



Office of  
Student Engagement

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

# RSO Advisor Handbook

*Western Michigan University*  
*Fall 2020 Edition*

**GENERAL DISCLAIMER**

*Reasonable changes may be made to this document without notice.*

*Information describing any changes will be made available.*

*Revised on [Date]*

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# OFFICE OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT INFORMATION

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## MISSION STATEMENT

The Office of Student Engagement exists to engage campus, empower students and develop leaders.

## OFFICES

### Office of Student Engagement Main Office

223 Bernhard Center  
Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5356  
Phone: 269-387-2115  
Fax: 269-387-2185  
Website: [www.wmich.edu/studentengagement](http://www.wmich.edu/studentengagement)

### Graduate Assistant Offices

*RSO Development, Campus Programming, and Fraternity & Sorority Life Office*  
131 Bernhard Center

*Campus Engagement and Leadership Programs*  
G06 Bernhard Center

### theSOURCE

G06 Bernhard Center  
Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5356  
Phone: 269-387-4889

### Student Organization Center

194 Bernhard Center  
Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5356

### Faith and Spiritual Development

Kanley Memorial Chapel  
Phone: 269-387-2506  
Website: <http://www.fm.wmich.edu/ap/bldg/031>

**Bernhard Center** – A vibrant community center for campus life. Students and community members can visit the Bernhard Center to eat, shop, buy textbooks, use a computer lab, or attend an RSO meeting. <https://wmich.edu/studentcenter>

**Division of Student Affairs (DOSA)** - Envelops the student services area (residential life, student conduct, student activities, recreational sports, wellness, career development, counseling and testing services, multicultural affairs, campus police, Bernhard Center, etc.) <http://wmich.edu/studentaffairs>

## OFFICE OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT PROFESSIONAL STAFF

Chris Sligh (he/him/his), Director of the Office of Student Engagement (OSE): 269-387-2115  
Kate Bates (she/her/hers), Associate Director of Leadership and Volunteer Services: 269-387-2182

Brad Kosiba (he/him/his), Assistant Director for Campus Programming & RSO Development: 269-387-2118  
Erin Baker (she/her/hers), Administrative Senior Assistant/RSO Financial Manager: 269-387-2119  
Abby Wallace (she/her/hers), Assistant Director of Fraternity and Sorority Life: 269-387-2131  
Glen Dillon (he/him/his), Assistant Director of Student Media: 269-387-2110

## RECREATIONAL CENTER STAFF

Andre Rattray (he/him/his), Assistant Director of Club Sports/eSports: 269-387-3757  
Renea Peruski (she/her/hers), Risk Manager of Club Sports: 269-387-3543

## RELEVANT GRADUATE STAFF

Cat March (they/them/theirs), RSO Development: 269-387-2157  
Kendra Coons (she/her/hers), Campus Programming: 269-387-2547  
Gigi Stahl (she/her/hers), Leadership Programs: 269-387-2565  
Colleen McInerney (she/her/hers), Fraternity and Sorority Life: 269-387-2138

## COUNSELING, HEALTH AND SAFETY

**Sindecuse Health Center Counseling Services** - Counseling services for Western Michigan University students. <https://wmich.edu/healthcenter/counseling>

**Counseling and Testing Center** - Professionals are available for students to speak with confidentially with on various personal issues such as substance abuse, eating disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder, stress, etc. <http://www.wmich.edu/healthcenter/counseling>

**The Invisible Need Project** - “The Invisible Need Project works to serve WMU students with unmet needs.” <https://wmich.edu/invisibleneed>

**Department of Public Safety (DPS)** - Focuses on four main areas: police, parking services, environmental health and safety, and security administration. <http://www.wmudps.wmich.edu/>

## ACADEMICS AND CAREER

**Academic Resource Center** - “Enhances teaching and learning by enabling a diverse student population to maximize their potential for academic success and excel throughout their experiences at Western Michigan University and beyond.” <http://wmich.edu/tutoring/>

