

Section IV Advisor Resources

Advising

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“What Kind Of Advisor Are You?”

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Successful Advisor/Student Relationships”*

Advising

What Kind of Advisor Are You?

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It's Crucial to Know Your Roles and the Challenges and Rewards that Come with the Job

During my first year as a student activities professional, I was given the role of advisor to the University Programming Council at my school. Unfortunately, I did not understand how difficult this role was going to be and figured I would be a great advisor. Halfway through that year, I began to realize I was doing things all wrong and I needed to change my view of what an advisor is and what an advisor does. Luckily for me, and the students, I now have a better understanding of my role as their advisor and the time and effort it takes to be good at it. Whether the role of advisor is one we choose freely or one assigned to us, it is important to understand the function and roles involved, as well as the challenges and rewards that come with it. The role of advisor is never the same; different groups require different types of advisors. It's hard to create a unified blueprint for being an advisor, but there are a few things every advisor needs to know. A large part of being a good advisor is finding the style that best fits that organization. Many advisors are comfortable with the traditional role of advising: attending meetings and organizational functions and providing a signature when necessary. However, a good advisor provides assistance beyond the needs of the organization and provides personal development, as well.

Four Primary Roles

An advisor plays numerous roles while working with a student organization. It is important to understand all of these roles and the importance of them. They include: Mentor, Supervisor, Teacher and Leader (Dunkel and Schuh).

Mentor

Every advisor serves as a mentor to those in their organization. They role model proper behavior and have dialogue with their students. Mentors are characterized as individuals who:

- * **Have a knowledge of their profession.**
- * **Enthusiasm for their profession.**
- * **Warmth and understanding with students.**
- * **A high, yet achievable standard of performance.**
- * **Honest emotional rapport.**
- * **Many other characteristics.**

There are five qualities that characterize good mentors (adapted from a citation in Schuh and Carlisle, 1991, p. 505):

- * **Good mentors have been successful in their own professional endeavors.**
- * **They behave in ways worthy of emulation.**
- * **They are supportive in their work with subordinates; they are patient, slow to criticize, and willing to work with those who are less well developed in their careers.**
- * **They are not afraid to delegate tasks to colleagues and are not threatened by others who exhibit talent and initiative.**
- * **They provide periodic, detailed and honest feedback to the protégé.**

Supervisor

A good advisor also serves as a supervisor to their organization. There are six areas in which a supervisor is most helpful:

- * **Team building**
- * **Performance planning**
- * **Communication**
- * **Recognition**

- * **Self-assessment**
- * **Evaluation**

A good supervisor works with group leaders to create team building activities. These could include team building retreats or workshops, which help establish trust among members of the organization.

Performance planning includes setting goals and expectations, as well as writing position descriptions. This helps members realize what is expected of them and what they expect from their advisor, as well.

The supervisor's role in communication is to make students aware of different types of communication they can use, both verbal and non-verbal. A good advisor teaches their students to use memos, letters, agendas, minutes, resolutions, Web pages, discussion boards and e-mail.

Recognition of members is also important within an organization, so members know they are doing a good job and are being noticed. A good advisor not only recognizes students for positive work, but also recognizes student behavior, emotions and characteristics.

Self-assessment consists of asking students to complete verbal or written self-assessments of how they are doing. This allows students to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses. It's also important for a good advisor to complete their own self-assessment every once in a while.

The final stage is evaluation, in which the students are asked to complete a formal evaluation. This provides an opportunity for everyone to provide feedback to the organization about an event.

