

STUDENT ORGANIZATION ADVISOR GUIDE



AY 24-25

Advisor Guidelines

Role of an Advisor

Northern Arizona University's faculty/staff advisors are vital assets to student organizations. The advisor plays an integral role in helping student leaders create an environment within their organizations that is productive, safe, enjoyable, and educational. Advisors also play a vital role in assuring that the experiences of a student organization are meaningful to students and aid in managing institutional risk and liability. The critical role of the advisor is to serve as a resource for the organization.

The Office of Leadership & Engagement requires all registered student organizations to have a primary advisor who is a current full-time and active employee of the university. Simultaneously, student organizations can have additional advisors that are unaffiliated with the university or hold a part-time employment status.

Club advisors have varying levels of commitment and responsibilities based on the organization, its constitution, and current student leadership. Due to feedback from student groups, we revised this guide to showcase the differences between under involved and overly involved advisors, so that we can help advisors strive to be more well-balanced between needs and expectations between their student organizations and work.

In the following pages, we'll answer some common questions including degree of liability for advisors, what trainings are available, what expectations advisors need to meet, and how you can you develop into a better advisor for your organization. Beyond this guide, we encourage advisors to reach out to the Office of Leadership and Engagement for more specific questions or scenarios.

Qualifications:

- A club advisor must be a current full-time employee of the university
 - Non-NAU affiliates (e.g., coach, campus minister) can serve as secondary advisors only if a full-time faculty or staff member is the primary advisor.

The additional advisor is still required to be listed on the True Blue Connects about page and complete all required advisor trainings.

Training & Resources from the Office of Leadership & Engagement:

- Serve as a Campus Security Authority (CSA) as defined in the [Clery Act](#).
 - Complete the [Clery Training](#) (by clicking “CSA Training Module on the webpage”).
 - Submit the [CSA Crime Report](#) form when necessary.
- Take the online [Title IX Training](#), in the Everfi Training System titled “Preventing Harassment & Discrimination: Clery Act and Title IX and Accommodating People with Disabilities” which is required of all NAU employees.
- Attend mandatory Advisor Summit in August of each year
- Attend monthly advisor meetings throughout the active academic year
- Be informed of the policies and procedures within the student organization manual and the [NAU Student Code of Conduct](#)
- Maintain current knowledge of the student organization’s constitution and all other governing documents
- Be familiar with the [Student Organization Manual](#) to understand current policies and expectations from the Office of Leadership & Engagement.
- And club-specific training

Club-Specific Training

Advisors for different clubs/orgs/chapters may have different responsibilities or expectations as outlined in the current constitution of their organization. Some clubs may want minimal presence or support from an advisor while other clubs may have aspirational goals that will require more support from their advisor. If students are trying to create a new organization, you can collaborate with the students on what you recommend for advisor role and responsibilities to support the function and longevity of their organization.

Liability:

Club advisors are not generally liable for the wrongdoing of a club member, leader, or organization. However, if an advisor becomes aware of wrongdoing and fails to report it or encourages behavior that is in violation of university policies, they will be liable to consequences dictated by university officials and/or law.

Next, I want to discuss three levels of involvement from advisors. Our office encourages most advisors to aim to be a well-balanced advisor that goes beyond minimum expectations to best support their organizations. However, advisors meeting only minimum expectations may be a good fit depending on the student organization's needs. Conversely, our office does not endorse overly involved advisors, so we'll cover some warning signs and missteps that some advisors can make that could harm their student organizations.

Minimum Expectations:

When a club does not desire much involvement from their advisor and/or the advisor has a high workload that decreases the time they have allotted for their advisor role, an advisor might only meet minimum expectations. This is not necessarily a bad thing if this meets the goals of the organization. Advisors that want to ensure they are meeting their responsibilities even if they have a limited capacity should ensure the following expectations are met so their organization maintains good standing.

