

Student Welfare Committee

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

**Student Organization Advisors Report:
Challenges and Best Practices
Spring 2021**



Committee Members

Official Committee Members

Areli Chacón Silva achaconsilva@utep.edu

Oralia Loza oloza@utep.edu

Arifur R Khan arkhan@utep.edu

Eric D Smith esmith2@utep.edu

Pratyusha Basu pbasu@utep.edu

Deepak K Tosh dktosht@utep.edu

Student Representative

Rebekah Plaza rmlaza@miners.utep.edu

Cierra Chenault cmchenault@miners.utep.edu

Nicole Mueller [nmuellet2@miners.utep.edu](mailto:nmueller2@miners.utep.edu)

Ex Officio Members

Virginia M Fraire vmfraire2@utep.edu

Guillermina Gina Nuñez-Mchiri ggnunez@utep.edu

Executive Council Rep

Daniel A Tillman datillman@utep.edu

Introduction

As members of the Student Welfare Committee (SWC), our duties are:

1. **Propose, review, and evaluate** the administrative policies for the recognition and registration of student organizations; and to mediate any dispute arising from the denial of recognition of a student group's petition for recognition.
2. At the request of the President, **review appeals** from decisions of the Hearing Officer and the Dean of Students regarding student organizations and make recommendations to the President.
3. **Advise the Vice President for Student Affairs** on policies related to student organizations, social activities, student government, student recreation facilities, disabled student services, international programs, union services, residence life, and student support and counseling.
4. **Advise the Bookstore Director, the Director of the Student Health Center and the General Manager of Food Services** on the development of policies and procedures.
5. **Work with** the respective **faculties** of the various colleges **to promote, support, and encourage** student development through involvement and participation in the activities and programs offered by the University.

As part of our commitment to working with faculty to promote student development, the members of the Student Welfare Committee have explored different ways to support Student Organization Advisors who are dedicated to assist and provide students with meaningful co-curricular experiences.

This report highlights the Committee's effort to document the challenges and best practices voiced by the Student Organization Advisors. Additionally, this report invites faculty members to serve as advisors and mentors to engage and provide leadership opportunities to students.

It is our hope that this report raises awareness of the important role Student Organization Advisors play in furthering student learning and development outside of the classroom.

Student Welfare Committee

Challenges and Best Practices

Advisors were invited to join the SWC meeting to have a conversation about the challenges and innovations underway to stay active as advisors during the pandemic. For those who were unable to attend, we asked them to provide their insights via email.

The following table provides the advisor responses received at the completion of this report. Challenges are noted in blue and best practices are noted in orange.

NOTE: Advisors were provided the option to remain anonymous.

Advisor Name/Email Student Organization	Comments: Challenges and Best Practices
VIA EMAIL	
Elvira Carrizal-Dukes ecarrizaldukes@utep.edu Chicana/o Studies Assistant Professor of Practice and Undergraduate Academic Adviser 2020-2021 Provost's Faculty Fellow 2019-2021 TeachTech Faculty Fellow La Mariposa Madrid	I'm the faculty adviser for La Mariposa Madrid, however, my students are waiting to be active until later this semester or summer. I don't believe we have renewed.
Ophra Leyser-Whalen, Ph.D. (she/her) Associate Professor oleyserwhalen@utep.edu Department of Sociology and Anthropology The University of Texas at El Paso 500 W. University Ave. El Paso, TX 79968 Office: 915-747-6587 www.utep.edu/liberalarts/sociology-and-anthropology/	I have found that corresponding in a timely manner has been a challenge-- whereas we would normally see each other every so often on campus, student group leaders aren't as responsive on email I think one of the student groups I advise for is doing a great job with virtual, Zoom meetings. The other I have no idea about, unfortunately. But they were hard to communicate with before the pandemic too
Matt Crouse cmcrouse3@utep.edu primary advisor to the Student Government Association (SGA)	Three major challenges: Students' inability to connect just with the meeting and not do other things while attending a meeting on Zoom or Teams. The distractions and things pulling them away from an online meeting is much greater than when we met in person, even with their cell phones on

