2. South Africa

Post-Apartheid Higher Education: The Role and Challenges Facing Student Activists

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Introduction and Background

South Africa celebrates ten years of democracy this year.[1] Over this period, South African higher education (HE) institutions have witnessed a transformation of institutional governance structures and a change in patterns of student activism from active opposition to governance structures to participation, despite the fact that much of the harsh realities of the pre-1994 Apartheid landscape remain. The change in student activism from direct confrontation to engagement has been widely explained as relating to the tough positions institutions took during the mid-1990s when student demonstrations were viewed as 'not constructive' and to generational factors such as different aspirations and apathy. This paper argues that the change in governance processes and change in patterns of student activism are related, and that organizational changes in the way student bodies operate and see their role are responsible for the focus on participation and engagement. Based on interviews with current student leaders, we also show that students adapted their organizational structures to the post-1994 institutional and national political contexts and that participation in governance structures at HE institutions have produced few positive outcomes for students.

Starting with an overview of the political and ideological role students played in addressing national problems in South Africa before 1994, we examine the nature of student participation and its outcomes since 1994 by looking at the emergence of new institutional governance structures that specifically provided for student input into institutional decisions. The paper shows that there has been a considerable focus at HE institutions on increasing the supply of students and in promoting responsiveness to economic demand factors. At the same time, the

central role of student politicians as architects of social change at higher education institutions has diminished with 'market' factors being blamed for educational sorting and the expulsion of large numbers of students who gained access because of increased supply, but who lack the resources to succeed.

Since most HE institutions also do not have the resources to address student demands for cheaper and more skill-intensive education and to achieve high pass rates, while responding to expansion in student numbers, we further argue that the failure to deliver outcomes, desired by student organizations through participation in governance structures, invariably means that student bodies today again face a choice with respect to their role at universities. What is important about this choice, between merely participating in structures and fighting to achieve specific outcomes, is that it reflects a tussle in student ranks about the political role they could be playing in South Africa. Looking at the relationship between university management and student organizations and how students have taken up struggles around tuition costs and financial support, we conclude by setting forth propositions about the way in which the relationship between students and university managers is likely to develop.

Part of our concern relates to how students have altered their organizational responses to the institutional problems they continue to face at universities and technikons. National retention data shows that 20-25 per cent of students continue to drop out each year. What is significant about this per centage is that it includes large numbers of students who were excluded because they could not pay their fees. For this reason, the major concern of many students is not whether they will be accepted at HE institutions, but whether they will be able to pay the costs. What is further significant about this is that student debt has crippled effective governance and offering of quality academic programmes at many institutions.

But, while student numbers, tuition fees and student debt have risen steadily over several years because subsidy funding from government has declined in real terms, and while student organizations have annually protested against exclusions and tuition increases, student organizations have on a few occasions won significant battles at universities over the last ten years in regard to exclusion, rising tuition fees and the increasing level of indebtedness. For instance, on one occasion, university authorities conceded to a judicial commission and re-registration of large numbers of excluded students after student leaders withdrew from negotiations with institutional leaders, following the death of a student in unrest-related activity in 2000 at the University of Durban Westville, and after the national Department of Education negotiated a truce that allowed for re-registration and the deferral of debt payment.

But while large numbers of students (graduates and dropouts) exit annually with huge debt at other institutions, before and after the victory at the University

of Durban-Westville, organizational defenses against indebtedness have invariably involved student leaders backing down from earlier demands for re-registration of financially excluded students and participating in decisions on who should be allowed back and on the payment conditions tied to re-registration. These decisions have generally taken the form of agreeing that students who passed their courses, but owe money, should be accommodated if their debt falls in a certain range, while those who struggle academically should be excluded. This pattern of participating in executive decisions and providing legitimacy to decisions that exclude probably 10-15 per cent of students annually can be observed at almost all higher education institutions since 1994.

At most institutions, the trend has involved initial student rejection of exclusions, protest against exclusions and then acceptance of exclusions following managerial efforts to first 'bully' student leaders through police involvement and then, through consultation, to win them over, and bind their future actions to support the exclusion of poor students from working class and rural communities. This response from student leaders stands in stark contrast to earlier times when student leaders and organizations resorted to more violent actions to highlight their grievances and to pressurize university managers. For example, for much of the 1980s and early to mid-1990s, student actions ranged from marches, to sit-ins, hostage-taking, vandalism, pickets, placard demonstrations, boycotts and disruption of administrative activities when faced with problems.

For us, this presents an intriguing puzzle. Considering that lengthy institutional protests generally resulted in HE authorities addressing and conceding to student demands to avoid lengthy and damaging image battles, we are interested in establishing why the change in student responses occurred and what students have achieved through participation in governance structures. We are also interested in establishing how students have defined their role in post-Apartheid South Africa and their contribution towards enhancing, consolidating and deepening democracy as active citizens both within and outside campuses. Further, we are interested in establishing how student leaders and university managers negotiate the 'response options' they face when addressing discontent that has variously focused on rising tuition fees (that even middle-class households struggle with), overcrowding in residences and lecture rooms, accusations that institutions develop at too slow pace, accusations about racist and discriminatory behaviour, concern about pass rates and so on and so forth. In this regard, our interest lies in reasons for a single-track approach to 'student problems' versus reasons why students have not used complimentary strategies.

It is particularly clear that student leaders, on the one hand, are caught between the traditional resistance and oppositional politics that characterized the pre-1994 period, and the consequences of their participation – rather than rejection – of institutional governance structures that make them jointly responsible for policy

issues that shape educational outcomes for other students. In terms of the first approach, it is a familiar tactic to different student generations and has a 'track record' that students fall back on. Traditionally, its success also provided a yardstick to measure the organizational muscle of student leaders. For this, and for other reasons, traditional protest actions, whether organized or spontaneous, in the past often emerged as the first method through which student frustration was expressed. These methods also continue to be widely used, as witnessed by the fact that organized and spontaneous protests involving marches and pickets occurred at almost all HE institutions over the past three years.

But, what also stands out in the present context is the strong negative reaction that such actions have elicited in the press, from government, and at institutions where fellow students and executive managers have strongly condemned protest. What is further instructive about the continuing reliance on these tactics is that organized demonstrations, over the last three years have mainly involved passive tactics and have generally not threatened academic or administrative functioning, while spontaneous actions have achieved the opposite.

What has, however, also happened is that the second approach has increasingly gained currency. For most of the early 1990s, this happened as a consequence of student leaders relying on discussions with managers to have vandalism and criminal intent charges dropped. But, the second approach is also largely a consequence of the negotiated settlement that led to the birth of the post-1994 democracy in South Africa, and renewed interest in this country in negotiations as a means of resolving resource inequalities. Before 1994, student leaders often refused to recognize management structures at universities and technikons and at times adopted a policy of non-collaboration that included not participating in institutional functions such as graduations. This policy was linked to social, political, economic and institutional realities that especially limited student autonomy at historically black higher education institutions in South Africa. While negotiation later provided a successful model for national political change our puzzle is why students follow this model and its associated trappings of participation in governance structures when the participation rules are strongly weighted against students acquiring any significant say in any policy issue that they collectively address with academics and university and technikon managers.

Data and Structure

This paper is largely conceptualized as a comment on the role of students in South African society. In preparing it, we draw together a broad range of sociological arguments on the role of students. We relate these arguments to case study data on how student leaders view the outcomes of their participation in governance structures. Regarding this, the empirical information on which this paper is based derives from data collected from students and Student Representative Council

(SRC) members at 20 institutions. This includes a survey questionnaire administered to 467 students at University of Durban-Westville (UDW) and Western Cape (UWC). This discussion focuses on the consequences of their involvement in institutional governance.

In addressing the role of students and the organizational challenges they face, this paper is divided into four sections. Section one situates our analysis within a broader socio-economic and political context. This is underlined by at least three sets of the underlying assumptions with related questions. That is, post-apartheid higher education transformation cannot be conceived in isolation from the reconstruction and development process of SA. In this regard, we need to ask the question: how can the relation between higher education transformation and reconstruction and development be conceptualized as integral and yet limitations of higher education transformation still be exposed? To what extent does this impact on the way students engage in the role they are supposed to be playing? This particularly poses a challenge to SASCO which is biggest national student organization and has a strategic and organic relationship with the ANC.

Second, student movement strategy should be understood in relation to the conditions which are internal and external to it. Thus, does raising questions about whether the composition, organization and leadership of students determine student approaches and strategies or the 'objective pre-suppositions' play any role and, if so, how are we to understand that role? Third, it is crucial to determine and analyse the effect, not only of the form of state, but also of the structure of the political terrain on the student organizational and strategic possibilities in a particular period.

Section three provides a lens through which to examine the role of students in South Africa in the post-apartheid transformation and the difficulties student organizations face in organizing support and protest. Many students at higher education institutions are members of a transitional generation whose early childhood was bound to Apartheid and political repression. But their post-Apartheid experiences are in many ways characterized by signs of increased social mobility, educational opportunities, rampant consumerism, high unemployment and new forms of youth culture that for some emphasize a 'free at last' syndrome that leads to pursuit of social pleasures. For example, segments of black youth are widely described as forming part of 'Kwaito' and 'Jam Alley' – referring to a popular local music genre and TV programme that promote black youth as sexually involved and free-spending generations.

Section four profiles the composition of the student body in order to better understand the students we discuss. What is important about the students we profile is that many are beneficiaries of the student demand for increased access to university and technikon education. We show that this has produced increased diversity in student ranks, but has also meant that a wide gap exists between

those who should have been there and those who gained access through politics. But while many students have gained access through political factors we point out that this has not necessarily added political weight to the activities of student organizations. Most incoming students today are women who also take extra classes to address academic development gaps, enroll in non-Humanities fields, and reject politics, because it affects educational and occupational outcomes.

Section five examines their organizational responses since 1994 and shows that much of the post-apartheid reorganization in higher education has involved an explicit focus on process and stability issues, and not on equitable outcomes. We show that student organizations have contributed to stabilizing higher education because the dominant student organization, the South African Student Congress (SASCO),[2] saw its role as both 'complimentary and confrontational', meaning that it helped to strengthen initiatives aimed at implementing and defending or challenging the educational policies of the ruling government and its transformation process. However, this student organization has not managed to strike a sufficient balance between the objectives. Finally, we argue that educational sorting has meant that the prime beneficiaries of increased student access are also the prime losers because the level of investment into HE institutions has made high dropout rates inevitable and raises important questions about the future strategies students could use to influence outcomes more positively for their peers.

Socio-economic and Political Context of the Post-1994 South Africa

Rather than conducting a comprehensive analysis of the post-1994 South African situation, we simply highlight a set of conditions that could potentially structure and influence the role and challenges facing students while recognizing the dynamic character of students as agents of change. South Africa's transition to democracy came as a result of a negotiated settlement. For the ANC, as it stood in 1997, neither the democratic movement nor the apartheid regime had emerged as an outright victor at the beginning of the negotiations.[3]

The dynamics of the negotiation process had the effect of politically marginalizing previously important social groups such as black students and youth (Badat, Barends, Wolpe 1995:13; see also SASCO Political Report 1996). Students became spectators and were glued to television in order to keep abreast of new developments or outcomes of the negotiation process, to such an extent that the effect of this is still manifest in the student movement, particularly its inability to clearly identify a role for itself in the post-apartheid transformation.

