

Recognized Student Organization Advisors

Thank you for choosing to be an Advisor to a Recognized Student Organization at FSU Panama City. Your voluntary commitment is recognized and appreciated in the service you are providing to our students as they grow as individuals and community members outside of the classroom. Through these organizations, our students gain lifelong skills in leadership, communication, problem solving, event management, professionalism, and so much more. With your guidance and support, our students build on foundations within their personal, professional, and social lives.

The Office of Student Affairs and the Student Government Council value your dedication to the development of our students and their organizations. Together, we hope to build lasting, meaningful opportunities for students as they create their own experiences on campus and beyond. Should you have any questions or need our assistance, please contact our office at 850-770-2170, 850-770-2190, or stop by our offices in Barron 210 and 309 as we are happy to work with you.

Role of an Advisor

An Advisor of a Recognized Student Organization (RSO) is a faculty or staff member employed full-time by FSU Panama City that commits to being an educational resource and consultant for the organization, its officers, and its members. Advisors are caring individuals with a genuine interest for students, the organization, their purpose, and their programs and activities. Advisors should be knowledgeable about the University, the policies and procedures related to the organization, and organizational and leadership development. Additionally, an Advisor should be an individual that the organization feels comfortable and confident with working on a regular basis.

A RSO Advisor serves as a mentor for the organization and as a liaison between the University and the organization. As such, the Advisor needs to be familiar with the Florida State University Student Code of Conduct, the Florida State University Student Organization Conduct Code, the Recognized Student Organization Handbook, and other institutional guidelines that establish expectations for student behavior and activities. The Advisor should be aware of all organization activities and finances and should be able to answer any questions or concerns that may arise.

Advisors do not have voting rights within the organization. Rather, the Advisor's role is to support officers and members through decision-making processes and counsel the organization on University, local, state, and federal policies that may impact the organization.

Selection

Recognized Student Organizations are responsible for identifying and reaching out to a faculty or staff member that they feel is best suited to advise their organization. Each RSO has a variety of different reasons for reaching out to a potential Advisor including previous experience with the organization (locally or nationally), academic work related to the organization's purpose, or a previously established sense of trust. Even if you know nothing about the organization, this can be a great opportunity to expand your own knowledge as well as learn from your students as much as they learn from you.

Becoming a RSO Advisor is mutual agreement between you and the organization. It is a voluntary commitment to spend additional time and effort outside of your normal role with the University. This can be a truly beneficial experience both personally and professionally as you connect with students in a new way, engaging in the campus community together.

Requirements

Florida State University Panama City requires Advisors to:

- Serve as a mentor for the organization
- Serve as a liaison between the University and the organization
- Be familiar with the Florida State University Student Code of Conduct and Student Organization Conduct Code
- Be familiar with the FSU Panama City Recognized Student Organization Handbook
- Be familiar with University guidelines, policies, and procedures that may impact the organization
- Attend officer meetings, member meetings, and organization events when possible
- Attend RSO trainings offered by the Office of Student Affairs and the Student Government Council when possible
- Report any violation of the Student Code of Conduct or the Student Organization Conduct Code to the Office of Student Affairs (850-770-2171)
- Review and approve RSO paperwork including the Advisor Agreement form and Organization Signature form.
- Complete a hazing prevention training each year

Responsibilities

Advisors should keep the following sets of responsibilities in mind while working with Recognized Student Organizations. (Adapted from The University of South Florida and Virginia Commonwealth University.)

Responsibility to the Members.

- The Advisor should help the students find balance between their academics and their co-curricular activities. Student leaders often have the tendency to burn the candle at both ends and may overextend themselves. The Advisor has a unique opportunity to remind students of their academic obligations and personal needs.
- The Advisor should encourage each individual to participate in and plan group events. Some students fade into the background if not effectively encouraged. Being a member of a student organization can provide students with valuable interpersonal and leadership skills, but these will not develop if the student is not involved.
- The Advisor should encourage students to accept responsibility for specific roles within the organization. The Advisor should help them realize the importance of these roles. From officer positions to committee members, each student should feel invested in and accountable for their specific role.

