Dissent by design
Fostering student activism in higher education through a case study of student affairs in a public university in the Philippines

Abstract
Student activism is a ubiquitous component in most democratic societies. Hence, albeit its disconcerting implications to the university’s operations, it remains an important agenda to student development in higher education. The study presents a case of a university in the Philippines where student activism is a predominant ethos. The findings expose the role of the wider social context, university, and students in creating a culture of activism. This research uses the case study methodology, initially framed around investigating student affairs practice in a state university in the Philippines, eventually leading to the emergence of student activism as a dominant theme of analysis.

Keywords: student development, student affairs, student activism, educational leadership, and institutional culture
Introduction

The role of student activism in promoting political and social transformation is a ubiquitous phenomenon in most societies striving to live out the ideals of democracy (Stitzlein, 2012). Activism, which has often been associated with dissent, identifies with the mobilization of the masses towards a common agenda usually directed at political, economic, and social reforms (Biddix, Somers, & Polman, 2009), therefore, positioning student activism as a critical nexus between higher education and the democratic development of a country. Needless to say, albeit its disconcerting implications to the university’s operations, student activism remains a tacit agenda of student development in higher education.

Although student activism has initially been labeled as disruptive to student development in the 1960s, recent literature heralded it as integral not just to civic development but also to student development in general (Biddix et al., 2009; Bryant et al., 2012; Stitzlein, 2012; Zimmerman & Halfacre-Hitchcock, 2006). Activism, as a task, needs a set of complex skills and a deep level of emotional maturity. In particular, it requires synthesis of a wide base of historical and contextual knowledge, public speaking and organizing skills, demanding a disposition inclined towards empathic care, and the ability to engage effectively with people (Stitzlein, 2012).

University educators, particularly those tasked with student development such as student affairs practitioners, have been faced with the challenge of mobilizing students towards greater civic involvement within a foreboding ethos of disengagement and apathy (Zimmerman & Halfacre-Hitchcock, 2006). Some of the barriers identified were apathy among students, lack of tangible results, lack of coordination among campus community, emotional dynamism between students and issues, locating campus as part of community, commitment barriers, incorporation of
personality into roles, individual perception of “sense of place”, and individual
perception of what community engagement project is (Zimmerman & Halfacre-
Hitchcock, 2006). However, Zimmerman and Halfacre-Hitchcock (2006) did not
expound on the nature of these barriers, essentially cultural factors, which could have
led to a deeper understanding on the relational dynamics. Such, in effect, would have
given university educators concrete insights on how to address these barriers. In a
comparative study of student activism in Southeast Asia by Weiss and Aspinalli
(Eds)(2012) on Student Activism in Asia: Between protests and powerlessness, the
authors acknowledged that despite the continuous attention student activism receives
in the media and among scholars, there is a dearth in exposing the factors that bring
about student activism.

The main appeal of student activism among educationalist, practitioners and
scholars alike is it’s being student-driven as compared to a university-initiated
program such as service learning. Hence, there lies a research gap of not just
exploring various ways to promote student activism but more importantly, to
understand how it is developed and nurtured. The aim of this study is to investigate
factors in higher education that promotes student activism, through a case study of a
public university in the Philippines where student activism is a dominant feature of its
institutional culture,

Institutional culture is defined in this study as standards for group
identification, process of decision making of what is acceptable behavior and an
emotional attachment to those standards (Goodenough, 1971 as cited by Patton, 2002,
p. 81, Albert, Ashforth & Dutton,2000). These standard (s) is referred hereto as
student activism.
The concept of student activism is predominantly explored within the discipline of political science, where discourses on the history and hegemonic dynamics of power struggle among society’s socio-political players are amply made. This study is limited to investigating student activism from the angle of student development, particularly from the lens of development psychology, leadership and from the programmatic intervention of student affairs, which is the common unit within higher education tasked to facilitate student development. Moreover, the participating university is just one among 111 state-funded tertiary educational institutions in the Philippines (http://www.gov.ph/directory/state-universities-and-colleges/). Thus, the investigation is within a public sector perspective, comprising merely 11% as compared to 89% of the private educational sector.

