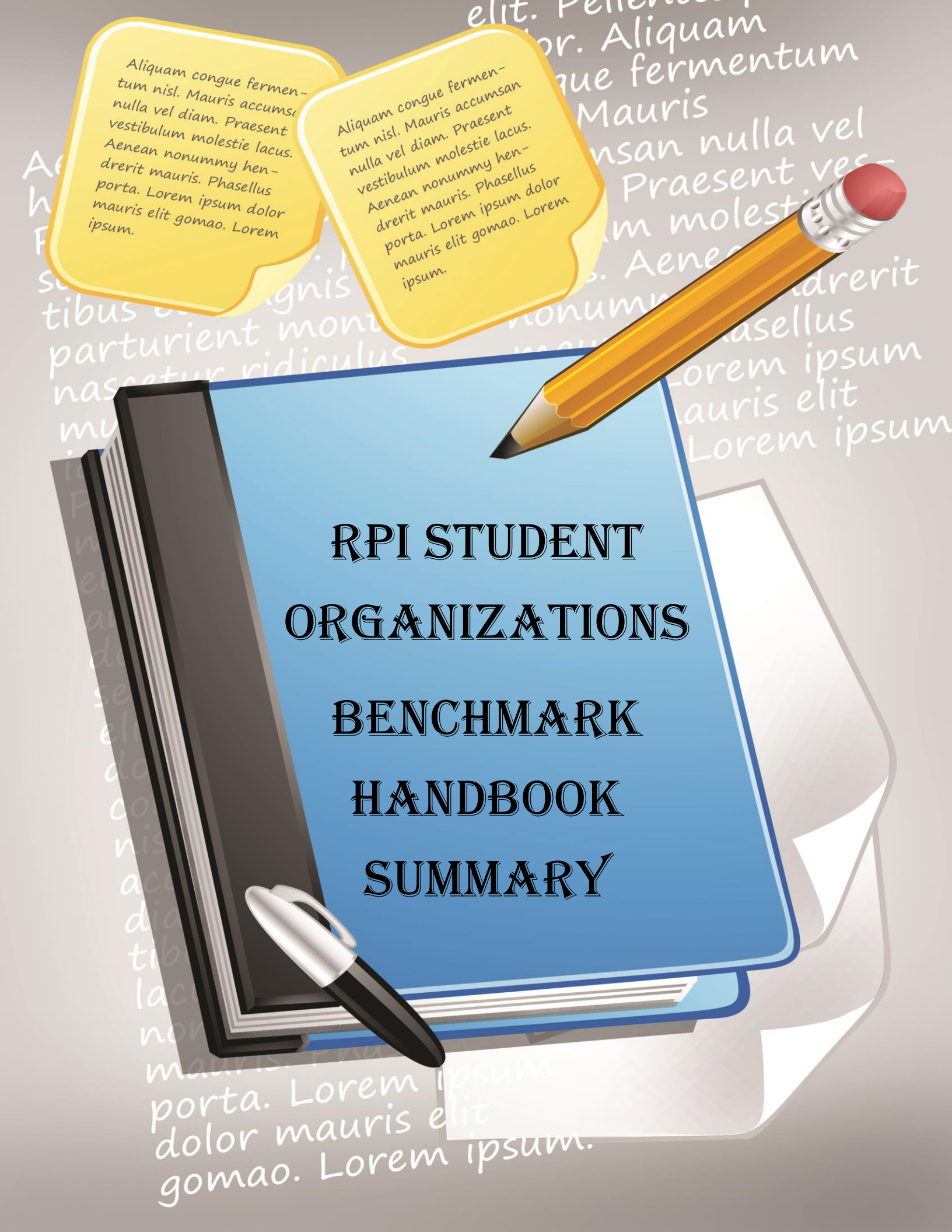


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**RPI STUDENT
ORGANIZATIONS
BENCHMARK
HANDBOOK
SUMMARY**

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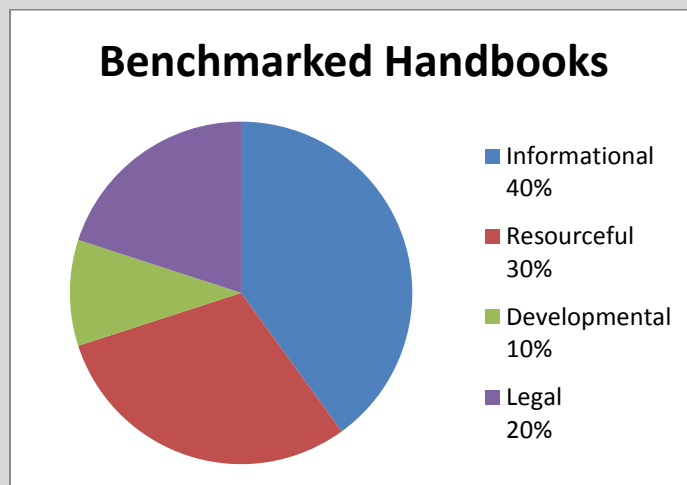
Overall Summary

Each student club and organization handbook contained similar structures. The order was based on subjects and further subdivided based on relevancy. For example, *Transportation* sections included an overview of when transportation would be available to student organizations, stipulations/criteria, (distance, mobility, etc.) and any relevant institution policies. Though institutional policies may have had its own section in a handbook, policies related to the specific handbook sections were typically included in that section. After this initial overview subdivisions would be overviewed. For *Transportation*, car rental, mileage reimbursement, drivers license record, were all housed under it—each detailed as if it were its own section, yet connected to the section to give cohesive details.

