

Report of the Student Regent on the General Assembly of Student Councils

First GASC for Academic year 2011-2012

2 January 2012

The General Assembly of Student Councils (GASC) was held as scheduled on 20-21 December 2011 in UP Visayas. It was hosted by the local student councils, who did a commendable job of welcoming everyone to the campus.

This year's first GASC raises alarms as to the state of the University: first, there is restless over rising school fees and weakening public character of a UP education; second, there is an uneven experience with democratic governance across the system; third and most grave of all, elements of degeneracy and corruption have may have poisoned otherwise healthy conflict among the students.

The GASC is an annual convention of all student councils in the UP System as venue to discuss matters pertaining to the student regent, the highest-ranked student officer in the University, and all other issues that affect the University in general.

It was created in 1997 by agreement of all student councils, under the Codified Rules for Student Regent Selection (CRSRS). It was thereafter formalized in the 2008 UP Charter "for the University System". The GASC institutionalizes student autonomy and operates in the spirit of unanimity and consensus. The ascendancy of accords clinched during the GASC is by far undisputed.

Attendance

Forty-five out of 52 student councils were represented at the assembly, with at least 106 individuals attending. All University Student Councils were present, and thus are expected to assist the absent seven college student councils in the processing of information:

- UP Diliman Architecture Student Council
- UP Manila College of Dentistry Student Council
- UP Manila College of Nursing Student Council
- UP Manila College of Public Health Student Council
- UP Manila School of Health Sciences Baler Student Council
- UP Los Baños College of Human Ecology Student Council
- UP Mindanao College of Humanities and Social Sciences Student Council

Relatively, this is a substantial turn out. The roll was called at 12:17 pm on 20 December 2011.

Agenda

The substantive agenda proposed by the Student Regent is as follows:

- 1) 2011 Student Regent Report
- 2) Council Reports
- 3) Proposals to amend the CRSRS

A significant amount of time was spent reordering the agenda, as some student councils believed it more urgent to discuss the proposals to amend the CRSRS. All matters had been intended to be tackled within the two days allotted for the GASC. Ultimately, the dispute was rendered moot when the Student Regent decided to defer deliberations on the proposals.

Due to a disturbing complaint by one student council of attempted bribery with regard to the amendments to the CRSRS, the Student Regent deemed it prudent to conduct an investigation into such serious allegations. Several councils believed that such development compromised the integrity of the GASC. The student councils reasonably agreed to cooperate to ensure that the investigation will be speedy, fair and impartial. (A separate statement has been made.)

The body first discussed the urgent concern of relief efforts for Typhoon Sendong victims. The UP administration was preparing by that time strategic efforts. Students were invited to participate, but from the discussions, majority of the councils had already launched separate activities. The students however pledged in principle to work as one UP community to deliver maximum impact for relief and rehabilitation. (A separate statement has been made.)

The reports of the student councils on issues were duly discussed and revolved around the following:

- Reductions in the UP budget for 2012
- Current rate of the UP tuition
- Impact of the Socialized Tuition and Financial Assistance Program
- Justifiability of laboratory and other school fees
- Improvement of the Revitalized General Education Program
- Revision of rules on student discipline, and rules for student organizations, fraternities and sororities
- Practice of democratic governance and student representation in policy-making bodies
- Campaign to free all political prisoners including Maricon Montajes and Ericson Acosta

The discussions also opened more particular and other concerns, among them:

- Accessibility of the UP student loan program
- Budget for the education sector and other social services
- On the job training (OJT) or practicum fee, Civic Welfare Training Service (CWTS) fee
- Improper use of university funds and assets by the UP administration
- State of libraries and other service facilities in UP
- Resources for graduate students
- Collection, administration and release of student funds
- Waiver of UPCAT requirement for some courses
- Large lecture class policy
- Gender sensitivity training requirements for organizations
- Better campus security
- Genuine land reform

House Rules

The House Rules, which serve to guide the delegates on conduct and proper procedure, was proposed by the Student Regent in a form substantially similar to the rules adopted by previous GASCs. They are in principle open to change with each new GASC. The ideal is to put the house rules in a form acceptable to all members of the body, particularly because the assembly is self-regulating.

After more than 12 hours of deliberations, the body approved all of the recommended provisions, save for two contentious sections, and inserted a new provision to clarify that

student council members are allowed to conduct caucuses, among themselves without interference from others.