Theoretical Perspective

Student Development and Student Affairs

Student development in higher education can be defined as the integration of academic learning programs working in combination with the larger issues of personal improvement and individual growth of the student. As defined by Shoup and Struder (2010), it is a student-centered, holistic experience focused on understanding and demonstrating values, nurturing skills, and moving towards comprehensive knowledge. The operationalization of student development in education has normally been relegated to the unit of student affairs. Student affairs, or sometimes referred to as student services, is tasked to support the learning process through the provision of multifarious programs and services. Identified services ascribed as functions of student affairs include guidance and counseling, career, discipline, housing, transportation, student records, facilities, scholarship, admissions, campus ministry, and management of student organisations, as well as the provision of support for
targeted groups such as international students, student athletes, student leaders, and student artists. Although student affairs is not wholly responsible for student development, its role as support to academics ensures holistic educational delivery. This is reflected in its generally accepted outcomes, such as the one used by UNESCO as drafted by the International Association of Student Affairs and Services Professionals (2009), to wit: (1) high quality, well-rounded higher learning experience; (2) improved higher education access regardless of ability and background; (3) better retention and progress toward graduation; (4) enhanced career and employment prospects and lifelong learning interest; and (5) life as responsible members and citizens of their community. The last outcome on development of citizenship has direct allusion to student activism. Similarly, other proposed outcomes of activism to student development are: (1) students examine and develop personal values; (2) students demonstrate how to bring about change in society; and (3) students develop a sense of community on campus. Student activism achieves specific democratic aims such as learning how to advance a community search for mutual agreement and to preserve and legitimize the expression of a broad range of perspectives and judgments (Biddix et al., 2009).

**Student Activism as a driver of student development**

Activism is defined as mobilizing groups of people for a common cause, often framed around the promotion of an issue that affects the common good and in the achievement of democratic goals (Biddix et al., 2009). Activism among students is usually identified with civic engagement, volunteerism, and mobilization, in conjunction with concepts such as social and political activism, generally featuring dissent as a defining feature of student activism (Bryant et al., 2012).
The development of activism could be explained by the theory on intellectual and ethical development among students which underpins the cognitive processes of thinking and reasoning (Perry, 1999). William Perry’s theory stated that undergraduate students go through four stages of mental and moral development. More importantly, Perry’s theory explained how people arrive at one stage and then experience changes in their thought processes which enables them to go to the next stage. These four stages are duality, multiplicity, relativism and commitment.

During the first stage, dualism, the young person thinks and believes that every problem is solvable, that one must learn the right answer and that one must obey authorities. In short, this first stage consists of very white and black thinking. The second stage is multiplicity. During this stage the person begins to realize that there are two types of problems, those that are solvable and those that the answer is not yet known. This is the stage whereby students begin to put trust in their own inner voices. The third stage is relativism. During this stage, all answers and solutions to problems and issues must have a reason and be viewed within a specific context. In essence, a person in this third stage evaluates everything within a certain context. The last stage, commitment, the person begins to accept that there is uncertainty in many things and accepts this as a part of life. During this last stage, the student begins to evaluate problems and issues from both personal experiences and evidence learned from outside sources. The student arrives at his conclusion based on both.

According to Perry’s theory, it is during late adolescence and young adulthood, a student under supportive conditions will shift his thinking pattern from dualistic to multiplicity thinking (Perry, 1999).

The student is able to comprehend that two or more points of view can have value. The goal is to embrace both points of view and through critical thinking and
prioritizing realize that many problems have no clear solution and that several points of view may have merit. Multiplicity thinking allows for more complex problem-solving about academics, morality and life dilemmas. This allows for greater appreciation for diversity of people and ideas. By having a greater appreciate for other perspectives, along with one’s own perspective, allows the student to have a greater capacity to engage in relationships based on shared values. This added complexity also allows for a clearer understanding of and appreciation for such concepts as constructive criticism, loyalty and commitment, as well as more sophisticated thought patterns needed to undertake positions of leadership and public service. However, it must be remembered that multiplicity thinking works best when the external environment provides a strong, shared set of values through family, school and the community have a value structure that the person can follow. This is a highly adaptive style in situations and institutions where conformity is import to assure safety. In short, it is the pattern of a follower and not of a leader.

It is during the next stage relativism, whereby the student begins to know and understand that there are multiple ways to view situations and begins to think about supporting his or her opinions. Furthermore, the student begins to looks at each viewpoint or answer and determines what makes the most sense and what the right answer is for him or her.

For students to be effective activist to promote social change, the student must be able to view social problems and issues from many different points of view, and hence understand why his or her choice of solutions is the best for society at large.

