

Faculty Involvement in Student Affairs: Legitimate Claim or Latest Fade?

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Higher education is experiencing tremendous pressure from constituents to justify activities and the quality of its product (student outcomes). This increased level of accountability makes it a necessity that collaborative relationships exist between academic and student affairs to improve the quality of undergraduate education. One way in which this collaboration may occur is through faculty involvement in student affairs governance activities. This study focused on the perceptions of Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAO) regarding faculty involvement in institutional and student affairs governance.

The primary goal of any given college or university is the development and nurturing of learners. Students arrive on campus with a host of expectations and needs, and institutions struggle to develop strategies that will best meet these needs in a manner that provides for the intellectual and social development of students. A primary strategy for student development that has become more commonplace in the last decade is the integration of faculty activities into the network of student experiences. This trend toward the inclusion of faculty is consistent with movements in private sector business practices such as Total Quality Management and Continuous Quality Improvement (Rudolph & Howard, 1996). Even though faculty lack a strong legal base for involvement in administrative decisions (Miles, 1997), many institutional leaders, administrators and trustees have come to accept faculty governance as an opportunity for faculty to voice their concerns about student affairs. Even though there has been a great deal of research regarding faculty involvement in governance activities (McCormack, 1995), there has been no true delineation of the role of faculty in student affairs administration.

Faculty involvement in student affairs decision-making is significant in the development of programs that address all of the needs of the student population. This involvement can be deemed beneficial in at least three major functions of student affairs. First, faculty involvement in new student transition programs is important to help convey a sense of academic expectation. Second, faculty can serve as role models to students in out-of-class settings. And third, faculty can enhance efforts to integrate academic curriculum into student activities that can potentially provide unique and beneficial learning experiences.

Divisions of student affairs play critical roles in the formation of practical programs that are instrumental in ensuring that students achieve. In the creation of these practical programs, it is important that student affairs bridge the gap between the academic and non-academic experiences. Thus, divisions of student affairs must work to formulate

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opportunities for faculty, i.e., those responsible for the academic development of students, to participate in the planning of collaborative programs. The current study assesses the role of faculty in the planning and implementation of student affairs programs.

Faculty in Student Affairs

Astin (1984) wrote, “the greater the student's involvement in college, the greater will be the amount of student learning and personal development” (p. 307). Also it has been postulated that the mission of colleges and universities is much broader than the intellectual development of students (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1991). The mission should contribute to the total development of the student beyond classroom experiences, which include co-curricular and extra-curricular activities (Bowen, 1980). Thus, professionals in the area of student affairs must be competent in the design and implementation of programs that are responsive to student development theory (Andreas, 1993). They must also be able to use evaluation skills in order to revise, retain, or expand such programs (Brown & Podolske, 1993).

The American College Personnel Association, in an effort to promote student affairs professionals' role in the overall personal development and learning of students, emphasized that faculty are an important factor in student affairs planning (Ashlock, 1996). Brown and Miller (1998) concluded that it is important to include faculty in the decision-making processes of student affairs because they may be responsible for the implementation of these policies. This collegial collaboration among departments is also significant in creating feelings of satisfaction in students regarding their college experience (Wood, 1993).

Prigge and Ray (1992) identified that learning in college transcends the official curriculum that is outlined in college catalogs. There has been a hidden curriculum which is generated by the atmosphere of the college (Snyder, 1971). An institution's degree of collegiality, the attitudes of faculty and administration toward students, rule enforcement, faculty availability to students, and other factors all create this “hidden curriculum” (Goodwin & Markham, 1996). Thus, it is important to administrators and faculty to effectively cultivate environments that are conducive to the development of students through this hidden curriculum.

By definition, the senior student affairs administrator (SSAA) is the leader of the student affairs division and is the primary leader of its mission and philosophy, both within the division and to its constituents. In many instances the student affairs division is not understood, and thus it is the role of the SSAA to promote the potential of the division in enhancing student development. Through the transfer of this information regarding divisional roles, the SSAA must present the division as an advocate for student needs and interests (Stamatakos, 1981). This role of advocacy requires that the SSAA be knowledgeable of student development theory and consequently be able to implement this theory into practice through effective programming (Andreas, 1993). During the planning and implementation of these student development programs, it is important that the SSAA be cognizant of student outcome assessment and evaluation measures. These

efforts are significant in providing an overview of the impact of student programming on student development, which is a driving force behind arguments of accountability not only for the division, but also the institution (Erwin, Menard, & Scott, 1988).

