

THE ROLE OF A STUDENT ORGANIZATION ADVISOR

Every registered student organization at Mansfield University is required to have an advisor who is a current faculty, staff member or someone closely associated with the University. Advisors serve as mentors, counselors, allies, liaisons, and friends. They play key roles in the development and continuation of student organizations both to the students as individuals and to the organization as a whole.

WHY SHOULD I BECOME AN ADVISOR?

Advising provides the opportunity to contribute to the growth and development of students.

Student organizations provide opportunities for students to learn outside of the classroom and to expand their leadership skills. As an advisor, you will have a central part in this process. Not only will you make a difference in students' lives, but you will also receive the satisfaction of watching an organization grow and become successful.

WHY DOES THE ORGANIZATION NEED AN ADVISOR?

There are many benefits to having an advisor. Advisors maintain continuity within the organization from year to year, providing a sense of history for your organization. Advisors act as advocates for students, and they can also provide helpful resources and knowledge. It is not the advisor's role to take over the organization, but to help make the group the best it can possibly be. Student organizations have the opportunity to choose their own advisor, so they should choose someone with whom they will enjoy working!

ADVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

To Advise, Not Lead

The real learning for the students involved within an organization takes place when they function as group members within the organization.

- **They** must function as the leaders and voting members.
- **They** must be held responsible for their decisions. Under ordinary circumstances, the advisor should not assume a role as leader or voting member within an organization.

The advisor is to **advise** on matters requiring an opinion from someone who has a more sophisticated bank of knowledge in group dynamics, about the institution as a whole, about referrals, etc. The advisor must, however, realize that in this role, the student members of the group decide what advice to accept and what advice to reject.

To Caution When Necessary

The advisor should alert the group when s/he feels they are about to make a decision before all known facts are gathered or when the group appears to be functioning outside the boundaries established within their constitutions, by the university or legally.

To Function as a Liaison

There are times during fact gathering or after a decision is made that the group will need the assistance of an advisor in making appropriate contact with school officials, faculty, etc.

To Work Closely with the Leader

Much advice and counsel can be provided by an advisor on a one-to-one basis with the designated leader of the organization. Standing appointments are conducive to assuring that there will be continuing dialogue between these two individuals. A new student leader can gain needed assistance and advice from the advisor on this one-to-one basis and then be able to function as the group leader in a much more effective fashion.

ADVISOR QUICK TIPS

ADVISING TECHNIQUES

Generally, the advisors' contact with the organization will take place in three settings:

1. Working with student leaders
2. Aiding in the planning of activities
3. Attending meetings and group activities

ADVISOR "DO'S"

- **Allow the group to succeed and fail**
Give students a chance to work through problems without interference. When they succeed, it will encourage them to be involved in other activities; when they fail, they will learn valuable lessons in planning and responsibility.
- **Know your limits as an advisor**
You are an advisor, not a member of the organization. Not everything is your responsibility; not everything that goes wrong is your fault.
- **Be visible**
Your presence at meetings and events lets the group know the university cares about them as people and productive members of an organization.
- **Be consistent with your actions**
Fairness in advising is critical. Make sure you remain objective.
- **Teach Leadership**
Leadership is the most important skill that organization members learn through their involvement in the group. By teaching leadership, the group ensures strength in replenishing members and smooth transition between officers.

ADVISOR "DON'T'S"

- **Control the group**
- **Manipulate the group**
- **Take ownership of the group**
- **Close communication**
- **Be afraid to let the group fail**
- **Know it all**
- **Take everything seriously**
- **Say "I told you so"**

SUCCESSFUL AND HEALTHY GROUPS

Adapted from the Student Organization Advisor Manual at Wright State University

SEVEN CHARACTERISTICS OF A SUCCESSFUL ORGANIZATION

1. Organization members know each other well.
2. Members are involved in defining organizational purposes.
3. Members are used to help generate ideas.
4. There is a commitment to group decision making.
5. Skills, resources, and liabilities of the organization and community are identified.
6. Systematic problem solving techniques are used.
7. The organization effectively communicates itself and its purpose to members and the student body.

SYMPTOMS OF A HEALTHY AND UNHEALTHY GROUP

A group is healthy when:

1. All members feel comfortable saying what they think.
2. Decisions are worked through until a general consensus of agreement is reached.
3. Well-informed members contribute their ideas in the area of their competence.
4. The whole group handles questions that concern the whole group.
5. Major issues get major time.
6. Major issues invoke mature approaches to change.
7. Minor issues are settled with the attention they deserve.
8. Decisions reached through participation are final and satisfactory.
9. Members really understand one another's ideals, plans, and proposals.
10. The group carries forward in the performance of tasks and the achievement of goals.
11. The group is solution oriented.
12. Rewards and feedback are shared among the entire group.

A group is unhealthy when:

1. A few members do all the talking.
2. Members mumble agreement.
3. Competent people sit by silently.
4. Decision making is quickly referred to committees.
5. New people with good ideas are not listened to.
6. Minor issues consume the majority of the group's time.
7. Minor and simple issues make people angry and resentful.
8. Major issues are passed over.
9. The same subjects, supposedly settled, keep coming up again.
10. Quick judgments are passed on issues people do not understand.
11. Members subjectively talk about people in a scapegoat manner.
12. The group accomplishes little in absence of the leader.
13. The group avoids change.
14. Rewards and criticism are concentrated on a few people.