Teacher

A good advisor knows that learning does not take place exclusively in the classroom and that being a part of a student organization can be one of the best learning experiences a student can have. This puts the advisor in the role of teacher; they teach students how to:

- * **Handle budgets.**
- * **Be part of a team.**
- * **Communicate effectively.**
- * **Develop many other skills they will use well beyond their time in school.**

Leader

The advisor also plays the role of the leader of an organization. This role requires the advisor to not only lead by example, but also provide leadership opportunities for the students in the organization. Kouzes and Posner (1987) identify the five fundamental practices that are found in leaders. They:

- * **Challenge the process by seeking ways to improve the organization.**
- * **Inspire a shared vision by creating an image of what the organizations can become.**
- * **Enable others to act by involving students in activities on committees and task forces.**
- * **Model the way by setting standards and assisting other students through their problems and concerns.**
- * **Encourage the heart by recognizing members for their achievements and by motivating members to achieve their goals. It is important to understand that no matter what the motives of the student organization might be, students require guidance and direction in order to succeed.**

Another Important Role

Motivator

Perhaps the most important role an advisor may play is that of motivator for students. Student motivation can be divided into two categories: extrinsic and intrinsic.

* ***Extrinsic Motivation***

There are three types of extrinsic motivation for students:

- * **Recognition**
- * **Money**
- * **Achievement**

It is important to recognize students for the hard work that they put in, but it is even more important to realize that using one type of recognition will not work for all members. In order to best recognize members, it is essential to get to know them and what they enjoy. Recognition is the category of motivation that most advisors use.

Many advisors struggle with the question of whether or not to pay students, but many organizations do not have that ability. However, if an organization does make the decision to compensate students, it can take several forms:

- * **Conference cost reimbursement**
- * **Summer jobs**
- * **Room and board**
- * **Academic credit**
- * **Salaries**
- * **Parking**
- * **Other stipends**

Students who are motivated by achievement are driven to take on more responsibility and authority. They will be willing to take on tasks other students may not because of their difficulty. It is important to work with those students to find a role of increasing responsibility or authority for them. These students can often lose motivation, get frustrated or refuse to involve others, so you must work closely with them.

* ***Intrinsic Motivation***

The three types of intrinsic motivation are:

- * **Desire**
- * **Value**
- * **Approval**

Students become involved in activities and organizations that provide a desirable outcome for them. If a student knows that being part of an organization or holding a specific role is desirable, they will be more likely to consider it.

The student who perceives value in participating in an organization, attending a conference, or holding an office will be motivated to become involved. Advisors can work with students to determine the particular value of being involved and holding an office.

Some students may get involved because earning a sense of approval from others motivates them. It is imperative to identify the students motivated by approval and give them a pat on the back, a kind word or another form of approval.

Motivating students will help keep them happy, which will keep the organization running smoothly.

Challenges and Rewards of Advising

Being an advisor brings many challenges, but also great rewards.

Challenges

The greatest challenge for any advisor is managing their time and not becoming overcommitted. You may be asked to do several things for the organization on top of your job and other commitments. You need to set expectations early as to your ability to attend organization meetings and events.

Another challenge many advisors face is defining their role with the organization. Students may have their own ideas as to the advisor's role, so you should discuss your role as soon as possible following the election of new officers.

Yet another challenge is to avoid becoming overly controlling of the organization's business. A student organization is "for the students and by the students," so advisors need to stay out of it as much as possible. An advisor should serve as a supervisor and step in only when needed.

Being aware of all the decisions and actions taken by the organization is also a challenge. Sometimes advisors are not able to make meetings and, consequently, miss some of the decisions being made. However, it is the advisor's responsibility to be aware of the actions of the organization so they may respond to questions, ensure that any legal and financial issues are properly addressed, and better understand the climate of the organization and its members. Weekly meetings with the president and making sure to read minutes are two ways to stay informed.

Additionally, an advisor can be challenged to be patient with students and the organization. It may seem easier to make a decision for the organization and provide solutions for students. However, if you allow students the opportunity to solve problems for themselves, they and the organization will benefit.

Rewards

There are many rewards of being an advisor, and one of the most gratifying is being able to observe the development of students during their time in college. You may have the opportunity to work with many students during their first year and it is rewarding to watch them move from membership to leadership, or from being reserved to fully participating.