Contrary to a widely held liberal view, South Africa's negotiated settlement was neither a miracle nor exceptional. Instead, it was a consequence of many factors including the sacrifices, long protracted struggles of the downtrodden which spanned over three centuries. Its unique feature is that it took place against

the backdrop of the dissolution of the Soviet bloc of countries under one superpower, the Soviet Union, at the end of Cold of War. However, this did not mean, as Nzimande (2003), cautioned a freer and conflict-free world, as the advocates of benign globalization and 'end of history' ideologues would want us to believe. South Africa's negotiated transition shares commonalities with transitions in developing countries (Africa, Latin America and Asia) in the 1980s. For instance, these transitions were accompanied by low-intensity conflicts, warfare and attempts by the old ruling bloc to exploit differences among oppressed people (ethnic, religious, language, class, gender and racial contradictions) to fragment and weaken the democratic and oppressed forces so as to produce of a particular kind of product.

The apartheid regime particularly intensified its low-conflict warfare, promoted violence and attempted to create hatred of the democratic movement among the oppressed themselves (Nzimande 2003). The democratic movement foiled these attempts, but a tone for compromises had already been set regarding the establishment of a government of national unity, the entrenchment of some of the rights of the existing public service, including the security forces, the judiciary and para-statals, and the establishment of provinces with original powers. This meant that the democratic movement inherited the apartheid state machinery that was intact, orderly within its own rules, and with the majority resolved to continue in their positions and any attempt to transform these would have met with resistance from within. For Nzimande, the democratic movement did not in its theory, strategies and conceptions of democratic South Africa plan for these compromises which profoundly conditioned the character of the reconstruction process, including education.

South Africa's negotiated transition involved a compromise and trade-off between inclusive political democracy, while leaving the economic structure intact (Nzimande 2003). This resulted in a democracy with political power but no economic power. The fact that the transition was negotiated was not a consequence of an overthrow of the apartheid regime reflected the prevailing balance of class power, and implied recognition of white's inclusion in the social structure and their property rights (Gelb 2005: 368). Such business demands helped to frame the negotiation process and a resumption of capital inflows was one of the top priorities. On the other hand, there were social and political imperatives to reverse racial discrimination in the distribution of wealth, income and goods and services in both public and private sectors.

According to Gelb (2005:369) the top priority in deracializing economic power was 'capital reform' (equivalent to land reform), or opening the ownership and management of private corporations and the direction of state institutions and public corporations to the black middle classes, obtaining access to power, influence and remuneration. The negotiated nature of the transition meant that capital

reform would necessarily be an incremental, market-focused process engaging with current owners of capital. A second imperative was the reallocation of public expenditure on goods and services to reflect the racial composition of the popular, to address social exclusion and poverty.

Some of the landmarks of the negotiated transition include the adoption of the Interim Constitution, the 1994 elections, the very act of dislodging the apartheid regime from power, the establishment and adoption of the Constitution with a single South African citizenship and which was based on the principles of democracy, non-sexism and non-racialism, the abolition of both the tricameral and Bantustan systems and legislating equality before the law including gender equality. These could be seen as contributing towards addressing the national question and in laying the basis for nation-building and reconciliation, cornerstones of the reconstruction of society.

During the first decade of freedom, the democratic state put strong emphasis on nation-building and reconciliation — an imperative of stabilizing democracy with numerous consequences. For example, the working class and poor had to abandon or retreat from struggling for their own demands while at the same time both local and global capital forces including elements within the democratic movement took advantage of and exploited a space by playing a dominant role in shaping and influencing the new state regarding economic restructuring. At the same time, SACP (2005) argued that nation-building, reconciliation and the imperative of stabilizing democracy served as a shield behind which global and domestic capital forces began to advance and consolidate their class interests and agenda and to forge an elite pact — a class compromise which required an offensive against the working class, the poor, and the public sector.

This has involved both attempts at major restructuring of the economy, including the labour market — mass retrenchments, casualisation, informalisation, privatisation, and the fragmentation of the public and parastatal sector (see also Desai and Pithouse 2004: 845). In this regard, it is women who have borne the brunt of retrenchments and casualization in two ways: firstly, as direct victims, but secondly, as the ones who normally have to face and deal with the reality of poverty in the household. However, it would be wrong to project women primarily as victims. Millions of working class and poor women have been and continue to be involved in the liberation struggle (SACP 200; see also Daniel and Habib 2003; Terreblanche 2004; Desai 2003).

The current South Africa's socio-economic trajectory is contradictory. It is acknowledged that if the 'dynamic of inclusion and exclusion' continues along the same trajectory, it will pose a major threat to our democracy as it enters its second decade of freedom — especially if the 'negatives' overwhelm the 'positives'.[4] On the one hand, there is a systemic persistence of poverty, unemployment and underemployment — a point that has been underlined by various re-

search projects, including that which informed the government's recent ten-year self-review. According to Bond (2004), unemployment rose from 16 per cent in 1995 to 30 per cent in 2002. Adding frustrated job seekers to that figure brings the total unemployed to 43 per cent. Youth unemployment stood at 47 per cent. Worsening poverty and rising water and electricity prices together accounted for 30 per cent of the income of those earning less than R500 per month: ten million people had their water disconnected, according to national government surveys, and ten million were also victims of electricity disconnections (see also Desai 2002; Terreblanche 2003; Desai and Pithouse 2004).

In addition, according to Bond (2004), a government agency, Statistics South Africa, released a report in October 2002 confirming that in real terms, the average black "African" household income declined by 19 per cent from 1995 to 2000, while white household income rose by 15 per cent. The average black household earned one-sixth as much the average white household in 2000, down from a quarter in 1995. Households with less than R670 per month income (mainly black African, coloured and of Asian descent) increased from 20 per cent of the population in 1995 to 28 per cent in 2000. Across the racial divides, the poorest half of all South Africans earned just 9.7 per cent of national income, down from 11.4 per cent in 1995. The richest 20 per cent earned 65 per cent of all income (Statistics South Africa, Earning and Spending in South Africa (Pretoria: Statistics South Africa 2002; Business Day 2002 November 22).

On the other hand, in 2004, the country achieved macroeconomic stability, which was firmly entrenched with the fiscal deficit being consistently low, inflation was within the 3-6 per cent target range, net foreign reserves stood at R11.4 billion up from minus R25 billion in 1994; and the prime overdraft was down from 25.5 per cent in 1994 to 11 per cent. The economy grew at an estimated rate of 3.8 per cent in 2004, forecasted at 4 per cent for 2005. Investment by government and the private sector improved from 14 per cent to 16 per cent. In mid-2005, business confidence was said to be at an all time high.

The current socio-economic situation is characterised by shifts from the Reconstruction Development Programme (RDP) to Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) to the post-2002 anti-privatisation era of 'developmental and interventionist change'. Whereas there is no consensus as to whether three policies represent a shift or not, there is no doubt, though that they (especially GEAR) have been a site of struggle and the object of resentment especially from the working class and poor and student movement who blamed it for the current social inequalities. GEAR was imposed and cast as 'non-negotiable' and promised, among other things, to create about 400,000 jobs by the year 2000 – which obviously did not happen. It has been described as a voluntary structural programme. Although the realisation that getting economic fundamentals right will not on its own eradicate social inequalities, at least the early obsession with this

objective is beginning to make way for a broader and all-encompassing approach which government seems to be taking. However, the key question is to what extent is this shift to developmental and interventionist policies a sustainable and effective means to address dynamics of inclusion and exclusion and all forms of social inequalities.

Perspectives on the Role of Students and HE Institutions

There is a voluminous body of international research on the political role of students in developed and underdeveloped countries. Most of this writing draws on the distribution of power and social control in a particular country and argues that universities by virtue of their special role in maturation provide students with an important site in which to engage in transformative activism and in which to foster democratic civic notions. In these perspectives, students are not viewed as merely passive receptors of information, but as individuals who contribute to society's development through active involvement, despite the wide acknowledgement that while some parts of higher education are devoted to producing knowledgeable well rounded individuals, others are equally concerned with producing narrow trades' people.

University education is further viewed as an opportunity for students to use their status, knowledge and sense of freedom to engage in diverse activities and to critically address pressing university and societal problems. It also affords them space for the emergence of radical and militant leaders. Among these latter students, a small number, who act as 'shock troopers', provide leadership through democratically elected or ad-hoc voluntary structures and use methods that range from street protest to negotiation and abstention to highlight their views and to influence others. However, the majority who remain politically inactive, typically adapt to the institutions' dominant system of values and norms, do not 'rock the boat', and act consistent with their end goals of graduating and using HE as a social mobility mechanism. For most students, this goal is consistent with their aspirations of benefiting from HE by getting a good job, starting a family and enjoying consumerism.

In so far as these research results have been applied to South African students, there has generally been agreement that HE, with some exceptions, continues to be for the elite. Thus, even among Coloureds and Africans, who on average are the poorest in South Africa, and among whom the middle class group is still relatively underdeveloped, it is clear that most university graduates come from areas where home-ownership has become the norm. It is also obvious that while there are many examples of poor students from working-class and rural communities succeeding at universities and technikons, it is equally true that many of these proletarian students drop out of university and take many years to complete their education since this is often interspersed with full-time employment.

For most of these students, the main reason for dropout is their working- class status and the fact that available student funding barely covers tuition fees, and leaves most of them owing more than they paid toward their studies.

However, while all the students view HE as a key to opportunities that will improve their labour- market position, three basic propositions exist on the broader purpose of HE institutions and role of students in South Africa. The first perspective, which focuses on supply-side factors (and pays homage to an early student demand that the doors of learning and culture should remain open), is influenced by functionalist discourse. This argues that universities and technikons fulfil both a labour-market and welfare function by minimising unemployment and providing some skills and mobility prospects. In this view, universities and technikons are essentially sponges that take in large numbers of student at the behest of politicians and student protest groups, but fail to provide them with real opportunities for educational success and contribute to educational and labour- market problems.[5] As captured in a comment on student unrest, the main reason for the internal failure of institutions invariably relates to an inability on the part of the governing party to allocate sufficient resources to help HE institutions promote the life chances of HE recruits, due to competing investment claims.

The second perspective views HE institutions as a microcosm of the larger society and argues that the strain of transformation is fought out between contending forces within institutions with students playing a crucial role as change agents in using their knowledge to articulate views about a more just society.[6] In this view, student struggles are not about forces external to HE, but are inherent in resource scarcity within HE institutions and the relation between this and investment and allocation decisions by the governing party. In contrast to the pessimistic view of students as drains on society, this perspective further depicts students as key players in civil society who contribute positively to the development of society and help to extend notions of civic engagement and democracy by using their knowledge to improve broader life chances.

The third perspective sees HE institutions as demand-oriented in terms of serving the labour market and as providing narrow technical education that contributes to student apathy. In this perspective, students neither drain societal resources, nor do much to advance social needs. They rather act in their narrow self-interest, advance consumerism and indirectly contribute to more general wellbeing by paying taxes, but make little active commitment to developing society. On the other hand, HE institutions become more demand-and-vocation-oriented and develop new programmes, emphasize different outcomes and try to establish more links with business and industry in order to help promote economic growth.

