Introduction to Student Organization Advising

Although advising an organization will require additional responsibilities and demands on your time, the opportunity to work with students outside of the classroom allows you to make contributions to students and student life. Research confirms that involvement on campus promotes a number of desirable outcomes such as: increase in the likelihood of a student continuing his/her education, improvement of student academic performance, promotion and development of leadership skills, and enhancement of one’s appreciation of diversity. Through participation in activities and organizations, students can complement the classroom curriculum with out-of-class related experiences, form relationships with other students with similar interests, develop mentor relationships with faculty and staff, and utilize life skills such as decision making, planning and critical thinking.

Student organizations also help to create a sense of community at West Georgia. Collegiate environments that are characterized by a sense of community and caring are ideally suited to support academic and personal development. Therefore, advisors have additional opportunities to contribute to the university mission of “academic excellence in a personal environment”.

From the American College Personnel Association, “The Student Learning Imperative”: “Experiences in various in-class and out-of-class settings, both on and off the campus, contribute to learning and personal development. Indeed, almost any educationally purposeful experience may be a precursor to desired outcomes. However, optimal benefits are more likely to be realized under certain conditions, such as active engagement and collaborations with others (faculty, peers, co-workers and so on) on learning tasks.”

Who can be an advisor?
Student Organization advisors must be full-time (who appear on the monthly payroll) West Georgia faculty or administrative staff members. Potential advisors should be able to attend as many organizational meetings and events as possible and should be willing to serve in the many roles that are listed on the next page. Potential advisors should feel free to discuss specific expectations with the student organization.
Advice for the Advisor

Pop Culture
“Today’s students are products of media-rich environments, having been raised watching everything from Transformers and My Little Pony to MTV’s The Real World and CBS’s Survivor. Music, TV, books, and other media outlets are more influential than you might first realize. So spend some time watching The Osbournes, The Simpsons, Comedy Central, South Park, The Sopranos, Friends, Survivor, and The Real World. These and other popular shows will give you an idea of the world to which many of our students currently relate.”

Technology
“…it is helpful to stay abreast of the latest developments in technology. Are a lot of your peers talking about a new computer program or other technological trend? Ask what all the buzz is about. Talk to a co-worker, or in fact, ask a student. Chances are they will know about it, can tell you if it would be helpful to you, and would think you were pretty darn cool for even knowing about it.”

Advising Style Adjustments
“One of the most important decisions any of us has to make is what style(s) we will select in working with individual leaders and their groups as a whole. It may be necessary to select several styles to work with different segments of the same group. For example…you may use one style when dealing with the president, another with the officers, and a third with the general membership. The challenge is using several advising techniques, and that can be quite a lot to juggle.”

From “Years of Experience Are Not Enough: Seasoned Advisors Must Continually Adapt” by Max Vest, in Programming, Fall 2002
Possible Advisor Responsibilities

The specific roles and responsibilities of an advisor will vary from group to group and from advisor to advisor, but the following presents a list of possible responsibilities or duties.

Communication/University Link—the faculty/staff advisor is the primary link between the student group and the university. The advisor should be familiar with University policy and procedure in order to convey accurate information to the organization. The Center for Student Involvement will communicate with both the advisor and the student organization president whenever possible, to ensure that both have access to the same information.

Meetings—The advisor should attend all regular and special meetings of their organization whenever possible. Attendance of meetings allows the advisor to be current with all organization business and activities.

Activities and Programs—The advisor should attend all programs and activities sponsored by the organization to ensure all university policies and procedures are followed, and to provide on-site assistance if needed.

Continuity—Turnover in a student organization can be frequent. At times, the only link with the past is the advisor. The advisor orients new officers and members to the history and purpose of the group and helps them to build upon it. The advisor can also play an important role in helping members to look toward the future by developing long-term goals and communicating those plans to future members. Advisors walk a fine line in maintaining history while allowing new leadership to develop the organization into new and different directions. The key to success is remembering that the organization belongs to the students, and part of student development may include allowing for mistakes, and organization or programming experiments.

Operational Guidelines—Become familiar with the contents of the organization’s constitution, the Registered Student Organization Handbook and the Student Handbook to ensure the organization’s actions are in line with the University of West Georgia and of the organization.

Clerical—Assist the organization with the registration process, verify member and officer eligibility, and ensure the organization meets its academic requirements, if required.

Leadership Development—The advisor can play a significant role in the development and personal growth of members. Advisors can help identify new leaders within the organization, assist in developing or coordinating training programs, and nominate members for university leadership training programs. Participation in an organization’s retreats or workshops can be beneficial to members and to the advisor.

Financial Supervision—Some advisors may be involved in the financial operations of the organization. Roles may include budget supervision, advisement, expenditure approval, or budget development.

Interpretation of Policy—As a representative of the University to the organization, the advisor is constantly in a position to interpret West Georgia policy. Advisors may confirm interpretation of policy and procedure with the Center for Student Involvement.

Personal Assistance—Serving as an advisor to a student organization provides a unique opportunity to contribute to the success of individual students. A working knowledge of campus or community resources will allow you to make appropriate referrals if needed. Advisors also need to maintain confidentiality when a student shares personal information, and must also know when to seek additional assistance or guidance for that student.
Advising Styles
Applying Interactive Leadership to Advising

The best advising style could be dependent upon the “maturity” of the students, which will vary from task to task.

Step 1

Assess the group/leader “maturity level”

High=motivated, capable, highly informed

Low=uninformed, unsure, organizationally naïve, not familiar with work that needs to be done

Step 2

Adapt a Task/Relationship advising style that corresponds to the maturity level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Advising Style</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>“Telling” or “Directing” Style, more focus on task behaviors, less on relationship (more involved)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-moderate</td>
<td>“Selling” Style, focus on task and relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate-high</td>
<td>“Participating” Style, more focus on relationship, less on task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>“Delegating” Style, less focus on relationship and task (less involved)</td>
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Task Behavior: organizing members, defining roles and procedures

Relationship Behavior: maintaining positive feelings, giving members support, encouragement, rewards