

**GOVERNANCE PRACTICES BY THE STUDENT GOVERNMENT
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN PHILIPPINES:
A PARADIGM SHIFT IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE SUPERVISION OF
AND SUPPORT FOR STUDENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS**

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ABSTRACT

This paper illustrates the governance practices on Campus Leadership and Administrative Supervision in the University of Northern Philippines (UNP) in Vigan City. It discusses the thrusts of the Student Government, the supervision of the Administration, and how such can be sustained for intergenerational purposes.

UNP boasts of a Student Government that typifies the generally-accepted principles of good governance such as **participatory, accountable, consensual, predictable, effective and efficient**, and **transparent** student government.

There exist **independence** and **interdependence** among student formations that run the student government, namely: the Student Council (**SC**) as the executive body; the Supreme Order of University Legislators (**SOUL**) as the policy-making entity; the Student Auditors for Financial Efficacy (**SAFE**) as the audit czar; the Honest, Orderly and Peaceful Elections (**HOPE**) Commission as the division for student elections; the Truthful and Responsible University Student Tribunal (**TRUST**) Commission as the adjudicatory body; the Academic Unit Councils (**AUCs**) as the mandated organizations; the student interest groups as Accredited Organizations (**AOs**); the Society for the Protection of Interests, Rights, Initiatives and Talents of Students (**SPIRITS**) as the confederation of accredited organizations; the Accredited Fraternities (**AFs**), and; the Peaceful, Responsible and Organized Fraternities (**PROFrat**) as the central board of accredited fraternities.

The UNP-Office of Student Affairs (OSA) accords high regard to **student initiatives, innovations** and **self-determination**. It exercises **General Supervision** over these student operations through proper and timely **intervention**, support **mechanism, monitoring and evaluation** with a **motivational system of incentives**. UNP is one of the few institutions to have this kind of structure in its student development program which promotes self-directed student formation.

It is in the spirit of this practice that this paper is humbly shared to Administrators of Student Affairs and Student Leaders in the Asia-Pacific Region.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

University of Northern Philippines Administration – the framework of the institution which embraces all officials, faculty and staff, students, mission, vision, objectives, functions, programs and development.

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University of Northern Philippines Student Government – the sphere through which all student formations revolve. It is the sumtotal of student initiatives, innovation, etc.

Administrative Intervention and Support Mechanism – these are approaches enforced by the administration to supervise and evaluate the student governments' performance.

Student Council, Organization and Fraternity Service (SCOFS) – set of student services which aspire to extend assistance to the operations of all student formations.

University of Northern Philippines-Student Council (UNP-SC) – can be understood in two viewpoints: 1) as the entirety of the student government – embodies all student formations; 2) as an independent organization – supreme student government and the executive branch.

Supreme Order of University Legislators (SOUL) – the highest policy-making and legislative body of the students composed of the AUC Governors, SPIRITS Chief Chancellor and PROFrat Secretary-General which formulates policies and approves appropriations.

Honest, Orderly and Peaceful Elections (HOPE) Commission – composed of representatives from the academic units who administer and enforce all laws relative to the conduct of student elections, plebiscite and referendum.

Students' Auditors for Financial Efficacy (SAFE) – composed of students knowledgeable on accounting rules in charge of auditing the financial statements of the UNP-Student Council and all student organizations.

Truthful and Responsible University Student Tribunal (TRUST) – in charge of the judicious implementation of the UNP-SC Constitution and the rules and regulations stated in the Student Code of Conduct and Discipline.

Society for the Protection of Interests, Rights, Initiatives and Talents of Students (SPIRITS) – serves as the confederation of all **Accredited Organizations (AO)** in the university. A Chief Chancellor represents the confederation in the SOUL.

Peaceful, Responsible and Organized Fraternities (PROFrat) – serves as the confederation of **Accredited Fraternities (AF)** within the campus. Its elected Secretary-General represents the confederation in the SOUL.

