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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

**STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE AT THE UNIVERSITY
OF ALBERTA**

BY 
BING ZUO

**A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in
Educational Administration**

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL, 1995



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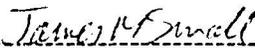
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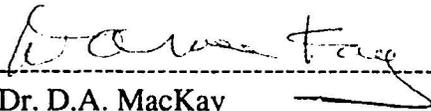
The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a dissertation entitled STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA, submitted by BING ZUO in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION.



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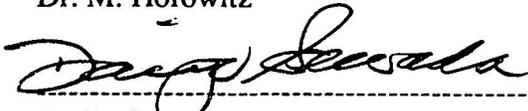
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To my father, Caijie Zuc, and my late mother, Jizhi Tan, whose love, support, and encouragement will always be remembered.

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the scope, process, and effect of student participation in governance at the University of Alberta, including student government, and identified and analyzed related issues, various influential factors, and potential for improvement.

The researcher employed a naturalistic and qualitative inquiry approach. Related literature was reviewed to provide a conceptual framework for the study. Two pilot studies were conducted. Augmented by documentary analysis and direct observations, the semi-structured interview was the major data-gathering technique utilized.

The results of the study reveal that student participation in the governance of the University is beneficial to students, the University, and society. Students have been extensively involved in decision-making at different levels. Both student organizations and students at large employed different informal means, such as lobbying, media, and caucuses to exert their influence. Associations of students as organized forces had much greater influence than students at large. A variety of factors affected how influential they were.

The successful experience of the student government has demonstrated that students are capable of administering their own affairs, satisfying various student needs, and protecting the political interests of students. The University-run student services and the services run by the student government have complemented each other.

Implications of the study include the following: a) further cooperation between the two kinds of student-related services can help them conserve resources and better serve the needs of students; b) joint efforts could be made to improve student participation. The University administration may facilitate student involvement by providing necessary training, including students in some University committees with no student representation, using multiple approaches to obtain student input, and treating students as equals. Students should be aware of their limitations and work to compensate for these limitations; c) in resolving common problems, all members of the University community, including

students, ought to strive to consider the interests of the University as a collective rather than attending predominantly to their own interests; and d) future studies of student involvement in university governance should include student government and the informal involvement of students in their research design.

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CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

Traditionally the responsibility for decision-making regarding university governance was assumed mainly by administrators. However, in recent years, participative decision-making in university governance has been fashionable, and it has drawn extensive attention from both researchers and practitioners of post-secondary institutions. Academic faculty members have clearly established a voice in the decision-making activities associated with university governance. As original clients of campus services, students have also become actively involved in university governance for years. Relevant literature has shown not only advantages, but also limitations and issues relating to student participation in university governance.

An initial literature search revealed that the current research base with reference to student participation in university governance is limited. This study examined the nature and perceptions of student participation in the governance of the University of Alberta.

Statement of the Problem

The writer investigated the nature (scope, process, and effect) of student participation in the governance of the University of Alberta (U of A), including governance of student affairs, and identified related issues and potential for improvement. The following are the purposes of the study: a) to describe the governance structure at U of A, and find out how students are selected and involved in the University governing bodies; b) to describe the student role in the governance of U of A; c) to assess and discuss the effectiveness of student participation in the governance of U of A; d) to find out what means and strategies students employed in their involvement in decision-making activities of the University governing bodies; and e) to explore what can be done to improve student involvement in the governance of the University if necessary.

The following questions based on the above purposes guided the study:

1. What is the governance structure of the University of Alberta?
 - a) What is the administrative decision-making structure of the University?
 - b) What is the structure of the student government? How does it administer students' affairs?
2. What are the University student-related services? How do they satisfy students' needs?
3. How are governance decisions made at the University of Alberta?
4. What are the decision areas in which student involvement is excluded? What are the reasons for such exclusion?
5. What major decisions were addressed by the University administrative decision-making bodies in 1992-1993?
6. What role did students play in making these decisions? What are the perspectives and observations on the involvement of students in decision-making?
7. What informal means and strategies were used by students to exert their influence upon the decisions?
8. What are the factors affecting the impact of student involvement in the governance of the University?
9. What issues need to be addressed and what measures should be taken to lead to more effective student participation in the governance of the University of Alberta?

These questions were formulated to guide the development of the research precisely. During the research, the respondents were invited to provide additional related information which was not addressed in these questions.

