Student Participation in University Governance

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the scope, process, and effects of student participation in university governance, including student government. The study demonstrated that students are capable of administering their own affairs, satisfying various student needs, and protecting the political interests of students. Students were extensively involved in university academic and administrative decision-making at different levels. However, student associations as organized forces had much greater influence than did students at large. Both environmental and personal factors affected the impact of student participation in university governance. Although student participation in university governance is deemed indispensable, student participants must hone their group decision-making skills and demonstrate commitment to the mission of the university and its long-term interests.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude porte sur l'envergure, le processus et les effets de la participation étudiante à l'administration universitaire, y compris la gestion relative aux étudiants. L' étude a montré que les étudiants sont

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capables de gérer leurs propres affaires, satisfaisant divers besoins et protégeant les intérêts politiques des étudiants. Les étudiants sont largement impliqués dans les décisions académiques et administratives prises à différents niveaux. Toute fois, les associations étudiantes en tant que forces organisées ont une influence beaucoup plus grande que les membres individuels de la population étudiante. La participation étudiante dans l'administration universitaire est affectée à la fois par des facteurs personnels et des facteurs relevant du milieu. Bien que la participation étudiante en administration universitaire soit considérée comme indispensable, les participants étudiants doivent améliorer leurs habiletés à prendre des décisions en groupe et démontrer leur engagement envers la mission et les intérêts à long terme de l'université.

THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL BASES FOR THE STUDY

The concepts of shared authority and interdependent responsibility are important in the development of effective university governance. Traditionally the responsibility for decision-making in university governance was assumed mainly by administrators. However, the variety and complexity of tasks performed by universities require interdependence among administrators, faculty members, students, and members of the support staff. Participative decision-making in university governance has been practiced for years. As the clients of campus services, students are affected by decisions that are made on campus and have become actively involved in university governance. Nonetheless, there has been very little research on the nature and impact of their participation. The purpose of the case study reported in this paper (Zuo, 1995) was to investigate the current status of student participation in the governance of a major university, the University of Alberta, with the intention of improving decision-making in the governance of institutions of higher education, including student government.

Five bodies of literature related to student participation in university governance were reviewed: (a) theories on decision-making, including participative decision-making, (b) theories underlying participative decision-making, including human growth theories (Alderfer, 1972; Argyris, 1969; McGregor, 1960; and Maslow, 1954), and democratic theory (Pateman, 1970; Thompson, 1970; and Vanek, 1975), (c) university governance models, (d) the evolution of student participation in university

and college governance, and (e) student rights and legislation pertaining to student involvement in university and college governance.

This literature reveals that student involvement in university and college governance began in the late 1960s and the early 1970s in the U.S. and Canada. In Canada, Duff and Berdahl (1966) conducted a national study of university governance and encouraged institutions to make the decision-making process more open and transparent and to allow for greater participation by faculty members and by students. According to Houwing and Kristjanson (1975), by 1975, 78% of Canadian university boards included students. Since the mid-1970s, student involvement in university governance has been widely accepted. Based on their national survey of Canadian university boards of governors, Jones and Skolnik (1997) reported that a greater number of universities included student representatives in 1995 than in 1975 (p. 292). They indicate that students comprised 9.2% of board membership, and that 100% of the reporting institutions had student members on their boards (p. 283).

With regard to differences between participation of Canadian and American students in the governance of public universities, Jones and Skolnik (1997) quoted U.S. and Canadian statistics indicating that members of faculty and students comprised more than a quarter of the board members of Canadian universities. By contrast, these two groups accounted for less than 3% of U.S. board membership (p. 286). In 1988 there was a much higher percentage of Canadian board members elected or selected by constituent groups (about a quarter) than in four-year public universities in the U.S. (about 9%) and a much smaller proportion appointed by government in Canada (less than a quarter) than in the public universities in the U.S. (77%) (pp. 285-286). Jones and Skolnik conclude that it is clear Canadian universities place a high value on attempting to ensure that both internal and external interests are taken into consideration (p. 292).

Advantages, limitations and issues associated with student participation in university decision making have been explored in earlier studies. Factors inhibiting student involvement included disrespect of administrators and faculty members for students participating in this process, student apathy, student transience, student immaturity, frequent absence of students from university committee meetings, limited knowledge and experience of students, the requirement of confidentiality, and the exclusion of students from sensitive decision issues (Knock, 1969; Lee, 1987;

Riley, 1977; The Independent Study Group, 1993; and Wood, 1991).
Following the early 1980s, student participation in university gover-
nance in the U.S. declined, leaving some observers pessimistic about the
future of student influence (Schlesinger & Baldridge, 1982). According
to the above-mentioned Canadian studies and Canadian statistics, this
does not appear to be true for Canadian universities; indeed, the opposite
would seem to be the case in this country.

The literature on decision making indicates that process and style of
decision making are very important (Barnard, 1938; Hoy & Tarter, 1995;
and Simon, 1957). The concepts and theories underlying participative
decision making, along with the writings on student rights and the legiti-
macy of student involvement, provide a convincing rationale for student
participation in university governance. Additionally, the literature on
university governance identifies the strengths and weaknesses of four
major university governance models: the bureaucratic (Weber, 1947), the
collegial (Millett, 1962), the political (Baldridge, 1971), and the orga-
nized anarchy (Cohen & March, 1972).