**Career and Student Employment Services** - This center can help students find work on campus, assist with finding an internship, provide workshops on the job search process, and undergraduate/alumni job-placement services. <http://wmich.edu/career/>

**Registrar** - This department manages the process for and maintenance of official student transcripts. <http://www.wmich.edu/registrar/>

## DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND MULTICULTURALISM

**The Office of Diversity and Inclusion** - “Provides leadership in creating systemic change at Western Michigan University to ensure equitable access, resources and success of all members of the campus community.” <https://wmich.edu/diversity/>

**The Multicultural Center** - “Provides the University student population with spaces for study, meetings, projects, and conversation. It also provides information on diversity, ethnic, and cultural issues through speakers, events, exhibits, and displays scheduled by University groups and organizations.” <https://wmich.edu/diversity/center>

**Disability Services for Students** - “The mission of Disability Services for Students at Western Michigan University is to make education accessible. DSS advocates for the student to be provided with the appropriate tools to allow that person the opportunity to reach goals and potential. Those tools, academic accommodation or adjustment, facilitate learning while maintaining the integrity of course content and outcomes.”

<https://wmich.edu/disabilityservices/>

**LBGT Student Services** - “Ensures equitable access for all at Western Michigan University and promotes a campus climate that affirms and supports the academic and personal development of all students inclusive of their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.”

<https://wmich.edu/lbgt>

**International Admissions and Services** - This office provides informational, academic, and other resources to Western Michigan University’s international students.

<https://wmich.edu/internationaladmissions>

# ADVISOR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

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RSO advisors are important not only because they are role models for students, but also because their involvement in the organization itself provides learning experiences that are transferable to situations beyond college. In order to assist the advisor and the RSO in understanding the roles of an effective advisor, the Office of Student Engagement offers the following list of responsibilities:

## ADVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE RSO:

1. Serve at the discretion of the organization.
2. Assist officers in understanding their duties, administering programs and plans, organizing projects, and making appropriate transitions.
3. Preserve the continuity of the organization through the constitution, traditions, files, and minutes.
4. Encourage the use of procedures to ensure that the meetings run in an orderly and efficient manner.
5. Encourage students to understand and apply democratic principles, including the recognition of diverse opinions and rights.
6. Attend as many organization meetings and events as possible.
7. Articulate campus policies and procedures and help cut through “red-tape” when necessary.
8. Support officers and be available for evaluation of ideas.
9. Facilitate discussions among officers and between officers and members.
10. Be familiar with national structure and services if relevant.
11. Assist with specific University services, for example, obtaining an organization account and obtaining facilities.
12. Consult on programs.
13. Advise individual students when necessary.
14. Assist the organization as needed.
15. Provide historical context of RSO to new leadership/information necessary for leadership transitions

## RSO RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE ADVISOR:

1. Notify the advisor of all meetings and events.
2. Confer with the advisor on plans, projects, and events.
3. Consult with the advisor before making structure or policy changes.
4. Understand that although the advisor has no vote, they should have speaking privileges.
5. Remember the responsibility for the success or failure of group projects rests ultimately with the group, not the advisor.
6. Acknowledge the advisor’s time and energy and express appropriate appreciation.
7. State clearly and openly the expectations of the advisor.
8. Evaluate the advisor and periodically give appropriate feedback.

From Reinhardy, G. Training organization advisors. Student Activities Programming, 1981, 14(1), 39-41. Appendix A.

## ROLES AND ADVISING STYLES

There are four common roles advisors can have and each one has implications for student learning:

### **DIRECTOR**

- Specific instructions
- Activities heavily facilitated
- Heavily responsible for the vision of the RSO
- Students told exactly what to do
- Results in low student learning

This advising style is most effective for a newly-formed RSO, consisting of students who are unfamiliar with university/OSE processes. As students begin their initial forays into leadership, they may require a more hands-on approach. Once your students begin to understand how to run their organization, it may be beneficial to transition into a more laid back advising format.