Significance of the Research

The concepts of shared authority and interdependent responsibility are important in the development of effective university governance. The position jointly formulated in the United States by the American Council on Education, the Association of Governing Boards

of Universities and Colleges, and the American Association of University Presidents (1966) is that "the variety and complexity of the tasks performed by institutions of higher education produce an inescapable interdependence among governing boards, administrators, faculty, students, and others" (p. 179). This applies equally to Canada.

Although there is recognition that university students have been involved in the governance of their institutions, there has been very little research conducted concerning student involvement in university governance in Canada. For instance, there have been only two relevant studies among all of the master's theses and doctoral dissertations at the Department of Educational Administration of the University of Alberta. To the writer's knowledge, no study has ever been conducted dealing specifically with student participation in the governance of the University of Alberta. The present study helps to clarify and explain the process, current status, and effect of student involvement in the governance of this university and it identifies pertinent problems.

This study has also yielded some insights which could be useful to administrators and faculty members in other universities. The knowledge and information provided by the research might be interesting to fellow researchers who have been studying participative decision-making and the student role in university governance.

In addition, the research findings should be of value to student organizations and individual students involved in university decision-making. The results may provide them with some suggestions on how to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their relevant practice. Moreover, students' experience on this campus could be shared by students at other universities. Students' perspectives should also be of use to the University of Alberta administrators and faculty members because those perspectives can help them better understand students' positions and, ultimately, lead to enhanced services and relationships.

Furthermore, as a doctoral student from China, the writer has been concerned about reforms in Chinese institutions of higher education and was involved in the past few years in a collaborative research project between the University of Alberta and the National

Academy of Educational Administration in Beijing, China, which was designed to help the Chinese institutions of higher learning conduct reforms regarding decentralization. This research may provide some insights for reforms in the governance of Chinese universities and colleges in the future.

Delimitations and Limitations

This research was delimited to related practice within the University of Alberta; it can only provide insights into the process, present status, and practical effect of student participation in the decision-making processes of major institutional governing bodies such as the Board of Governors, the General Faculties Council, and some of their respective committees, one faculty council, two selected department councils and some departmental committees within that faculty, and a major advisory body, the Senate, in the 1992-1993 academic year . Therefore, inferences beyond the study must be cautious.

The limitations of this study were as follows. First, the researcher selected as interviewees a limited number of respondents involved in decision-making at the institutional level, the faculty level, and the departmental level. Also, responses of the informants were influenced by factors such as their different experiences, personalities, education, the length of their involvement, interpersonal skills, their own biases, and various environmental factors. Furthermore, the researcher only sought to investigate the current status, processes and effects of students' involvement in the governance of this university in general; no particular decision area was given special attention. All the above factors could limit the overall understanding of student participation in the governance of the University of Alberta.

Definition of Terms

The following terms warrant explicit definition to ensure consistency in usage throughout the research.

Governance is "the act of decision-making about institutional purposes (mission), about basic policies, about program objectives, and about resource allocation" (Millett, 1980, p. 495).

Participation means direct involvement in a decision-making process. Warr and War (1975) posited: "From a social psychological standpoint, 'participation' has intended to be defined in terms of concepts like 'involvement' and 'influence' (cited in Chell, 1985, p. 1).

Student Organizations refers to the two major student organizations -- the University of Alberta Students' Union, and the Graduate Students' Association, -- and one faculty students' association, the Education Students' Association.

Student Government relates to the student organizations as a whole at the University of Alberta.

Students at Large refers to those students sitting on various University governing bodies at different levels on this campus who are not appointed or nominated by any of the student organizations of the University.

Outline of the Report

This report has nine chapters. Chapter 1 overviews the background, significance, and purpose of the research. The definition of terms used in the research, and limitations as well as delimitations of the research are also included in this chapter.

In Chapter 2, the literature relevant to decision-making, including participative decision-making, university governance models, student right to participate in institutional governance, and the evolution of student involvement in university and college governance are reviewed. A review of 44 Canadian university and college acts was undertaken to

establish the governance structures and statutory provisions for student involvement in Canada in order to provide a national context for the study. The review includes a description of the two major institutional governing bodies -- boards of governors and academic councils or senates -- and the selection of student representatives, and their terms of office, duties, and responsibilities. The conceptual framework for the study comprises of related literature and a conceptual model developed by the researcher.

