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Introduction

Welcome Letter
Thank you for becoming an advisor to a student organization here at VCU! Whether you are a new advisor or have been helping an organization for years, we look forward to working with you. We have put together this manual to help guide your process as an advisor and to serve as a resource on student organizations here at VCU.

Advisors are an important member of a student organization. You can help facilitate the co-curricular experience for students and enhance their time as a student here at VCU. While it does take time to be an advisor, we hope that it is a meaningful and rewarding experience for you!

Student Leadership and Civic Engagement offers a wide variety of resources and services to aid in the development of student organizations and student leaders, but we are also here to support advisors. If you have any questions regarding this manual, advising, or student organizations at VCU please do not hesitate to contact Student Leadership and Civic Engagement. We are located in the University Student Commons, Room 229 and can be reached at 804-828-3648 or studentorgs@vcu.edu.
Staff Directory

Heather Nunes
Assistant Director for Student Leadership and Civic Engagement
hnunes@vcu.edu

Donte' Sharpe
Interim Coordinator for Student Leadership and Civic Engagement
dsharpe2@vcu.edu

Nicole Patterson
Coordinator for Student Leadership and Civic Engagement
nlpatterson@vcu.edu

Justin Raibolt
Coordinator for Student Leadership and Civic Engagement
jraibolt@vcu.edu

Lisa Matthews-Ailsworth
Off Campus Student Services Coordinator
lmathewsails@vcu.edu

Tracey Bailey
Administrative Office Coordinator
tmbailey@vcu.edu
Advising a Student Organization

Introduction to Advising
Advising a student organization is a great way to interact with students outside of the classroom. It is an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of our students and in the community. Through advising you can help students develop new skills and interest, become a leader, and enhance their co-curricular experience. Not only will you be able to share your personal experiences, but you will be able to watch them grow through their own involvement. Being a student organization advisor can be extremely rewarding both personally and professionally.

Student organizations can benefit greatly from having a permanent advisor. Organizations have regular turnover and oftentimes the advisor is the only constant from year to year. Your role will be to help the organization move forward with new officers instead of them taking two steps back. An advisor is also there to help the organization through challenges, whether it is with understanding policies, membership retention, or organizational conflict. Advisors are also there to provide support and encouragement, to help with goal setting, and to provide feedback to help the organization succeed.

Advising Styles
Every advisor uses a different approach to working with a student organization. Some advisors attend meetings and events and have regular meetings with the organization leadership. Other advisors have a more distant relationship with the organization. Below are some of the possible roles you may take on as an advisor. You may use one style of advising or a combination depending on the situation or based on group dynamics and leadership.

Educator
As an advisor, you will spend time teaching and coaching the student organization to help them achieve their goals. Whether it be educating the students about how to recruit new members or walking them through a challenging moment, you will be providing them with valuable information to succeed as an organization. In this role, you will also be providing the organization with support and guidance in running meetings, managing a budget, and planning events. While you may have an immense amount of knowledge in certain areas, it is important to remember to empower the students to take action instead of doing it for them. One of the biggest challenges as an educator is being ok with letting the students fail. While not stepping in to fix something may not seem natural, it sometimes provides the biggest learning outcome when you take the time to help them reflect on what could have been done differently and how they will make a change in the future.

Mediator
Student organizations are bound to run into some form of conflict between members. An advisor can serve as an impartial mediator in these situations to help the students talk through the issue and hopefully come to a resolution. During these conversations, it is important to remind the students that they should be focusing on what is in the best interest for their organization. They should talk through how they can work together to achieve their goals and the purpose of the organization. If one student appears to be causing problems for other students and the organization, it would be best to have a private conversation with the student to see what is wrong and how the issue can be resolved.
Mentor

Relationships between advisors and students can turn into a mentor/mentee relationship as you work together through the student organization. The role of a mentor is most common when the students are seeking to enter the field that the advisor works in or if they share a mutual passion for a specific topic. Students may ask their advisor for help outside of the student organization. This may be in the form of asking for help with their resume, connecting to a professional network and other resources, or help seeking out internships and jobs after graduation.

