Advising Do’s

Each advisor and organization leadership should openly discuss what kind of role the advisor should play with the organization. Some organizations have a pool of advisors to assist them with different aspects of the organization (financial, scholarship, programming, etc.). Some advisors have a high level of involvement with every aspect of the organization, others have a very limited role. It is up to the organization and the advisor to set the parameters of involvement.

With those thoughts in mind, the following list is a guideline to the “dos” of student organization advising:

- Be visible and choose to attend group meetings and events. At the same time, know your limits. Establish an attendance schedule at organization meetings, which is mutually agreed upon by the advisor and the student organization.
- Know your group’s limits. Help students find a balance between activities and their academic responsibilities.
- Keep your sense of humor and enthusiasm. Share creative suggestions and provide feedback for activities planned by students.
- Serve as a resource person. The advisor does not set the policy of the group, but should take an active part in its formulation through interaction with the members of the group. Since members and officers in any organization are ordinarily active only as long as they are students, the advisor can serve as a continuity factor for the group.
- Be consistent with your actions. Model good communication skills and listening skills. Develop good rapport.
- Be available in emergency situations.
- Head off situations that might give rise to poor public relations for the student group or University.
- Introduce new programs and ideas with educational flavor; point out new perspectives and directions to the group; and supply the knowledge and the insight of experience.
- Carefully review monthly financial reports from the organization treasurer or business manager. Familiarize yourself with the group’s financial structure, from where the treasury is derived (dues, fundraising), for what the money is used, how money is allocated, and how the money is budgeted; assist in budget development and execution.
- Learn the strengths and weaknesses of the group. Offer support when necessary, but also allow people to make their own mistakes and learn from them.
- Encourage feedback and the evaluation process.
- Plan and encourage attendance at leadership training.
- Do things right and to do the right things. Guide and assist students in becoming responsible leaders.
- Provide support. Give the group autonomy but offer feedback, even when it is not solicited. Let the group work out its problems, but be prepared to step in when called upon to assist.

Once again, this list is not meant to be totally inclusive or applicable to every organization, but it may serve as a guideline when determining the role that you will play.

It is also important to bear in mind that the job of Advisor is not always an easy one. At times you may have to make a difficult decision or take an action which is not popular with the organization. It is important to realize that your first responsibility is to the health and well-being of the students and to uphold campus and community policies and regulations. It may be necessary on occasion to use your authority to ensure that you meet these responsibilities.

Some information provided by Jim Mohr, Advisor for Student Organizations and Greek Life, Eastern Washington University; Office of Student Leadership Development Programs at East Carolina University; and Jon Kapell, Associate Director of Campus Activities, Drexel University; and adapted from the Wesley College Student Organizational Manual and Boland, Paul A., Student group advising in higher education. ACAPA Student Personnel Series No. 8; Schreiber, V. and Pfieghaar, E., Supervising vs. Advising, UMR-ACUHO, 1999; and Adapted from Leader Bits, University of Kansas.
Advising
Don’ts

- Know it all.
- Be the leader or “run” the meeting.
- Say I told you so.
- Impose your own bias.
- Manipulate the group, impose, or force your opinions.

- Close communications.
- Tell the group what to do, or do the work of the president or other members of the executive board.
- Take everything so seriously.
- Take ownership for the group, be the “parent,” or the smothering administrator.
- Miss group meetings or functions.
- Be afraid to let the group try new ideas.
- Become such an advocate that you lose an objective viewpoint.
- Allow the organization to become a one-person organization.
- Be laissez-faire or autocratic.
- Assume the group handles everything okay and doesn’t need you.
- Assume the organization’s attitudes, needs and personalities will remain the same year to year.

*Some information adapted from Schreiber, V. and Pfleghaer, E. “Supervising vs. Advising”, UMR-ACUHO, 1999*