

Student Organization Advisor Resource Guide



**West Chester University
Office for Student Involvement and Leadership
Division of Student Affairs**

Student Organization Advisor Resource Guide

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This Resource Guide is not meant to be totally inclusive or applicable to every organization, but it may serve as a guide when determining the role that you will play. The purpose of this guide is to help Advisors navigate the resources available to them. It is a collection of best practices in the field of higher education; however, it is not a magical formula for guaranteed success. The contents should enhance the Advisor’s effectiveness, rapport with students, and overall enjoyment of the advising experience.

Introduction

What is a registered student organization?

A registered student organization at West Chester University is defined as any student club or organization that meets the following standards:

- Officers and members consist of students currently enrolled at West Chester University
- Organization's purpose is to contribute to students' personal interests and development
- Meets all registration requirements as outlined by the Student Government Association and by the Office of Student Leadership and Involvement
- Understands and adheres to policies and procedures

What is an Advisor?

The role of the Advisor is to help the group meet its stated goals.

- The Advisor should review the club or organization's constitution and/or bylaws to clearly understand its purpose and determine how they can best assist the group.
- The officers of the club or organization should discuss their specific roles and responsibilities with their Advisor and keep their Advisor abreast of any issues or situations that might warrant their attention.
- The Advisor and the group should have a mutual understanding of support being offered by the Advisor
- The Advisor should challenge and support the students when necessary, reminding them to remain true to their organization's purpose, goals, by-laws, mission, etc.

Responsibilities of a Student Organization

The complete "Student Organization Policy and Procedure Manual" established by the Student Government Association, can be found by clicking this link:

https://www.wcupa.edu/_services/STU/sga/documents/SOPP%203-18-19.pdf

A summary of these procedures as it relates to your role as an Advisor is below. To remain an active student organization at WCU, each student organization is responsible for the following:

1. Approved by SGA through the formal approval process
2. Abide by the University policies and regulations of the Student Code of Conduct:
 - a. https://www.wcupa.edu/_services/STU/ramsEyeView/codeOfConduct.aspx
3. A student organization must maintain at least (5) five undergraduate student members. Graduate student membership is only permitted on a case-by-case basis and must be inquired upon to the Graduate Student Association. Any West Chester University undergraduate student may join the organization, provided they have paid their student activities fee in full.
4. A full-time or part-time University staff, faculty or administrator must be secured as an Advisor.
5. A current list of members must be on file with the Office for Student Leadership and Involvement.
6. The student organization must have a President, Vice-President, Treasurer, and Secretary.

7. A current constitution and/or bylaws must be on file with the Office for Student Leadership and Involvement and include the SGA requirements for these documents. All organizations undergo a regular review of their bylaws every three years.
8. All officers must maintain a cumulative GPA of 2.25 at the time of election and during their term in office.
9. All organizations must complete the re-registration process (via RamConnect and as outlined by SGA policy) at the end of every spring semester.
10. Any organization requesting funding from SGA will submit budget requests annually, around the end of the fall semester.

Advisor Roles (adapted from American College Personnel Association resource guides)

Each Advisor perceives their 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 their 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. 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 of the 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 their professional development. To be effective in this capacity, you will need to acknowledge 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/their 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/their attitudes are affecting 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 areas for improvement. 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 growth areas, 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 might not 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 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.

Responsibilities of an Advisor

The role of your group's faculty/staff Advisor is important to the success of a campus organization. Some of the responsibilities may include, but are not be limited to, the following:

1. Familiarity with all applicable University regulations, as well as any applicable federal, state, or local laws and ordinances to provide advice to student members.
2. Regularly attending general organization meetings and committee meetings of the organization.
3. Helping to organize fair election of officers.
4. Assisting in the installation and training of new officers to provide guidance and continuity.
5. Assisting in the administration of organizational financial affairs. Special attention should be given to the monitoring of all organizational bank accounts per the SSI Financial Guidelines on expenditures.
6. Assisting in planning special programs and special events.
7. Meeting regularly with organizational officers to discuss goals and direction of the group.
8. Assisting with the recruitment and selection of new members and overseeing the process by which students become full members.
9. Being available to members wishing assistance or counsel.
10. Assisting in establishing procedures for discipline or even expelling members for just cause, if necessary.
11. Ensuring accurate re-registration of the organization with the Office of Student Leadership and Involvement by end of Spring Semester each year.
12. Work with members who might be struggling academically and provide them with information concerning the academic support systems that are available.

