of the program? What time will it begin and end?
5. Has a campus calendar been checked for possible conflicts?
6. Has the location been determined and have reservations forms been completed?
7. Has special equipment - TV, VCR, Projector, etc. been requested?
8. Have any funds that are needed, been requested?
9. Has the speaker/presenter/DJ been contracted? Does s/he know the purpose, length, audience, etc of the program?

10. Who will meet and introduce this person?
11. Have arrangements been made for refreshments if necessary?
12. Has publicity been taken care of?
13. Who has been assigned to set up? Clean up?
14. How will the program be evaluated to determine whether it should be done again?

Legal Liabilities

The legal liabilities of a student organization advisor are not clearly defined. Since liability is most often based on negligence, it is your responsibility to make organization officers fully aware of possible negligence. However, as an advisor, your role is to give advice. To be most effective in the role, you must have an intimate knowledge of SU's Policies and Procedure, and have a good working relationship with the officers of the organization you advise. If you have made every effort within your power to avoid possible negligence, and have done on record as doing so, your personal liability should, in most cases, be minimal.

Some important things to remember:

- The college accepts no liability for events that occur off campus. This includes, “open parties,” where alcohol may be served to minors. However, as an employee of the college, you are legally bound to report any illegal activities, such as these “open parties” where alcohol may or may not be served to these minors, or any forms of hazing.
- You should not be liable for anything printed or broadcast by a student organization. But you ARE responsible for making that organization’s leadership aware of the possibility of liability involved in their actions.
- The degree of liability you will be responsible for will always be determined by the courts.

Thank you for taking the time to review this material. If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact us.

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