In one of the two pilot studies that preceded the main study reported
in this paper, 41 Canadian university and college acts were examined for
provisions related to student representation on the boards of governors
and the academic senates or academic councils of universities and col-
leges, the rights and terms of office of student members, as well as the
approaches used to select these members. There is explicit mention of
student participation on boards and academic senates or councils in 28 of
the 41 university and college acts examined. For example, the Alberta
Universities Act (1998) stipulates that three of the 20 members of the
board of governors (15%) are to be students. In addition to such explicit
mention, permissive legislation in 10 college and university acts allows
for members other than those specifically mentioned in these acts to be
added to their boards and senates. Thus, the number of colleges and uni-
versities having student representation on their boards and senates may
exceed 28. Only three of the 41 acts did not include provisions that may
have permitted student representation. Student representatives on gov-
erning bodies are either elected at each institution or appointed by the
institution's administrators. Student members are accorded the same
rights as other members. There was, however, no information in these
acts concerning the composition and function of institutional governing
bodies at faculty and department levels.

In planning the paper, consideration was given to two complementary approaches to describing the theoretical underpinnings for this study. In many ways, the study has a systems basis with a specific context, a variety of inputs, a process, numerous outcomes, and feedback, all within the broader societal environment. The study obviously had systems characteristics, and could be described in systems language. On the other hand, as the introduction to the paper reveals, the study has its roots in theoretical and historical literature, in empirical studies, and in legislation on student involvement in university and college governance. A model was developed in the effort to bring together the theoretical and empirical bases of the study (Figure 1). In addition, Figure 1 identifies the rationale for the study, the study context (developed further in Figures 2 and 3), the anticipated outcomes and the implications (feedback) of the study. Furthermore, the model presents the relationships among the many disparate yet related facets of the study.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Semi-structured interviews were the major data-gathering technique. As mentioned above, two pilot studies were conducted. Thirty-one respondents were selected by purposeful sampling based on their involvement in the decision making activities of major university governing bodies and three student bodies: the Students' Union (SU), the Graduate Students' Association (GSA), and one of the large faculty student organizations, the Education Students' Association (ESA). The Faculty of Education and two departments within this faculty were chosen for the interviews centered on faculty and department levels (Table 1). Some respondents, including faculty members and students, sat on more than one governing body at institutional, faculty, and department levels. These respondents were able to provide information on student participation in decision making at different levels. The interview data were verified by each respondent and some respondents revised or made additions to the original transcripts.

The minutes of all the major decision making bodies and their respective committees at institutional, faculty and department levels, along with the minutes of the Students' Union Council, the Graduate Students' Association Council, the Education Students' Association Council, student newspapers (Gateway and Currents), newsletters, and brochures were also reviewed.

