

The role of students (and staff) in higher education governance

Dr Manja Klemenčič, Harvard University | https://scholar.harvard.edu/manja_klemencic
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Talk outline

- EHEA policy framework
- Conditions for students (and staff) representation
- Structures and process of student (and staff) representation
- Student (and staff) representative associations
- References

EHEA policy framework

EHEA Ministerial commitments

- 2001 Prague Communiqué
 - “Ministers stressed that the involvement of universities and other higher education institutions and of students as competent, active and constructive partners in the establishment and shaping of a European Higher Education Area is needed and welcomed. [...] Ministers affirmed that students should participate in and influence the organisation and content of education at universities and other higher education institutions.”
- 2005 Bergen Communiqué
 - Student participation included as part of the Bologna Process accession criteria.
- 2012 Bucharest Communiqué
 - “We commit to supporting the engagement of students and staff in governance structures at all levels and reiterate our commitment to autonomous and accountable higher education institutions that embrace academic freedom.”
- 2015 Yerevan Communiqué
 - “We will support and protect students and staff in exercising their right to academic freedom and ensure their representation as full partners in the governance of autonomous higher education institutions.”

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● 2018 Paris

- “Academic freedom and integrity, institutional autonomy, **participation of students and staff in higher education governance**, and public responsibility for and of higher education form the backbone of the EHEA. Having seen these fundamental values challenged in recent years in some of our countries, we strongly commit to promoting and protecting them in the entire EHEA through intensified political dialogue and cooperation.”

● 2020 Rome Communiqué

- “Higher education institutions “must prepare learners to become active, critical and responsible citizens and offer lifelong learning opportunities to support them in their societal role”.
- “We commit to upholding institutional autonomy, academic freedom and integrity, **participation of students and staff in higher education governance**, and public responsibility for and of higher education. We ask the BFUG to develop **a framework for the enhancement of the fundamental values of the EHEA ...**”

Latest developments

- BFUG Task Force on Fundamental Values in EHEA/the BFUG Fundamental Values Working Group
 - Agreement in the BFUG on the need to develop a monitoring framework on values in the EHEA that goes beyond collecting information for the Bologna Process Implementation Report
 - How fundamental values can be clearly understood in higher education systems across the EHEA.
 - To propose a methodology for future reporting to Ministerial Conferences on the issues defined as the fundamental values in the Paris Communiqué
 - To recommend indicators of fundamental values, as well as the evidence required to assess them, and the source for such evidence.
- (draft) **Statement on Student and Staff Participation in Higher Education Governance**

Conditions for student (and staff) representation in HE governance

Necessary conditions for student(and staff) representation in HE governance

- There exist **formal structures and processes** of involving representatives of students and staff to contribute to decision processes at all stages of decision processes, including agenda setting and implementation, and within the multilevel governance of higher education.
- There exist **legitimate representative associations of students and staff** which are autonomous and have organizational capacities for representative function and are democratic, i.e., representatives are democratically elected to the positions representing students and staff and are governed democratically.
 - Reflects the multilevel governance of HE – departmental, institutional, national level

Student (and staff) capital in HE governance

- Student unions possess and can supply important resources for effective policy formulation and decision making:
 - professional expertise,
 - legitimisation of policy outcomes,
 - accountability,
 - social control of their members, and
 - services valued by the HE authorities.
- Legitimacy is crucial for student capital

**Structures and
processes of
student (and
staff)
representation**

Key issues to consider

- Legal provisions on *student authority* as students' rights for co-decision in the context of shared governance in HE, and specific governing structures and processes implementing these student rights.
 - formally stipulated in legislation or dependent on traditions and cultural expectations, and informal negotiated arrangements
- 4 levels of participation on institutional level:
 - (1) There is no involvement of students in decision-processes.
 - (2) In need-based consultation, student representatives are invited to voice student concerns in a departmental academic meeting or to university leaders. Such consultation can be initiated by either party, but the ultimate decision for involving students rests with the departmental or institutional leaders, not the student representatives.
 - (3) Structured dialogue is a form of student representation whereby formalised procedures for student representation in governing bodies and processes exist. This means that there exist some agreements – written or informal - that specify the rules for student representation. However, students are typically only observers, asked for input but do not hold voting rights.
 - (4) Students are considered full partners in shared governance arrangements when they are given seats and voting rights in decision making processes, monitoring and implementation, and when they can introduce issues to the agenda like any other members of the governing bodies. Such rights are typically formalised in legal and statutory documents.

