Guiding Preservice Teachers to Lead Student Organizations in Education: 
The Faculty Advisor’s Perspective

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Abstract
This case study examined 11 teacher educators who served as faculty advisors of a student leadership organization in education. Drawing on data from written surveys and telephone interviews, the study found that administrators and colleagues identified interpersonal and organizational skills that made the faculty members suitable as advisors. The study also showed that the professors received little preparation for the position and that they drew upon their prior knowledge of pedagogy and learning theories to guide the student officers to become leaders. In spite of the challenges, the faculty viewed their advising role as a form of personal enrichment and professional development. The study provides insights to teacher educators who are evaluating the role of student professional organizations in their preparation programs.

Student organizations serve an important role in the life of a university. They support the institution’s mission of developing students as leaders who will foster positive change in their professions and communities after graduation (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2007). These organizations also serve as vehicles for enhancing the college experience, increasing campus and community involvement, and fostering intellectual development (Foubert & Grainger, 2006; Montelongo, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In the field of education, student organizations introduce preservice teachers to the real-world experiences they will encounter as practicing teachers, provide ongoing professional development, and offer networking opportunities with experts and peers (Roberts, Harlin, Murphrey, & Dooley, 2007). These groups also act as training grounds for preservice teachers to develop the leadership skills they will use in future classrooms and schools (Sterrett & Bond, 2012).

In spite of the benefits, universities routinely face challenges when it comes to maintaining student organizations. Institutions question their necessity, struggle to allocate financial and physical resources, and labor to find professors who will serve as advisors (Dunkel & Schuh, 1998). These issues are exacerbated in the climate of change in higher education. More and more, universities are encouraging faculty to decrease their efforts on service endeavors and increase their efforts on research and grants, which are becoming the gold standard in annual instructor evaluations. Because of the time commitment, serving as advisor to a student group is viewed by some faculty as “a prescription for career disaster” (Coplin & Rosch, 2007, p. A36).

Student organizations in education must overcome an additional hurdle. They are caught up in the public’s general dissatisfaction with the overall quality of teachers in schools, the credentialing process, and teacher preparation programs (Darling-Hammond, 2012). In response to the negativity, teacher educators are assessing all aspects of their programs, jettisoning...
underperforming parts, and launching new initiatives with the hope of increasing their programs’ success. It seems that no part of a teacher preparation program, even the student professional organization, is exempt from this scrutiny.

This study attempted to explore student organizations in education and their role in teacher preparation in depth. The investigation was significant because of the small number of empirical research studies in the field. The study built on findings published earlier in a companion article on student organizations in education from the officer’s perspective (Sterrett & Bond, 2012). Attention was now turned in the article presented here to the other person in the dyad, the faculty advisor. The specific research questions of this descriptive case study were: How were faculty members selected to become advisors of a student organization? How did they learn about advising and leading a student group? How were they teaching the student officers to lead the organization? What were the benefits and challenges of advising a student organization in education?

Review of the Literature

A review of the literature uncovered two empirical research studies on advising student organizations in education (Roberts, Harlin, Murphrey, & Dooley, 2007; Sterrett & Bond, 2012). Both investigated the student’s, not the faculty member’s, side of the experience. It appears, therefore, that the study below fills a gap in the literature. Since the research pertaining to student organizations in education was limited, the search parameters were expanded to include studies about faculty advising student organizations in other subject areas. Even though these studies were not directly related to education, they offered insights and informed the study presented here. The literature in the area can be divided into three categories: the roles of an advisor, the knowledge and skills required for the position, and the challenges and benefits of serving as an advisor. The following sections highlight each area.

The Multiple Roles of an Advisor

Serving as an advisor of a student organization requires the faculty member to assume various roles, such as mentor, supervisor, teacher, leader, follower, and motivator (Dunkel & Schuh, 1998). In the mentoring role the advisor strives to cultivate leadership skills in the officers and members of the organization. In a national study, Dugan, Komives, and Owen (2007) found that mentoring by faculty contributed significantly to students’ leadership development. The mentors helped the mentees more fully understand the concept of leadership. Thompson (2006) drew similar conclusions in his study examining the utilization of college resources. Students’ interactions and experiences with professors were “the strongest contributing college resource to students’ belief systems regarding leadership” (p. 348).