Another reward for advisors is to be recognized by the institution, organization, students or professional organizations for a job well done. While this reward is seldom sought, it is a nice perk.

You should feel flattered in serving as a reference for students. If asked by a student to be a reference, that means they respect you and you have developed a relationship with them.

One of the most fulfilling aspects of being an advisor is serving as a mentor for students. Advising also provides an opportunity to teach, lead and coach students involved in organizations.

Yet another reward is the opportunity to participate in an organization whose purpose you truly enjoy.

Finally, there is the opportunity to form networks with colleagues who serve as advisors for similar organizations. Traveling to conferences or meetings allows the opportunity to visit with colleagues in similar situations. These trips not only rejuvenate you, but also help you create a network to rely on for information and support.

Being the Best Advisor You Can Be

Advisors can be separated into three different categories:

- * Those that don't
- * Those that wish they could

*** Those that do (Rotz and Pesco)**

Those that don't will never attend meetings, don't know what actions or decisions the organization is making and are hard to find. The students don't know who their advisor is and have to search for their contact information.

Those that wish they could meet with the organization every once in a while, support only a few of the programs, are contacted only when it's time to sign paperwork and show up only at budget and election time.

Those that do meet with the group weekly, attend events on a regular basis, contribute to the legacy of the organization and offer support and guidance when needed. If you are not the advisor that does, there are steps you can take to become a better advisor.

The dream advisor is one who has a vested interest in the organization. They attend meetings and events, participate in retreats and trainings, offer advice and counsel students, and support the effort of the organization.

Here are 10 steps to become a great advisor:

1. Discuss your role with everyone in the organization.
 2. Attend all meetings possible.
 3. Attend all events possible.
 4. Schedule weekly one-on-one meetings with the president or executive board.
 5. Get copies of agendas and minutes of all meetings.
 6. Be involved in all financial areas, not just signing check requests and reimbursements.
 7. Be involved in all constitutional or charter rewrites.
 8. Make sure to be included in the election of new leaders.
 9. Have fun with your committee members.
 10. Finally, recognize your members for their good work.
- It's never too late to be a dream advisor. Start now!

Strategies for Establishing and Maintaining Successful Advisor/Student Relationships
By Erin Morrel, MA Albertus Magnus College (CT)

Sometimes we may feel that the challenges and obstacles we face as student organization advisors outweigh the benefits and rewards. Many advisors can become overwhelmed and frustrated while working with students and student groups; however, learning to seek advice from others can be extremely beneficial. If an advisor feels they do not have the proper tools to guide them in being a successful and effective student organization advisor, perhaps some of these strategies will point them in the right direction. One of the most daunting tasks you have as a professional or graduate student advisor is learning that you may not always have the answer, but you can certainly seek ways to get the answer.

Establishing Effective Advisor/Student Leader Relationships

An advisor can either be assigned to or chosen by a given student organization. Therefore, all advisors should have a working knowledge of how the organization operates, as well as the history of the group and how it was established. Roles should be defined so that there is no confusion as to what each person thinks the other is doing.

It is important to keep in mind that there is a difference between advising and supervising. Student organization members and those in leadership positions, for the most part, take initiative

and are highly motivated. Advisors should encourage, support and be a resource for leaders and the student organization. Supervisors exert control and give direction, as well as take responsibility if or when things go wrong. When a problem arises, advisors assist the students in reflecting and assessing the events and how to improve upon them for the future.

In both cases, when working with a new group of students, it is important to set goals and expectations. This encourages individuals to grow and learn without feeling pressured to please others.

Establishing Identity as a Student Organization

Student organizations should have a mission and purpose that will guide them in their efforts to improve student life on campus. Create a connection among the members of the organization through trainings and retreats and student leaders will learn to trust each other and their advisor. If the organization plans to do something, it is crucial to follow through, all the while gaining respect from the campus community and each other. Once an organization feels it has established an identity, it will help to define and direct what they execute.

