

Defining the Role of the Advisor

Introduction

Each non-Social Greek club/organization must have a Faculty/Staff Advisor. A Faculty/Staff Advisor is defined as a person (faculty, administrator, or staff) currently employed by the University and holding office hours within the University. Social Greek Letter organizations must have a chapter advisor. A chapter advisor is defined as above or an Alumni member of the organization with a letter of support from their national headquarters on file with the Center for Student Involvement and Leadership. A faculty, administrator, or staff member who is on a sabbatical leave cannot serve as an advisor nor can graduate students.

The advisor plays an integral role in helping student leaders create an environment within their club/organizations that is productive, safe, enjoyable, and educational. The main objective of an advisor is to be available to guide and assist the officers or members in the mission/goals of the group and to make choices within the boundaries established by state, federal, and local laws, University policies, and the educational mission of the University of Arizona. Advisors are essential in helping their students facilitate the coordination of club/organization events and help student leaders take corrective actions and proactive steps to minimize accidental injury and loss.

Our staff can answer questions or assist you in other capacities related to advising a club/organization.

Because student leaders and advisors may imagine the advisor's role and appropriate advising differently, the student leaders and advisor should discuss and agree upon the specific responsibilities of the advisor. Listed below are some expectations student leaders may have of their advisor. The advisor and leaders should each respond to the following items then discuss answers and resolve differences. For some items that are determined not to be the responsibility of the advisor, it would be valuable to clarify which officer will assume that responsibility.

An important part of any student organization is the advisor. Every student club/organization must have an advisor to be officially recognized by the University. The advisor is required to be a faculty or academic staff member. The University believes an advisor serves a very important function to the organization, and to the campus activities program. The selection of an advisor provides a new perspective, opportunity for feedback and support to the organization. His or her experience and position with the University helps provide the ability to serve as a mentor, consultant and resource.

There is a tendency for an organization to select an advisor and feel that it has met the requirement and that nothing more is necessary. However, the ideal relationship between the advisor and the student organization would be a partnership providing the basis for good decision-making and leadership of the organization.

It is obvious that there is a need for communication and mutual understanding. Advisors have obligations to their organizations and to the University, and organizations have obligations to their advisor as well as the University. Ideally, the relationship between the advisor and the organization would involve trust and respect. The advisor must feel that she or he can depend on the organization to act in a manner that is responsible, and the organization must feel that it can depend on the advisor to act in a manner that is responsible as well.

One of the most frequently asked questions about advising students groups concerns the legal liability of the advisor. In general, the advisor has accepted the position of advisor to a student group as "part of the job." The advisor would probably not be held personally liable for mistakes as long as the organization is not engaged in an activity that is illegal and as long as there is not negligence involved in the performance of the advisor's function. The use of common sense is one's best guide to determine what needs to be done in the event that an activity is potentially dangerous or unethical. An advisor who utilizes appropriate techniques to insure the safety of the participants will usually not be judged liable should a participant become injured.

Advisor/Student Club/Organization Statement of Understanding

This agreement is designed to enhance and codify the relationship between the advisor and the members of a student club/organization. It describes the expectations and responsibilities between parties. This form may be used as a tool for evaluating the relationship between the advisor and members of a student club/organization. Periodic review of the contents of this agreement is necessary for the benefit of both parties. Renegotiation of any area should occur whenever one or both parties deem it appropriate.

This agreement is divided into four sections. Sections I and III outline the general roles and responsibilities of the advisor and the student organization. Sections II and IV should include specific roles and responsibilities that are to be negotiated and mutually agreed upon by both parties.

The members of _____ (club/organization name), by the selection process outlined in our constitution hereby announce that _____ (advisor name) will be our club/organization advisor for the _____ (year) academic year.

