



Illinois College
Student Organization Advisor
Resource Guide

Introduction

The Illinois College Student Organization Advisor Resource Guide is designed to familiarize advisors with best practices related to advising student organizations, thereby helping the advisor, organization and students to be successful.

Student organizations are an important part of the educational experience at Illinois College. Student organizations provide students with opportunities to cultivate friendships and to develop leadership, communication and organization skills that will be beneficial in college and a career. The work advisors do with regards to helping students along paths of development are incredibly beneficial.

This resource guide will feature information on advising styles, organization development, as well as references to the Illinois College Student Organization Handbook. This guide is intended to complement the Bluebook and Student Organization Handbook which provide complete information regarding policies and procedures applicable to student organizations at Illinois College. If you have any questions about student organizations or advising please contact the Office of Student Activities at 217.245.3094.

Purpose of an Advisor

Student organization advisors:

- Promote cognitive and psychosocial development
- Serve as a mentor for the organization as a whole and students as individuals
- Actively promote and seek to expand student learning at many levels
- Assist individual students within the context of the organization
- Keep students engaged and persistent in the college environment

Why Advising Matters

The role of advising is rewarding for students as well as faculty and staff. Students with faculty and staff mentors, who are involved with learning in and out of the classroom, are more likely to succeed at Illinois College and campuses across the country. Your participation as an advisor makes a difference!

Roles of Advisors

Each advisor perceives his/her 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 choose their advising roles and styles based on organization's needs. 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. Information in this section has been adapted from information provided by Jon Kapell, Associate Director of Campus Activities, University of North Carolina Wilmington.

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 his/her professional development. To be effective in this capacity, you will need knowledge of their academic program and desired profession, a genuine interest in the personal and professional development of the student and a willingness to help them connect with a new network in their chosen field. 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 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 attitude is impacting other people and how this attitude or action 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 performances. 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 in 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 College 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.

Developer

The advisor encourages and often facilitates the development of leadership and interpersonal skills among members/officers. Chief among these many developmental responsibilities is to educate the group and individual members on the value of personal responsibility.

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, as well as the successes and failures of their groups.

Advising Styles

Acting as an advisor to a student organization is a meaningful and challenging job. Effective advisors assess and balance the needs of the College, student organization and individual student members. A portion of this section will focus on the Situational Advising Model outlined by Kathleen Allen and Dr. Kevin Jackson. The section will then focus on additional advising styles that can be implemented with student groups.

Situational Advising

The Situational Advising Model is a tool that utilizes student group development, advising styles, and specific advising roles to help move student organizations to higher levels of development while recognizing their current needs.

Definitions for four basic stages of group/organization development will be presented and following you will find four accompanying basic advising styles that can meet group needs.

Stages of Group Development

Infancy

Students possess poor program planning skills and a low level of commitment to the organization. They also demonstrate an overall lack of responsibility for their actions.

Adolescence

Students possess basic program planning skills and a medium level of commitment to the organization. They demonstrate some degree of responsibility for their own actions

Young Adulthood

Students possess competency in program planning and implementation and a high level of commitment to the organization. They are fully responsible for their actions

Maturity

Students possess advanced skills in program planning, implementation and evaluation and in facilitating group decision making. They demonstrate a strong commitment to the goals of the organization and take responsibility for their own actions and the actions of others within their organization.

Advising Styles with Group Development

It is important to note that the stage of group development will change between years and, hopefully, through the work of advisors, within the year.

Program Director for a group in the Infancy stage:

- The advisor works directly with the group to achieve specific tasks. The emphasis of the advisor is on *what* is getting accomplished (the product).
 - The specific products will vary by group but can range from fundraising to socials, conferences and any other activities produced by the organization.
- High concern for product; low concern for process
- Roles an advisor can use in this style are:
 - Group Member – The advisor actively takes part in the group's activities much like a member becomes part of a group. Advisors utilizing this could attend all meetings and volunteer ideas.
 - Programmer – The advisor determines, plans and implements programs and activities for students.

