



Cornell University Student Activities Office

Student Activities Office
Cornell University
521 Willard Straight Hall
Ithaca, NY 14853

Telephone: 607 255-4169
Fax: 607 255-1116
E-mail: activities@cornell.edu
Web: www.activities.cornell.edu

An Organization and its Advisor

Advice for Student Leaders

You might wonder why a student organization would want a faculty or staff advisor. After all, you were elected because you are a competent and capable leader, right. Right! But...

- Do you sometimes have trouble with administrative red tape?
- Do you sometimes wish your group had more support from related academic or service departments?
- Could your organization benefit from some “connections” with university policy-makers?
- And even though you are doing a super job now, will your group have to start again from scratch again next year?

A faculty or staff advisor could help alleviate these and other problems, WITHOUT TAKING OVER the leadership of your organization.

The role of an advisor is to:

- Serve as a sounding board off of which you can bounce new ideas
- Support your group
- Intervene in conflicts between group members and/or officers
- Be knowledgeable of policies that may impact your organization’s decisions, programs, etc.
- Run “interference” with University departments
- Provide continuity and stability as student leadership changes
- Provide an “outside” point of view or perspective
- Provide your group with connections
- Help deal with organizational crises
- Give honest feedback to group members

Better still is the fact that the organization/advisor relationship benefits the advisor too. Being involved with a student organization offers the faculty or staff member:

- 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
- An opportunity to feel satisfaction and accomplishment through making a special contribution to a particular group of students
- The reward of watching students develop their individual skills and talents
- The chance to informally share his/her knowledge and expertise on relevant topics

The responsibilities of group members to the advisor are:

1. Discuss your expectations of the advisor’s role with your advisor - from the beginning.
 2. Notify the advisor of all meetings.
 3. Send the advisor a copy of all minutes.
 4. The President/Committee Chair should meet regularly with the advisor to discuss organizational matters and to relay and update information.
 5. Consult him/her before any changes in the structure or policies of the organization or committee are made, and before major projects are undertaken.
 6. Understand that although the advisor has no vote, he/she should have speaking privileges.
 7. Remember that the responsibility for the success or failure of a group project rests ultimately with the group, not the advisor.
 8. Periodically, evaluate your advisors and give appropriate feedback to let them know how they may improve in order to advise you better.
-

Now that you know how much your organization and its potential advisor can gain from one another, you probably want to know how to find this advisor. There are at least two things your organization should do first: develop a clear statement of group goals and a clear statement of expectations of the advisor, both in terms of role and time commitment. It would also be helpful to outline what the advisor could fairly expect of the group. With this information in hand, you will be ready to approach potential advisors and discuss with them their interest and ability for advising your group. The most suitable advisor is one who shares a common interest with your organization.

Poll your group members for the names of professors or staff members who they have found helpful and interested in student life. Approach potential advisors confidently and positively. Remember to be clear about the purpose and activities of your organization, your expectations of the advisor, and all benefits the advisor will enjoy.

Once your advisor begins to serve, keep them well-informed, clarify expectations and roles when needed, and draw on their expertise. Remember that like you, your advisor has multiple demands placed on their time. Be sensitive to this fact. Occasional thank you's and acknowledgments are a good idea - 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.

For more information on this, or any other policy/guidelines pertaining to student organizations, please contact the Student Activities Office, 5th floor, Willard Straight Hall, (607) 255-4169, email: <activities@cornell.edu>.
