

ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE COUNCILS IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING: A CASE FOR THE ZIMBABWE OPEN UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed at establishing the effectiveness of the Student Representative Council in Open and Distance Learning institutions. A case study was undertaken at the Zimbabwe Open University, in the Mashonaland East region which the researchers selected to understand in depth regardless of number of there being 10 regions in the ZOU. In order to make an assessment of the effectiveness of the Student Representative Council at the Zimbabwe Open University, this current study sought to find out what services were being offered by the SRC, how beneficial these services were and how effective the SRC had been in addressing student concerns. The study also aimed at unearthing the challenges which the SRC faced in their quest to provide effective student services. The respondents were drawn from all the 436 active ZOU students from the four faculties in Mashonaland East region duly registered for the August-December 2010 semester. A sample of 100 students was drawn and consisted of 10 Student Representative Council members, and 90 ordinary students. The responses from the students were solicited through the use of a questionnaire, for the ordinary students, while the student representatives' views were extracted through the use interviews. Findings revealed that at most, the SRC was not being effective in rendering the services for which they were elected. No meetings had been held with students although only one had been held with the Regional Administration. Students' grievances were obtained through a suggestion box once, but unfortunately, these had not been deliberated upon. The most dominating challenge was lack of funds and this made the majority of the SRC's objectives unattainable during the 2010 academic year.

For the effective functioning of the SRC, it is recommended that financial control of the students' monies should be devolved to regions in order to expedite disbursements to various service providers. For ease of coordination, office space should be availed to the SRC where the receive students' issues and sit for their meetings. There is also need for a vigorous campaign to have the students linked with their counterparts in universities inside and outside the country for exchange programmes.

Key Words: Open and Distance Learning, Distance Education, Student Representative Council, Student Unions