In the supervisory role the advisor guides students through a sequence of steps that includes team building, performance planning, communication, recognition, self-assessment, and formal evaluation (Dunkel, 1996). Establishing strong working relationships among members is vital to enhancing the organization’s effectiveness. As Dunkel and Schuh (1998) explain in their definitive book on advising student organizations, “Teamwork does not occur by accident” (p. 50). Therefore, advisors may need to plan multi-day team-building workshops or retreats with
the goal of fostering a learning community among students and developing their leadership skills through discussions, activities, or other interactive experiences (Haber, 2011). In the supervisory sequence, communication is also important. Advisors model appropriate verbal and written communication and work with the officers to establish a free flow of information. Dunkel and Schuh (1998) noted, “Student organizations thrive on continuous communication among the executive officers and members, the adviser and executive officers, the organization and institution, and perhaps the members and their constituency” (p. 10).

Next, advisors are teachers. In a study of successful chapters of student organizations in engineering, Evans, Evans, and Sherman (2001) found that the advising role has a prominent teaching function. The advisor must “design the curriculum, teach or lead students through key concepts or activities, provide learning experiences, provide regular feedback and assessment, provide additional instruction when necessary, and watch as students occasionally fall, then learn and grow” (p. 69).

When it comes to leading and following, advisors must know when to shift from one role to the other. Miles (2011) learned in her examination of student government leaders and their advisors that professors need to be able to lead the group but also recognize when to step back, follow, and let someone else lead. There are times when control is relinquished so that officers can experience leadership more fully.

Finally, the advisor in the motivator role provides emotional support to the students and encourages them to be involved in the organizations (Astin & Antonio, 2000). A few carefully chosen and delivered comments are “just the push or nudge needed for these individuals” (Jones, 2011, p. 41). In a study on member engagement, Bardou, Byrne, Pasternak, Perez, and Rainey (2003) discovered that when the advisor prompted students to develop their leadership skills, they reported greater actual personal involvement in various leadership activities.

**The Knowledge and Skills of an Advisor**

Effective advisors employ specific knowledge and skills to guide student organizations. First, they know the contexts in which they are operating, such as their institution’s expectations, rules, requirements, and policies pertaining to organizations (Love, 2003). Second, they know the people with whom they are working. Advisors are aware of their own personal biases and appreciative of their students’ cultural backgrounds (Delgado-Romero & Hernandez, 2002). They understand gender differences as well as specific strategies for guiding males and females. In a study of undergraduate student leaders, Bardou, Byrne, Pasternak, Perez, and Rainey (2003) found that male and female student leaders perceived the advisor’s support differently. For example, females benefitted from more intentional mentoring and role-modeling by advisors than did males.

Third, advisors demonstrate good interpersonal and problem-solving skills. A solid understanding of group dynamics and strategies for developing group cohesion is essential. In short, “the advisor is attempting to influence the development of leaders within the student group and attempting to influence positive group development and functioning” (Love, 2003, p. 512).
Fourth, effective advisors must possess a solid grasp of learning, leadership, and developmental theories. Understanding learning theories is critical since teaching is at the heart of the advisor-advisee relationship. According to Boone and Taylor (2007), advisors are responsible for providing explicit training, direction, and guidance that will help students to become successful leaders. They work with students to explore personal values, interests, and abilities while considering academic and career goals (Bland, 2004). Besides learning theory, advisors must have a command of leadership theories and leadership styles. A primary function of an advisor is to “help students strengthen their understanding of their own leadership style and build leadership skills” (Shertzer, Wall, Frandsen, Guo, Whalen, & Shelley, 2005, p. 102).

In addition to learning and leadership theories, advisors need to know developmental theories (Laosebikan-Buggs, 2006). In a longitudinal study examining the development of leadership identity, Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, and Osteen (2005) found that leaders pass through stages of maturation and that the advisor’s interaction with students changes over time. In the beginning, advisors are influential role models who are often the first people to recognize leadership potential in students, prompt the students to get involved in organizations, and set high expectations and goals for students in the area of leadership. In the next stage, advisors continue as role models but become more actively involved as mentors. In the last developmental stage they shift to the roles of meaning-makers to the students.