These perspectives all emphasize the production function of HE and, in part, whether and how students contribute to society. The production feature does not

however exhaust the role of HE institutions as captured in South African writings. Aside from these production functions, HE institutions have also played a vital role in addressing the 'student problem' of groups of students engaging in revolutionary actions and the political problem of ensuring that HE institutions remain academically sound and politically stable. Historically, HE institutions in South Africa, with one exception, remained true to their conservative roots, but allowed students room to 'find their feet'. Thus, especially white students, in the past, were able to use their status to advance their mobility and the claims of universities to be autonomous institutions, to sporadically protest against inequalities in South Africa because English universities, in particular, espoused liberal philosophies and academic freedom and imbued students with values of respect and fairness.

On the other hand, black students, whose university education was more tightly controlled by the Apartheid state, did the same under much harsher institutional conditions and faced more direct state reprisals, and repression, and greater resource scarcity. They also did so in contexts in which various leftwing ideologies such as liberation theology, black consciousness, Pan-Africanism and Marxism had taken root and co-existed alongside more conservative and orthodox views of economic, social and political engagement. In this sense, while HE institutions have always been connected through their leaders to the ruling government, the purpose of production activities never solely related to producing apathetic students, but rather emphasized that students, as consumers of HE services, had choices, a degree of freedom in which to exercise these choices and a responsibility to help contribute to developing the society.

However, since economic and political factors always limited black advancement, many participated in development activities and student politics, although many students also did not participate. For example, between 1960 and 1980 black students at white institutions largely refrained from political activities, while most other students at black and white institutions did not involve themselves in associational activities, despite considerable resource scarcity. Indeed, while the romantic view of student struggles during the 1970s and 1980s suggests that students acted in unison when opposing Apartheid, the reality was vastly different. While opposition to Apartheid was widespread and mostly fomented by 'professional Marxist revolutionaries' and 'nationalists' (the 'shock troopers'), who believed that student interests were harmoniously aligned and that universities were instruments of the Apartheid order, and structures that could be turned against 'their master's, this unity was often assumed.

One often-cited case that illustrates the folly of this utopian view concerns developments at the most radical anti-Apartheid university during the 1980s: the University of the Western Cape, whose Rector, reflecting the views of a significant segment of academic staff, grandly proclaimed that the institution would

transform itself from the 'University of the Working Class' into 'The Intellectual Home of the Left' and become a 'People's University' dedicated to overthrowing Apartheid. In this view, students at the university were a united class whose main aim were not academic graduation, but contributing to the struggle against racial and class inequalities in South Africa. This recognized that Apartheid defined the role and contribution of students and that black students could not stand apart from their social context. Thus, student leaders and political organizations argued that black students were first members of their society and communities and secondly operated as students. Conceptually, this reduced the role of students to their social context, but obscured the connection among South African students between ethnicity and social class, financial difficulties, political involvement, field of study and a host of other variables.

But, not only do students come from different social and cultural environments and have different goals, student bodies were also often divided on the best way through which opposition should be expressed, if at all. That this should be so is not surprising. Students in South Africa attend three types of HE institutions: historically black, historically white English or historically white Afrikaans. Historically, these institutions were separated by their relations to the governing party as defined by language and in cultural and political terms. In turn, their student bodies owed different allegiances to the governing party and expressed their support or frustration against the governing party and its policies in terms of these allegiances, with students at Afrikaans universities and technikons at times venting their support for racially based policies. What this point partly underscores is the simple fact that students in South Africa were fragmented. Many also still come from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds that have largely been left untouched by South Africa's transition.

As before, many of these students are also disillusioned with politics and express antipathy to actions that disrupt academic programmes. Various journalists and political commentators have highlighted that many students are more concerned with social bashes, finding jobs, completing their studies and paying off debt than financial difficulties of fellow students and that they show dissatisfaction with the public demonstration methods used by national political student organizations. Students have also been described as disinterested in politics, disillusioned with the manner in which protest and negotiations take place and as wanting everyday issues addressed.

Some[7] further argued that this student apathy relates to a view that student representatives cannot solve many of the day-to-day issues affecting students. Certainly, prevailing historical factors limit the likelihood that accumulated student debt can be written off, as student organizations once demanded. Nor can higher education institutions create jobs or eliminate racism. Disinterest in politics is possible because students lack confidence in their representatives, because they

find past protest activities alienating and because recent key criticisms of SRC members and of members of political organizations concern the view that they are riding on the 'gravy train' and engage in corruption. Many have also been accused of being incompetent, not possessing basic organizational skills and needing leadership training.

Factors that Influence Student Behaviour

It is indeed possible that such factors have affected student interest in broad social and political activities. It is also possible that this may relate to differences in social upbringing since it is clear that black students today tend to play a more dominant role in political matters at all institutions where they have a tangible presence. Indeed, while it is beyond the scope of the present paper to comment on political socialization, it is evident that for many current black students whose early childhood was rooted in Apartheid, their educational socialization at secondary level often involved rapid movement from under-resourced schools to semi-private high schools and moving from townships to suburbs for better quality education. Along with those who are used to private education and those from schools in white areas, they now share university places with small numbers who progressed through disadvantaged schools and enjoyed less privileged education. In this regard, students for whom the character of education has remained the same since 1994, despite huge investments in post-Apartheid schooling, find themselves lumped with others whose educational and political socialization differs significantly.

What this means is that HE in South Africa now has to cater for a more diverse group of students than before and have to facilitate their adaptation to university life. But while they differ, they also show signs of accommodating new expectations. Thus, while all are exposed to the same consumer products and images directed at youth, all do not have the same economic security, or desire the same cultural artifacts, or share the same political views, background, or social orientations. But they also participate in the same youth market and having something like a common youth culture, in which there is a concerted battle for their hearts and minds and for encouraging values of individualism and the pursuit of money and material symbols.

But while their aspirations seem heavily materialistic, they also do not all face the same futures. As before, for many students the future is uncertain. There are signs of graduate unemployment in various fields, and that graduates take time to secure jobs. Many students believe that affirmative action will threaten job opportunities for them. Many wish to escape the introduction of community service that now applies to health professionals. Many are not sure whether they will complete their academic studies. Many also expect university education to include sufficient time for social activity. And, many believe that diversity needs to be

promoted and that they share a common future, but also see little future in political activity, or believe that they can live off the political activity of others. In this latter view, some students believe that black students are best placed to win institutional gains and that they need not actively support particular struggles since gains apply to all.

For these reasons, the 'Kwaito' and 'Jam Alley' generations which prefer social to political activities are in many ways similar to white students who come from different social backgrounds and life experiences, but have similar educational and occupational aspirations and depend on university and technikon education for mobility. Many are also viewed as marginalized by a society that invests too little in their occupational futures and are therefore believed to be reluctant to participate in national government elections. However, because political organizations require their support, their impact on universities has also been significant. Consider the following: in 1988, the Student Representative Council (SRC) at the University of the Western Cape organized three functions for students, compared to seven organized fifteen years later by the SRC. In 1988, the functions related to 'welcoming first-year students', an end-of-term ball and an end-of-year function. In 2003, the functions included two Jazz festivals, two beauty pageants and the traditional welcome and farewell. Furthermore, in 2003 the SRC, as in previous years, made money available to a broad range of clubs for day-events, tours, balls and other social events. But whereas this shows a sharp increase in sponsored events at the University of the Western Cape, the number of events is small compared to those offered at some other institutions where student leaders openly argue that it is their job to 'entertain' their fellow students.

For this reason, several SRCs have over the last few years begun to hold their 'major bash' – to which 'youth stars' are invited because students need 'top performances' – just before the annual student elections in order to spur the future electoral chances of those who wish to return to office, or to give an impetus to the organization they represent. Several SRCs also focus exclusively on social events and argue that such events constitute the mainstay of student activity. The pulling power of such events for SRCs and student political organization is all the more obvious, given the fact that it is now customary for black student political organizations to refine their tactics in order to appeal to the "Kwaito' generation. Thus, almost all now combine political and social programmes to maintain student interest in politics and typically link a short political programme to a social event. One other area in which this has also happened is student elections in which manifesto readings have changed significantly with each candidate, at most institutions, only being offered two minutes to present reasons why they should be elected. This has directed attention from the issues students represent to popularity contests between individuals and gimmicks through which students try to grab the limelight.

But, while fewer social events took place before, and while beauty pageants were viewed as 'cattle shows' and outlawed at several universities before 1994, in many ways segments of the present generation are much the same as before, albeit in a different context. Thus, while politically minded students tackled the apartheid state before 1994, at most black universities social fragmentation and differences in the goals students desired from university education still revealed a lack of unity. For this reason, groups of politically-minded students at times using coercion and violence through the operation of 'disruption squads' to enforce class boycotts at some institutions and to ensure that the romantic notion of unified opposition to Apartheid by the oppressed was maintained. While not empirically established and while neither motives nor assumed social class behaviour are immutable, these divisions were largely attributed to differences in social standing of students with students from proletarian backgrounds often projected as pro-boycott (along with a small group of radical students from middle class backgrounds) compared to students with higher social standing who were often more interested in realizing the academic objectives of their university study and who wanted to study without interruptions to their academic programmes.

However, while pro-and anti-boycott positions as a way of highlighting collective opposition to Apartheid policies marked some differences in student ranks during the 1980s, one simple fact that most commentators, who observe student struggles, have highlighted since 1994 concerns an obvious change in the way especially students at historically black universities have responded to institutional and political student issues. In its simplest organizational form, at historically black universities, this has involved a shift away from using mass meetings, often attended by less than ten per cent of a student body who decided on student responses to institutional and national grievances on behalf of everyone, to using a broader range of decision-making measures that minimize the influence of a segment in decision-making and strategy formation. Embedded in this switch is an implicit shift from what some viewed as 'mob-rule' to more consultative, time- consuming and less confrontational engagement between students and university managers.

What is significant about this shift is that it points to a move away from pressure politics to a pre-occupation with administrative and management-related issues and places increased emphasis on the development of procedures and decision-making mechanisms to deal with a broad range of issues. What is further significant about the shift is that it constitutes a response to the view that working class kids who have working class problems at HE institutions were holding institutions and other students hostage by resorting to undemocratic 'mob-rule' procedures and that the shift allows HE institutions the opportunity to deal with the 'students problem' as a problem of a segment of students. In this way,

'student problems' become issues that do not affect the majority and do not interrupt academic programmes.

An example of this is a march of 200 students at the University of Cape Town (UCT) who demanded that arrangements should be made to allow them to register for academic studies in 2001. Asked to comment on public radio,[8] a UCT spokesperson, remarked that the students had failed to secure financial aid the previous year, but had nonetheless decided to study at UCT. As such, the march represented the actions of a small band that were responsible for their own situation and in no way indicated unhappiness with the core academic and business activities at UCT. Further, while the students' case merited empathy, it did not imply that student representatives were organizing political support on their behalf or that the institution would be affected by student activism. Instead, the incident was regrettable.