Program Teacher for a group in the Adolescent stage:

- As a program teacher, the advisor continues to focus on the product, turns over the more basic programming responsibilities to the students and begins to equally emphasize *how* things are accomplished and *who* is involved, as well as *what* is accomplished.
- High concern for product; high concern for process
- Roles an advisor can use are:
 - Advocate – The advisor persuades students concerning appropriateness of activities.
 - Authority – The advisor monitors the student's compliance with legal requirements as well as institutional policy.
 - Expert – The advisor offers suggestions to students based on experience and specialized knowledge base.

Program Advisor for a group in the Young Adulthood stage:

- The advisor places less emphasis on the product and more on group decision making, dynamics, evaluation, etc – the *how* and *why* (process) of the organization.
- Low concern for product (students have assumed concern for product); high concern for process.
- Roles an advisor can use:
 - Educator – The advisor designs and encourages student participation in developmentally powerful experiences.
 - Resource – The advisor provides alternatives and suggestions to group leaders or members on request.
 - Evaluator – The advisor assists the group in collecting data to be used in decision making, program planning, etc.
 - Process Consultant – The advisor assists students in increasing effectiveness of group functioning (e.g. problem solving); advisor tends to be content neutral.

Program Consultant for a group in the Mature stage:

- The advisor is available to provide information, historical perspective, etc., yet does not become consistently involved in the day to day operations of the organization.
- Low concern for product and process because students have assumed the responsibility for both.

- Roles an advisor can use:
 - Reflector – The advisor listens and serves as a sounding board for students’ ideas and plans.
 - Fact-Finder – The advisor provides information to students on request.

Other styles of advising that can be used with groups in different stages include:

Directing

The advisor provides specific instructions and closely supervises task accomplishments. Use this style with students/groups that are at a low level of readiness.

Coaching

The advisor continues to direct and closely supervise task accomplishment, but also explains decisions, solicits suggestions and supports progress. Use this style with groups that have a few leaders that are at a higher readiness level who will need your support with the rest of the group to get things accomplished.

Supporting

The advisor facilitates and supports the efforts toward task accomplishments and shares responsibilities for decision making with the students. Use this style with students/groups that are just starting to understand the concepts that will lead to success – the group is just starting to “get it”.

Delegating

The advisor empowers the students to conduct their own decision making, problem solving and delegating. Use this style with students/groups that are at a high level of readiness.

Basic Advising Skills

Each student organization presents different needs and wants and, as such, what advisors do should vary. To this end, advisors need a large “toolbox” full of styles, roles and skills to utilize when appropriate. Below are a few skills and things to keep in mind for advising.

Do!

- Empower students to take action and to take satisfaction in seeing the student organization succeed.
- Let the students make decisions while you provide guidance and advice.
- At the beginning, develop clear expectations about the role of the advisor and your relationship to the organization.
- Discuss concerns with officers in private and praise them in public. Share creative suggestions.
- Be consistent with your actions.
- Head off situations that might be dangerous or give rise to poor public relations for the student group or College. Sometimes you have to mandate a decision.
- Offer support when necessary; but also allow people to make their own mistakes and learn from them.
- Guide and assist students in becoming responsible leaders.
- Model good communication and listening skills.

Don't!

- 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 too seriously.
- 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.
- 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.

Annual Checklist

Illinois College student organizations are responsible for following College policies on annual and semester registration forms, travel, fundraising, posting (advertising on campus), requesting student activity fee funds, check requests, purchase orders, contracts, space reservations and much more. Check out the Student Organization Handbook to learn what is specifically required and how to accomplish the tasks!

Semester Requirements:

- Submit annual registration forms by the 10th day of class in the fall semester to the Office of Student Activities. The forms can be accessed by students on Connect2.
- Submit semester officer and member lists, future organization leader contact information and the civic engagement and service form at the end of each semester to the Office of Student Activities.
- Ensure that you have the latest version of the organization constitution and that the Office of Student Activities has a copy.
- Submit expense/revenue forms to Student Forum by the 10th day of class in the fall and spring semesters.
- Transition any new officers and obtain transition packets/manuals from leaving officers (review the section of this guide on transitioning officers for more information).
- Help student leaders develop comprehensive and appropriate operational budgets.

Additional Resources

Student leaders often seek out their advisors to help them answer questions. If you need help assisting students, or have any questions regarding being an advisor please feel free to contact the Office of Student Activities in the Caine Student Center. Our staff can serve as resources to students, staff and faculty on a wide variety of topics related to student organizations, leadership and programming.