

# Using Executive Advisory Boards: Best Practices

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## **Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to assist deans and schools develop effective advisory boards that add value to the school's activities and programs and assist in achieving the school's mission. The paper addresses the following issues: establishing a mission statement for the advisory board, selecting board members, appointing members, adopting charter documents, forming committees, setting agendas for meetings, using the board, raising funds, developing school and program advocacy, providing publicity for members, and evolving member responsibilities.

## **Mission**

The mission of the Executive Advisory Board should be clear and to the point. Here are three examples that are brief and to the point:

*“The Dean’s Advisory Council is a proactive organization dedicated to helping the School of Business and Economics achieve its mission and be a top choice school for business education among students and employers.”*

*Michigan Technological University*

*“The Business Advisory Council exists to support the School of Business in its efforts to achieve the school’s vision, actualize its mission, and continually improve the quality of education it provides to its students.”*

*Ithaca College*

*“The mission of the Business Advisory Council is to guide, promote, advise and support the School of Business Administration in its efforts relative to the University of South Carolina Aiken in its efforts to serve its students, state, region, and nation.”*

*University of South Carolina Aiken*

The mission statement is usually followed by a listing of purposes and functions of the executive advisory board. These often include:

- Advising the School, through the Dean, on issues that impact mission and strategy
- Serving as a sounding board on planning issues, new programs, and activities
- Identifying opportunities for students to interact with business, both public and nonprofit organizations, through internships, mentoring, and experiential learning
- Serving as an advocate for the school's interest with the external community
- Providing access to business leaders for the dean and faculty
- Assisting in acquiring resources and fund raising in support of the mission

### **Selecting Members**

The first step in selecting members of an executive advisory board is to meet with one's president to discuss the mission and role of one's board. It is imperative that the president supports one's efforts and sees it for what it is – a win-win situation for the university. The president will immediately recognize that it is a way to get more business leaders and alumni involved with the university. The president will also see that it could lead to the development of future donors as well as potential members of the board of trustees.

The selection process should be carefully developed to assure that the members of the board will be able to accomplish the school's goals and that the school's programs will meet their expectations. What level or title of business leader is the school seeking and is this consistent with the institutions reputation and standing in the community? If the school wants to add members that are senior executives (presidents, chairs of boards, executive vice presidents), is school prepared and able to match their expectations and will the school have the university president's support or will it be seen as a possible conflict with his or her needs for new members of the board of trustees? Would your program be better off seeking executives of smaller regional firms including firms owned by alumni that have closer alliance to the school?

Certainly the school will want to plan the mix of members in terms of corporations, key industries, and potential for partnerships that the school would like to develop. If the dean is new to the university or community, consider asking the president to get the dean together with several business members of the board of trustees to discuss strategy and potential participants. Development officers, alumni directors, faculty members, career placement directors, etc. all can be valuable sources of referrals. Effective networking is a key to developing a strong advisory board.

Some communities are blessed with a number of executive retirees. These individuals often bring a wide array of contacts, speakers, resources, and networking opportunities. A School should not restrict membership to working executives or alumni.

Alumni members are very important because of their knowledge and their networking with other

alumni as well as their commitment to their alma mater. They also bring knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the institution and its policies which can be invaluable.

### **Appointing Members**

Establish a formal process for nominating and renewing the board; it will save a great deal of grief! Consider establishing a nominating committee that annually reviews the board composition and seeks nominations to fill openings and add coverage where needed. Many boards periodically schedule a meeting of the dean and the nominating committee to discuss possible new members. Once key individuals are identified, the dean, the nominator and the chair should approach the prospective member about joining the board. Usually a meeting is set up with the prospective member at his or her office or over lunch to discuss the role of the board and the responsibilities of members. If the prospective member agrees to join the board, then the university president should send the individual an invitation to join the board.

The letter from the president should state the term of office as well as the next meeting date if known (See Attachment 1). Once the letter has been sent, the dean and nominator should follow-up with a phone call to answer any additional questions that the proposed member may have.

If there are several months between the appointment and the next meeting of the board, the chair should seek to get the new member engaged with one or more of the ad hoc or standing committees or a board social event.

### **Charter Documents**

There are many schools using advisory boards with very little formal structure. This is an area where a formal structure, even if brief, is an advantage. Attached you will find the Holy Family University's School of Business Administration Business Executive Advisory Board Charter. It is brief and to the point. It gives the mission, the officers, the criteria and term of membership, the meeting schedule, and authorization for committees. A more detailed structure is contained in the attached By-Laws of the College of Business and Economics Advisory Board, California State University, Northridge. These by-laws define the purposes of the Board, membership and expectations, officers, executive committee, standing and special committees, meetings, and amendments of the by-laws. These by-laws are the most comprehensive found.