The Challenges and Benefits for an Advisor

Faculty members often encounter challenges as advisors (Dunkel & Schuh, 1998). They must overcome a fairly common attitude that student organizations are unimportant. In an unpublished dissertation, Croft (2004) asked 49 advisors of student organizations at a research-extensive university about their motives for serving in this role. Eight professors cited no benefit in serving and openly discouraged others from doing so.

In addition to the institutional challenges, advisors confront practical issues as well. Time management and over-commitment easily entangle advisors. Dunkel and Schuh (1998) wrote:

Attending weekly meetings with the student organization president, the executive board, and the organization itself; attending a couple of activities or events each week; making phone calls; attending individual meetings with students in the organization; and writing letters of reference and recommendation—these activities collectively can take a considerable amount of time (p. 8).

Other potential problems include a lack of training to fulfill the position, confusion about the roles and expectations for an advisor, poor communication among all the parties involved, and frustration and impatience when mistakes are made during the learning process (Miles, 2011).

In spite of the challenges, sponsoring student organization is rewarding (Dunkel & Schuh, 1998). Advisors often receive recognition from the institution and the students for contributing to the betterment of the university and shaping future leaders. Service in this position is viewed as a way to give back to the university and to network with students, administrators, community members, and fellow advisors at other universities. When advisors engage in these out-of-class
experiences, they remain current with the fads and interests of the younger generation. Overall, they report a sense of personal satisfaction and enjoyment working with the student organizations.

Methods

This study examined 11 professors who were serving as faculty advisors of a student chapter of an international organization in education. A case study approach was employed because the research goal was “to describe the incidence or prevalence of a phenomenon” (Yin, 2003, p. 6). The questions that guided the investigation were as follows: How were faculty members selected to become advisors of a student organization? How did they learn about advising and leading a student group? How did they teach the student officers to lead the organization? What were the benefits and challenges of advising a student organization in education?

The Honorary Professional Organization in Education

The student organization highlighted in this study was Kappa Delta Pi, International Honor Society in Education (KDP). Founded in 1911 by Dr. William Bagley, a teacher educator at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, KDP honors academically accomplished students and provides them with service opportunities and scholarship on effective teaching practices (Null, 2012). Staff members in the national office in Indianapolis, Indiana, partner with student officers and faculty advisors to offer these benefits to the more than 40,000 members in 600 collegiate and professional chapters around the globe.

Each biennium, chapters can apply for an Achieving Chapter Excellence (ACE) Award, which is given to the top four percent of all chapters. The award acknowledges accomplishments in five areas: leadership development, events programming, membership recruitment and retention, local chapter management, and chapter management for the national office.

Participants

The participants were 11 faculty advisors, or counselors, as they are called in KDP. In this role, they were responsible for working closely with the student officers to initiate new members, host professional development opportunities for chapter members, and complete service projects benefitting the university and community. The participants were identified using purposive sampling. The faculty advisors of the 24 chapters that won the ACE Award in the fall of 2011 were chosen because their receiving this prestigious award suggested that the chapters, officers, and advisors were functioning at a high level. The researchers e-mailed the 24 advisors and invited them to participate in the study. Eleven agreed, thus narrowing the initial sample from 24 to 11 chapters (46%). This approach reduced our purposive selection to 11 participants, with the unit of analysis being a faculty advisor.

Overall, the participants were fairly homogeneous in terms of language, sex, and age. The 11 participants were English-speaking females between 40 and 60 years old. There was minor variation in terms of ethnicity (White=9, Latina=1, African-American=1). These demographics are proportional to the general KDP membership. On average, the participants had been
members for approximately 12.5 years and advisors for 10.8. Table 1 provides an overview of the 11 participants. All names are pseudonyms.

