

Association of Leadership Educators
2006 Annual Conference
Practice Presentation Proposal

1. Presenter Information:

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2. Title of Presentation:

A Missed Opportunity: Leadership Education through Student Group Advisement

3. Presentation Track:

Practice

4. Description:

As leadership educators we often have the opportunity to advise student organizations. This role is a unique opportunity to educate and develop future leaders outside the classroom, but often we are not quite sure how to approach it. This presentation will discuss the role of the advisor in student organizations with a focus on how the advisor can contribute to leadership development of group members and leaders.

5. Biographical Profile:

Carol McBryde is a current PhD student in Agricultural Education at Oklahoma State University. Currently she holds a graduate assistantship in the department with the Leadership Education Institute. Prior to coming back to school Carol worked for 10 years in student affairs advising student groups, teaching leadership, and supervising staff. She holds a M.S. in Higher Education and Student Affairs from Indiana University and B.S. in Agricultural Development from Texas A&M University.

6. Paper:

Attached

A Missed Opportunity: Leadership Education through Student Group Advisement
Carol A. McBryde
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Introduction

As leadership educators we often neglect one of our most powerful opportunities to nurture future leaders when we put advisement of student groups on the back burner. Most college students will learn as much (if not more) about leadership from their involvement in campus groups as they do in our classroom (Astin, 1993). As advisors we have a unique opportunity to facilitate this learning, yet often we see advising a student group as more of a formality. We may occasionally go to an organizational meeting or visit with the president, but mostly we see our primary job as advisor to sign university-required paperwork and be the name on record so the group can go about its business. This interactive presentation will attempt to challenge leadership educators to utilize advising opportunities as another way to help develop and educate future leaders. Specifically, participants will explore the role of student organizations in leadership development and the role of advisors in facilitating this development.

Presentation Outline

1. *Introductions*

Participants will have an opportunity to introduce themselves and briefly state their current advising roles and experience.

2. *Purpose of student organizations*

Each student organization has an individual purpose, but in general student organizations exist for three primary reasons: social interaction, academic connection, and leadership experience. Dunkel and Schuh (1998) provide a taxonomy of various types of student organizations: student government, Greek, residence hall, honors and recognition, military, sports, departmental, and special interest. All of these types of organizations provide social interaction and a connection to the university, but perhaps most importantly they all provide leadership experience. Students use involvement at the college level to practice the leadership skills that they will use the rest of their life. Astin (1993) tells us “students learn by becoming involved. The focus is on what the student does and the motivation, time and energy devoted to learning.” As advisors we have a unique opportunity to facilitate this leadership development in our interactions with students and the organization as a whole. How can we capitalize on this experience?

3. *What is the role of the advisor?*

After the discussion of the purpose of student organizations, participants will have an opportunity to brainstorm the role of the advisor in the student organization. The presenter will share a list of advisor roles adapted from Dunkel and Schuh (1998) and relate them back to the brainstormed list. Each role will then be discussed in greater detail with an emphasis on how this role contributes directly to leadership development.

- **Educator/Trainer:** This is the most critical role of the advisor. Seeing the role from an education perspective helps the advisor keep in mind that their purpose with the group is to help facilitate a learning experience. As an advisor my most utilized technique in this role is what we would call Socratic questioning in the classroom. Students who I advise

quickly learn that I will seldom give them advise or tell them exactly what to do, but I will ask questions like “what do you think you should do?” or “why do you think that would be an appropriate course of action?” This style of advising is much more difficult than the supervisory perspective taken by many advisors. Giving up the supervisory role means giving up control.