This depiction of a student response to an education-related grievance contrasts starkly with the focus of many earlier student struggles, which were about political discrimination, social injustice and economic inequality. Indeed, while education-specific grievances were not neglected, the critical role students played during the 1970s and 1980s in promoting social and political change involved consciousness-raising activities to create a groundswell of opposition to government policies and building strong civic orientations by fostering links between community organizations and students. Student activities also extended to playing a leading role in providing organizational assistance to the emerging black trade union movement during the 1970s and to providing coherence to social struggles by pointing to an ideological base for the promotion of inequality and by putting forward alternative social visions. As demonstrated by police beatings on campuses, the imprisonment of student leaders and the fear and repulsion that brutality induced, Apartheid in South Africa became the hegemonic project that glued liberal and radical and black and some white students together despite often stark differences in terms of social background, political orientation, ideology, strategy, approaches and organizational methods.

What the UCT incident, by contrast, illustrates is that the focus on reducing financial concerns of students to the 'problem' of a segment effectively demobilizes, and uses negotiations as a means to address issues often elicits concern, but also demobilizes student protesters because involvement involves following procedures to address problems. For student leaders, this model of student involvement in university affairs during the 1990s is essentially new and very much a consequence of changing times. Social context previously placed some students in opposition to the state and to university managers and gave rise to the establishment of non-inclusive decision-making bodies and abstention politics because student leaders invariably rejected separate organizational structures. However, changes in the political landscape in 1994 ushered in changes in the HE landscape

involving the introduction of structures that gave students joint decision-making powers in relation to the distribution of resources.

The opening up of international opportunities to student organizations in the sporting and cultural arena and demand that universities and technikons pay greater attention to 'student affairs' and the quality of the student experience also meant that the way in which higher education authorities viewed students changed after 1994. This occurred especially at historically black institutions where the post-1994 changes have often involved calls to improve the quality of student experience in order to address the cumulative disadvantage of taking in large numbers of poorly prepared students and trying to develop them academically in a resource scarred environment. But, since these students, at many institutions, are further divided for the most part from other more affluent students by race, language and class differences it also meant that students could no longer maintain the illusion that the institutional interests and grievances of all students were aligned.

Composition of the Student Body

Much of the above touches on the question of the changing composition of the student body, and their financial status. For the most part, the demographic composition of the student body has changed significantly since 1980 and is beginning to reflect the composition of the national population. As described in the 2001 National Plan for Higher Education the most striking change in the growth of the HE student body concerns the enrolment of black students which increased from 191 000 to 343 000 between 1993 and 1999, i.e. by 152000 (or from 40 per cent to 80 per cent, and the enrolment and distribution of African students who in 1999 constituted 59 per cent of the total head count enrolments in higher education. This headcount enrolment, in 1999, compared with a national population distribution, which indicated that Africans constituted 76 per cent of the total population. Concerning their distribution,

In 1993, 49 per cent of African students were enrolled in the historically black institutions, 13per cent in the historically white institutions, and 38 per cent in the two distance education institutions. This had changed by 1999 to 23 per cent in the historically black institutions, 41per cent in historically white institutions, and 27 per cent in the distance education institutions. As this indicates there has been a shift in enrolment of African students to historically white institutions. This is a direct result of the availability of places at these institutions and a threefold increase in the number of African students at universities over the last ten years and a fourfold increase in their enrolment at technikons over this period.

More specifically, between 1993 and 1999 African student enrolments: (a) Decreased by 7 000 (or 9 per cent) in the historically black universities; (b) Increased by 22,000 (or 138 per cent) in the historically black technikons; (c) In-

creased by 10,000 (or 100 per cent) in the historically white English-medium universities; (d) Increased by 56,000 (or 1120 per cent) in the historically white Afrikaans-medium universities; (e) Increased by 49,000 (or 490 per cent) in the historically white technikons; (e) Increased by 22 000 (or 31 per cent) in the two dedicated distance education institutions.

What is also important about these changes in enrolment is that in the post-1994 period, as mentioned above, there was a shift away from enrolment at black universities to white universities who offered a better quality student experience, higher academic standards, greater academic and effective support, improved mobility opportunities, a more stable institutional environment, better accommodation and improved chances of finding donor support for studies.[9]

Four other points are noteworthy:

Much of the growth in black students at white Afrikaans-medium universities occurred in distance education programmes and in e-campus programmes. This implicitly means that large numbers of black students are not properly integrated into institutional affairs and lack a voice, except where representation is provided for sectional groups in institutional matters.

The increasing diversity of the national student body resulted in an increase in the number of international students from about 10,000 in 1993 to 43,000 (7 per cent of the national student body) in 2002.[10] What stands out about these students is the fact that most come from SADC countries, attend the distance education university and historically white English universities and international students constitute almost 30 per cent of doctoral candidates.

The growth in black student numbers has been accompanied by a decline in white student enrolments. This fell from 222,000 in 1993 to 164,000 in 1999 — a decline of 58,000 (or 26 per cent). In terms of total enrolments, gender equity has been achieved in the higher education system. This is a consequence of significant differences in headcount growth since 1993. Whereas female headcount enrolments increased by 89,000 (or 44 per cent) between 1993 and 1999, that is, from 202,000 to 291,000, by contrast, male headcount enrolments grew by only 2000 (or one per cent) between 1993 and 1999. The main result of these different growth rates is that the proportion of female students in the higher education system has risen from 43 per cent in 1993 to 52 per cent in 1999. However, gender equity continues to remain a problem in the technikons, where the proportion of female enrolments increased from 32 per cent to 42 per cent in 1999. Furthermore, as with black students, the spread of female students across different programme areas remains uneven with female students clustered in the humanities and under-represented in science, engineering and technology, business and commerce, and in postgraduate programmes. The majority of students (82 per cent) surveyed in the study indicated that the SRCs should promote debates on equity, gender and non-sexism on campuses.

Concerning the financial status of students, no detailed empirical data are available on income levels of parents, their educational and occupational background as well as resources they have and plans to finance their children's HE education. The result is that very little empirical information is available on social class positions although there is a broad range of indirect indicators that is suggestive and demonstrative of significant divergence in social class positions. Among these factors, 80 per cent study full-time and 20 per cent part-time, with most part-time students involved in undergraduate studies. While some of these students qualify for tertiary education due to age exemptions, most accumulate money in order to pay for their education. This is largely a consequence of their financial status.

Besides, national socio-economic data indicate sharp variance in average income levels of black and white South Africans, which largely underscores the point that race remains an indicator of social class in South Africa. Another indicator relates to debt levels of black and white students that further illustrate the difference. While the extent of this debt varies at any given moment during a financial year, student debt at historically black institutions reached R500 million at one point in 1998. Considering that this total was almost equal to the state subsidy allocated to four historically black universities in 1998, it is easy to see why student debt was responsible for huge debts owed to banks by most of these institutions in 1999 and the need for urgent government action to minimize debt levels that accumulated steadily from 1993.

That this debt is indicative of an inability to pay fees is not disputed, although it has been argued that some student leaders and student organizations, by the mid-1990s, did not accept the notion that students should share in the costs of their higher education. This latter position relates to a demand for free education, which some student leaders believed should be a policy goal of the African National Congress. Nor is it disputed that the inability to pay is largely found at historically black institutions or that probably more than 50 per cent of students at historically black institutions need loans and scholarships to afford HE. For this reason, students at these institutions were initially the main beneficiaries of loans provided to students by government through its national loan scheme (National Student Financial Aid Scheme - NSFAS) introduced in 1994. This scheme has to date supported more than 300,000 students although it does not cover all student costs. In fact, most students owe considerable amounts because the scheme allocates a minimum of about R2000 and a maximum of about R18,000 to each student, with an average of about R6000 to students whose annual tuition, accommodation and living costs vary from R25,000 to R40,000. The majority of students (80.5 per cent) indicated that the SRC should play a strong role in determining tuition fees.

The changing composition of students has changed that of the SRC. Compared to 1994 when only a handful of SRCs at HWUs and HWTs had black SRC members, all today have black SRC members, with the leadership of SRCs at most technikons today being composed solely of black students. One consequence is that black (African) students hold about 80 per cent of leadership positions at HE institutions. Along with the increase in the number of international students (who numbered 42,000 in 2002) some of these students (about 2 per cent) come from African countries other than South Africa. One other interesting demographic aspect relates to the small number of black women members at HBUs vs. the larger number of women at Afrikaans universities. For example, from 2000 to 2003 UDW had four women SRC members whereas the University of Potchefstroom had 20. This difference, *inter alia*, is partly a result of SASCO's failure to implement its ANC derived resolution (except in the Eastern Cape) that 30 per cent of its SRC members should be female. More broadly, research results show that student leaders attribute the low level of female participation at HBUs and HBTs to culture and lack of interest in student politics among female students.[11]

Student Participation: A Historical Overview

Historically, students were excluded from participating in decision-making at higher education institutions in South Africa although they nonetheless contested governance at institutions. From the outset, governance structures at universities were exclusionary in the sense that Council included business and state representatives but excluded student representatives. At historically black institutions (HBUs) where all-white councils were appointed by the State President (Kgware 1977).

Overall, this composition, at HBUs reflected the limited role then assigned to blacks at universities. Most HBUs were established in 1960. Initially, legislation provided for two main types of racially differentiated governance structures at these newly established institutions: a white council, a black advisory council, a white senate and a black advisory senate (Kgware 1977). These racially exclusive formations were opposed by staff at several institutions who called for mixed bodies that did not duplicate functions (Bhana 1977). Along with this external control over HBUs, in particular, the activities of SRCs were more tightly controlled. In the 1960s, SRC constitutions at some black universities were invariably written by management and required that SRCs restrict their roles to social, academic and administrative concerns (Maseko 1994). In doing this, SRC members represented students at functions, were viewed as ambassadors of institutions and occasionally selected by institutional managers. This often gave rise to resentment and meant that SRC members at black universities were sometimes viewed as stooges (Bhana 1977).

Where SRCs existed, the scope of their functions was limited since several institutions and government demanded that student actions be subject to their approval. At times, this contributed to the student view that the existence of SRCs implied student acceptance of government restrictions (see Bhana 1977, van der Ross 1977). In other cases, students refused to form SRCs on terms that did not suit them (Maseko 1994). This policy of non-collaboration presented councils with numerous challenges since various student bodies implicitly rejected the legal basis on which councils governed institutions. Apartheid higher education institutional governance structures (in particular councils) were accordingly often described as illegitimate and unrepresentative, and viewed as 'objects of resentment' (Badat 1999).

For students, this had enormous implications. White universities were effectively state-aided institutions[12] while black universities were ethnic institutions. Since each was further controlled externally (despite the existence of institutional autonomy) students' ability to influence institutional processes was always limited and to some extent dependent on national political changes. In response, student dissent and national student political movements have been a feature of the South African higher education landscape since the early 1920s. The National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), founded in 1924, presents the first example of a national student political movement that struggled over several decades to increase student influence at universities.[13] Mostly, this struggle was first carried by SRCs at English white and black universities[14] and by left-oriented clubs and societies that were influenced by Stalinist, Trotskyite and Leninist philosophies. Small liberal student groupings also often expressed a normative opposition to discriminatory practices or policies that limited individual actions.