Table 1.
Summary of Participants’ Characteristics from Eleven University Chapters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Participant’s Name</th>
<th>University Characteristics</th>
<th>Duration in Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Pseudonyms)</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Enrollment$^1$</td>
<td>Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Smith</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Jones</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Johnson</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Medium</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Roosevelt</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Medium</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Large</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Davis</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Small</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Davis</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Williams</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Nelson</td>
<td>Southwest</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Small=0 to 10,000 students; Medium=10,001 to 20,000 students; Large=greater than 20,001 students

Researchers’ Positionality

The researchers assumed two roles during the study. First, they designed the study, collected and analyzed data, and authored the manuscript. Second, they were very involved as members and leaders of the organization. One researcher was serving as the national president of KDP and as the faculty counselor of his local university chapter. Although his chapter received an ACE Award at the 2011 KDP conference, his officers did not participate in the study in order to avoid a conflict of interest. The second researcher was also actively involved in the national organization; he was chairing the KDP Public Policy Committee, a group dedicated to bringing various stakeholders together to discuss pertinent policy issues and advance the field of education.

Their past experiences positively biased them toward leadership development. The researchers served in these roles because they strongly believe in the mission of KDP and the organization’s efforts to recognize excellence in education and to develop members’ leadership skills. They believe that faculty counselors can guide preservice education students to become teacher leaders through participation in the day-to-day management of their local KDP chapters.

Data Sources

The researchers collected data through an electronic written survey and a one-hour telephone interview. The participants received a researcher-developed survey containing 14 open-ended questions. Two informed people, the KDP Executive Director and a Regional Chapter Coordinator at KDP Headquarters, offered feedback on the survey, thus strengthening its validity. Both people regularly work with chapter counselors and officers. The survey solicited...
information about the participant’s name, number of years as an advisor, the way the participant was named to this role, the goals for the chapter, previous training, and approaches to chapter management.

After submitting the completed surveys, each participant completed a one-hour semi-structured telephonic interview. The interviews allowed in-depth probes into the comments provided in the written survey and offered insight into the participants’ perspectives (Merriam, 2009). The questions from the survey served as a starting point for exploration into why the professors decided to serve as counselors, what they were specifically learning from leading, how they were guiding the officers, and what successes and challenges they were experiencing. To ensure consistency, only one researcher interviewed the participants. Additional measures to ensure consistency included field notes, audiotaping, transcription, and member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Data Analyses and Trustworthiness**

Data collected from the written surveys and telephone interviews were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The data consisted of 20 hours of audiotape and 150 pages of survey and verbatim interview transcription. The researcher who conducted the interviews also transcribed them verbatim. Since the number of studies pertaining to faculty advisors of student organizations was limited, the researchers kept the initial analysis as broad as possible. Working independently, each researcher read through the data to “gain a sense of the whole” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 464). Next, each separately analyzed the transcripts sentence by sentence, labeled topics with a code to capture the essence of the ideas, and drafted memos to focus the coding and record the logic used for forming a working hypothesis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Before moving forward with the analysis, the researchers came together and triangulated their findings via peer checks and an iterative peer debriefing processing. These meetings allowed the researchers to monitor each other’s work done separately and guard against any biases or illogical conclusions (Mishler, 2000). The iterative process of reading, re-reading, comparing and contrasting, interpreting the sources, and analyzing data continued until a point of saturation was reached where no new topics emerged (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The researchers read through the data again to refine the identified topics into distinct categories and confirm the themes. During this final pass, direct quotations were excerpted from the data to use as exemplars for illustrating the designated themes.

The researchers established trustworthiness in several ways. They triangulated data from differing points of view by looking for regularities and considering only information that at least three participants shared (Denzin, 2000). The researchers also held peer debriefing sessions, which allowed them to step away from the process and clarify their thinking. Furthermore, they conducted member checks by asking each participant to verify in writing the researchers’ understanding and correct any misconceptions (Drew, Hardman, & Hosp, 2008).
Results

Six themes emerged from the data to describe the faculty advisors’ role in guiding student organizations in education. The themes included (1) the ways the professors became advisors, (2) the sources of their knowledge about leadership needed for serving in the position, (3) the goals set for the students and the organization, (4) the methods used to foster students’ leadership skills, (5) the benefits associated with serving as advisors, and (6) the challenges associated with serving as advisors. The following sections expound upon each theme.