### **COACH**

- Continue to decide tasks and monitors them, but students execute
- Explain reasoning behind decisions and organizational procedures
- Students are part of RSOs progress and encourage it
- Results in low-medium learning

Once a new RSO or renewed RSO is up and running, students will begin to express interest in taking on more tasks, or handling processes on their own. They may not be ready to take on a full leadership mantle, but they are ready to see how leadership works and take a peek 'behind the scenes.' Assign your students tasks and make sure to continue checking in with them to ensure follow-through.

### **EDUCATOR**

- Students do most of the facilitating of tasks
- Decision-making by students defines RSO
- Encourage, provide information, and intervention as needed
- Support RSOs efforts
- Problem solving is less often
- Results in medium-high student learning

By now, your students' RSO will have an established presence on campus. Your students will have a shared vision, goals, and a robust knowledge of university processes/procedures. You will no longer need to ask them to do tasks, as they will most likely complete these tasks on their own. An RSO that reaches this stage is very likely to continue its operations in following years. Issues with leadership transitions and large-scale organization may persist.

### **MENTOR**

- Students make decisions and empower each other to do so
- Present as needed or when asked
- Students have full ownership over the RSO, its accomplishments, failures and successes
- Intentional problem solving is needed less and less
- Learning with you comes from reflection
- Results in high student learning

Your to-do list as an advisor will have decreased exponentially by this point. Leadership, training, sharing of information, and more will be handled by your empowered students. Essentially, your RSO is running itself. Your students may still need you for processes that require an advisor to sign off, to manage conflict should it arise, or assist with operations as needed. You are essentially a safety net for your students, while they run the show.

## REMEMBER:

**RSOs are different.** RSOs are unique, not only in their statistical and physical attributes, but in the quality of their organization, in their size, and in their esprit. Therefore, an advisor must take the information contained in this manual and modify it to fit their particular organization.

**Advisors are different.** By accepting this position an advisor agrees to assist the organization in conducting its operations and in realizing its ideals and aspirations. However, each advisor will also have their own philosophy and unique approach to advising and should take those into account.

**Advisors are volunteers.** The advisor is a volunteer and has other important demands on their time. The RSO must, therefore, avoid setting up unrealistic expectations of them.

**Advisors are advisors, not dictators.** If push comes to shove, an advisor cannot force an RSO to do anything. Their respect and authority are based upon the quality of their relationship with the members.

**There is often no right answer.** (and even when there is, the manual may not have it!)

## 30 REMINDERS FOR EFFECTIVE ADVISING

1. Care about the students you advise by showing empathy, understanding, and respect.
2. Establish a warm, genuine, and open professional relationship.
3. Show interest, helpful intent, and involvement.
4. Be a good listener.
5. Establish rapport by remembering personal information about students that you advise.
6. Be available; keep office hours and appointments.
7. Provide accurate information.
8. When in doubt, refer to the college/university student handbook and your advisor's manual.
9. Know how and when to make referrals, and be familiar with referral sources.
10. Don't refer too hastily; but don't attempt to handle situations for which you are not qualified.
11. Have students contact referral sources in your presence.
12. Contact students you advise frequently; don't always wait for students to come to you.
13. Don't make decisions for students; help them make their own decisions.
14. Focus on students' strengths and potential rather than limitations.
15. Seek out students you advise in informal settings.
16. Monitor students' progress toward educational goals.
17. Determine reasons for poor academic performance and direct students to support services.
18. Be realistic with the students you advise.
19. Use all available information sources.
20. Clearly and professionally outline students' responsibilities.
21. Follow up on commitments made to the students you advise.
22. Encourage students to consider and develop career alternatives when appropriate.
23. Keep an anecdotal record of significant conversations for future reference.
24. Evaluate the effectiveness of your advising.
25. Don't be critical of faculty or staff to students.
26. Be knowledgeable about career opportunities and job outlook for various majors.
27. Encourage students to talk by asking open-ended questions.
28. Don't betray confidential information.\*\*
29. Categorize students' questions: are they seeking action, information, or involvement and understanding?



