

## **Award Title**

Student Organization System: An Online Student Organization Management System

## **Awards Categories**

Administrative, Assessment, Information Technology, Fundraising, Professional Development and related

## **Executive Summary**

The Office of Student Organizations within the Department of Student Life plays a critical role in the support of all student organizations. The Office of Student Organizations provides assistance, guidance, and counsel for all official student organizations, from inception to official recognition. In March 2008, the Office of Student Organizations was created to merge student organization renewal, finance, and spirit programs. The Office of Student Organizations is staffed by the Coordinator for Student Organizations and a graduate assistant. This area is supervised by the Director of Finance and Personnel for the Department of Student Life.

The Office of Student Organizations continues to stress the relevance and importance of involvement on campus. Involvement is defined as participation in campus activities outside of class attendance. Involvement can include attending university events, joining student groups, working on campus, taking part in residence hall activities, being a fan of Gamecock athletics, and much more. There are over 380 registered student organizations on the University of South Carolina - Columbia campus offering thousands of students the opportunity to participate in co-curricular activities. These organizations are supported through advisement by hundreds of faculty and staff members.

The University of South Carolina created an online, web-based Student Organization System (SOS) which was launched in the Fall of 2008. SOS was designed to automate the complex tasks of collecting student organization recognition requests, managing the renewal process for currently recognized student organizations, assessment, and budget submission. SOS also provides a single, standardized platform for the administrative tasks of faculty advisors. The system was created by University Technology Services with functional guidance from the Office of Student Organizations staff and students. SOS operates on a secure PHP-based platform with log-in capabilities integrated with the University's Active Directory authentication process. This ensures that the data is always secure and is only available to authorized users.

The multifaceted, cutting-edge SOS system continues to grow and evolve to meet the needs of the student organizations. Frequent assessment activities, along with top-level review and feedback provide a constant, reliable source of feedback for improvement and evolution of SOS.

## **Award Description**

The Student Organizations System currently collects and stores the following data elements associated with student organizations:

- Name
- Organization Type
- Description
- Webpage Address
- Webspaces Username/Password
- Election Date for Officers
- Collection of Dues
- Attendance at Mandatory Renewal Workshops
- Number of Active Members
- Local/State/National Affiliations
- Department/Fund Numbers
- Organizations Meetings Times/Locations
- GPA Status Checked
- Advisor Appointment
- President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer Information
- Advisor Information
- Advisor Confirmation
- Advisor HR

This information is seamlessly integrated into the Student Organizations website (<http://www.sa.sc.edu/studentorgs/>), ensuring that all content is current. The data is easily extracted to .csv format for further analysis when needed.

The centralized nature of the SOS system provides a stable, reliable platform for knowledge transfer between organization leaders. As new leaders transition into appropriate roles in the student organization, the SOS system can prove to be an invaluable archive of information and activities.

#### Specific Strengths of SOS:

- SOS gathers and stores needed information regarding each student organization.
- Organizations can be quickly and accurately categorized as active, pending, renewal-eligible, or inactive/archived
- SOS automates and streamlines the many steps involved in the Student Organization renewal process. These steps include determining the name and purpose of the organization, recruiting students, identifying a faculty advisor, writing a constitution, and completing and submitting registration forms with the Office of Student Organization.
- SOS provides a stable, reliable platform for faculty advisor administrative tasks
- SOS provides a simple, streamlined method for Student Organization Fair registration.
- SOS is designed with embedded assessment tools throughout the system. Feedback is gathered unobtrusively during each process.
- SOS allows for simple administrative control over access to the system.
- SOS streamlines and automates the Student Organization budget submission process. Such strengths include:
  - Effectively managing organization budget submissions electronically
  - Accurately managing account and object budget reporting
  - Simple coordination of complex budget cycles.
  - Manage sections and expenses, which means when organizations go online to submit their budget requests we can add or delete request areas (i.e. food, registration, transportation, lodging, honorarium, contractual services, etc.)