Team Builder

Most student organizations have new officers each year and members that come and go. It is important that they are constantly working on creating a team environment. As an advisor, you can help encourage and build this environment. This can be done through helping plan a yearly retreat where they set goals and expectations for the organization. It is also important that they continue the team building process throughout the year. If the organization hits a bump in the road, suggest that they add a team building activity to their meeting time or have them plan a group outing so they can spend time together.

Motivator

There are going to be times when the organization is struggling to stay positive and not get discouraged with difficulties as a group. It is helpful for you to step in at these times of challenge and encourage them. When things are going well, recognize their individual and group efforts and achievements to keep them motivated.

Policy Interpreter

Student organization members and leaders may not always be aware of the policies and procedures for student organizations. As the advisor, the more you know about these policies and procedures, the more you can help the organization be sure they are following them. While you may not know them all by memory, if something does not sound right you can reference the Student Organization Manual or contact a member of the Student Leadership and Involvement staff.

Questions to Ask the Organization

Advisors should initiate a meeting with the student organization officers to discuss your role and to set expectations. Below are some questions that can be used to start the conversation. There is also a separate document titled “Student Organization/Advisor Expectation Checklist” that can be used as a guide to facilitate this meeting.

- What is the organization looking for in an advisor?
- How often/when does the group meet? Am I expected to attend meetings?
- What type of events does the organization host and how often?
- What are some of the biggest challenges you have as a student organization?
- Do you want me to be an active participant in meetings or an observer?
- Do you want me to step in when there is conflict within the organization?
● Are there certain areas the organization needs assistance with (e.g. finance membership, recruitment, officer transition, publicity, etc.)?

**Time Commitment**
The time commitment of being an advisor to a student organization can vary depending on your level of involvement and the needs of the organization. It can range from mostly email communication to attending every meeting and event. Your time commitment is something that should be discussed with the student organization officers at the beginning of each year.

**Tips**
Regardless of your advising style, here are some tips when working with student organizations.

● Learn organization member's names and get to know them
● Understand student organization and University policies
● Establish clear expectations about your role as the advisor
● Read the weekly e-blast sent out through the Student Leadership and Involvement Center
● Communicate with members even if you are not at meetings
● Find the right balance of involvement with the organization for you
● Develop relationships with the organization officers and establish meeting times as needed
● Set up a meeting with a staff member in the Student Leadership and Involvement Center
● It is ok to say no!
● It is ok to let the organization fail
Registration of Student Organizations

Annual Student Organization Registration
Each year all organizations are required to renew their registration with Student Leadership and Civic Engagement if they wish to stay as an official organization. Registration will open from July 21 through September 29 for the Fall semester. Registration will open up again for the Spring semester January 5 through February 10. They are also required to submit a GPA Authorization Form to Student Leadership and Civic Engagement. Please be sure that your organization completes these important steps!

Benefits of Being a Student Organization
Student organizations must register with Student Leadership and Civic Engagement to take advantage of the benefits we provide. The following are resources available to your organization:

- 150 black and white copies per month
- Computer stations with printers
- Organization mailboxes
- Banner paper, paint, and art supplies
- Helium tank, button maker, and other PR materials
- Registration and webpage on RamsConnect
- Opportunity to apply for SGA funding for conference travel, events, and programs
- Room reservations on campus
- Weekly Newsletter
- Invitation to the Leadership and Service Awards Ceremony

Requesting a Student Organization Website
Registered student organizations have the option to create a website through VCU Technology Services. When making a webpage and any other social media, it is important that the student organization name policy is followed. Please review the “Logo and Name” section of this manual for more information.

RamsConnect
Each registered student organization has a page on RamsConnect that can be used for communication, posting events and photos, submitting finance paperwork, and much more! As a VCU faculty/staff member, you have the ability to create an account and join the organization page.