Figure 1

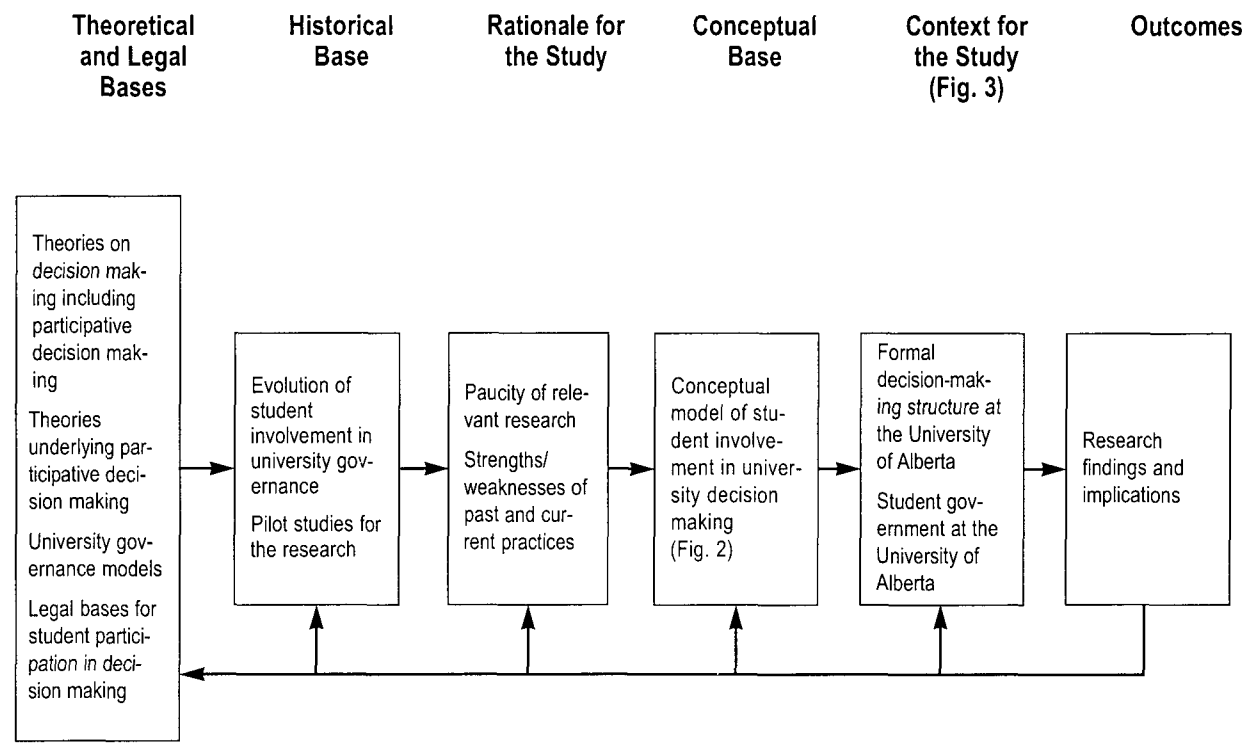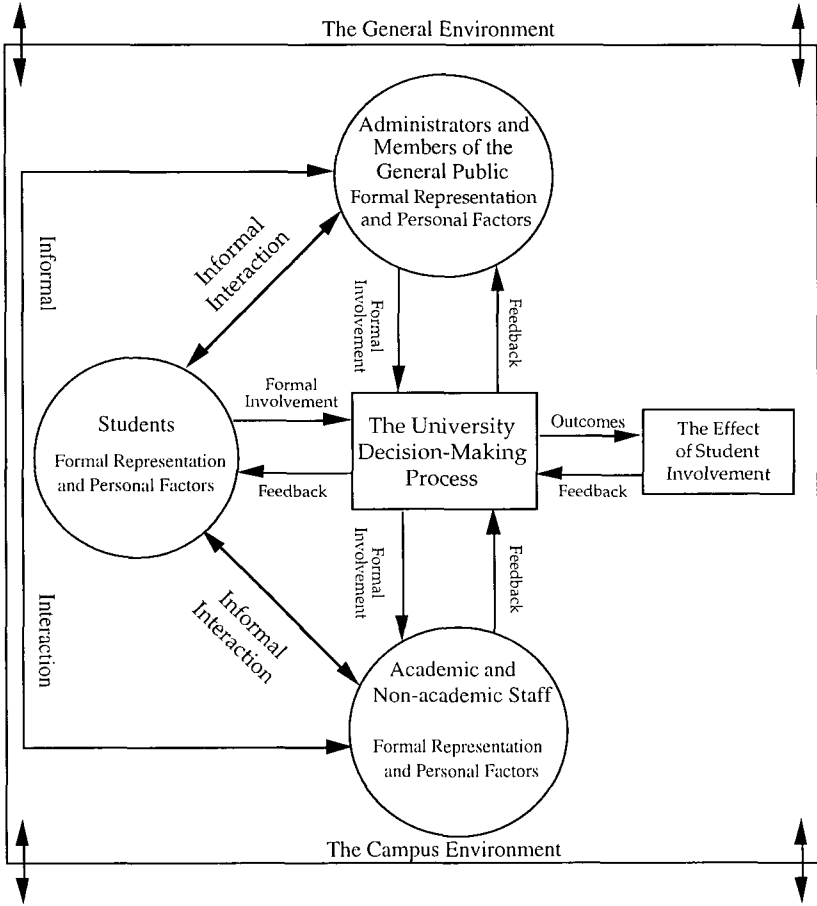**Theoretical and Empirical Bases for the Study**

Theoretical and Legal Bases	Historical Base	Rationale for the Study	Conceptual Base	Context for the Study (Fig. 3)	Outcomes

Theories on decision making including participative decision making

Theories underlying participative decision making

University governance models

Legal bases for student participation in decision making

Evolution of student involvement in university governance

Pilot studies for the research

Paucity of relevant research

Strengths/ weaknesses of past and current practices

Conceptual model of student involvement in university decision making (Fig. 2)

Formal decision-making structure at the University of Alberta

Student government at the University of Alberta

Research findings and implications

Table 1
Interview Participants

Category	N
At institutional level	
Administrators	2
Academic staff member	1
Community member	1
Representatives of the Students' Union	5
Representatives of the Graduate Students' Association	6
Students at large	2
At faculty level	
Administrators	2
Representatives of the Education Students' Association	2
At departmental level	
Administrators	2
Academic staff members	4
Graduate students at large	4
Total participants	**31**

Additionally, two General Faculties Council (GFC) meetings, two GSA Council meetings and two SU Council meetings were observed in order to obtain perceptions of how students interact with administrators and others during university committee meetings and how the executive members of student organizations communicate and interact with student representatives from different faculties and departments. Direct observations helped provide a sense of the dynamics of student participation in both student government and university decision making and also afforded opportunity to perceive the impact of student involvement.

