

VCU | USCA

Virginia Commonwealth University

Student Organization



Advisor Handbook

Engaging students to embrace leadership and empower service

The Student Organization Advisor Handbook is intended to *help*. It is a collection of suggestions, recommendations, expectations and tips that have been assembled into one resource. This is *not* a magical formula to guaranteed success. However, if faithfully observed, the handbook's content should enhance the advisor's effectiveness, rapport with students and, overall enjoyment within the organization.

Student Organization Advisor Handbook

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<u>A</u>ware	Know what is happening with the group at all times...problems, dates of function, etc.
<u>D</u>edicated	Willing to assist the organization when necessary. Enjoys being associated with the group and is very involved.
<u>V</u>isible	Attend meetings, social functions, and other special activities of the group.
<u>I</u>nformed	Familiar with the rules, policies, and regulations of the University and the by-laws and constitution of the organization. Is prepared to render assistance with their interpretation.
<u>S</u>upportive	Provide encouragement and praise to group members.
<u>O</u>pen-minded	Willing to consider new ideas and approaches although he/she may not totally agree with them.
<u>R</u>espected	Earn respect through being trustworthy, honest, and demonstrating a genuine interest in the welfare of the group.

Advisors can model a very positive example for the organizations they advise. Student organization campus involvement has a major impact on educational outcomes and the individual students' development at VCU. Such activities and duties they perform can complement classroom learning and facilitate development within the student. Advisors assist a students' growth in many different ways. Your organization involvement facilitates students to be able to:

- develop positive, professional and meaningful relationships between students & faculty outside of the classroom
- learn self-discipline, initiative, self-direction, and responsibility
- apply learned concepts in a real-life setting
- test beliefs, values, attitudes and morals
- solidify his/her personal identity through contact with diverse and conflicting viewpoints
- improve leadership and communication skills
- channel anxiety and excess energy into enjoyable and productive pursuits
- have access to student support groups with common needs and interests
- strive for and maintain academic excellence (i.e., honor societies, departmental organizations etc.)
- plan major events that benefit and unite the entire campus community (i.e., Homecoming, Black History Month etc.)
- broadening their perspectives of a variety of different personalities and an understanding of different cultures
- explore social issues

Responsibilities of an Advisor

The organization should expect their advisor:

- To NOT let personal goals interfere with or influence group decisions, activities, or goals
- To clarify his/her role as an advisor to the group members as he/she 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

The role of the advisor is determined in part by the advisor. He/she must determine the level of priority that he/she 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 he/she advises. There may be personality conflicts with a new president. Whatever the situation, an advisor should not advise an organization unless he/she feels the rewards are sufficient to merit the time and effort involved.

Advisor Tips

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) Keep up to date of 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.

Advising Styles

- A. "Training Wheels" – be hands on a first and then slowly back away
- B. "Letting them fail" - Allow the group to fail. Although this is often a difficult thing to watch, it is very powerful in developing student leaders. Failure can be the best learning experience. It is also important that the advisor not take responsibility for an organization's failures. The choice of whether or not to act is the students' decision. An advisor feeling overly responsible is most likely too involved in the group.
- C. "Too Hands-on" Advisor- you should not be making the room reservations or writing the constitutions
- D. "Missing in Action" Advisor- you are not just a signature
- E. Balance- Find a good balance between being overly involved and under-involved. Advisors set principles and offer guidance and do not directly do the work which is the responsibility of the students.

Liability Concerns

One question advisors often ask is, “What is my liability as an advisor to a student organization?” The type of liability or risk varies greatly depending upon the type of organization and what activities are involved. Rather than address specific organizations or activities, a general list of suggestions is included here to assist you with your responsibilities as an advisor to a student organization.

- 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. The university also reserves certain rights (for instance, the signing of any contracts). 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.

Checklist for New Advisors

_____ Manage your organization and update your officers' information on **Club Manager**: <http://www.usca.vcu.edu/studentorgs> Questions? Email judginsbj@vcu.edu or jbutt@vcu.edu. Remember that there are enrollment and grade requirements for major officers (2.0) in registered student organizations. Make sure your officers meet these requirements before submitting your update.