**Context of the Study**

**The Philippines and its educational system**
The Philippines is comprised of 55 ethnic groups, which speak 171 languages and dialects across the 7,100 islands that constitute the archipelago. The country is divided into three main islands: Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. The National Capital Region (NCR), where the nation’s capital, Manila, is located, is in Luzon. Each major island has its own distinguished culture and ethnic identity such as Mindanao, where most of the Filipino Muslims live. Tagalog, the Filipino’s national language, and English, the medium of instruction (ESCAP, 2000), are considered the country’s official languages. Economically, the Philippines is considered a developing country beset with socio-economic structures that are inequitable. To date, it is heavily populated at 94.9 million with 66% of its population living within the poverty-threshold. The Philippines is evidently a developing country beset with a myriad of economic, social, and political problems. Its condition is exacerbated by the natural disasters that often plague its islands. Although present figures tend to present the Philippines as a country on its way to economic recovery, local and independent economists still consider the Philippine situation a long way from the road to development. This reality is situated within a social landscape where a few elite families who own and control main industries exert considerable control in its political system (IBON, 2013).

The Philippine educational system just recently adopted the K-12 structure of basic education, consisting of kindergarten, six years of primary education, four years of junior high school and two years of senior high school. The latter years being in preparation for work and university.

The Philippines has a total of 1,599 universities, 11% are tertiary educational establishments and universities which are owned and funded by the government. The rest are privately owned by individuals and religious congregations (UNESCO, 2007).
Most students who avail of public education come from the low socio-economic class, who avail of the public university’s minimal tuition fees and the scholarships.

**Student affairs in the Philippines**

The Philippines’ current educational system is largely shaped by its colonial past particularly with the Americans (Bago, 2001) and its own socio-political transitions (Wong-Fernandez, 2003). Thus mainstream student affairs are mostly adaptation from Western (American) models, despite the reality that the practice of student affairs in the Philippines is highly influenced by its immediate environment. (Bernardo & Howard, 2011).

Student affairs, or sometimes referred to as student services, is tasked to support the learning process through the provision of multifarious programs and services. Identified services ascribed as functions of student affairs include guidance and counseling, career, discipline, housing, transportation, student records, facilities, scholarship, admissions, campus ministry, and student organizations, as well as the provision of support for targeted groups such as international students, student athletes, student leaders, and student artists. Location of the student affairs within the university structure varies from university to university. Some universities may have its own Vice President whilst others fall under middle-management positions. The terminology of student affairs also differs, common nomenclatures used are student affairs and student services (Bernardo & Howard, 2011).

**Student Activism in the Philippines**

The involvement of students in shaping the history of the Philippines can be traced back to the Spanish colonization around the 19th century, when Filipinos who
were educated in Europe brought back the ideals of liberalism that led to the revolution for Philippine independence (Palafox, 2013). However, the political value of students was only recognized by the Americans during their occupation of the Philippines from 1898 to 1946 and later on exploited by the Communist Party in the 1950s to 60s, and rose to its peak during the presidency of Ferdinand Marcos, ensuing his declaration of Martial Law, during the 1970s. This era was marked by rampant human rights violations and the suppression of the freedom of speech (Abinales, 2007). Among the leading proponents opposing the Marcos regime was the assassination of Benigno Aquino in August 21, 1983. His death reignited the democratic fervor that has been in stupor for almost two decades of the Marcos’ dictatorship that eventually led to the first people’s power revolution that ousted Marcos in February 1986. Although historians do not credit the instigation of this revolution to students, the role of student activists in the entire movement is definitely recognized (Abinales, 2012). The first people’s power revolution created a precedence for bringing about political reforms, in the second peoples’ power in 2001 to oust Joseph Estrada the students were now acknowledged as a major protagonist (Weiss, Aspinalli, et.al, 2012). The student movement in the 1970s were identified to have originated from state universities, led by the University of the Philippines (UP), the premiere and largest state university in the Philippines. Other state-owned universities such as the participating university in this study, look to UP as a resource for ideological guidance, being the birthplace of the highly radical League of Filipino Students (LFS) (Abinales, 2012). Students in private universities also have their share of student activists but not as prominent as those in the public sector.

