Today's article by Jason Enser introduces a new direction for The APCA Student Activities Journal. Moving forward, the APCA will be presenting its readers with weekly articles of interest opposed to a multi-page quarterly online publication. It's our hope that you will benefit from these learning opportunities. You will also have the ability to directly click on the articles to interact with the author via email or be forwarded to additional resources. I invite you to submit articles for consideration at www.apca.com. Please email elambert@apca.com with any feedback and/or topics that you would like to read in future articles.
Happy Learning!
Eric Lambert,
Executive Director, APCA

ADVISING STUDENT PROGRAMMING BOARDS

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Jason Enser has been working in higher education for over ten years. He is currently the Associate Dean of Students for Student Organizations and Student Union Operations at Clarkson University and most recently served as Director of Student Activities at Hilbert College. He received a Master's of Science in Student Personnel Administration from Buffalo State College and a Bachelor of Science with a double major in Communication and Political Science from SUNY Fredonia. Throughout his career Jason has worked at a variety of institutions including a small public two year college, a large public institution, and a small private institution. In all of his positions he has been involved in advising multiple student organizations, specifically student programming boards. He is happily married to his wife Pamela (who also works in higher education). Together they have a 2 and a half year old daughter, Clarissa.

Student programming boards can often be the catalyst of extracurricular and co-curricular life on college campuses across the country. These organizations are typically advised by Student Activities staff ranging from entry level professionals to upper level management. According to Dunkel and Schuh (1998, p. xiii) "Students benefit tremendously from participating in campus organizations; advisers can play a key role in advancing student organizations; and advisers, far too often, are not well equipped for their role." So what does it take to be a good advisor to a campus programming board? Unfortunately, there is not one good answer to that question. Each institution is unique and may require a different advising style for activities professionals to be effective. The purpose of this article is to provide tips for staff to enhance their role as advisors and to appropriately adjust their style given the environment they work in and the structure of the groups they advise.

When starting a position at a new institution, it is advisable to read and review the mission, goals, objectives, constitution and bylaws of both the institution and the programming board. Hopefully, there are similarities in what the institution values and what the students want to see for activities on campus. However, these paradigms may very well be in conflict. Research has shown that it is critical for all members of an institution to share common goals and values (Kuh, Schuh, and Whitt, 1991) which can be accomplished through campus wide programs.

The job of an employee of the college is to value both the organizational goals and the student desires, and find a way to make the two compatible.

Staff affairs practitioners often advise more than one organization. Recognizing the difference in student organizations and understanding that they will contribute differently to the college is imperative.

Once a basic understanding of the programming board, other organizations, and the institution is established it is time to develop an advising style. Three different styles one may choose to adapt when working with student organizations include a Hands-On, a Hands- Off, or a Hybrid Approach. Each style encompasses a flexible range of advisement approaches allowing a student affairs professional to appropriately adjust his/her advising style depending on a variety of situations. It is important to understand that one's adaptive style needs to be based on many factors, but the most important is the personalities of the students one is advising.

One one end of the spectrum there is the Hands-On advisor. This is a person who attends every meeting and event, is seen as the supervisor of the group, and wants to be in charge of all activities. Although this advising style may seem extreme, there are times when this style is critical to use. For example, when advising first generation college students, community college students, or other students who do not have much experience planning and running events, it is often prudent for an advisor to be more of a supervisor than a mentor. Whether justified or not, the success or failure of a programming board can often be viewed by college administrators as the responsibility of student activities personnel. However, staff members need to balance allowing students to develop as leaders in groups, while ensuring that there is some programming success the community can value.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is the Hands-Off advisor. This is a person who rarely attends meetings and events, does not know much of what is happening with a group and may be seen as an individual who is only needed to sign forms for an organization. Again, this advising style is an extreme but there are times when having a more hands-off approach will be necessary. Staff members who work at colleges and university with an active student body and well established programming boards may find more success if they adopt a hands-off advising style. Student leaders in well-established organizations can become accustomed to autonomy and thrive on the ability to run their organization with limited supervision from their advisor. A good advisor needs to know when to take a hands-off approach and lets students learn from both successes and failures. This is especially true when a staff member takes over advising an already established programming board. Sometimes, one will find more success if one takes an initial hands-off approach while getting to know both the organization and the student leaders before offering suggestions to the group.