Academic Unit Councils (AUCs) – otherwise known as mandated organizations which cater to the needs of students in the academic unit. The **Academic Unit Council Consultative Assembly (AUC-CA)**, the highest policy-making body of the AUC is composed of class mayors and AUC executive officers.

Good Governance – refers to a student government that practices the generally-accepted principles of organizational management such as participatory, accountable, consensual, predictable, effective and efficient, and transparent student government.

Governance Practices – set of services which includes principles, systems, collaboration, etc. that can be used as elements in the realization of the said services.

Participatory Student Government – refers to a student government which actively involves members in organizational endeavours.

Accountable Student Government – pertains to a student government which takes a sense of responsibility and liability in all of its actions and decisions.

Consensual Student Government – observes and values the spirit of harmony, unanimity and compromise.

Predictable Student Government – deals with the application of laws uniformly at all times, in the manner of fairness and equality.

Effective and Efficient Student Government – does the right thing where members are able to maximize work outputs with minimum inputs such as time, effort and resources.

Transparent Student Government – deals with the exercise of justice and clarity in all transactions where every member is well-informed of the organizational matters.

INTRODUCTION

The University of Northern Philippines is adept to its delivery of student services for the exploration, enhancement, and deepening of the student's full potential for personal development, leadership skills and social responsibility through various institutional and/or student-initiated activities (CMO 21, Series of 2006, Sec. 6.2, Art. III and Sec.32, Art. VI).

Through time, the University has spotlighted student endeavours. The creation of student organizations paved way for student leaders as active partners of the institution in its programs for student welfare and development.

Before 2000, there was the existence of the: (1) Student Council; (2) Mandated Organizations, and; (3) Accredited Organization, each of which enjoyed administrative autonomy. There was a trust fund, called Student Miscellaneous Fund (SMF), intended to supplement organizational revolving funds.

A more elaborate student government started to metamorphose in 2003. More branches began to emerge, each with distinct functions. The legislative or highest policy-making body of the students was dubbed University Student Leaders Assembly (USLA). The SC officers, though under the executive body, were members of the USLA. The USLA – Commission on Audit (USLA-COA) was the audit board of the students. In line with the development of students' special talents, a confederation of accredited organizations called Council of Student Interest Groups (CSIG) was introduced. With the end view of putting a finale to campus violence, fraternities and sororities were accredited and confederated through the PROFrat. Freshmen potentials were also recognized through the Freshmen Block Assembly (FBA). Elections were facilitated by the Student Elections Commission (SELECOM).

It was also in 2003 when the Student Development Fund (SDF) came into being. It was utilized to finance only infrastructures and trainings. No specific guidelines and allocations on its disbursement were carried out.

The UNP student government felt the need to attain a new level of actualization. Student leaders realized that the present system could no longer work with the new times. Hence, the student government and the administration turned to a more optimistic eye on the channels of dialogic university living. The students found themselves on the grassland of paradigm shifts. By virtue of Board Resolution No. 12, Series of 2011 approved by the UNP Board of Regents, a new UNP-Student Council Constitution was adopted.

Year 2011 welcomed the birth of a student government which epitomizes both independence and interdependence. The said structure is divided into three, namely: (1) independent branches; (2) constitutional commissions, and; (3) independent organizations and confederations. The independent branches are the: (1) UNP-SC, and; (2) SOUL. The constitutional commissions are the: (1) HOPE; (2) SAFE, and; (3) TRUST. The independent organizations and confederations include the: (1) AUCs; (2) SPIRITS and; (3) PROFrat.

The structure exercises a complimentary/coordinative authority between and among them with the Student Regent exercising the power of general supervision. "General supervision" connotes the inherent duty of the Student Council President, simultaneously serving as the Student Regent, to regularly update himself with the concerns of the formations and present the same before the Board of Regents. The power likewise includes his responsibility to oversee the close and smooth coordination of all the formations.