Based on the relevant literature and, to some degree, on the two pilot studies, a conceptual model was designed for the research (Figure 2). The model helped guide the development of interview questions. These questions addressed the nature of student involvement in the governance of the university, factors influencing their involvement, and informal

Figure 2
**Conceptual Model of Student Involvement in University
Decision Making**

The General Environment

Administrators and
Members of the
General Public
Formal Representation
and Personal Factors

Informal Interaction

Informal

Formal
Involvement

Feedback

Formal
Involvement

Students

Formal Representation
and Personal Factors

Feedback

The University
Decision-Making
Process

Outcomes

The Effect
of Student
Involvement

Feedback

Interaction

Informal Interaction

Formal
Involvement

Feedback

Academic and
Non-academic Staff

Formal Representation
and Personal Factors

The Campus Environment

strategies used by students to increase their influence in university decision making. The inductive approach of content analysis (Berg, 1989) was employed, and conventional procedures for assuring trustworthiness of the data as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were used.
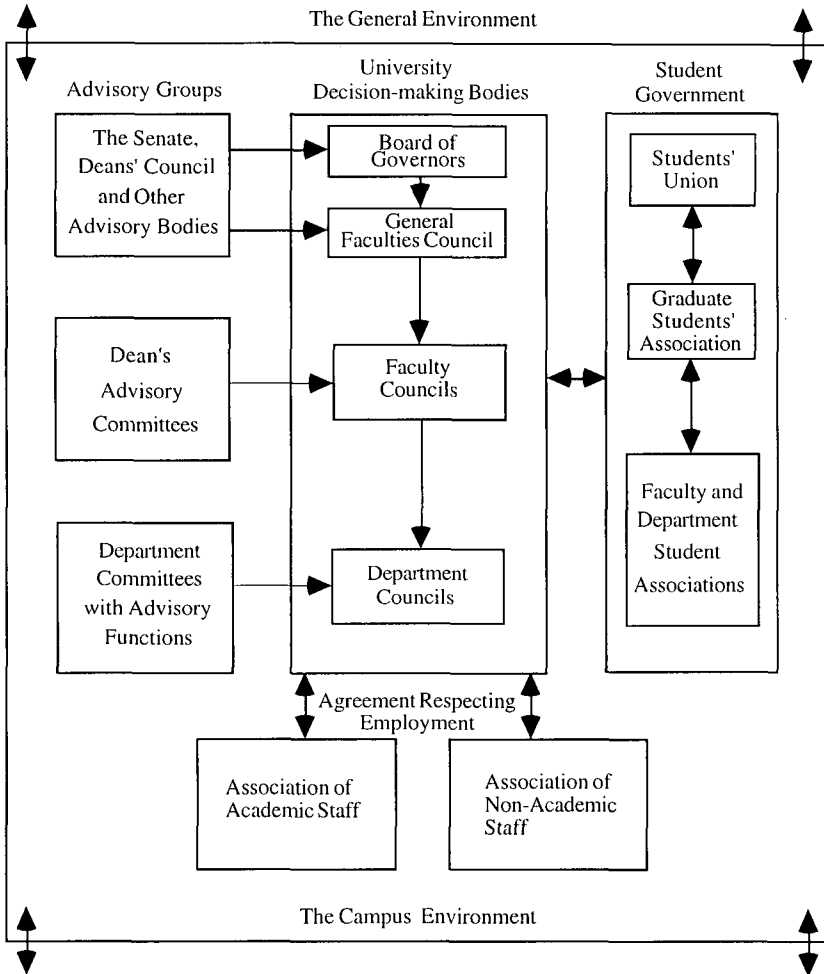
CONTEXT FOR THE STUDY

In order to explore student involvement in practice, it was necessary to develop a full understanding of the context for the study. This is described below under two headings that identify: (a) the formal decision making bodies in charge of all the administrative and academic affairs as well as operations of the university, and (b) the student government that is responsible for a substantial part of student affairs on campus. The descriptive model in Figure 3 explains in pictorial form the interrelationships among the university governing bodies, as well as the relationship between them and the association of academic staff, the association of non-academic staff and the student government.

As mentioned earlier, student involvement in university decision making at the most senior level, that is, the board of governors and the academic council (General Faculties Council at this university), is mandated by provincial legislation. Figure 3 also includes student government as a part of the governance structure of the university. The justification for this inclusion has a legal basis in two sections of the Alberta Universities Act (1998):

43(1) For each university there should be a students' union to provide for the administration of the affairs of the students at the university, including the development and management of student institutions, the development and enforcement of a system of student law and the promotion of the general welfare of students consistent with the purpose of the university (p. 39).

43(5) When a university has a faculty of graduate studies, the Lieutenant Governor in Council may incorporate a graduate students association for the university, with any name he considers appropriate, to provide for the administration of the affairs of the graduate students and the promotion of the general welfare of the graduate students consistent with the purpose of the university (p. 40).

Figure 3
Governance Structure of the University of Alberta

The General Environment

Advisory Groups	University Decision-making Bodies	Student Government

The Senate, Deans' Council and Other Advisory Bodies

Board of Governors

General Faculties Council

Students' Union

Graduate Students' Association

Dean's Advisory Committees

Faculty Councils

Faculty and Department Student Associations

Department Committees with Advisory Functions

Department Councils

Agreement Respecting Employment

Association of Academic Staff

Association of Non-Academic Staff

The Campus Environment

Thus, not only is student involvement in university decision making mandated, but provision is also made for student organizations to administer student affairs on campus.

