



ADVISOR ROLES

Advisors may take on different roles and responsibilities depending on the needs of their organizations. It is important to remember that advisors are not supervisors. Below are some roles in which advisors may serve.

- Mentor
- Team builder
- Conflict mediator
- Reflective agent
- Educator
- Motivator
- Policy Interpreter

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 the student's professional development. To be effective in this capacity, you will need 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.

Advisor Expectations

All student organizations are not the same, so each one will have a different set of expectations. In addition to the organization expectations, the officers and members will have their own individual sets of expectations. It is important for the advisor to talk to the organization in order to develop a set of expectations for both sides.

See some important questions advisors should ask organizations below:

1. How much involvement is expected or needed?
2. How often does the organization meet?
3. How many major activities does the organization plan per semester?
4. How experienced are the student leaders?
5. How do your skills meet the needs of the organization?
6. What are some areas where the organization specifically needs guidance? Ask for examples of past problems.
7. What are some ways the advisor could be more helpful to the organization?
8. Do they expect the advisor to be a silent observer or an active participant?
9. Is the advisor expected to give feedback?
10. Are there areas of the organization that are 'hands off' to the advisor? If so, which ones?
11. Does the national organization (if applicable) require an affiliated advisor? If so, what is his or her role?

Adapted from the Advisor Handbook, University of South Florida

ADVISOR DO'S & DON'TS

DO

- Be a resource
- Interpret University Policy
- Serve as a role model
- Keep record of organization history
- Be consistent
- Allow organization to succeed and fail
- Teach leadership
- Have a sense of humor
- Enjoy being a part of the organization
- Be available in emergency situations

DON'T

- Micromanage the organization
- Run organization meetings
- Veto organization decisions
- Be the sole recruiter for new members
- Say "I told you so"
- Break promises
- Be the leader of the organization
- Be unavailable
- Take everything seriously
- Be afraid to let the organization fail
- Be afraid to let the group try new idea

Adapted from Student Organization Advisor Guide, University of Nebraska—Lincoln

Some other DO's:

- Assist officers with procedural matters. Be knowledgeable of the organization's purpose and constitution.
- Empower students to take action and to take satisfaction in seeing the student organization succeed.