The present status of the student government of the UNP in terms of its structure, policies, objectives, systems, processes and outputs is said to be indicators of good governance practices, thus, the need to validate has been carried out through this research.

This study aimed to present data regarding campus governance practices in UNP which had been appraised and subject to paradigm shift to constantly respond to the changing demands of student welfare and development. Specifically, the research was conducted to: (1) identify former and current governance practices of the student government; (2) identify intervention and support mechanisms by the Administration to intensify these practices; (4) promote breakthroughs that are either purely student-initiated or administration-recommended.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Under the qualitative aspect, the descriptive development method of research was utilized. One researcher has been in the day-to-day programs of student formations for the past thirteen (13) years as Head of the Program and for the past nine (9) years as Adviser of the Student Council, while the co-researcher served as key officer of an interest group for one (1) year and executive officer of the SC for three (3) years. The researchers were immersed in the undertakings of the student government, by reason of which they were able to gather information relative to the study. Some other data were likewise gathered through questionnaires. Exploratory research was also conducted through unstructured interviews and focused group discussions (FGDs).

As to the quantitative aspect, a descriptive-correlational method of research was used. There were 630 UNP student leaders and non-student leaders who were respondents to the questionnaire on the governance practices of the student government. Frequency counts and percentages, mean, simple bivariate correlation analysis and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were the statistical tools employed in the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Participatory Student Government

The student government has become a monopoly of student leaders. There was not a good venue where ordinary students could air their ideas, which made them lose their social and political interests as manifested in their lack of participation to student activities.

In dealing with this, the student government instituted a collaborative technique where representatives of formations could discuss issues and come out with solutions. Among others, the Student Council conducts the SC Leadership Institute and Policy Conference. It also ventures into international benchmarking and marketing activities, student exchange programs and youth camps.

Administrative Intervention and Support Mechanism:

The university's Accreditation/Recognition Program for Student Organizations and Formations guarantees the year-round existence of a student government, therefore there is no vacuum in its operations. Recognized and accredited student organizations operate during the regular (1st & 2nd) semesters. The SC functions even during summer, so with the constitutional commissions, but in a limited period.

The school administration recognizes student representation not only in the Board of Regents but also in the Administrative Council, Adjudication Board, Bids and Awards Committee and Special Events Committee. This practice is a reassurance that the rights and concerns of the students are upheld at all times.

B. Accountable Student Government

Years back, the student government was very dependent on university policies alone. It did not give much attention to its own rules as a vanguard of students' rights and welfare.

Under its new set-up, the student government exercises accountability by making students aware of university policies not only through orientations and programs but also by way of their direct access to university working groups that deal with policy-matters.

Administrative Intervention and Support Mechanism:

The OSA-SCOFs empowers the student formations to have a freehand in the formulation of their own policies. Each time the Administration introduces matters that affect students, it always sets a series of consultation with them even if these are aptly within its turf.

The liberty extended to the student government is not absolute. The administration warrants that these are not in contravention with higher and general policies. The Administration

sustains its disciplinary as well as adjudicatory roles by always on the lookout of the student leaders' conduct. It intervenes when a student officer, in the discharge of his functions, has acted with grave abuse of authority.

C. Consensual Student Government

In the past, the weak collaboration of the formations to arrive at a consensus was the major problem. There were overlapping and constraints in functions due to emphasis on rules and procedures, which oftentimes caused inefficient student service.

Today, the presence of more opportunities where students could discuss both sides of matters prove to be very helpful for win-win solutions. Students are now more oriented about critical solidarity. The student government has been more coordinative, always ensuring proper representation from the formations through the creation of working committees.

