
STUDENT ANGLE

How to Establish a Student Subunit

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INTRODUCTION

The American Fisheries Society (AFS) plays a critical role in preparing fisheries students to become fisheries professionals. Membership in AFS provides students with multidimensional benefits, including membership in the Student Subsection of the Education Section (Subsection). The Subsection provides an organized forum for discussion of issues relevant to students and empowers aspiring fisheries professionals to become active members in AFS. One way students can be active and contribute meaningfully to the Society is by establishing a Student Subunit (Subunit) at their college/university.

Although 65 Subunits are currently distributed throughout 39 states and one Canadian province, the AFS master list of fisheries schools indicates that 734 colleges and universities offer fisheries or closely-related degrees. Thus, there is ample room for students to launch Subunits throughout North America. The AFS has developed a simple seven-step process for Subunit formation (AFS 2014). However, after helping students initiate Subunits at Minnesota State University-Mankato (MNSU; 2013), Bemidji State University (2014), and the University of Minnesota-Duluth (2015), we can offer additional valuable advice for Subunit development. In this article, we describe how to select an advisor, recruit members, prepare for meetings, gain university recognition, and manage finances.

SELECTING AN ADVISOR

The first step in forming a Subunit is to select an academic advisor. We recommend students select an advisor who is: (1) enthusiastic about the fisheries profession, (2) active in AFS, (3) knowledgeable about advancements in fisheries, and (4) well-connected with fisheries management agencies, nonprofit organizations, and public entities (e.g., lake/homeowner associations).

RECRUITING MEMBERS

After selecting an advisor, members need to be recruited to promote active student involvement in the Subunit. We recommend sending emails to fisheries students and asking professors for permission to give short presentations about the Subunit during classes. Be sure to explain the purpose of the Subunit, typical activities, and benefits of membership. Additionally it is necessary to include your email address as well as the time and location of Subunit meetings. Then, create flyers and posters with this information, get approval and notarization

by your university, and display them throughout campus. Next, create a social media page on Facebook or Twitter, and invite everyone you know. Also ask appropriate personnel about posting an advertisement on the department, college, and/or university website. Tech-savvy students may even consider creating a webpage for their Subunit. Finally, spread the word about your Subunit at campus events. For instance, MNSU students had a booth at a fall semester kickoff celebration that featured the Subunit and diverse fisheries field equipment.

PREPARING FOR MEETINGS

After recruiting members, prepare to host an informational meeting. Contact the office manager of your department about how to reserve a room. Alternatively, if you wish to host the meeting outside of your department, contact your university's Scheduling and Conference Services Center (or its equivalent). Be warned that reserving a room can be costly and paperwork-intensive. At MNSU, room reservations outside the department can cost as much as \$1,000. Be sure that the room has the necessary amenities (e.g., projector, computer, Internet access) and can be easily located.

To host the meeting, start with an introduction by a current member of the local AFS Chapter. This will give students the opportunity to learn about AFS history and benefits of membership from a knowledgeable fisheries professional. After the speaker, have a social that includes refreshments, and engage students by encouraging them to introduce themselves and share their interests and ideas for Subunit activities. End the meeting by evaluating students' interest and enthusiasm.

GAINING UNIVERSITY RECOGNITION

If sufficient interest exists, pursue formal university recognition. Send a petition and a list of Subunit officers to AFS Unit Service Coordinator Jasmine Sewell and your local AFS Chapter. Then, determine requirements of your university by contacting your university's Center for Student Involvement (or its equivalent). The MNSU Subunit gained recognition from the university by completing a simple application through a portal (i.e., Orgsync) used by all student organizations at the institution.

MANAGING FINANCES

A crucial step in Subunit development is managing finances. A Subunit can open a cost center account at the university or

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an independent bank account. Both options require minimal paperwork. The cost center account will need to be approved by the Subunit advisor and your university's Student Allocations Committee and Business Services/Accounting Department (or their equivalents). In contrast, an independent account requires the Subunit to have a tax/employer identification number from the Internal Revenue Service, so it can be recognized as a non-profit organization (IRS 2015).

Choosing between university and independent accounts can be difficult because each type may provide benefits the other cannot. For example, the MNSU Subunit's cost center account enables members to reserve university vehicles. In addition, the cost center account does not have monthly fees. However, making purchases is complicated by the need for a purchasing card, prior approval, and quotes. If a purchase is approved, a Subunit member must pay in advance and complete a reimbursement form. In contrast, an independent account can simplify the purchasing process because purchasing cards are readily accessible and quotes are not necessary, but the Subunit may need to make a minimum deposit.

Once you choose an account, be mindful of who has access to it. Identify a responsible person or group of people to manage the account, and hold them accountable. In the MNSU Subunit, the academic advisor is the account manager, whereas the treasurer has limited access. If access to the account or its funds is necessary, a majority vote by the Subunit is required. Moreover, two Subunit members (including one Executive Committee officer) need to be present for all transactions.

Managing finances is irrelevant if the Subunit has no funds. Many options are available for Subunits to secure startup funding. Talk with professors, office managers, other student organizations, the Center for Student Involvement (or its equivalent), and members of your local AFS Chapter about potential funding sources for student organizations. Finally, explore funding options provided by fisheries management agencies, municipalities, and local businesses as they may be able to support your Subunit.

CONCLUSION

Although Subunit formation can be challenging and frustrating, do not despair: Rome was not built in a day. Establishing a Subunit will enhance your department, university, and the fisheries profession. Don't miss this opportunity to contribute meaningfully to AFS!

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