The charter and/or by-laws may provide a list of standing committees and responsibilities or simply define the means for establishing standing and special or ad hoc committees. For example, the Northridge by-laws establish an executive committee and five standing committees in its structure.

The charter and/or by-laws documents normally are presented and reviewed by the advisory board during the organizational phase at its first meeting or one of its early meetings. Once it is approved, it can be used as part of the package that one would give to a prospective member at an initial meeting. It also provides a formal structure for succession in the advisory board chair

position as well as providing guidance for any new members of the school leadership team.

### **Committees**

Advisory board members want to be engaged and active members. The committee structure should provide for active participation and interaction with students, faculty, the dean, and other members of the advisory board. These meetings can be scheduled anywhere that is convenient for the members and at any time that meets their needs. If one is using standing committees be sure that they have both a mission and action plan for the committee members. If one is using special or ad hoc committees, the mission and action plan should be developed early on so that the chair can involve members with related interest.

Standing committees consisting of the executive committee and a nominations committee certainly should be considered in the initial structure. Other standing committees may also make a lot sense for your programs.

Holy Family University is currently using a large number of ad hoc committees: a committee on leadership development, a committee to evaluate and recommend improvements in the Master of Human Resource Management program, a committee to evaluate and recommend improvements in the Master of Information Systems program, a committee on marketing, a committee on developing a certificate in Pacific Rim Business Practices and Culture, a Student Managed Investment Fund committee, and a committee on establishing a Distinguished Speakers series. As these committees complete their study and recommendations, they will be dissolved and replaced by new projects and activities.

The key is to provide everyone who wants to be involved an opportunity to be involved where they can contribute and make a difference in the program.

### **Meetings**

Many advisory boards meet formally two or three times a year and then have committee meetings and other events throughout the year. It appears that one meeting in the fall and one in the spring is the most common practice.

While most advisory boards meet on campus, it is not uncommon to meet at a board room of one of the companies represented by the members. Some boards take pride in rotating between campus and corporate facilities. With off-campus meetings, it is not a problem for the board to get there; however, it gets to be an issue for students and faculty that may teach on the same day.

The meeting agenda should normally follow a standard business meeting protocol. The meeting should have a formal opening, introduction, approval of minutes, report on the school by the dean, unfinished business, committee reports, new business, etc. Whenever possible, the reporting party should be a member of the advisory board, administrator, faculty member, or

student to provide variety and engagement.

It is always politically proper to invite the president to speak and open the meeting, and to invite the vice president for academic affairs, a development officer, and the alumni director to the meeting. Holy Family's Advisory Board includes the career placement center director and the cooperative education – internship director from time to time as well as special guest.

Many of the meetings are held in a half-day format. For example, Holy Family starts at 9:00 a.m. and ends at 1:30 p.m. after a luncheon with students. Some schools with advisory board members that travel in from out of area start the evening before with a dinner reception.

Regardless of the format of the meeting, it is important to give the board members an opportunity to meet and talk with students. This can be part of the meeting; it can be speaking opportunities at the university; or it can be serving as a judge or assessor on student projects and reports.

### **Using the Board**

Advisory board members want to be used and valued. Do not be afraid to ask them to evaluate programs, to review and suggest new approaches to teaching, to actively assist with finding mentors for seniors, or any other reasonable request. They will let dean know if the task does not fit their interest or if they are not going to be available during the time period suggested for the project.

The dean also needs to nurture your chairman of the board. Go to lunch every month or so to discuss issues. Use the chair and vice chair to bring prospective to issues, and use them as a shoulder to cry on when the dean is at the end of his/her rope!

What is clear, is the faculty will respect the opinions and reports of the advisory board and will look at issues afresh if presented by the board. Several years ago, I had the opportunity to meet with my faculty and a group assembled by the board to discuss direction and content in the accounting program. After listening to the discussion and asking questions, the faculty left with a new prospective on business needs and immediately start implementing the changes that had been suggested. The advisory board as an independent body was seen as being unbiased and only interested in improving outcomes.

### **Fund Raising**

Advisory board members can be major financial supporters of the business program. This is an area where board members and the chair should take the leadership role. It is an evolutionary role. As the board members become familiar with program needs, they will be looking for ways to help meet the school's resource problems. Sometimes this is through partnerships with business, and sometimes it is in trying to motivate and mobilize business alumni to be more supportive.

