Benefits of Advising

There are many benefits associated with becoming an advisor to a student organization:

- The satisfaction of seeing and helping students learn and develop new skills.
- Watching a disparate group come together to share common interests and work toward common goals and an understanding of differences.
- Developing a personal relationship with students.
- Furthering personal goals or interests by choosing to work with an organization that reflects one’s interests.
- Sharing one’s knowledge with others.
- Participating in an area outside one’s area of expertise to expand knowledge of college-aged students and interests.
- What other benefits have you discovered?

Advisor Roles

Each advisor perceives his/her relation to a student organization differently. Some Advisors play very active roles, attending meetings, working with student officers, and assisting in program planning and development. Others maintain a more distant relationship to the organization. It is hoped that each Advisor will maintain some regular contact with his/her organization. An Advisor accepts responsibility for keeping informed about activities of the organization and for advising officers of the organization on the appropriateness and general merits of policies and activities. However, Advisors are not responsible for the actions or policies of student organizations; students are solely responsible. Advisors should be both accessible and interested and should provide whatever counsel a group or its members might seek.

Given the myriad of purposes, activities, and objectives of various student groups, the role of the Advisor will vary in some degree between groups. The purpose of this section is to outline basic roles of an Advisor. As groups vary in their expectations and needs, it is important that you, as an Advisor, develop an understanding with the organization you are to represent as to the nature of your involvement. The Advisor and group should agree on a set of expectations of one another from the onset and should write this list down as a contract between the group and the Advisor.

Following are some roles you may assume as an advisor:

Mentor

Many students will come to see their advisor as a mentor and the success of these relationships can last many years and be rewarding for both the student and the advisor. If the student is seeking an education and a career in your field, you may be asked to assist in his/her professional development. To be effective in this capacity, you will need a knowledge of their academic program and profession, a genuine interest in the personal and professional development of new professionals, and a willingness to connect students to a network of professionals. You may be approached to review resumes, to connect students with community resources, or to be a sounding board for their ideas of what they want to accomplish in the field.
At times, students will seek out someone to assist with their personal development. In this capacity, a mentor will have a basic understanding of student needs and perspectives, a desire to challenge students intellectually and emotionally while providing support to meet the challenge, and the ability to listen to students' verbal and nonverbal communication. Students may want to talk to you about family or relationship issues, conflicts they are having with other students, or to have conversations about their ideas and thoughts on different subjects.

**Team Builder**

When new officers are elected or new members join the organization, you may need to take the initiative in turning the students from individuals with separate goals and expectations into a team. Team building is important because it enhances the relationships of the students between one another and the advisor. Positive relationships help the organization succeed and to work through conflicts and difficult times.

To accomplish the goal of creating an effective team, it is necessary to conduct a workshop (if you and the students have the time, a full-scale retreat encompassing team building and goal setting could be planned) to engage students in this process. As the advisor, you may consider working with the student officers to develop a plan and to have the students implement it. Training students in effective techniques for team building will keep students invested in the organization and give them the opportunity to learn what it takes to build a team.

**Conflict Mediator**

Inevitably, students are going to join the organization with different agendas, goals, and ideas about how things should function and the direction they should be taking. When working with students who have come in to conflict, it may be necessary to meet with them and have them discuss their issues with each other. In many cases, it may be necessary to remind them that they both want what is in the best interest of the organization. Ask them how they think they can work together, point out the organization's mission, and ask how their conduct is helping the group achieve its mission.

Sometimes, one student may be causing problems with other students. In many cases this student may not realize that his/her actions are causing a problem. In this case, speaking with the student individually could be helpful. Chances are that no one has met with the student previously and discussed how his/her attitudes are impacting other people and how those attitudes or actions can be changed to make everyone feel better. In many cases, the student will appreciate honest feedback.

**Reflective Agent**

One of the most essential components to learning in “out of classroom” activities is providing time for students to reflect on how and what they are doing. As an advisor, you will want your officers to talk to you about how they think they are performing, their strengths, and their weaknesses. Give them the opportunity to discuss their thoughts on their performance. Then be honest with them. Let them know when you agree with their self-perceptions and in a tactful manner let them know when you disagree. Remember, any criticism you provide students should be constructive and you will want to provide concrete examples of actions the student took that seem to contradict their self-perceptions. When students discuss their weaknesses, ask them how they can improve those areas and how you can help them. Students usually
have the answer to what they need; they just don’t like to ask for help. Remember to have students reflect on their successes and failures.

**Educator**

As an advisor, your role of educator will often come through the role modeling of behavior, guiding the student in reflection of their actions, and being there to answer questions. One of the most difficult actions to take as an advisor is to do nothing, but sometimes this can be the most important action of all. Allow the students to make their decisions even if they do not agree with your ideas. Sometimes, students will succeed; other times, they may fail. The key is to return to the role of the reflective agent and give the students a safe place to reflect on their experiences.

