Student Leadership Programs
Background and History
By Mandy Ellertson

Portland Community College’s student leadership and activity program echo Virgin Slim’s 1968 ad campaign slogan “You’ve Come A Long Way, Baby.” While the first PCC President, Amo DeBernardis, believed strongly in creating an institution that was wholly student-centered, space and money for student activity programs eluded his early vision. This direction of PCC mirrored the majority of the early community college movement—a populist initiative with a core value of making higher education inclusive. The practicality of establishing a community college did not allow for many frills. Curriculum development, building renovation and creation, and securing financing held the top priorities of the college. Student government and activities earned a lower number on the list.

However, student voice and representation found a place within the early governing structure of Oregon’s community colleges. Governing the institution required input from all sectors of the college. The membership of the initial Oregon Community College Association (OCCA) included all aspects of the institution—faculty, administrators, board members, classified staff, and students. “It was wonderful because everyone contributed,” former Chemeketa and Portland Community College Dean of Students Lowell Ford said. According to Ford, all five sectors voiced opinions and voted on legislative positions as a unit. The organization also provided college employees and students the opportunity to network and bounce ideas off each other. “The board and Presidents were not off doing things and making decisions by themselves,” he said.

In the early 1970’s collective bargaining broke the coalition. Portland Community College’s full-time faculty unionized in 1972, the same time that the OCCA reorganized into an association for college Presidents and Board members only. The students responded by creating the Community Colleges of Oregon Student Association and Commissions (CCOSAC) which formed in 1974. This organization’s original purpose provided students with leadership training and development, networking, and a lobby group devoted to state level issues.

The idea of student involvement in the affairs of the college received support from scholars who studied the community college movement. Terry O’Banion and Alice Thurston wrote that student involvement in most

3 Telephone interview with Lowell Ford on October 30, 2006 with author.
areas of the college policy formulation is essential.\textsuperscript{4} O’Banion and Thurston recommended students also obtaining total control over student publications, fees, conduct outside the classroom, recognition of student organizations, invitations to speakers, and distribution of literature.\textsuperscript{5} These recommendations took a long time for PCC to implement.

Hiring professional staff to work with student leaders advanced during the turbulent years of the 60s and 70s. When students began to voice opposition to administrative perspectives, many of the Oregon community college Presidents began to discuss the idea of hiring professional staff to work with student groups and programs.

\begin{quote}
When we started out, our students were kind of a motley crew. The teaching staff and administration had no clue as to how to help out many of the students coming through our doors. At first, they turned to the counselors. However, when high school grads starting coming through our doors and students became more interested in becoming active, they decided to assign someone to advise the students. As the years progressed, the college presidents selected someone to work with students who had some student affairs backgrounds.\textsuperscript{6} Gene Ann McLean, Blue Mountain Community College
\end{quote}

It wasn’t until the 1980’s when PCC decided to hire someone with a student personnel background to advise the student government. Bob Palmer, Dean of Students hired one full-time person to serve the district from the Sylvania campus. Eventually, two part-timers came on board on the Rock Creek and Cascade campuses. Those positions became full-time in 1990 and a part-time advisor was added to the Southeast Center.

The original structure of the student governments created a centralized council and three campus councils. The purpose of the organizational structure created a coordinating body to:

1. Delegate to subsidiary bodies management responsibilities
2. Have Authority to establish policies and procedures in established areas of concern; and
3. Provide a maximum of local autonomy at the level of basic concern.\textsuperscript{7}

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{6} Telephone interview with Gene Ann McLean, Counselor and Student Government Advisor at Blue Mountain Community College from 1968 – 1999.
\textsuperscript{7} ASPCC Council Handbook. 1985. Constitution and Bylaw Section (110.001)
A formalized centralized council dissolved in 1990 when President Moriarty envisioned a more decentralized system. The four campus council groups operated independently, but came together on a variety of issues that were a matter of district concern. This body became known as the Council of Presidents (COP). This structure remained in place until 2005 when the district governing body grew to include the representatives from 3 members of each campus student government. The students ratified a new constitution in 2007 and called the central governing body the District Student Council. In 2009, a couple of students went to the Board of Directors to express their dissatisfaction with the ASPCC “Selection” process. PCC President Preston Pulliams asked the DSC to analyze their structure and study the possibility of instituting an election process. The Student Leadership Development Program conducted an extensive evaluation of itself through the feedback that was provided in a survey released to the entire PCC community. With input from 923 respondents and work of students, staff, and faculty; an approved final report of this analysis was presented to the President. Slight changes were made to the system like electing the chair of the DSC – the student who serves as the voice of the entire group. The analysis is on the website for public review. (Click on http://www.pcc.edu/resources/aspcc/district-student-council/analysis.html)

Securing a stable, student-driven and run budget became a priority for the student leaders in the 1990s. In 1993, a coalition of student leaders joined together to ask that the board impose a Student Activity Fee. The administrative liaison, Dr. Jim Van Dyke, worked with the students to create a proposal. The original Student Activity Fee was introduce Fall of 1994 with a $7/quarter fee for students taking 6 or more credits and $2/quarter for those taking five or less. In 1999, the fee structure altered to reflect $1/credit hour not to exceed $15 each quarter. This restructure increased the overall budget. The fee rose again in 2004 to $1.25. It now stands at $1.70/credit hour. The last increase in the SAF was 10 cents that was dedicated to The Green Initiative Fund – or a fund that serves to promote sustainability and help PCC reach its goals of becoming carbon neutral. Over the course of time, the student leaders struggle with the allocation process. Currently each campus receives a percentage of the SAF based on a formula that reflects a base amount complemented with FTE and headcount.