Ultimately, the dean will want to have the board adopt a project to fund or establish minimum giving guidelines for members. At Jacksonville University the members of the board suggested that each board member be responsible for raising \$5,000 a year for the business program to use for new initiatives, student engagement, speakers, etc. The actual contribution averaged somewhat less than \$5,000; however, it still provided \$50,000 to \$70,000 a year. At Holy Family the Board is very new and relatively young. The Board has decided to kick-off and support the establishment of a Student Managed Investment Fund. The members set a modest goal of \$250 each, and they actually averaged close to \$500 each; and thereby raising over \$8,000.

Involving the board in fund raising is extremely valuable to the school's program regardless of whether it is done on a project-by-project basis or whether it is done to provide discretionary funds to be used for special projects and needs.

The school should make it clear through the board's charter or by-laws that the dean wants their support in identifying funding sources as well as a clear expectation of financial participation.

### **Advocacy**

Board members can be a very powerful advocacy group for the business program. They can arrange for the dean and faculty to speak at community events and service group meetings; they can open the doors for liaisons with the chamber, rotary, and other organizations; they can arrange for business leaders to speak at the university or to classes; and they can sponsor events for the business program. Perhaps equally important, they bring credibility to the school's programs and offerings. Board members become informal spokesmen for the school and programs with their associates and contacts.

The board members also provide the university news service with a group of experienced business men and women to call on for observations and testimonials.

### **Publicity for Members**

The members of the advisory board are giving of their time and sharing their expertise with the dean and the faculty. This gift requires the same stewardship that one would provide for a valuable cash donation. The dean needs to recognize and honor the advisory board members whenever possible.

Some schools put the pictures and information of their advisory board members on their website; some prefer to print a brochure with a brief biographical statement on each member; and some list the members on the back or inside of programs and publications. Usually, a newspaper article can be generated when the advisory board is initially organized and announced to the university and business community.

While most board members are not on the board for publicity, it is important to give them time to

network with others, to promote their companies, and honor their service.

### **Evolution**

As board members grow and continue to serve the school and its programs, some of the members will be noticed by the president and members of the board of trustees; and from time to time the advisory board may lose members who are asked to serve on the university board.

This is a great event for now their knowledge and understanding of the school's programs and needs have been transferred to university board of trustees. As they serve the university and the president, the dean will find that they become strong advocates for the school. The dean will also find that the president will be looking for new talent to recommend. These individuals recommend by the president will be nominated to serve on the business school's board; they will become familiar with the university and its policies and goals; they will have an opportunity to prove their interest and level of involvement, and at a future date, they may be asked to move up to the board of trustees.

The school should give serious consideration to establishing a membership category of "emeritus." From time to time the school will have members that cannot or are unwilling to participate. These members should be given the opportunity to resign or moved to an inactive status. This is an area where it is easy to hurt feelings and offend potential supporters.

It is probably wiser to move inactive members to emeritus status than dismiss them from the board, particularly if they have been valuable supporters of the school in the past. At the University of Louisiana, Lafayette, we had a member who made one or two meetings over a three year period. However, when the capital campaign was kicked off, he stepped forward and endowed a one million dollar chair in his field of interest. This might not have happened, if we had dropped him from board after missing several meetings in a row.

The emeritus status at some schools is established automatically for members that have served two terms or more.

**Attachment 1**

**Draft letter of Invitation to Join Board**

June 10, 2010

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Dear XXX,

I am very please to invite you to serve on the School of Business Administration's Business Executive Advisory Board. It is my understanding that you and Dr. Duggar have discussed this very important business advisory program, and you have agreed to serve.

As we move the University forward, it is extremely important that we grow the School of Business Administration both in terms of number of students and quality of programs. It is through individuals like you, giving of your time and talents, that we will strengthen the quality of our offerings and their relevance to the business community.

This initial appointment to the SBA Business Executive Advisory Board is for a term of three years, 2010 through 2012. At the end of the term, the appointment may be extended for one additional three-year period.

Dr. Duggar will be scheduling the fall meeting of the Advisory board for September 2010, and he will be consulting with you regarding the date and the agenda. Normally, the meetings begin at 9:00 a.m. and end around 1:30 p.m.

I look forward to meeting you in September.

Sincerely yours,

Sister Francesca Onley, CSFN, Ph.D.

President



**Attachment 2**

**HOLY FAMILY UNIVERSITY**

**THE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION**

**Business Executive Advisory Board**

**Charter**

**Name**

The name of this body shall be the School of Business Administration (SBA) Business Executive Advisory Board.