Chapter 3 introduces the methodology employed for this research which includes the design of the research, the process of data collection and data analysis, two pilot studies, ethical considerations, and specific steps taken by the researcher to ensure trustworthiness of the research.

The governance of U of A is the subject of Chapter 4 which actually has two main sections: 1) the organizational structure and mandates of the University of Alberta administrative decision-making bodies and advisory bodies, the administrative decision-making procedures, and communication procedures; and 2) the student government, including their management and operations, decision-making procedures, their major contributions to the well-being of students of the University, and their internal and external relations.

Chapter 5 describes the student-related services of U of A. Both the University-run student services and the services provided by the student government are presented. The characteristics of the two categories of student-related services are described and compared, and the relationship between them is analyzed.

In Chapter 6, student involvement in the administrative decision-making procedures of the University in 1992-1993 is examined. Different perspectives and direct observations on student involvement in administrative decision-making are reported. The decision areas from which student involvement was excluded are presented, and relevant reasons analyzed. Moreover, major decisions addressed in 1992-1993 are reported, and the informal means or strategies of students during their involvement are presented.

Chapter 7 contains the findings of the research concerning why and how students were involved in student government in 1992-1993, including students' antecedent experiences, motivations, and the perspectives of the informants on the significance of student involvement in the student government. The major achievements of the three student organizations in 1992-1993 are reported to illustrate their specific contributions to students. Issues pertinent to the student government are also analyzed.

Chapter 8 presents the assessment of impact of student involvement in the governance of the University. Various factors affecting the impact of student involvement are analyzed in detail, which include different personal factors, environmental factors, University organizational issues and student organizational issues, attitudinal factors, and program level factors.

The last chapter, Chapter 9, presents a general summary of the research, recommendations made by the respondents for enhancing student participation in the governance of the University for both students and the University administration, major findings of the research, conclusions and personal reflections of the researcher, and the implications for both research and practice in the future.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The primary purpose of reviewing related literature is to present the theoretical and empirical foundations which helped the writer design the research and provided the theoretical bases for the analysis of the data collected for the research. The search of related literature has focused on the following topics: a) nature of decision-making, b) theories underlying participative decision-making, and other supportive opinions, c) university governance models, d) the evolution of student participation in university and college governance, and related student rights, and e) relevant Canadian legislation.

Nature of Decision-Making

According to Griffiths (1967):

The central function of administration is directing and controlling the decision-making process. It is not only central in the sense that it is more important than other functions. But it is central in that all other functions of administration can be generally recognized that decision making is the heart of organization and the process of administration. (pp. 121-122)

MacCrimmon (1974) defined decision-making as a process involving both thought and action that culminates in an act of choice. Simon (1964) believed that one important organizational function was to segregate elements in the decisions of members and to establish procedures for the selection, determination, and communication of these elements. He stated:

The organization, then, takes from the individual some of his decisional autonomy, and substitutes for it an organizational decision-making process. The decisions which the organization makes for the individual ordinarily (a) specify his function . . . (b) allocate authority . . . (c) set other limits to his choice as are needed to coordinate the activities of several individuals in the organization. (p. 8-9)

In addition, Simon (1964) stated that "all decision is a matter of compromise. The alternative that is finally selected never permits a complete or perfect achievement of objectives, but is merely the best solution that is available under the circumstances" (p. 6). Eastcott (1975) pointed out that any thorough analysis of the nature of decision-making

must include a consideration of:

1. The varying abilities of administrators of identifying the need for a decision.
2. The relativity of a decision.
3. The hierarchical and sequential nature of decision-making and decision outcomes, e.g., any decision influences the nature of other decisions to be taken.
4. The relationship in the decision-making process between the beliefs held by decision makers about causation, and their preferences about possible outcomes of decisions. (pp. 15-16)

Participative Decision-Making

Participative decision-making may be defined as the involvement of subordinates in the decision-making process. Steers (1977) explained that

participative decision making represents one attempt to decentralize authority and influence throughout the organization. It is generally thought that such action will often lead to improved decision quality, increased commitment of members to decision outcomes, and increased satisfaction resulting from involvement. Such results are often felt to be associated with effective organizations. (p. 159)

Theories underlying participative decision-making include democratic theory (Pateman, 1970; Thompson, 1970), socialist theory (Kangrga, 1967; Vanek, 1975), human growth theory (Maslow, 1954; McGregor, 1960; Likert, 1967; Alderfer, 1972), and productivity and efficiency (Turner & Lawrence, 1965).