Becoming an Advisor

When asked to explain how they became the faculty advisors of their KDP chapters, the professors recounted stories that often included three parts. First, they were asked to serve by colleagues who were retiring or pursuing other professional responsibilities or by department chairs or college deans. None of them had responded to an open call for volunteers or won an election. In essence, they had been tapped to serve.

A second key part of each story was that these same anointing colleagues and administrators recognized qualities or attributes that made their younger counterparts well-suited for the role. The new counselors were viewed as dedicated, industrious, organized, and personable. Davis recounted:

My dean was familiar with what I was doing and suggested that it would be a nice for me to serve. She thought that I had some skills that would be helpful to the organization in terms of developing students’ leadership skills. I tend to be pretty responsible, so she teased me about that. Of course, she did sell this in a way that wasn’t quite accurate in that she said, “Oh! This will be a piece of cake for you.”

Third, the professors who eventually accepted the position reported knowing little about KDP or advising a student organization. They accepted the position as a leap of blind faith. Smith reminisced:

There was a faculty member at my university who retired, and she asked me to take it [KDP] on. And lo and behold, I had no idea what I was getting into. But, I thought that I could do this. And the rest is history.

In summary, the advisors each responded to an invitation from a trusted colleague without knowing much about the organization.

Sources of Knowledge about Leadership

Participants generally received no formal leadership training to prepare them for advising a student organization. On-the-job training appeared to be the norm. Roosevelt commented, “I just learned by doing. Nobody trained me.” Davis echoed this sentiment when she said, “I think that I have learned lots from just throwing myself in.”
In spite of the lack of preparation, all the advisors drew insights about leadership from their past and current experiences serving on various committees in their departments, colleges, universities, communities, and state and national professional organizations. Jones stated, “I think the best preparation I have had for these roles were my previous leadership experiences. I have been actively involved in various leadership roles and organizations since my undergraduate days.”

Five advisors remembered mentors who had significantly impacted their leadership development. Davis recalled, “I have had some wonderful mentors along the way early in my career. When I was in graduate school taking a doctoral seminar class, my professor stressed how important it was to identify a mentor.”

Although most learned about leadership informally, four advisors cited specific leadership courses or trainings they completed. Davis participated in a leadership program as a teenager, and that program served as a springboard to more leadership opportunities as she grew older. Jones took a course on leadership as part of the requirements for her graduate degree while Lee pursued an entire graduate degree in leadership. After she was an advisor, Washington completed a series of leadership workshops offered at her university. She elaborated:

> I attended special training sessions that my university has offered to assist administrators and faculty in working with student leaders. The sessions were brief. What I learned from the sessions is that everyone becomes a leader with true guidance and that everyone learns differently.

In summary, the advisors varied in how they learned about leadership, with some taking an informal and others a formal route.

**Goals in the Position**

The advisors identified numerous goals they hoped to accomplish in the position. At the most basic level, they viewed the KDP chapter as a way to recognize high-achieving students. This goal was obvious since KDP is an honor society comprised of members who have demonstrated academic excellence as measured by grade point average. Washington summarized the essence of the organization when she said that KDP is one way to “showcase the talents that students have.”

In addition to the basic goals, advisors held loftier aspirations for their chapters and officers. They viewed KDP as a vehicle for helping students to become better leaders, teachers, and people. To help the officers become better leaders, the advisors gave them experiences that would develop their interpersonal, organizational, communication, and time-management skills. This goal is addressed more fully in the section on the next theme.

To help the officers become more effective teachers, the advisors took a multi-pronged approach. They emphasized the importance of professionalism in education by setting high expectations for the officers’ behavior and interactions with chapter members, faculty, and people in the community. They also worked with the officers to plan professional development experiences.
that would enrich the required coursework for their degrees. This extra knowledge would ideally have a long-lasting impact and help the officers to be more successful in the classroom, thus retaining them longer in the profession. Finally, the advisors gave the officers leadership opportunities that would distinguish them from other candidates in the competitive job market.