30. Be yourself and allow students to be themselves.

(Source: [www.umich.edu/~salead/advisor/handbook.html#roles](http://www.umich.edu/~salead/advisor/handbook.html#roles))

\*\*If the information in question relates to a Title IX or Misconduct violation, you may need to communicate certain details to university officials. You may be considered a “Responsible Employee” of the University. Please review the “Responsible Employee Requirements” section on page 12 of this document if you are unsure about your Responsible Employee status.

## ADVISING THROUGH RSO TRANSITIONS

If you remain with your RSO as an advisor from one academic year to the next, you will likely witness a turnover of leadership and membership within the organization. These times of transition can be difficult for executive officers to navigate, especially if their predecessors did not prepare training/informational materials for the next generation. Below is some advice on how to advise a Registered Student Organization through a transition in leadership.

### TRANSITION BINDERS

Transition binders are a proactive measure to ensure that your RSO’s new generation of leaders has access to important guidelines, processes, procedures, usernames/passwords, and other types of information. A transition binder (or folder, or digital document) may include the following:

- Usernames and passwords for ExperienceWMU, RSO email addresses, Facebook, Instagram, and other accounts
- Important contact information for events, collaborations, questions about policies/procedures, etc.
- Contact information for active alumni
- Information on how to:
  - Access funding/bank accounts
  - Access storage areas
  - Find storage locations for items
  - Rent office or meeting spaces
  - Roles and responsibilities of the position
  - Planning procedures for annual or repeated events/activities
- Information on daily operations. For example:
  - How do you edit the RSO’s webpage on ExperienceWMU?
  - How do you re-register each academic year?
  - What is the correct format for an RSO constitution?
  - How do we obtain WSA funding?
- Legacy notes on important experiences and lessons learned
  - The whys and hows of successful (or unsuccessful) events
  - Major challenges (and the methods for resolving them)
  - Personalized tips/advice on reservations, helpful WMU staff members, making procedures/processes move faster, etc., etc.
  - Running elections smoothly
  - How to maintain positive relationships with the University/University officials

Make sure to suggest that your RSO’s leaders create helpful and accurate transition materials to ensure the continuity of their organization. The OSE recommends having a transition binder for each turnover of each e-board position. Leadership transitions are key factors in determining whether or not a Registered Student Organization remains active on campus.

# POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

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Registered Student Organizations often require guidance through the particularities of University policies and procedures. As an advisor, you are able to act as a source of information for your students. The Office of Student Engagement's most important RSO regulations and processes are detailed below.

## REGISTRATION AND RE-REGISTRATION

In order to become recognized as an RSO by Western Michigan University, student organizations must register with the Office of Student Engagement. Once an RSO has gone through the initial registration process, it is required to re-register every subsequent academic year. If a student organization does not re-register by the October re-registration deadline, it will not be granted RSO status until the next academic year. New student organizations, however, are able to register at any time.

### EXPERIENCEWMU

RSOs register online using ExperienceWMU. The 2020-2021 has specific information on this process. All current Western Michigan University students have access to ExperienceWMU. However, if prior RSO leadership does not register next year's executive board members with their organization's ExperienceWMU page, your students may be unable to re-register.

If a student executive (president, vice president, treasurer, etc.) is unable to access their organization's re-registration page, have them contact the Graduate Assistant for RSO Development ([ose-rsodevelopment@wmich.edu](mailto:ose-rsodevelopment@wmich.edu)) for further assistance. Please note that there is a re-registration deadline for all RSOs.

### RSO CONSTITUTION

To complete the online registration or re-registration process, your students must create an RSO Constitution. The Office of Student Engagement encourages students to customize the Constitution to best fit their organization's mission and values. However, **there is a list of statements that all RSOs must include in their Constitutions.** The list is available to your students during the registration or re-registration process. The required statements are as follows:

- a. Non-Discrimination Statement
- b. Statement of University Compliance
- c. Statement of Financial Compliance
- d. Disposition of Funds

It might be helpful to check in with your students (especially with new leadership, or a new RSO) and make sure they have included these required statements in their RSO Constitution (and have written the statements out correctly).