- Know your club's name and current club leadership
- Establish open lines of communication with organization leaders to enable effective management of the student organization
 - Respond to communication from student organization leaders and members within 72 hours unless extenuating circumstances apply
- Notify the student organization immediately if your status as advisor changes
- Read MS Teams and email updates from the Office of Leadership & Engagement to stay informed on news and updates to advisor duties and policies
- Attend the August Advisor Summit and monthly advisor meetings during the academic year hosted by the Office of Leadership and Engagement
 - Or watch the recordings if unable to attend
- Know where to locate resources for organizations to refer your club
- Understand policies and procedures implemented by NAU and the Office of Leadership and Engagement
- Answer university policy-related questions and guide the student group and its officers to follow established policies and protocols
 - Explain the consequences of choosing to act outside of established guidelines
- Be able to work with students and the Office of Leadership & Engagement as necessary to handle conflict within the organization
- Assist the organization in maintaining current records
 - Emphasize the importance of routinely updating and reviewing their constitution, rosters, and organization policies on True Blue Connects and MS Teams member

The Well-Balanced Advisor

In addition to meeting the above minimum expectations, this type of advisor does more to meet the needs and wants of the officer team. If the advisor has the time, they should try to incorporate the following recommendations below as appropriate to be as supportive of and collaborative with their organization.

- Attend executive officer, general meetings, or organizational events based on club needs (have a solid compromise between the advisor and club members/leaders)
- Aid student organizations with conflict that doesn't align with their constitution's mission, vision, and values
- Provide guidance to students to prevent repeating mistakes made earlier in the organization's history
- Assist the group in developing realistic goals for the academic year
 - Help new officers build on the history and develop long-term plans for the future of the organization
- Provide guidance to organizations on appropriately managing student time, abilities, and duties within the program
 - Help students maintain a balance between academic and co-curricular responsibilities when needed
- Offer ideas and suggestions for projects, events, and procedures when asked, but refrain from directing the activities
 - All members should have the opportunity to exercise initiative and judgment and participate in facilitating organizational activities. If the opportunity arises, encourage quieter students to take the initiative.
 - Provide support to the organization regarding managing risk and liability, on- and off-campus
- Assist the organization in maintaining current financial records
 - Organization leaders should be responsible for budgeting and raising funds. However, the organization advisor may be asked to hold funds or maintain records of banking information and the organization's Tax-ID, if applicable
- Be familiar with funding opportunities
- Assist with the leadership transition process each year and the orientation of new members, if applicable
- Ensure that student organizations strive to maintain a positive and appropriate image within the university and the Flagstaff community

The Over-Involved Advisor

Some advisors are incredibly invested in their organizations and/or want to take a key role in the development and maintenance of an organization. Sometimes this is due to alumni affiliation, previous student leadership experience, passion about the organization's mission or more. The problem with this advisor type is that they can undermine the organization being student-led, impede organizational growth, and in severe cases, encourage members or officers to terminate their positions. Here are some examples of concerns that may indicate an overly involved advisor:

- Defining the expectations/goals of the student's organization without letting the students provide their input
- Completing student organization requirements like re-registration, registering for events like club fair, and submitting event requests instead of the executives
- Feeling that the student organization is not achieving necessary requirements if the advisor doesn't step in to complete them
 - *Remember that failures can sometimes be more effective teaching moments for student leaders!*

This is *different* from the profile of a long-term and committed advisor that may showcase the following traits which are protective from being overly involved.

- Provide continuity within the group and be familiar with the group's history and constitution
- Encourage organization leaders to take charge of activities and decisions
- Encourage the organization to pursue opportunities within the university and Flagstaff community that will contribute to their personal, professional, and academic development
- Ensure organization leaders share responsibility for the organization



Advisor Roles

It is key to remember that you are an advisor, not the leader, to understand which roles you might be asked to complete. 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.

Again, there are many different approaches to advising and you will develop a style that is most comfortable for you and the students you work with. In most cases, it is best to be involved with the students and to talk them through the process they are going through when they are trying to turn their ideas into action. Students will challenge you to assume and work with different roles depending on the situation. The following roles are some that you may assume as an advisor: Mentor, Motivator, Team Builder, Conflict Manager, Policy Translator, Supervisor, and Reflective Agent.

MENTOR

Many students will come to see their advisor as a mentor, and flourishing relationships can last many years and be rewarding for both the student and the advisor. Because of the nature of student organizations, your mentoring role may meet different needs.