To help the officers become better people or humanitarians, the advisors dedicated themselves to their officers. Roosevelt noted, “I want KDP to exert a strong and lasting impact upon our students and their value systems that will positively change the way they think and the way they live.” Lee noted the importance of her role by stating, “Being a counselor allows me to model for our students the significant impact we educators can have on the individuals we teach. We teachers should guide our students both academically and emotionally while providing them with kindness and support.”

In addition to helping the students, the advisors viewed the KDP chapter as a form of advertisement to enhance the university’s teacher preparation program to external constituents. An active and recognized chapter would be a bragging right for the university to other KDP chapters across the nation, the local community, and prospective students. Still other advisors assumed a more internal stance by promoting the chapter’s projects and initiatives as a way to increase the organization’s status on campus. Roosevelt wrote, “I am trying to make our chapter of KDP visible and recognized as a premier society in education by all education students and administrators at our university.”

### Teaching Leadership to Officers

The advisors employed strategies for developing the student officers’ leadership skills. A primary method was modeling effective leadership practices. Smith explained, “I try to lead by example and show them examples of good leadership. I help them to understand the decisions that I make as a leader, how I make them, and why I make them.”

Formal classes were the second method for teaching leadership. The counselors encouraged their officers to attend the national organization’s online webinars and in-person workshops that focused on leadership offered at the regional and national conferences. Furthermore, the advisors encouraged the officers to take advantage of any special leadership classes conducted at the local university. Lee described these leadership classes by saying, “The students go through a training [in] how to best present yourself, how to be able to collaborate with other people, how to have a conversation with other people, and how to facilitate meetings.”

Third, learning about leadership occurred in informal settings. Chapter officers networked with other officers at the regional and national KDP conferences. Smith extolled the benefits of these exchanges, saying, “When students have the opportunity to attend Convocation and interact with other student leaders, that is very powerful. You see how other students are fulfilling those responsibilities and learn how to enhance your own leadership role.” Conversations with other officers were important. All advisors required their incoming and outgoing officers to meet during a scheduled transition retreat. At these meetings the two groups shared printed binders of materials for each leadership position. As part of the training the incoming officers observed or
“shadowed” the outgoing officers for a period of time to learn about the specific leadership position.

Fourth, the advisors stated that over the course of a year, they adjusted the amount of support they provided to the officers. When the students began their terms as chapter leaders, the advisors took a more hands-on approach to guiding them. They modeled or explicitly taught how to complete a specific task or responsibility. Then, as the officers experienced success and gained confidence, the advisors assumed a more hands-off approach. Lee elaborated:

I actually followed Pearson’s Gradual Release of Responsibility. I modeled for them how to run a meeting and showed them initially all the steps. Then, I gave them reminders and asked questions all along the way. As I saw them grow and develop, I backed off. So, my overall philosophy, as with any new teacher, was to show them, give them information, explain why it’s important to do things a certain way, be there as a support, and then gradually back off.

Fifth, the advisors differentiated the support they provided certain officers. Some advisors spent time at the beginning of the term informally assessing the officers’ leadership abilities. Based on these pre-assessments, the advisors determined how much support was needed and adjusted the level of mentoring for individual officers accordingly. Davis clarified, “Sometimes I have had officers who seem to be able to hit the ground running and other times they need assistance.” In summary, the advisors modified their approach based on the officer’s learning needs and ability levels.

Benefits of Advising

Advising a student organization was rewarding. The professors mentioned the personal sense of satisfaction they gained from working in this role. When describing the professional relationships with these outstanding students, the advisors used words such as “phenomenal” and “wonderful.” Jones noted, “Actually, advising is part of my job; it’s in my job description, but working with them is by far my favorite part of my job.” Moreover, the university could also feel a sense of satisfaction with these outstanding students. Nelson noted:

There’s a feeling of empowerment when these students join Kappa Delta Pi. It’s a point of pride for them. They feel empowered because they can elaborate on the things that they did as chapter officers during the job interviews for teaching positions. The leadership skills they developed are evident because the students are very confident and they procure jobs right away. Their applications come to the top of the list when there are so many applications. I know this simply because I have been in meetings with human resource people in the districts, and they tell us again and again. The principals are very happy with their performance in the classroom.