The organization should expect their Advisor:

- To not let personal or professional goals interfere with or influence group decisions, activities, or goals.
- To clarify his/her/their role as an Advisor to the group members as he/she/they sees fit. Once understood, there should be fewer problems due to misunderstandings regarding roles and responsibilities.
- To be aware of and able to interpret university policies that govern registered student organizations.
- To manifest the enthusiasm necessary to help the organization work toward its potential.
- To understand the organization, to be aware of its purposes and to assist in formulating goals and in planning for the organization.
- To assist members in improving leadership skills.
- To serve as liaison with the university when necessary.
- To encourage and support them during periods of trial and stress.
- To help them evaluate group projects as well as their individual performance.
- To be familiar with the financial procedures of the Student Government Association Appropriations Committee.
- To serve as a resource and provide ideas and constructive feedback.
- To stay up-to-date on what is occurring within the organization and be mindful of any future areas of difficulty or avoidable problems.
- To promote involvement, discussion, and diversity within the organization.
- To discourage group domination by one individual; encourage all group members to participate.
- To challenge the students to leave their comfort zones and take risks and support them in their efforts.
- To be a facilitator of creativity and innovation for the organization.
- To recognize that failure is as much of a learning process as is success in many instances.
- To incorporate classroom learning into group activities when possible.

Getting Started with RamConnect

Each organization on campus is provided with their own online community to communicate with members and manage their events, calendars, files, websites and much more. Campus administrators have many of the same tools but with an additional governing ability over the organizations, which allows them to centrally manage the activities of student organizations on campus.

You will use your RamConnect account to learn about campus and organization events, communicate with organization leaders, participate in campus-wide polls and discussions, generate verified records of your involvement with co-curricular transcripts, and much more!

For RamConnect general training or additional information please view the below links:

[RamConnect For Organizations](#)

[Getting Started with RamConnect](#)

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpEnybY_fZ1EbfeK2xDrHIA?view_as=subscriber

Ways your organization can utilize RamConnect

Create a Sustainable Organization

- Create an organization knowledge base to ease officer turnover and workload
- Store contact information to create lasting relationships with vendors and partners
- Build and host your public website using RamConnect's website builder
- Archive an unlimited amount of organization documents, pictures and videos

Manage Organization and Memberships

- Maintain a web-based portal to centralize organization data and member records
- Delegate officer responsibilities and provide members with privileged based access
- Maintain accurate, up-to-date member rosters and profile directories
- Market your organization online to increase awareness and participation

Plan and Schedule Events

- Publish event details and involvement opportunities on the organization calendar
- Send out invites and track RSVPs to prepare for upcoming events

- Track involvement hours & attendance for events and meetings
- Allow members to share events within their Facebook news feeds

Communicate with Members

- Streamline communication between officers, members, alumni, and committees
- Send mass text messages for last minute reminders or changes to events
- Target information to members with messages, emails and news posts
- Survey members to collect feedback via polls and discussion board

Liability Concerns

One question Advisors often ask is, “What is my liability as an Advisor to a student organization?” Every time we undertake an activity, we assume a certain level of risk. Each time you get in your car, you run the risks related to other people’s driving, risks related to construction work, risks related to weather, etc. Therefore, yes, there are risks associated with being a student organization Advisor.

The level of risk that student organizations pose relates directly to the activities they engage in. The type of liability assumed varies greatly depending upon the type of organization and what activities are involved. However, this might change depending upon the level of active risk management within the organization. An arguably dangerous activity could be rendered extremely safe if the student organization takes the appropriate steps to mitigate all unnecessary risks. Your level of involvement can contribute to this risk-mitigation.