Section I: General Roles and Responsibilities of the Club/Organization Advisor

ASUA has the following basic expectations of all student organization advisors:

1. Treat students as mature individuals who possess dignity, worth and self-direction.
2. Understand the purpose and objectives of the student club/organization.
3. Meet with the executive board as often as necessary.
4. Have knowledge of and explain institutional policy/procedure.
5. Offer financial management advice.
6. Act as a resource to the group.
7. Attend programs that may potentially have liability/risk for the institutions.
8. Intervene when knowledge of illegal activity/activities contrary to UA policy occur.

In addition, the advisor has the right to disagree with student club/organization decisions. It is understood that as an employee of the University, the faculty advisor may disagree with an organizational decision and/or activities. A situation may occur when the University administration deems this club/organization's activities or decisions as incompatible with the objectives of the University or inappropriate for a university setting.

Section II: Specific Roles and Responsibilities of a Club/Organization Advisor

The following expectations are to be negotiated between the advisor and the club/organization. The following list may serve as a tool to determine role and responsibilities of your club/organization advisor.

- ___ 1. Attend all general meetings.
- ___ 2. Attend all executive committee meetings.
- ___ 3. Call meetings of the executive committee when she or he believes it is necessary.
- ___ 4. Explain University policy when relevant to the discussion.
- ___ 5. Explain University policy to the executive committee and depend on officers to carry them out through their leadership.

Advisor/Student Club/Organization Statement of Understanding (cont.)

- ___6. Explain University policy to the entire membership at a general meeting each year.
- ___7. Have a meeting with the club/organization president (chairperson) before each meeting.
- ___8. Help the president (chairperson) prepare an agenda before each meeting.
- ___9. Serve as parliamentarian for the group.
- ___10. Speak up during discussion when he or she has relevant information.
- ___11. Speak up during discussion when he or she believes the group is likely to make a poor decision.
- ___12. Be quiet during general meetings unless called upon.
- ___13. Exert his or her influence with officers between meetings.
- ___14. Take an active part in goal formation of the group.
- ___15. Initiate ideas for discussion when he or she believes they will help the group.
- ___16. Be one of the group, except for voting and holding office.
- ___17. Attend all group activities.
- ___18. Require the treasurer to clear all expenditures with him or her before commitments are made.
- ___19. Request to see the treasurer's books at the end of each semester.
- ___20. Check all official correspondence before it is sent.
- ___21. Get a copy of all official correspondence.
- ___22. Inform the group of infractions of their bylaws, codes, and standing rules.
- ___23. Mediate interpersonal conflicts that arise.
- ___24. State what his or her advisor responsibilities are, or as he or she sees them, at the first meeting of the year.
- ___25. Let the group work out its problems, including making mistakes and "doing it the hard way," as long as such decisions do not violate University policy or are not illegal.
- ___26. Take the initiative in creating teamwork and cooperation among the officers group.
- ___27. Represent the group in any conflicts with members of the University staff.
- ___28. Be familiar with University facilities, services and procedures that affect group activities.
- ___29. Recommend programs, speakers, etc.
- ___30. Take an active part in the orderly transition of responsibilities between old and new officers at the end/start of the year.
- ___31. Cancel any activities when she or he believes they have been inadequately planned.

Advisor/Student Club/Organization Statement of Understanding (cont.)

If there are other specific expectations and responsibilities please list them here:

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The above expectations and responsibilities may be reconsidered at any time based on the needs of all parties.

Section III: General Roles and Responsibilities of Members of Student Organizations

The University of Arizona has the following basic expectations of all student club/organization members:

1. Understand the purpose of the student club/organization and pursue activities that fulfill its purpose.
2. Take advantage of opportunities to enhance their leadership skills.
3. Provide positive and negative feedback and confront behavior in other members and the advisor that they deem to be detrimental to that individual and/or club/organization.
4. Treat the advisor as an individual who possesses dignity, worth and self-direction.

In addition, members have the right to be listened to by other members and the advisor and to voice their disagreements with the decisions of the advisor. They have the right to choose their level of involvement in the student club/organization.

Section IV: Specific Roles and Responsibilities of Members of the Student Club/Organization

If there are other specific expectations and responsibilities please list them here:

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Advisor/Student Club/Organization Statement of Understanding (cont.)