Responsibility to the Organization.

- The Advisor should assist the organization in developing realistic goals, strategic planning, and training for the academic year. This will contribute to the education and personal

development of the students involved. The Advisor must take an active role, rendering advice and counsel as circumstances dictate.

- The Advisor should be aware of all plans and activities of the group and inform the group of institutional policies that may affect these plans. The Advisor should see that the group and its officers know where policies are listed, what the policies are, why they exist, and the channels to be followed for changes, revisions, or exceptions to policies. Advisors should also participate in the planning and review of activities.
- The Advisor should be available to the organization officers and members and regularly meet with the organization. Being visible is one key aspect of being an Advisor. When members feel like they can talk to their Advisor about issues within the organization or other things that are bothering them, an organization will be better off.
- The Advisor should discourage dominance of the group by any one individual and should encourage less involved students to take initiative. Eager leaders often provide strong leadership more often than necessary. This can lead to resentment by some or pressure others into silencing themselves. The Advisor can help provide a balance by pointing out such concerns in a one-on-one setting with the students or the organization leadership.
- The Advisor may need to refer students to counseling. Invariably, during interaction with the group's members, the Advisor will encounter students with personal problems. The counseling role might require individual consultation on a personal level or referral to the University's Counseling Services (850-770-2174).
- The Advisor should provide continuity within the group and should be familiar with the group's history and constitution. Membership turnover in student organizations is high and often the only link with the immediate past is the Advisor. The Advisor can steer members clear of mistakes and help them avoid the proverbial reinventing of the wheel. Serving as the organization's memory and continuity link, the Advisor can help new officers build on history and develop long term plans for the future of the organization.
- The Advisor should offer ideas for projects and events. The Advisor will perform their greatest service by providing opportunities for the students to exercise initiative and judgment and to enjoy a proper measure of autonomy in self-directed social, educational, recreational, cultural, and spiritual activities. The Advisor should not dominate the program planning process; however, Advisors should ensure that the organization understands a program's complexity and has discussed the necessary steps that need to take place in order for the program to be successful. The Advisor should remember that it is the task of the active members to operate the organization. Removing this responsibility from the members would deprive them of an important educational experience.
- The Advisor should assist the organization in evaluation. This includes evaluating individual programs as well as doing a complete evaluation at the end of the academic year. The Advisor must be willing to give constructive criticism when necessary and offer words of praise for work well done.

Responsibility to the Institution

- The Advisor should attend any sponsored training activities and stay current on University policies and protocols. Although some Advisors have been an Advisor before, it is important that Advisors attend any training sessions created for them, to stay up-to-date on the latest University policies and Recognized Student Organization resources. Information will be communicated to Advisors regularly, but Advisors should ask the Office of Student Affairs about anything that they are unsure of or would like more information about.
- The Advisor should work with the group, but not direct its activities. Although the Advisor's role is not regulatory or disciplinary, the Advisor has a responsibility to both the institution and the organization to keep their best interests in mind. At times, the Advisor may need to remind the organization of institutional policies so that violations do not occur. The Advisor

may also work with the organization's officers to establish and maintain internal group standards and regulations for conduct.

- Occasionally, an Advisor can help an organization during an emergency. Although this type of intervention is rarely necessary, the Advisor's good judgement can be the saving grace in the event of mishaps, internal conflict, or personal crisis. Assisting the group's president as a spokesperson or serving as the main contact for the University can help in these cases.

Advisor Expectations

Given the myriad of purposes, activities, and objectives of various Recognized Student Organizations, the role of the Advisor will vary in some degree between organizations. As organizations vary in their expectations and needs, it is important that as an Advisor, you develop a clear understanding with the organization as to the nature of your involvement. The Advisor and officers should agree on a set of expectations of one another from the onset each year.