The Formal decision making Bodies of the University of Alberta

The Board of Governors is the most senior decision making body in respect of the university budget, university-provided services, and university operational affairs. The General Faculties Council (GFC), chaired by the university president, is the senior academic decision making body. Subject to the authority of GFC, there is a council in each faculty or school, which is empowered to determine the programs of study in the field of the faculty. Similarly, controlled by their faculty councils, department councils are empowered to develop their budgets and programs within their discipline areas. There are other formal bodies at all levels such as the Senate, the Deans' Council, deans' advisory committees, and some department committees which serve an advisory function for both the decision making bodies and administrators. These decision making bodies include administrators, members of the academic and support staff, undergraduate and graduate students and, especially for the most senior of these, representatives of the general public as shown in Figure 2.

Student Government

Student government, as used here, refers to the student organizations in the university as a whole. The two major student organizations at the University of Alberta are the Students' Union and the Graduate Students' Association, which represent the undergraduate and graduate students on campus. Additionally, there are at least one major student association and other associations as well as clubs within each faculty which are independent of SU and GSA. Each student organization has a council as its most senior governing body, an executive committee, and several standing committees.

Protecting student interests and promoting the welfare of students are two major functions of each of the student organizations. First of all, student representatives sit on almost all the formal decision making bodies of the university at the different levels taking part in university policy making and in administering university affairs including student affairs. In addition, students are extensively involved in the provision of

student-related services, first, by sitting on university committees asso-
ciated with these services, and, second, by operating their own student
services. Much of the budget for each of the three student organiza-
tions examined in this study is actually devoted to providing services
to students.

To supplement the student services provided by the university
administration, the major student services offered by the student govern-
ment relate to information sharing, financial aid, peer counseling, prob-
lem solving in both academic and non-academic aspects, study facilities
and services, provision of voluntary opportunities, and services and
facilities for recreational and social purposes. The University Student
Services and SU jointly operate some services.

With a larger student population and greater funding sources, SU has
more facilities and provides more services than any other student organi-
zation on campus. Because of their limited funding, faculty and depart-
ment student associations, including the Education Students' Association,
mainly provide services associated with induction to the profession —
forums and other orientation activities on subjects in which students in the
particular faculty are interested — some mediating and consulting pro-
grams, and social and recreational activities. Also, all three organizations
offer a variety of recreational and social activities for their members.

All three student organizations reviewed in this study have their own
funding sources, including membership fees, profits from businesses
such as the bookstore, the post office and photocopying services, and
engage in a variety of other fund-raising activities. Membership in SU
and GSA is mandatory for undergraduate and graduate students respec-
tively, and these students are assessed fees to belong. SU and GSA have
hired professional and support staff members to run their businesses and
offices. The major responsibility of their more senior level employees is
to provide advice on what to do, but the ultimate decisions are made by
the student executive members.

As Anderson and Jones point out, in addition to the formal struc-
tures, including a corporate board with legislative authority over admin-
istrative matters and a senate responsible for academic matters (at the
University of Alberta called the General Faculties Council), both faculty
and student associations play a role in terms of influencing central
university policy and their representatives often sit on major committees
(Anderson & Jones, 1994; Jones, 1993).

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

In all there were nine sets of findings in this case study as follows: (a) student motives to participate in university governance, (b) the extent of student involvement in university governing bodies, (c) contrasting perspectives on student participation, (d) the decision areas from which students were excluded, (e) the roles assumed by students in decision making, (f) the informal strategies used by students, (g) factors affecting the impact of student involvement, (h) student roles in boundary spanning between the university and its broader environment, and (i) measures that might be taken to achieve more effective student participation in university governance.

Student Motivation for Participating in University Governance

The study examined the motivation for and history of individual student involvement in university decision making generally, and in student government specifically, as well as factors influencing this involvement. Student respondents provided multiple reasons for their involvement; each respondent identified one or several reasons. The most common of these, in the order of frequency of mention, are as follows:

1. to improve university governance,

2. to gain experience,

3. for social reasons,

4. desire to serve other students, and

5. influenced by their friends or parents.

Such factors as the financial status of the family seemed related to student involvement. Furthermore, almost all the student executive members had prior involvement in student organizations in secondary school or college, and their interest in university student government had been nurtured during this earlier experience.

Student Involvement in University Governing Bodies

Study respondents, the review of documents, and observations at meetings revealed that students participated in decision making within most of the governing bodies at institutional, faculty and department levels. They were most actively involved in the senior academic deci-

sion making body of the university, namely, GFC. Student members of various university decision making bodies had rights equal to those of other members. However, their terms of office, as regulated by the governing bodies, were only a year, which is two years shorter than those typical for other members. The justification provided for this was the students' transient nature.

Several means were used to select student representatives for governing bodies. Some student leaders were *ex officio* members of university committees, and some student members of university committees were first appointed by the council of the student organization and then approved by the particular administrative body. At faculty level, student representatives on the Faculty of Education Council were appointed by the Education Students' Association. Student members of department committees would, in theory, be elected, but this occurred mostly by acclamation. Student-at-large representatives on university bodies were either elected by students or they applied for positions on their own and were then appointed by the particular body. The latter practice was criticized by student leaders who felt such individuals tended to represent only themselves and were not accountable to the larger body of students.