Methodology

Case Study
This study was conducted as part of a national study to map the student affairs management of state universities in the Philippines. Activist University (AU) was one of the seven universities involved. During the course of the investigation, the concept of student activism and its connection to student development became a dominant theme of Activist University case study.

Case study utilizes semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and site observations. Case study research is advisable when the inquirer seeks to understand the how and the why of a particular phenomenon. It enables the researcher to probe an object of study in which events are beyond his/her control. It is likewise used to generate knowledge by offering a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables. Moreover, the case study allows the researcher the opportunity to isolate student affairs unit as a separate phenomenon from the general school management. It is important that the part chosen is clearly distinguishable from the whole, or what is commonly referred to by qualitative researchers as a “bounded system”. A bounded system is defined by a finite set of variables. The researcher would have to define these “boundaries” or the frames from which dimensions of the phenomena will be harvested (Merriam, 1998). In the present study, the case study is bounded initially by the scope of functions and purview of student affairs in the university. This preliminary scope was guided by the technical review of the literature.

Data were analyzed using the coding and categorizing methods of prescribed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). The interview transcriptions, field notes, and the document excerpts were coded to derive the properties and dimensions of the phenomenon. The procedure begins with the researcher reading an entire text of an incident (e.g., from one interview) and captured the essence using “in vivo codes” or
concepts, terms used in the technical review of the literature and the principal researcher’s own words. Similar codes where then coalesced into categories, with corresponding concepts and properties. The categories where then put together to explain a phenomenon called the paradigm.

Primary data were derived from 16 interviewees: two group interviews of students, four individual students, five heads of programs of student affairs, the Vice President for Student Services, and the University Chaplain. Respondents were first chosen by the head of student services, who was the initial point of contact. Succeeding interviewees referred other groups and individuals.

Each interview was tape-recorded and took from 30 minutes to two hours. For purposes of triangulation, other data came from nine public documents and on-site observations of student events and facilities for student activities. Interview transcripts, public documents, and site observation notes were content-analyzed according to themes. The themes were coalesced into a meaningful whole through a paradigm of student affairs practice in Activist University. This paradigm was then compared with the extant literature on student affairs.

Ethical considerations of the study involved withholding the identity of the university and the respondents (e.g. Brian is a pseudonym for the respondent) in the research report, as agreed between the administration of AU and the principal researcher.

**The Research Site: Activist University (AU)**

At the time of the study, Activist University was known as the Philippines’ citadel of student activism, as its students are in the forefront of most left-wing movements. It had 20 campuses in different parts of the island of Luzon, offering 60 different academic programs and serving 70,000 students. Most students belong to the
lower socio-economic class. Parents of students are those working in blue-collar occupations or in the underground economy (e.g. helpers, tradesmen/women, street hawkers) or are unemployed. AU employs more than 1,400 full-time employees and around 700 part-time staff. Its student population are mostly Filipinos and around 100 international students. Its tuition fees are minimal of $3.7 per unit (An equivalent of 17 lecture or laboratory hours, each course usually consisting of 3 units), plus miscellaneous. AU offers extensive scholarship and financial assistance as well. The research site was the main campus located in the capital city of Manila with around 26,000 enrolled students and 200 student organizations. Its student affairs office was headed by a Vice President for Student Services. The units under this office were the Library Services, Registrar, Student Services, and University Center for Cultural Arts. The offices of scholarship and financial assistance, guidance and counseling and the placement office were categorized under Student Services.

Results

Poverty as an Impetus

**Students’ experience of poverty.** The students’ experience of poverty is a reflection of the greater socio-economic poverty situation in the Philippines. A student leader of a leftist organisation exclaimed that “the AU is a microcosm of Philippine society” as poverty-related personal and student difficulties resonate across all the respondents.

Students of AU are distinguished as “scholars of the nation” or are pertained to as recipients of government-sponsored scholarships. These students have the intellectual aptitude to be admitted to a state university, and also belong to the lower income levels of society. As one staff in student affairs described:
They are very poor, some are working students or self-supporting. You have students who cannot afford to buy books and lack sleep. Even if the tuition fee is very low [P12 or $.30 per unit at the time of the study], they still have to deal with the daily expenses of food and transportation. Some of them go to school hungry; sometimes all they have is bread.

