Enhancing the Role of Student Organization Advisers in Building a Positive Campus Community

By Debra Floerchinger

The importance of focusing attention on a positive campus community is indispensable. A variety of authors specifically have referred to the importance of faculty and staff interactions with students as a critical variable in building community. As a published topic, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1990) elaborated on six principles that its members defined as the kind of community every college and university student should strive to be.

The first principle reflected the goal that a college or university should be what's considered an "educationally purposeful community, a place where faculty and students share academic goals and work together to strengthen teaching and learning on the campus" (Page 7).
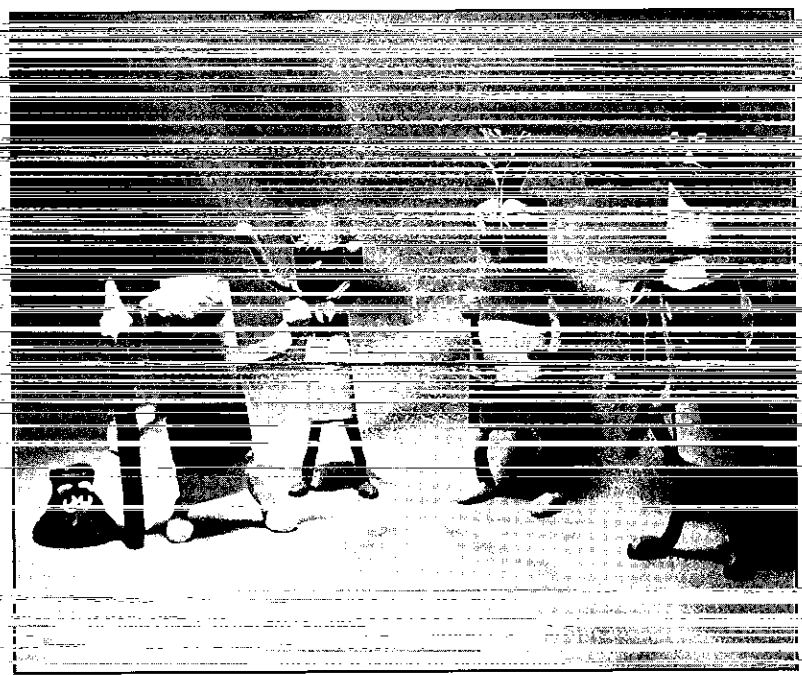
In their book, *Involving Colleges* (1991), Kuh, Schuh, Whitt and Associates spent a large portion ... the positive ... that ... faculty and staff interactions with students have on developing and maintaining a sense of community. Further, student involvement on campus ... has been stressed as relating positively to numerous variables such as satisfaction with college, retention, academic achievement and loyalty to an institution. Morrissey (1991) discussed the role of student activities in building community ... and argued that a comprehensive approach is ...

Student involvement and interaction with faculty members, both inside and outside of class, have been considered to be determining factors in a student's satisfaction, intellectual and personal development, and persistence in college (Astin and Panos, 1969; Astin, 1977; Chickering 1974; ... and Panos, 1969; Astin 1977; Chickering 1972; Endo and Harpel, 1982; and Pascarella and Terenzini, 1976; Astin 1984) in discussing his ... ... noted that "frequent interaction with faculty is more strongly related to satisfaction with college than any other type of involvement or indeed, any other student or institutional characteristic. Thus, finding ways to encourage greater student involvement with faculty (and vice versa) could be a highly ... tive activity on most college campuses" (Page 304).

One way to promote these interactions is

... "ity" ... in Colestock and Garside's 1992 article. Carpenter et al., (1990) elaborated on ... ... in student affairs areas such as advising. Barriers to ... communication and partnerships between academic and student affairs were examined by Zeller, Hinni and ... (1989) and strategies for overcoming these barriers were outlined. The *ACU-I Bulletin* (March 1991) listed "33 Ways to Tell Your Story" in an article that provided suggestions for communicating how the union or activities program contributes to a sense of community, including numerous faculty-student activities coalitions.

The third important way to involve faculty and staff is by linking them with student organizations as advisers. This is often not an easy task but by examining the issues involved and positively structuring these connections, one can ... ... results. This paper will focus on the topic of building organization advisers in building and expanding the developmental focus of community on the college campus.