This opposition took three principal forms:

1) SRCs generally accepted their role as voice institutions and represented student views on administrative and academic issues (in conjunction with student-based faculty boards and class representatives on academic issues to deans and senate).

2) SRCs and other student bodies addressed the implications of administrative decisions related to timetables, accommodation, tuition and residence fees with Registrars and other secretariat-level staff.

3) SRCs and other student bodies used protest action to highlight their opinions on policies regarding enrolment, discrimination, government policies and other social and political issues.

This last set of actions contributed to some SRCs rejecting the ideological-political basis upon which black universities, in particular, were established and to propositions that SRCs were weapons for the promotion of student activism

and not merely structures that represented students on academic and administrative matters (Maseko 1994; Badat 1999). It is significant to note that the formation of the most significant black student political organization, the South African Students Organization (SASO) in 1968 resulted in calls for a black principal, black wardens, black representation on student disciplinary committees and on university planning committees, black representation on senates, and black representation on councils (Kgware 1977; van der Ross 1977). Students, at a small number of institutions, also took up the cudgels and engaged in violent confrontation with police and security officers to back up their claims. By the mid-1980s, this partly led to the branding of SRCs at some HBUs as creations of political formations and as subordinates to political student organizations and organs of 'people's power' (Gwala 1987; Maseko 1994).

A periodic effect, this consequence is a function of the rejection of the idea that SRCs in the 1970s and 1980 play the role of a liaison organ for institutions that communicate student grievances.[15]

Instead, SRCs at some HBUs came to be viewed as conscientization structures that informed students about the false ideology they previously internalised and facilitated their empowerment.[16] In this formulation, student leaders were strongly influenced by the views of Paulo Freire, Lenin and development theorists that highlighted participation as a key mechanism through which to effect empowerment. Accordingly, SRCs in the 1970-1994 period essentially functioned as cultural institutions that initiated student protest activities, provided the cultural-political unifiers (as legitimately elected representative structures) to lead students and influence university structures.

Collectively, these functions increased the social role of SRCs and the areas in which SRCs represented students. For example, these areas were no longer simply restricted to university concerns. The areas instead incorporated national concerns (Cele *et al* 2001). Further, they were political and economic in nature and intended to unify all students in common action, rather than highlight sectional or non-universal cultural concerns.[17] Thus, by the late 1980s, student demands had expanded into calls for the creation of the new and alternative 'organs of people power'.[18] This demand applied to all spheres of South African society, but in higher education institutions, it included calls for the establishment of broad transformation forums (BTFs) to democratise universities and to increase black influence. In addition, students argued that there was a need to democratise councils and senates by changing the composition and representation of constituencies and by allowing for decision-making processes that were democratic and participatory (NCHE 1996).

Following concerted protest and institutional struggles to establish black-led SRCs and to participate in institutional decision-making, these last demands were eventually conceded in the early 1990s. The initial vehicles were Broad Transfor-

mation Forums (BTF's).[19] These structures which brought together worker, student, civil society, academic and management representatives emerged at almost all institutions to help restore confidence in governance, to contain conflict and to legitimate efforts aimed at institutional transformation.[20] Among the few universities at which BTFs were not established, the University of Stellenbosch (US) stands out as an institution which had very close ties to the ruling government and which subsequently changed institutional management structures, policies, programmes and staff composition at a snails pace. Beyond this, few BTFs were formed at technikons due to the tight control management exerts at these institutions and the limited historic role that SRCs and non-business representatives played.

They sprung from the continued efforts by students at specifically black universities to discredit management, to contest fee increases, to demand increased access to institutions, better accommodation, different governance structures and the involvement of 'people's representatives' in institutional activities[21] (Johnson 2000).

Collectively, this challenged management's prerogative to make decisions without adequate consultation and without the involvement of those most affected by decisions. Mostly the organized groups such as students, workers and unionized academics argued that effective participation is one of the key criteria of any democratic process and that democracy and increased involvement of black staff were crucial in effectively steering higher education institutions. In this sense, the introduction of a higher education cooperative governance model was intended to forge a new political process or culture of democracy within the system.

The philosophical underpinnings of this model were wide-ranging and not reducible to a single set of views, but everyone upheld Dahl's (1989: 109) postulate that throughout the process of making binding decisions, citizens ought to have an adequate and equal opportunity for expressing their preferences as to the final outcome. For Dahl, this meant that, the students must have adequate and equal opportunities for placing questions on the agenda and for expressing reasons for endorsing one outcome rather than another. To deny any citizen adequate opportunities for effective participation means that because their preferences are unknown or incorrectly perceived, they cannot be taken into account.

For students this meant that SRCs should be the vehicles through which their views about fee increases, accommodation, academic programmes and the like were presented. This, they argued, should not occur after fee increases or other actions affecting students, but before. They added that consultation and advice-seeking actions should be a necessary cornerstone of institutional governance (Johnson 2000). Badat (1999: 25) and Wolpe (1989: 23) argue that the formation of structures and relations is always the outcome of struggles between contending groups or classes. For Badat (1999), this implies that the analysis of the out-

comes, success and failure of organizational initiatives and collective action as well as understanding the form and content of struggles should be grounded on the conditions underpinning the struggles. For students, this further meant that BTFs had to address institutional culture and they themselves should be involved in shaping the vision and mission of institutions and contributing to planning frameworks.

In this regard, students clearly linked the demand for institutional change and the establishment of BTFs to broader restructuring processes occurring within South African society. In several fundamental respects, the demand for BTFs duplicated other reform processes. At national government level, parallel processes from 1992 to 1994 resulted in the formation of Interim councils that examined broad transformation issues and tried to steer the direction of change. These negotiations were underpinned by the view that stakeholders should jointly engage around issues, try to resolve points of difference and lay down processes through which structured change could be effected. At national government level, this provided a framework for co-operative governance and joint decision-making by business, labour, government and the government-in-waiting.

More narrowly, the culture of cooperative governance is part of the broader reconstruction of the higher education process against the backdrop of rampant globalization. This has contributed to institutions developing new missions and visions and has accelerated both corporatism and stronger management-type steering of higher education institutions. The new government elected in 1994 further took up this broad theme of representative democracy and central steering by requiring that institutions make provision for accommodating student leaders in institutional structures. Indeed, with the election of a new government, student participation is increasingly seen as central to the development and sustainability of an acceptable and effective institutional governance structures and decision-making processes. This last point was recognized during the NCHE process when the role of BTFs was more narrowly defined to embrace institutional issues only. This commission noted that new governance structures in higher education were necessary and that such structures should take the form of advisory bodies for restructuring and innovation where representatives of all stakeholders could meet, identify problems, mediate interests and advise relevant structures (NCHE 1996).

This view was later promoted by the government's comprehensive framework on transformation - the 1997 Education White Paper 3 and 1997 Higher Education Act 101 (DoE 1997). The 1997 White Paper dealt with South African responses to the challenges of institutional transformation within a global age. To deepen democracy and strengthen institutional management, the White Paper highlights the value of co-operative governance and encourages the 'meaningful

involvement of students and staff in all permanent governance structures of the institutions including councils' (DoE 1997).

Principally, the 1997 Higher Education Act 101 overturned four decades of excluding black students at historically black universities from participating in institutional decision-making. The Act requires that all HE institutions formally recognize Student Representative Councils (SRCs) and approve their constitutions. The Act also provides elected student leaders with seats in the highest decision-making body on strategic issues (council), the highest academic body (senate) and the highest advisory body (Institutional Forums).

Regarding the manner of their involvement, the Act stipulates that students should act in the interest of the institution when participating in governance structures, and not act as mandate-carrying representatives from student organisations (see Ncayiyana and Hayward 1999: 46). This formulation aims to promote deliberative democracy (rational discussion and agreement). However, if voting is necessary to create agreement, students have to form alliances with other stakeholders and acquire further votes from HE managers to secure their preference. Fundamentally, the Act then did not dilute the power of institutional leaders. Rather, it promoted 'constructive engagement' between HE management and student leaders by facilitating the incorporation of student leaders.

Three primary factors underpinned this democratization process. First, the trickle down effect of the corporatist arrangements that characterized South Africa's post-1994 political transition created a framework for promoting co-operation between former political opponents. Second, the ANC government had sufficient political muscle and legitimacy amongst student leaders and the new group of HE managers – whose appointment the Minister of Education approved — to legislate their co-operation. As in other African countries (Munene 2003), the implication is that some students form part of the national political order. Third, government and HE managers viewed incorporation of students into governance structures as the most appropriate measure to 'professionalize' their actions and minimize annual bouts of protest and conflict, while simultaneously promoting democratic practice.

The consequences of this situation include student involvement in committees dealing with academic development, student fees, bursary allocations, institutional finances, financial exclusions, academic exclusions, appointing senior executives, equity committees and a host of other institutional structures. As in trade union contexts, the price SRCs were asked to pay for formal access to decision-making involved the possibility of being influenced by management and acting like an instrument of social order. The price therefore included the possibility of defending the decisions of HE managers vis-à-vis students and turning their back on the tried and tested means of dissent and mass protest because the ANC government and HE institutions desired stable academic processes.

Participation Experiences of Students

Since the change in national government in 1994, popular perception holds that student political activism at universities and technikons has declined. This is widely viewed as having contributed to stable institutional governance, fewer disruptions to academic programmes and to a decline in the incidence of protest actions. It is indeed so that the upsurge of publicly visible student political activism in the 1980s and early 1990s has given way to sporadic one-off protests on matters such as fee increases, exclusions, institutional racism, management's powers, mergers, and greater student participation in decision-making. In the same vein, students now play a more modest role limited to campaigning for a greater role in campus governance structures and exert no real influence on political events, but they are still interested in matters of social concern such as the rising incidence of HIV-Aids and increase in mortality.

Protest actions have nonetheless remained common at historically black institutions. In 1999 and 2000, students at the University of Durban Westville (UDW) protested against the exclusion of fellow students for financial reasons, while students at the University of the North burned barricades and alleged misappropriation of funds by members of the Students Representative Council (SRC). For the past three years, students at the University of Venda have protested against corruption and misspending by SRC members. In 2001, Fort Hare students protested following accusations that SRC leaders benefited from nepotistic institutional practices. In 2002, students at Natal University, University of Durban Westville, ML Sultan Technikon, Eastern Cape Technikon and University of Transkei protested against mergers, while students at the University of the North went on a rampage following suggestions that management would not concede to demands for the allocation of additional money for a bash. The Medical University of South Africa further closed for one week in February 2002 and one week in March, while the University of the North closed for one week in May. In 2003 lengthy interruptions to academic programmes also occurred at Fort Hare University where close to 1 000 students were excluded by the university authorities for failing to pay fees.