Brian (not his real name), a student and member of a leftist student group, shared that he was homeless and even used the bathroom facilities of the student services office. If he could avoid getting caught by the university guards, he slept in the office. If he was lucky, he would find a bed space in a friend’s house or would be welcomed in one of the shanties that line the train railway located just outside the university. In worst situations, he had to sleep on the streets. Site observation showed that the student organization office of which Brian is a member had bags, clothes, shoes, and personal items sprawled all over the place, evidence that some students used the office as an occasional shelter. Brian did not know when his next meal would come and that was the life he saw living until he finishes his college degree.

The situation of Brian was more of an exception, as he was rejected by his parents for his communistic ideals. The rest of the 26,000 students of AU who study in the main campus (research site) are those who have residences or found accommodations in Manila, nevertheless could be characterized as a condition of living below the poverty line. Most students were children of the working class and that included those who labored in sweatshops and unregistered occupations such as house help, street vendors, drivers of alternative public transport such as the jeepneys (a World War II innovation, by which army jeeps were transformed into smaller versions of a bus), tricycles (altered motorcycles with three wheels) and sidecars (a similar structure as the tricycle but is maneuvered through a bicycle), or simply
unemployed. There were a few who were in better economic situations such as those whose parents worked overseas and held a regular blue collared job.

In a nutshell, the condition of poverty among students was best expressed by a group of students:

We come from all over the country, from various cultures and orientations, our main commonality is that we all come from poor families, and the spirit of the poor is the same—the difficulty of surviving.

**The condition of poverty within the university.** The condition of poverty was also reflected in their student life, as one student shared the condition of “…not having enough facilities, obsolete books, few computers, substandard instructions (instructors are always late or absent), crammed classrooms.”

Another student, Carlo, shared that to be a student of Activist University, one must be ready for anything, and that could range from classes being disrupted by rallies anytime, the computer shutting down, and all the other nuances that come from the inadequacy of resources.

A site observation of the campus revealed unattended rubbish due to lack of cleaners to attend to the maintenance of the school, unkempt toilets with no running water, students seated outside the classroom due to lack of space, among other conditions, that manifested the marginal condition with which the university itself is contending. Another factor which reinforced the marginal condition of the university was its location near the railway which was populated by shanties. The imminence of street crime trickled into the educational milieu, despite efforts to keep the grounds safe. One evidence was a conspicuous sign at the entrance gate which said (in Tagalog) “Beware of pick pockets”. The researcher was also advised by the students
and staff to refrain from using expensive gadgets or bringing in valuables as these may attract untoward attention.

**The role of the university.** Activist University’s primary role was to embed activism in the institutional identity, and this was done by: (1) promoting iconic personality from the university’s history; (2) implementing programs and policies, and provision of corresponding resources; (3) emphasizing the belief of the educators in the importance of activism in student development; and (4) initiating student activities from which students derive alternative out-of-classroom learning.

There were two distinct ways by which AU promoted activism in its ethos. One was by imbibing the philosophy of an iconic personality in the university’s history; second, by implementing policies and programs which encourage activism.

AU staff and students often referred to a past university president (name is suppressed for ethical considerations), who was an iconic personality in the university. He served for a decade in the 1960s to the early 70s and in 1986. He was a highly respected political activist, writer, and human rights defender in the Philippines. Apparently, it was under his leadership that cultural and structural changes in the university were made to promote activism. During his term as university president, the student relations and student publications units were abolished as he believed that students can self-govern. He was also the originator of electing a student regent in the governing body of state universities. In fact, at the time of the study, the university’s Mission, Vision, and Educational Philosophy upheld activism as integral to the university’s identity. However, this was no longer apparent upon current review of the university’s website. This could be gleaned more succinctly in the way discipline was enforced, as the head of student organizations explained:
Education is a laboratory where students explore life, to be allowed to make mistakes…thus, concept of discipline is corrective not punitive. AU has never expelled any student. Offending students are given the chance to voluntarily withdraw from the university.

Moreover, site observation of the university revealed several practices of accommodation towards student protests, such as the presence of a freedom park, a designated area where students can congregate for their rallies. At the time of the study, the researcher had witnessed a protest inside the premises of the university. A student commented that classes being disrupted by rallies were usual in AU. The relationship of culture and the beliefs of the educators were pronounced in AU. However, the beliefs of the educators merited a distinct analysis. In the case of the head of student organizations, he said that students are given the greatest latitude of freedom of expression: without censorship, regardless of the target of their protests. And this was concurred by other staff of student services. His claims could not have made this emphasis more pronounced when he said that “each student must be an activist, a social transformer and a contributor to social change. If student activism becomes irrelevant in AU, the administration will be forced to instigate students to be activists.”

