

Creating and Developing Effective Business and Professional School Advisory Boards

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External advisory boards have become indispensable to academic units in higher education, particularly to business and professional schools. Such boards can provide significant benefits and value but, at the same time, can create utter chaos if not developed and managed actively and strategically. This paper will address issues and choices associated with the creation and development of advisory boards and present strategies for maximizing their value.

INTRODUCTION

Advisory boards in professional schools can take a variety of forms and include general community advisory boards, alumni boards, professional boards, emeritus faculty boards, and development boards (Olson, 2008), among others. Advisory boards are named as such because they're designed to provide counsel and guidance to the leaders of academic units and are usually not part of the unit's governance structure. There are varied perspectives regarding the best ways to organize and utilize such boards as well as to their relative value. They are often viewed as having great value in terms of soliciting strategic and programmatic advice, cultivating political influence, and supporting fund raising, and can be of particular importance in public institutions which are often dependent on limited and decreasing state funding (Olson, 2008). A critical role of any advisory board is to ensure that the school, department or program does not operate in a vacuum (Schaeffer and Rouse, 2014). In essence, an effective board can assist a dean or academic unit leader in accomplishing things she/he otherwise might not be able to accomplish without the board as well as make accomplishments far easier and less cumbersome.

It has been noted that there is a significantly higher presence of advisory boards in business schools as compared to other academic units (Benigi et. al., 2011; Hicks, et. al., 2011). Indeed, accreditors such as the Association to Advance Collegiate School of Business International (AACSB) has cited the importance and value of advisory boards in bringing relevance to the curriculum as well as in championing the school to prospective donors. A survey of AACSB-accredited business schools found that 98.5% had an advisory board. On these boards, membership was 83.3% male, 18% had faculty representation, 13% had student representation, and 55% of board members were alums; 73% had a written mission statement; the mean number of meetings per year was 2.5; the median size was 27 members; and 30% required some level of financial support by members. The five most common activities of these boards, in which 90% or more of boards engaged, were, in order, strategic planning (98%), mission statement development and review (97%), curriculum (93%), speaking with students and/or at events (92%), and fund raising (91%) (Ellingson, Elbert and Moser, 2010).

ESTABLISHING A BOARD – PURPOSE

The critical first step in establishing an advisory board is articulating its purpose. No board should be established without a specific reason and vision. There may be multiple reasons for creating such a board but all should be clearly articulated and understood by all relevant stakeholders as a prerequisite for recruiting members as well as for any subsequent activity the board undertakes. While some boards are established due to recommendations (or mandates) from accreditors, placating accreditors should not be the purpose of any board. Advisory boards established for this purpose or without a clear reason, unfortunately, are greatly underutilized, completely non-functional, existing merely for “window dressing” (Sykes and Roper, 1994). Some such boards are more honorary than “working” in nature and composed of successful, well-known executives and/or wealthy donors who may lend an air of prestige and/or provide financial support but contribute little to nothing beyond these things.

The purpose of an advisory board should have a direct correlation to the goals, mission, and strategy of the academic unit. The various reasons for establishing a board will determine both its size and composition. As examples, an academic unit might be focused on globalizing programs, better integrating technology into its curriculum and/or operations, developing or expanding executive and/or graduate programs, revamping its undergraduate core curriculum, or providing more practice-based pedagogies. An advisory board should be established which addresses specific strategic initiatives and/or ongoing challenges and members invited to serve who can contribute meaningfully to these issues.

It is critical to clarify the purpose of the board from the outset, prior to issuing invitations to join. This does not mean that feedback can't be sought as to what the board's purpose might be prior to its establishment. Indeed it is possible and, in some cases even advisable, to consult with prospective advisory board members as to their perceptions for the need for a board as well as its possible purpose and functions. Key internal and external stakeholders, such as students, faculty, administrators, alumni and employers, can also be consulted in this regard to gain their support, enthusiasm, and commitment to working with the board. Some of the more common reasons for creating a board include forming a more expansive network of business contacts to support the school, increasing the school's visibility in the business community, fundraising, and developing internship and job opportunities for students (Flynn, 2002). A definitive decision must also be made as to whether there are expectations or requirements of any minimum level of financial support by board members.

