

### ***Role Model***

Good Student Affairs practice provides significant opportunities for students, faculty, staff, and other educators to demonstrate their values and professional attributes. According to the American College Personnel Association, “Effective learning communities are committed to justice, honesty, equality, civility, freedom, dignity and responsible citizenship.” Student Affairs officers attempt to follow this model, knowing that the modeling of professional and ethical behavior is a powerful way to influence the development and maintenance of high professional standards in the academic community.

### ***Advisor to Student Organizations***

As an advisor to medical student organizations, the Student Affairs officer provides an administrative home for student government and other student organizations and interest groups that have received formal recognition from the institution. In this role, the Student Affairs officer is responsible for advising and supporting the elected (or selected) Organization of Student Representatives (OSR) representative(s) for the school. The Student Affairs officer may also monitor the process by which the OSR representative is selected annually. The Student Affairs officer may also work with other student groups (e.g., the Medical Student Section of the American Medical Association [AMA-MSS, [www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/14.html](http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/14.html)]; the Student National Medical Association [SNMA, [www.snma.org](http://www.snma.org)]; the American Medical Student Association [AMSA, [www.amsa.org](http://www.amsa.org)]) and community organizations affiliated with student-administered community service activities.

### ***Advisor to Organizations for Spouses and Significant Others***

The Student Affairs officer is also frequently responsible for advising and supporting, either formally or informally, various organizations that support the spouses, significant others, and other family members of enrolled medical students. Ensuring the ongoing effectiveness of such organizations can assist the Student Affairs officer in fulfilling his or her goals of supporting the students themselves.

## Part 2. Understanding the Mission of the Institution

### **Structure of Student Affairs Offices**

The fact that the structure and functions of Student Affairs offices vary significantly from school to school results from the influence of many variables, including the administrative history of the school; the requirements of the educational program; new or evolving Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME, [www.lcme.org](http://www.lcme.org)) accreditation standards; the relationship of the medical school administration with the administration of the parent university, if present; the number and level of training of staff members; and the extent of integration or separation of the various medical school administrative functions.

Other offices or functions may be covered under the umbrella of Student Affairs: financial aid, student records, minority affairs/diversity, academic standing and student promotions, academic counseling, admissions, clerkship and elective scheduling, visiting students, and student conduct and discipline, among others. Additionally, Student Affairs offices may have responsibility for components of the formal and informal curriculum, including professional development, career planning and advisement, and aspects of basic science and clinical education. Within the administrative structure of the medical school, the Student Affairs officer may report directly to the Dean, although, more recently, the Student Affairs officer may report instead to a vice-dean or senior associate dean for academic or educational affairs, in parallel with offices of medical education/curriculum, graduate medical education, and other offices. Depending on the institution, the administrative rank of the senior administrator in charge of Student Affairs functions may be that of senior associate dean, associate dean, assistant dean, or director.

Staffing levels and responsibilities in Student Affairs offices also show substantial variation, affected by available resources, the level of training and interests of individual staff members, and the nature of the work performed in the office. Some offices assign “generalist” staff to serve as the primary liaison for a large group or class of students, while others assign staff to one or more specific functional areas, e.g., student records, student events, and student personal and professional conduct. The significant variability among the structures and responsibilities of Student Affairs offices at individual schools makes meaningful comparisons of staff to student ratios difficult to determine and interpret.

Relationships between the Student Affairs office and other administrative offices involved in medical students' lives show similar variability. The Student Affairs office may be centrally involved in medical student education, overseeing most or all of the aspects of the students' progress through the education program. Alternatively, the Student Affairs office may have oversight of some aspects of students' lives, and work in conjunction with other medical school offices that oversee other components of the educational program. The Student Affairs structure may exist independently of the parent university's structures, be independent in some areas and integrated in others, or be fully integrated into most or all of the corresponding administrative structures in the parent university.

In June 2004, the AAMC Section on Student Affairs and Programs distributed an "Office Organization Compendium," which contained organizational charts for Student Affairs offices at those schools whose Student Affairs staff responded to the request for such information (approximately 75 percent of AAMC-member schools). Those seeking additional information about the administrative organization of Student Affairs functions are encouraged to review this compendium.

### ***Student Affairs-Related Committees***

Although there is variability among schools, a preclinical sciences student promotions committee typically considers the academic progress and problems of students enrolled in the first two years of the curriculum. The same or a different committee may consider the academic progress and problems of students enrolled in the final two years. The membership on these committees also varies greatly among schools. At some schools, student promotions committee members include course directors and faculty members who teach in each year's courses and clerkships, while, at other schools, school policies may specifically exclude course and clerkship directors from membership. At other schools, committee membership is made up of department chairs or elected faculty representatives. The Student Affairs officer can expect to play some role in the functioning of this committee, although he or she must take care to define his or her role carefully to avoid actual conflicts of interest or even the appearance of such a conflict.

These committees typically represent the faculty in decision-making about student promotion or advancement, as well as in assessment and decision-making about students with academic and other problems that have impeded their progress through medical school. There is an obligation to conduct a comprehensive review of the records of students who present to the committee with deficiencies. These committees also have an obligation to establish policies related to the appropriate use of data about students (e.g., regarding the exclusion of health and disability data from consideration in some cases). The committees may also seek input from a student's faculty advisor or any other faculty member representative designated by the student. In reaching its decision, the committee shall give due consideration to the nature, extent, and significance of the deficiencies manifested, as well as the time required for remediation of any deficiencies identified by departmental course and clerkship directors. In many cases, these committees are responsible for balancing the best interests of the student with the best interests of the school and the profession.

Generally, these committees may recommend a variety of actions including:

- Promotion of the student to the next academic year after remediation of all deficiencies identified
- Requiring the student to repeat the year, repeating only those courses in which a deficiency occurred
- Requiring the student to repeat the year, including all course work in that year
- Placing the student on a leave of absence
- Dismissing the student for failure to meet the requirements for advancement or graduation, or
- Requiring special activities of the student that are indicated in exceptional cases.

**Practice Tip:** Periodically review with relevant faculty committees and the institutional general counsel the descriptions in academic bulletins and student handbooks of the operation of faculty committees, particularly those that make decisions about student academic progress. In particular, ensure that these descriptions provide specific information about due process policies and procedures and the means by which students request a review of committee decisions within the medical school and the parent institution.