It was interesting to note that among the nuances of student activism is being a frequent target of protests and student scrutiny. As observed in the site, even the Vice President for student services was publicly criticized in placards posted in the campus and even in the students’ publications. The VP for student services slipped at some point in the interview when he said that “student activism is a problem in AU.” But
further into the conversation, he reiterated what the head of student services claimed that should student activism be gone from AU, they would be forced to revive it.

Finally, activism could be learned from fellow students through involvement in student organisations and co-curricular activities. AU allowed students to organize with minimal censorship and supervision. Activism was given various expressions aside from political activities such as rallies and fora. One of the respondents was a group of students called Cultural Activist. These students used theater as a medium of advocacy. Another group of student activists claimed that they learned more outside than inside the classroom. The student respondents considered their involvement in activism as the “real classroom” and their teachers and the other leftwing advocates they interfaced with in meetings and rallies as their fellow students.

**Poverty as a sense of pride.** The condition of poverty both in their lives and in the university made majority of them inferior, as one of the students in a group interview expressed. However, juxtaposed with the feeling of inferiority was a resistance to being looked down upon, by turning the condition of poverty into a certain badge of honor that distinguished them from students of other well-off universities.

An evidence of this was a personal incident of the principal researcher. She asked if the university is “safe” while pointing to the warning against “pickpocketers” in the main gate. The student condescended “if you are stupid”, which merely meant that the safety of the place depends on your ability to protect yourself. And the principal researcher, at the time of the investigation, worked in a university known to educate the affluent of Philippine society, was considered a “sitting duck” because of the ignorance and lack of survival skills which her affluent milieu had enabled. At that juncture, the tables were turned to who was advantaged and
disadvantaged. Poverty, then, became the prize of the poor because it made them strong, resilient, and smart.

Activist University was referred to by its own students and staff as the “Poor Man’s University”, and such branding was not meant to refer to the marginalization of their economic condition, but rather to reiterate a statement of their distinction. In fact, in the celebration of AU’s centennial, the university formed a human rainbow composed of its 26,000 strong students plus staff. It was a show of strength in numbers as the most populous university; it was not just an expression of unity and strength but more so, of superiority and pride.

In summary, the promotion of a university culture with activism as a central focus requires a cohesive story. In this story, the students are heroes in the quest for solving poverty (the wider social-context) and the educators (student affairs) reinforce this story through its practice. The wider social context further serves to justify this story, thereby weaving student activism as a major component of the university’s identity.

**Discussion**

A plausible way of analyzing the results was to identify the social structures interacting in the AU case (See Figure 1). This translated to breaking down the roles of the dominant players (students, university, and society) and extracting their contribution in fostering a university culture grounded on the ideals of activism (Lopez & Scott, 2000).

Students, no doubt, contribute to the development of a university culture, bringing with them their own culture, as this is expressed in their interaction among themselves and the employees of the university and in the assertion of their own worldviews. In the case of AU, the students elevated their poverty story and that of
the condition of the university as a different form of education that was distinctly theirs. Poverty, then, became a backdrop of their story in which they are victors and survivors rather than victims.

Figure 1. Framework for fostering student activism in higher education.

In the same breadth, educators reinforced the culture through narratives of icons of the university who imbibed activism in their lives. This was concretely translated through policies, programs, and resources, and constantly animated through their beliefs. The wider society acted as impetus for both students and university in sustaining the culture of activism.

The interaction of these three social structures created learning permeated by the ethos of activism. This did not happen by dint of AU being in a poor country or a society such as the Philippines in which activism is tolerated. In similar studies of
universities within the Philippines in a different context, such as war, student activism was not as present, but student development evolved in a form that reflected students’ sense-making and coping with the imminence of war (Bernardo & Baranovich, 2012). The common denominator was the role of the educators in shaping the learning environment where the students are supported to pursue their natural course of making sense of their struggle and elevating it into a paradigm through which they emerge as victors rather than victims.

