

# American Society of Highway Engineers



## Best Practices for Developing and Sustaining Student Chapters

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Developed by the  
ASHE Student Chapter/CEU Committee

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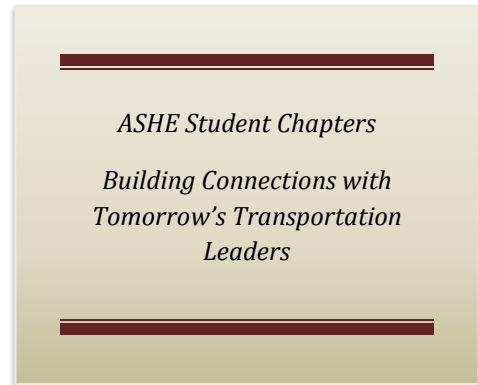
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# Best Practices for Developing and Sustaining Student Chapters

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## 1. Introduction

The American Society of Highway Engineers (ASHE) National Board of Directors encourages those Sections with nearby university engineering programs to consider linkage with students through a student chapter. Many Sections express interest but are reluctant to initiate one because of real or imagined barriers to entry. This resource document is intended as a living depository of ideas and best practices that have been at the heart of our most robust and sustainable student chapters. This document is not a list of rules or even guidelines, really; instead, the intent is to share ideas that we have found successful in overcoming barriers and achieving better sustainability.



If you do not find the information here that you need or if you are looking for general assistance in the development or enhancement of a student chapter, you are encouraged to contact the Student Chapter/CEU Committee and we will help in any way we can.

As you are successful with your own student chapter, we hope you will share new ideas, resources, and approaches so that we can expand this depository over time.

## 2. Know Your Goals

Don't start a student chapter just to do it – know your goals.

### 2.1. Students

Before you begin or after you are approached, gather your student colleagues and ask yourselves what you hope (individually and collectively) to reap from the effort. Your role as inaugural leaders and members of a new student chapter can be an impressive topic of discussion as you interview for internships and full time opportunities upon graduation and there is nothing wrong with that seemingly selfish motive.

Your goals should extend beyond simply forming a student organization on campus. You should know what you hope to do, what you hope to see, and who you hope to collaborate with. You should have an eye towards sustainability (more on that later).

If you're really only pursuing the opportunity because you've been badgered into it or you're looking for a resume line item, it will be self-evident. Have a real purpose in mind and you'll instead be self-evident as solution-oriented, professionally-minded leaders.

### 2.2. Section Leadership

The Section must want a student chapter for a similar mix of selfish and selfless reasons. Sections typically have some mix of the following goals in mind:

- Membership expansion – experience has shown that student members are more likely to be ASHE professional members upon graduation and, more importantly, active members.

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- Professional development – a core goal of ASHE is to promote the highway industry and attract not just “the best and brightest” but those for whom the highway industry is an exciting career rather than just a job. Our job is to expose them to the parts of our world that have brought us professional satisfaction, spot the ones that share our enthusiasm, and convince them to join us by seeing us in action.

## 2.3. Education/Institutional Leaders

Your search for value-added opportunities for students should include an ASHE student chapter because most of the heavy lifting can be done by the students and professional members. Students in ASHE will often have opportunities for construction site visits and meeting practicing professionals that they might not find in similar engineering professional societies. It’s not that ASHE is better; it’s just a different opportunity. Why not provide more and different opportunities for your students?

## 3. Gauging Interest

Before a student chapter is formed, three parties should have clear interest in the endeavor for it to have a high likelihood of success and sustainability.

### 3.1. Student Interest

Potential inaugural members must have a clear interest in not just joining, but actively participating in activities and leadership positions.

Section members should meet with at least a handful of students (a meeting with pizza or sandwiches is always effective) and a prospective academic or staff advisor and/or a representative of the institution’s registered student organization office. In a brief meeting, the Section members should brief the students on the benefits of such a chapter, the resources that are likely to be available, and what is expected of them. If the students are enthusiastic, a general interest meeting with other prospective inaugural members can follow.

*Example: The Temple University student chapter took nearly three years to activate, as the students and Delaware Valley professionals worked to overcome challenges, but their tenacity paid off with the launch in the Fall of 2015.*

*Example: At the University of Delaware, Dr. Robert Muir, a mentor to the effort, advised, “advertise a meeting broadly among engineering students, offer pizza, and sodas, show and tell them why ASHE is a great opportunity for them, and don’t let them leave the room without signing up.” Eight students showed in March 2009, all signed up, and they were the early core of the continuing success at UD. The pizza was apparently good.*

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*[ASHE@UD] as a whole definitely influenced my decision to accept employment in the transportation industry. With all the benefits I saw as an ASHE student member, becoming a professional member was a no-brainer.*

Matthew G. Galenas, E.I.