Advisor Name/Email Student Organization	Comments: Challenges and Best Practices
	• Student accountability for actions from a distance, and advising accountability from a distance is harder than if you could call a student into your office for a conversation • Innovation around online events did not seem to go as well with our student demographic as I would have hoped Best practices • I kept regularly scheduled, structured meetings with the executive team and 1:1 meetings with each exec member to push/hold them accountable. This was more important when I couldn't physically see what they were doing • We got creative with our funds on how to best serve students – we are hosting an event on a scale we don't normally do in order to try to re-engage students. This has meant helping the students learn some event planning skills that were not previously there. It has also meant allowing experts to do the contracts part of our event planning with external artists • Focus on keeping better minutes because communication is different electronically versus in-person • Be prepared to work on team dynamics – we have had some dusts up because the students are relying even more on electronic communication versus talking to each other 'face to face.' I fully expect I'm going to have to work extra hard on team dynamics for in-person meetings starting in April because this group isn't used to seeing in each other's reactions in an in-person setting. We are going to go back through the storming stage of group development. I expect more storming in the summer with transition and the team having to readjust to traveling to campus and seeing each other • Finally, this pandemic finally made the group force greater reliance on MinerTracker and making the process more paperless and sustainable. We anticipate moving almost all processes electronic by Summer including how we distribute money through the student org allocation process

Advisor Name/Email Student Organization	Comments: Challenges and Best Practices
Misty Duke mcduke@utep.edu Students in Intelligence and National Security	This is my first semester as advisor to our student organization, Students in Intelligence and National Security. Our first major challenge resulted from a transition in advisors (the previous one left the University) and confusion about the future of the organization, stemming from a recent merger between the INSS program and the Department of Criminal Justice. Therefore, students had not held elections the previous year. We had to quickly recruit officers for this year and hold elections to get the board in place. A second challenge was also inherited from the previous year. Members received stoles upon graduation and one student purchased stoles on his own that were very expensive. There were issues with reimbursement and with following appropriate financial protocols. We also realized that these stoles were extremely expensive, in general, and shouldn't be the purpose of fundraising efforts. Fortunately, the new slate of officers have been very professional, productive, and efficient. They revised the organization's bylaws, reorganized fundraising efforts, and have done an amazing job rebuilding the organization, especially with recruiting new students. This has all taken place with the challenges to all organizations stemming from pandemic-related limitations. They have held several virtual events that have been quite popular, as well.
DURING ZOOM MEETING	
Shalla Copeland smcopeland@utep.edu Texas Nursing Students' Association (TNSA at UTEP)	Nursing is year-round Going into hospitals for clinical practice Students are tired of being online Balancing safety issues in staying safe
Jesse Singleton jasingleton@utep.edu Graduate Student Association (and Residence Hall Association until Nov. 2020)	Used to work for res life Social programing Identity and sense of community were challenges Maintaining information digitally but zoom fatigue Affects morale when students do not show up

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	Advantage is that students can participate from a distance
Suzanne Ramirez sramirez13@utep.edu Society for Human Resource Management (College of Business)	Challenges with fundraising This year, conferences are online and free Student org does not have a tax id (501c3 status) <i>*Response from Mallory Payan: this is currently under development and policy revision. New tax-exempt guidelines will be made as well as expectations</i> <i>*Response from Dr. Charlin Jones-Chavez: This is a UT issue/challenge</i>
Gina Nuñez-Mchiri ggnunez@utep.edu Advisor to Vision Mexico, student organization of Mexican national students at UTEP	Advisor to Vision Mexico, student organization of Mexican students enrolled at UTEP. Student representative expressed the feeling of isolation they are feeling while being away from campus; the feelings of disconnection is greater for students because they are in another state and not know what is happening on campus and what they are missing out Students are losing family members and cannot get support from peers The Mexican consulate invited the Students of Vision Mexico to connect and to meet other non-profit organizations. Vision Mexico students see the Mexican Consulate as an ally As WGS, they hosted an open house this spring semester. Faculty shared their work and the classes they teach. Acknowledged successes of the students <i>Advice/Best Practice: find ways to acknowledge students and connect them with alumni</i> Students liked seeing the face of the faculty, particularly during this time of the pandemic
Adolfo Alvarez adolfoa@utep.edu Lecturer in Psychology Psi Chi Psychology Honor Society	Increasing membership by 22 students Open to all students New officers are active