Protests in 2001 also manifested at historically white institutions where black students demanded changes to regulations for SRC candidates at the University of Potchefstroom and to the composition of the SRC at the University of Pretoria (UP). At the same time, white students protested last year against the use of English during a public meeting at Pretoria. Localism also characterized one-off incidents at the University of Stellenbosch (US) where a call for less public initiation rituals produced a one-off protest and at Technikon Natal where students protested that a merger with ML Sultan could devalue the quality of their qualification. On the other hand, broader social concerns played a key role at Wits where HIV/Aids awareness activities provided reasons for an anti-government

protest, while for a few hundred students from the University of Cape Town (UCT), fees and restricted bursary opportunities provided an opportunity to express their frustration in 2001. In addition, in 2003, students at Witwatersrand Technikon protested against policies that limit sexual contact in residences, while race-based incidents occurred at the University of Stellenbosch and University of Pretoria. But not all protests have had a local dimension. Cross-national and international issues have also featured in public protest. In 2001 and in 2002, some students at the Cape Technikon, University of Stellenbosch, University of Cape Town, Rhodes University and Witwatersrand University marched in support of anti-farm evictions and pro-democracy activities in Zimbabwe while the Israeli-Palestine conflict continues to generate support for both sides with students on each side participating in placard demonstrations and marches at Wits.

However, while protest have remained a constant feature since 1994, student organizations have also changed the way they take up issues, their methods of mobilization and the way they respond to management. These adaptations have involved responding to external and internal developments, *inter alia*. For example, portfolios on SRCs have changed. Following the promulgation of mergers, several SRCs have created portfolios for Merger Officers[22] by shuffling responsibilities between different portfolios. Another example relates to the disappearance of the Political and Education portfolios that existed during the 1980s and early 1990s. These positions were invariably replaced with Transformation and Equity Officers, while many SRCs also added Culture and Entertainment portfolios to the services they provide to students to cater for the demand for more social activities. To effectively participate in governance structures, SRCs have also had to select individuals to represent them on particular structures and have had to provide space for this.

Besides this type of positional change, other adaptations have involved developing policy-making structures to ensure that student politics could participate in institutional affairs irrespective of whether or not an SRC existed. At some institutions such developments involved the establishment of a Student Parliament consisting of representatives from cultural, sports, academic and political student organizations that are required to discuss strategic approaches to problems faced by students. But not all have chosen to create fixed structures for this purpose. Thus, the University of the Western Cape relies on a Student Summit – a one-off annual event at which recognized role players participate and help chart responses to issues facing students. The overall effect of these structures has been to shift the focus of communication in SRCs from engagement in a mass meeting (potentially with all students) to organizational engagement and greater organizational involvement in institutional governance structures with the SRC, in most cases, playing the role of coordinator of student decision-making.

Furthermore, organizational developments have involved changes in the relationship between SRC members and ordinary students. This engagement was often direct, with SRC members 'manning' offices and making themselves available to assist students. While this element still exists, some SRCs have created 'service providers' (sub-committees comprising of students) that address particular needs and respond to queries. Where this exists, the SRC itself mainly functions as an administrative body that deals with correspondence and liaison issues, while the service provider interacts with 'ordinary' students and provides a 'professional' service in a designated domain. Where this has occurred, SRC members have subsequently indicated that they have 'lost contact' with students, but believe that the development is a logical consequence of three factors: first, a lack of interest in student political matters; second the under-resourcing of SRCs in terms of funding sufficient administrative positions; the increasing need for SRC members to attend institutional committee meetings in order to remain informed of institutional developments and to communicate this to students.

During interviews student leaders further indicated that participation in governance structures has largely involved a focus on adhering to procedures and did not really addressed outcome issues. At all the institutions, the main emphasis has been on adapting to the changing organizational context and trying to learn what student organizations should do. For student leaders, this adaptation has generally involved paying much greater attention to management issues since their roles, at one extreme, appear to involve considerable office functions. Indicative of this, student leaders we interviewed indicated that the SRCs they participate in have more formal bureaucratic features than before, that they are generally understaffed and involve an increasing number of official activities. For them this means that they perform a wide range of administrative duties and act as 'professional counselors to those who voted for them' and as 'management consultants' to the university executive who they keep informed of student decisions and possible actions. The reasons for these two perspectives and their implications are in many ways self-evident. Since student leaders interact with university and technikon management they are knowledgeable about institutional policies and in a position to inform other students. Second, they are trusted – because they were elected – and are believed to act in the interests of students, whereas other university officials are widely viewed as putting bureaucratic interests first. Third, their involvement in institutional meetings involves carrying student views and putting student perspectives on issues.

But, while process issues have featured strongly in student participation, they have not always participated equally. One reason relates to poor attendance. This is attributed in some institutions to 'leaders not showing enough responsibility' and in other institutions to student leaders being "overworked" since they mostly remain full-time students, but sometimes serve on more than 10 institutional

committees, while also being involved in SRC activity and in the work of their student organization. But, poor attendance in meetings also relates to the fact that student leaders sit on consultative structures that lack decision-making powers. For example, one common student's comment highlights the point that Institutional Forums were 'toothless' and only active when faced with senior appointments and re-naming buildings and structures. A second gripe involves students' difficulty in dealing with issues, documents, deliberations in senates that do not deal with "fancy issues" such as governance, but with hard academic issues, which in most instances would have gone through long.[23]

In these cases, student leaders highlighted a central criticism that SRCs are often expected by management representatives to advance only mandated positions from the student body or at least to speak more on issues which directly concern the general student body and not to contribute to general issues. A further perceived expectation relates to a perception that student participation in governance structures is exploited to legitimate decisions since their limited voting power does not provide for veto rights, while they often have no real chance of influencing decisions. For this reason, student leaders evaluated their participation as not being robust and as characterized by their silence on issues in which they are expected to speak on. In general, they speak mostly on issues which have a direct impact on students such as fees, access, the appointment of senior management especially the vice-chancellor, etc. But there was also a feeling that students reserve their comments on things that they are comfortable with.

What have students achieved through participation? This question elicited varied responses. Mainly staff and students suggested that students have displayed mature leadership and shown that protest was not the sole means through which change could be effected. For them, this change in tactics produced the following results across the five institutions: Student leadership has worked with management in establishing common frameworks around which future negotiations around student access, retention, exclusion and individual financial difficulties could be addressed. This involved extended negotiations for several years in forums outside council, senate and IFs, but was greatly helped by participation in such forums since students participated in relaying the outcome of negotiations. The 'pacts' in turn provide a platform for future engagement around issues and implies that 'institutional memory' and not 'strength' will determine the outcome of future engagements around access, retention and exclusion.

Student leaders have continually provided a student perspective on issues and highlighted historical trajectories with respect to how some issues affect students and how they have historically been handled differently. This, in the view of students, has contributed to several important victories. For example, all institutions have lately raised tuition and residence fees substantially, but student leaders

feel that they have been able to contest the scale of tuition fee increases and are responsible, in cases, for lower than envisaged increases.

Involvement with management representatives has contributed to student leaders establishing up joint bursary and tuition support schemes to support needy students. This has increased the scope of SRC activities and has contributed to SRC members playing a greater role as part of the corporate face of institutions. It has also meant that their overall contribution to institutional investments has greatly expanded.

Student leaders have gained from the presentation of 'institutional pictures' in forums and have gained a greater appreciation of long-standing institutional efforts to promote student welfare. They have specifically gained greater insight into budgetary concerns and issues that impact on institutional performance and have been able to look at the way developments impact on the institution, and not simply on students. This in turn has meant that they have tried to defend student interests in a more guarded manner and have not necessarily contested issues that the larger student body views as crucial.

Student leaders have represented foreign students and other student views and experiences in consultation with management representatives and have consistently been able to push a student position and to improve the position of sectional student groups. This has especially happened at UCT and Stellenbosch.

Student leaders have developed and improved administrative and policy skills. They have gained familiarity with national priority issues confronting institutions such as the scope and content of debates, the development of three-year strategic plans. They have also helped shape the vision embodied in institutional responses to nation-wide developments.

However, others expressed discontent and disillusionment with their participation in policy and institutional governance issues. They described their participation as debilitating since their views are often not taken very seriously. This is most forcibly expressed in the following argument:

> Student participation is a joke. There is a mentality that students are about protests. We are capable of causing violence and bringing institutions into turmoil. We are not seen as intellectually capable to contribute to transformation, but are expected to listen to senior professors. … Most of the time we attend to get information about what is happening. No agenda is given. No preparation takes place. No mandate is carried. ... Although we don't fully participate, it is really better to get access to information, than to abstain and remaining ignorant. Sometimes we don't understand the issues under discussion. … With finance issues we wait for stuff around students and then contribute. Otherwise our views don't matter. Some see us as delaying decision-making.[24]

On the other hand, there are comments indicating that student leaders are expected to participate equally in committee meetings and to be actively involved in deliberations, but are hamstrung by the onerous demands of full participation.

Asked what organizational difficulties student leaders and structures encounter in responding to the changing political landscape, several interviewees noted that while unevenness exists across institutions, leadership, policy training and research expertise were essential and that official skills require improvement. Their tasks are further complicated by the fact that in some cases, previous SRCs did not keep adequate records, that they lack information about the terms of agreements reached with university management; and that there was little continuity in the handing over of positions.[25] Consequently, SRCs members are not always fully prepared for the responsibilities they have to assume and the tasks they have to perform. Many also lack experience in staffing organizations and do not have a clear idea of what they need to do in their various portfolios, or what possible strategies they could follow to improve organizational performance. As a result members conceded that they often flounder in meetings with university management, feel powerless in representing students and need training in organizational procedures and university protocols.[26]

In their defense, several students also noted that bureaucratic difficulties were similar to problems experienced by earlier SRCs, but that new benchmarks existed in terms of financial accountability and proper reports and that there were many formal demands. For them, the enormity of this adaptation requires socialization into new organizational practices. Thus, whereas lax accounting procedures were sometimes tolerated in the past, to circumvent misspending, audited statements brought tighter controls and formal accountability in performing tasks. Others noted that besides administrative difficulties, it is arduous to mobilize students in support of actions and unlikely that protest action could be sustained for a few days without incidents of violence. While it happened in 2003 that protest action at the University of Fort Hare and Witwatersrand Technikon lasted for extended periods, this partly related to institutions being closed to take the sting out of protest and to limit the damage caused by newspaper reports of disruptions. Flowing from this, interviewees intimated that SRCs were responding to pressure from small groups when mobilizing students and that proper representation of concerns through appropriate channels is time-consuming, frustrating and exhausting.

Further compounding administration and governance difficulties is the fact that portfolios were not always neatly aligned with emerging responsibilities, but that constitutional changes were difficult to make as apathy made it difficult to get quorums.[27] Also, SRC members conceded that they needed to do a situation analysis to determine how best to address student issues. Instead they inherited organizational frameworks and operated within their parameters. Consequently,

when new issues arose, responses were haphazard or characterized by inaction, as it was not always clear who was responsible for taking up specific issues or how this should be done. Also while SRCs are now more involved in policy considerations than before, they lack knowledge of legislative frameworks and policy processes. Nor do their budgets allow for commissioned research or other assistance when engaging in policy actions, yet, they and other student representatives are expected to participate in committees dealing with appointments, employment equity and transformation issues. In consequence, several SRCs have requested that leadership skills, project management, entrepreneurial management, skills training and capacity building programmes should be institutionalized and that they receive training in administrative management and policy related issues.