**CAMPUS PARTNERSHIPS:** SOS provides inquiry capabilities to a variety of authorized students, faculty, and staff. Currently the Sports Clubs Director, Office of Greek Life, University Technology Services, Event Services Office, Student Body Vice President, and Senate Finance Committee have access to the system for basic data retrieval and analysis. The Student Body Vice President and the Senate Finance Committee also have the ability to view the budget submissions and make allocations and/or comments on each submission and event.

**DATA ANALYSIS:** SOS can export data into .csv format, allowing detailed analysis of the following facets: Active and Renewing Student Organizations by Category, Presidents, Advisor Emails, Organization Emails, Pending Advisor Lists, Info Sheets, Advisor Info Sheets, Workshop Organizations, Organization Fair, Graduate Groups, Account Budget Report (Accepted), and Object Budget Report (Accepted). This allows for easy access and distribution of information.

**HISTORICAL DATA:** SOS can also provide the office with past officer and advisor history. This information is incredibly useful for longitudinal analysis, knowledge transfer, and archival efforts.

**UPLOAD DOCUMENTS:** SOS allows authorized student organization representatives to upload current documents, such as a current Constitution. Further expansion in this area is being considered to include all past documentation and history of each organization.

**BUDGETS:** SOS allows the submission of budget requests for student activity fee allocations. Organizations can log in to the system and submit requests by individual event. The organization advisor is sent an automated email to approve the budget submission. The budget submissions are retained within SOS, allowing organizations to view information from previous submissions and allocations.

**INTERNAL USE BY THE OFFICE OF STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS:** SOS provides a simple, reliable source of information on organizational leadership and associated advisors. This information is enormously helpful to the Office of Student Organizations. Staff can also check if organizations meet university requirements or make notes that a staff member is in contact with an organization to get an update or correction.

### **Assessment Data**

Although the SOS system was only recently developed, the University of South Carolina has already seen an incredibly positive response to the program's design, features, and streamlined capabilities.

SOS has been attributed to the marked increase in the number of student organizations able to successfully complete the recognition process each year. 292 organizations acquired active status as of September 29, 2009 compared to only 281 organizations as of November 3, 2008. This increase of 11 active organizations with 35 less days confirms the impact of SOS on this process. This number increased even further to 340 active student organizations during the 2010-2011 academic year.

Organizations that fail to attend a re-recognition workshop and submit the re-recognition information are archived after the subsequent deadline. In the 2009-2010 academic year, 45 organizations became archived. However, in 2010-2011, only 34 organizations were archived. This represents a decrease of 24.4%.

Additionally, while the number of archived organizations decreased, the number of new organizations increased. During the 2009-2010 academic year, 39 organizations completed the new organization application process. During the 2010-2011 academic year, 49 organizations completed the new organization application process. This represents an increase of 25.6%.

The decrease in archived organizations, coupled with the increase in new organizations that completed the initial registration process, can be directly correlated to the increased ease and accessibility afforded by SOS.

The Office of Student Organizations has administered satisfaction surveys for all those organizations which completed the renewal process. In 2009, these findings indicated that 96% of student users were satisfied or very satisfied with the system. Students extolled the site's usefulness, convenience, organization and efficiency with a 92% or higher ranking in all categories.

In the most current survey, 96% of organizations stated that they preferred the online system to a paper based system. The relevant responses were as follows:

What is your favorite feature of the Student Organization System (SOS)? Check all that apply.

Online budget submission 42%

Online organization fair sign-up 56%

Online renewal submission 72%

I am not happy with any of the above features 0%

Which aspects of the online Student Organization System (SOS) are most beneficial to your organization? Check all that apply.

Organization information is accessible to all executive board members (with login information) 56%

The online renewal process is simple to use/understand 72%

Organizational information is easy to retain from year to year (and exec board to exec board) 56%

My organization appreciates that an online system eliminates unnecessary paper waste 72%

Organizational information is pulled from SOS and placed onto the campus Student Organization website 56%

The Student Organization system has also been positively accepted by faculty advisors. One organization's advisor recently sent the following: "I just wanted to take a moment to thank you for the ease of use of the Advisor budget approval form! It was fantastic! It may not be new, (my org. hasn't requested money in years) but it was my first time and I was grateful to be able to see exactly what our officers had submitted. Great work!"