Investing in the Organization

Investing time and interest in the organization can be a great way to interact with your student leaders and help them to develop their skills. Try to attend as many of the regular meetings and events as possible to demonstrate to students that you want them to succeed. Encouraging student leaders to have trainings and retreats will allow the group to create a sense of ownership while learning their positions. As an advisor, you can offer advice and support the efforts of the student organization.

Gaining and Maintaining Respect

Advisors are expected to maintain a professional relationship with their students. Students will respect you if you show them the appropriate way to behave as an advisor. Respect is a two-way street, though. It is also important for student leaders to gain respect on campus, as well.

Advisors should set limits as to when students should expect them to be working, and advisors, in turn, should respect students' personal time. Being available and approachable to students builds rapport and trust. Advisors have the responsibility to know when it is time to have fun and when it is time to be serious. As the advisor, you set the example. Starting out as an advisor can be stressful, but if you set expectations and follow through, students will listen. If you find that your expectations are too high, you can always relax them. It is much easier to start off running a tight ship and ease up later, if necessary. Sometimes showing some "tough love" to your students will get them to understand where you stand, as long as you continue to listen and give honest feedback when they need it.

Balancing and Prioritizing Your Job Responsibilities

Learning when to use the word "no" is the best advice one advisor can give to another. There will be times when student leaders will, sometimes without even realizing it, take advantage of their advisor if the advisor allows it. It is also important to realize that you have specific responsibilities, and taking on extra projects and commitments without more available time may be foolish if you have to complete them hastily.

Taking time to figure out a system that works well for you and your advising style will help you balance all your work responsibilities. For example, make to-do lists, identify days and times for specific tasks and learn to take "me" time.

Sometimes that may mean saying no to a student who wants to have a meeting at 10 pm and asking them to meet earlier in the day. From time to time there will be situations students deem as needing immediate attention, and it will be up to you to determine how desperate the

circumstances actually are. But once you are familiar with your responsibilities and workload, you can lead a balanced work and personal life.

Establishing Boundaries—Advisor vs. Friend

There is a difference between being a friendly advisor and being a friend. Advisors are responsible for setting the boundaries between themselves and students they advise. It is important to tell students they are being inappropriate if they exhibit behavior that violates boundaries; otherwise, your silence will tell them it is acceptable. Be up front with your students about what you are and are not able to do with them. Keeping your interactions with students limited to work and school-related activities should clear up any confusion as to your role.

Dressing professionally makes a statement to students that you are a working professional. It is natural to be friendly and even caring as an advisor, but remember to maintain appropriate relationships.

Training of New Members

When advising a student organization, especially if it is the first time you are involved with the group, it is ideal to have a retreat or planning session with the entire group before the semester begins. This gives everyone a chance to set expectations for themselves, as well as for their advisor. It is a great time to review policies and procedures, as well as changes to any of them since last year.

Pairing up new student leaders with experienced student leaders gives new members the opportunity to make a connection with someone who has been involved before, but also gives them someone to go to with questions and concerns they might have. Student leaders are constantly learning and developing new skills. Work with your experienced student leaders to train incoming members and transition them into their positions and help them learn the expectations for that position.

Finally, allow time in training sessions for students to have “free time” together and get to know each other, such as going out to eat, to the movies, bowling or other group activities. This will help to create a team that is bonded and wants to work together, as opposed to a group that is forced to work together.

Dealing with Difficult Students

If you find yourself dealing with a difficult student, or group of students, establish goals and deadlines for them to be accomplished. Trying to see their perspective and understanding where they are coming from will create a better working relationship and, in the long run, make life easier for all.

If you feel they are exhibiting a challenging behavior, address it and explain the impact they have on others when they behave that way. You can also attempt to make a personal connection with the student by finding a common interest, which would show them you are making an effort to know them, which, in turn, means you care and want to build a working relationship with them.