Administrative Intervention and Support Mechanism:

The university heartens the student formations to do things for the students as a whole. In so doing, the OSA-practitioners provide learning experiences like exposure to regional and national student convergence, and internationalization through exchange, benchmarking and marketing activities. The SCOFSS has also laid down as a matter of policy the Synchronization of Student Activities with objectives such as unanimity and uniformity (student organizations altogether sponsor occasions/events with university-wide scope), and economy in time and resources (emphasis on academics over extra-curricular activities and the judicious use of organizational funds).

D. Predictable Student Government

There was no separation of powers long before the improved formation. A demarcation line did not exist between the executive and legislative departments as manifested by the Student Council being members of the legislative assembly. Rules and policies were so relaxed that these invited varied interpretations.

The 2011 SC Constitution exemplifies separate executive and legislative branches, as well as constitutional commissions in relation to all other formations. One student formation is free from the encroachment of the other. Whenever conflicts in the interpretation of constitutional provisions arise, the SC Constitution Primer is made a ready reference.

Administrative Intervention and Support Mechanism:

The observance of the underpinnings of independence and interdependence is a matter of policy which the OSA seeks to implement through efforts to make certain that the conformity of students to established school policies and the rule of law.

E. Effective and Efficient Student Government

Previously, the students were more often focused on academics and skills competitions. The student government trust funds (SDF and SMF) were not properly disbursed because of the

absence of a budget allocation. Income-generating projects (IGPs) were just starting, hence the student government became very dependent on its collected fees.

At present, in tandem with the University Extension Office and the Extension Programs of the academic units, the student government regularly goes into community immersions, leadership/skills, advocacies, and the like.

As to the disbursement of funds, the SDF and SMF have now specific allocations. IGPs are now more effective because of student initiative and innovation. These generated funds have become a financial aid for students and helped carry out projects and programs in the University.

Administrative Intervention and Support Mechanism:

Breaking out from the conventional in-campus ECA, the administration has exposed the students beyond the university walls to become more aware and responsive of the social issues. With the guidance of their advisers and the university Legal Office, Memoranda of Agreement (MOA) or Understanding (MOU) are further entered into by student organizations with the LGUs and NGOs concerned.

The utilization of student trust funds lies within the discretion of the student government. However, the administration recommends the SC to zero-in on developmental projects that are responsive to the needs of the end-users. Along with these are those realized through the joint-efforts/shared-expenditures of the student government and the school administration as well as Joint-Resource Generation Programs like the Students' Resource Center (E-Library) and the University Fitness Gym. But the administration accords to the student government the privilege to maintain their IGPs to stimulate their ingenuity, and to produce additional funds to augment their operations and other projects.

Speaking of best practices, the University of Northern Philippines blows its own trumpet as one, if not the only Asian Public University, which has made possible the peaceful Confederation of Campus Fraternities – making them Service Fraternities. This administrative approach is indeed *sui generis*. The institution formally recognizes their existence through accreditation; specifically makes their confederation a single formation within the student government, *ergo* legally reserving them a seat in the legislative body, and; regularly designates them to spearhead community extension activities or officially requests them to be support groups to other undertakings.

The school administration takes a keen eye to these success-stories, thereby giving the merit the students are entitled to. And it is for this reason that the administration, for the past eleven (11) years, has maintained an Incentive System to deserving students as illustrated by the year-end *Parangal* (Recognition Program) and the accompanying grant of year-end Cash Award.

F. Transparent Student Government

Concerns along transparent student government such as the lack of information on the government's thrusts and cash disbursements take the lead. This is because students have become more empowered to keep pace with their government.

The presence of student tribunes and bulletin boards where accomplishments, programs and projects are seen, coupled with the paperless information dissemination system has become a helpful tool in informing the students. Financial efficacy concerns are being solved by the presence of the SAFE Commission with their Standardized Accounting System for Student Organizations (SASSO), a governance practice unique to the UNP student government. Furthermore, the Commission conducts audit and financial orientations, engagements and evaluations.

Administrative Intervention and Support Mechanism:

The UNP Administration sanctions and integrates several programs of the Student Council into the university's financial management system.