In other words, the officers of the student organizations demonstrate that universities are doing a good job preparing new teachers.
The KDP officers helped in their respective colleges of education when necessary, in terms of fostering the mission of the institution. Jones explained:

The KDP officers are my go-to people in the College of Education. If I need a representative from the College of Education to speak or serve on a panel or just shake hands to incoming students, they are the first go-to people. When I get an email or an announcement for a service award, a student award, or a senior award, they are the first people that I think of because they are the ones who are putting so much hard work in and they are the leaders. They stand out on their own. And I think that Kappa Delta Pi just helps foster that in them. I can’t imagine not having the group. It really is the premier organization in our college. I often get asked, “Can you send me someone who could…. Can you ask the general membership who could tutor this student because we’re looking for strong math people? Or do you have a member in Kappa Delta Pi that would be willing to come and talk to this group of incoming freshmen or whatever?” I get asked all the time to use this group. These officers are amazing.

The KDP officers also helped the university by completing service projects in the local community and hosting professional development conferences for practicing teachers in neighboring school districts.

Working with chapter officers and advising student professional organizations was a good learning experience for the professors. They learned more than they otherwise would have about the popular culture of the next generation – their fashions, interests, and trends. Advising KDP afforded the professors more opportunities to interact with pre-service teachers. As Smith noted, “It’s a constant reminder of the need to be aware of where they’re at in their professional growth because sometimes it’s easy to forget.” The insights gleaned from these experiences inform the professors’ decisions about teaching and the preparation program in general.

The professors also learned about leadership, teaching leadership to others, and the methods for running a student organization. Roosevelt noted, “I am learning to let go and let others do more and more in my place, while still scaffolding and providing guidance and support.” The advisors were able to take the skills they learned while advising and apply them to other contexts. Washington responded, “I have used many of the skills KDP has taught me to run various programs and events.” In other words, serving as a KDP advisor was good professional development for the faculty member.

**Challenges of Advising**

Advisors faced some institutional and instructional challenges in their role. Institutional challenges refer to the relationship between the chapter and the university or national office while instructional challenges refer to the problems of teaching leadership to the officers. First of all, some advisors did not feel appreciated by their universities. Smith noted:

I just wish that our campuses appreciated the work that counselors do because they have made a huge impact on these students. It’s a shame that in some places that’s not really
valued as much as it should be because we know how much time and energy it takes to do this and do this well.

Besides the lack of support from administrators, advisors dealt with colleagues who would not help or support the chapter. Nelson explained, “My challenge has been trying to get someone, trying to get some fresh blood in there, to come in and help me mentor as a counselor.”

Along the same lines, the advisors mentioned the institutional support they received from the KDP national office. Although they were generally satisfied with the support, they wanted more webinars for each officer position. They wondered if technology could be used to bring together officers from different university chapters to share ideas with one another. The advisors felt stressed at times by the demands of the position. Lee explained, “At our university there isn’t any compensation for acting as a counselor. With all of our other duties and responsibilities as faculty, sometimes we get overwhelmed and need a nudge or two to respond to emails and other tasks.”

The instructional challenges varied greatly, depending on the advisor and the set of officers. The advisors mentioned a plethora of challenges: fostering teamwork and camaraderie among the officers, building a sense of community among the membership, instilling the importance of commitment, managing time, delegating responsibilities to others, motivating members, planning an appropriate type and number of events, communicating well, and completing required paperwork correctly and in a timely manner. In other words, the role of advisor posed unique problems to each professor.