Democratic Theory

Historically, participatory democracy has functioned as a social value in itself. One line of democratic theory envisages a society in which members participate in every aspect of collective life. The assumption that the democratic process educates and develops implies that the process must occur and function in all social, economic, and political organizations, including the family, the school, the work place, and political institutions (Pateman, 1970; Thompson, 1970; Vanek, 1975).

Pertaining to the theory of participatory democracy, Pateman (1970), said that the theory of participatory democracy is built round the central assentation that individuals and their institutions cannot be considered in isolation from one another. This development takes place through the process of participation itself. The major junction of participation in the theory of participatory democracy is therefore an

educational one, educative in the widest sense, including both the psychological aspect and the gaining of practice in democratic skills and procedures. (p.42)

Banning (1989) emphasized the necessity of community participation in institutional decision-making on the basis of democratic principles as follows: "All campus members must be encouraged to participate to avoid the impersonal manipulation of many by a select or self-appointed few" (p. 317).

Socialist Theory

The extensive literature on socialism also has a significant bearing on the issues of participation. Karl Marx's concern, especially in his early writings, for a free, unalienated human existence led to theorizing on the debilitating effects of the social and economic order in the capitalistic system. Socialism gives work and the productive process a central role in explaining human personality and social processes (Kangrga, 1967, pp. 13-30). Vanek (1975) believed that a central assumption in the socialistic literature is the potential of people to become economically liberated by participating actively and creatively in the production process, and ultimately controlling it.

Human Growth Theories

McGregor (1960), Argyris (1964), and Likert (1967) put forward several theories of human behavior which focus on personality growth, development of individual potential and efficiency, and mental health in the context of organizations. All these theories hinged on participation as one of the important means of overcoming the debilitating effects of traditionally designed organizations on their members.

Some theories assume a basic hierarchy of needs which culminates in a need for self-actualizing or growth (Maslow, 1954; Alderfer, 1972). Consequently, they argue for assigning greater importance to the intrinsic motivational properties of work itself by allowing greater employee influence, autonomy, and responsibility through such organizational redesign strategies as job enrichment, job rotation, management of

objectives, employee-oriented supervision, and participation (Argyris, 1969, 1975, 1976; Isrel & Tajfel, 1972; Hackman, 1975).

Students' all-round development has been emphasized by some educators. Brown (1989) thought that "the term student development in the definition of a student development educator's role refers to the goals that institutions have for students" (p. 285). Clothier (1986) interpreted the philosophy of whole person: "We are interested in the individual students' development, not in any one phase of his program such as scholarship, intellect, leadership, but from the aspect of his whole personality" (p. 15). Brown (1989) posited that we want students to become alert, sensitive, ethical, knowledgeable, and capable citizens (p. 285). He emphasized that "student development is a required dimension of the collegiate experience" (p. 300). The above statements suggest that the student developmental process is not automatic but must be intentionally initiated and carefully nurtured by the environment if students' full growth and development are to be achieved as a goal of the institutions they attend.

Barrett (1969) summed up the needs for participation and the influence of various relevant concepts and theories as follows:

1. A human organism has a series of physiological and psychological needs which he will strive to satisfy.
2. A degree of needs satisfaction can be derived by involvement or participation in the decision-making process.
3. A human's needs are organized in a hierarchy. The needs of security, love and esteem and self-actualization and their satisfaction are related to involvement in decision making.
4. A human is involved in interpersonal relations. The more rewarding the relationships, the more involved the human becomes. (pp. 18-46)

Efficiency Theory

Productivity and efficiency are also regarded as a rationale underlying participation, conforming to a paradigm which seeks an instrumental understanding of human beings and their capacities, and in which people are considered to be manipulable toward maximum output through appropriate social technologies. Noting widespread alienation,

dissatisfaction, and lack of commitment in the work force, and the consequent cost of reduced efficiency, lower quality and quantity of production, absenteeism, high turnover, and increased sabotage and labor unrest (Turner & Lawrence, 1965), management theorists and business leaders have examined various kinds of social science techniques, including different forms of participation as a solution to these costs.