Signatures

Advisor:

I have met with the club/organization and have discussed my expectations/responsibilities. I agree to the above Statement of Understanding and will fulfill my responsibilities to the best of my ability. This agreement is binding until a new a new agreement is developed.

Signature of Advisor

Date

Student club/organization:

I have met with the club/organization advisor and have discussed his or her expectations/responsibilities. I agree to the above Statement of Understanding and will fulfill my responsibilities to the best of my ability. This agreement is binding until a new a new agreement is developed.

Signature of club/organization president

Date

Advising a Student Club/Organization (cont.)

Rewards of Advising

There are many benefits that can result from the advising relationship. Individual students, the club/organization, and the organization's members share these benefits:

- Being able to observe the growth and development of students.
- Recognition from the students, the club/organization, and (hopefully!) the institution.
- Serving as a resource to students and to the club/organization.
- Opportunity to observe fads, student culture, and subtle changes that occur in student life. You'll have your "finger on the pulse" of the student body.
- The opportunity to teach, lead and coach involved students.
- The opportunity to form networks with other colleagues involved in advising and the ability to network with advisors of similar club/organizations on a regional or national level.
- The opportunity to serve the club/organization and the institution and simultaneously build your resume.
- The opportunity to participate in a club/organization whose purpose you enjoy.

Functions of a student club/organization advisor

Broadly stated, the purpose of the advisor is to work with the designated leaders and members of a functioning student club/organization with the intent of:

1. Assisting the leaders and members to fulfill their responsibilities.
2. Aiding the club/organization to define and achieve its goals and objectives.
3. Integrating the organizational activity with the overall purpose of the educational setting.

When issues arise, the opinions of the advisor should be sought and given proper consideration. Although the advisor is not responsible for policy-making, he or she may make recommendations and should expect that these will be considered.

The literature on student club/organization advising suggests three main functions of responsibility for advisors. These functions are: maintenance or custodial of the club/organization; group growth and leadership; and program content and coordination. The advisor will perform certain functions within any of the three categories. The three categories provide a classification, a rationale, and validity to group advising.

Maintenance Functions

- Provide a historical view of the group and the institution. Serve as a resource on administrative/academic issues and how these relate to the functioning of the group.
- Be aware of any and all procedures and regulations affecting the group, including the club/organization's constitution and by-laws. Assist them in adhering to them.
- Encourage the group to keep records and evaluation files. Procedures for passing this information along should be developed.
- Inform members of resources and opportunities that will advance the goals of the group.
- Establish a rapport with the students. Be available to consult with them.
- Mediate inter-group disputes when necessary.

Growth Functions

- Express sincere enthusiasm and interest in the group and its activities.
- Assist the group in determining how they will function, and what roles the officers will take.
- Act as a positive critic of the group. Give feedback on how they are doing.
- Try to encourage the assignment of tasks to all group members.
- Help them to understand the principles of the club/organization and its importance to the UA community.

Program Functions

- Enlarge the thinking of the group by introducing new ideas and challenging the group on "the way we've always done things."
- Review financial accounts being maintained by the students.
- Attend as many meetings and planned events as possible, or as desired by student club/organization leaders.

Miscellaneous

- **Allow the group to be on its own. Remember, it is a student club/organization and should be run by and for students.** You should intervene if the group wants to do something that is illegal or is not in line with their mission or the mission of the University of Arizona.
- Provide support for students to practice their management and leadership skills.
- Form a positive relationship with the officers and the members of the group. You will be looked up to by the students – take this responsibility seriously.

The advisor's activities may fall within any of these categories as the situation dictates. There are various types of groups with different objectives; consequently, the advisor functions differ from club/organization to club/organization. Also, because new circumstances and environmental factors may arise, the advisor may find that his or her approach and activities will change throughout the year. Advisors should not allow their groups to become dependent upon them and their decisions, but they should work toward becoming accepted as participants and as part of the decision-making process of their clubs/organizations.

