

SUNY Cortland Chapter Advisor Guidelines

Preface

Over the past couple of years some chapters have 'lost' their advisor and weren't sure what to tell people when asking them to consider serving in this capacity. At the same time several incoming advisors have asked me to clarify what is expected of them in this role. This document is intended to be of service to everyone. Being a chapter/colony advisor is a multi-faceted experience, is intended to be both positive and rewarding, and no two people will experience it in exactly the same way.

As I started pulling this together I had just finished reviewing materials submitted for recognition consideration by Mu Sigma Upsilon Sorority, Inc. Much of what I intended (and wanted) to say was presented in their materials. I asked, and have been given permission to use, whatever portion of their material that I deem helpful. So as to cover all bases, I am simply going to thank the MUs and give the sorority credit as a co-author of this document.

College requirements of any and all SUNY Cortland chapter/colony advisors:

- Must be a full-time employee of SUNY Cortland
- Cannot also be an undergraduate or graduate student at SUNY Cortland
 - Exceptions will be made if an individual is taking an occasional course for their own self edification
- Must be willing to learn (and agree to follow) College policies pertaining to Greek life and student life in general
- Must genuinely want to help the chapter/colony and its members succeed
- Must have regular contact with the chapter/colony at least once every 3 weeks
 - Cannot be simply a name on a piece of paper to meet a College requirement
 - Should not simply be an email to inform advisor of what the group is doing; Interaction of some sort is strongly preferred
- There are no official forms for chapter/colony advisors to fill out. That being said the chapter/colony president is to provide the College's "Greek Advisor" with the following information for any and all advisors as soon as that person(s) has been found:
 - Name of person, college position and campus address, preferred email and phone no.

Things that aren't relevant (in terms of serving as an advisor)

- Whether or not the person is or was a member of a fraternity/sorority
- Gender, sexual orientation, etc.
- How long person has been employed by the College
- SUNY Cortland chapter/colony advisors ARE NOT responsible for learning and knowing organizational specific policies. It is natural to pick up on them over time but it is not required.

While the College requires that each recognized fraternity and sorority must have a SUNY Cortland chapter/colony advisor, the more correct wording would be "must have at least one SUNY Cortland chapter/colony advisor." The College does not limit the maximum number of advisors each group can have. If there are multiple advisors then each should share equally in the advising, especially as it relate to such things as 'event supervisor' for activities held on campus outside of regular business hours.

Examples: Weekend events held in Moffett Gymnasium, Brown Auditorium, Lusk Field House, Alumni Arena, etc. and/or late night social events

The College does not require a SUNY Cortland chapter/colony advisor to attend organizational meetings held on campus after hours (including weekends). That being said, it would be hoped that advisors would be welcome/invited to do so at least once in a while.

A few things to keep in mind moving forward:

- There is a strong correlation between successful chapters/colonies and good advisor support.
- While every chapter/colony is required to have at least one SUNY Cortland advisor, most will also have an organizationally specific one as well. If they don't, there will be a National volunteer who works with them at the district or regional level.
 - These relationships should be mutually supportive
- Advisors are volunteers. Do not let chapters/colonies set up unrealistic expectations of you.
- Every relationship is a two-way street.
- Chapter/colony advisors can only advise, they cannot force chapter/colony and its members to do anything

The most frequent question I get from prospective advisors: What kind of personal liability do I have if I agree to serve in this capacity? The answer is simple: None so long as you are not endorsing any illegal and/or high risk activity and if you become aware of any such activity, you report it to the appropriate person. Usually this would be the College's "Greek Advisor" but sometimes time is of the essence and you would report it directly to either UPD or the Cortland Police Department. We would love to be able to have educational/developmental conversations to prevent "bad" things from happening but we also have to hold people accountable for those items that have taken place.

Examples:

- ❖ Initiated members are discussing hazing their new members. You need to speak up and tell them why this is wrong. Not comfortable bringing this up in front of the whole chapter? Talk to an officer or two about it and at the very least you need to report it.
- ❖ Members are discussing hazing that has already taken place. Report it.
- ❖ Members are talking about hosting a social event with underage drinking. Speak up and do your best to dissuade them. Report it.
- ❖ Members are talking about getting first semester first year students to join. This is against College policy. Again, dissuade them and report it.

Chapter/colony advisors often fall into other roles by virtue of relationships they have established. There is nothing wrong with this, just know that it could happen and establish boundaries that are comfortable for all parties. Other roles could include:

- Friend
- Mentor
- Mother/Father figure
- Big brother/sister
- Confidant
- Career Services Advisor

Most frequent areas where chapter/colony leaders look for assistance:

- How to motivate members – generation of new ideas, attendance and participation in meetings, events, etc. Motivation is usually not difficult with social events but successful groups are not defined by their social events alone.
- Finances and/or financial challenges – members not paying dues, fines, etc.
 - National resources exist to provide assistance, College tends to stay out of picture
- Chapter management: elections, officer transitions, how to run an effective meeting, holding members accountable for their individual and/or group actions/decisions
- Knowledge and/or clarification of College policies (not only as relate to Greek life)
- Establishing short and/or long term future goals of chapter/colony

Generic outline for advisors and chapters/colonies to follow:

- Establish expectations of each other
 - Set them up at start of relationship and periodically revisit; Remember that leadership changes fairly frequently and expectations may as well
- Keep open clear lines of communication
 - Frequency and style should be mutually agreed upon; Be open to possible needed adjustments
 - Speak up early if expectations not being met; Do not bottle things up inside
- Follow through with promises in a timely fashion
 - If don't know answer to something, say so and get back to them within an agreed upon amount of time
- Get to know each other; Don't have to be pals but will help you relate as people and show that you care and are interested in what's going on
- Lead by example, be a positive role model
- Respect each other

Possible areas of expectations:

- Frequency of attending chapter events and which ones
- Frequency of attending chapter meetings
- Advising chapter/colony in specific areas of need
- Advocating on behalf of chapter/colony to the College or vice versa

How to be a successful advisor:

- Be honest
- Be competent
- Be forward looking
- Be inspiring
- Express sincere interest in group and its members
- Create a trusting relationship
- Inquire as to expectations
- Receive input prior to giving advice or taking action -- listen
- Customize your advice
- Provide reasons for why your advice should be taken
- Keep members' priorities in mind
- Provide alternatives when making suggestions
- As much as possible, avoid being an enforcer
- Avoid putting yourself in the limelight
- Respond to questions and requests for help in a timely manner
- Be a positive role model
- Make your communications positive – avoid cynical or negative remarks
- Don't lose your temper
- Avoid saying "I told you so"
- Recognize success
- Keep group's goals and objectives firmly in mind
- Assist chapter/colony in setting realistic, attainable goals
- Be aware of various roles you may be filling and recognize that they may rotate or happen simultaneously
 - Consultant, information source, clarifier, counselor, facilitator, and/or mediator

- Don't let yourself be assigned to something – let students do the work (and yes, you can volunteer to help if you want)
- Help provide continuity
- Challenge group and its individual members to grow (not just in terms of membership numbers)
- Be creative and innovative
- Recognize and accept the fact that there may be no direct or readily evident results of all your hard work

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