

INSTITUTIONAL DIFFERENCES REGARDING STUDENT GOVERNANCE IN INSTITUTIONAL

Copyrighted material

LEADERSHIP

Higher education in the United States is diverse and complex, with more than 4,000 institutions nationwide. Different types of colleges and universities have different missions, student populations, campus cultures, and institutional contexts, and student governance structures and engagement vary accordingly.

For example, at community colleges, which account for more than half of undergraduate enrollment overall, involving student governance in institutional leadership can be a challenging task because of the large number of part-time and working commuter students. With limited time and competing outside commitments, community college student governments can be “up and down” in their level of effectiveness: they might have a few strong leaders for a while, but then slip badly after those officers graduate. Due to the transient student population, many of these student bodies start over from scratch annually (ASGA, 2011).

Despite the challenges, some community colleges manage to have student governance in institutional leadership. Grand Rapids Community College has a student congress whose purpose:

shall be to represent the students at Grand Rapids Community College and promote their interests and welfare in the college decision-making process. The Student Congress is thereby the voice of the Student Body. The Student Congress will also be responsible for the allocation of funds for recognized student organizations and campus life.

(GRCC Student Congress Constitution, 2011)

One specific way Grand Rapids students are involved in institutional governance is through Student Congress, the body that governs and manages campus activities fees. Members serve alongside college officials on the budget, campus elections, communication and technology, recognition and involvement, and rules committees.

For example, private institutions can also face challenges in engaging student governance in institutional leadership, mainly because of how they are funded, run, and structured. Private schools are not required to provide public records, and their governing boards are appointed by the schools themselves rather than by the state or governor, which can lead to a lack of information in the eyes of students. Often the cost of such institutions encourages students’ expectations, and in some cases, demands, to increase as well.

Despite these challenges, a number of private institutions have sought to include students in their decision-making processes. Columbia College Chicago (CCC) is a private liberal arts college. The American Student Government Association recognized CCC for making great strides in student governance:

Copyrighted material

SGA now sits on several campus-wide committees that had been closed to students in the past. It has a representative on CCC's board of trustees—a position that even many long-established SGs do not possess. Members work together with administrators on issues facing students, such as coming up with alternatives to expensive textbooks.

(Campitelli, 2007)

A number of activities demonstrate how students at CCC are engaged in institutional leadership. The SGA holds student forums, puts out a student-driven agenda, conducts student polls, reaches out to participating students, sends representatives to every college-wide event, finds common ground between faculty and administrators, provides tangible benefits and funding to students, and takes on long-term projects in the community.

Similarly, Middlebury College has a student government association that serves as the main channel for student involvement in institutional governance:

The Student Government Association is the vehicle through which students can participate in the formulation of institutional policy affecting academic and student affairs and collectively express their views on matters of general interest to the student body. The SGA makes student appointments to student, joint student/faculty, and trustee councils and committees. The SGA also allocates student activities fees and authorizes student activities for their eligibility to receive funds. The SGA provides services to the student body as deemed necessary.

(Middlebury Student Government Association, 2012)

Public universities, particularly big research universities, have actively engaged student governance in institutional leadership. The University of California, San Diego, has a policy for student participation in institutional governance in its student conduct regulations. Purdue University boasts separate undergraduate and graduate student governments. Purdue Graduate Student Government has worked on a number of university governance initiatives, including a smoking ban policy, travel grants, and negotiated health care costs. Florida State University, a research university known as the "Berkeley of the South," has a long tradition of involving students in many avenues of governance and institutional leadership (Marshall, 2006); most notably, the student body president is a voting member of the Board of Trustees and the Student Senate allocating the activity and service fee budget of \$13 million.

Private research universities can also successfully engage student governance in institutional leadership. Students at Duke University developed a general statement of rights and freedoms (Duke Student Government, 2011). Designed to guide future university actions to ensure that students were not only represented but also had a voice in the decision-making process, this statement signaled a fundamental change in the Duke

Copyrighted material

community.