“Though institutional policies may have had its own section in a handbook, policies related to the specific handbook sections were typically included in that section.”

The most detailed areas in all handbooks included financing/budgeting, Access to forms, and Recognition, which is the process of creating a new student organization. The least included segments were email and communication policies the judicial process, and outlines for E-board (and general member) roles.

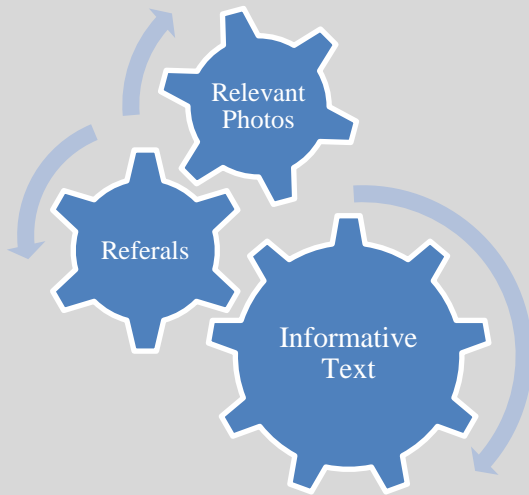
15/16 Included their handbook on the official student activities website. A note to consider is a few handbooks included terms (i.g., 2013-2014), which implies a continuous updating process. This included contact information if staff may change, a list of official student organizations, and any new laws/legislations (e.g., with the current state of sexual assault processing in Higher Education, one 2014-2015 handbook outlined in detail this process. However, the majority were standalone handbooks that were not annually updated.



Though each handbook was designed differently, statistically, each handbook can be divided into four broad areas and the chart to the left shows this combined average. Providing information such as institutional mission/vision statements, student expectations, and details on student organizations comprised the bulk of handbooks on average. Resources such as forms, reservation logistics and departmental referrals summed up the next largest bulk of handbooks. Little to none benchmarked handbooks invested space for assessment or member role development. Finally, institutional and state legalities comprised 20% of content.

Benchmarking Strengths

| Illustration/Cohesiveness | Breadth/Depth | Status Quo |



I commend 10/16 handbooks for the structural layout utilized. Not only were subjects ordered by themes and relevancy, subjects were further elaborated on by subdividing and branching information. This created a level of cohesiveness with the content by keeping all relevant information in one area. When applicable, relevant photos were used to further convey information or to provide information text could not. For example, when detailing the web portals for student organizations, many handbooks used a photo (screenshot) to show students accurate instructions. Many handbooks also referred to information found elsewhere (website, student handbook, institution department, etc.). Written text was the primary way of conveying information, either in bulleted sections, paragraphs or a combination of text and photos.

Only half of the benchmarked handbooks contained information scoring high in breadth and depth. For instance, while one handbook gave a brief overview of how/where to reserve equipment and resources, another addressed this same subject by defining “reservation”, detailing criteria/policies, providing contact information and subdividing what can be rented (technology, office supplies, staffing, etc.) in relation to **breadth**. In relation to **depth** for written information / resources, sections were much focused. In particular, legal policies, when included, were sharply defined and the few handbooks that provided a judicial process linked offences with consequences in relation to student organizations. I echo that the depth of legality was specific to student organizations, therefore was contained only in the handbook and could not be referred outside of it or elsewhere, like in the general student handbook.

It was apparent many handbook developers were *injecting* innovative policies and practices into their materials. For instance, sexual assault policies, technological rules and restrictions, and student development theories were new additions in a few handbooks, specifically and especially because these topics affect students and my assumptions is these institutions wanted to have checks and balances in place. Feedback from student leaders was another option provided. This can be accomplished using a Google Doc form or simple “How Are We Doing?” slips for students to fill out. This ultimately will lead to evaluation and assessment for providing services to student organizations, and this was mostly noted in the handbooks that were updated annually.