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Arifur R Khan arkhan@utep.edu	Students appreciate asynchronized courses Some students are caretakers
Areli Chacón Silva achaconsilva@utep.edu Advisor to Alpha Phi Omega	Coffee hours with the advisor via Zoom Check-in to identify students at risk
Eric Smith esmith2@utep.edu	Has open office hours via Zoom using a permanent link
Charlin Jones-Chavez crjoneschav@utep.edu Assistant Dean of Students for Engagement and Mallory Payan magarcia23@utep.edu SELC Assistant Director, Student Organizations, Fraternity & Sorority Life, Terry Scholars Program	Add events to MineTracker It will soon be linked to University Calendar minetracker.utep.edu Student Org can request funds from a new fund
Matt Crouse cmcrouse3@utep.edu primary advisor to the Student Government Association (SGA)	Three major challenges - Students' inability to connect just with the meeting and not do other things while attending a meeting on Zoom or Teams. The distractions and things pulling them away from an online meeting is much greater than when we met in person, even with their cell phones on - Student accountability for actions from a distance, and advising accountability from a distance is harder than if you could call a student into your office for a conversation - Innovation around online events did not seem to go as well with our student demographic as I would have hoped Best practices - I kept regularly scheduled, structured meetings with the executive team and 1:1 meetings with each exec member to push/hold them accountable. This was more important when I couldn't physically see what they were doing - We got creative with our funds on how to best serve students – we are hosting an event on a scale we don't normally do in order to try to re-engage students. This has meant helping the students learn some event planning skills that

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	were not previously there. It has also meant allowing experts to do the contracts part of our event planning with external artists • Focus on keeping better minutes because communication is different electronically versus in-person • Be prepared to work on team dynamics – we have had some dusts up because the students are relying even more on electronic communication versus talking to each other ‘face to face.’ I fully expect I’m going to have to work extra hard on team dynamics for in-person meetings starting in April because this group isn’t used to seeing in each other’s reactions in an in-person setting. We are going to go back through the storming stage of group development. I expect more storming in the summer with transition and the team having to readjust to traveling to campus and seeing each other • Finally, this pandemic finally made the group force greater reliance on MineTracker and making the process more paperless and sustainable. We anticipate moving almost all processes electronic by Summer including how we distribute money through the student org allocation process
Anonymous Comments	
	PT students are in the same situation as Nursing
	Contact with others beyond people that they live with Changed format for Halloween event from on-campus to a podcast Engagement with alumni to address drop-out Using this time to improve organization
	Students do not come to office hours They do reach out with issues or problems No longer a casual (much needed) hello

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	I am sorry but I am unlikely to join the meeting as I have class plus a prior commitment at that time. That said, I believe the biggest challenge for any of these organizations under COVID is building a strong community digitally. At the center of service organizations is the actual act of service, which fosters the strong sense of shared community among its members. COVID naturally curbs these types of activities which helps members form bonds that foster the greatest benefits derived from belonging to a service organization. The members of the ECC I am sure are experiencing similar difficulties to their peers in developing student awareness of their organization as well as recruiting and retention. I have not had an extended conversation with the officers of the ECC on this matter, but I know that it is a concern.
	My biggest challenge is to inspire group work while the students are being held pretty much in isolation during a Pandemic. The students are online 24/7 and overwhelmed with work. Doing anything "extra" curricular is proving to be a challenge. If there are ideas you all have for safe group building projects that are NOT 100% online, this would be helpful too...maybe something the students can contribute on their own, in a safe way, but then we come together as a group online again or something? I'm so grateful for all of the work you all are doing to keep us thriving somehow.
	Some students are in need of counseling, and wondered if UTEP's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) has mentioned any spike in appointments Students need some quiet time and a quiet place for their studies, but they often are tasked to run errands or to be caregivers. Many appreciate the asynchronous courses They have become disconnected from friends and boyfriends/girlfriends Best practice: add events to the university events calendar at events.utep.edu

Summary of Results

Challenges



Keeping students engaged

- Approaches to inspire group work while the students are being held pretty much in isolation during the pandemic
- Implementing icebreaker techniques to prompt group activities and interactions
- Distractions and lack of a support system that allow students to focus
- Multitasking while attending school or extra-curricular activities



Reaching out

- Students have been disconnected from family, friends, and student organizations
- Students do not reach out to advisors and do not come to office hours
- UTEP's student body have not demonstrated interest in online events



Student Organizations Challenges

- Fundraising has been a challenge
- Barriers to recruit new student members
- Lack of communication between student organization officers, advisors, and members

Best Practices



Creativity and innovation

- Find ways to acknowledge students and connect them with alumni
- Opportunity to promote team building and teamwork within the student organizations
- Meetings to do a quick check-in and monitor possible students at-risk/drop-outs



MineTracker

- Use of MineTracker to support student organizations
- Add events to university event calendar



- Use of social media to connect with members (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, etc.)



Student Services

- UTEP's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), Student Engagement & Leadership Center (SELC), Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS), and Student Recreation Center have been available to students.