

A Typology: The Many Faces of Volunteer Advisors

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Support for members and chapters of a fraternity and sorority community can take the form of many different faces. Campus-based advisors, organizational-based advisors, paid professional advisors, and volunteer advisors all make up a support network for students and chapters. In theory, volunteer advisors have the potential to develop closer connections with students, aid with the development of programs, assist with mitigating risk and adhering to policy, and support the campus-based professional to achieve community and campus goals/initiatives. However, some chapter advisors can be a detriment to their organization and disrupt the hard work that campus-based professionals do on a daily basis. In order to understand appropriate forms of training or communication, it is valuable to consider the various types of volunteer advisors that exist. Here, we explore four negative types of chapter advisors with which campus-based professionals may interact.

The helicopter advisor. This is the dictator of his or her organization; he or she will do anything and everything for the chapter because they feel the students are simply not fit to manage the organization. Instead of challenging students, they baby and belittle them leaving little room for development to happen. Students are not allowed to fail. After the advisor leaves his or her role, the chapter is left helpless without a clear path to regain autonomous control of the chapter.

The missing advisor. This is the advisor that will not answer e-mails, phone calls, or respond to even a desperate carrier pigeon; these advisors often times are just a name on paper. Students miss out on using them as a sounding board, receiving their advice, or utilizing them for other educational opportunities. Students often need to resort to occupying space and time in the campus-based advisor's office because the students have few resources on which they can rely.

The egotistical advisor. “Well our advisor said...” is the phrase uttered by students working with the stereotyped “know-it-all.” In this scenario, the campus-based professional is always wrong, and the way the chapter advisor wants things done is the way it should be. In some situations, students will readily admit “our advisor told us it was okay if we did this.” On approaching the advisor or sometimes the students, the explanation is frequently “this is how it has always been done.”

The immature advisor. These advisors have just recently graduated and are eager to fill a vacant position. They still participate in social events, philanthropy events, and even intramurals—provided their student ID still grants them access. They do not incorporate any new ways of benefiting the organization because they have not yet put themselves in the mindset of an alumnus. Additionally, members of the organization still see this advisor as a peer and not as a formal mentor.

Suggestions for Improved Communication

Each volunteer advisor, similar to students, is going to be on a different point of the developmental scale. The approach for communication, training, and challenge should mirror that which campus-based professional have been trained to use when working with students.

The helicopter advisor. Sanford's Theory of Challenge and Support explains that with a balance of both challenge and growth is needed for a student to thrive in college (Association of Fraternity/Sorority

Advisors, 2012). Translation: the advisor needs to balance the amount of challenge and support as appropriate for tasks being completed by chapter members. First, we suggest engaging in a constructive dialogue with the advisor focused on your concern for the chapter's development. Next, having an honest discussion with your advisors about the healthy balance between being over or under bearing when working with their organization is recommended. Applying Sanford's theory to the helicopter advisor holds them accountable and encourages them to provide the appropriate amount of dedication to the chapter as well as the campus community.

The missing advisor. For this circumstance, it is best to consider that the advisor might not feel like they matter when it comes to working for their organization. "Schlossberg (1989) states that institutions of higher education need to help people feel like they matter. She saw this goal as a precursor to students becoming involved in activities and academic programs that would facilitate development and learning" (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Looking at Schlossberg's Theory on Marginality and Mattering, one can express the importance of what it means to be an alumni advisor to a fraternity/sorority through the five aspects of mattering.

The egotistical advisor. Having this conversation takes an understanding of Perry's Theory of Intellectual and Ethical Development (1968). The egotistical advisor looks at fraternity/sorority life from a dualistic perspective—my way is right, and your way is wrong. The goal is to give the advisor a more relativistic mindset. This gives the professional an opportunity to work along with the advisor and allows the advisor to open up to the undergraduate students. One of the more popular applications for this theory is through experiential learning and the use of challenge and support strategies involving direct experience gives the advisor an opportunity to move on to the next step in development (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010).

The immature advisors. A familiar theory, Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development (1981), breaks down six stages of moral reasoning. For this circumstance, it is encouraged to evaluate and understand the advisor's stage of moral reasoning. By understanding the advisor's stage in moral development, any fraternity/sorority life professional can readily apply resources that pertain to the advisor in question. This theory should be applied for designing interventions to foster moral development within your advisors. Meaning, challenging the pre-existing moral processes and taking an opportunity to provide best practices for advisors to use when working with their organizations (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010).

Training your Alumni Advisors

The most productive way to train advisors is a one-on-one conversation pertaining to student development including theories that might be applicable to their organization's development. However, because not all advisors are easily accessible, it is encouraged to develop a highly accessible theory to practice program for your advisors. The outline for this program leads to limitless possibilities on what might be the best way to reach out to advisors, depending on the climate of the campus. The curriculum itself should focus on basic theory/application, educational styles, and goal setting in order to be of better use to their organizations and the fraternity and sorority community on campuses.

By applying theory to the practice when working with volunteer advisors who mentor and develop students, the scope and the impact of a campus/organizational-based professional begins to expand. Volunteer advisors should be considered as much a part of the collegiate experience and the

developmental process as any program or service provided by a campus/organizational-based professional. With a little time and effort paid to developing the volunteer advisor, not only will the collegiate experience be improved, but the campus/organizational-based professional will have additional advocates to rely on as they work with the students.

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