

Management of non-academic activities for academic enhancement in Universities

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Abstract

The thesis of this paper is to demonstrate that effective management of non-academic activities enhance the academic aspects of the students. It also argued that all that students' need is found in a lecture theatre. Some are found outside of it. Scanning the students' environment reveals a situation that calls for an appropriate response. It is the response which makes the position of the dean necessary. The paper has outlined the generic roles of the dean of students. The skills, knowledge and competences of the dean of students are briefly highlighted. The management approaches which are central to handling students' affairs have been stated. It is also advised that deans should policies that are coterminous with universities' strategic plans.

The need for non-academic activities in universities

When students join a university their primary objective is to acquire three things:

(1) Knowledge

There are many definitions of knowledge but my simple description is that knowledge is the processed information which can be used later for some purpose. When one has acquired that knowledge, one has expertise. Knowledge acquisition involves complex cognitive processes: perception, learning, communication, association and reasoning. The term knowledge is also used to mean the confident understanding of a subject with the ability to use it for a specific purpose if appropriate. Students acquire this knowledge through the lectures and learning activities in which they get involved while at the university. In the ancient world knowledge was known as | πιστήμη. This is the academic side of the students activities while at university.

(2) Skills

Skills refer to aptitude or competence in performance a certain task. Some skills are acquired through lecture room activities. Take for instance computer skills are acquired from being taught in a computer laboratory. Other skills are acquired through non-academic activities like sports,

cultural activities, attachments, interactions with fellow students and staff, or through participation in various activities. Skills combine both academic and non academic categories. Some are professional skills and other are not necessarily professional skills.

(3) *To be*

The third thing that students acquire at universities is they learn to be. This is a consciousness which every student that goes through a university is expected or supposed to acquire. First of all students have to convince themselves that they are university people therefore educated. This means that they have to emulate their ideal educated person. The way they will talk, do things, behave, and the values they will espouse will depend mainly on their conviction of the ideal self. Some get detracted and end up projecting a facade which contradicts their being educated. Students ought to learn to be responsible, to be industrious, to be caring, to be smart, etc. This is what distinguishes a university graduate from the uneducated person.

The last two aspects fall directly in the office of the Dean of Students.

Situational analysis

In most universities in Uganda the state of the students' non-academic situation is such that it has the following aspects:

- (i) *Many want free things.* Free education, free food, free marks, free lecture rooms, free medical services,
- (ii) *Some are indolent.* They do not want to work. This may explain the rampant plagiarism. They want to be given, they cannot even ask whether the marks you have are good enough,
- (iii) *Some would want to have a lot of money even when they have done nothing.* Some even misuse tuition fees,
- (iv) *Some students harbour uncouth behaviour.* Take for instance, stealing and doing drugs, imbibing alcohol excessively. Consequently some become addicted,
- (v) *Recklessness.* Some do things recklessly. They drive recklessly, they love recklessly, write recklessly etc.
- (vi) *Some love non-academic activities like sports and games.* They give high priority to being Ms Nkumba or merge. Sometimes at the expense of the academic work,
- (vii) *International students* who unilaterally transform into local citizens of Uganda without going through the right channel. That is some

overstay their student visas, some do not want to be charged extra money. Yet the national students' have been subsidised by the tax payers.

- (viii) *Adaption*. Many students national or international often take longer to fit into their new environment at the universities. Some do not even know what to do with the freedom they find at the university.
- (ix) *Focus on co-curricula* activities at the expense of academic work. There are students who have focused on the non-academic activities at the expense of academic work. Music, dancing, student politics, rel Twgna,

The campus is potential area for legal issues. So the existence of the office of the dean of students, fulfils many of the legal requirements.

The role of the Dean of students department

1. Develop short and long range vision for the department, lead department staff in the implementation of plans and oversee development, coordination and dissemination of department policies and procedures
2. Create and co-ordinate department publications such as the Student Handbook and the Campus Crime Report. Ensure all publications meet required standards
3. Overall responsibility for Student Affairs Department budget
4. Assure housing services are developed and maintained while promoting a residential life concept.
5. Assure student counselling services and proactive intervention programs are provided
6. Oversee support services for international students and special needs.
7. Provide first line contact and problem resolution for parents, students and others and assure that a variety of student life opportunities are offered to all students
8. Develop and implement a student judicial system; serve as Chief Conduct Officer of the university.
9. Work collaboratively with all other departments on achieving university objectives.
10. Assures that there is student affairs representation on some university committees.

Skills, Knowledge and competences of the dean of students

Skills:

- a) Excellent written and verbal communication skills. A dean interacts with students, parents, community, other departments, top management of the university, and the general public.
- b) Strong interpersonal skills with both faculty and student populations. The dean should be a person of repulsive personality. Instead the dean should have an attractive demeanour
- c) Superior organizational and problem resolution skills. Students are usually young and therefore have tremendous energy which can be dangerous unless re-directed to something useful. This is where sports

and social activities are very critical. Such activities sap their energy and occupy their mind,

- d) Good and strong computer and analytical skills. Students' affairs department should have an online newsletter. The newsletters help to keep students abreast of the developments in their alma mater.