The Hands-On and Hands-Off advising styles can be seen at two ends of an advising style spectrum. In the middle of that spectrum one would find the Hybrid approach. The Hybrid model combines Hands-On and Hands-Off advising techniques depending on the structure of an organization, the students involved in the group and specific circumstances that may arise in the course of advising an organization. Although established groups, with strong student leaders, usually need a more hands-off approach to grow and be successful, there are times advisors need to be hands-on to ensure a group perceives an advisor as a valuable resource with helpful suggestions. On the opposite end, even though less structured groups with novice leaders typically need a more hands on approach, there are times when an insightful advisor needs to step back and give students a chance to learn from their accomplishments and their disappointments.

No matter what advising style a student advisor chooses, he or she must remember to "be present". This does not mean attending every event, or meeting. What this means is students need to see their advisor at key activities or know that person is there for support even if he/she cannot attend a program.

"Part of the difference between working with staff and working with student organization leaders is the dedication of our limited available time and energy to our student organizations"
(Phyllis McCluskey-Titus, 2004).

Dedicated advisors need to work with students to ensure their group meetings and executive board meetings are scheduled at times the advisor can regularly attend. When scheduling conflicts occur, advisors should offer to be available, if possible, via phone, skype or email. Whenever possible, prudent advisors allow students to run meetings while adopting the role of a sounding board only when necessary. Often being in the back of the room to answer questions is better than voicing one's opinion. Once an advisor has been established as a respected counselor, his or her input will be sought and respected.

When advising programming boards, it is critical to understand the role and responsibilities of the group vs. the duties of the advisor. "Student groups and organizations will continually challenge you to assume and work with various roles depending on you or your situation" (Dunkel and Schuh, 1998, p. 42). Although the basic concept of providing extracurricular and or co-curricular programs is typically something these groups do, how this is accomplished can vary from group to group. Some program boards will plan events from start to finish including: determining the program, working with the agent, negotiating a contract, reserving the space, advertising the event, selling tickets, buying prizes and refreshments, setting up the event, supervising the program, running the sound and lights, handling security, cleaning up after the event, etc. At other institutions, some or all of these tasks may be the responsibility of an advisor. An advisor needs to clarify beforehand which tasks students are accountable for in contrast to what the advisor's obligations are pertaining to each event or program.

No matter the level of responsibility placed on the programming board, there are a few key factors that will help build a strong group on campus (Dunkel and Schuh, 1998). The first is a thorough knowledge of what is happening on campus. For a program board to be successful, it needs to know all events scheduled on campus. This should include activities and events planned by student organizations, academic areas and professional departments in order to avoid conflicts and foster support.

The second key to programming board success is access to, and respect from, faculty, staff and administrators. The programming board should have the opportunity to work with college officials aside from those in the student activities office. Intentional student development is less effective when only supported by student affairs professionals. As well as respect from administrators, programming boards need respect and support from the student body to be successful. Programming board members find it frustrating when they spend hours planning an event, then witness a handful of students attend the activity only to hear mass criticism of that program from those who did not attend.

The final component to programming board success is recruiting a strong membership and being open to student voice. Planning regular events all year long takes a lot of work. Encouraging a diverse, cross section of students to join the group will help ensure that the minds and hands necessary to plan and run the events will be available. The students on the programming board must realize they represent the student body. They need to give their constituents the opportunity to voice their opinions on the programs that take place on campus and use that information to craft the events they plan.

Similar to a group's accomplishments, there are multiple factors that contribute to an advisor's success.

A strong advisor can:
• Bridge the transition from year to year
• Explain regulations and procedures to ensure an organization is following them
• Form positive relationships with all constituents
• Fairly mediate disputes
• Provide the history of an organization
• Adapt their personality and advising style to thrive in different circumstances

A strong advisor is:
• A knowledgeable resource
• Respected at the institution
• A positive role model

The best advisors are those who can change their game plan in the middle of a meeting or event. When planning and running events, both the students, and the advisor need to be prepared for unexpected situations. The stronger an advisor's adaptive capabilities are the better he or she will be at handling the unforeseen things that happen at student programs.

As a result of longevity, a seasoned advisor will have a lot of organizational and institutional knowledge that they can provide student leaders. This knowledge will assist in bridging the transition from year to year as student leaders move into officer positions and new students come on board. The maximum amount of time students belong to an organization may be four to five years, but more typically (especially at two year institutions) student leaders are only part of a group for a year or two. A student activities counselor, however, will see many successes and failures through the years of his/her employment. This accumulated knowledge gives an experienced advisor invaluable insight as he/she continues to professionally advise future student leaders.

Programming board advisors are often seen by administrators as the university official who represents a group, even though it really is the students who should be given credit for an organization. Consequently, if the advisor is not a well-respected member of the campus community the programming board may also suffer. Because of this distorted perception, it is critical for advisors to network and develop relationships across the university.

A strong programming board is one with a diverse make up of student members and leaders. Some of the benefits of holding a leadership role in a college include: growth in civic responsibility, leadership skills, multicultural awareness, understanding of leadership theories, and personal and societal values (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster and Burkhardt, 2001).

Programming board advisors will work with many students from different backgrounds who have dynamic personalities. The ability to form positive relationships with all constituents is a critical skill advisors need to possess. Appreciating students, being supportive and sensitive to their needs both academically and socially as well as finding common grounds for forging relationships with students is all part of this skill (Boatman, 1988).

Just like the programming board, an advisor also needs to be aware of all events happening on campus through student organizations, as well as academic and professional departments in order to avoid conflicts and support other events. The advisor should also have higher level institutional knowledge of what strategic and master plans the university is undertaking in order to ensure that the programming board's goals align with institution initiatives.

Golden and Swartz (1994) believe that in order to create a positive and successful campus environment for students, student affairs practitioners must build an ethical and effective relationship with their leaders. Boatman (1998) describes being a positive role model as demonstrating creative problem solving, providing a positive approach, showing a balanced life and exhibiting an appreciation of diversity. An old adage summarizes this philosophy very concisely, "Don't expect others to do something you are not willing to do yourself."

The ability to fairly mediate disputes is one that can becoming challenging as an advisor develops personal relationships with the students in a group. Disagreements will most certainly happen within every group one advises. Conflict is a natural part of student development and can be positive and healthy if handled accordingly. Conflict can inspire new ideas; clarify unresolved issues, increase student work ethic, and lead to better results because of increased understanding of differing views. (Franck, 1983) Conflict can strengthen both the individual and the group.

For an advisor, it is important to let disagreements take their natural course while being able to become an impartial mediator if things start to get out of hand. Even though an advisor may spend more time with certain members of the group, like the President, all group members should be treated equally when disputes are mediated. The advisor needs to help group members to realize that differences of opinions are inevitable. When students disagree, an advisor should foster the concept that an individual is entitled to his/her opinion and others must respect his/her right to hold that opinion even if they disagree. Conflicting opinions are a natural phenomenon of life; if students can learn how to deal with conflict in a healthy manner now, it will help them be very successful in their professional careers.

Research by Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) and Astin (1993) has shown that extracurricular involvement has many positive effects on students including increased retention and persistence rates as well as enabling greater academic success. For this reason alone, it is critical that student program board advisors provide the best guidance possible so groups are both enjoyable for the student members and productive for the experiences they present to the campus. Hopefully, this article has provided student activities personnel with some concrete suggestions on how to enhance their roles as advisors by adjusting their counseling styles given the environment they work in and the structure of the groups they are advising. If one is interested in reading for more in-depth information on club advisement, Advising Student Groups and Organizations by Norbert W. Dunkel and John H. Schuh is a great resource.

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