To create an account and log in, go to: https://vcu.campuslabs.com/engage/

You will need to use your VCU eID and password to create an account. Once you’re logged in, you can search for your student organization’s page and then click the “Join Organization” button to request to be added to the roster. The President is the only individual with the ability to manage the roster, so you’ll want to let them know that you have a request pending.
It is important that the President keeps a current and accurate roster on RamsConnect. Student Leadership and Civic Engagement uses the roster information to communicate with officers and student organizations. If the roster is not accurate, officers will not receive any emails regarding upcoming deadlines, events, trainings, and opportunities.
Policies and Procedures

Membership
The majority of the membership of an organization must be currently enrolled students at VCU. A minimum of eight (8) currently enrolled VCU students are required to form and maintain an organization.

Non-students may hold membership in an organization as an associate member. However, they may not serve as an officer nor may they conduct official business on behalf of the organization.

Officer Positions and Grade Requirements
Each organization is required to have a President, Vice President, and Treasurer and they must maintain certain academic requirements in order to hold an office. Undergraduate students must be enrolled and registered for a minimum of six (6) credit hours and graduate students must be enrolled and registered for a minimum of three (3) credit hours. Officers must maintain a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.30 for undergraduates officers must be in good standing with their academic department for graduate students*. Any officer who fails to meet any portion of these academic standards will be contact by Student Leadership and Civic Engagement and will not be able to serve in an officer position until they meet the minimum requirements.

*Student Leadership and Civic Engagement will mirror GPA requirements of certain graduate and professional programs. This will be handled on a case by case basis between Student Leadership and Civic Engagement and the department of the student leader.

Part of being an organization officer is to stay up to date with information from Student Leadership and Civic Engagement such as annual registration and trainings. They are also expected to keep their RamsConnect page accurate with officer information and their membership roster.

Hazing
Hazing is prohibited by law in the Commonwealth of Virginia and by Virginia Commonwealth University. Hazing is activity which is physically or mentally abusive, potentially dangerous, humiliating or demeaning, or which interferes with academic achievement and the human rights of the individual.

Branding and Tattooing: The University prohibits branding and tattooing in University facilities and on University grounds. The University does not encourage the practices of branding and tattooing.

Discrimination
Virginia Commonwealth University will maintain a strong commitment to outstanding achievement, educational excellence and high principle. Activities of the university are designed to promote the continuing policy of providing equal opportunity for employment and education and access to all programs and services without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, age, gender, political affiliation, veterans’ status, sexual orientation or disability. Notwithstanding these provisions, a religious or political student organization may determine that ordering the organization's internal affairs, selecting the organization's leader and members, defining the
organization’s doctrines, and resolving the organizations disputes are in furtherance of the organization’s religious or political mission and that only persons committed to that mission should conduct such activities. If such a determination is reached, the organization may limit the selection of members or customary rights and privileges of membership in the organization. Such determination shall be certified in the registration form.

**Logo and Name**

A student organization may not use the University’s name or an abbreviation of the University’s name, in the name of the student organization in such a manner to suggest the organization is sponsored by the University. Student organizations may use "of VCU" or "at VCU" following the name of the student organization, so that the location of the organization is reflected in the name.

VCU Cooking Club is NOT allowed
Cooking Club at VCU is CORRECT

Please remind your student organization members of this policy, especially when they are creating marketing for an event. This policy also applies to all social media pages.

**Trademark and Licensing**

Student organizations are permitted to use the VCU logo and other trademarked items, but it must be done properly. To ensure the organization is within the guidelines, anything bearing VCU’s key trademarks will need to be purchased from a licensed vendor.

Key VCU trademarks include:
- Virginia Commonwealth University®
- VCU®
- VCU Rams ™
- Rams ™
- Medical College of Virginia ™
- MCV ™
- VCU Health System ™
- Havoc ™

To confirm which vendors are licensed to produce any of VCU’s key trademarks, here is the link to view all current licensed vendors:

[http://www.identity.vcu.edu/](http://www.identity.vcu.edu/)

For additional questions or concerns, please email identity@vcu.edu or call (804) 828-1463.