- 1) You should anticipate risks that may arise out of any decision or situation. Regardless of what organization or activity is involved, there always will be an opportunity for something out of the ordinary to happen – a risk. However, if decisions are made with consistency and in good faith, and reasonable precautions are taken, the risk involved can be minimized.
- 2) Be aware of the scope of your authority. The University grants student organization Advisors the authority to make certain decisions or take certain actions within their stated responsibilities as an Advisor, including signing vouchers for reimbursement for club expenses. However, the University also reserves certain rights (for instance, the signing of any contracts must be executed by our Student Services, Inc. office). If you remain within the designated responsibilities of this position, you will be able to avoid many unnecessary risks.

Definitions:

Risk: The possibility of suffering harm or loss; (mental, physical, social).

Liability: The state of being legally obligated; responsible.

Risk Management: The act, manner, or practice of controlling risk.

To minimize liability, student leaders and their Advisors need to consider various methods of managing risk.

These include:

Risk Avoidance: the elimination of the problem or the risk.

Reduction Control: controlling the frequency and/or severity of the problem or incident that is threatening libelous action. Implementing “Due Standards of Care” is key to reducing risk.

Risk Transference: transferring the risk through contractual arrangements, disclaimers, waivers, or insurance.

Advisors should encourage student leaders to act responsibly and make reasonable and prudent efforts to manage risk. This is your best defense; but more importantly, it is the key to providing a safe environment for organization members, participants, residents and others.

Please remember that in this role, like all other roles here at WCU, you are a campus resource and a mandated reporter of all known inappropriate conduct. You may consult our Office of Student Conduct, Student Services, Inc., or the Office of Student Leadership and Involvement with further questions.

Advisor Tips

The role of the Advisor is determined in part by the Advisor. They must determine the level of priority that they will give to this function. The effort and time allotted will be determined by the other demands on the Advisor's time. An Advisor may become disenchanted with the organization they advise. There may be personality conflicts with a new president. Whatever the situation, an Advisor should not advise an organization unless they feel the rewards are sufficient to merit the time and effort involved.

1) Meet regularly with officers and members.

- Discussions about agenda, projects, goals, etc. offer an opportunity to develop a rapport and provide an opportunity to make suggestions to members.
- Informal meetings often allow members and the Advisor to share information not directly related to the organization and become better acquainted.

2) Let the situation determine the advising (or intervention) style.

- Often it will be necessary for the approach to range somewhere between non-directive and very directive. As the skill level of the organization's leadership increases, the need for a directive style of advising decreases.
- Strive for the group to be self-sufficient where the members resolve their own conflicts and solve their own problems. Students grow more from their own choices than following orders.

3) Offer feedback to members.

- Suggest alternative approaches when planning a project. Constructive criticism or praise presented at the appropriate time can be very instrumental in the development of members and of the organization.

4) Stay up to date on university policies, procedures and resources.

- Develop a referral system; it can save time and energy.

5) Let officers and members know what is expected of them, and determine their expectations of you.

- Develop a written understanding and review it often – a good understanding of your relationship with organizations can make the advising experience more rewarding.

Advisor Contact Information – The Office of Student Leadership and Involvement sends an annual appointment notification to every Advisor. If the Advisor changes, a new appointment notification will be sent when a replacement Advisor is appointed.

Room reservations should be made through the organization's account in 25Live. An account is provided to the organization upon their official recognition. **Please do not make reservations on behalf of your group under your personal or departmental 25Live account; all space reservations should be made through the group itself.**

Equipment use in classroom space is often required to have Advisor or professional staff support. It is a technology requirement of the institution that an Advisor or professional staff member utilize technology equipment in classroom spaces. This requirement does not stand for collective spaces such as Sykes Student Union.

Remind your officers of re-registration requirements (every spring semester, by the last day of classes) and mandated election deadlines of March 31st so they can remain in good standing with SGA. It is good practice to discuss legacy and transition of officers all year long to gauge interest and longevity of the organization.

Read the Organization's Constitution/By-Laws – it is the most important organizational document. It gives the organization and membership purpose, direction, and guidance. The document is not intended to be static; rather it should be reviewed periodically so that it fits the needs of the student group.