It is also paramount to be able to communicate a clear and unambiguous understanding of the board's purpose to prospective board members in tandem with an agreement regarding the roles and responsibilities for and expectations of board members. These roles and associated expectations can include strategic counselors, curriculum and program advisors, community ambassadors / partnership developers, fundraisers, and student mentors. The academic leader will also need to determine the level of direct contact or involvement board members will have with students and/or faculty and, conversely, whether students, faculty, or other administrators should have direct access to advisory board members. This is especially important in light of the fact that many board members may not understand or appreciate the culture of higher education as an industry or and the concept of shared governance and simply assume the academic unit head has the authority to implement decisions as (s)he sees fit. An understanding of shared governance is similarly important in preventing board members from attempting to micromanage the dean or leader of the academic unit (and leaders need to be prepared to manage such interpersonal dynamics).

The benefits that have been gained from the use of advisory boards have been well documented. Advisory boards can be particularly useful in assessing learning outcomes and developing academic curricula, particularly in advising relative to the level of development in both skills and practical knowledge (Penrose, 2002). This kind of assessment can provide a direct, objective, and valuable measure of learning outcomes; however, this benefit can only be achieved when the academic leader has forged a partnership between the advisory board and faculty. In doing so, the leader needs to ensure that faculty don't feel threatened by the board members and that mutual trust, respect and a sense of shared responsibility exist between the faculty and board in partnering on student success.

Other benefits of advisory boards which have been noted include curriculum and new program development and ensuring curriculum relevance (Rose and Stiefer, 2013), assisting with accreditation (Coe, 2008), enhancing the visibility of the school and its programs in the business community, mentoring students, and helping to identify practice-based research opportunities, partnerships, and funding for faculty development (Benigi et. al., 2011; Hicks, et. al., 2011). Advisory boards can also be an invaluable source of information whereby board members offer input on recruitment trends and curriculum, feedback on academic program content and quality, networking opportunities, and internship and job opportunities. Whether these benefits fully materialize are dependent on how the board is composed and managed (Flynn, 2002).

One commentary on advisory boards noted that their benefits can include assisting with strategic planning, providing administrative counsel, financial support, networking, job and internship development, curriculum and program development and assessment and speaking with and mentoring students (Ellingson, Elbert and Moser, 2010). It is, critical, however, not to load too many responsibilities and expectations on the board for fear of overwhelming members and/or losing the board's main focus when so many diverse opportunities are assigned to it. Multiple tasks and roles should be prioritized (with board input) and it has been suggested that curriculum guidance should be at the top of an advisory board's list of responsibilities (Kaupins and Coco, 2002).

Resource acquisition, particularly financial resources, is a potential important benefit of advisory boards. Board members themselves can be direct sources of financial funding, equipment, technology, or other resources and board members are often directly supportive of student professional organizations which may have limited resources (Coe, 2008). This is particularly true in the case of alumni who may wish to support programs and their students from which they themselves have graduated (Coe, 2008). Providing opportunities for board members to directly connect with students and/or support and/or mentor a student organization important to them can provide powerful and meaningful engagement opportunities. Further, board members can play critical roles in the overall advancement function by helping to publicize accomplishments of students and their academic programs and cultivate and nurture donors within their peer networks (Olson, 2008).

In assembling an advisory board it is critical that its members remain cognizant of the fact that the board does not have fiduciary, legal or decision making authority. Its role and function is to provide counsel and make recommendations (Schaeffer and Rouse, 2014). The demands on and expectations for advisory boards continue to grow, especially in accredited schools as accreditors expect to see some kind of meaningful involvement of the business community in supporting a school and its programs (Knetter, Malekzadeh, and Kooser, 2007). Hence, it is paramount to determine the roles and purpose of a board, communicate such roles and purpose to not only prospective board members but also all other stakeholders of the academic unit to obtain their support, and manage the board toward the ends of fulfilling its purpose and realizing its full potential.

COMPOSITION – INDIVIDUALS AND PROGRAMS

Once the purpose and responsibilities of the advisory board have been established, individuals can then be invited to serve on the board. Two critical factors need to be considered in composing a new board; programs and individuals.

Programs

At the program level, it's beneficial to have representation for each of the academic unit's degree programs with an understanding among board members of the status of each program (i.e., signature programs, low enrolled programs for which there remains demand, stagnant or declining programs, etc.) and the fact that all are important. In fact, low-enrolled and stagnant/declining programs might be more important for the board than signature programs relative to the need to make a determination of the reasons for modest enrollment levels and solicitation of ideas and energy to build/salvage such programs. It can be clearly articulated or simply understood that each advisory board member has affiliation with a

program and/or is “on board” to provide leadership in understanding and positioning of her/his program but that the input of all members is sought on the overall portfolio of programs.