**Violation of Policies**

If an organization fails to abide by University policy, they will be contacted by Student Leadership and Civic Engagement to discuss the violation. The appropriate actions will be taken to remedy the situation.
Event Planning

Planning Your Event
The Event and Meeting Services office is available to help your organization reserve space in the Student Commons, Larrick Student Center, and Hunton Student Center for meetings and events. They are also available to assist with vendor recommendations, audio/visual support, parking needs, as well as tips and advice on how to successfully plan and execute events. They can be reached at 804-828-9502 or at uscaevent@vcu.edu. They are located in Room 106 of the University Student Commons.

Reserving a Room
Student organizations can reserve a room at https://www.pubapps.vcu.edu/campusems/. They can also reserve information tables, banner space, and the rolling display boards.

Reservation requests for publicity and information tables/standard* meeting spaces must be made through Virtual EMS at least 3 business days prior to the requested date.

Reservations for non-standard* meeting and event space must be made through Virtual EMS at least 10 days prior to the requested date. A *complex event* request must be submitted through Virtual EMS at least 90 calendar days in advance. See below for what constitutes as a complex event.

*Standard vs. non-standard meeting space:
- Standard space: already equipped with furniture (i.e. Metro, Forum Room)
- Non-standard meeting space: a clear room; furniture needs to be added (i.e. Commonwealth Ballroom, Richmond Salons, Virginia Rooms)

Complex Events
If an event includes any of the following, it is considered a complex event:
- Attendance (expected or historical) of more than 100 people
- Tickets (paid or free)
- Contracted Services (catering, speakers, DJ's, etc.)
- Police and/or Security Required
- Audio Visual Support (DJ, band, multiple mics, speakers, etc.)
- Alcohol is Served
- Event is a: Social, Festival, Carnival, Dance, Fashion Show, Pageant, Auction, Open Mic, Concert, or Culture Show

Event Planning Resources
Please reference the Meetings and Events Guidelines & Procedures Manual for more information: http://www.usca.vcu.edu/event-meeting-services/

If you or the student organization has any questions regarding space reservations or set-up, contact the Event and Meeting Services office in Room 106 of the University Student Commons or send an email to uscaevent@vcu.edu.
Publicity Resources
There are many ways student organizations can promote events. Below are a few recommendations of how to publicize:

- RamsConnect Events: Create an event page and upload a flyer to the virtual bulletin
- TelegRAM: Email announcement to Faculty, Staff and Students. Submit email announcement to: www.vcu.edu/telegRAM/.
- University Calendar: Place your program on the online University Calendar by submitting a request at: http://www.pubinfo.vcu.edu/calendar/
- Axis-TV: Create a PowerPoint slide and email in JPG form to contactusca@vcu.edu
- Banners: You must make a reservation through MERA to have it hung
  - This can be done on Virtual EMS at https://www.pubapps.vcu.edu/campusems/
  - All banners must be 8’ × 3’
  - Inside banners: may be paper or vinyl
  - Outside banners: MUST be vinyl with grommets in each corner
- Facebook: Create events and use announcements to post to newsgroups
Finance

Introduction
USC&A Finance is the one stop shop for all of your student organization's financial needs. The Finance staff members are available to provide students assistance in the areas of funding requests, purchase requests, reimbursements, budget reallocations, travel, and more.

Bank Accounts
Student organizations may open an account with an off-campus bank or credit union. It is strongly recommended that all off-campus bank or credit union be established with two signatures for the withdrawal of funds from the account.

Any funding received from the Virginia Commonwealth University Student Government Association (VCU SGA) must stay in the on-campus account managed through RamsConnect. This account can only be accessed by the President and Treasurer of each organization once they have completed the finance training process.

