

Bridging the Divide:

Perceptions of effective responses to student protests as perceived by administrators and student activists

“Political leaders would do well not only to listen to student protest movements but also to understand their dynamics, since regimes have been threatened or even toppled by student protests” (Altbach, 1989, p. 97).

Educational leaders would also benefit from understanding and attending to student protests in a positive manner.



This study sought to understand three things:

- Student protesters' definition of effective administrator responses to student protests
- To understand what are key administrators' perceptions of effective responses and goals to student protests
- To examine how student protesters' and administrators' perceptions of effective responses to protests are the same or different

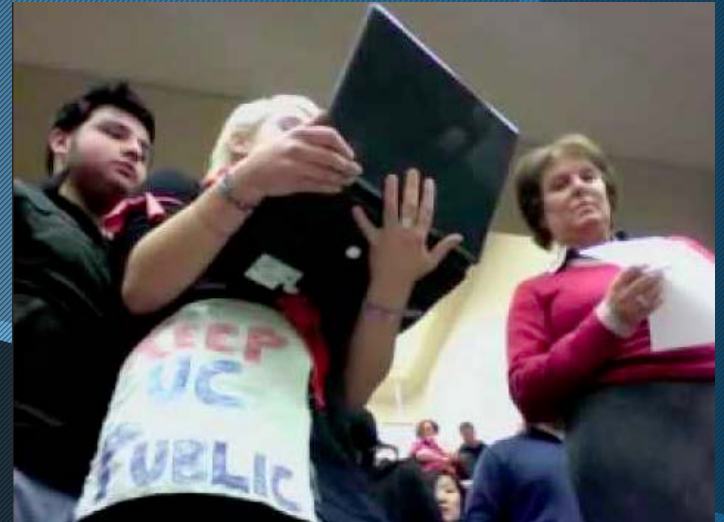
Methods

- Participants included student activists and upper level administrators at three University of California campuses
- Data were collected utilizing qualitative methodology, specifically semi-structured interviews
- Eight administrators and 23 student activists were interviewed

Results

Research question #1 states, “What are student protesters, at three University of California campuses, definition of effective administrator responses to student protests?”

- Listening
- Communication
- Transparency
- Safety



Research question #2 states, “What are selected key administrators’ at three University of California campuses, perceptions of effective responses and goals to student protests?”

- Safety
- Communication
- Listening
- Continuity of campus operations



Research question #3 states, “How are student protesters and key administrators perceptions of effective responses to student protest the same or different?”

- Student activists and administrators expressed wanting similar things.
- Students did not feel that administrators were demonstrating those things or they defined these things differently.
- These included communication, listening, and safety. Students wanted more transparency and administrators were concerned about the continuity of campus operations.
- Additionally, some administrators did not know how to respond to protests that they perceived to be “leaderless” like the Occupy movement.

“These institutions are wrong sometimes. Sometimes they’re racist, sexist, homophobic, elitist places that have lost their place at the forefront of moving along society. And our students will call us on that periodically. And when they do, I think it’s a good thing. And I think if you have an environment where you have generations of students who don’t call you on these things, then you’ve not educated them well.”

--Rudy, Administrator

Tools Administrators Perceived to be Effective in Responding to Protests

- Relationship building
- Knowledge of student development theories
- Trust
- Patience
- Relaxing rules
- Police
- Negotiation
- Protest Response Team/Demonstration Operations Team/Consultation

Tools Student Activists Think Administrators Should Use to be Effective

- Diversity training
- Understanding students' experiences
- Conflict mediation skills



Recommendations

- ✓ Student Affairs Administrators Take the Lead in Responding to Student Protests
- ✓ Training for Administrators
- ✓ Student Led Activism Response Training
- ✓ Proactive Meetings Between Student Activists and Administrators
- ✓ Paradigm Shift About Student Protests

"Campus activism can represent not a breakdown in student development but evidence of its success."

Hunter, p. 35 in Miser



Literature cited

Altbach, P. G. (1989). Perspectives on student political activism. *Comparative Education*, 25(1), 97–111.

Hunter, D. E. (1988). Student activism: Growth through rebellion. In K. M. Miser (Ed.), *Student affairs and campus dissent: Reflection of the past and challenge for the future*, (pp. 23-40). United States of America: National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, Inc.