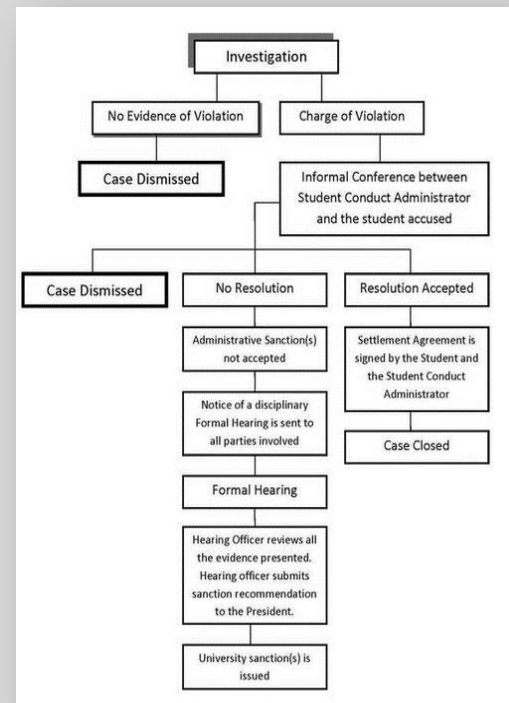
Benchmarking Weaknesses

| Advisor Role | Judicial Process | Leadership Training |



Student organizations are most successful when there is cohesion and collaboration between the organization members and organization advisors (Astin, 1999). Additionally, personal and professional growth typically occurs when advisors can help guide students through the logistics related to leading, learning and impacting the greater community (1999). However, this is often easier said than done. With that said, only 3/16 provided either an advisor resource, how students can work effectively with an advisor, or clearly defining the role an advisor plays in a student organization or assisting in a student's developmental growth. With the advisor being the key moderator and student affairs professional, it was unfortunate to see such little representation, and what representation was included was more clerical than developmental, limiting the framework and outcomes of student organizations to “fun activities” instead of “learning opportunities”.

How universities handle student misconduct, from a simply policy infringement to illegal activities, has recently become an area of concern. While many handbooks included a risk management, none were as elaborate as the flowchart to the left from CSUSM. This is a division-wide *risk management / judicial process* used for students, and goes in detail about the steps in disciplinary actions. While many student organizations may not infringe to the point of entering such a flowchart, having a standard judicial process in place gives any institution security in case a student feels justice for an incident is not established. This also raises the awareness of students toward their rights and responsibilities. Even if this is not included in a handbook, a reference to such a process would increase content comprehensiveness and security overall.



Leadership Training, except for 2 handbooks, was limited to simply transition training, which included E-board members informally teaching the incoming staff. Upon reviewing the leadership training opportunities of these institutions, none were mandatory or incorporated. They were optional and listed in an entirely different division. The lack of leadership training is unfortunate because this limits the developmental opportunities and may not adequately equip them to effectively lead in their respectively student organizations (Posner, 2012).

Key Identified Insertions

- ❖ Budgeting/Finances—this was a primary focus in every handbook. Frequent subcategories were funding request timelines, budget forms, receipt policies, and financial literacy.
- ❖ Institutional Policies/Procedures—from division mandates to policies institutional-state wide, regulation were adequately conveyed that were relevant to student organization functions.
- ❖ Relevant Resources—rather it was a list of significant departmental contact information, instruction on technology or a reference/referral to forms, resources were standout inclusions.
- ❖ Transportation/Travel—keeping a record of mileage, trips and vehicle logistics seemed to be primary focus area for handbooks.
- ❖ Posters/Fliers/Banner Guidelines—because many student organizations advertise events around campus, signage (posters, chalking, etc.) regulations were helpful to have articulated in print.

Key Missing Insertions

- ❖ Advisor Roles—advisors are the professionals who help students lead, learn, hold them accountable for actions, and develop for a successful college experience. This role was not articulated in the handbooks effectively, thus students create their own expectations and relationship definition that may not align with the student affairs division’s definition.
- ❖ E-board/Member Roles—the benchmarked handbooks highlighted the roles and responsibilities of treasurers frequently and often times the president. Roles for vice-president and secretaries were nonexistent. Having a clear definition of these roles are important for professional growth and understanding responsibilities. (*Are they listed in the bylaws/constitution? See next bullet*).
- ❖ Bylaws/Constitution Awareness—no attention was given to the role bylaws/constitutions play, and according to research, many student organizations operate without genuinely understanding the policies and logistics included within them (Randall, 2007).
- ❖ Judicial Process—not to say divisions did not have a set of judicial processes in place, but little importance was placed on outlining the process in conjunction with risk management sections.
- ❖ Liability Waivers—for institutional security and student awareness, having a liability waiver for travel, equipment rental, etc., could be highly effective under specific circumstances. No handbook highlighted or referenced this.

Recommendations for RPJ Handbook



Recommendations for RPI’s student organization handbook should be taken from all above sections. SARPs (RPI’s *advisor* equivalent) could benefit from a definition outside of the budgeting guidelines and procedures. Additionally, assessments of programs facilitated by student organizations (survey, debrief meeting, etc.) both allow students to examine their own work and improve future programs of a similar type, magnitude or function.

References

Astin, A.W. (1999). Involvement in learning revisited: Lesson we have learned. *Journal of College Student Development*, 40(5), 587-598.

Randall, M. (2007). Amending the bylaws. *Journal of singing*. (64)2.

Posner, B. Z. (2012). Effectively measuring student leadership. *Administrative Sciences*, 2(4), 221-234. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/admsci2040221>