Student leaders or organizations have recently deployed ethnicity and racism as a student election strategy. During the 2002/2003 UWC SRC elections, the issue of ethnicity featured prominently as a tool to highlight the plight of coloured students and the need to unify students under the broader umbrella of the United Student Front, on the one hand. On the other hand, it was used as a 'conscious strategy' to unseat SASCO, which seemed to have a numerical advantage over individual opposition groups. In this regard, SASCO was projected especially through its nominated list of candidates as an organization that did not accommodate other ethnic groups than Xhosa group. Illustrating this, an argument was raised both during interviews we conducted and anonymous pamphlet issued during elections that the current and only SASCO member in the SRC was supposed to be nominated as a presidential candidate. But he was not nominated because he was not a Xhosa. There were issues about the way SASCO SRC operated and use of SRC vehicles, offices, etc. The interviews further indicated that ethnicity is not a mere political ploy.

> What happened, I think was a card that was used by our opposition. There was a time whereby there was a flyer that was circulated on campus pretending to be from a member of SASCO whereby the article said that I as this member of SASCO is concerned by the way the organization is Nguni dominated, it is Xhosa. There is ethnicity within SASCO. If you are not Xhosa you are going to be marginalized in SASCO. So that was the perception that created around campus by the opposition camouflaged to be a member of SASCO writing that article. Then there was a debate around the issue of ethnicity with people saying that SASCO is an ethnic group. That people from the Eastern Cape, Xhosas, dominate the SRC in particular. But also when you go back to the history, previous leadership, it is not true. SASCO never condoned or encouraged issues of ethnic divisions because we are a non-racial, non-sexist organization. So we accommodate each and everyone. But one issue we have never done is to say we are going to give specific treatment to particular groupings. We deploy

> comrades equally. We are not going to deploy you because you are coloured. We deploy you on the basis that you are committed enough to take a job. Because it is a public office. What you do in the office is always going to reflect back on SASCO. They are not going to say it is XXXX who is doing bad, they are going to say its SASCO.[28]

In addition, ethnicity and racism have manifested themselves in various ways — be it among students, between students and staff or between students and senior managers. One UWC SRC member argued that some students (particularly Coloured) were not welcome and and did not have a sense of belonging to the campus. It was argued that these students had 'limited access to resources' such as financial aid and so forth.

> It's a perception of I'm not black enough. I categorized as black but I'm not black. It's an issue if I need funding or financial assistance. The university will not give it to me because I am financially…and the issue of the work-study needs to be looked at, and be addressed. It's the fact that coloured students feel they are here merely…space and not here create a constructive contribution like the fact that Indian students sit at the library and congregate. I have money, I don't need to associate myself with coloured students, and I don't have to associate with Black students, because their problems are not my problems. It is an issue that students should stop to syndicate themselves into little quarantines, and say my issues are special, my issues are special, my issues are not student issues.[29]

While another SRC member argued that some African students perceive Coloured students as being given preferential treatment with regard to bursary allocation and interactions with academics at UWC. To this extent, there are:

> More African students than coloured students who go through the university credit management control in order to be cleared before proceeding to register. In addition students from other African countries seem not to be treated the same way as those from the rest of the world. For example, a group of African students had to wait for three to four days before they could be allocated individual rooms. Whereas non-African students did not experience the same problem, everything was sorted out before they could even arrive on campus.[30]

Regarding the issue of ethnicity at UCT, a SRC member[31] indicated that some students (particularly African) view residence admission and allocation policies as being ethnic-based. In terms of these policies, a priority is given to those students (mainly white) with the best matric results, mainly from ex-model C schools.

At UDW, the issue of ethnicity has been used as a political mobilisation strategy by the 2002/2003 SRC president to mobilize students to oppose his suspension from the university. That was after charges of corruption, bribery, fraud and coercing the institution to enter into contracts costing the university millions of rands and mismanagement of university funds were leveled against the president by the university management. Subsequently, a series of student placard demonstrations were held, calling for the immediate reinstatement of the SRC president. In addition, it was alleged that the SRC president was 'responsible for a pamphlet, which was distributed on campus accusing Cooper of creating an "Indostan" by appointing management that is predominantly Indian".[32] The SRC president argued that 'while we agree with the content of the pamphlet, the SRC would not have raised those issues by distributing anonymous pamphlets'.[33]

He questioned the appointment of the new vice-chancellor, describing the move as a blow to the transformation goals of higher education institutions. He said that he was being 'victimized because I questioned the appointment of the vice-chancellor'.[34]

Although about 57 per cent of the students disagreed that the SRC is mainly for hostel or residence students. In most institutions, students who reside outside campuses (and part-time and distance) seem to be neglected and not integrated into SRC activities in effective and meaningful ways. To this extent, at UDW township students organized themselves and formed a township student society to handle with transport, representation and other issues. At the University of the North, postgraduate students established their association as an alternative form of student representation. A similar initiative was aborted at UCT mainly because the SRC opposed it. According to the UCT SRC, had this attempt succeeded it would have seriously threatened and challenged the relevance and role of SRC structures. Given failure in launching postgraduate associations, postgraduate students have in most institutions resorted to contest the SRC elections and to use them as a forum for voicing their grievances; whether this is effective remains to be investigated.

The lack of sufficient involvement of all students is mainly due to the fact that most SRC constitutions are not respected and applied with respect to the composition of the SRC. The UDW SRC should consist of 26 members (house committees, faculty councils, part-time students, clubs and societies and executive members, with nine members directly elected annually by the general student body). However, this has never happened; instead the SRC is usually composed of the nine executive. At UCT SRC is an executive arm of the Student Parliament, which was described as being ineffective and needing to be changed. There seems to be tension between the role and powers of the SRC and Student Parliament. The tension is caused by the fact that SRC members are elected directly by the general student body, whereas membership to Student Parliament is through

indirect nomination or recommendation from various clubs and societies representing sectoral interests. The SRC has found it difficult to accept the fact that it was accountable to the student parliament despite the fact that it was directly elected by the student body.

Gererally, SRCs strive to attract as many students as possible to participate in their activities. This was evident in the response of 55.6 per cent of students who felt that there was far too little involvement in SRC affairs. SRCs have been organizing bashes with a view to drawing support and meeting social needs of students. Students' interest in attending bashes is flagging to the extent that both the UWC and UCT recently organized a joint bash held at the UWC sports stadium. But this event failed to attract thousands of students from both campuses in spite of the fact that about 87.5 per cent of students felt that the SRC should become more active in promoting social and reaction activities for students. The failure of this joint social activity was due to the prohibitive entrance fees (R30) that most students could not afford to pay[35] and perhaps because students need more religious or cultural festivals and so forth.[36] It was also argued that SRCs entertainment activities usually cater for resident students at the expense of the broader student body. Thus, students in hostels are unfortunately African students and as a result coloured students do not participate. Therefore one of the key immediate challenges is to attract coloured students to participate in entertainment activities, but 'I had no idea how to do that'.[37]

Students felt that the SRC should play a more active role in the following areas: About 61.2 per cent strongly felt that the SRC should play an important role in promoting democracy on campuses. About 83.2 per cent strongly felt that the SRC should protect and advance their interests. About 84.8 per cent strongly felt that the SRC should represent their interests. About 66.2 per cent strongly felt that the SRC should be accountable to students. About 63.4 per cent strongly felt that the SRC should promote debates on racialism on campus. About 28.3 per cent strongly felt that the SRC should promote political debates on campus. About 52.8 per cent strongly felt that the SRC should promote debates on the economy. About 41.5 per cent strongly felt that the SRC should not be linked to any political organization. About 20.8 per cent strongly felt that part-time and distance students should elect their own SRC representatives. About 58.3 per cent strongly felt that the SRC members should be available on a full time basis to address student issues. About 42.8 per cent felt that SRC members are providing competent leadership on campus. About 52.2 per cent were not sure if the SRC was autocratic on campus. About 56.3 per cent felt that the lack of involvement in important student issues was a real problem on their campus. About 49 per cent felt that SRC should play strong role in political activities on campus. About 88.1 per cent felt the SRC should play a strong role in academic activities on. About 90.4 per cent felt that the SRC should play a strong role in addressing safety and

security for students on campus. About 81.5 per cent felt that the SRC should play a strong role in addressing HIV/AIDS-related issues on campus. About 72.8 per cent felt that the SRC should establish good relations with other structures on campus. About 74.3 per cent felt that the SRC should become more active in taking up women's issues. About 69.2 per cent felt that the SRC should become more active in addressing transport and parking issues. About 85.7 per cent felt that the SRC should become more active in addressing disability issues.

Conclusion and Recommendations

What the preceding description highlights is that student organizations have adapted to the changing higher education environment over the last ten years and that they have acted as 'learning organizations'. However, while they have adapted to changes in governance structures and to different aspirations from their constituency, a key question remains: what have they achieved and why?

The implications of this question are important. If student organizations have not achieved much through their participation, an important issue is whether they can achieve more by adopting a different approach. Indeed, there is a widely held view that student organizations are more likely to score 'victories' on challenges confronting students if they engaged in protest action, despite the vehemence with which many university and technikon interest groups reject protest action nowadays. In this perspective, protest action immediately draws institutional attention to an issue and requires that the issue be resolved. Since students invariably occupy the moral high ground because their inability to pay fees or academic performance partly relates to a failure from government to adequately provide for their needs, it is opined that they are invariably likely to win protests around financial, academic and transformation concerns.

In addressing this issue, student leaders variously indicated that the changing nature of the student body and the diverse aspirations of students mean that they cannot simply act in the interests of particular constituencies, and that this has affected the manner in which resource struggles are addressed. They further suggested that the fundamental problem they encounter is that HE institutions have not fully transformed themselves and that institutions also cannot realistically solve societal problems such as the ability of working class learners to pay their fees. In their view, HE institutions have, for the most part, done their best to respond to student demands, although they have not necessarily responded speedily and without being pressurized to act in a particular manner. What further stands out in their responses is that the responses have largely been in line with government policies, some of which have been contested in student ranks. This has led to strong interest in demographic change and in how financially sound institutions are managed because this is in the national interest. In this regard, emphasis has been placed on programmatic, and therefore, gradual change in dealing with

issues such as responsiveness to labour market demands, devising strategies to ensure that student debt is reduced and HE institutions become more financially autonomous.

What this in turn has done is raise an interesting dilemma: with some exceptions, the effect of student actions over the last few years, and of their participation in governance structures, has contributed to more stable governance patterns and adaptation to pre-emptive approaches to potential conflict resolution without resort to protest (and violence). This has been in line with the view that student organizations should act as a complement to the policies of the government and in support of national political efforts to steer the higher education system more closely in order to ensure that future labour-market needs are met. But, along with this, HE institutions have also increasingly raised their fees, become selective in who they admit and have generally moved in the direction of treating students as customers who pay for specific services. In this sense, the privatization and individualization of HE services has actually run parallel to efforts to realize national interests, which raises the question whether the larger student bodies are best served by student political organizations or by independent candidates whose interest lies in winning popularity contests and in promoting socially-oriented interests.