Abilities:

- a) Work effectively as either a leader or a team member to ensure that departmental goals are met.
 - b) Ability to prioritize work and perform well under pressure.
 - c) Ability to manage multiple tasks and meet deadlines.
 - d) Good general business knowledge and ability to effectively supervise and lead a staff of professionals.
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- a) Have good training in Counselling, Student Personnel Administration or other related field is required.
 - b) Knowledge of current practices and theories in student affairs in higher education .

Necessary management approaches.

In conclusion it is appropriate to assert that the dean of students is charged with the following practical management approaches

- (i) *Keeping close contact* with students, top university administration, other department of the university, parents and others stakeholders. This approach to management enables the dean to create a good rapport and trust between the office and all those other parties.
- (ii) *Think proactively*. Deans have to think proactively if they are to keep ahead of the students' demands and issues. In that way they will be able to answer students' questions and attend to their needs with satisfaction.
- (iii) *Articulation of university rules and regulations*. For proper management of affairs at campus and off campus, there must be rules and regulations. The rules and regulations help to streamline all pertinent affairs.
- (iv) *Communicate the vision, the mission, and objectives* of both the department and the university. This helps the university community to identify with the aspirations of the university. They can harness their visions with those of the university in a fulfilling and productive manner.

- (v) *Advice, counsel and admonish students* wherever possible and necessary. Whenever students demonstrate tendencies of discord. This helps to stave off a number of negative activities like strikes. Deal adequately with issues like indiscipline in halls of residence; fights; and the controversial same sex relationships.
- (vi) *Project friendship*. Deans should be project themselves as friends of students. This can be done both formally and informally. Interact with them at parties, sports galas, church services, and so on. Through this kind of networking, it is possible to develop trust and open communication.
- (vii) *Organise students' functions*. The deans of students office is charge with organisations big events like guild elections, bazaar (open market), dances, beauty contests, public lectures, cultural activities, students visits, and community liaison.
- (viii) *Encourage students to develop talents*. This could be in the area of games and sports, music, community work, academic and so on. Students can be encouraged to begin where they are. Let them take part in various competitions internally and externally. They are a number of openings in which students can participate. Take for instance the Zain quiz challenge.
- (ix) *Develop emotional responsiveness*. Students fall sick, some die on campus or off the campus. So the dean of students' affairs has to ensure that there is medical facility students can go to. The mechanism of dealing with death or bereavement should be clear and known.

Policies and strategies

For the dean of students to carry out his or her activities effectively and with confidence, there is need to have a clearly formulated policies for each aspect of affairs.

Policies are frameworks within which future decisions and actions are taken. Policies are good because of the following reasons:

- (a) *Policies give the dean of students affairs authority*. When students have internalised the policies, they will become aware that if they contravene those policies, the dean authority to deal with them accordingly.
- (b) *Policies ensure consistence* and keep capricious changes in direction at bay. Take for instance if there is a bereavement policy that when student loses a parent the university contributed UGX100,000. Or if the policy is when a student dies the university contributed UGX5000,000,

This policy will apply in the same way to all students regardless of their other standing.

- (c) *Policies help to reduce on the unrealistic demands* made by students. When students are familiar with the policies, they will not make many unrealistic demands. For instance if the policy is that without payment no student is allowed in university accommodation, those who will not have paid will not demand to stay in university accommodation for free.
- (d) *Policies clarify positions of the university on pertinent issues.* Once there is a policy students and other stakeholders will definitely know the position of the university. Take for example if the policy is that married students are given university accommodation, then no married students will put pressure on the dean of students to give them housing. The dean may help such students to find accommodation elsewhere but not in university houses. Or when a student excels in some activity, the university may offer a partial scholarship of UGX 1,000,000.
- (e) *Policies help universities to keep abreast with the legal requirement.* Laws change concerning various aspects of students and university life. When laws change, new policies should be formulated to ensure compliance.
- (f) *Policies enable deans to be free from reliance on precedents and people.* Where there is no policy the tendency is often to rely on precedents and people. This is not good because what worked ten years ago may not work today. Good may not be reliable because they can quit, they can forget, they can change, and so on. So it is better to have a good policy in place.

Deans as good managers of students affairs must formulate policies and implement effectively. Without policies deans will be more of gamblers and less of managers.

It is common for each university to have a strategic plan. This means that deans should comprehend the strategies in the universities strategic plan and create their work plan which is consonant with the strategic plan. For example if the strategic plan of the university is to increase the intake by 4%, the deans has also to increase his budget accordingly.

Conclusion

Non academic affairs of students call good planning and management. It also requires the deans to be leaders as well as managers. The non-academic activities are just as important as academic activities. This is because students have to exist even if their primary objective at university is to study. This means they have to sleep, eat, get treated when sick, they have to relax, they have to explore their other potentials. Non academic and academic must held in constructive harmony.