Adviser Recruitment Problems

On many college campuses, all student organizations are required to have a professional faculty ... ... to establish ... ... tion. Many advisers work with several groups ... ... faculty and staff members have never advised a student organization. The desire to

status;
- Family involvement including responsibility for children, elderly or disabled parents, and serious medical problems;
- Commuting distance that affects one's ability to commit to late meetings or activities;
- Dislike for, or fear of personal involvement with students or desire for particular students;
- Fear of financial or legal repercussions based on an organization's off-campus liabilities;
- Concern about lack of university support—that is, the rewards do not outweigh the costs of involvement in terms of money or time;
- ... (our quit community,) or professional organization commitments as well as personal hobbies;
- Disagreement or conflict with the goals or philosophy behind the organization;
- Previous experience with student organizations or groups that resulted in one or more of the above outcomes. Also, contact with other faculty or staff persons who relate bad or negative experiences with organizations will be bad publicity; and
- With minority-group professionals, another fear could be concern about advising a minority student group or vice versa. Individual prejudice does exist, and some persons may limit their involvement based on this factor. Other professionals may appear unapproachable. Because of this, student groups may not have asked them to advise.

Factors Influencing Adviser Retention

Another problem that may arise is with retaining group advisers. Some persons will be honest about their reasons to terminate the relationship, but others may find it easier not to confront the real issue. ... these factors may "turn off" an initially enthusiastic adviser:

1) Like all persons, advisers' interests and expectations change. The satisfaction gained from several years of advising one particular group may dissipate. The adviser may terminate the relationship based on ... concern for the relationship ... group and the desire to influence change.

2) As laws and policies change, advisers may feel the need to remove themselves from involvement. Many advisers on our campus have ended their involvement because of the amount of negative publicity on liability factors.

3) Many groups do not inform their advisers of their responsibilities. An easy way to

responsibility is to expect that advisers must be involved with an organization as actively as members. Some groups exert pressure on advisers to purchase group memorabilia, attend shows ... for members and actually be involved with money-making projects.

5) Groups may actually falsify information provided to advisers. This may include financial information, member recruitment or meeting activities and information concerning meeting times and dates. Groups sometimes forge their adviser's signature and may falsify information after they have acquired their adviser's signature.

6) Advisers' responsibilities to their families and professional involvement may change. Young, unmarried staff and faculty members are often hit hardest with requests for organization involvement. As responsibilities change, so does the adviser's ability to adequately respond to a group's needs.

> *"On many college campuses, all student organizations are required to have a professional faculty or staff adviser to establish university recognition."*

7) Advisers sometimes have personality conflicts with individual students that decreases their ability to function effectively with the entire group. Personalities may clash ... and because of this, attendance at meetings or other activities may be difficult or uncomfortable.

8) Organization traditions are hard to change. An adviser may have to work with a group for years to remove racist, sexist or otherwise stereotypical goals, behavior and activities. After years and numerous discussions, disagreement can't help but set in when no change occurs. The statements: "We've always done it" ... "I had to do this when I was pledging" are two ... that can utterly destroy an enthusiastic change agent. When an organization refuses to give up ...

interest is also a fairly frequent reason for adviser turnover. If an organization's members can't motivate member recruitment, this task should not be left up to the adviser, but it sometimes is.

Diversity and Student Organizations

Many current research studies also comment on the special needs of minority students on predominantly Caucasian campuses and the lack of minority role models on the professional staff. This can seriously alter their perceptions of the campus community and student organizations. Carpenter, Peterson, Kibler and Peterson (1990) described the increased expectations of minority ... (particularly black and Hispanic) faculty on research university campuses. These increased expectations create an almost impossible situation with limited time involvement as adviser role models for minority students.

The influence of mentors in improving the satisfaction of minority students during the college experience is documented by Braddock (1981); Pollard (1982); Fleming (1984); Nettles, Thoeny and Gosman (1986); Hughes (1987); and Mallinckrodt (1988). Sedlacek (1987) related the concern black students expressed concerning the lack of black faculty and staff as role models on many predominantly white campuses. A lack of variety of viewpoints or cultural perspectives relevant to black students can result in a range of feelings of loneliness and isolation as a lack of learning, development and identification with an institution.

Some authors have focused on the importance of multicultural programming and other interventions in developing an inclusive community to assist in retaining minority students and maximizing their collegiate experiences. Excellent examples of these articles include Quevado-Garcia (1987); Green (1989); Manning (1989); Leppo (1987); Manning (1988); Rasch (1988); and Johnson (1989).