**Mission**

The mission of the SBA Business Advisory Board is to assist the Dean and the School leadership team in strategic planning, developing short and long range goals, strengthening business community outreach and service, establishing mentoring and internship opportunities, sharing of business expertise and identifying funding sources.

**Officers**

The officers shall consist of a Chair and a Vice-Chair, selected by the Dean in consultation with the members. The Chair shall preside at all meetings and in general perform all other functions appropriate to the office. The Vice-Chair shall preside in the absence of the Chair and perform such other duties as the Chair may request.

**Board Membership**

Members of the Board shall be individuals of stature that are willing to share their talent and expertise to build a high quality, distinctive and relevant business education program. The Board shall consist of no less than 7 nor more than 25 members with consideration given to diverse and inclusive business representation. Board members shall be appointed to an initial three-year term, January 1 to December 31st.

Members shall be selected by the Dean in consultation with the Board's Executive Committee and the University President. Individuals selected to join the Board, will receive a formal invitation from the University President. From time-to-time, Board members may be reappointed for an additional term.

Members completing their term of office may be given emeritus status, the specific benefits of which will be defined by the Board.

### **Meetings**

Meetings generally will be held twice a year in September and March at a time and place designated by the Chair and Dean. The first organizational meeting will be held (has been held) in March 2009.

Notice of meeting dates will be scheduled, to the extent possible, a year in advance. Notice of each meeting with agenda and supporting materials will be sent to Board members at least 14 days in advance of the meeting.

Quorum for Board action will be 50 percent of the membership including ex-officio members.

Minutes of the meeting will be taken by a staff secretary, reviewed by the Chair, and provided to all members.

### **Committees**

The Board may create such committees, standing and *ad hoc*, as it deems necessary, and designate their responsibilities. There shall be an Executive Committee consisting of the Chair, the Vice Chair and three to five members selected by the Chair. Other possible committees may include strategic planning, business community outreach and service, internships and mentoring, funding sources, and special task forces.

Committees may meet as called throughout the academic year.

**Attachment 3**

**BYLAWS OF THE COLLEGE OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS ADVISORY BOARD  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE**

**Article I: Name**

This organization shall be known as the College of Business and Economics Advisory Board, hereinafter referred to as the Advisory Board.

**Article II: Purposes**

The Advisory Board shall serve as an advisory body to the Dean of the College of Business and Economics on many aspects of the College, its mission and its programs.

The specific purposes of the Advisory Board are as follows:

- A. To serve as a “sounding board” for present and proposed programs and activities of the College.
- B. To identify opportunities for business students to enrich their education through internships, mentorships, and other learning-practical work experiences.
- C. To help bring business executives into the classrooms and other close contact with students and faculty in both formal and informal settings.
- D. To help build important ties and connections between the College and the business community.
- E. To assist the Dean in the solicitation, cultivation, and stewardship of external support.
- F. To assist in the ongoing strategic planning process of the College.

**Article III: Membership and Expectations of Board Members**

- A. The Advisory Board shall consist of the Dean of the College of Business and Economics and business and community leaders who have a sincere interest in the College of Business and Economics and are devoted to excellence in higher education for business students.
- B. Prospective candidates for membership on the Advisory Board shall be identified by the Dean, in consultation with other Advisory Board members. After discussions among members of the Advisory Board, the candidates will be officially appointed by the Dean. The Advisory Board should not exceed 40 members.
- C. Newly appointed members shall begin their term of office with the first regular

- meeting of the Advisory Board following their appointment by the Dean of the College of Business and Economics.
- D. The term of membership on the Advisory Board is three years. To provide for continuity on the Advisory Board, approximately one-third of the members should be appointed/reappointed each year. Upon consultation with the Advisory Board and the Dean, individual members who agree to continue to serve may be appointed for up to a maximum of three full terms of membership.
- E. Advisory Board members are expected to maintain active participation in Advisory Board activities.
- F. Advisory Board members are expected to advise and assist the Dean in efforts to secure annual and major gift support and other external funding for programs and initiatives.
- G. Advisory Board members are expected to advise and assist in efforts to involve our alumni and the business community in the programs and activities of the College.
- H. At the choice of the Board Member:
1. \$2,500 initial contribution, unrestricted, to the COBAE Development Fund, with an annual gift of \$1,500 thereafter (note: Board members making such financial contributions automatically become members of the President's Associates); or,
  2. A minimum of 60 hours, annually, of service as described by the Advisory Board Executive Committee; or,
  3. A combination of financial contributions and service, as determined by the Executive Committee; or,
  4. For those members who have already made significant pledges, donations or planned gifts, the Executive Committee may waive or modify the above requirements.
- I. Board Members participate as they can by:
1. Donating no less than 20 hours, annually, for activities in support of the College and/or the Advisory Board, including guest speaking, judging student events, professor for a day, hosting/participating in student dinner events, scholarship selection committees, student mentoring, and student internships.
  2. Attending, schedules permitting, no less than 50% of the Board/Committee meetings annually.