_____ Mark Your Calendar for the annual Student Organization and Volunteer Opportunities (**SOVO**) Fair is a prime time to recruit new members and publicize your organization. Questions? Email judginsbj@vcu.edu or jbutt@vcu.edu.

_____ Mark Your Calendar, for the annual VCU **Leadership Conference** The Leadership Conference is designed to be an all-in-one event where student organization officers can gain all the information they need to know for the year. Advisors are encouraged to attend.

_____ Remind your officers to attend **Officer Training**. For a program calendar and list of dates and times, go to: www.usca.vcu.edu/studentorgs

_____ **Encourage your leaders to reserve meeting/event/advertising space at** <<http://www.ems.students.vcu.edu>> To request space for things like regular meetings, annual events, dances, lectures, workshops, rush, ceremonies, films, concerts, etc. (*When choosing dates, keep in mind: national and religious holidays, and the VCU academic schedule.*) In order to reserve space, an organization officer must complete the online Reservation Workshop. If you have questions about a Reservations Workshop, please call 828-9502.

_____ **Stay informed about the SGA Appropriations Bylaws and when budgets are due.** <http://www.usca.vcu.edu/studentorgs/forms/forms/2006.07%20Appropriations%20Bylaws.pdf>> Contact [Student Organization Financial Services](#) Office with questions.

_____ **Mark Your Calendar for the next Student Organization Awards Ceremony, and start dropping hints to your organization to nominate themselves. Nomination Deadline: March 25th. Ceremony: Thursday, April 23, 2009, 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm.**

_____ **Attend an Advisor Roundtable meeting to receive support, tips, answers and advisement from the Office for Student Organization Development. For a list, visit www.usca.vcu.edu/studentorgs .**

Extra Credit for Advisors

Assuming the advisor is advising because this is an enjoyable activity and there is a concern for the organization and the members of the organization, there are additional functions the advisor may wish to perform. This is not an all-inclusive list, but it indicates some services that can be provided. In most cases these are items that the advisor should encourage the organization to address.

1) Orientation and Training

One of the basic needs in any organization is continuity. Generally the organization operates in a manner allowing for this, and new officers usually have had experience within the organization. However, there is a need to structure a training program for new officers and an orientation for new members. The advisor should encourage the organization to develop these programs.

2) Professionalism

The organization should be encouraged to develop a sense of professionalism. It should be encouraged to plan well and to provide a quality program at all times.

3) Communication

The officers should be encouraged to maintain open communication with the members of the organization. Effective methods for communicating in writing and speaking should be sought and used.

4) Development

There must be opportunities for the educational and personal development of students who participate as members. The program must justify the expenditure of the students' time, abilities and energy. The advisor, because of his/her experience, background and education, should be a major resource for means in which this can be accomplished.

5) Records

The advisor should encourage an organization to keep good records. These may include minutes, records relating to programs, scrapbooks, historical records, financial records, reports, and evaluations.

6) Finances

Organizations receiving funds from the Student Activity Fees must maintain all organizational funds in a university account, which can be accessed only by the appropriate organizational officers.

7) Constitution

The constitution is the document that maintains the structure and procedures of the organization. It is more important to some organizations than it is to others. Advisors should encourage their organizations to make an annual review and to amend or revise when necessary.

8) Leadership

An advisor should be aware of the qualities of leadership displayed by members of the organization. He/she should encourage members who have these qualities to seek leadership positions in the organization. The organization should be encouraged to develop internal leadership training programs or attend other leadership development programs sponsored by the University Student Commons & Activities.

9) Interpersonal Situations

The advisor needs to gain the confidence of the members. If the advisor detects dissatisfaction within the organization he/she will be in a better position to deal with the issues and sources of the problem.

10) Assisting the Individual

The advisor should encourage each member to participate in the organization. To the extent possible he/she should be aware of the academic strengths of the individual and assist the individual in maintaining a proper balance between the academic and extra-curricular aspects of student life. The advisor is often requested to write recommendations for individuals and the observations made of the students' abilities in the organization are often helpful.