Some initial questions you may want to ask the organization include, but are not limited to:

- How much involvement is expected or needed?
- How often does the organization meet?
- How many major activities or events does the organization plan each year? What and when are they?
- How experienced are the officers?
- How do your skills match the needs of the organization?
- What are some of the problem areas that the organization specifically needs advisory assistance in dealing with? Ask for past examples.
- What are some of the ways the Advisor can be more helpful to the organization?
- Will the advisor be a silent observer at meetings or an active participant? What level of participation is desired or needed?
- Should you interrupt during meetings if you think the organization is getting off track? How? When?
- If things get unruly, should you interrupt or remain silent?
- Is the Advisor expected to give feedback? How? When?
- Are there areas of the organization that are "hands off" to the Advisor?
- Does the national organization (if applicable) require an affiliated Advisor? If so, what is their role?

Tips for Advising

Every Recognized Student Organization will differ and may require a different approach by the Advisor. The following information was adapted from Lenoir-Rhyne College's Advisor Handbook and can serve as a starting point.

- In the beginning of an advising relationship, agree on clear expectations about the role of the Advisor and the role of the organization.
- Read the constitution of the organization, get to know the members, attend organization events and activities, and generally make yourself available so that the students know who you are.
- Assist in the establishment of responsibilities for each officer and member.
- Develop a strong relationship with the organization's officers. This is key because these students will be your main contact with the group.

- Remember: praise in public, criticize in private. Discuss concerns in a one-on-one setting. When someone does something extremely well, let them and others know.
- Maintain a sense of humor – it is college, not rocket science (or maybe it is that too).
- Be honest and open with all communication. The students need to feel that you are just in your dealings with them.
- Realize that you have the power of persuasion, but use this judiciously. The students sometimes need to learn how to fail.
- Help the organization see alternatives and provide an outside perspective.
- Find a balance between being the strict naysayer and the laissez-faire friend. The organization must feel that you are supportive of them and you will also hold them accountable.

Principles and Practices of an Effective Advisor

- Develop leaders by challenging the students to strive for excellence
- Encourage and assist the organization in setting and reaching goals
- Promote diversity within the organization and campus involvement
- Establish a consistent working relationship with officers and members
- Coach officers in principles of good organizational and administrative skills
- Provide continuity to the organization's policies, programs, and traditions
- Advise organization officers on finances and review financial statements monthly
- Facilitate officer transition and orientation of new members

Liability and Risk Management

By agreeing to be the Advisor of a Recognized Student Organization, you have taken on additional responsibility. Now, you may ask, "What is my liability as an Advisor?" Because there are so many varieties of student organizations, the answer to this question may vary depending on the type of organization and what activities are involved. In general, it is important for you to keep in mind that as an Advisor, you are the University's representative regarding the organization and its activities. As such, you are expected to give reasonable and sound advice to the organization about programs, events, procedures, etc.

Liability is defined as the state of being legally bound to do, pay, or make good which results from actions taken by an Advisor relevant to the business or activities of a student organization and its members in their pursuit of organizational programs. FSU Panama City Advisors to organizations will generally be protected by the state risk management program from liability claims if it can be established that they were acting within the scope of their authority and they were not intentionally negligent or in violation of the injured party's civil rights. It is important that FSU Advisors' position descriptions or statement of duties and responsibilities include reference to a duty to serve as an Advisor to a Recognized Student Organization.

You are encouraged to take prudent and careful actions as the Advisor to stay abreast of the organization. Some of these actions may include, but are not limited to:

- Attending regularly scheduled and special meetings
- Attending organization activities and events
- Meeting with organization officers to discuss goals, directions, policies, and programs
- Being available to the organization when they assistance
- Being familiar with institutional policies and applicable laws
- Being generally aware of the activities of the organization

- Warning participants in activities of the potential risks involved
- Being familiar with the constitutional and statutory rights of students
- Being reasonable, consistent, and using common sense in all aspects of your relationship with the organization

Be aware of the scope of your authority. The University grants RSO Advisors the authority to make certain decisions or take certain actions within their stated responsibilities as an Advisor. In some instances, the University may also reserve certain rights (for instance, signing contracts). If you remain within the designated responsibilities of this position, you will be able to avoid many unnecessary risks.