McCormick Taylor

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## 3.2. Institutional Interest

The institution should permit and even endorse the student chapter for it to be a success, although it is theoretically possible to form a chapter outside of the academic environment (albeit with greater challenges, less resources, and less access to sustainable membership).

Section members should meet with some collection of academic and staff personnel at the institution, including but not limited to professors, professional staff, and a representative of the office of registered student organizations (or similar such name).

There may be rules for a minimum number of students, bylaws, officer elections, conduct, activities, etc. and they should be clear from the start. Many institutions encourage a wide array of student activities and have an advisor's handbook or other such set of guidelines, instructions, and procedures; these should be obtained and reviewed up front to ensure that the students and Section are comfortable with the requirements, limitations, and resources. Section members should ask about resources such as meeting spaces and off-campus transportation.

Most institutions will require that a student chapter have an on-campus advisor, typically a professor, and that is highly desirable for a variety of reasons, including access to students for recruiting and announcement of events. However, academics are sometimes hesitant to take on a new responsibility and in this case, the Section may be able to assure the professor that he/she will be fully supported (including logistics and planning); alternatively, the university may have a professional staff member (preferably a transportation professional) that is willing to take on the role and the registered student organization may find that acceptable.

*Example: Delaware Valley Section, conscious of the burden an academic advisor might be wary of, assigned a Section member to be a liaison between the Section, the students, and the academic advisor, providing greater assurance that the advisor would not be solely burdened with the oversight of the chapter.*

*Example: At the University of Delaware, the Registered Student Organization office typically requires the involvement of an academic advisor, but First State Section found a professional staff member in the College of Engineering that the RSO found acceptable.*

## 3.3. Section Interest

Section members should be enthusiastic about the potential for actively engaging with students or the success will be limited. Obviously, the Board of Directors should be fully on-board, but some significant number of members should be prepared to welcome students to dinner meetings, engage with them, introduce them around, and even host field visits to their construction sites, design offices, fabrication plants, and operation centers. Section leadership should poll their

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*The key is staying persistent and making regular visits to campus and showing the Faculty and Student that you will be involved in all step of the process including when the chapter is officially up and running.*

John Caperilla, E.I.T.

Borton-Lawson

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members in some fashion and ensure that the Section is enthusiastic and prepared to be fully engaged with students.

*Example: Before accepting the advisor role at the University of Delaware, the prospective staff advisor met with First State Section leadership to ensure that students would feel welcome and comfortable at dinner meetings, that the membership was prepared to fully engage students, and that requests to visit construction sites (up close, feet on rebar, with a real reason to wear safety vests, hard hats, and steel toe boots) would not be unreasonably withheld. First State Section members have consistently met that challenge and the students have never been denied access to a construction site, manufacturing plant, or operations center.*

## 4. Getting Started

### 4.1. General Interest Meeting

This is a great way to start. Often, colleges/universities have some form of “activities night” at the beginning of the semester for students to “shop” their interests. National Engineers Week, usually in late February and involving all sorts of raise the roof events, is another great awareness raising opportunity. Often, professors will afford five minutes at the beginning of a class to talk about the prospective student chapter – an energetic student and advisor or professional member should come prepared with trifold brochures or flyers advertising the general interest meeting.

The general interest meeting needn’t be long – better to be short. Try to have it at a time when all classes, freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors, are available – this can be tricky, but it’s important. Have some kind of food and drink, based on what time of day it is (pizza works almost anytime).

The Student Chapter/CEU Committee can provide brochures and presentations we’ve used and you can adapt them for your use. Just let us know and we’ll share what we have.

The goal of the meeting is to get them excited and sign them up before they leave. This is where you also rally your inaugural officers, who will be key in building a sustainable chapter.

### 4.2. RSO Rules

Student clubs/organizations are usually overseen by a registered student organization office or other such name, so we’ll call these the RSO Office. They will have rules (minimum number of students, bylaws, elections, handling of money, etc.) – find out what these rules are so there are no surprises. Usually, these are reasonable enough. In particular, find out their stance on students leaving campus, safety policies, riding in each other’s vehicles, using rented vehicles, and so on.

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*ASHE @ UD was the biggest factor in how I got to where I am today...There is no doubt that I wouldn't be where I am today without ASHE @ UD.*

Michael J Kelly Jr., E.I.T.