While academic leaders also need to consider signature programs, future planned programs, existing programs with unrealized potential, and industry collaborations in establishing an advisory board, it is further possible to have multiple advisory boards within same academic unit (i.e., one for academic unit itself and separate boards for one or more specific programs). Separate program advisory boards can be beneficial for programs for which there is specialized accreditation available (i.e., accounting, health care administration, public administration, sports management, etc.) as well as those which have licensing requirements and/or are heavily practice-based or industry-specific, such as information technology, human resource management, finance, supply chain management, and global business, among others. When utilizing more than one advisory board, it is critical to have all programs still represented on the schoolwide board to ensure that they remain in synch with each other and share best practices. It can be beneficial to have one person who serves on each specialized program advisory board do “double duty” and also serve on the school-wide board, if not too taxing or time-consuming for said individuals. This is especially true if the specialized board has a chairship where the chair agrees to serve on the school-wide advisory board.

In addition to programs, subunits of professional schools may develop their own distinct advisory boards. As an example, the Sam Walton College of Business at the University of Arkansas has separate advisory boards for its Center for Retailing Excellence, Supply Chain Management Research Center, and Information Technology Research Institute, as well as for its Accounting Department, MBA program, Diversity and Inclusion initiatives, and main Dean’s Executive Advisory Board. Advisory boards can provide particularly critical counsel for and support of executive education programs (Walsh, et. al., 2007) and one board was created solely for development and fundraising for the Honors College at Middle Tennessee State University (Carnicom and Mathis, 2009). In the latter case, it was realized that academic administrators, particularly those who head honors programs, do not have backgrounds in fundraising and often find the role “strange and foreboding.” This can be true of academic leaders in a variety of professional schools who are more comfortable with teaching and scholarship and the opportunities their leadership role provides to mentor junior faculty in these areas.

Individuals

In addition to ensuring that academic programs are appropriately represented on an advisory board, consideration needs to be given to the individuals who may be asked to serve and the experiences, perspectives, networks, skills, and personality traits they may bring to the board. This basis for selection is critical whereby the academic unit leader determines exactly what individual characteristics and experiences are essential to further support the delivery of the unit’s mission and achieve its strategic objectives.

A good starting point is consideration of alumni, given that alumni have a deep personal vested interest in the ongoing success and development of their alma mater. Some boards have been composed completely of influential alumni (Penrose, 2002) which assist in creating a strong team through the shared experience of having experienced exactly what students are experiencing, albeit at a different time. While having a board composed largely of alumni may be difficult to accomplish in academic units or for programs which are new, alumni status is a good starting point in identifying potential high-contributing advisory board members. At the same time, nonalumni, especially employers, can be critical, important stakeholders for the academic unit so their interests and potential contributions must be weighed alongside those of alumni. As noted previously, it is advisable to have representatives for each of the school’s programs, regardless of alumni status, and employers, in particular, can be key catalysts in assisting with program development and career development of students and new graduates. In this regard, those composing a new board can either start by basing their potential membership list on industries or key organizations for which representation is sought or by listing specific individuals worthy of consideration and the personal backgrounds and experiences they provide.

Appropriate diversity of membership should also be considered to ensure as much as possible that the board reflects the student population of the academic unit and region. However, selecting advisory board members merely because of their race, gender, religion, and/or other personal characteristic without consideration of what they could contribute to the board and the institution is a potential recipe for disaster. The board should provide appropriate diversity but a well-composed, diverse board will share common interests around active participation, a belief and commitment to the academic unit's mission and an ability and desire to influence outcomes. (Taylor, et. al., 2010).

Outside of personal characteristics, diversity should also be considered relative to the unique contributions which each prospective board member can make. Duplication of backgrounds should be minimized or completely avoided as much as possible (i.e., two hospital directors, two Big 4 accounting firm partners, etc.) unless individuals have distinct backgrounds (i.e., one hospital director from a large corporate-based health care organization with one from a local community hospital) or are both key stakeholders (i.e., both Big 4 accounting firms actively and equally providing internship and subsequent career entry-level opportunities for graduates). This diversity will ideally create a board on which members will feel free to fully contribute, perhaps even challenging each other and the academic unit leader in a collegial, constructive, respectful manner. A board consisting of individuals who do nothing more than smile, nod, and completely agree with each other and the academic leader is of limited to no value.