Contrasting Perspectives on Student Participation

Most respondents, including the students themselves, saw student participation in a positive light. They believed that students as clients of the university have a right to participate in making decisions that influence them, and that administrators and academic staff need student input in decision making. Some students, especially graduate students, were thought to have sufficient knowledge and experience to contribute meaningfully to university decisions. Several academics and senior university officials contended that administrators, as educators, have a responsibility to facilitate student participation in university decision making since student involvement not only ensures representation of student interests, but also provides opportunities to learn how the university works, and enables students to develop leadership skills. Student input is necessary, they claimed, if the university is to operate as a community in which everybody has a stake in the outcomes and health of the institution. Most of the respondents felt that administrators at different levels generally supported student participation in university decision making activities.

In contrast, some administrators and members of the academic staff claimed that the primary role of students is to study and, as a consequence, they should not be encouraged to be full-time politicians. These respondents argued that students do not have to be involved in university decision making processes because they already have a voice through the university-sponsored surveys. Additionally, student lack of experience and knowledge, their immaturity and other disadvantages were perceived as preventing them from being effective participants in decision making.

Decision Areas from Which Students Were Excluded

Specific decision areas from which student involvement was excluded at the university, as well as the rationale for this exclusion, were investigated. At institutional level, students were excluded from some standing committees of major institutional governing bodies, such as the Executive Committee of the Board of Governors. At faculty or school levels, students were not included in the faculty salaries and promotion committees and the dean's advisory committees. At department level, students have no formal representation on committees concerned with the selection of new faculty members, the annual review of performance of members of faculty, the tenure and promotion of academics, and some other department committees such as ones dealing with undergraduate student affairs.

Various reasons were given for not including students. First, some administrators were averse to involving students in decisions on personnel and budgets at institutional level. Second, certain decisions were perceived by administrators to be sensitive ones, with personal careers and confidential information involved. Third, students were not seen by faculty members and administrators as peers in decisions concerning promotion and tenure.

Student Roles in Decision Making

The findings indicated that the role that students played in decision making on university committees depended on each individual student participant. Some students acted as colleagues; some played a leadership role in debates or discussions; some acted as watchdogs; and many students were primarily information providers.

Students contributed to the decisions of university committees by presenting information and perspectives, sharing knowledge and

understandings, and arguing strongly for student interests. For instance, following the initiative of students, the Board of Governors reviewed the student loan program and proposed a major redesign. The representatives of student organizations were perceived by others to have been politically astute and more influential than student-at-large members who normally acted on their own. Student participation was substantial on institutional governing bodies. As indicated earlier, students were very active in debates at GFC level, and they were reasonably effective in putting their points across. However, there were great differences in effectiveness among individual student representatives. ESA was actively involved in decision making procedures on the Council of the Faculty of Education and it exerted some influence over issues that were of interest to student teachers. There were no formal student organizations at department level. As a result, students had the least influence in decisions at this level. In general, although students were given a fair hearing, they could not exert much influence over the decisions of the university because of their relatively-weak representation and other limitations that are explained below.

Informal Strategies Used by Students

As student involvement in university governance is clearly a political process, students used a variety of political strategies. They often employed informal tactics to achieve what they were unable to achieve through formal involvement. Lobbying was a major strategy to increase their influence in decision making. Their media, including a radio station and two student newspapers, caucuses, training programs, cooperative rather than confrontational tactics and other strategies also played important parts in helping them attain their objectives. According to a variety of study participants, all these strategies proved effective.

Factors Affecting the Impact of Student Involvement

The impact of student involvement in the governance of the university was dependent on three main sets of factors:
1. **Personal factors.** These included the individual participant's philosophy; educational level, degree of maturity, attitudes, personality, age, leadership style, experience, and interpersonal skills. Examples of attitudinal factors were the attitudes of some administrators about student participation,

the confrontational or non-confrontational attitudes of individual students toward others, and the enthusiastic or indifferent attitudes of individual students towards student participation in university governance.

2. **Environmental factors.** The most prominent were political and economic factors existing in the broader community, and the culture and special circumstances of the organization. For instance, student involvement in university decision making was heavily influenced by the local economic and political situation as the university was forced to restructure its units due to the financial restraints it faced.

3. **Organizational factors.** There were university organizational and structural factors, such as time of scheduling meetings and rules of the university governing bodies affecting student participants. There were also program-related factors caused by differing characteristics of students studying in programs at different levels.

With more resources, adequate support staff, and attractive incentives such as full salaries for its executive members, SU has been more effective and better organized than any other student organization on campus both in terms of governing student affairs and student participation in university decision making. SU has played a leadership role in serving University of Alberta students and protecting their interests. SU facilities, businesses and various services it provides have been run effectively since the staff it employs can provide professional advice and maintain the continuity of the SU operations and services. On the other hand, the volunteer-based student organizations such as GSA and ESA have not been as successful as SU in the two above-mentioned aspects due, in large measure, to their lack of resources and incentives.