VCU SGA Funding
Student organizations with the classifications of Class, Competitive, Cultural, Honorary, Political, Professional/Academic, Recreational, Service, Social Justice, Special Interest and Spiritual are able to apply for funding directly through the SGA Appropriations Committee.

To become eligible for VCU SGA funding, an organization must be active for 30-days and must be in good standing with Virginia Commonwealth University and Student Leadership and Civic Engagement. Once the 30-day period has passed, a budget may be requested. Before any SGA funding can be spent, the President and Treasurer of the organization MUST complete finance training and pass the mandatory quiz.

Member Dues
Student organizations are allowed to collect membership dues. The money collected through dues should be held in an off-campus bank account created for the student organization.

Reimbursement
The following information should accompany every Reimbursement Request:
- Submitted Reimbursement request through RamsConnect.
- ORIGINAL receipts and/or invoice. (receipts should be taped to blank piece of paper)
- Copy of the bank statement showing the charge has posted. The charge cannot be ‘pending’
- If food is involved include:
  - Flyer w/ approximate number of attendees, OR
  - List of attendee names

The following should accompany every Travel Reimbursement Request:
- Submitted Reimbursement request through RamsConnect.
- ORIGINAL hotel check-out folio showing room rate and all applicable taxes, as well as the hotel charges have been paid.
● ORIGINAL receipts for incidental expenses—gas, parking, etc. (receipts should be taped to blank piece of paper).
● Copy of the bank statement showing the charge has posted. The charge cannot be ‘pending’
● Copy of the conference flyer, indicating dates, location, and conference information
● Food is NOT funded for travel.

Travel Process
To ensure success of travel, student organizations that have received travel funding through the Student Activity Fee must to adhere to the following guidelines:

● All travel paperwork is due **at least 30 days prior to travel** to Student Leadership and Civic Engagement.
  ○ The minimum GPA requirement for travel with SGA funding is a 2.5.
● Airfare and rail should be arranged by the finance office.
  ○ Connect with the finance office early. Rates change daily with airfare and the closer you get to your travel date, the higher the prices become
● Registration can be arranged either by the finance office, or the student organization can pay out of pocket, and submit for reimbursement.
● Lodging, rental car, and gas will have to be purchased out of pocket by the student organization.
  ○ Each student organization will need to plan to have these expenses paid out of pocket.
  ○ Student organizations will need to submit reimbursement paperwork within five (5) business days after returning from the trip

Required travel paperwork to be turned into Student Leadership and Civic Engagement:
● USC&A Travel Authorization – cover sheet for travel authorization packet
● Travelers Statement of Responsibility and Authorization – signed by each member traveling
● Travel Waiver – signed by each member traveling
● NEW THIS YEAR - Copy of Title IX Certificate for the current school year from each member who is traveling
Organizational Development and Leadership

Constitution and Bylaws
A group’s constitution and bylaws are important documents that govern its purpose and future actions. Be sure to anticipate the future to ensure that your constitution does not limit the organization’s options for growth and change.

The constitution of an organization contains the fundamental operating principles that govern its operation. The bylaws establish specific rules of guidance by which the group is to function. All registered student organizations should have their basic structure and methods of operation in writing. The constitution is the essence of the overall purpose of the organization and is not changed unless the purpose changes. Bylaws set forth in detail the procedures a group must follow to conduct business in an orderly manner. They provide further definitions to the articles of the constitution and can be changed more easily as the needs of the organization change.

Officer Transition
The officer transition process is a key step to a successful upcoming year. Taking time to have an officer transition meeting or retreat allows the outgoing officers to share information and knowledge with the incoming officers. Some of the important things to do during this time is to share job descriptions, organization constitution, policies, and other important documents. The new officers should also create a calendar with meetings and events for the upcoming year.

Developmental Opportunities
Student Leadership and Civic Engagement provides regular opportunities to enhance the leadership skills of all student organization members. Please read the weekly e-blast for upcoming sessions and conferences. The information will also be listed on the Student Leadership and Civic Engagement and/or the VCU University Student Commons & Activities RamsConnect pages.