Another concern is whether we can be effective working as an adviser with students who do not identify with us racially. Are interracial ... as effective as utilizing advisers from the same racial background as group members? Research in this area is also limited. Steele (1989) noted that universities should emphasize commonality as a higher value than "diversity and pluralism." These latter words are ... for the politics of difference. Kuh and MacKay (1989) supported interactive pluralism beyond

student affairs staff. The faculty and staff must recognize environmental factors that inhibit development and revamp the environment to better support their development. Practitioners should be careful in interpreting that all black students are alike. Faculty and staff members, whether black or white, can become effective if they possess good human relations skills and use them to understand students' needs. There must be a delicate balance between adequate support and the scrupulous avoidance of patronizing.

[...] can be initiated through self-awareness and institutional support of faculty and staff training as well as that of advisers. Nairo (1990) stressed the importance of advisers in "redefining the norms" that exist on campus to discourage multicultural student organizations. Jackson (1984) provided self-evaluation instruments for educators by which they can identify behaviors they may display in and out of the classroom that are interpreted by students as prejudicial, hostile and discriminatory. In addition, his 1986 checklist was designed to assist advisers, counselors and teachers in evaluating their readiness to work with students of disadvantaged backgrounds.

There are several other positive things the university can do to facilitate positive multicultural experiences between advisers and organizations. Education is important, especially in relation to communication and cultural differences (Gilliam and Van Den Berg, 1980). The minority may also want to focus on minority faculty/staff recruitment and retention as emphasized first that advisers. Rusu (1989) recommended changes in developing an agenda for the '90s in regard to staff issues such as recruitment. By increasing the total number of personnel from diverse backgrounds, the odds of interaction from diverse backgrounds, the odds of in-person contact are better, as well as the facilitation of positive student/adviser contact. If the lack of positive minority role models hampers your efforts, do not hesitate to develop or expand your efforts, do not hesitate to develop or expand peer-counselor or mentoring programs in addition to structuring your organization adviser program as suggested by Lewis (1986) and Watson and Stich (1984). Students often rely on peers for support. The research of Rice and Brown (1990) indicated that prospective mentees preferred a peer mentor one to three years older than themselves more than they preferred other "adult" mentors.

Spaights, Dixon and Nickolai (1985) stressed that campuses must look beyond their policies and check the practices that are occurring. Practices on the part of students, faculty and administrators that are of a racist nature must not be overlooked or condoned. In relation to student activities, both the U.S. Department of Education (1988) and the Council for the Advancement of Standards for Student Services/Development Programs (1986) addressed areas of programming and facilitation for minority student programs and services. Workshops designed to facilitate discussions about diversity and discrimination have been described by Vickio, Dings and Leopold (1989), Fukuyama and Human (1984) and Pittman and Muschin (1989). The Cultural Environment Transitions Model (Manning and Coleman-Boatwright, 1991) is a means to assist in defining and working towards the goals of multiculturalism. Sue (1991) described a model for diversity assessment and training.

"The influence of mentors in improving the satisfaction of minority students during the college experiences is documented..."

Structuring Effective Adviser/Organization Interactions

Advisers and groups often have no choice in the match, so it is best to focus on the development of their relationship in order to maximize effective interaction. Several authors have commented on this interaction. Gwost (1982) listed five basic assumptions about student/adviser relationships. These included shared responsibility for relationship building, the importance of open, direct communication, recognition of additional commitments, focusing on human value systems and individual styles of interaction, and the process of growth and development. She also discussed strategies both parties should consider when beginning and maintaining the process.

Mamarchev and Williamson (1990) focused on role clarification and fair rules of confrontation in dealing with individual conflicts between members and advisers. Research by Fitch (1991) indicated some individual differences in interpersonal values of differing levels of extracurricular involvement. Advisers may want to examine these levels and motives for individual group members and alter the advising style accordingly.

