

SKIDMORE

C O L L E G E

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Skill Building – Advisors

Introduction

As a student club with competent and capable leadership, you might wonder why student groups would want or need a faculty/staff advisor. Consider the following:

- Do you sometimes wish your group had more support from related academic or service departments?
- Could your organization benefit from some "connections" with College policy-makers?
- Will your group have to start again from scratch next year?

An advisor could help alleviate these and other problems, while support the autonomy of the group. Advisors play an important role in the development of the student organization by providing support and guidance.

The Role of an Advisor

After accepting the position, it is the responsibility of the advisor of a student club to:

- Serve as a "sounding board" off which you can bounce off new ideas;
- Support your group;
- Intervene in conflicts between group members and/or officers;
- Be knowledgeable of policies that may impact on your organization's decisions, programs, etc.;
- Provide continuity and stability as student leadership changes;
- Provide your group with connections;
- Serve as mediator during an organizational crisis;
- Give honest feedback to group members;
- Point out new perspectives and directions to the group and introduce new program ideas.

The Benefits for an Advisor

The club/advisor relationship benefits the advisor too. Being involved with a student club offers the faculty or staff member unique opportunities to:

- Get to know and work with students outside the classroom or office;
- Informally share knowledge and expertise on relevant topics;

- Feel satisfaction and accomplishment through making a special contribution to a particular group of students;
- Acquire knowledge and skills learned from the co-curricular experience;
- Serve as a resource and support person as well as facilitator of creativity and innovation for the group.

The Responsibilities of Group Members to Their Advisor

When someone takes the time to be a group's advisor, the members of the group that will work with the advisor have certain responsibilities to:

- Discuss their expectations of the advisor's role with your advisor from the beginning;
- Notify the advisor of all meetings;
- Send the advisor a copy of all minutes and other information—too much information is probably better than too little;
- Meet regularly with the advisor to discuss club matters and to relay and update information;
- Consult with the advisor before any changes in the structure or policies of the club (committee) are made and before major projects are undertaken;
- Remember that the responsibility for the success or failure of a group project rests ultimately with the group, not the advisor;
- Conduct annual advisor and organization evaluations—this allows for developing an ongoing and effective advisor relationship.

Acquiring an Advisor

While having an advisor is not necessary it can certainly add to the effectiveness of your organization. When seeking an advisor you should develop a clear statement of group goals and a clear statement of expectations of the advisor, both in terms of role and time commitment. It would also be helpful to outline what the advisor could fairly expect of the group. With this information in hand, you will be ready to approach potential advisors and discuss with them their interest and ability for advising your group. The most suitable advisor is one who shares a common interest with your organization.

Poll your group members for the names of professors or staff members who they have found helpful and interested in student life. Approach potential advisors confidently and positively. Remember to be clear about the purpose and activities of your organization, your expectations of the advisor and all benefits the advisor will enjoy.

Once your advisor begins to serve, keep them well-informed, clarify expectations and roles when needed, and draw on their expertise. Occasionally, thanks and acknowledgments are a good idea. For example, if you have organization t-shirts, make sure your advisor has one too! Enjoy what can be an extremely rewarding and mutually beneficial relationship.