Frequently Asked Questions

When are the advisor sessions and other student organization programs?

For upcoming Advisor Roundtable sessions visit www.usca.vcu.edu/studentorgs or e-mail John Butt at jbutt@vcu.edu
For a calendar of Student Organization programs and events, visit www.usca.vcu.edu/studentorgs

Why should student organizations register with the University?

The university recognizes that groups of its students may wish to form organizations intended to meet social, recreational, educational, political or spiritual needs. Through the University Student Commons and Activities (USCA), the university provides an orderly procedure for the establishment of student organizations

In order to become a Registered Student Organization, a student group must complete and submit a Student Organization Registration Form online and consent to give authorization for a GPA check to be conducted (all officers must maintain a 2.0 cumulative and semester) with University Student Commons & Activities (USC&A) each fall by the established deadline of September 30th..

Student groups that successfully complete and submit a Student Organization Registration form with USC&A will be afforded associated privileges for Registered Student Organizations.

What types of organizations are registered at VCU?

There are over 240 registered organizations included in the following categories: Academic, Cultural, Governing, Fraternity and Sorority Life, Political, Programming, Service, Spiritual, Special Interest, Sports/Recreational and Student Media. [Click here to view a full list of student organizations.](#)

What are some resources for advisors?

There is a [VCU Resource Guide](#) published annually that has policy documents that include those that pertain to student organizations. You can view a copy online or obtain one from the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Services Office at the 907 Floyd Avenue. Additional Resources Available on the Web: [Student Organization Handbook](#) and [Student Organization Resource Guide](#) and don't forget to frequently visit the [University Student Commons and Activities](#) website for news and updates.

What services do student organizations receive at the Office for Student Organization Development?

Some of the services are copying and fax service, poster maker & art supplies, computer and printer usage, mailboxes, storage cabinets, meeting space and a workroom. For a complete description of services, see the [Student Organization Handbook](#), page 4.

If I need assistance what office could provide help?

Contact the University Student Commons & Activities, Student Organization Development staff at 828-3648 or studentorgs@vcu.edu.

What do I need to know about requesting funding for student organizations?

[Student Organization Financial Services](#), 828-6501, located in the Office for Student Organization Development, can provide answers to your questions pertaining to anything financial with your organization. An overview is provided here:

The Appropriations Committee will consider budget requests for allocations of the Student Activity Fee from only the following groups:

- The [Student Government Association](#) and all Monroe Park Campus student organizations, which are registered with the Office of Student Organization Development.
 - Any newly registered student organization or any student organization that has been inactive for one year or more must have been registered for **three full months** before becoming eligible to request funds. Any registered student organization that receives funding during the Spring for the following academic year and fails to re-register with the office of Student Organization Development by the specified deadline the following Fall (September 30th) forfeits the allocation and will not be eligible to request funding again until registration has been current for three full months.
 - Eligibility of funding is contingent on fulfillment of the Presidential Roundtable requirements (attendance at 2 per semester is required of at least one representative from the organization.)
 - No funding shall be provided when it directly contributes to the membership recruitment and closed operations of social fraternities and sororities or other organizations which have discriminatory or restrictive membership practices.

Procedure for Requesting Student Activity Fee Funds

- All organizations submitting budget requests must have two student representatives attend a Budget Preparation Workshop. These workshops are offered on a frequent basis and a current schedule can be obtained from the Student Organization Financial Office. On-line registration is available on the Student Organization web site.
- All student organizations submitting budget requests must have a student representative attend meetings of the Presidential Roundtable, with only one absence per semester.
- All budget requests must be submitted on the "SGA Appropriations Committee Annual Budget Request Form," which is available on the Web at <http://www.usca.vcu.edu/studentorgs/forms.htm>. All of the information requested on this form must be provided, and submitted electronically to SOFS@vcu.edu. Please read SGA Appropriations by-laws for more information.