Boundary Spanning

In addition to representing their respective constituencies at institutional, faculty and department levels, SU, GSA, and ESA present the concerns of their membership to the government of Alberta, and the community at large. The three student organizations all lobby externally, and try to make government officials aware of the major issues facing university students. SU and GSA regularly contact the Minister's Policy

Advisory Committee of the provincial government, and also meet, on an ad hoc basis, with the head of the relevant department of government to discuss issues of particular importance to their members. Moreover, the three student organizations all work to strengthen their relationships with the community by being actively involved in community activities. Finally, the University of Alberta Students' Union has played a leading role in addressing student issues and discussing strategies for student involvement in the governance of institutions of higher education with other university and college student organizations throughout the country.

Measures Leading to More Effective Student Participation

According to study respondents, efforts should be made jointly by administrators and students to improve student participation in the governance of the university. For example, administrators could facilitate student involvement in university decision making processes by providing necessary training, appropriately scheduling university committee meetings, increasing student representation on certain university committees, and using multiple approaches to obtain student input. The challenge is to develop means whereby those faculty members and administrators who hold negative attitudes toward student involvement might be enlightened about the student role in university governance so that they would show greater respect for student members on university committees. Student organizations and students at large ought to cooperate and work pro-actively with administrators. They would earn the respect of others by being active participants in decision making, and acting in a mature and responsible manner. Student organizations should strengthen the training for new student executive members and student services directors in order to overcome the problems caused by the "transient nature" of students. Respondents indicated that both formal and informal communication between administrators and students should be improved to increase cooperation and decrease misunderstandings between them. To better satisfy student needs, they also suggested that a formal mechanism be required to coordinate the communication and cooperation between university-operated and student-operated student services.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study have confirmed the theories presented in the literature with respect to the rationale for student involvement in university governance, including human growth theories. Most of the respondents believed that student involvement is beneficially related to the future careers of students. Their involvement helps them understand the university operations, university-community relationships and university-government relationships. The theory on student involvement in university governance is also strengthened. In addition to the theoretical rationale and legal provisions affecting student participation (first column in Figure 1), there are practical reasons for such participation. For instance, as clients of academic and other services on campus, students provided important feedback, including their concerns and opinions, that helped administrators improve the quality of their decisions. Moreover, students, as members of the academic community, have a responsibility to ensure that the academic programs are appropriately delivered.

Regarding the governance pattern of the university, the results of the study showed that each of the four governance models found in the literature reflects only in part the realities of the university. First, both the university administration and the student organizations employed bureaucratic structures and practices. Second, based on democratic principles and the collegial governance model, students have participated in the university decision making process as members of the academic community. Occasionally, some decisions, such as the decision on the income contingency program for student loans proposed by the students, whereby repayment of loans would be based on the income of students following their graduation, were reached by "collegial" consensus. Third, all the interest groups, including students, are active in the political arena of the university. In this respect, the political governance model is obviously relevant. Fourth, because of the recent government funding cuts, the administration of the university faced a number of issues and engaged in some unplanned activities, specifically reducing the number of personnel, restructuring university units, and substantially increasing tuition fees. The university, in coping with these uncertainties, displayed characteristics of an organized anarchy. In short, the university exhibited a governance pattern that combines all

four governance models found in the literature. However, with the current pressure from government for the university to become financially more efficient, a more hierarchical governance pattern seems to be emerging within this institution. It appears probable that the financial restraints facing universities may be leading to a governance structure characterized by less participation of students, support staff, and faculty members. This is occurring at a time when students are demanding more participation because a greater proportion of university funding has its source in student tuition fees. These recent changes are certainly worthy of further analysis.

Some findings of the study differed from those of earlier American studies which indicate that student involvement in university governance declined in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s. In contrast, Canadian studies reveal that student participation is increasing in Canadian universities. Students at the focal university remained actively involved in university decision making processes, and there was no sign of a diminishing student role in the governance of the university. In addition, students were, in many cases, better organized and better prepared than were academic staff members in debates and discussions on issues, and individual students on various committees were, in general, perceived by others to have been more influential than individual members of the academic staff. However, since this is a study of student involvement in the governance of a Canadian university, cultural differences between the two countries, different environmental factors, as well as the different times when the studies were conducted should be taken into consideration in making these comparisons. The political, economic, and organizational factors; program-level factors; some attitudinal factors; organizational culture; some personal factors, including leadership style and philosophy; the issue of student representation on university committees; student motivation for involvement; and conflicts between university committee meeting times and class times of student members are apparently being reported for the first time. In short, the findings of the study have increased our understanding of certain continuing issues concerning student involvement in university governance and have identified new areas for research.

Student impact on university decision making is limited for the reasons discussed earlier, and students are likely to remain the minority on university governing bodies as the existing university structures suggest.

Despite these constraints, students will apparently continue to do their utmost to protect student interests, and they will continue to make significant contributions to university decision making by providing valuable student input.

The three student associations examined in the study appeared generally well organized and effective. Their successes have demonstrated that students are capable of administering their own affairs, satisfying the needs of their members, and protecting their members' interests. Student experience in student government at the University of Alberta in operating student organizations, running businesses and services, protecting student interests, employing different strategies of involvement in university decision making, and cooperating with the administration and the community should have utility for other university student organizations in Canada and elsewhere.