Consequently, all of the suggestions are made to remind as well as instruct. It is important that the relationship between the club/organization and advisor be mutually satisfactory. Each can learn from the other, and benefit from this relationship.

Advising a Student Club/Organization (cont.)

Possible Advisor Contributions

Financial Management

Assist your club/organization in the planning of its budget. Assist students in their decision making on how to use their money wisely throughout the year.

Planning, Goal Setting, and Evaluation

Provide planning resources and ideas. Assist students by meeting with them regularly to discuss the agenda of upcoming meetings and the details of upcoming events. Guide students by setting goals at the beginning of the year and evaluating them regularly.

Motivation and Delegation

Provide information on techniques that can motivate club/organization members. Assist leaders with defining the roles of members (with job descriptions, constitutions and possibly an organizational flow chart) and identifying skills and talents of members.

Communication

Compile resources on communication skills that can be used by members. Provide members with sample memos, contracts, letters of agreement, and other templates for relevant documents/communication. Encourage students to practice communication skills as a part of the learning process of being a leader or member of a club/organization.

Decision Making and Situational Analysis

Assist students in becoming "problem solvers" and being "resourceful." Help students to think through the pros and cons of decisions being made in the club/organization. Ask that students clarify the issues and focus on the outcomes of their decisions.

Initiative

Empower the students to take the initiative in all matters concerning the club/organization, thus helping to instill confidence in their abilities.

Support and Approachability

Be the cheerleader for the club/organization, offering encouragement to the students. Be a listener for the students and offer helpful feedback when needed. Always try to be approachable, open and honest.

Relationship Building

Be a resource for the students by demonstrating appropriate working relationships and being "professional." Discuss with the students your expectations of them and their expectations of you. Help students with conflict management by having them distinguish between personal conflicts and issues related directly to the club/organization.

Advising a Student Club/Organization (cont.)

Student/Advisor Relationships

An advisor and student should have an open, honest relationship and have the opportunity to share ideas, receive feedback, and build trust.

1. The responsibility for building the relationship must be shared between advisor and student. View this relationship as a partnership.
2. The relationship must be based upon open, direct communication. Share needs, responsibilities, and expectations with each other.
3. Both must recognize the other's various roles and responsibilities in/outside of their activity position. Know each other's commitments and let each other know their impact.
4. Both advisor/student are human beings who make mistakes, follow their own value systems, and work in individual, professional, and personal styles. Everyone makes mistakes. Accept, discuss, and learn from mistakes - then move on!
5. Both advisor and the student are continually growing, changing, and learning; each within their own unique stages of development. Challenge and support each other.

Advising styles

The advising style of a club/organization advisor varies from person to person, and group to group. If you have done this for more than one year, you will realize that your advising style will vary from year to year - even within the same club/organization. This is due in part to the changing dynamics of the different students involved.

- Depending on the experience and motivation of the students with whom you work, you may be asked to take either an active or passive role. Likewise, your own advising style will determine how active a role you play.
- Some advisors prefer to be highly involved in the groups. They advise by attending all meetings, helping to make the group aware of current situations, and aiding in major financial or programmatic decisions.
- On the other hand, there are advisors who see themselves as resources, or sounding boards for the group. This style of advising seems to be less active, but no less important or effective.
- Between these styles are various levels of involvement, all dependent upon your personal strengths and weaknesses, the group, and the situation.
- **What is most important is that the advisor and the leaders, and members of the club/organization communicate to mutually define your role as the advisor.**

Advising a Student Club/Organization (cont.)