The creation of a new board also needs to consider both the initial size of the board and its target size, if different. It can be relatively easy and beneficial to "start small" and then grow the board in tandem with the direction of the academic unit than to start larger and have to manage a larger group which could be dominated by one or a small number of individuals. Smaller groups allow more complete individual participation which is important when launching a new board. It is further important that board members consider themselves peers relative to title and company size (Flynn, 2002) to ensure that they develop mutual respect for each other as well as a synergy in working as a cohesive team.

Two other considerations in selecting advisory board members are the professional networks of each prospective board member and the possibility of having ex-officio members on the board. For the former consideration, each prospective board member has a professional network which (s)he can be expected to mine in support of the institution. This network can include professional associations and other boards on which individuals serve, as well as professional relationships and friendships with key individuals in the community who might be engaged in support of the academic unit and its strategic initiatives. Ex-officio members are often internal partners with the academic leader and can be invited to attend advisory board meetings with a clear understanding of expectations for the level of participation they might have, if any at all, versus more passive attendance to observe, understand, and answer specific questions, as appropriate. For example, an advancement officer of the institution might be invited to attend meetings to hear first-hand some of the ideas presented by board members and/or strategize with them development and fundraising initiatives and targets. However, is it critical for the academic leader to retain "ownership" and control of the board, clearly specifying the role that any ex-officio individual will be expected to play during and outside of formal meetings.

Once prospective board members have been identified, it is important that the academic leader personally invite each board member to serve, preferably in person, to explain her/his vision of the board's role and how this prospective member can contribute (Olson, 2008). Such a meeting also provides an opportunity to answer any questions that prospective members might have as well as to gain a sense (or better sense) of each individual's personality, if not already well known to the academic leader. It also provides an opportunity to articulate the various benefits board members gain from participation, including, but not limited to an altruistic sense of "giving back," support of their alma mater in the case of alumni, having first choice for recruiting the best and brightest students for internships and permanent placement, and the prestige associated with membership on the board.

In some instances an academic unit leader may find an advisory board already in place when (s)he first assumes a new leadership position which (s)he wishes to disband and subsequently create her/his own new board. When a board is inherited, it's important to do "due diligence" regarding the roles,

effectiveness, membership, and processes of the existing board to determine what's worked well and what hasn't and the reasons for such. Such information can be of great guidance in creating a new board. Such due diligence would involve conferring with the previous academic unit leader, if this individual is available, and/or at least one or two members of the existing board. In some instances, there may be some benefit in retaining select individuals from the previous board (Flynn, 2002), as long as these continuing board members understand the new vision and expectations for the revamped board. In other cases, a clean sweep of the inherited board is desirable. However, if this is done, former board members should be acknowledged and thanked by the new leader as a means of continuing their ongoing engagement with the school in other capacities in the future.

MANAGING THE BOARD

Given that board members will be bringing considerable experience and successes to their roles, they will correspondingly offer up their advice and counsel. It is likely, given their diversity that they will not always be in complete agreement on their assessments of situations or their recommended courses of action. Hence, the academic leader needs to be prepared to manage conflict among board members. This will likely involve diplomacy and perhaps managing egos and may occasionally put the leader in the position of having to outright reject the recommendations of any individual board member or even a group of board members.

Much like managing subordinates, open communication and transparency are key to managing advisory board members. Board members most likely do not understand the "industry" of higher education, its culture, the concept or nature of shared governance, and the resultant unique governance and accountability structures found in higher education (Birnbaum, 1988). Hence, academic leaders need to help board members understand the distinctiveness of the academy and decision making processes and accountability in academia. Most board members have successful business backgrounds and will be of the mindset that the academic leader can (and should) unilaterally make decisions as she or he sees appropriate and manage employees without regard to protections they may have from tenure and/or their ability to undermine the academic leader. As business people, board members will expect to see results and it will be incumbent on the academic leader to deliver results in order for there to be a successful partnership between the advisory board and the academic unit leader (Schaeffer and Rouse, 2014).