Dunkel and Schuh (1998) describe mentoring as a one-on-one learning relationship between an older person and a younger person based on modeling behavior and an extended, shared dialogue. They identify five qualities that characterize good mentors:

- Good mentors have been successful in their own professional endeavors.
- Good mentors behave in ways worthy of emulation.
- Good mentors are supportive in their work with students by being patient, slow to criticize, and willing to work with those who are less well-developed in their careers.
- Good mentors are not afraid to delegate tasks to colleagues and are not threatened by others who exhibit talent and initiative. They provide support for protégés who have been unsuccessful and provide plenty of praise for those who have been successful.
- Good mentors provide periodic, detailed, and honest feedback to the protégé.

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. This is a natural part of running an organization and conflict that is properly managed can lead to a more successful and active group. If conflict is ignored and not handled, the potential for the organization to become inactive is increased.
- When working with students who have come into 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, and to 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 their actions are causing a problem. In this case, speaking with the student individually could be helpful. Chances are no one has met with the student previously and discussed how their 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.

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 into one collaborative 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.
- Team formation does not occur by accident, but rather through an intentional design and process. 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 them 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. If you need resources on team building activities, Student Activities can provide them, or the office can conduct a workshop with your organization.

SUPERVISOR

There are many similarities between advising and supervising and many of the skills and styles are transferable. Dunkel identifies the components this style as a supervisory cycle many of which are transferable to effective advising. The six stages of the supervisory cycle are team building, performance planning, communication, recognition, self-assessment, and evaluation.

- **Team Building** – In team building, your role is to work with the president and executive board soon after their appointment or election. Team building establishes relationships that will enhance the ability of the organization's leadership, members, and adviser to work.
- **Performance Planning** – This includes writing position descriptions, determining and listing expectations, and setting.
- **Communication** – The third stage of supervision is regular communication which includes the transfer of both knowledge and keep in mind that communication comes in many forms and is both verbal and nonverbal.
- **Recognition** – As an advisor, you may participate in meetings with individual meetings. Students may express a wide range of emotions, and to respond effectively in unexpected situations, a working knowledge of these characteristics and backgrounds can be helpful. Some situations may require documenting the incident for your protection and the protection of the institution. Written documentation should include the specific nature of the exchange, the date and time, the individuals involved, and the outcome of the exchange. If there are concerns about meeting a student individually, consider notify the student that you're recording the meeting to ensure professionalism is maintained and in case the consultation ever needs to be evaluated by another office.
- **Evaluation** – The sixth and final stage of supervision is formal appraisal. Some institutions, national organizations, or oversight bodies require students to complete various evaluations.

You should know what forms the students need complete as part of the duties of their office or in order to fulfill all of their requirements. A formal evaluation is an opportunity for you to provide feedback to the organization or to individual members. Your participation in the evaluation process should be understood early in your relationship with the organization so as not to come as a surprise to the students.

EDUCATOR

- As you work with student organizations, students will undoubtedly look to you for guidance and assistance. In your work with them, you will find ample opportunities to help them learn. There may be formal educational moments such as workshops on how to run meetings or event planning or a seminar on topics related to the organization's purpose. There may be informal moments when a student doesn't follow through on a commitment or when a project doesn't occur as anticipated. 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; however, sometimes this can be the most important action of all. Allow the students to make their decisions even if their actions do not agree with your ideas. Sometimes students will succeed and other times they may fail. The key for you is to fill the role of a reflective agent and by doing so give the students a safe place to reflect on their experiences.

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. Student Activities can provide self-assessment tools for students to complete. There are also organizational and programmatic assessment tools available so groups can assess how they are functioning.

POLICY TRANSLATOR

- Student organizations operate under NAU policies, procedures, and rules. Some student organizations are affiliated with national or international organizations and are responsible to those entities too. At times, students may not be aware of these policies and may do things inappropriately. The more you know about these policies the better advisement you can give to the students on their actions.

MOTIVATOR

- As an advisor, you may have to motivate students to excel, 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,” working to keep them excited about all the potential successes they will experience. You can motivate students through the recognition of their efforts, by appealing to their desire to create change, and by helping them connect their experiences at university to the experiences they will have in the community.

Dunkel, N. W., & Schuh, J. H. (1998). Advising student groups and organizations. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Questions

Stop by our in-person office or reach out with any questions.

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