Check Officer Grades to make sure that they meet the SGA requirement, which is 2.25 cumulative GPA for all Executive Board Officers of clubs and organizations. Membership GPAs may be set by by-laws of certain recognized organizations specifically. Please keep in mind FERPA guidelines in checking grades; they cannot be released to anyone (other members of the club included) without written consent from the student in question.

Review Robert's Rules and Parliamentary Procedure – this is how most student organizations conduct business meetings.

Stay informed of SGA's bylaws, budget proposals, Council of Orgs meetings, requirements, standard operating procedures, and much more on the SGA website. Budget information is under the "Documents/Minutes" tab.

Budgets are produced annually and are due in December for the following year (information sent from SGA in the fall). New and forming organizations are probationary, and cannot apply for funding immediately but only at the next available budgeting semester. New and forming organizations have a \$300 maximum budget limit in their first calendar year of recognition.

Make sure your treasurer attends a 1) treasurer training workshop and 2) a budget submission workshop in mid-late fall. More information will be sent directly to treasurers from SGA.

Vouchers for organization expense invoices, reimbursements, and a credit card for ordering through sites like Amazon.com are available for organization treasurers in the SSI office, 259 Sykes. All vouchers for expenses must be signed by Advisors. They must be turned in with original receipts to the SSI office.

Keep an eye out for leadership programs and other opportunities and resources on campus available to your students through the Office of Student Leadership and Involvement. These are advertised throughout campus and on RamConnect.

Nominate your students for the Student Leadership Awards – held annually each spring.

Additional Resources for Advisors

SYKES STUDENT UNION

Information on the following topics (along with much more) can be found on the Sykes Student Union website and more specifically, in the Program Planning Guide, last updated in October 2017:

<https://www.wcupa.edu/services/Stu.Syk/programPlanningGuide.aspx>

- Vendor policy
- Food guidelines
- Preliminary information about contracts
- How to use 25Live (on-campus space reservation system) is found here:
<https://www.wcupa.edu/services/Stu.Syk/eventReservations.aspx>
- Policies relating specifically to space use, reservations and how to reserve academic space can be found here: <https://www.wcupa.edu/registrar/campusScheduling/students.aspx>

RAM'S EYE VIEW STUDENT HANDBOOK

Information on the following (along with much more) can be found in the Ram's Eye View Student Handbook:

<https://www.wcupa.edu/services/STU/ramsEyeView/>

- Policies pertaining to student clubs (including Anti-Hazing, Academic, Student Code of Conduct, Commercial and Non-Commercial Advertising, and more) can be found here:
<https://www.wcupa.edu/services/STU/ramsEyeView/policies.aspx>

STUDENT GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION (SGA)

All student clubs that are funded by our Student Government Association are also governed by the SGA. The SGA website contains a lot of helpful information, and their documents/minutes section shares information about their Standard Operating Policies and Procedures, the SGA's bylaws, Officer training modules, Robert's Rules of Order, Privileges of being a recognized student organization, and more:

<https://www.wcupa.edu/services/STU/sga/documentsMinutes.aspx>

STUDENT SERVICES, INC. (SSI)

SSI is involved in "all things financial" for our student clubs and organizations. Explore the SSI website for information about financial policies and procedures, mandatory treasurer trainings, reimbursements, vouchers, organization account numbers, and much more: <https://wcustudentservices.com/>

Student Organization Advisor Development

ADVISOR DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS AND NETWORKING

By request, The Office for Student Leadership and Involvement hosts "Advising 101" workshops, and annual Advisor Appreciation programming, which provides all Advisors with the opportunity to share their advising experiences, communicate on topics of interest, and recognize one another for their efforts.

The Advisor's role in student development is a critical part of co-curricular involvement. While the lessons learned are not taught inside a classroom, these tutorials provided by request to Advisors will provide the basic steps to deal with some of the fundamental issues for student organization management. Topics include the following:
Inter-Organizational Issues, Leadership Problems, Membership Problems, Organizational Problems, Group Development, Officer Transition, Advisor Do's and Don'ts

Office of Student Leadership & Involvement Contact Information

General Inquiries

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RamConnect Assistance

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