The contentious provisions dealt with, precisely, the personality of delegates. The proposed rule is to allow only confirmed delegates to attend the assembly. Confirmation helps the Student Regent and secretariat to appraise the legitimacy of representation by the delegate, determine quorum and arrange logistical matters. From experience, this has not been an issue with previous GASCs.

This time, however, two student councils failed to declare in advance their intent to join the assembly. Despite notice, follow up, and even cajoling, individuals from UP Baguio, UP Diliman and UP Los Baños surprised the assembly with their unexpected arrival.

One side argued that the loss of a substantive right (representation) over a procedural impairment (confirmation). The other side submitted that negligence, hopefully not malicious, resulted in consequences. There were several failed attempts to harmonize contrasting points and reach a consensus.

The second contentious rule is the identity of college representatives who straddle work between two student councils. Double-representation is generally not allowed, being unfavourable to comprehensive representation. College representatives are thus asked to declare whose authority they represent in the assembly. Since there was no standard to determine the personality of delegates, the body could not discuss this as well.

These issues have not been resolved. The unconfirmed delegates however, were eventually allowed to register for the GASC.

Resolutions and action plans

The GASC adjourned at 12:25 am on 21 December 2011. The following were clear actionable points during the assembly. Campaign-related arrangements were made separately.

Internal affairs

- 1) PROTECTION OF THE INTEGRITY OF THE GASC – The Student Regent and all student councils will implement measures to maintain respect in the assembly as a venue to agree on system-wide concerns. This includes the observance by all individuals of civility and other tenets of good morals, and the issuance of reprimands to those who will contravene such policy.
- 2) INVESTIGATION INTO THE ATTEMPTED BRIBERY – The claim of attempted bribery by one individual, in exchange for support of one student council for two amendments to the CRSRS, is serious and grounds for a disciplinary case. The three most recent Student Regents: Maria Kristina Conti, Jaqueline Eroles, and Cori Alessa Co have formed themselves into a committee. Faculty and staff per unit will be involved in the interview and consultations with students, as may be necessary. Their inputs will be recommendatory.
- 3) DEFERMENT OF DISCUSSION ON THE AMENDMENTS TO THE CRSRS
- 4) CLARIFICATION OF THE STUDENT REGENT ON THE PROPOSED HOUSE RULES – Some student councils questioned the change in the wording from the previous house rules. The previous and the present student regents will send a clarificatory letter to the interested parties.

Strategic relations

- 5) TYPHOON SENDONG RELIEF – The GASC compiled the list of efforts of student councils system-wide, which could hopefully direct students to ways they can help out in such devastating tragedy. No further commitments were forged, but the councils were open to tighter coordination with fellow councils and the UP administration.

UP Mindanao

Who: University Student Council with the Katipunan ng mga Sangguniang Mag-aaral sa UP
Local partner: Panday Bulig Relief and Rehabilitation Center, Tabang Mindanao Center
What: water, clothes, food, cash

UP Visayas

At least 5 students from UP Visayas were affected by the typhoon

Who: University Student Council, College of Arts and Sciences Student Council, College of Management Student Council, School of Technology Student Council, College of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences Student Council, UP Tacloban College Student Council

What: water, clothes, food, cash

Local partner: UP Tubong Mindanao (Tubao)

UP Manila

Who: University Student Council

What: cash

How: Deposit any amount to BDO account number 003530163362, account name University Student Council-UP Manila

Who: Medicine Student Council (MSC)

Local Partner: Philippine College of Surgeons (PCS)

What: cash

How: Deposit any amount to the account of PCS

The MSC as early as Saturday morning launched UPCM CARE (Calamity Assistance and Relief Efforts) and has sent liquids, supplies and other goods donated by students to Mindanao.

UP Diliman

Who: University Student Council with UP Kilos Na

Local partner: National Union of Students of the Philippines and Kabataan Partylist

What: water, clothes, food, cash

Who: College of Social Work and Community Development

Local partner: Oxfam GB

What: volunteers to repack hygiene kits

UP Los Banos

Who: University Student Council with Serve the People (STP) Brigade and Kabataan Partylist-Southern Tagalog

What: goods and cash

- 6) STFAP REVIEW – The student councils were asked to again assist in the next phase of the policy review.