- **Resource Person:** The advisor should keep themselves abreast of resources on and off campus. This does not mean the advisor should begin by telling students exactly where to find things, but when asked the advisor should be able to provide some direction to students.
- **Source of Continuity:** Student organizations by nature are transitory – student leaders come and go quickly as they graduate or take on different leadership roles. The advisor is likely to stay with the organization longer than most students, and can provide a historical perspective. This perspective from the past gives students the opportunity to learn from others mistakes and move the organization forward. The advisor should keep in mind, however, that sometimes students will make the same mistakes their predecessors made, and their predecessors before them. It is useful when this happens to keep in mind the purpose of student organizations as a learning opportunity, and while the particular learning opportunity is familiar to the advisor it is all new to the student.
- **Fiscal Agent:** On many campuses the advisor is primarily responsible for the money. In this role the advisor should promote student accountability and record-keeping, but also guard against major mistakes which are again the law, against university policy, or will cause undue financial stress on the organization beyond the current student leadership team.
- **Confidant/Counselor:** As an advisor to a student organization you will likely have students come to you with all sorts of problems and concerns unrelated to the organization. No two advisors fill this role in exactly the same way. It is important for you to determine early how much of this confidant role you are willing to take on and set appropriate boundaries. Anytime you are not comfortable in the counseling role you should refer the student to someone who is, usually someone at the university counseling center.
- **Conflict Mediator/Group Dynamics Expert:** When there is conflict in the group the advisor will typically be the first one asked to intervene. As a leadership educator your knowledge of group dynamics will be particularly useful here. Use conflicts as an opportunity to help the individuals in the organization learn about group dynamics. Your best role will often be to work with the leadership of the organization to help them figure out how to resolve the conflict rather than intervening yourself.

4. *Advising Framework*

This list of roles gives us a lot of ideas about what an advisor should and should not do, but making the day-to-day decisions about exactly what your group needs. The most helpful framework for me has been situational leadership (Blanchard, Carew, & Parisi-Carew, 1990). Let’s take a look at the four components of situational leadership and how they apply to the advising role.

- **Directing:** As an advisor you do not want to spend too much time in this style. However, early in the year or when you have a brand-new leadership team you may find this role particularly relevant. I recommend, though, that you be directive in helping the group

figure out where to focus its energy and not in telling them exactly what to do. For instance, you might tell the president she should facilitate goal setting with the group, and give her some ideas how to do this, but not tell her what the goals of the group should be.

- **Coaching:** As the group and its leadership figure some things out you need to be more supportive while still a little directive. This is often particularly useful in the storming stage of group development, when members are frustrated with each other and still not exactly sure what they should be doing.
- **Supporting:** As the leaders become more comfortable you will back off even more. This stage is often where the leader knows what he or she is doing but doesn't quite realize it yet. At this stage it is important to make sure you are not giving direction but are still being supportive.
- **Delegating:** Finally, when the leader is feeling comfortable with their role and the group is performing, you can sit back and watch more. Do not miss this opportunity, however. Often some of the greatest learning about leadership can take place when a student is feeling more comfortable in the role and ready to try out some new strategies.

An analogy I like to use when describing the advisor role in an organization is that of a parent teaching a child to ride a bicycle. In the beginning you put the training wheels on and hold on tight, running along beside the bike. The child is still pedaling and doing some work, but the parent is working twice as hard helping the bike stay vertical. As the child learns the parent will coach the child on how to hold the bike up themselves, and eventually start releasing their grip on the bike more and more. In the supporting stage the parent is still running alongside the bike or just behind it cheering the child on, but is no longer holding onto the bike. In the final stage the parent relaxes a bit and can stand on the side of the street and watch as the child confidently rides the bike alone.

5. *Wrap-Up*

I will conclude the presentation by asking the participants to think for a minute about what they have learned about advising today and specifically what they will do differently when they return home. Individuals who wish to will have the opportunity to share this with the group.

References

- Astin, A. W. (1993). *What matters in college? Four critical years revisited*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Blanchard, K., Carew, D., & Parisi-Carew, E. (1990). *The one minute manager builds high performing teams*. New York: William Morrow.
- Dunkel, N. W., Schuh, J. H. (1998). *Advising student groups and organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.