



Don't Even Go There

Avoid these mistakes SGs make

By Ken Kruger

Like clockwork every year, campaign signs are posted, debates are held, and promises are made. When it's all said and done, the election reveals the next year's Student Government officials. After nights of exhaustive campaigning, poster-making, and door-knocking, it's *finally* over.

It's time to get to work, but despite all of your great intentions, you can get tripped up if you're unaware of the common assumptions made by SGs. Needless requirements set potential death traps for your new team. If you can avoid these more than half-dozen mistakes that SGs commonly make, you'll be well on your way to a successful year.

Make the Grade

GPA requirements for SG involvement are not only unnecessary, but often counter-productive. If a student is allowed on campus in the first place, he should be mature enough to make decisions about the load he's capable of handling, and if he's not able to handle the load, that too should be his decision. If a member is doing a great job and all of a sudden he gets a 2.4, is the SG going to humiliate him and the organization by ousting that person? No way! Academics are important, but you don't have to go overboard by setting a GPA requirement.

Also, you're limiting more students from getting involved. In my experience, 10 percent of the people do 99 percent of the work. Don't put another burdensome requirement on those trying to make a difference on campus. Encourage academics, but don't beat students over the head with it.

Require Attendance

Leadership camps and conferences help leaders get off on the right foot in the beginning of the year. In fact, they're extremely useful for inexperienced leaders and experienced leaders to connect and set

goals together. But avoid making a carved-in-stone requirement to attend. Why? First of all, it could exclude people from being a part of SG (i.e., non-traditional students with jobs or kids, etc.). If you elect non-trad officers who can't go away for a week, are you going to penalize them? Some would say, "That's part of the decision in running for SG." But SGs should work to be inclusive and not elitist in their policies. Be flexible in by-laws when you write these requirements so that all students can benefit.

Lend a Hand

Community service is a hallmark of every great organization. Not enough can be said on what a positive impact this has on your members, students, administrators, and, most of all, those you're serving. But those 10 percent doing all of the work have a lot on their plate. Be careful again that you don't exclude members by overwhelming them with requirements. A likely scenario would be to require community service, and in an effort to complete the requirement, the SG member's GPA slips. Then, you remove the person for falling below the minimum GPA requirement. Don't punish a person for his good deeds.

Advise Me

SG advisors are a valuable resource. However, problems often arise when the advisor is part of the school's paid faculty. By its nature, SG won't always agree with the administration. On very controversial issues, the administration easily can look to that paid advisor and mandate that he fix the public-affairs nightmare or walk the plank.

An SG must be an autonomous organization. The administration has no role in commanding the SG to back down from what it believes is just. If a paid advisor can remain objective and simply advise without getting involved, there isn't a problem. But it's important that in situations where the

SG and the advisor or administration strongly disagree, there is a process to resolve the situation that ends with the president of the university or higher.

Read Your Dictionary

SGs shouldn't be viewed as a "student organization" even though it's an organization made up of students—SG's main role is as a governance organization. It has duties that include governing student organizations, but there should be caution if SG is ever simply considered a campus group. SG should comply with all the rules it establishes over other student groups. But it's important to understand that student organizations ultimately are not responsible to the student body—SG is. The university could ban any student organization from existence if it's warranted, but it cannot ban the right for students to be represented and ensure their tuition and fee monies are properly spent.

Play Nice With Others

Some by-laws restrict SG members from being involved with other organizations while chairing committees and sitting on the executive board. There are some good reasons for restrictions, but consider them very carefully when writing or enforcing by-laws. Obvious conflicts of interest occur when an SG executive board member is part of another student organization requesting money from the Student Activity Fee (SAF) controlled by SG. Develop a code of conduct for SG executive board members to simply abstain should a "conflict of interest" situation arise.

Grow Up Big and Strong

When making policy, keep in mind that what you do affects the SG many years after you leave, be it positive or negative. Build strong relationships with administrators but be sure they know you expect SG will have greater input in all decision-making at the university. Be sure that you never lose the perspective about including and empowering people on your campus. When SGs have that mindset, they will truly be the leaders on campus. **SL**

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