Research Procedures

Data were collected as part of the National Data Base on Faculty Involvement in Governance (NDBFIG) project at the University of Alabama. The NDBFIG project was a five-year national study of faculty in shared governance, their attitudes, beliefs, and perspectives about how and why faculty are and have been involved in shared governance activities. In the winter of 1999-2000, 200 senior student affairs administrators (SSAA) were provided a copy of the primary survey instrument used in NDBFIG activities. The survey included three sections about faculty in governance, including the role of faculty in governance, general perceptions about faculty in governance, and general perceptions about governance. The NDBFIG data collection instrument has been used over 50 times, and consistently had reliability indices above .69. The instrument was initially developed in the early-1990s, and was refined by McCormack (1995) in his study of faculty in Alabama public colleges and universities.

The sample of 200 SSAA was selected randomly from institutions that had members in the National Association of Student Affairs Professionals (in 1999, according to the NASPA membership directory). Many types of institutions (research, comprehensive, and liberal arts colleges, but not community and technical colleges) were represented in the sample, and those identified were asked to rate their agreement with statements on a 1-to-5 Likert-type scale, where 1=Strong Disagreement, 2=Disagreement, 3=Neutral perceptions, 4=Agreement, and 5=Strong Agreement.

Respondents initially received a letter indicating that they would receive the survey in the mail. One follow-up mailing was also conducted to ensure that those who did not respond to the first survey mailing were given an opportunity to respond.

Findings

A total of 160 SSAAs responded to the survey (80%), although only 141 surveys were deemed to be usable in data analysis (70% usable response rate). The high response rate was consistent with previous NDBFIG survey efforts, although the extent to which SSAAs might have had an associate or assistant SSAA complete the survey was not known.

As shown in Table 1, SSAAs were asked to rate their agreement about what the faculty role should be in student affairs governance. SSAAs indicated that they agreed with two statements, while rating neutral perceptions of the remaining three items. Respondents indicated their strongest agreement with the statement "faculty must convince the administration that its faculty 'voice' is a valuable component in decision making" (4.02; SD.876), indicating that SSAAs perhaps see that faculty think their efforts do not carry a certain degree of deserved respect, and that they should interpret

their role as one of greater advocacy. The other item that was rated in the agreement range was “faculty must insist on rights and responsibilities in appropriate governance roles” (mean 4.00; SD 1.02), meaning that faculty must make an effort, or at least meet divisions of student affairs halfway, to be effectively involved in student affairs governance.

As shown in Table 2, respondents indicated their perception about what the role of faculty in student affairs governance should be. Four of the five statements about ideal roles in shared governance had a mean rating of 4.00 or greater, including “faculty are empowered to question policy decisions through well-articulated process” (mean 4.23; SD.679), “the faculty senate is utilized as a conduit through which faculty participation is solicited” (mean 4.11; SD .926), “institutional procedures involve faculty governance early in the decision-making process” (mean 4.10; SD .990), and “Faculty members are adequately rewarded for their participation in the governance process” (mean 4.00; SD .650). These are important findings in that they reflect the thinking of SSAAs about how ideally faculty should be involved in student affairs governance. Similarly, the neutral rating about using external consultants to mediate disputes reflects a thinking that perhaps the management of disputes can best be handled between the groups directly involved rather than bringing in such mediators as bargaining unit representatives.

As shown in Table 3, respondents were asked their perception of faculty involvement in student affairs governance at their institutions. Five of these statements had a mean rating of 4.00 or greater, including “it is difficult to get people to serve on governance body standing and/or ad hoc committees for student affairs” (mean 4.20; SD .738), “the governance body is involved in important decisions about the way the institution is run” (mean 4.01; SD .779), “governance body practices adhere to the guidelines set forth in its constitution and bylaws” (mean 4.01; SD .701), “our governance body is not well-represented on committees making decisions on policy planning and allocation of resources in student affairs” (mean 4.00; SD .980), and “communication is good between the governance body and student affairs administrators” (mean 4.00; SD .888). These findings reflect that communication between student affairs and academic affairs exist and faculty are involved in the operation of the institution, but SSAAs have concerns about the active participation of faculty in student affairs meetings where planning and policy making take place.

Discussion

Student outcome assessment has become a major indicator of accountability for higher education institutions. Thus, it is important that all players involved in student development collaborate to create environments that are conducive to the success of students. Through the involvement of faculty in student affairs decision-making, this climate is perpetuated. This model of shared governance could potentially consist of student affairs and academic affairs collaborating to affect positively the programming and policy-making of both areas. This study examined senior student affairs administrators’ perceptions of the role of faculty in the planning and implementation of student affairs programs.

The SSAAs perceptions of faculty involvement in student affairs governance are quite clear. They realize that faculty are front-line workers who are frequently interacting with students and thus are able to identify many of their concerns. Faculty members are beginning to recognize the significance of student affairs programming in the out-of-class development of students. However, it is important for SSAAs to further emphasize the connection of affective and cognitive skills development in successful student outcome. This may include encouraging faculty to participate in policy-making and program development in the area. Faculty can serve as mentors, orientation leaders, advisors, and career counselors (Brown & Miller, 1998), while also providing for additional programming in areas such as service learning, study skills, and professional development (Pearson & Bowman, 2000). These opportunities would provide a bridge between academic and non-academic student development.

