

Being An Effective Conference Advisor  
Evelyn A. Wallington  
Appalachian State University  
SAACURH Regional Advisor

Congratulations, you are now in a role that many people choose not to take. The conference advisor. What a wonderful role it can be! You will probably learn more in the course of planning and implementing this conference than what you imagined. I promise that these things will help you grow both personally and professionally.

Here is my Top 10 List of How to Be an Effective Conference Advisor:

1. Set boundaries and limits with students with written expectations and job descriptions. Involve the students in writing these, so that they have ownership into this. This can provide needed structure and opportunities for feedback.
2. Remember that your role is one of helping students succeed, not being the doer of all tasks. Yes, this is a delicate balance, since you should be willing to do work, but you don't need to do it for them.
3. Assist the students in creating a timeline when all tasks are to be completed. Post this in a designated area & refer to it often. It can help folks keep on track.
4. Establish a good rapport/relationship with the conference chair(s). These individuals are vital to the success of the conference & they are taking on a tremendous responsibility. have regular meetings with just them to talk about the conference planning, who is doing what, who isn't doing what, etc. It is also important to talk with them about how they are doing as individuals. Don't let them forget that they are students.
5. Make sure that students know that you are the one who officially reviews and signs all contracts. they don't need to enter into any agreements that can't be lived up to. You as a professional have more legal issues to be concerned with and your signature carries more weight.
6. Document everything. Keeping a paper trail will help you more than you know in the long run.
7. Help the students to remember that even though the conference is important and everyone wants it to be the best that anyone has ever attended, it is not to be the only thing in their life. Too many times, I have seen students get into a competition over who gets the least amount of sleep, who can do more, who won't eat & who can get stressed the most. Here, classes, jobs, friends and others can often get ignored. The conference should not be their whole/sole world.
8. Make sure that your RHA officers are not trying to be an officer & a conference chair. I have seen more than one RHA torn apart over this. Encourage officers to be involved, but maybe in the role of a committee member, not a chair. This makes it easier for them to create a balance.
9. Keep to your budget! Be a Scrooge if you have to be! Set up strict procedures in spending & hold folks accountable for it. If everyone feels that going just a few bucks over budget in every line item is Ok, you are headed for disaster!
10. Have some fun with this! This is an opportunity to get to work with students and watch them grow so much! You get the chance to know them on different levels and be there for them. Yes, you need to create a balance to make sure that you are doing the job you get paid for, the conference stuff and your needs as a person. Role model what you expect.

I hope that this has been helpful. I have had the opportunity to be a conference advisor, work with conference advisors/staff and to be on a conference staff. It can be a wonderful bonding experience and one you will remember for a long time.