Some other tips in managing liability and risk reduction include:

- Complete a Pre-Event Planning Form to clarify the needs and expectations of participants.
- Identify specific risks involved in the event. These could include physical risks and/or liability risks (such as with alcohol, minors, or travel).
- Be willing to tell an organization that what it is doing, or planning to do, is wrong, inappropriate, illegal, or risky, and to offer alternative suggestions. For example, if a planned activity may constitute “hazing,” you have an obligation to take appropriate steps to ensure that the activity is not undertaken, including informing the Office of the Dean and Public Safety, if necessary.
- Ensure that the organization obtains release of liability/hold harmless agreements from members of the organization participating in activities, such as retreats, off-campus trips, etc.
- Provide proper instruction, preparation, or training for participants in an activity, including safety guidelines and regulations.
- Report potentially unsafe facility, grounds, equipment, or vehicle conditions to institutional officers and assist the organization in any decision not to conduct the planned activity in light of those conditions. This includes having a rain site reserved for outside events and helping the organization make decisions regarding the safety of an event.
- Give special attention to events which involve the consumption of alcoholic beverages.
- Educate organization officers of the legal implications of the various risks and liabilities of planned activities and events (for example, alcohol, presence of underage participants, physical dangers, etc.).
- If several members of the organization need to travel a long distance for an activity or event, consider contracting buses to transport attendees in order to reduce risk. This is especially a good idea if there will be alcohol served at the activity or event.
- To reduce organizational and personal liability, as a requirement for participation in an organization's activities or events, the officers should have members sign a release/waiver of liability form. Consider having all members complete release/waiver forms at the beginning of each year or when they initially join the organization.

Officer Transitions

One of the most important functions of an Advisor is to assist in the transition from one set of organization officers to the next. The Advisor is often the one who has seen changes, knows what works, and can help maintain continuity through the officer transition each year. Investing time in good officer transition early on will mean less time spent throughout the year training new officers.

The key to a successful transition is making sure new officers know their jobs before they take office. Expectations should be clearly defined. There are a number of ways to conduct officer transitions. The following examples demonstrate two commonly used methods.

Team Effort Method

The Team Effort method involves the Advisor, outgoing officers, and incoming officers. This method involves a retreat or series of meetings where outgoing officers work with incoming officers on:

- Past records and/or manuals for their office and updates for the new year
- Completed projects from the past year
- Upcoming and/or incomplete projects
- Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats identified throughout the past year
- Position specific responsibilities and guides for success
- Additional information the new officers need to know to have a successful year

The Advisor's role in this method may be to:

- Facilitate discussion and be a sounding board for ideas
- Organize and provide structure for the retreat or meetings
- Offer suggestions on various concerns
- Refrain from telling new officers what they should do
- Fill in the "blanks" if an outgoing officer does not know how something was done or does not have records to pass on to the new officer
- Provide historical background when needed
- Keep goals specific, attainable, and measurable
- Provide advice on policies and procedures

One-on-One Method

While it is ideal to have the outgoing officers assist in the training of the incoming officers, sometimes it is up to the Advisor to educate the incoming officers. Ideally, outgoing officers have submitted to the Advisor all resources and materials, including an officer manual, prior to or during their last meeting with the organization. Things to include in an officer manual may be:

- A copy of the organization's constitution and by-laws
- Copies of previous meeting agendas
- A summary of all duties
- Event reports regarding past event details and post-event reflections (what went well, what did not, suggestions for the future)
- Any forms the officer may need to use
- Any contacts the officer may need to use
- Logins and passwords for organization websites, social media platforms, accounts, etc. as applicable to the position
- Historical records of organization accomplishments

The One-on-One Method often starts with a joint meeting of the incoming officers to discuss the transition process and each of the officers' position descriptions. Then, the Advisor should meet with each incoming officer individually to review more specific responsibilities and all documentation left by the outgoing officer, including the officer manual. Expectations, goals, and concerns can also be addressed during this meeting. After all individual meetings are complete, the incoming officers and the Advisor should host another joint meeting to discuss the upcoming year as a new team.