**Motivator**

As an advisor, you may have to motivate students to excel and to carry out their plans and achieve their goals. Some students are easily discouraged and at the first sign of difficulty they may want to quit. You will need to be their “cheerleader” to keep them excited about all of the potential successes they will experience. You can motivate students through the recognition of their efforts, appealing to their desire to create change, and to connecting their experiences here at the University to the experiences they will have in the community.

**Policy Interpreter**

Student organizations operate under policies, procedures, and rules. At times, students may not be aware of these policies and they will do things in an inappropriate manner. The more you know about these policies the better advising you can give to the students on their plans. As an advisor you will assume numerous roles and all possible roles are not mentioned here. A key idea to remember is that you are an advisor not the leader. You provide guidance, insight, and perspective to students as they work on projects, but you should not be doing the work. Students will learn if they are engaged. Be careful of being challenged into doing the work for a student project. The students make the decisions, and they are accountable for those decisions, and for the successes and failures of their groups.
Roles as an Educator

True co-curricular success is linked to student learning and growth (Kuh, 2007). The ways in which students work through failure may be their greatest learning moments. As educators, we can guide and support students through the learning process.

We encourage you to remember that students are our product—not programs. Programs and student groups serve as vehicles in which students hone and enhance their learning.

There are 3 roles one can take on when supporting student organizations: Advisor, Coach and Educator.

**Advisor**— As an advisor, you work to maintain the organization and delegate tasks with the executive board members.

**Coach**— As a coach, you can work to improve the effectiveness of an organization and assist them in reaching organizational goals. In this role you will spend more time sharing a vision for the organization rather than maintaining the organization.

**Educator**— As an educator, you will spend more time as a sounding board with students. This role serves to provide students with an educational experience that will complement or supplement their education. Our hope is that you will reach a place where you are not giving students too many answers, but asking them questions that will teach them how to think through situations, therefore supporting them in their creation of the bigger picture for the organization.

Adapted from Bloland, P.A. (1967). Student group advising in higher education (Student Personnel Series No. 8). Washington, DC: American Personnel and Guidance Association; provided by the Office for Student Organizations & Leadership Development, Indiana University.
Advising Styles and Skills

Situational advising allows you to change your advising style to match the development needs of the individual or organization you advise. Your advising style is the way you advise when you work with someone. It is how you conduct yourself, over time, when you are trying to influence the performance of others.

**ADVISING STYLES**

You will need to vary these based on your assessment of the students/groups readiness level. Many times, advisors may struggle with students because they believe that they need a higher level of interaction or direction when the student is actually able to accept more of a delegating style and vice versa.

**Directing:** The advisor provides specific instructions and closely supervises task accomplishments. Use this style with students/groups that are at a low level of readiness.

**Coaching:** The advisor continues to direct and closely supervise task accomplishment, but also explains decisions, solicits suggestions, and supports progress. Use this style with groups that have a few leaders that are at a higher readiness level who will need your support with the rest of the group to get things accomplished.

**Supporting:** The advisor facilitates and supports the efforts toward task accomplishments and shares responsibilities for decision making with the students. Use this style with students/groups that are just starting to understand the concepts that will lead to success - the group is just starting to “get it”.

**Delegating:** The advisor empowers the students to conduct their own decision making, problem solving, and delegating. Use this style with students/groups that are at a high level of readiness.

**ADVISING SKILLS**

**Flexibility:** You must be able to move from one style to another in order to meet the needs of the different types of students and multiple circumstances you will encounter.

**Diagnosis:** You have to learn how to diagnose the needs of the students you advise. Determining what is needed as opposed to what is wanted is sometimes a difficult task. It is also important to note that what is needed is not always the thing that will get the most positive response - it is what will lead the student through a problem, set the standard for the future, or help to teach the student a valuable life lesson.

**Contracting:** You have to learn how to come to some agreements with students. It can be helpful to work together to reach an agreement as to which advising style they seek from you. This is a valuable lesson for assisting students with understanding the rules of engagement and interaction that will be carried forth as they mature.

*Information provided by Jon Kapell, Associate Director of Campus Activities, Drexel University*
Responsibilities of the Student Organization to the Advisor

The responsibilities of Student Organizations to their advisor include, but are not limited to…

- Establishing and sharing a job description for the advisor that clearly defines his/her responsibilities and anticipated lines of communication anticipated.
- Notifying the advisor of all meetings, activities, and programs.
- Establishing an attendance schedule at organization meetings, which is mutually agreed upon by the advisor and the student organization.
- Providing copies of meeting minutes in a timely manner.
- Meeting regularly with your advisor to discuss organization matters.
- Consulting the advisor prior to making significant changes to the structure of the Organization.
- Consulting the advisor when any significant organization policy changes are made.
- Allowing the advisor to share their thoughts and ideas.
- Showing respect and value for the advisor whom the organization chosen to serve as guide and mentor.
- Considering all advice and guidance provided with an open mind and a sincere interest for improvement of daily operational and special event/activity needs.

Some information provided by Jon Kapell, Associate Director of Campus Activities, Drexell University

Office of Student Leadership Development Programs at East Carolina