To Be a Successful Advisor:

- * **Establish relationships with students, based on appropriate boundaries and limits.**
- * **Help the student organization establish its identity on campus.**
- * **Invest time in the organization.**
- * **Set expectations and encourage respect.**
- * **Balance and prioritize your responsibilities.**
- * **Provide effective training for new members.**
- * **Establish goals and deadlines for difficult students and strive to understand their perspectives.**
- * **Create recognition opportunities.**
- * **Help students manage multiple leadership roles.**
- * **Keep your students—and yourself—motivated and strive to avoid burnout.**

*** Recognize the challenges and rewards of advising.**

Creating Recognition Opportunities

Hosting an end-of-the-year celebration or recognition banquet is a great way to not only end the year, but to celebrate the accomplishments of student leaders and student organizations. It helps students feel they have contributed and made a difference on their campus and that the work they have done has had an everlasting effect at their school.

If you work with other advisors, creating and distributing an advisor handbook or set of guidelines will assist them in their position and help them feel more connected to the student organization. Advisors often dedicate their free time to work with a student organization and, therefore, should also be recognized each year for their continued support.

Managing Students with Multiple Leadership Roles

Having the ability to truly listen is one of the best traits you can possess as an advisor. Students often will tell you what you want to hear, but you can listen for underlying information that will help you to better understand them.

It is important to assist student leaders in managing their time well and help them to not become overwhelmed by their responsibilities and obligations. Regularly check in with them by asking how they are doing, how their classes are going or how the big exam went. Even asking how their weekend at home went will give you a sense of whether or not a student is balancing everything while still having time for themselves.

Motivating Others, as Well as Yourself

*** *Motivating Others***

As an advisor, you can find it difficult to motivate students while keeping yourself going day after day, event after event. Motivating others can be a challenge, but there are things you can do to keep morale high in your student organization. Always have a smile on your face—it might seem to be a small thing, but it goes a long way. Recognizing others' accomplishments gives individuals a sense of belonging. Lastly, being a positive role model who does their best to make work fun will also help create a highly motivated crowd.

*** *Keeping Yourself Motivated***

Being content and satisfied in your job can be difficult for many to achieve, so if you do like your job, it's crucial to stay fresh and motivated. Self-motivation only contributes positively to others' motivation. If students see that you are dragging, they will think it's fine to slack off, whereas, if you stay motivated and keep going, they will also forge ahead with full steam.

*** *Avoiding Advisor Burnout***

One of the biggest challenges we sometimes face as advisors is trying to avoid burnout. The field of student activities, more often than not, requires extra hours, most of which are outside the typical workweek. Keeping a positive attitude and an open mind can really make a difference on the job. Be sure to take time for yourself, and if it seems like you are always sacrificing your personal life for work, try to re-prioritize what is really important and what can wait until tomorrow.

Sometimes professionals can become frustrated with the way things are accomplished on their campuses, or the red tape they may endure, but if you find someone with whom you can vent, you will feel much better and make your days less stressful. In our field, there is always going to be change, and there will always be a new group of students each year. Do your best to take time for yourself, especially during breaks and the summer, and you will feel rejuvenated when the new year begins.

Recognizing the Challenges and Rewards of Advising Student Organizations

There are times when advisors realize there are many variables that are out of our control; but recognizing these factors is the first step to overcoming them. There are going to be members of the organization who do not see your position, or you personally, as a valuable asset. Typically, there is a high turnover of members each year. But rather than looking at this as a challenge, advisors can treat it as a blessing. New members and new ideas can be the lifeline of a student organization. It is imperative to know the past and learn from it, but it is also essential to realize that change is inevitable and should be embraced.

Advising students is a privilege that can and does really make a difference in the lives of students. Think of yourself as the coach of a team. It is your job to be concerned about students in terms of academics, their personal lives and how they contribute to the team.

Students should always hold their academic careers as the top priority. It is very easy for student leaders to overextend themselves and become overwhelmed. Letting our students know we are there for them and care about them and their success as students is extremely important. Caring about our students comes naturally and can really make a difference to them today, tomorrow and in the future.