Because of the nature of the study, caution should be exercised in drawing generalizations from it. Nevertheless, a number of implications for administrative personnel, leaders of student organizations, and individual students involved in the governance of institutions of higher education arise from the study. First, it seems that student involvement in institutional governance should be intentionally nurtured in universities and colleges to ensure overall student development both as members of these institutions and as members of society. Students cannot effectively participate in institutional governance without the full support of university administrators. Owens (1995) claims, "It is insufficient that only the administrator be skilled in participative methods: it is essential that all participants understand and know how to play their roles effectively" (p. 198). Thus, university administrators need not only take a supportive stance toward student involvement but should also provide concrete assistance that facilitates student involvement. Examples are organizing lectures or workshops on university operations, issues facing the university, shared decision making, open communication, and conflict management; and scheduling meetings when students can be available.

Additionally, all students who wish to be involved in university governance should first develop a thorough understanding of the significance of their involvement. They must become knowledgeable about their university's decision making procedures and seek the background information required for informed participation in the process. They must also be aware of their own limitations as students and be willing to

take concrete steps to compensate for these limitations. In this study, a constructive stance toward such involvement was found to be effective.

Moreover, student organizations should employ various means to encourage capable students to become involved in the governance of their university. More incentives appear to be required for students to participate in this process since their financial and other limitations may deter them from doing so. Conditions permitting, some student organizations could require their executive members to take leave of formal studies for a year and financially assist them during the period of their involvement, as the University of Alberta Students' Union does. Course credits, certain kinds of recognition for student involvement, and other incentives may also be considered. As the results of the study demonstrate, sometimes it is the quality of individual student participants and the effectiveness of strategies employed rather than the size of the student membership that determines the impact of student participation. Also, in view of the limited resources of student organizations, the numbers of student executive members and their committees may have to be reduced to a bare minimum. Consequently, importance should also be attached to improving the selection process for members of the student government and student representatives on university committees.

Another implication of this study derives from the finding that students were involved in university decision making mainly as representatives of student organizations because these organizations have adequate resources to support and coordinate such involvement. It appears necessary for administrators at different levels to better understand the role of student organizations in the governance of their institution, and to strive to maintain good working relationships with them. In this respect, organized student representation on department committees seems desirable so that student needs are better served at that level. Based on the study findings, the university's administrators and representatives from student organizations can cooperate effectively for the well-being of students and improved university governance.

Specific steps may be taken to make student-related services more efficient, economical, and accessible. In considering the characteristics of university-administered student services and the student services provided by student organizations, it seems that, separately and together, the two types of student-related services need to bring their strengths into full play. Overlap between the student-related services

provided by the university and those provided by student organizations should be reduced to a minimum; each could take charge of a narrower range of services and each should specialize in the services it is more capable of providing, not only to conserve resources, but more impor- tant to improve the overall quality of these services.

A further implication is derived from the complaint of some admin- istrators and one community member that students sometimes overem- phasized their own interests and ignored the interests of the university and the broader community. Jones and Skolnik (1997) observed:

> Both internal and external board members agree that the role of the board member is to make decisions that are in the best interests of the university as a whole, though internal mem- bers also have a stronger tendency to view at least part of their role as representing the interests of a specific con- stituency. (p. 293)

As members of the university community, all the interest groups, including students, should strive to consider the interests of the univer- sity as a collective in which they all have a stake. The "collegial role" of students in university committees is seen as important, which is a reason for their being invited to participate in the governance of their institu- tion. Emphasizing the interests of the collective by no means suggests that the interests of individuals and specific groups should be ignored, whereas valuing collective interests can be seen as a positive means of increasing mutual understanding and reducing conflicts among different interest groups. How can the interests of individuals be guaranteed when collective interests are endangered? The disregard of collective interests could be devastating.

The study findings have implications for further research on student involvement in university governance. First, future studies relating to university governance should include "student government" as an important component. Also, any study of student involvement in uni- versity governance would be incomplete if it were to focus only on stu- dent participation in academic and administrative decision making. Although formal student involvement in university decision making is important, the informal strategies used by students are of significance and must be recognized. Researchers interested in studying student par- ticipation in university governance would find advantage in attending to this informal dimension in their conceptual framework, and including

the environmental and personal factors reported in this study. The conceptual model used to guide the current study (Figure 2) proved to be consistent with the realities of student involvement in decision making on the focal campus, and may be useful for other studies.

Finally, some of the theorizing on participative decision making helps explain and give credibility to findings and recommendations of the study. For example, relevance, expertise, jurisdiction, and commitment are identified by Bridges (1967), Owens (1995), and Hoy and Miskel (1996) as important criteria to consider in determining involvement of individual participants in decision making. As explained earlier, students have a personal stake in university decisions as well as the legal right to participate in university governance. They thus fulfill the relevance and jurisdiction criteria. However, students must develop an understanding of how the university functions and of the issues it faces, and learn group decision making skills to meet the expertise criterion. Furthermore, student commitment to the mission of the university has been in question due to their transient nature and the likelihood that student participants in university governance won't be on campus to implement the decisions that they have helped to make. The fourth criterion for involvement in decision making supports the recommendation that in order to resolve the problem associated with their temporary and transient presence student participants would be more effective if they would demonstrate commitment to the mission of their university and show they have the long-term interests of their university at heart. ❦

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