Different perspectives on advising

Student leaders and advisors may have different perspectives on the role of the advisor and different expectations for appropriate advising. The below lists offer a comparison of how student leaders and advisors may perceive the role of the advisor:

The role of the advisor as viewed by the advisor

- Person of resource
- Friend/counselor
- Picks up pieces when necessary
- Assists in planning
- Able to play "devil's advocate"
- Helps set goals
- Helps maintain direction and provide continuity
- Stimulates creativity and motivates
- Serves as a sounding board for chairpersons
- Facilitator for group process
- Being accessible

The role of the advisor as viewed by student leaders

- Person of resource
- Positive reinforcement and support
- Provides constructive criticism
- Serves as liaison between committee and college
- Deals with legal and contractual matters
- Attends committee meetings
- Advises on specific college procedures
- Easily accessible and available
- Discusses ideas but doesn't dictate
- Able to play "devil's advocate" when necessary
- Has brainstorming skills
- Realizes leaders are volunteers

Tips for advisors

- Advisors who are able to establish mutually rewarding relationships with leaders and members of the club/organization generally do so by naturally allowing their experience and expertise to direct them.
- Spend time getting to know the students. Meet for lunch or a break during the day and talk about activities, how you spend your time when you're not at work, recent books you've read, movie likes/dislikes, etc. This is a great way to get to know each other as you begin to build this advisor/student relationship.
- Attend meetings and keep in touch with the officers on a regular basis keeps the lines of communication open and encourages the advisor to assist in planning and problem solving as needed. Some students need to meet more often than others depending on how often the group meets.
- Failure can also be a learning experience. Nobody expects you to have all the answers. Problem solving involves the whole group.
- Officers and advisors must work to provide each other with a positive experience. Once you build the relationship you need to work at it to keep it together.

Advising a Student Club/Organization (cont.)

Evaluation of the Advisor's Effectiveness

It is important for the group advisor to periodically become involved in the evaluation of his or her effectiveness. Use these questions as a way to gauge your role as advisor:

- How much time have I devoted to my advisor position this semester?
- Have I given enough/too little time to my position?
- Have I confronted executive board members on issues and concerns?
- Have I been consistent in reading/answering calls, emails, and mail?
- Have I been enjoying what I am doing?
- If I were to rate myself from 1-5 (5 being the highest), what would my score be?
- If the student club/organization members rated me, what would it be?
- What one thing about being an advisor do I enjoy the most?
- What one thing about being an advisor do I enjoy the least?
- What can I do to help this club/organization, the members, and the leaders succeed?

The evaluation is most helpful when the advisor does a self-evaluation, and the club/organization members offer feedback. Open, two-way communication is critical in an effective advising relationship. Consider the following items in the evaluation process:

1. Have students and advisor discussed the role of the advisor in the club/organization?
2. Is the advisor's involvement in different areas of the club/organization (i.e. programs, meetings, planning) appropriate?
3. Is the advisor an effective resource person? Is he or she familiar with the college's policies and procedures, as well as the special interest areas of the group?
4. Is the advisor adequately available to group members?

Terms of Service for Advisors

It is customary for clubs/organizations to choose an advisor for an academic year. At the end of this time, the club/organization may decide to reappoint the advisor with his or her approval or select a new advisor. However, a club/organization is free to choose to have an advisor for an indefinite term of service. An exception to this involves the advisors to certain academic or major/departmental status clubs/organizations which have the advising responsibility written into their position description.

When a club/organization becomes interested in acquiring a new advisor, it is very important for that organization to keep in mind the challenges involved in doing so. Clubs/organizations should make sure to line up a new advisor well enough in advance of the start of a new school year in order to have the time necessary to secure the interest of the individual.

Both the advisor and the club/organization should understand the term of office. The recommended procedure is that each year when new officers are elected, the advisor should also be selected.

Every group on campus is different, and so is every advisor. The best way to settle on mutual expectations is to sit down and talk with each other. It's always in everyone's best interest to keep communication lines open. If difficulties do arise which cannot be worked out, feel free to contact ASUA at 621-2782 for assistance. Students and staff at ASUA have knowledge and expertise in working with student groups. It is through continuous and open dialogue between ASUA and club/organization advisors that the greatest amount of assistance can be given to advisors. Students should never feel that advisors are being intrusive, but rather know that they are there as a resource and are always willing to act as a mediator for any of their conflicts.