In managing an advisory board it is paramount that the academic leader create a culture in which board members understand and respect the fact that their counsel, rather than their control is sought (Rose and Stiefer, 2013). In this capacity, board members need to understand that they are an advisory council rather than a decision-making body and that the academic leader may or may not act upon recommendations made. Particularly in the case of the latter, transparency and open communication are essential in allowing the board to better understand accountability structures, organizational politics, and strategic allocation of existing, often scarce, resources. The academic leader should always report back to the board on the status of its recommendations, rather than simply avoiding discussion of those which will not be implemented, to gain their continued support and commitment. The recommendations of the advisory board may also be counter to the wishes and recommendations of faculty and the academic leader has to be prepared to navigate such potential quandaries and their consequences while maintaining the commitment and support of both groups simultaneously. Advisory boards, again, are not governance boards and the academic leader is not, per se, accountable to the advisory board, however, (s)he needs to have their continued commitment and support to move the academic unit forward toward its strategic objectives.

At the time the board is established the academic leader can make a decision which can significantly impact her/his ability to manage the board effectively. That decision is whether the board will have fixed or open-ended terms of service (as well as whether any fixed terms are renewable and, if so, for how many additional terms). Term limits makes it easier to move off non-contributors (Olson, 2008) as well as individuals who are difficult to manage and also allow any individual member to terminate their service at the end of their term without any hard feelings over a resignation. There can also be individuals

who are non-contributors yet never want to leave so term limits provide a graceful means of separating from these individuals. Term limits also ensure that new energy and ideas are regularly brought to the board and do not preclude retiring board members from making any ongoing contributions to the academic unit once a board term has been completed. Ongoing engagement of outgoing and former board members can bring significant benefits to the academic unit.

A decision will also have to be made as to whether there will be a chair of the advisory board and, if so, whether the chair or academic leader will convene and preside over meetings. If a chair is utilized, a further decision needs to be made as to whether this individual will be asked to serve in such capacity by the academic unit leader or elected by her/his board peers. If an advisory board chair is utilized, (s)he needs to have leadership skills, the ability to manage brainstorming and problem solving processes, the ability to “tame” dominant personalities, and the capacity to remain objective (Rose and Stiefer, 2013). These traits are true of the academic leader as well if (s)he decides to convene and preside over advisory board meetings.

Decisions will also need to be made as to whether the advisory board will have separate subcommittees (Rose and Stiefer, 2013) as well as whether it will operate under any kind of formal or informal by-laws (Olson, 2008). Typical subcommittees can include curriculum, fundraising, students, and accreditation. It is probably advisable to keep faculty affairs and related human resource management outside of the purview of the advisory board as faculty have noted a number of challenges in working with advisory boards (Kilcrease, 2011). The ultimate challenges for the academic leader in working with and managing an advisory board include the time and effort required to establish and manage the board, negotiating board recommendations with faculty, especially curriculum recommendations, ensuring that the board’s role is understood and accepted by all constituents who appreciate the “value added” it provides, and ensuring that individual members do not dominate board proceedings and activities (Ellingson, Elbert and Moser, 2010).

MEETINGS/ACCESS

As alluded to above, effective management of board meetings is critical to the success of the advisory board. The academic leader, either with or without the counsel of the board, will need to determine the frequency, length, dates, and time of day meetings will take place. This decision is more critical than it might appear in light of the fact that the typical advisory board meeting draws 50% attendance (Olson, 2008). Scheduling meetings can provide a particular challenge for advisory boards whose members are not all local to the academic institution and geographically dispersed. Hence, strategies need to be developed which address expectations for meeting attendance (i.e., formal policies, phone-in or skype options, etc.). It is advisable to meet no more than two to three times per year and to schedule meetings months in advance (Olson, 2008), especially if travel is involved or expected. It is also important to realize that board members have high-level commitments in their own organizations which frequently need to be scheduled on a short-term or emergency basis so flexibility is important in respecting board member priorities, especially when last-minute cancellations for board meeting attendance are received.

To increase the likelihood of attendance, the meeting experience needs to be enjoyable, have realistic time commitments, and show appreciation for board member involvement (Taylor, et. al., 2010). Even though time available for meeting may be limited, it can be beneficial to schedule some time during meetings for members to informally chat and network with each other, usually at the start of the meeting, as well as having the meeting room free for a time period at the conclusion of the meeting should some board members wish to engage with each other post-mortem.

