Nicholas Guy

Professor Davenport

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Student Organizations: How can student organizations use this handbook?



In the past decade, student activism has surged on college campus across the United States and the rest of the world. Often, one can find young campaigners calling on leaders both on and off campus to help erase inequalities, right wrongs, and secure the economic and political future of our world. But calling on students and especially student organizations on college campuses to create lasting change in their communities is nothing new. There are countless examples of [student activists and organizations](https://www.bestcolleges.com/blog/history-student-activism-in-college/) aiding pivotal social movements across time. For example, student organizations during the Civil Rights Movement helped organize and create effective peaceful protests that led the charge against racial inequality of African Americans. And during the Vietnam War, student organizations helped arrange staged sit-ins across college campuses in protest to the war.

As described throughout this handbook, there are many different ways students on college campuses can get involved with activist causes. Often, this involvement is sparked through interest of student-led organizations which provide a ready-made association of active individuals that are willing to dedicate their energy and time to assisting a social movement cause. However, not many students are aware of the processes that come along with setting up a college or university recognized student organization on campuses across the United States. This section is dedicated to students that may not have access to a student organization on their campus with the same shared activist goals as they do, and will outline some information and tips students may use if they desire to create their own student-led organization on a college campus.

**Creating a student organization on your college campus**



Creating a new student organization varies across campuses and universities. But registering and creating an organization as an official student group through the college or university provides one with many resources that are otherwise not available. By being officially recognized by the college or university, organizers might be able to reserve campus space for meetings and events, more easily publicize their organization, or even receive school funding for their activities. However, these resources are frequently dependent on the type of student organization that one registers with the college or university. Often, colleges and universities have different classifications of student groups, and how one registers their organization will depend on how they envision their student organization will function on campus. There are mainly [three categories](https://www.campusexplorer.com/college-advice-tips/FD80E2FC/How-To-Start-Your-Own-Student-Organization/) of student organizations that colleges and universities recognize:

Student Organizations: These groups are comprised almost exclusively of students who are currently enrolled at the university. At least 75% of the group must be current students and only those students can run for officer positions.

Campus Organizations: If you are planning on adding university faculty members, you will have to register as a campus organization. These groups are run by students in conjunction with university staff.

Community Organizations: Community Organizations are open to anyone in the local community. In order to register as a community organization, you will have to demonstrate that your group will serve the college and campus even if members are not attending or working for the school.

Besides these three general classifications of college or university recognized student organizations, many colleges and universities have specific sectors which outlines the privileges, expectations, and compliance standards each organization must abide by to be in good standing so that recognized organizations may keep their status. For example, the [University of Michigan](https://campusinvolvement.umich.edu/content/definitions) outlines the different student organization classification structures needed for university privileges:

Student Organization Advancement and Recognition (SOAR): SOAR is the formal relationship between the University and student organizations. It includes the tiered structure of student organization status and the Standards of Conduct for student organizations.

Recognized Student Organizations (RSO): This category refers to both sponsored and voluntary student organizations. RSO’s typically agree to abide by the Standards of Conduct for Recognized Student Organizations.

Sponsored Student Organizations (SSO): Sponsored student organizations are student organizations that have a substantial relationship with a sponsoring University unit. SSO’s must be sponsored by an executive officer, dean, or director of an academic or operational unit and must have a mission consistent with the missions of the University and sponsoring unit. The unit must provide an advisor for the SSO. SSOs agree to be held to the same standards of responsibility as both VSOs and University Units.

Voluntary Student Organizations (VSO): Voluntary student organizations are student organizations that seek access to certain University-controlled benefits and resources and are accountable to the university for legal compliance, fiscal responsibility and adherence to established community standards. VSOs are recommended to seek out a faculty/staff advisor although an advisor is not required for VSOs.

Non-Affiliated Student Organizations (NSO): Non-affiliated status only gives an organization a listing in a universities’ recognized organization “pages”. An NSO is not afforded other benefits such as a SOAS account, free space usage, university funding, or participation in student organization fairs.

There may be several different classifications of college or university recognized student organizations, but at many locations, registering a student organization can be achieved entirely online through a streamline process. There may be written materials or video tutorials you will have to read/watch before your group is accepted, in order for you to learn what the university expects of the student organization and vice versa. With this information, defining the type of student organization you wish to create and registering the organization through your college or university is the largest hurdle in forming student organizations across college campuses.

It may be true that the process of clarifying your student organization with your college or university is difficult to understand, but the online registration process often provides tips and resources students can utilize to aid them in the task. But truly, becoming a registered student organization that is affiliated with your college and university provides student organizers with many resources that otherwise would not be available. These university funded resources and privileges often include, and are not limited to, items such as: access to campus buildings and equipment, funding decided by the school’s student council or student government to pay speakers, take trips and host social gatherings, the ability to create a website using the college or university’s domain to help get the word out on campus, and establish a checking account and use campus mail for correspondence. All of these services provided student organizations that are registered and officially affiliated with your college and university will help spread your student organization’s goal and cause.

This handbook has provided you with the tools to become an activist in your community and on your college or university campus. The table of contents, and all the sections in this handbook, has outlined ways to become an activist ranging from Overview from Theory to Strategy to Interacting with the Press. However, this section specifically provides insight, tips, and information for ways in which students can create their own university recognized organizations, and the benefits in resources of becoming student organization that is affiliated with a college or university, so they can continue to implement the outlined strategies and methods necessary for student organizations to become vehicles for student activism in social movement causes.

Works Cited

Blackwell, Morton. “Student Organizations and Activism.” Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy, vol. 6, no. 1, Harvard Society for Law and Public Policy, Inc, 1982, p. 135.