Recommendations or Policy Options

Establishment of National Student Federation

Students need to strengthen their influence and contribution to national debates and policy process. Critical to this is the establishment of united and legitimate body representing and carrying the mandates of all students, irrespective of political affiliation, race, gender, institutional affiliation, etc.

More Broadly Representative and Expanded Student Representative Councils (SRCS)

There is no doubt that the current student governance system is inadequate and incapable of realizing such broad objectives of democracy, accountability, active participation, transparency and delivery of student needs. Therefore, rather than disband or cast SRCs as irrelevant and irresponsible structures, government should establish an expanded and broadly representative system of student governance that allows more students to participate and actually influence SRC decisions and orientations.

Systematic and Coherent Capacity-Building Programme

One of the key challenges facing students which they themselves acknowledged is the lack of necessary and appropriate capacity to lead, drive and shape policy at both national and institutional level, and to robustly engage in all debates, includ-

ing academic programmes and curriculum. Both national government and higher education institutions need to be responsible for developing students' capacity. Accordingly advanced and systematic capacity-building programmes should be established and implemented.

Political Education Revival Programme

The three national student political organizations (South African Congress, Azanian Student Congress and Pan Africanist Student Movement) are facing serious political challenges internally and externally. These organizations are facing serious problems such as dwindling of resources, lack of quality and visionary leadership, and membership. Furthermore, their credibility and legitimacy are challenged on the grounds of their performance as SRCs on campuses. Some of the external challenges are linked to the nature of the current crop of students characterized as being politically unconscious, young, consumerist and individualistic. There is also a large group of students from the emerging black bourgeoisie and middle class who attended better and well resourced schools and, unlike the majority of their black fellow students, are not faced with the huge financial problems which have triggered most student protests and boycotts.

Student political organizations therefore need a serious comprehensive education and revival programme to enhance their role and relevance.

Student Unity and Social Cohesion Programme

The creation and realization of a non-racial, democratic and non-sexist society means that higher education should produce students imbued with these values. Issues of race, gender, ethnic differences and discrimination are still predominant in our society and manifest themselves in various ways, including student power and leadership struggles. There is need therefore for higher education authorities and all key stakeholders, including students, to create and promote student unity and social cohesion across the spectrum.

Notes

1. This article was written in 2004
2. See detailed discussion on this in the 1997 ANC Strategy and Tactics document.
3. See details government Ten Year Review 2003 (Endnotes)
4. South African Student Congress Annual Congress Political Report (1996:12)
5. Charles van Onselen (1997)
6. (Nkomo 1984, Badat 1999)
7. Cele, G., Koen, C., Mabizela, M. (2001) 'Student Politics and Higher Education in South Africa - Emerging Trends since the early 1990s'. Paper presented at the EPU/ SRHE conference on Globalisation and Higher Education. March. Cape Town.
8. Cape Talk. "Latham at Six", Thursday, 9 March 2001- Gerda Kruger. Similar descriptions have characterised the responses of university spokespersons at other institutions. For example, UDW ascribed activities leading to the fatal shooting of a student last year as

the work of troublemakers who managed to disrupt university activities.

9. Cooper and Subotzky, 2001.
10. Bunting, I. (2003) "Foreign Students and Academic Staff in Public Higher Education in South Africa in 2001", In Pillay, P. et al., (Eds) "GATS and Higher Education in SADC.
11. (see NASDEV's 2002: Women in Leadership survey).
12. All institutions have historically depended on government for financing. Thus, while institutional autonomy is centrally inscribed in South African higher education, the state has always been able to influence institutional policies and to prescribe the framework within which institutions operate.
13. NUSAS was widely perceived to be a national student political body, but was actually constituted as a federation of SRCs at white English universities. In this sense, only SRC members were actually members of NUSAS. More broadly, NUSAS developed a broad political manifesto and covertly organized student activities through SRCs or other structures at white English universities.
14. SRC members were largely drawn from the ranks of national student political organisations. At English universities this contributed to NUSAS dominating student politics. At Afrikaans universities, individuals associated with the Afrikaanse Studente Bond (formed in 1934 at three institutions) did the same. In later periods, students from organizations such as the South African Student Organization (SASO) and Azanian Student Organization (AZASO) and South African National Student Congress (SANSCO) did much the same. Breakaway groups from these organizations and groups that either positioned itself to the left or right sometimes dominated the SRC for short periods at some institutions, but also fulfilled a similar role.
15. A similar response emerged in trade union circles where efforts were increasingly made to organize black workers into industrial unions whose power derived from shop stewards. This lead to the replacement of management appointed liaison councils with more effective worker representatives who tackled industrial and societal issues. In this regard, it is clear that obvious parallels exist between student struggles and broader economic struggles and that these conflicts did not occur in isolation of each other.
16. This role was linked to divisions in student bodies and the fact that not all students agreed that SRCs should play a wider political role. Indeed, while not covered in literature, apathy contributed to the failure of many SRC elections at several universities during the 1970s. It also contributed to some SRCs devoting energy to ensure the success of future elections. This involved building organizational structures, rather than focusing most energy on conscientization activities. At some institutions, activism was also seen in a negative light since it contributed to high failure rates, brought interruptions to the academic programme and contributed to increased violent outbursts at institutions.
17. Students at HBUs unanimously demanded the replacement of the existing government with democratically elected representatives who committed themselves to promoting the aims of a non-racial democracy. At some institutions, this political demand was linked to economic restructuring. Opinions were divided on the form this should take. Students at some institutions strongly supported a socialist economy while others favoured more market-driven policies.
18. This conceptualisation showed strong support for the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) in student ranks. Principally, the ANC

advocated the use of people's power to drive a wedge between those who supported and those who opposed the struggle for a non-racial democracy. The people's power notion further held that individuals and collectives could influence social change by standing together in pursuit of social justice.

19. These structures were, at the time, widely viewed as having a status comparable to that of senate and council. However, whereas senates and councils were viewed as tainted by their historic roles, BTFs were perceived by students (and worker representatives) as legitimate structures that would drive change at higher education institutions.
20. Among the few universities at which BTFs were not established, the University of Stellenbosch (US) stands out as an institution which had very close ties to the ruling government and which subsequently changed institutional management structures, policies, programmes and staff composition at a snails pace. Beyond this, few BTFs were formed at technikons due to the tight control management exerts at these institutions and the limited historic role that SRCs and non-business representatives played.
21. The fact that some SRCs and student bodies strongly articulated these demands resulted in them effectively setting the agenda of many BTFs meetings (see Johnson, 2000 for a description of the key role students played at UWC). At other institutions, the BTFs were steered much more centrally by institutional managers and were used to achieve the same decision-legitimating outcome (see Austin, 2001 in King and Mabokela, 2001 for a description of the role management played at UPE).
22. The term'merger' refers to the government amalgamation and reduction of higher education institutions from 36 to 23.
23. See Hardy, C., Langley, A., Mintzberg, H. and Rose, J. (2001) "Strategy Formation in the University Setting" In Jenniskens, I., eds., "Management and Decision-Making in Higher Education Institutions", CHEPS and CHERI, pp.293-325.
24. Cele et al., Ref 4
25. Here UCT SRC represented the sole exception. Most notably minutes of last years meetings are logged on an internet site and are available along with other historical information and information from newsletters.
26. Interviewees at all institutions expressed this sense of powerlessness. In addition, interviewees at four institutions indicated uncertainty about tasks. SRC members at three institutions revealed that they were particularly unsure about demands since they had no idea what was expected of them in some forums (that have existed for several years).
27. These factors have especially been cited at WITS and at UWC with the latter being forced to operate with a draft constitution adopted in 1997.
28. Interview held on March 27, 2003
29. Interview with UWC SRC member, March 20, 2003
30. Interview with UWC SRC member, March 20, 2003).
31. Interview held on March 31, 2003
32. 2003 March 19 The Mercury
33. Mercury Ref.19
34. Mercury Ref. 19
35. UWC SRC member, March 21, 2003
36. UWC SRC member 2003 March 20c, UCT SRC member, March 31, 2003.
37. Interview: Ref.16

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Interviews conducted

Interview with UWC SRC member, March 20, 2003
Interview with UCT SRC member, March 31, 2003
Interview with UDW academic member of Council, June 24, 2003
Interview with UWC SRC Member, March 23, 2003
Interview with UWC SRC member, March 23, 2003
Interview with UDW 1999/2000/2001 SRC Secretary General, June 24, 2003
Interview with DIT SRC Secretary General 2003
Interview with UDW ex SRC members (1997-2000), June 03, 2003
Interview with UWC SRC President, March 8, 2002
Interview with Cape Tech SRC President, May 8, 2002
Interview with Pentech Deputy President, September 23, 2002
Interview with Stellenbosch SRC January 31, 2002
Interview with UCT Registrar, February 26, 2002
Interview with UWC Registrar, December 11, 2001
Interview with Pentech Deputy Registrar, May 10, 2002
Interview with Cape Tech Deputy Vice Chancellor Student Affairs, April 16, 2002
Interview with UWC Institutional Planner, December 10, 2001
Interview with UWC Nehawu full-time shop steward, December 10, 2001
Interview with UWC Institutional Forum Chair, December 10, 2001
Interview with senior members of UWC Senate and Council, May 9, 2002
Interview with National Department of Education Official, February 14, 2002
Interview with UCT Student Development Officer, January 31, 2002
Interview with Cape Tech Student Development Officer, May 8, 2002

Interview with UWC Student Development Officer, February 18, 2002
Interview with UWC Chair of Committee Secretariat, December 10, 2001
Interview with UWC Vice Rector Student Affairs, December 12, 2002
Interview with University of Fort Hare SRC President, Student Services Officer, Treasurer General and SASCO Chairperson, September 4, 2003
Interview with University of Transkei SRC Deputy Finance Secretary, Deputy Social Welfare and Sport and Cultural Officer, September 5, 2003
Interview with Rhodes University ex-SRC Vice President 2002/2003 and 2003/4 SRC Chief Electoral Officer, September 3, 2003
Interview with Eastern Cape Technikon (Main Campus) SRC President, General Secretary, Chairperson (Queenstown branch), September 2, 2003
Interview with Rhodes University (East London Campus) SRC Secretary General, September 2, 2003
Interview with Border Technikon SRC Education and Transformation Officer, September 1, 2003
Interviews with UDW SRC President, Vice President and Information and Publicity Officer, June 24-27, 2003
Interview with Tswane University of Technology (Former TNG campus) SRC Deputy President and Gender officer Project Officer, March 29, 2004
Tswane University of Technology (former Pretoria Tech) SRC Secretary General- 30/03/04
UNISA National Deputy President Azasco and NSRC Projects and Finance Officer 30/03/04
Interview with Wits SRC President, March 31, 2004
Interview with Pretoria SRC President, April 1, 2004
Interview with UNISA National SRC Secretary General, April 1, 2004
Interview with UCM National PRO and UNISA local SRC secretary and UCM NEC member-project officer, April 1, 2004
Interview with UniZulu SRC Deputy President, April 5, 2004
Interview with Peninsula Technikon Deputy SRC President and SATSU President, July 7, 2003
Interview University of South Africa (Durban Campus) SRC member, June 25, 2003
Interview with 2002/3 Natal University SRC Faculty Officer (Durban Campus)