### RSO ONLINE ORIENTATION

In order to become eligible for University funding, Registered Student Organizations must have at least one financial officer complete RSO Online Orientation. You are welcome to complete RSO Online Orientation as an advisor. However, a student financial officer will still be required to complete Orientation for their RSO. The modules and videos can be accessed in the 'Forms' section of ExperienceWMU. This information is available for students to refer back to whenever they have a question about RSO operations. When an RSO's financial officer completes Online Orientation, the organization then becomes eligible to apply for funding from the Western Student Association, the Graduate Student Association, the Campus Activities Board, and the Sustainability Fund.

### ADVISOR PAPERWORK

There are a few items of mandatory paperwork that you will need to complete as an advisor, as well as other types of forms available on an as-needed basis. The items are as follows:

- a) Advisor Expectations Form: RSOs and advisors will create an agreement listing the advisor's responsibilities to the organization, and the organization's responsibilities to the advisor.
- b) Letter of Intent: Advisors will be required to sign a letter of intent, indicating that they accept their advising position.
- c) Advisor Evaluation: At the end of each semester (or as needed), Registered Student Organizations will have the option to provide feedback directly to their advisor and the Office of Student Engagement via this form.
- d) Complaint Form: Should an issue arise between an advisor and their Registered Student Organization, a form is available to submit an official complaint and request for action/mediation to the Office of Student Engagement.

More information on these forms, as well as copies of the forms themselves, are available in the 'RSO Advisor Policy Guide.'

## RISK MANAGEMENT

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Due to the nature of RSO activities, certain types of risk are more prevalent than others. It is important for you to guide your students through risk management because they often will only focus on the positives of the event and not consider potential risks.

Any possibility of loss, harm or damage to individuals, property or organizations associated with an activity or event would be considered to be a risk.

The goal of risk management is to identify, control, and minimize the negative impacts to your organization. It is expected that RSOS take the steps necessary to manage the risks associated.

Please note that the students within your RSO (and *not* Western Michigan University) would be held liable for any incident since Registered Student Organizations are not affiliated with the institution.

### ASSUMPTION OF RISK FORM

In current legal tradition, waivers of personal rights have generally been ineffective in protecting an organization from the harm or damage sustained by an individual during a sponsored event or activity. A better method of protecting your organization from personal injury and damage claims is the "Assumption of Risk" form.

Individuals participating in an activity or event should sign this form. The form acknowledges that the individual is aware of the potential risk involved in the specific activity. Under common law tradition, the individual's assumption of known risk is a more successful defense against damage claims. You can view an example in the RSO Handbook.

\*For signing and filing official forms with The Office of Student Engagement, the organization advisor is **not** the official contact person. The official contact person must be a registered WMU student. Any official requests and forms must be signed by the student listed as the Primary Contact on the Contact Information form.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Does a contract need to be signed for anything associated with this event?
- If event is held in the community, how will this activity affect the neighborhood?

- What liability does the organization run the risk of incurring?
- What state laws or city ordinances have the potential of being violated?
- What safeguards will be used to keep these laws from being violated?
- List the possible problem situations that could present themselves at your activity.
- List how you will solve each of the situations listed above.
- Do you have an established procedure to follow in case of emergencies?
- Could you convince a reasonably prudent person that your event is not dangerous?
- Is the potential liability for the organization worth the potential benefits to the organization?
- Have you as the RSO Advisor reviewed this activity?

## **AREAS OF RISK MANAGEMENT**

- i. Financial: Contracts, verbal agreements, budget and spending
- ii. Personal: Travel, events
- iii. Physical and Emotional: Hazing, Title IX

### **FINANCIAL RISK MANAGEMENT**

Financial risk management includes contracts, verbal agreements and spending and varying from high to low risk. For example, bringing a speaker to campus for \$250 is relatively low risk. Bringing a large act or musician for \$1,000 is generally going to be a higher risk financial commitment. However, put this broad spectrum into the context of your RSO. If your RSO's annual budget is \$2,000, a fee of \$500 is 25% of the budget.