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- Student governments stand in implicit or explicit exchange relationships with authorities whom they seek to influence.
 - In this relationship, student unions possess and can supply important resources: professional expertise, legitimation of policy outcomes, social control of their members, and services valued by the authority.
 - Authorities in turn provide funding and other material or symbolic resources. They also define the relational structures through which student governments can formally and informally intermediate their interests.
- Neo-corporatist vs pluralist system of student representation on national level
- Formalised (and institutionalised) or informal channels of student representation

Principles of student (and staff) representation (from the draft Statement)

- “Student and staff participation in higher education governance is one of the fundamental values of European higher education, ingrained in the European model of **shared and collegial governance**.”
- Affirming “principle of democratic governance, setting an example for the democratic societies [...], and the equal partnership of students and staff as the **safeguard of the democratic character** of higher education in Europe.”
- “Student and staff participation in higher education governance **strengthens higher education governance**, enhancing **ownership and a sense of common responsibility** for the development of high quality, and as such, socially responsible, higher education. “

Practices of representation

- to elect and to be elected to the governance bodies in open, free and fair elections and without any discrimination,
- to have their views represented and taken into account, to have the right to initiate debates and table proposals in all governing bodies and actively participate in discussing and deciding on them, and
- to be actively included and empowered to make and to take decisions and vote on the internal organisation and administration of higher education institutions/ systems and crucial issues for higher education governance.
- this practice to be applied throughout the EHEA to all systems and all institutions, and at all levels of governance and in all stages of the decision-making and decision-taking processes.
 - at institutional level, such participation should be a prerequisite for an institution or programme to be recognised as a part of any given national education system within the EHEA

Developing rules (laws governing) student representation

- Participation regulations, procedures and processes should be established in **partnership with the legitimate representatives of students and staff** themselves and relate to all issues before the governing bodies.

**Student (and
staff)
representative
associations
(student unions)**

Key issues to consider

- Legal provisions regulating formation and operations of representative student bodies
 - As a distinct form of political institutions which organise, aggregate, and intermediate the interests of higher education students, provide services for students, and organise student activities.
- *Autonomy* of student unions refers to student representatives within the student government having full decision-making competences and being exempt from external interference and constraints on the actual use of such competences:
 - policy autonomy (ability to decide on its own political and professional agenda);
 - governance autonomy (ability to decide on internal structures and processes) and
 - managerial autonomy (discretion over financial matters, human and other resources).
- Influences whether membership in student unions is
 - automatic (or mandatory) or voluntary;
 - how student governments are funded (through mandatory student fees or through voluntary contributions of students); and
 - what the legal status of student governments is (are student governments legally independent or integrated into governing structure of the university they belong to).

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- *Internal legitimacy* of student unions refers to the belief of the student body that these are representing their interest truthfully and effectively, are governed democratically and according to the principles of good governance.
- *External legitimacy* is reflected in beliefs of stakeholders other than students, i.e., university leaders, academic staff, government officials, that student unions can truthfully and effectively represent student interests, are governed democratically and according to principles of good governance and can effectively contribute to the decision and policy processes.
 - assessed by representativity, structural and procedural democracy, but also expertise, constructiveness, reliability, and trustworthiness of elected student representatives.
 - relationship to political parties
 - election turnout

Principles (from the draft Statement)

- “...their rights to organise autonomously without interference from public authorities, governing bodies or other stakeholders...”
- “Election procedures of student and staff representatives should adhere to democratic principles to be legitimate and representative.”
- “Institutions as well as student and staff organisations should seek to stimulate participation in student and staff elections as well as encourage students and staff members to run for elections and engage in the life of the institution with a view to enhancing its democratic legitimacy and representativity.”
- “Higher education institutions/systems should provide support and resources for sustainable representation of students and staff, guaranteeing their financial independence. “

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**Thank
you :)**

COMMENTS +
SUGGESTIONS



QUESTIONS