3. Assisting the Development Officer and the Dean in securing donations through contacts and breakfast/lunch/dinner meetings with alumni and potential friends to the College.
4. Completing a profile that sets forth the member's desires or interests in key areas of the College, business expertise and support.

#### **Article IV: Officers of the Advisory Board**

- A. The officers of the Advisory Board shall consist of a Chair, two Vice-Chairs, and a Secretary.
- B. The election of officers shall take place at the regularly scheduled fall meeting.

Newly elected officers shall assume their duties upon election.

If a position on the Executive Committee becomes vacant mid-term, the Chair will appoint an interim officer to fill the remainder of the term. If the office of Chair becomes vacant mid-term, a Vice Chair will assume that office and the Executive Committee will appoint an interim Vice Chair.

#### **Article V: Executive Committee**

- A. The Executive Committee shall be made up of the Advisory Board Chair, an Advisory Board Vice-Chair, the respective chairs of the Development and Student Relations Committees, and up to three other ad hoc advisory board members, selected by the chair in consultation with the Dean.
- B. The Dean, in consultation with the Executive Committee, shall prepare the agenda for each regular meeting. The agenda shall be distributed to all members of the Advisory Board seven days prior to a regular meeting.
- C. The Executive Committee shall function as the long-range planning committee of the Advisory Board and shall also perform other such functions as the Advisory Board assigns to it and as it deems appropriate.
- D. The Executive Committee shall review annually the membership of the standing committees described in Article VI below, appointing or reappointing the chairperson and members.
- E. All recommendations of the Executive Committee shall be voted on by the entire Advisory Board at the next meeting.

#### **Article VI: Standing and Special Committees**

- A. The standing committees of the Advisory Board, and their general functions, shall be as follows:

*Alumni Relations Committee:* The Alumni Relations Committee is focused on building the College of Business and Economics alumni network to connect them back to their alma mater.

*Development Committee:* The Development Committee is focused on raising private funds to support priority initiatives of the College and the Dean.

*Student Outreach Committee:* The Students Outreach Committee is focused on student success and bringing forth Advisory Board to become more involved with the student body in the College of Business and Economics.

*Events Committee:* The Events Committee is dedicated to deliver social and educational events that provide business professionals with opportunities to meet, maintain contact, and share best business practices.

*Corporate Relations Committee:* The Corporate Relations Committee is focused on building and creating ties between Los Angeles' corporate community and the College of Business and Economics.

- B. The Advisory Board may also create such special committees as it deems useful to the exercises of its functions, and shall determine the functions, duties, and terms of office for each special committee.

## **Article VII: Meetings of the Advisory Board**

- A. Notice of regular meetings shall be given by mail, email or phone to each member at least 45 days prior to the stated date. The Advisory Board shall hold two regular meetings during the calendar year, typically in the fall and spring.
- B. Special meetings may be called by the Chair of the Advisory Board, or in the absence of the Chair, by the Vice Chair, or by the Dean of the College of Business and Economics. Notice must be given at least three days prior to the date of the meeting.
- C. One-quarter of the membership of the Advisory Board shall constitute quorum.
- D. Invited guests may attend meetings of the Advisory Board, and may participate in the discussion. However, members may not send someone to represent them in their absence.
- E. Minutes of the Advisory Board meeting shall be distributed to members by mail within three weeks after each meeting. At least one permanent file of the minutes shall

be maintained by the Dean of the College of Business and Economics.

**Article VIII: Amendments of the Bylaws**

- A. Proposed amendments to these Bylaws may be submitted to the Secretary of the Advisory Board who shall report the proposal to the Advisory Board at its next regular meeting.
- B. When voting to amend the Bylaws is held, the proposal must be submitted in writing to the membership of the Advisory Board at least one month prior to its next regular meeting.

Source: [http://www.csun.edu/busdean/pdf/COBAE\\_AdvisoryBoard\\_bylaws.pdf](http://www.csun.edu/busdean/pdf/COBAE_AdvisoryBoard_bylaws.pdf)