SSAAs should strive also to establish more faculty development programs that will further enhance the student development efforts between academic and student affairs. These programs will orient faculty to effective student development techniques and strategies. Since faculty have a high level of formal and informal interaction with students, it is important to guide them in their role as student advocates. In most cases, their methods of dealing with students is representative of the knowledge and experiences of their own academic career and skills in human relations gained over time. As professionals in the area, SSAAs should develop programs that will include information about the purposes and implementation of student development programs which are reflective of the institution's mission statement and conducive to student outcome. Such seminars can also be beneficial in allowing faculty opportunities to brainstorm effective methods for including student affairs in the curriculum.

SSAAs also identified problems regarding voluntary faculty participation in committee and governance body meetings. SSAAs should serve as advocates for faculty who are interested in student affairs involvement. This means more communication is necessary with chief administrators to encourage alternatives to present faculty workloads and to emphasize the importance of student development philosophies and processes and their role in student outcomes. The orientation of these administrators should also include information regarding the significance of academic and student affairs working together to achieve total student development. This systematic change of faculty workloads and rewards will be instrumental in providing alternatives to faculty who are interested in actively participating in the student affairs governance.

SSAAs should also serve as conduits for soliciting faculty ideas and participation in orientation and in transitional programs. Faculty, ultimately, are the first line of institutional representatives to encounter student academic performance. Their work with students needs to be exposed to developing and existing student affairs programs, and, in particular, faculty need to be placed in a position where they can report the needs of first-time and transfer students, and how these needs are transferred to student affairs divisions in a timely fashion. Faculty, in this regard, also can prove to be valuable resources in building and evaluating orientation programs.

This study has provided valuable understanding of faculty involvement in student affairs governance. By allowing faculty an opportunity for involvement and by orienting

them to the role of student affairs in the development of students, student outcomes can be achieved through collaborative efforts between the areas of academic affairs and student affairs.

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TABLE 1

Faculty Roles in Governance

Role	Mean	SD
<i>To what extent do you perceive the faculty role should be in student affairs governance:</i>		
Faculty must convince the administration that the faculty “voice” is a valuable component in decision making	4.02	.876
Faculty must insist on rights and responsibilities in appropriate governance roles	4.00	1.02
Faculty committees work harder to cooperate with administration	3.96	.720
Faculty should assist in clarifying roles of administrators so that they know they are to administer policy and not impose their own	3.41	.982
Faculty should be more involved in developing specific outcomes for budgetary expenditures	3.40	.991

TABLE 2

Characteristics of an Ideal Co-Governance Process

Characteristic	Mean	SD
<i>What are the ideal characteristics of faculty involvement in student affairs governance?</i>		
Faculty are empowered to question policy decisions through well articulated process	4.23	.679
The faculty senate is utilized as a conduit through which faculty participation is solicited	4.11	.926
Institutional procedures involve faculty governance early in the decision making process	4.10	.990
Faculty members are adequately rewarded for their participation in the governance process	4.00	.650
Neutral “consultants” are utilized to mediate faculty-administration dealings	3.78	.755

TABLE 3

Perceptions of Faculty Involvement in Governance

Characteristic	Mean	SD
It is difficult to get people to serve on governance body standing and/or ad hoc committees for student affairs	4.20	.738
The governance body is involved in important decisions about the way the way the institution is run	4.01	.779
Governance body practices adhere to the guidelines set forth in its constitution and bylaws	4.01	.701
Communication is good between the governance body and student affairs administrators	4.00	.888
Our governance body leaders are not well prepared to assume their positions	4.00	.801
Our governance body is not well represented on committees making decisions on policy planning and allocation of resources in student affairs	3.97	.980
The governance body operates efficiently	3.96	.427
Student affairs administrators and governance body expectations regarding the governance body's role are the same	3.90	.824
Management information is readily provided to the governance body concerning issues it considers	3.88	.625
Faculty members are not adequately rewarded for their participation in the governance process	3.86	.929
The governance body's operating budget is adequate	3.62	.729
Governance body members and student affairs administrators meet regularly	3.60	.915
Communication is good between the governance body and the Board of trustees	3.54	.945
The governance body does not have sufficient information on which to base its decisions	3.50	1.11

Our governance body adequately represents the faculty point of view in student affairs	3.47	.862
Governance body representatives and the Board of Trustees meet regularly	3.42	1.10
We have difficulty getting a quorum at governance body meetings	3.40	.700
The governance body attracts the most capable people as members	3.37	1.24
The issues considered by our governance body are not important	3.34	.991