Yukl (1981) thought that participation in organizational decision-making can improve employees' satisfaction and performance in the following ways:

1. Participation leads to greater understanding and acceptance of decisions.
2. Participation leads to greater identification with decisions and more intense commitment to their implementation.
3. Participation leads to greater understanding of objectives and action plans developed to achieve objectives.
4. Participation provides employees with a more accurate perception of organizational reward contingencies.
5. Participation is consistent with the needs of mature employees for self-identity, autonomy, achievement, and psychological growth.
6. When a decision arise from a participatory process, groups apply pressure on dissenters to accept or at least outwardly comply with decisions.
7. Group decision making promotes cooperation, mutual understanding, team identity, and cooperation.
8. In case of divergent objectives, consultation and joint decision making provide opportunities for resolving conflicts.
9. Participation allows the use of the expertise and analytical skills of individuals throughout the organization. (pp. 208-209)

In summary, the above-mentioned concepts and theories comprise a major part of the theoretical framework of the study and support the rationale of student participation in university governance.

University Governance

Alfred (1985) stated: "Governance is defined as the process for locating authority, power, and influence for academic decisions among constituencies internal and external to the college" (p. 25). The following four major models for university and college governance have been developed by researchers and theorists: bureaucratic model (Weber, 1947), collegial model (Millett, 1962), political model (Baldrige, 1971), and organized anarchy model (Cohen & March, 1972).

Bureaucratic Model

According to Weber's ideal-type concept, "bureaucratic administration, is, other things being equal, always, from a formal, technical point of view, the most rational type" (Weber, 1967, p. 88). In brief, a bureaucracy creates " a systematic division of labor, rights, and responsibilities and enforces it through a hierarchical control system" (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 111). In this model, the decision-making power largely vested in the individual depends on the levels of decision-making formally assigned. This model is appropriate for organizations with limited and clear goals, and it helps institutions to achieve maximum efficiency. Nevertheless, it does not address the political constraints, organizational dynamics, as well as ambiguous goals or uncertainties of universities and colleges.

Collegial Model

Student participation in university governance is closely related to the collegial model. Millett (1962), who proposed this model, believed that academic organizations are sufficiently different from other types of institutions and could be better understood as communities rather than hierarchies. He described decision-making in this case as being achieved "not through a structure of super-ordination and subordination of persons and groups but through a dynamics of consensus" (p. 235). This model seeks and assumes egalitarian and democratic values; shared power among faculty, students, alumni, and administrators; professionalism among organization members; academic freedom; a high degree of participation in decision-making; and shared understandings of the purposes of educational institutions (Curtis, Ecker & Riley, 1986; Birnbaum, 1988). Baldrige (1971) mentioned that "the supporters of this approach argue that a university should not be organized like other bureaucracies; instead, there should be full participation of the members of the academic community in its management" (p. 5). This model suggests the significance of organizational members' participation in decision-making, which is

definitely beneficial to institutional governance. Nonetheless, decisions are rarely made by consensus in reality. In addition, this model fails to reflect the complexity of conflict and it ignores the role of bureaucratic rule-making in academic institutions.

Political Model

Baldrige (1971) identified the university as a complex, fragmented structure of miniature sub-cultures all with divergent life styles and concerns, all articulating their interests in different ways, all using pressure, power and force to influence decision outcomes (p. 8-9). The political model lays special stress on the dynamic processes of the decision-making act. Baldrige (1971) saw the decision-making process as one which has the following characteristics:

- a. Conflict is natural.
- b. Many power blocs and interest groups try to influence policy in accordance with their values and goals.
- c. Political elites govern most decisions.
- d. Decisions are negotiated compromises rather than bureaucratic orders.
- e. External interest groups have considerable power.
- f. There is a democratic tendency in decision-making. (p. 10)

As a result, "choices have to be made not between good and bad things but rather between competing goods" (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 134). In this model, decisions are generally made through negotiations and compromises. The political model mirrors political realities of academic organizations. But it only lays its stress on certain factors such as goal setting and conflicts rather than efficiency in achieving goals, and it also underestimates the impact of routine bureaucratic procedures.

Organized Anarchy Model

This model, also called "garbage can model," was proposed by Cohen and March (1972) who described universities and colleges as "organized anarchies" based on their discovery that institutions of higher education have ambiguous goals, poorly defined technology, and diverse and shifting participation in academic issues. According to Taylor