Discussion

This study examined the advisor’s role in a student organization. Although several studies have investigated this topic in the past, the current study focused on the little-researched field of student organizations in education. From the data, some expected as well as unexpected findings emerged. First, it seems that advisors are often asked to serve. In an earlier study, Myers and Roth (2010) investigated professors’ motives for becoming advisors and found that they either volunteered or accepted an invitation from administrators, colleagues, or community members. New findings in the current study provide some details about the selection process and the events that occurred after the invitation was extended. When administrators and colleagues asked the faculty member to serve as an advisor, they saw qualities that would make the person ideally suited for the role. The professor possessed the interpersonal and organizational skills to succeed in the position. The approach worked because the professor accepted the invitation without knowing much about the organization and continued in the role for several years. Future scholars may want to explore the recruitment of advisors more in-depth to determine the best way to recruit professors to serve.

Second, the education professors, as a result of their prior training for their careers, possessed in-depth knowledge of learning theories, developmental theories, and pedagogy. Conversely, they knew little about advisement and leadership instruction. Dunkel and Shun (1998) noted in their classic book on advising student organizations that professors often receive little training for the role. Studying how professors learned how to advise, De Sawal (2006) in his unpublished
dissertation found that many relied on their experiences as members of student organizations. The education professors in the current study drew upon their expertise in pedagogy and applied it to the unknown situations related to running a student organization and fostering leadership skills in the officers. They did what all effective teachers do. They pre-assessed their officers’ background knowledge about leadership, modeled appropriate ways to lead, provided opportunities to practice the new skills, differentiated support based on the officers’ ability levels, and then gradually withdrew support to the budding leaders. Future scholars might investigate the specific steps that advisors in non-educational fields take when working with chapter officers and teaching them about leadership. Are their steps similar to those taken by advisors in the field of education?

Third, faculty advisors viewed student organizations as a form of personal enrichment and professional development for themselves and for the students. Other scholars, such as Dunkel and Schuh (1998) and Love (2003), have noted the professor’s strong sense of personal satisfaction derived in the role. Similarly, the advisors in the current study enjoyed getting to know students on a deeper level, completing activities with them, and watching them mature as leaders. In addition to the personal benefits, there were professional ones as well. When the education professors interacted with preservice students outside the classroom environment, they got more first-hand exposure to the culture of the students, in effect narrowing the gap between generations. The opportunity to work with young people caused ripple effects. The faculty members were better informed as they revised their individual courses and their entire teacher preparation programs. Moreover, the professors added to their knowledge base. They learned about leadership and the teaching of leadership. In essence, they became leader educators as well as teacher educators. Future researchers may want to delve more deeply into the benefits of student professional organizations to departments and colleges of education.

The study was not without its limitations. The participants were a small, select group of White female counselors from high-performing chapters at colleges and universities, primarily, though not entirely, located in the northeastern part of the United States. Follow-up studies could be conducted to determine whether similar results would emerge if the variables changed. For example, do the counselor’s ethnicity and gender matter? Does the size of the institution matter? Do the performance levels of the chapter affect what happens? Does the geographical location of the organization make a difference?

Based on the findings, there are two implications for those who support the faculty advisors and make decisions about the fate of student organizations in education. First, universities seeking faculty advisors may want to consider personalities and affective attributes. Miles (2011) warned university administrators about randomly selecting advisors of student governments. She wrote:

A good advisor will serve the university well, just as [an] institution’s random selection of an advisor can create even more friction and adversarial relationships between an administration and student government. Both groups will suffer accordingly, but students pay the ultimate price (p. 6).
Universities and, in this instance, teacher preparation programs, may want to closely assess their student professional organizations. Although these organizations are at times challenging, they reap rewards for the institution and for the faculty member advisor. Second, the national office of the professional organization may want to focus on the advisors’ needs and help them to complete their job responsibilities more effectively. It appears that the counselors would welcome and benefit from ongoing professional development on leadership and the teaching of leadership.

Faculty advisors of student organizations in education have pedagogical and content knowledge. Even though they have acquired this professional knowledge over the years, they may lack knowledge and experience of leadership and the teaching of leadership. Overall, they view their work as advisors to student organizations as fulfilling a higher purpose and believe their efforts will benefit students, teacher preparation programs, institutions, and local communities. If teacher preparation programs want their graduates to become teacher leaders and if they believe leadership is indeed a process and not a position, then supporting faculty members as they advise students in professional organizations would be good policy.

References


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