UNP students manage and maintain two types of fund, the Trust Funds and their Revolving Funds. The SDF and SMF are *trust funds* under the guardianship of the administration. The student government has the autonomy to dispense with the said funds, subject to existing government accounting rules and procedures. Student formations and organizations are allowed to keep a *revolving fund* for their day-to-day operations. They have control over the said fund and disburse the same in the framework of their approved annual action plan, but subject to the SASSO.

In the allocation and appropriation of their budgets, the administration requires the Student Council to take active part in the annual Cascading Workshop and Budget Hearing of the university. It is in these occasions that the university Finance Division and Planning Office advise, listen or suggest amendments to the student government's performance indicators and the budget apportioned thereto for their realization.

Administrative intervention persists up to the point of implementing specific infrastructure projects of the student government. Any undertaking of this character must be presented by the SC before the university Finance Committee for more insightful assessment and recommendations for improvement.

CONCLUSIONS

The UNP Student Government is always in the process of discovering opportunities for students. Since the pioneering years, the student government with the school administration has created a horizon where students are brought out to catalytic changes.

In the educational campus, good governance is being realized by having a student government which is participatory, accountable, consensual, predictable, effective and efficient, and transparent, among others. It is within an institution to engage in paradigm shifts in order to improve campus student governance. Youth transitions should be critically investigated in the context of the changes. There ought to be a conscious re-discovery and re-construction of the measures and categories of youth transition that would reveal both the structural and institutional barriers that hinder the process of growing up (Clarence M. Batan, "*Charting the Directions of Youth Transition Research in the Philippines*", International Youth Conference, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2004).

There are no hard and fast rules regarding the most effective way to manage student affairs and organizations but administrators must learn to experiment and to look beyond the traditional to what is uncharted territory..." Specifically, the institution should provide and/or allow a structure for increased interaction, independence and interdependence, opportunity for a democratic and representative involvement in school concerns (Arlene Maneja, "*Meeting the Challenges of Managing Student Affairs and Student Organizations through Creativity and Innovation*").

Based on the findings of this study, the student government of the University of Northern has a **very high level of governance practices** in terms of the abovementioned elements of good governance.

It is in the context of these impressive breakthroughs that service-providers of student affairs, as model leaders, must keep pace with the ever-changing motivations of their wards on campus leadership. "Leaders unleash the power of collective intelligence. They assemble extraordinary people, focus them on meaningful work, connect their wisdom and motivate them to do great things" (Robert H. Rosen et al).

Therefore, in specific and global context, the commitment to professionalize student affairs practitioners is necessary to keep them deeply motivated in partnering with our youth in sustaining, tutoring and facilitating the means in attaining the goals for responsible leadership. Training enhances the skills and abilities of employees to perform specific jobs (*Sison, Perfecto S. 1981. Personnel and Human Resources Management. Manila: Rex Bookstore Inc. 5th Edition*).

IMPENDING BREAKTHROUGHS

1. Full operationalization of the constitutionally-created TRUST Commission, the student judiciary, in order to interpret the provisions of its Constitution, rules and policies, and as an arm of the University Tribunal in the speedy resolution of cases
2. Internationalization of student initiatives through student researches on student affairs, governance and academics; cultural talent exchanges, and; academic partnerships and student curriculum exchange programs which have become a global demand in University undertakings
3. Self-sustaining and self-liquidating student government through the improvement of the system and mechanics of income-generating projects (IGPs) such as the Student Resource Center (SRC), Fitness Gym, and School Uniform and Patches Distribution to come out with further proceeds that will be used for projects. Breakthroughs such as printing and photocopy centers, souvenir centers and water refilling stations should also be carried out.
4. Efficient and hassle-free information dissemination system (paperless) through electronic billboards
5. Overhauling of the students' values system through spiritual and moral orientations, and avenues where they can mingle with their fellow students and feel one another's conditions.

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