For further information on financial risk management, please consult the RSO Advisor Policy Guide.

### **PERSONAL RISK MANAGEMENT**

Personal risk management includes travel and events. Both areas cover a broad spectrum of high and low risk activities. Keep in mind that as the RSO advisor, you are liable. Students hosting and/or attending off-campus events will be subject to the same rules and regulations as if they were on campus.

Personal risk management includes travel and events. Both areas cover a broad spectrum of high and low risk activities. Keep in mind that as the RSO advisor, you are liable. Consider factors such as travel distance, event venue rules, local laws/restrictions, event security, and proximity to urgent care. For example, you and your students traveling to Detroit by car for a one-day conference is relatively low in terms of risk. Your students driving down to Texas for an alternative spring break is high risk. For information on traveling, consult the Financial Handbook and the RSO Handbook.

Events can be high risk or low risk. A high risk event could be a controversial musician or a large-scale event with inflatables. A low risk event could be simply bringing a noncontroversial speaker to campus. Consider factors such as projected attendance, cost, food, venue, security needs, contracts, activities, and attractions to evaluate the degree of risk to the event.

As set forth in the WMU Student Code: All social events sponsored by organizations or University affiliated groups, on or off campus, must comply with University alcohol regulations. In addition, the Student Assessment Fee may not be used in whole or part for the purchase of alcoholic beverages for any purpose.

The possession, use or storage of weapons is prohibited on University owned or controlled premises and at University sponsored events without authorization from the appropriate University official. Using or possessing a weapon, even with proper authorization, in a manner that harms, threatens or causes fear in others, or is otherwise in violation of the Weapons on Campus Policy contained in the Registered Student Organization Handbook, is also prohibited.

For specific information on university policy regarding risk management, please consult the RSO Advisor Policy Guide.

### **PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL RISK**

This includes hazing and Title IX. Copies of the policies related are below and more information can be found in the RSO Handbook.

#### **WMU HAZING POLICY**

No RSO shall conduct hazing activities. Hazing activities are defined as: any action taken or situation created, whether on or off campus, for the purpose of initiation or affiliation with any University organization or team which jeopardizes the physical and/or mental well-being of an individual; embarrasses, frightens, degrades an individual; or is illegal.

More information on Western Michigan University's specific hazing policy can be found in the RSO Advisor Policy Guide.

#### **UNIVERSITY SEXUAL ASSAULT AND MISCONDUCT POLICY**

Western Michigan University encourages all members of our community to participate in the process of creating a safe, welcoming and respectful environment on campus. With the Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment and Violence, Intimate Partner Violence, and Stalking Policy and Procedures, we affirm the commitment of the university and our community to the values of transparency and timely communication, and accountable and responsible behavior within an ethical, compassionate, diverse and respectful environment.

For complete policies, please visit: <http://www.wmich.edu/equity/sexualmisconduct>

There is also a [resource guide available via the Office of Institutional Equity](#).

#### **RESPONSIBLE EMPLOYEE REQUIREMENTS**

Advisors employed by the university are mandatory reporters. Kalamazoo community members who are not employed by Western Michigan University do not fall under the mandated reporter policy. However, we highly encourage all advisors to reach out to the Title IX office if they encounter any issues. Specific information can be found at the link above.

Title IX Coordinator Felicia Crawford (269-387-6316, [felicia.crawford@wmich.edu](mailto:felicia.crawford@wmich.edu)) is also available to host workshops and provide resources for advisors. Feel free to contact her for more information.

*Portions of this manual were adapted from:*

**Worcester Polytechnic Institute Fraternity and Sorority Organization Advisor  
Manual**  
**University of Minnesota Faculty/Staff Advisors Manual**  
**Sigma Alpha Epsilon Organization Advisor's Guide**  
**Association of Fraternity Advisors Organization Advisor Manual**  
**University of Nebraska-Lincoln Student Organization Advisor Guide**  
*and other sources as identified in the document*