

As an advisor or student, you may be wondering why a student organization would want a faculty or staff advisor when most of the students are competent and capable leaders. Although advisors are not required at UWM, an advisor can provide the student organization with support that the students may not have thought of:

- assisting the student leaders with administrative red tape;
- providing more support from related academic or service departments;
- providing the organization with some “connections” with University policy makers;
- assist in providing a past history of the organization to new members.

The role of the advisor, besides assisting student leaders with the list above, includes:

- serving as a “sounding board” to bounce new ideas off of;
- providing support to the organization;
- intervening, when appropriate, in conflicts between group members;
- being knowledgeable about policies that may affect your organization’s decisions, programs, etc.
- running interference with the University community when necessary;
- providing continuity and stability as student leaders change from year to year;
- providing an outside perspective or view on various policies, decisions or activities;
- providing your group with connections;
- helping deal with organizational crises;
- giving honest feedback to group members to assist them in their personal growth and development as a leader.

The responsibilities of group members to their advisor includes:

- discussing expectations of the advisor’s role with the advisor from the very beginning of the year;
- notifying the advisor of all meetings;
- sending the advisor a copy of all minutes;
- meeting regularly with the advisor to discuss organizational matters and to keep him/her updated on organization activities;
- consulting with the advisor before any changes in the structure or policies of the organization are made and before major projects are undertaken;
- understanding that although the advisor has no vote, he/she should have speaking privileges;
- evaluating your advisor periodically and giving appropriate feedback to let them know how they may improve in order to advise you better;
- remembering that the success or failure of an organization or project rests ultimately with the group.

It is important to determine what the advisor’s role will be with each group of officers from year to year. Depending upon the group, the role of the advisor may change.

Being involved with a student organization can offer the advisor a number of benefits:

- a unique opportunity to get to know and work with students outside the classroom or office
- the reward of watching the group develop to its fullest potential
- the reward to watching students develop their individual skill and talents
- the chance to informally share his/her knowledge and expertise on relevant topics
- an opportunity to feel satisfaction and accomplishment through making a special contribution to a particular group of students

Once an advisor begins to serve, keep him/her well-informed, clarify expectations and roles when needed, and draw on the advisor’s expertise. Occasional thank-you’s and acknowledgments are a good idea (e.g. if you have organization t-shirts, for example, make sure your advisor has one too!) Enjoy what can be an extremely rewarding and mutually beneficial relationship.

Advisor Expectations

Listed below are some expectations student leaders have of their advisor. This form is designed to help advisors and student officers arrive at a clear and mutually agreed upon role for the advisor.

Directions: The advisor and each executive officer should respond to the following items and meet to compare answers and “iron out” any differences. For some items, which are determined not to be the advisor’s responsibility, it would be valuable to clarify which officer will assume that responsibility.

For each of the following statements, respond on a scale of 1 - 4 how important this function is:

- 1 - Essential for the advisor to do
- 2 - Nice, but not essential
- 3 - Not an advisor’s role
- 4 - Does not apply to our organization

Roles of the advisor may include:

- _____ 1. Attending at all general meetings.
- _____ 2. Attending at all executive meetings.
- _____ 3. Explaining University policy to the officers & depending upon the students to carry them out through leadership.
- _____ 4. Explaining University policy to the entire membership at a general meeting once a year.
- _____ 5. Scheduling an appointment with the president once a week (or as agreed) to discuss items related to the organization.
- _____ 6. Serving as parliamentarian for the group.
- _____ 7. Speaking up during discussion at general meetings when he/she believes the group is making a poor decision.
- _____ 8. Being quiet during the general meeting unless called upon.
- _____ 9. Speaking up during executive committee meetings when he/she has relevant information.
- _____ 10. Exerting his/her influence with officers between meetings.
- _____ 11. Taking an active part in formulating goals with the group.
- _____ 12. Attending all group activities and events.
- _____ 13. Requiring the treasurer to clear all transactions with him/her.
- _____ 14. Checking all official correspondence before it is sent out.
- _____ 15. Keeping official files in his/her office.
- _____ 16. Informing the group of infractions that occur which violate the group’s bylaws, constitution or rules.
- _____ 17. Mediating conflict that arise.
- _____ 18. Planning and assisting in the leadership development of all executive officers and general members.
- _____ 19. Letting the group work out its problems, including making mistakes and doing the task at hand the hard way.
- _____ 20. Representing the group in any conflicts with members of the university community.
- _____ 21. Approving all candidates for office in terms of scholastic standing (GPA) and ensure those standards are maintained.

*Part of this information was taken from “Resources for Leadership and Organizational Development,”
Student Organization Development Center, The University of Michigan.*