Johnson, Mirmiran &  
Thompson, Inc.

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## 4.3. Bylaws

The student chapter bylaws should mirror those of the host ASHE professional section and include elements required by the academic institution (see the RSO Office).

## 5. Funding – Revenues and Costs

Typically, the costs of a student chapter fall into these general categories:

- ASHE dues (Sectional, Regional, National). ASHE dues are the best deal going, but \$45 to become a member is a barrier for many students and annual dues can be even higher.
- Dinner meeting expenses. As members, we sometimes grumble at a \$30-45 dinner meeting cost; as a student where a weekly pizza is a treat, this may be a much bigger deal.
- Travel costs (site visits, meetings). If a university vehicle is available for use, there may be no costs to the students, but if a rental is involved those costs can mount quickly. Even if students use their own vehicles and carpool, the owner may expect some cash for mileage.
- On-campus meetings (food, drink). Some student chapters are able to and elect to have pizza or other simple food and drink at their membership meetings, which can be a powerful recruiting tool. That said, student officers should continually evaluate whether members are attending for the program or for a free slice.

### 5.1. Section, Regional, and National Dues

Joining ASHE as a professional member currently costs \$45 and Sectional and Regional fees are sometimes added. Annual renewals are often similar for the member, although National renewals are \$20 and more stays with the Section typically. These are modest costs in comparison to other professional organizations, but can be a barrier for students.

ASHE National does not distinguish between professional and student members, but some regions and sections elect to waive some or all dues for students in good standing. The Section can elect to absorb some or all of the student membership dues, but even with a modest group of 6-10 students, this can become an unsustainable policy for the Section.

The host ASHE professional section may elect to form a less formal student chapter, whereby students do not become formal members of ASHE until they approach graduation. This approach eliminates the need for collection of ASHE professional dues and loses little of value for the students. In this approach, the host ASHE Section might offer to pay the initial dues of the senior, if he/she has been active and in good standing.

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*Although the experience of every chapter and individual student is unique, I continue to see successful student chapters fulfilling a fundamental need: fostering a community of future transportation leaders.*

Matthew G. Galenas, E.I.

McCormick Taylor

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## 5.2. Student Chapter Dues (Internal)

Students are usually free to raise their own dues from members. Dues may be \$5 or \$10 per semester or per academic year. If the chapter is required by the institution to hold such funds in their university account, it will be important for them to ensure that these are kept separate from institutional funding which may, if unused, be taken away at the end of the semester or academic year (so called, “use it or lose it” funds).

*Example: First State Section’s student chapter, ASHE@UD, collects \$5 per semester from its students. Paid dues and regular attendance at meetings and site visits are necessary for students to be considered in good standing, making them eligible to be in the Resume Book, eligible for discounted dinner meetings, and additional consideration in the scholarship program.*

## 5.3. Institutional Funding

At some institutions, student chapters receive annual funding that is typically funded by a “student activity fee” or other payment by all students.

*Example: A student chapter at the University of Delaware that is active and meets the requirements of a Registered Student Organization (RSO) received \$800 per year to help fund their operations (2015). These are “use it or lose it” funds at the end of the school year (May).*

## 5.4. Alumni Funding

At some institutions, the annual funding drives can be a means to support the student chapter, although this is not generally obvious, since that is not the first preference of the institution (i.e., they would prefer donations to the university itself or one of the colleges or a specific endowment). This may be a way for individuals to support the student chapter and receive a tax deduction (consult your tax professional).

*Example: When supporting the University of Delaware in their annual funding drive, a donor may choose “Other” for a portion or all of the donation and write in “American Society of Highway Engineers (ASHE@UD) RSO,” and those funds go directly into the account of ASHE@UD (all of it).*

## 5.5. Section Member Funding

Professional members and companies can be given opportunity to sponsor the student chapter in several ways:

- A portion of annual corporate sponsorships can be earmarked for the student chapter.
- An optional line item can be added to corporate sponsorships, earmarked for the student chapter.
- Individual members can contribute to the student chapter through the Section or through the Alumni funding noted above (if available), which may have better tax deduction benefits.

*Example: First State Section, in its annual solicitation for Diamond and Platinum Sponsors, lists an option to sponsor students in increments of \$40. This fund is used to discount student costs for*

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*attending monthly dinner meetings. The student leadership is charged with allocating the fund to its best advantage for student members in good standing.*

## 5.6. ASHE National Exposure Funds

ASHE National, through its Regions, makes available Exposure funds, intended to “promote the society and/or the highway industry” and/or increase membership. Typically, these funds have not been granted to support the ongoing operations of a student chapter, but startup and promotional costs for a student chapter might be eligible. Contact your Region for additional details and see the applications at <http://www.ashe.pro/manual.html>.

