

Helpful Tips for Advisors

Every student club/organization will differ and may require a different approach by the advisor. The following information can serve as a beginning point.

- In the beginning of the advising relationship, agree on clear expectations about the role of the advisor and the role of the student club/organization. Discuss philosophies and reach a consensus. The activities under the 'creating expectations' section below will facilitate this process.
- Read the bylaws/constitution of the group, get to know the members, and attend events.
- Assist in the establishment of responsibilities for each officer and member.
- Develop a strong relationship with the president and other leaders.
- Maintain a sense of humor, its college, not rocket science. Unless, of course, you are the advisor to the Rocket Science Club.
- Be honest and open with all communication. The students need to feel that you are fair in your dealings with them.
- Realize that you have the power of persuasion, but use this judiciously. The students sometimes need to learn how to fail.
- Help them to see alternatives and provide an outside perspective.
- Remember: praise in public, criticize in private.
- Find a balance between being the strict naysayer and the laissez-faire friend. The students must feel that you are supportive of them and yet that you will hold them accountable for their actions.

Eleven Skills for Advisors to Teach

As an advisor you are a role model, mentor, and teacher for the group. In your role as a teacher you can help the students develop certain skills that will help make the club/organization more effective. Eleven skills have been outlined to be taught to students through consistent, planned advising.

Skills for Accomplishing Tasks

- **Problem Solving:** the ability to solve problems creatively. The process includes these components: identify the real problem, assess all components of the problem, weigh what is relevant, pursue alternatives, and identify a solution.
- **Planning and Organization:** the ability to set goals and coordinate a variety of human and material resources to accomplish these goals.
- **Delegating:** the ability to identify or develop a task, and then share the responsibility, authority, resources, and information needed to accomplish it.
- **Decision-making:** the ability to evaluate existing information and to be willing and confident enough to make a choice of what should be done.

- **Financial Management:** the ability to plan, develop, and implement a budget, including cost and expense estimates, budget implementation, and budget evaluation.

Skills for Improving Relationships

- **Persuasion:** the ability to identify our own opinions and use logic and communication to change the opinions of others.
- **Relationship-building:** the process of creating, developing, and maintaining connections between groups or individuals.
- **Adaptability:** the ability to cope with a variety of situations and kinds of people.

Skills for Self-Improvement

- **Stress Tolerance:** the ability to cope with taxing situations, while getting the job done and having a satisfying life.
- **Initiative:** the ability to take responsibility for originating new projects, ability to think and act without being urged, the ability to develop new ideas or methods.
- **Risk-taking:** the willingness to try something new or make a decision without the assurance of success or improvement.

Twenty Tips to Increase Group Productivity

- Know what the students expect of you as an advisor.
- Let the group and individual members know what you expect of them.
- Express a sincere interest in the group and its mission. Stress the importance of each individual's contribution to the whole.
- Assist the group in setting realistic, attainable goals. Ensure success in the first project undertaken, and then increase responsibility.
- Have the goals or objectives of the group firmly in mind. Know the purposes of the group and know what things need to be accomplished to meet the goal.
- Assist each member in meeting his or her needs while helping the group achieve its goals. Understand why people become involved. Learn strengths and emphasize on them. Help each person grow and learn through their involvement by providing opportunities.
- Know and understand the students with whom you are working. Different groups require different approaches.
- Assist the group in determining the needs of the people the group is serving.
- Express a sincere interest in each member. Encourage everyone to be responsible.
- Assist the members in understanding the group's dynamics and human interaction. Recognize that at times the process is more important than the content.
- Realize the importance of the peer group and its effect on each member's participation or lack thereof. Communicate that each individual's efforts are needed and appreciated.
- Assist the group in developing a system by which they can evaluate their progress. Balance task orientation with social needs of the members.

- Use a reward and recognition system for work well done.
- Develop a style that balances active and passive group membership.
- Be aware of the various roles you will have: clarifier, consultant, counselor, educator, facilitator, friend, information source, mentor, and role model.
- Do not allow yourself to be placed in the position of the chairperson.
- Be aware of the institutional power structure--both formal and informal. Discuss institutional developments and policies with members.
- Provide continuity for the group from semester to semester.
- Challenge the group to grow and develop. Encourage independent thinking and decision-making.
- Be creative and innovative. Keep a sense of humor!

Adapted from M. J. Michal

Goal Setting

Creating a vision and setting goals to reach that vision are essential to progress and success in any club/organization. It is especially important in a student group because of the high turnover rate. Since much can get lost from year to year, it is necessary for group officers to write down their goals, provide a copy for the advisor or have them in the minutes and periodically review them with the membership to evaluate their progress. This is often effective at the beginning of a term so that the members feel as though they have something to strive for throughout the year. These steps will serve as a helpful guide in a goal setting meeting or retreat.

- Have group members brainstorm concepts for what they want the group to look like in a specific time period, such as one year. Write down their ideas and turn them into a concise vision or mission statement. This is the broad ideal view of the future of the group. From this general vision, eventual get more and more specific.
- Divide the concepts into manageable sections, such as: publicity, recruitment, successful event planning, etc. Have member's list possible goals for each area; try to reach some consensus.
- The goals should be ambitious, yet attainable.
- For each goal, have members design specific steps to reach them.
- Put everything in writing and have the leadership distribute this Action Plan to all members.
- Follow up weekly to evaluate progress.
- Celebrate when milestones are reached.

Adapted from the Center for Student Involvement. University of Florida (2006)

The Dos & Don'ts of Advising

Do...

- Do serve as a resource to the club/organization
- Do interpret and clarify college policy and procedure
- Do suggest program ideas
- Do serve as a personal role model
- Do advise officers in decision-making matters
- Do provide historical continuity for the club/organization
- Do act consistent with what you say
- Do allow the group to succeed
- Do allow the group to fail
- Do teach leadership
- Do keep your sense of humor

Don't...

- Don't control the group
- Don't run the club/organization meetings
- Don't have veto power over decisions
- Don't be the sole recruiter for new members
- Don't know it all
- Don't say "I told you so"
- Don't break promises
- Don't take ownership of the group
- Don't be the leader

Dunkel, N. W., & Schuh, J. H. (1998). Advising student groups and organizations. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.