

A Brief Guide to Advising Student Organizations at Thiel College

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Role of the Advisor

“Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does.” – William James

Student organizations play a critical role in the Thiel College experience, providing unique opportunities for students to gain practical skills, develop lasting relationships, engage in service to the community, and overall enhance the out-of-class experience.

As an advisor, your role is equally important: advisors serve our organizations by helping build organizational skills amongst the members, provide continuity during transitions, render knowledge about history and tradition, and achieve goals for the organization—among many other tasks. Your dedication is not only beneficial to the student organization and its members. It should also be personally rewarding.

All recognized student organizations must have a faculty or staff advisor that is employed by Thiel College. In special cases, the College will direct certain organizations to use an appropriate advisor. These individuals may be chosen because of their capabilities in a specific area, or because of the nature of the organization. In such cases, the student organization shall follow the guidelines of the advisor assigned. In all other cases the organization may select a qualified faculty/staff advisor on their own.

Responsibility of the advisor to the college:

- ✎ Must be familiar with college and student organization policies and procedures, as well as the policies of the organization he/she advises.
- ✎ Thiel College recognizes the role of advisors to be that of a consultant or resource person, one who guides the organizations toward the completion of their goals. Therefore, he/she should be assisting the organization's members to be accountable for their conduct.

- ✿ Since academic success is the primary reason for our students being here, the advisor may also wish to work closely with them concerning their academic progress.

Responsibility of the advisor to the organization:

- ✿ Maintain regular contact with officers and members.
- ✿ Serve as the resource person on matters of policy and procedures, finances, organizational and personal development, and attend functions.
- ✿ Assist with the formulation or revision of the organization's constitution and/or by-laws.
- ✿ Encourage the organization to plan active and meaningful programs, and work with officers to promote efficient and effective administration of the group.
- ✿ Assist the treasurer in maintaining accurate accounting procedures and formulating annual budgets.
- ✿ Immediately inform the organization and Student Life Division should he/she choose to resign from their role.

Types of Student Organizations

While there are numerous student organizations at Thiel College with varying goals and purposes, they may usually be identified by one of the following three categories:

- 1) **Special Interest Groups** are typically what comes to mind when the term student “club” or “organization” is mentioned. Membership is open and serves students with shared interests. (e.g., Environmental, Ski, Chemistry Club, Awareness/Multicultural Associations, etc.)
- 2) **Honor Societies** are typically closed groups where members are only invited should they meet requirements such as GPA, volunteer service, or recommendations. (e.g., Les Lauriers, Sigma Tau Delta, Phi Alpha Theta, etc.)
- 3) **Fraternities and Sororities** are social, single-gender organizations, whose main purposes are to help members live up to the ideals and values of their group, create meaningful connections with one another, and build important skills through the development of programs and philanthropic efforts. Students in fraternities and sororities typically pay higher dues (compared to other organizations) to for the benefits of membership. New members are only recruited during specially designated periods, must be invited and accept to join, and learn about their organization before becoming fully-initiated members. Students may only join one fraternity or sorority.

To learn more, visit: www.thiel.edu > Campus Life > Greek Life.

Direct link: http://www.thiel.edu/campus_life/greek-life

Student Government Association (SGA)

The SGA exists to advocate for student needs, promote their interests, increase involvement and civic engagement, and serve as the voice for Thiel College students.

It is led by SGA General Assembly, comprised of elected officers and representatives from organizations, all of whom have voting power and are expected to represent the best interests of students.

It is the governing body for all student organizations (with the exception of varsity athletic programs and to certain matters of the fraternity and sorority community), is structured to provide support, and allocate funding to recognized groups. In order to be considered an officially-recognized, student organizations must comply with the rules and guidelines set forth by the SGA.

Organization Requirements

In order to continually qualify for the benefits granted through recognition by the SGA, advisors must ensure organizations are meeting the following requirements:

- 🍁 Regular attendance at SGA bi-weekly meetings
- 🍁 Submission of all necessary forms and documents (Club Rosters, Monthly Reports, and Budget Requests)
- 🍁 A minimum of 1-2 community service projects each semester, depending on club status, and an accompanying report.
- 🍁 Creation of fundraising activities and an accompanying report.




Additional information and supplemental documents are located at:
www.thiel.edu > Campus Life > Student Activities > Student Government.

Direct Link: http://www.thiel.edu/campus_life/student-activities/student-government-association.

Important Dates

Organizations and advisors should pay attention to the following periods during the academic year:




September

-  First meeting
-  Activities Expo
-  Freshman elections

December

-  Semester Report

April

-  New budget requests
-  SGA elections
-  Officer transitions

Regular reporting is also required each month.

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Finances

Thiel College provides each student organization an account for funds allocated to them. For any transaction they choose to complete, they must obtain the approval signature of their advisor. The following are a list of unauthorized purchases:

- 🍁 T-shirts or any other type of apparel for members (unless approved by SGA)
- 🍁 Alcohol, tobacco, or any illegal products
- 🍁 Personal items for members
- 🍁 Food for normal meetings (groups can purchase food for events open to all students)
- 🍁 Any other item(s) deemed inappropriate by the SGA

Advisors and organizations are encouraged to consult the SGA any time they are uncertain about whether they are using funds for approved purchases.