By actively involving faculty and staff organization advisers in student development issues and leadership training, the limited outreach of a small, overworked student activities staff can be

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Appendix A

Adviser Luncheon Topics
(1991-1992)

September: Paperwork and Policies (Resources: adviser handbook, organization president's manual, university center handbook)

October: The Horror of Hazing (Newspaper clippings, articles, videotape)

November: Your Advising Style (Allen [Programming, May 1981], adapted to fit in with your organization members' and adviser's tasks on specific campus)

December: Relaxing Before Finals

January: The Officer Transition (Handouts and other educational materials)

February: Communicating Across Cultures (Handouts and inventories listed in article by Jackson and videotape concerning faculty/student stereotypes)

March: The Adviser's Perceptions of Their Role (Featured questionnaire and discussion between advisers concerning what's important and what's not)

April: Improvements to Our Organizations and Our Office's Services (Featured discussion about what's good, what could be better and

understanding of unions. Many faculty didn't have that experience. So we have to prepare them for whatever it is we're asking them to do and not assume they know. We complain in student affairs when people assume that anybody can do our jobs, that it doesn't take any special training. And then we ask all kinds of people to help and [illegible] ing. It's a mixed message" (Page 30).

Silien, Lucas and Wells (1992) contend that [illegible] and incorporate the values-oriented, collabora- [illegible] style of leadership" (Page 75). This same skill building relates to adviser leadership training as it does to student leadership training. Campus activities and organizations offices can no longer assume an inactive role with their adviser program. Adviser training is vital in creating an involved and perceptive advising staff. Advisers [illegible] them and the more specific, the better.

[illegible] ented organization advisers. Some suggestions include:

1) Providing an adviser notebook, guide or contract would be minimal expectations. Sandeen (1989) recommended that the chief student affairs administrator should write a clear policy statement defining roles and responsibili- [illegible] major faculty group on campus.

2) Advisers also want to receive copies of any correspondence sent to their group, whether it is a financial statement, adminis- trative paperwork request or judicial charge.

3) Providing leadership training in the form of a student officer workshop may take some of the pressure off of the adviser as will a monthly leadership newsletter addressing is- sues such as conducting a meeting or reward- ing group members. Officer transition training should also be provided.

4) Providing extra assistance to organiza- tions in terms of skill building, recruitment and retention of advisers and facilitating in- teraction are all important for struggling groups. Craig and Warner (1991) delineated a variety of additional services that the "forgotten majority" of student organizations and their ad- visers desperately need.

5) Providing incentives for advisers

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ing positive contributions in the form of letters and sending copies to department chairs and administration would also benefit the faculty adviser.

"By increasing the total number of persons of from diverse backgrounds, the odds of increasing contact are better, as well as the facilitation of positive or minimum of positive student/adviser contact."

6) In addition to student leadership train- ing, adviser training on specific student devel- opment issues should be provided. McManus (1990) [illegible] at the University of Wisconsin/Stout as liability issues, roles and responsibilities, goal setting with new officers, budget planning and other problems offered at the request of the advisers. Specific adviser

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article.

7) Maintaining a library of recent and pertinent information may facilitate discus- sion and promote constant examination of issues relating to student groups and their needs. Our office just finished a resource direc- tory that contains resources available to student rary and leadership issues. It includes books, subscriptions, video and audio tapes, and a [illegible] who are interested in speaking on certain topics. The materials are located in a variety of depart- [illegible] Center.

8) If all else fails, and yours is one of the lucky campuses that has excess funds, finding money to supplement faculty travel to student services or faculty academic conferences would work well as an incentive.

Conclusion

The university must take a more active role in [illegible] tribute more effectively in structuring the cam-

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Appendix B
Adviser Luncheon Topics
1992-1993

September:	Liability Issues for Organizations (Features system legal counsel)
	Student Leader Weekend Workshop (Open to advisers)
October:	Warning Signs of Student Crises and the Services Offered by the Counseling Center
November:	Alcohol and the College Student (What faculty members need to know)
	Materials provided by the Office of Substance Abuse Prevention (OSAP)
December:	Finals Week Luncheon
January:	Sexual Harassment on Campus (Videotape and materials prepared from other resources)
February:	Black Students at Predominantly Caucasian Campuses/Histori- cally Black Campuses and What They Offer That "We" Don't (Materials compiled by literature review and presented by guest speaker)

...pus community. Students... need to take more responsibility for their actions. They need to recognize the concerns that advisers face when working with student groups... appreciation and consideration for their adviser(s)...

...the future of their organizations. They also need... about prejudicial treatment and make a concerted effort to realistically appraise their organizations' reputations, activities and goals. Wells (1990) concluded his discussion of community and leadership by noting that it is design, ... centered faculty and staff. Unfortunately, if we ... commitment to the development of a positive campus community, we need to analyze the ailment and seek a cure.

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