

Special: Statement on Student Power

NASPA Ad Hoc Committee on Student Power

The Statement on Student Power presents a perspective on the relationship and relevance of students in university governance. The Statement seeks to confront contemporary problems of higher education, recognize the need to respect that which builds an academic community and to reject that which disrupts or destroys.

The Statement represents a point of view concerning student power. Interpretation and implementation are the prerogative of member institutions . . . in the process of which the individual character of NASPA institutions is paramount.

Student power is a moving reality confronting NASPA which demands bold new professional insights and action. The dominant theme of student power is the right to share in the formulation and application of institutional policy. Two major directions are evident: One related to student rights, the second to educational reform and change. For some students this means the right to be heard and taken seriously. For others, it means confrontations on fundamental issues and values central to university life. To some, shared power is a competitive game to establish "authority" or to assume control for ends which deny the essential spirit and purpose of higher education. For still others, it means questioning the essential mission of a university and its relationship to the campus population.

Student power brings into focus many crucial social and educational issues. Of central importance are the differences existing between a collegiate and faculty-administrative generation, not only in the classroom but in the campus living and governing styles. Accentuating these conditions is the problem of communication, stimulated by close-mindedness and low tolerance levels on the part of both generations. Frequently the student power movement has been influenced by student radicals exercising a catalyst role. Rather than seek change through cooperative effort and shared responsibility, the radical catalyst seeks revolution for its own sake. Student power can strengthen, student tyranny cannot.

Student Power . . . As It Should Function In The University

"Student power," as a descriptive term, sets forth the right of students to influence and to exert control. In theory, it characterizes concerned students seeking to respond and act within the university in a meaningful way.

Student power can and should be a constructive force. It should be free of divisive manipulation and role playing. The conflicts of destructive interest-group warfare for partisan ends must be converted to constructive argument for educational ends. While there can be legitimate differences regarding these ends, there must be agreement on a process which accommodates the differences and seeks to build on them. Student power belongs to those who respect the rights of others, not those incapable of living with divergency.

The *Joint Statement on Student Rights* acknowledges that students have a part to play in all institutional affairs. It establishes the legitimacy to share in university affairs in the fullest sense. In this context, student power is meshed into an institution

with a new sense of community rather than a system of separate domains and vetoes. This concept of shared power does not argue that a university is a democracy based upon "one man, one vote" with all entitled to an equal claim to power. A university is based upon freedom of inquiry and not upon the belief that all opinions or theories are equally meritorious. The *Joint Statement* clearly implies persuasion based upon reason and evidence, uncoerced agreement, trust, and tolerance.

Conditions Which Favor The Development of Legitimate Student Power

Belief in the legitimacy of disagreement.

Increased awareness of what students are saying and, often more significant, attempting to say.

Emergence of bright, articulate students who employ constructive tactics and seek positive change, rather than dropping out.

Acceptance of students as participants rather than spectators in university affairs.

Recognition that most students have an enlightened understanding of educational issues and are capable of participating freely in their resolvment.

Innovative and creative programs in the learning and teaching process.

Placement of students in active roles in traditionally restricted policy and decision-making areas.

Conditions Which Work Against The Development of Legitimate Student Power

Proclivity to cast students, faculty and administration into contending interest groups.

Inconsistencies between the principles of academic freedom (open inquiry and submission of findings to public assessment and criticism) and university governance procedures.

Emphasis upon diplomacy, strategy and bargaining as an institutional style.

Responses which block principled and legitimate protest leaving the protestor in position of moral strength.

Declaration of the sanctity of certain areas of university affairs, precluding the option for a simple expression of opinion.

Status-bound and polarized components within the campus setting.

Inability to identify issues and communicate about them.

Isolation of student government with consequent exclusion from the mainstream of campus life.

Over-reaction to confrontation.

Recommendations

It is urgent that institutions initiate planning action prior to and during the 1968-69 academic year. Farsighted and anticipatory action is required in which justifiable changes are instigated before students resort to demanding action. This facilitates a crisis-free pattern of gradual change in a climate which supports a judicious assessment of issues and points of view.

The revision of institutional governing structures and processes is vital if the strengths of student power are to be accommodated. Reasoned power is a forward force, powerlessness is not. Even more vital are changes in spirit and conviction which

will evoke trust and tolerance *vs.* suspicion and dogmatism which can escalate present crippling dilemmas. The Spring of 1968 provided evidence that many traditional attitudes and practices are ineffective and that dramatic changes in all processes, academic and non-academic, are imperative. Many of the changes sought in the student movement are improvements and must be judged on their own merit.

While student power should not function within a university modeled on the forms of political democracy, a university must be democratic in spirit insofar as it affords intellectual freedom to its members and respects them for their intellectual and moral worth. The model, therefore, should be based on personal merit and the worth of ideas expressed, not on the notion of one man, one vote.

Faculty, students, administrators, governing board members, and alumni should plan a comprehensive summer program of meetings in which representatives from each segment openly confront current educational issues. Each group must listen with concern to the feelings and opinions of the other. *Rapprochement* is a critical requisite if the impending crises of education are to be met. Discussions should include consideration of how the institution is measured in terms of the conditions which favor and those which work against the development of legitimate student power.

Action steps should be taken to accomplish movement toward procedures which facilitate shared power, open lines of communication between faculty, students, and administration and clarification of critical educational issues. Germane herein is the need to reaffirm mutual feelings of respect and trust.

The identification of issues in the student power movement is a crucial step frequently treated in a perfunctory manner. University personnel are disposed to seek technicalities and become romanticized by them. Students become disenchanted with this approach and rapidly presume deterring and delaying action. Time spent on technicalities is expensive and is costly in terms of student frustration and loss of respect.

Student power groups must be geared into the organizational structure, not antagonized out. Subgroup polarization and confrontation leads to university disunity and a tendency to emphasize working and living conditions, with diminution of significant educational concerns. The university model must acknowledge a difference between dissent based upon reason and brazen intolerance, and between compromise and withdrawal.

It is clear that NASPA must assume a bold and forward stance. The right and capability of students to influence and/or control the university affairs is a reality. NASPA should react to students *where they are*, with urgency and with a belief that shared power will be a viable part of a new university society.

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