## 6. Student Transportation

Student members will require transportation to site visits, Section meetings, and other activities. This is sometimes seen as a barrier to the creation of a student chapter, but it needn't.

Many students have their own vehicles and are willing to use them to carpool. However, some universities discourage or even prohibit the practice and some consideration should be given as to the Section's policy on the matter.

Registered student chapters sometimes have access to a motor pool (at a cost, at a reduced cost, or perhaps free). Some student chapters are located within a College or a Center that owns vehicles that can be used to support the students and those can be used. Even if the academic hosting group does not own vehicles, other groups within the university may and, as one Temple student noted, “you don't get what you don't ask for.” Point being, ask around, look beyond your own organization, and realize the worst they can say is “no.”

*Example: ASHE@UD is supported by the Delaware Center for Transportation within the College of Engineering at the University of Delaware. The Center owns two passenger vehicles available to the students for free (including fuel and tolls). When these vehicles are in use by the Center, the students can use their Registered Student Organization (RSO) funding to rent a vehicle from the UD Motor Pool or a car rental center, and sometimes they use their own vehicles (although their advisor discourages this last practice for anything but nearby meetings or site visits).*

## 7. Meeting Space

At most colleges or universities, classrooms and other meeting spaces are abundant and often available to students for free. However, advance reservation (weeks, not days, in advance) is usually advisable.

If you are one of the organizing students, chances are you are a senior or junior and know the campus like the back of a Ramen Noodles package, but don't assume freshmen or off campus guests do. Include directions to the building (and even within the building for larger or more byzantine structures) in your invitations and announcements.

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## 8. Activities

As an ASHE student chapter, the array of interesting activities is a key part of your success and sustainability. Get creative, continually ask members what they want to see, and try to make that happen.

### 8.1. On-Campus Meetings

Once or more per semester, a general membership meeting and an officer meeting should be held on campus. You will likely find that monthly meetings of each during the semester will be helpful. Officer meetings are typically for planning events and taking care of business. General membership meetings can be used for administration, soliciting ideas for field trips, election of officers, collecting of dues, invited speakers, and panel discussions at a minimum. Attendance should be recorded and dues should be tracked.

Invited speakers can be drawn from anywhere, but professional members from the host ASHE section tend to be willing candidates and recent graduates make great panel members to relate what life in the first year or two after graduation is like.

*Example: ASHE@UD's Secretary tracks attendance at all events (campus meetings, field trips professional dinner meetings) and payment of dues (with the Treasurer's assistance) in a spreadsheet for a reference of which students are in "good standing," which affects their ability to participate in various benefits.*

*Example: ASHE@UD often hosts a panel of recent program alum, who haven't yet become 'old geezers' and make for great peer-to-peer observations about what the first couple of years can bring, what opportunities they've had, and projects they're working on.*

### 8.2. Construction Site and Operation Facility Visits

The types of site visits are only limited to the imagination and interest of the members. Generally, visits should be highway construction sites (bridges, tunnels, roundabouts, roadways, interchanges, etc.) or transportation control centers, but even less obviously highway related visits can be legitimate when they introduce some of the construction, design, operation, and maintenance concepts common to the highway field. These visits should reflect what the students want to see. Again, to the extent achievable, visits should be arranged democratically so that all classes have a reasonable opportunity to participate.

### 8.3. Student Attendance at Section Meetings and Activities

This is an important opportunity for students to get to know professional members, see our enthusiasm for the field, and explore different parts of the highway industry they might like to join. If possible, student attendance should be reduced/subsidized (but some "skin in the game" is always a good idea to ensure they aren't just there for a fancy dinner) and professional members should be encouraged to welcome students, engage with them, and introduce them around. When it comes time to sit down to dinner, students should ideally split up (or at least in groups of two), lest they all end up at a table talking to themselves.

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Some sections meet at times that may not be compatible with student academic schedules. For example, if the Section has lunchtime meetings, students may not be able to get away unless the meeting is close by. Even evening meetings may run afoul of evening classes. Professional organizers and students should openly communicate about schedules to determine if a different night of the week would improve attendance or if a meeting held closer by would make a lunchtime meeting feasible. With that input available, the Section can decide if making those changes, even once in a while, would be feasible in support of greater student interaction.

Another means of increasing student interaction can be special events beyond regular dinner meetings. For example, the professional members and students could gather at a university hockey game or basketball game and with a large enough crowd, they might even get a break on ticket prices.