The office and activity space has also evolved over the years. Cascade’s student government went from occupying a closet, to the old gate house, to an old conference room. ASPCC CA now has office space, student club space, and a game and TV area in the basement of the Student Center. In the future, the program will relocate to the new building. RC and Sylvania also managed to gain more space for gaming, student offices, conference rooms, TV, and club rooms. The SEC ASPCC recently went from a smaller area (a small information kiosk) to a larger space. SEC looks to expand in the bond process. In 2008, a Bond was passed for capital

---

8 Fee timeline derived from reviewing the PCC Catalogues between 1993 and 2006.
construction. The Student Leadership Programs will acquire new real estate in the upcoming years. Student leaders are currently engaged in the process of helping to envision the space that future students will occupy as well as watch as the construction. New buildings are scheduled to begin opening in 2014.

As the budget and space grew, so did the Student Leadership Programs. PCC student leaders are involved in numerous programs and initiatives that empower and impact the student population. Raising the student voice through legislative lobbying and campus committee work has been a part of the program for over 25 years. Multicultural activities and programs have been planned by student activity professionals and leaders since the diversity budget went into place in the 1980s. In 2003, the Stop the Hate Train program generated 100s of trained staff and students on the issues of hate crimes and bias incidents as well as produced a slew of programs and initiatives around the topic. The student leadership program also provided leadership on the service learning movement in the early 1990s, as the Student Leadership Coordinators worked with Foundation staff to institute the Service to Community Scholarships and write the Campus Compact grant.

Currently, this program plays a key role in the sustainability movement at PCC. Student leaders are members of each campus Green Team and each campus student government voted to hire a staff member devoted to this topic. The Green fund provides support for a large number of student lead initiatives and programs. In short, as the program grew through support (both financially and administratively), so has the impact on the campus community.

Student leadership also incorporated an academic component in 2006. The SLCs submitted curriculum under the Educational Leadership discipline and began offering course in Personal Leadership Development, Civic Engagement, and Representation for 3, 2 and 1 credits respectively.

ASPCC also supports over 100 student Clubs and Organizations. The original student organizations and clubs at PCC found homes in the professional technical programs. The SODA (Student Organized Diesel Associationm1980s) boasts the longest running club on the Rock Creek campus. Clubs out of the academic side of the house thrived for years because a faculty or staff member made sure the students received guidance and support. The early Student Leadership Program provided little support until college budget authorities determined that no club or organization could have an off campus account.

Phi Theta Kappa – the 2 year honor society – chartered chapter on each of the four comprehensive campuses. Several of the chapters have gone on to garner a large number of members as well as receive 4 and 5 star ratings in the past. Financial support for this program ranges from campus to campus, but all members have to pay a fee to join the national, regional and local chapters.

In the late 80s and early 90s, Portland began experiencing the influx of immigrants and ethnic groups. Early efforts to help these new community members began with ESL (English as a Second Language) and ENNL (English for Non Native Language speakers which was a CREDIT transfer program).
As PCC Rock Creek became more diverse, several other organizations established a presence at PCC like the Black Student Union, a MeCHA, Somalian Student Association, Muslim Student Association, Christian Clubs (they come in some shape or form every year), Veterans and a Gay Straight Alliance. These clubs have helped the college realize the importance of a safe space on campus for specific student populations. For example, RC now houses a Queer Resource Center (2011 opening) and both Cascade (2011 opening) and Rock Creek (2010 opening) established a Veterans Resource Center. Both of these “spaces” or “centers” grew out of the Club Program.

In the 1980s, PCC supported 3 inter collegiate sports teams – Basketball at Cascade, Soccer at Sylvania, and Volleyball at Rock Creek). Prior to 1992, the college dropped the funding for these sports (except for Basketball because Board Member Harold Williams championed the program). Soccer, Volleyball, Softball, Basketball, and Flag Football have always had a following, but never established itself on an ongoing basis. The Outdoor Recreation Club has functioned as a District Club under the guidance of David Hall for over 10 years and the Dragon Boat Team has also been in existence for over 20 years. Both of these groups function more on the district level. In 2012 the Soccer Club garnered some funding from the District Student Council. However, this group has yet to institutionalize itself on campus. The student center/game rooms at PCC also support other clubs like the Pool Club, Table Tennis, Foos Ball, and the infamous Gaming associations. The DSC, in 2008, proposed an increase in the Student Activity Fee to support a Club Sports program. The administration rejected the proposal.

A variety of interest based social organizations have come and gone over the years. From knitting to a smoker’s group – you name it, the Student Leadership staff have worked on it and with interested parties.

During the 2004 Student Leadership Review, it was recommended that PCC investigate hiring a professional staff member to work with the clubs and programs. Sylvania had already hired the first Club and Program Specialist with their SAF budget on a part time basis. Their club program blossomed and it was determined that a staff member would greatly increase the activity and continuity of our clubs and programs. Now all four campuses all have full time Club and Program Specialists. As a district, the CPS instituted a new program – the District Club Convention in 2011 to help train and facilitate leadership development in the club program.

Conclusion

The Student Leadership Program at Portland Community College continues to grow, meet the challenges of our students and align with the institutions goals and vision.