Meetings should always have a set agenda which should be followed and time should be managed accordingly, whereby the leader keeps the discussion focused on the agenda and moving. The agenda should not be a simple recitation of the academic unit’s accomplishments. Accomplishments and successes can be communicated easily electronically. Rather, meetings should present genuine issues for discussion, feedback, recommendations, and resolution, if appropriate (Olson, 2008). The agenda and all relevant documents and supporting materials should be sent out well before the meeting with the

expectation of prior review by board members to make best use of meeting time. Discussion of particular “assignments” can then take place during the meeting and board members will appreciate the effective use of their time and expertise.

Advisory board members are generally not at meetings to listen but rather to contribute by sharing their expertise and experience (Flynn, 2002). Hence, it’s important to structure meetings around board member participation and contribution. Board members should do the overwhelmingly majority of speaking at meeting. Meetings also shouldn’t be a self-congratulatory exercise. While announcements of “points of pride,” especially those of students and their accomplishments and awards and external recognition of program quality, can be made at the start of the meeting, the main agenda should consist of discussion and recommendations.

Academic leaders also need to determine whether non board members (such as an associate dean, department chairs, program directors, student leaders, etc.) should be invited to meetings in a guest capacity. Board members typically enjoy meeting students, especially the “best and brightest” and learning about student successes first-hand. The decision, however, to invite outsiders to advisory board meetings does open up the possibility, if not likelihood, of direct communication channels being established between board members and invited individuals. This can support as well as undermine the academic leader’s relations with individual board members as well as the entire board if not astutely managed.

While it is important to use meeting time wisely and keep members engaged, it is equally important to provide follow-up, if not act, on advice provided by the board (Watson, et. al., 2015). Meetings should always conclude with summaries of discussion points as well as pending deliverables and the parties responsible for such deliverables to ensure clarification and commitment on the part of those in attendance. The academic leader should also be prepared to answer questions from board members who were not able to attend or participate virtually. Follow-up formal minutes or informal notes should be emailed as soon as possible after the meeting and subsequent meetings should include expressly on the agenda reports on deliverables established at the previous meeting.

ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

The benchmark of a successful advisory board is its level of commitment and involvement in the activities of the academic unit (in light of individual board members other time commitments). The value and importance of a specific strategy for engagement of board members cannot be underestimated in developing their commitment. Opportunities can and should be made to engage advisory board members outside of meetings. Such strategies can include, but are not limited to, guest lectures or even co-teaching, judging student project presentations, mentoring individual students or student organizations. Individualized for engagement strategies need to be developed for each board member specific to the kinds of engagement activities in which they would find most rewarding.

The academic leader also can and should make personal efforts to engage members between meetings. Such strategies can include periodic e-mails, phone calls, and/or breakfast/lunch meetings, if feasible (Olson, 2008). Advisory board members should be “perpetually cultivated” (Flynn, 2002) and this can be accomplished via regular engagement and contact by the academic leader between meetings. Such communication should occur regularly (but not excessively) and provide board members with periodic updates and communication regarding how their recommendations are being implemented (Rose and Stiefer, 2013).

Similarly, it’s critical to thank, acknowledge, and recognize advisory board members, even though most members will already get some intrinsic satisfaction from their work in supporting the academic unit, particularly if they’re alumni. Providing appropriate thanks and acknowledgement is particularly important in light of the fact that board members are frequently sought for other endeavors with an opportunity cost associated with the time they give toward advisory board service. There are a myriad of ways to show appreciation. Board members can be acknowledged and asked to stand at events and ceremonies as well as having their photos on the website of the academic unit. Framed certificates /

acknowledgements are particularly effective as is memorabilia which members may display in their offices and wear in public (such as sweatshirts) which are a means of not only showing appreciation but also a means of promoting the school and allowing the board member to “tell your story” for you. (Flynn, 2002). The benefits of an effective working advisory board are numerous once members have become invested and engaged in their board activity. Perhaps the greatest benefits is that as board members become increasingly engaged, they’re also more likely to provide direct financial support (Olson, 2008).

CONCLUSION

There are no universal guidelines or “best practices” for developing and managing advisory boards (Worth, 2018). Rather, the leader of the academic unit needs to develop what works best for it in light of the variables, conditions, circumstances, and contingencies discussed within. Successful advisory boards can improve student learning outcomes and enhance students’ abilities to gain challenging, professional employment opportunities. They can also truly be “game changers” in advancing the academic unit toward its strategic objectives and improving its competitive position and resource base. Ultimately an effective board can provide an academic unit with a difficult-to-duplicate competitive advantage in the increasingly challenging and changing higher education environment.

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