Spending an Approved Allocation

The president and/or treasurer of each organization are required to provide the Student Organization Financial Office with a signature specimen card as a means of authenticating all requests. All individuals authorized to spend against an account must receive training at scheduled workshops from the Student Organization Financial Office on all current policies and procedures for usage before they are eligible to access funds. If trainings have not been completed, no expenditures will be permitted. Training workshops for spending funds are scheduled primarily in September but also throughout the academic year. See the [Student Organization Financial Office](#) for a complete schedule.



907 Floyd Avenue, PO Box 842032, Richmond VA 23284-2032, Telephone: 804-828-3648/804-828-6500, <http://www.usca.vcu.edu/>
VCU is an equal opportunity / affirmative action institution providing access to education and employment without regard to age, race, color, national origin, gender, religion, sexual orientation, veteran's status, political affiliation or disability. If you feel you need special accommodation from University Student Commons & Activities, please contact, 804-828-3648.

Advisor / Student Organization Statement of Understanding

This agreement is designed to enhance and codify the relationship between the advisor and the members of a student organization. It describes the expectations and responsibilities between parties. This form may be used as a tool for evaluating the relationship between the advisor and members of a student organization. Periodic review of the contents of this agreement is necessary for the benefit of both parties. Renegotiation of any area should occur whenever one or both parties deem it appropriate.

This agreement is divided into four sections. Sections I and III outline the general rights and responsibilities of the advisor and the student organization. Sections II and IV should include specific rights and responsibilities that are to be negotiated and mutually agreed upon by both parties.

This agreement is entered into by: _____ (herein referred to as the advisor)
and _____ (herein referred to as the student organization) Dated _____

Section I: General Rights and Responsibilities of the Advisor

1. The advisor is expected to have or obtain knowledge about university policies and procedures that impact student organizations.
2. The advisor is expected to attend student organization meetings and functions. Specific details may be included in Section II.
3. The advisor is expected to assist in the negotiation of contractual agreements entered into by the student organization.
4. The advisor is expected to encourage student organization members to take advantage of opportunities to enhance their leadership skills.
5. The advisor is expected to provide assistance in the areas of budget development, major expenditures and financial record keeping.
6. The advisor is expected to provide positive and negative feedback and confront behavior in members that he/she deems to be detrimental to the individual and/or other members of the organization.
7. The advisor is expected to treat students as mature individuals who possess dignity, worth and self-direction.
8. The advisor is expected to understand the purpose and objectives of the student organization.
9. The advisor has a right to a private life.
10. The advisor has the right to disagree with student organization decisions.
11. It is understood that as an employee of the university, the faculty advisor may disagree with an organizational decision and/or activities. A situation may occur when the university administration deems this organization's activities or decisions as incompatible with the objectives of the university or inappropriate for a university setting.

Section II: Specific Rights and Responsibilities of an Advisor

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Section III: General Rights and Responsibilities of Members of Student Organizations

1. Members are expected to understand the purpose of the student organization and pursue activities that fulfill its purpose. It is understood that the objectives of the organization will be compatible with the objectives of the university and not in violation of university, local, state and federal regulations and statutes.
2. Members are expected to attend meetings and functions. Specific details can be included in Section IV.
3. The officers are expected to inform and involve members and the advisor prior to making any financial commitments. The advisor and the members of the organization may wish to define what expenditures the advisor should review. (Use Section IV.)
4. Members are expected to take advantage of opportunities to enhance their skills, i.e. participate in the leadership development programs sponsored by Commons & Activities.
5. Members are expected to provide positive and negative feedback and confront behavior in other members and the advisor that they deem to be detrimental to that individual and/or organization.
6. Members are expected to treat the advisor as an individual who possesses dignity, worth and self-direction.
7. Members have the right to be listened to by other members and the advisor.
8. Members have the right to choose their levels of involvement in student organizations.
9. Members have the right to voice their disagreements with the decisions of the advisor and appeal those decisions to a predetermined higher authority. (Use Section IV.)

Section IV: Specific Rights and Responsibilities of Members of the Student Organization

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This agreement is binding until a new a new agreement is developed. Signed and dated:
