

Recipe for a Great SG

Student Leader's 'top 10' list of ingredients

By Vincent Alex Brown, executive editor

Having looked at Student Governments for 20 years and visited many schools nationwide, we at *Student Leader* know a good SG when we see one. We know, too, what most SGs lack and how to remedy that.

Today, SGs are stronger than ever, and each year, administrations from one corner of the nation to the other, from the public university level to community college level, seem to be improving.

However, we're always looking for a group that excels in every area. When even the top groups falter, showing a glaring weakness, we as observers wonder how they could have missed it and why.

Based on our observations and debate on our e-mail discussion group, here's our "top 10" list of areas a top SG should excel in:

1. Serve the students first.

Remember that as an SG leader, you're a public servant and that students are your constituency. It's all about them and not about you.

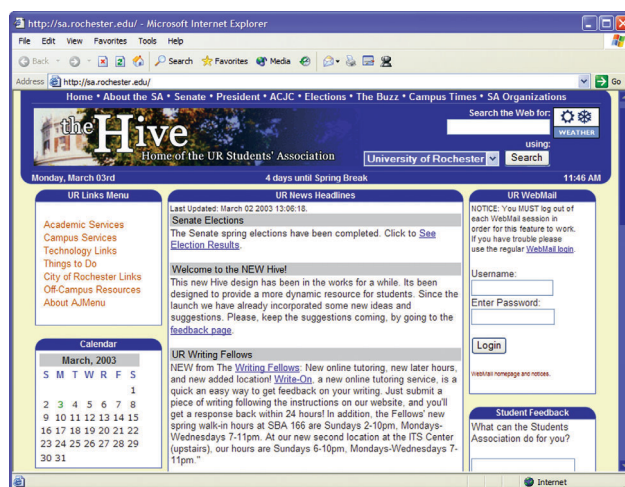
2. Improve if you can, but always excel.

While you don't have to feel pressured to always excel beyond last year's group, the goal should be to excel to your, and your administration's, utmost ability.

3. Communicate services and accomplishments.

Tell students about the services you're providing, the events you've planned for them, and how SG serves them and makes itself available. There's no excuse for not having a good web site. At all levels, most

SG sites in the state are atrocious or nonexistent. Use the 2002 *Student Leader* "America's Best Student Web Sites" winner in the SG category as a model: "The Hive," site of the Students' Association at the University of Rochester in New York (<http://sa.rochester.edu>).



Model SG Web Site: Home of the Students' Association at the University of Rochester in New York, "The Hive" is a top student portal worth emulating.

4. Guarantee fiscal responsibility.

Put budget safeguards in place, establish an approval system, and define a requisition policy. Make sure you have a clearly written set of documents that spell out how money is spent, approved, and distributed.

5. Work with other schools and statewide lobby groups.

There's strength in numbers and encouragement in teams through statewide groups such as FSA (Florida Student Association, www.fsa1.org) or MSUSA (Minnesota State University Student Association, www.msusa.net).

6. Implement on-line voting.

Some SGs say they're not planning to implement on-line voting or are in the midst of considering it or are working out the technical difficulties. Meanwhile, other SGs say they've been doing it for years, boosting voter turnout as a result.

7. Establish transition plans and processes.

Most SGs across the state are finally embracing this. Having a transition manual and new-leader retreat should be mandatory given the turnover nature of the college population.

8. Strengthen student body relationship.

Does your constituency truly see you as advocates for them? Are you approachable? Do they know you care? Conduct an honest survey that evaluates student perceptions, needs, and wants.

9. Strengthen relationship with administration.

Do school administrators respect you as leaders and as advocates for students? Do they take you seriously? During our judging, a lack of response from administrators is our first "red flag" that all is not right with an SG.

10. Strengthen relationship with campus media.

In spite of little things like the First Amendment, SGs still toy with school newspaper budgets when they don't like the coverage. Go ahead and mark this down in the transition manual: The campus press is off-limits. Once that's settled, you can work on developing a relationship built on mutual respect. And then you'll thank them for being a watchdog to help you build a better SG administration—the kind they'll want to write about!

For those SGs that don't do these things or wonder what makes a great one, the list provides a nice place to start. For those that are following it well, go ahead and tackle those areas where you're weak so that you excel in all areas, setting a "gold standard" of service to your constituency: students! **SL**

Resources for SG Success

SG Consultant: Providing a new service to readers, Publisher and Editor in Chief Butch Oxendine provides consulting to SGs and can serve as a leadership retreat facilitator. Check out the details at www.sgconsultant.com.

SG Elections Review: View *Student Leader's* extensive and exclusive research on on-line voting, from why and how it works to options available, vendor profiles, and case studies. Read the review at www.studentleader.com.

SG Effectiveness Test: Quantify how effective your SG is by using *Student Leader's* scored test at www.studentleader.com.

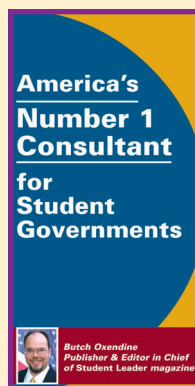
Admin Perception Test:

Quantify how the administration perceives your SG by using *Student Leader's* scored test at www.studentleader.com.

ASGA: Are you a top SG? Consider becoming a charter member of the American Student Government Association, *Student Leader's* "in the works" group devoted to providing the best of its resources and networking access to SG members nationwide. Complete the survey at www.asgaonline.com.

America's Best Student Web Sites:

Wonder what a top SG web site looks like? Check out the best of the web for SGs and



other organizations in *Student Leader's* annual contest at www.studentleader.com.

Exclusive Books: Discover the secrets of success for SG presidential election campaigns, find out how to get publicity on campus, and even get inspired. Order these and other *Student Leader* resources at www.studentleader.com.

Student Leader E-mail

List: Share your unique perspective as an SG leader and learn what others in the nation

are doing through *Student Leader's* e-mail discussion group. Get started at www.studentleader.com.