The findings support recent researches that posit collective identity and context as impetus for student activism. Collective identity refers to how a group (students) define itself within the wider social context (Weis & Aspinall, 2012). Some student activism aren’t necessarily perceived within the purview of being “student” but fall within particular political or ideological affiliations (e.g. Maoism). Hence, one of the group of respondents refer to themselves as “cultural” activist with primary reference to them being artists working for social justice (activism). These affiliations, often advanced by organisations ran by adults, offering alternative sources of knowledge that provides a concrete rationalization of their experiences. The combination of theory and experience, which is seldom seen in the formal curriculum creates a powerful impact in the lives of young adults. The collective identity emergent in the study, is that of the students of AU being “scholars of the nation”, a tacit nomenclature for “students who are poor, thus, studying under the assistance of the state”, in contrast to those “who can pay for private education”. This collective identity cannot be certainly gleaned as an overarching group identity, but definitely one that can specifically be discerned with their affiliation to a university like AU. This then becomes an organizational adhesive which educators and educational leaders have exploited to increase student morale and a motivational tool to encourage
them to reach their potential. Concretely, leadership legitimizes activism and reinforce
in the university’s organizational identity through its communication, the narratives of
the university’s history along with upholding iconic personalities who represent the
ideals of activism, directing policies and allocating resources. The concept of
organizational identity nascent to this study refers the members’ collective
understanding of the character of the organization which distinguishes it from other
organizations and endures over time (Albert, Ashforth & Dutton, 2000). Student
activism then as a focus of organizational identification is then used as an image by
which public perception about the university can be influenced, thus reinforcing
student activism in the culture of the university (Goia, Schultz, Corley, 2000).

Translating the findings to its implication to student development, the study
underpins the importance of students being able to feel comfortable to take risk and to
authentically express themselves, as they go through their stages of ethical and moral
development, during which they are weighing choices among various world views
and values. An environment of emotional safety, where their disappointment towards
society and their desire to find a space of significance, are recognized and supported.
In this sense, universities, through its leadership and educational programmes that
need to create an environment for both disruption and coherence. They needed to
challenge students with new ideas and experiences even as they provided the
intellectual tools and personal skills to nurture self-awareness.

It is important to remember that student development does not always occur in
a linear, chronological, or systematic fashion. Movement can be static at times, reach
plateaus or be consciously or unconsciously postponed within the student (Perry,
1999). For the student activists of AU, their knowledge of their reality was broadened
and they saw their distinct place as actors in a bigger story of society. It was in the
awareness of that role that gave them a sense of control in shaping the socio-economic script. This “role” was reinforced by fellow students, lecturers, friends in the leftist movement, and their own encounter with the oppressive structures of society: a role which was clearly validated by the university.

**Conclusion**

The findings proposed that students would support issues that weave into their personal phenomenon: a bigger picture in which they can be an important part of the story, and for which the university can provide a sympathetic space. This concurred with Zimmerman and Halfacre-Hitchcock (2006) proposition that the success of student volunteerism rests on the ability to situate the smaller movements into a larger system of change. This further means, addressing new barriers in student mobilization by situating the campus as part of the wider community, understanding the focus of students’ emotional dynamism between the students and the issues, and influencing the students’ perception of sense of place. The study contributes to the identification of institutional culture and its concomitant relational dynamics as a determinant in promoting student activism.

Future research can delve more deeply into the aspects of organizational identity, identification and image of student activism as a primary lens of investigation and analysis. The substantive entry point of this study was student affairs that gave rise to the element of institutional culture in shaping student development. Thus, the data in the study is limited in supporting trajectories with these regard without sacrificing the integrity of the research process. Future studies then would have to be approached with a specific goal of investigating the role of institutional culture in student activism. Similarly, expanding the study in a private
university is highly recommended as the public sector is a minority in the Philippine higher educational system.

The case of AU pointed to the fact that encouraging students towards social concern and action needed a conglomeration of multifarious factors. From the standpoint of educational intervention, the study posited that an agenda through a formal program or curriculum in itself would not be enough. The importance of civic involvement needed to be translated in the formal, as well non-formal structures of the university. Also, educators, from its top-most leadership to a critical mass of its staff, were articulators of the civic ideals the university wished to promote. This was further translated into the university policies and program delivery. This resonated with present literature which affirmed that the context or the university, through its ethos of activism, has a definite effect on the students (Bryant et al., 2012). The crux of education’s contribution was to provide the “bigger story” of society which the university wants to play as a major protagonist, and where students’ take the center stage in shaping the story of their own liberation.
References


