Youth and Student Unions: A Governance Model

Lorine Sweeney

Getting Started

To teachers

This lesson involves student understanding of governance in non-profit organizations and involves students in adopting or creating a governance model for student unions.

To students

Do you ever wonder about the responsibilities of being on student council? Do you ever wonder if those who are on student council are meeting your needs? Do you understand what is meant by good governance? The activity in this issue involves your input. We need you to develop or adopt a model for effective student union governance.

Background

The article in this edition of LawNow entitled *Being a Governor* by Keith Seel describes a global governance model and talks about three dimensions of governance as being (a) fiduciary, (b) strategic, and (c) generative. Dr. Seel tells us that it is important for those in governance to understand the most important functions of their organization and to spend the majority of their time in priority areas. Could there be a similar model created for student union governance?

Task

Using the activity guidelines below, you will

- brainstorm and categorize student union activities.
- design a student governance model that prioritizes time spent in each area of governance,
- explain the accountability structure that applies to the financial areas of your specific student union.
- present your ideas about student governance and student governance priorities using the model you created.
- extension: prepare a sample campaign speech or develop a simple handbook as an aid to understanding student union governance.

Presentation format

The presentation will be to your class, student executive, or other groups as deemed appropriate by your teacher. Your presentation will be through a Power Point, web page, chart, or document and will demonstrate understanding of student union governance and a governance model.

Completing the Activities

A. Activity One: List and categorize student union activities

1. Create a list of all activities that you feel should fall under student union jurisdiction.
   - Brainstorm ideas in your group.
   - Ask current student union members what they see as their responsibilities.
2. Categorize each item in your list under the headings in Table one.
3. Add further columns if some of your activities do not fit within one of the three headings provided for you.

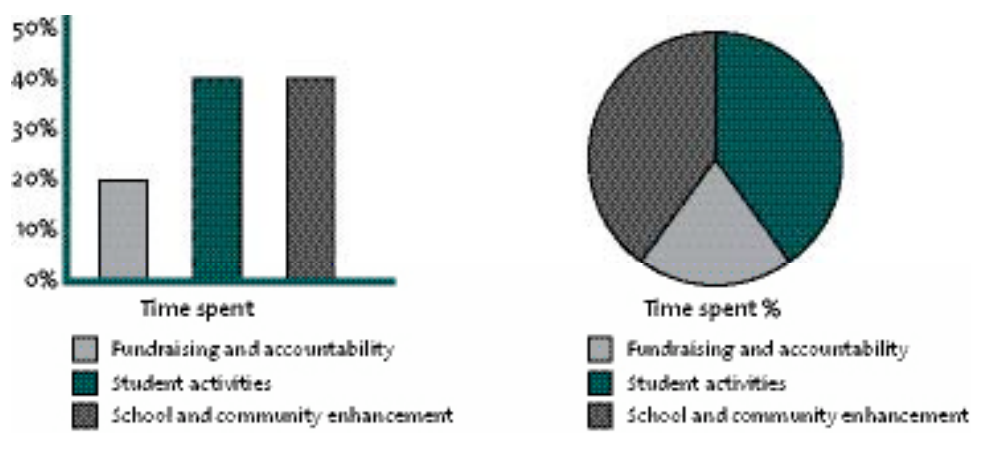
Table one: Student union activities

Fundraising and accountability	Student activities	School and community enhancement

B. Activity Two: Designing the governance model

1. The student-designed governance model will be similar to the one in Dr. Seel's article but rather than dimensions of fiduciary, strategic, and generative, the model would include the suggested dimensions of (a) fundraising and accountability, (b) student activities, and (c) school and community enhancement. You may add additional dimensions if you wish.
2. The model will indicate the proportion of time that you think should be given to each dimension. Time will be prioritized by what you think is most important. Part of your presentation will be to indicate if you think the current student council is spending their time in areas of priority.
3. You must be able to present your model and defend your conclusions.
4. The preamble to your presentation will explain the current structure of your student council.

Model examples



C. Activity Three: Financial accountability structure

Many organizations are governed by rules or policies that influence what they can or cannot do. Student unions are no exception. When your student union undertakes a fundraising activity, it may be governed by outside rules that the student government must understand.

Example

Imagine that your student union decides to raise money for school football uniforms by selling chocolate bars. Before deciding to proceed with the fundraiser, the students must be aware of fundraising and financial auditing rules or policies outlined in

- their student union constitution
- their school board policies
- Alberta Education's finance department.

Many school boards ask to be involved in auditing student union spending in order to be accountable for that part of school-generated funds.

Task

Ask about the accountability structure that applies to the financial areas of your specific student union. Explain the structure through a flow chart.

D. Activity Four: Your presentation

After looking at your model of activities and the financial responsibility chart, you will present your findings.

Your findings will include

- The definition and structure of your student government;
- A model indicating what areas of student union governance you feel should take the most time and why;
- How financial procedures are governed by outside policies.

Creating your visual presentation:

- Be sure that it is appropriate for your audience, is easily viewed, and is clear.
- Be sure that the visual clearly explains the background information that you are presenting orally.

Doing your presentation:

- Speak clearly and face your audience rather than your visuals.
- Allow time for questions and discussions.

E. Activity Five: Extension

At the discretion of your teacher, you may do one of the following:

- prepare a campaign speech for any student governance position clearly indicating that you understand the nature of governance and how you will prioritize your time in office;
- prepare a brief one or two page student union governance handbook that includes **your** model and outlines how student union governance time should be prioritized.

F. Evaluating presentation

- Be sure you understand all the evaluation rubrics discussed with the teacher.
- This is an *example* of a rubric for this unit.

Level / Criteria	4 Excellent	3 Proficient	2 Adequate	1 Limited	Insufficient / Blank
Researches appropriate information	Efficiently brainstorms and locates information	Appropriately brainstorms and locates information	Credibly brainstorms and locates information for assignments	Vaguely brainstorms and locates information	No score is awarded is insufficient student performance
Demonstrates information through a chart	Develops significant chart demonstrating pertinent understanding of levels of student governance	Develops meaningful chart that demonstrates appropriate understanding of levels of student governance	Develops credible chart with general understanding of levels of student governance	Develops vague chart with little evidence of research & irrelevant support	
Develops solution	Illustrates through an existing or new model a thoughtful and comprehensive understanding of student union governance	Illustrates through an existing or new model a detailed and logical understanding of student union governance	Illustrates through an existing or new model a rudimentary and workable understanding of student union governance	Illustrates a sketchy or improbable action plan to solve problems connected to student union governance	
Presents position	Presentation is insightful and persuasive that enhances understanding	Presentation is comprehensive and logical that displays understanding.	Presentation is clear and plausible that displays basic understanding	Presentation is confused or illogical that displays minimal understanding	

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