Additional Notes:

- 🍁 At the end of each budget year, funds over the amount of \$200.00, remain in an organization's budget will be re-deposited back into the SGA General Fund.
- 🍁 Student organizations may request an Agency Account through the College for self-raised funds. These will rollover each year and the responsibility of control will be transferred from each group of officers. Purchases using these funds are more flexible (i.e., member shirts, donations, etc.). Organizations are still encouraged to consult the SGA about approved uses.
- 🍁 Student organizations are not permitted to open bank account off-campus to transfer SGA funds.

Legal Considerations

Legal Issues for Organization Advisors:

- 👉 Agreeing to serve as an organization advisor is a decision that should not be taken lightly.
- 👉 When you agree to be an advisor, as a college representative, you do assume a degree of risk.
- 👉 However, risk can be minimized by being familiar with college policies, staying informed of your organization's activities, keeping open lines of communication, and practicing good judgment.
- 👉 Faculty and staff advisors are covered under the college's liability insurance, but they must act within the scope of their employment and refrain from gross negligence.

Clery Act and Title IX Compliance:

- 👉 According to the Jeanne Clery and Campus Crime Reporting Acts, organization advisors are considered Campus Security Authorities.
- 👉 As a result, if any person disclosed to you that they have been the victim, witness, or perpetrator of any incident that may involve a crime, it is your obligation to report that information immediately to Campus Police (x2222).
- 👉 Under Title IX, organization advisors are considered "responsible employees" (which is true for almost all faculty and staff). Therefore, advisors must report incidents of sexual harassment/misconduct to the Title IX coordinator and/or Campus Police.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) Compliance:

- 🍁 FERPA was created to protect student privacy, and provide ownership of his/her records to the student.
- 🍁 In most cases, neither a student's educational records nor the personal information found in those records may be disclosed without prior consent.
- 🍁 If your organization needs a student to disclose his/her educational records for the purposes of officer elections or membership, you must get consent from the student before you can access that information.
- 🍁 Consent should be in writing, indicating the specific records to be release, the purpose, the date, and the individual who is receiving the consent.
- 🍁 The Academic Records Office and/or Student Life can help you access student records.

Risk Management

Advisors should help student organizations assess, minimize, and prevent accidents through the use of safety measures and preparation. Student organizations are exposed to varying types of risk, such as: liability, safety, reputation, financial, and emotional.

Some activities and events have a certain level of risk (i.e. those of a physical nature, off-campus trips, eating competitions, events with alcohol, etc.). When considering those types of activities, advisors should have a pointed conversation with organizations' officers.

- 🍁 Make sure the organization understands the risks inherent with such events, and the additional planning that is necessary to minimize risk.
- 🍁 Student organizations must comply with state, federal, and local laws. There is no immunity because they are students or because they are part of the College.

- 🍀 Student organizations must comply with all college policies including the Thiel College Student Handbook.
- 🍀 Student organizations may seem challenged by some of the laws or policies that they must follow. As an advisor, you can assist them in adjusting their events so that they are in compliance with the necessary guidelines.
- 🍀 The Student Life Office can also help you navigate through risk management decisions and planning.

The following is a list of risk management issues both the advisor and student organization should consider:

- 🍀 Waivers
- 🍀 Cash Handling
- 🍀 Contracts
- 🍀 Controversial speakers or events
- 🍀 Responsibility for others
- 🍀 Student Code of Conduct
- 🍀 National Organization Risk Management Guidelines
- 🍀 Possible hazing
- 🍀 Possible discrimination
- 🍀 Travel safety
- 🍀 State and local codes
- 🍀 Room/building occupancy

Programming Policies

For any student organization interested in hosting an activity (workshop, social event, trip, fundraiser, etc.), the Office of Student Activities & Involvement has established specific guidelines and procedures which must be followed.

Before initiating the planning stages of any activity, student organization officers and advisors should review this information, which may be found online and in the Office of Student Activities & Involvement. Questions are always welcomed and encouraged.

Visit www.thiel.edu > Campus Life > Student Activities > Forms and Policies

Top Ten Suggestions

The following is a list of tips from seasoned advisors on how to better work with student organizations:

- 🍁 The most important thing you can do to help them is gain their trust. If you've done that, almost everything else will take care of itself.
- 🍁 Do what you say you will do.
- 🍁 Read what they ask you to sign before you sign it!
- 🍁 When they tell you they've thought of everything, keep asking them questions.
- 🍁 Don't expect a thank you note after everything you do to help the students out. Not expecting it will make it that much sweeter when it does come.
- 🍁 You don't have to be an expert on everything. Just use your best judgment. No one is a perfect advisor.

- 👉 Be an encourager. Take the opportunity to praise the good things they're doing.
- 👉 Choose your battles. Sometimes I have to challenge my students to keep them from making the gravest of mistakes, but other times I know that confronting them on something trivial could be far more damaging than letting them fail. Encourage students to take initiative and don't give all the answers.
- 👉 Don't let them forget to take care of themselves and their studies.
- 👉 Stay involved, be available, and attend meetings as often as possible.

Campus Resources

Important Campus Links:

- 👉 www.thiel.edu/campus_life
- 👉 www.thiel.edu/calendar/submit-an-event
- 👉 www.thiel.edu/academic-records

Important Contacts:

- 👉 Office of Student Activities & Involvement (x 2192),
studentactivities@thiel.edu
- 👉 Campus Police (x 2222)
- 👉 Registrar (x 2109), registrar@thiel.edu
- 👉 Student Life (x 2125), studentlife@thiel.edu

Please visit the Student Life Division and the Office of Student Activities & Involvement inside the Howard Miller Student Center for questions or assistance.