### 8.4. Student Attendance at Section Board of Director Meetings

Some hosting ASHE section Boards of Directors will invite one or more chapter officers to their Board meetings as a liaison to the students and as another opportunity to keep communications open with the student chapter. Students can (at least with some Boards) learn a great deal about leadership, organization, risk management, liability, and logistics by attending Board meetings.

*Example: ASHE First State Section invites ASHE@UD officers to all Board meetings and routinely 1-3 of them attend, brief the Board on upcoming activities and ask advice for prospective contacts for other ideas.*

### 8.5. Miscellaneous Activities

The activities should mirror what the students have interest in and sometimes, those won't look much like highways. Social events or excursions to non-highway things are also a fine way of bringing students together and providing for networking with ASHE professionals.

*Example: ASHE@UD holds a BBQ at a local park in lieu of one of First State Sections regular dinner meeting and professionals get a chance to relax and get to know students in a great outdoor venue. Another miscellaneous example includes several trips to the annual Punkin' Chunkin' competition in Delaware – not highway related, other than the ride, but it's a lot of fun.*

### 8.6. Resume Book

A collection of resumes can be circulated throughout the Section members (and beyond) on a semester basis to make hiring managers aware of those interested in internships and full time employment after graduation. This has been a successful way to connect between students and professionals and has grown meaningful internships where used.

*Example: ASHE@UD has generated a resume book each semester for several years and it has grown in popularity to the point that hiring managers now inquire if they don't see a new one come out when they expect it. Many students have attributed hiring directly to the resume book. Only students in good standing are permitted to participate.*

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## 9. Section Member Involvement

Enthusiastic involvement by professional members of the hosting ASHE section is critical to the success of the student chapter. Members of the Board of Directors should periodically remind members (in newsletters, announcements at meetings, and so on) of the importance of the students to the section and the ways in which they can involve themselves (starting with just saying hello and inviting them in).

## 10. Logo/branding

ASHE National has a Public Relations Committee that develops and maintains the society's brands and logos and student chapters must ensure that any use of the ASHE brand or logos are in compliance with the latest standards. The easiest way is to contact the Committee Chair (currently Amanda Schumacher, [arcshumacher@urbanengineers.com](mailto:arcshumacher@urbanengineers.com)) by looking at the ASHE Committees web page, <http://www.ashe.pro/committees.html>.

## 11. Sustainability

Once started, sustainability of the student chapter is an important challenge. But, experience has shown that keeping it active and energized comes down to several "secrets," which we will address by examples.

*Example: ASHE@UD strives to include membership from freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior classes to ensure a "deep bench" and to prepare younger members for eventual leadership.*

*Example: ASHE@UD officers often include a mix of seniors, juniors, and even sophomores; when this happens, the transitions from one executive board to the next is much easier.*

*Example: ASHE@UD officers look for opportunities to assign tasks to non-officer members, particularly the younger members; these can include arranging a field trip, managing the web site, organizing a panel discussion, and so on. In doing so, the member gets a taste of leadership and, being actively involved, is more likely to expand his/her involvement going forward, including future runs for leadership office.*

*Example: First State Section welcomes ASHE@UD officers to its Board of Directors meetings, providing another routine interaction between students and professionals.*

## 12. Liability and Risk

If a student chapter is formed at a university as a Registered Student Organization (or other such structure), there is often some degree of liability protection and even insurance coverage for the students involved. However, the students and professional organizers are strongly encouraged to research this topic to ensure that their risks are adequately managed, since the needs and coverages will vary between student chapters and the hosting universities.

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*Hosting a student chapter in First State Section has been a lot of fun (and the barriers we thought were there weren't so tough after all). Showing students around highway projects reminds me how much I enjoy being an engineer.*

Matheu J. Carter, P.E.

University of Delaware

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*Example: ASHE@UD is a Registered Student Organization at the University of Delaware and as such enjoys rather extensive liability coverage, including insurance, for the students' activities. However, it is essential that the students conduct themselves in accordance with the rules of the RSO office, such as procedures and forms associated with off-campus travel.*

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The Committee needs your feedback:

- Was this document helpful to you?
  - If so, how so?
- Do you have a student chapter, are you starting one up, or have you been thinking about it?
  - What challenges have you encountered that aren't discussed here?
  - How did you overcome them?
  - What new ideas or examples do you have for the next edition of this document?
- Share with us.

You can contact the Student Chapter/CEU Committee about this document or other related questions through Matt Carter:

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