

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF STUDENTS WELFARE SERVICES IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI
LIBRARY

The students welfare services staff of public universities and some private universities met at the first ever seminar on students welfare services at Masinde Muliro University to discuss the challenges faced in providing students welfare services in all the universities with a bias to public universities.

A paper presented by Mr. J. S. Ayieko, Dean of Students, Moi University at the seminar recognized that the general objectives of students affairs department are:

- To produce all round developed individuals able to stand out as better prepared graduates among others and capable of facing the daily world problems and challenges and provide solutions to those problems.
- To produce well-behaved graduates who are capable of functioning and interpreting their environment, give respect to society and to respect public property, our culture and respond to the needs of society in general.
- Develop the moral aspect of an individual and the whole total personality.

The Students Affairs Department is not directly in charge of all the departments that deal with students' welfare, but works in liaison with those respective departments to oversee that students' welfare is not neglected or compromised since students are our main customers.

Students Welfare department provides the following services to the students

- Accommodation
- Catering
- Games and Sports
- Health Services
- Careers Placement
- Counseling
- Students Organizations and Clubs
- Chaplaincy
- Students with Special needs
- Security

- Nurturing talent through Choir

Accommodation services

University provides accommodation for Joint Admissions Board students (JAB) with accommodation not being adequate compared to population of students. Students have increased every year with introduction of Privately Sponsored Students Programme (PSSP) or the Module II and also due to introduction of new programmes.



Uon Staff attending Students' welfare Services Seminar at Bishop Stam Pastrol Centre - Kakamega

Cohabiting, pirating, and renting of rooms by students to module II programme students are some of the problems being faced in the provision of accommodation services to student in public universities. Also the accommodation services suffer due to vandalism by students, lack of funds for repairs, inadequate staff (cleaners) and breaking of rules by students. There is also the issue of unwanted pregnancies and abortion putting in question the moral fabrics of students at the halls of residence in the public universities. Whereas in private universities halls of residence are out of bounds for non-residence it is directly opposite in the public universities.

Also prominent is the reluctance of Wardens to do their work as they are only seconded to the student welfare services department.

Since accommodation rates charged for PSSP (module II) are different and lower than those charged to regular students, this has led to corruption in hostels amongst students and staff members.

Catering services

Before the introduction of Pay-As-You-Eat (PAYE) the university used to provide free catering services to students. Problems arose when most students would riot over food (inadequate food; not well cooked; poor diet etc). Since students started paying for the food, many resorted to cooking in the hostels, since those who eat from the cafeteria complain of high cost of food, bad quality of food. In most cases needy students go hungry without food due to lack of money. Cooking in halls of residence creates filth leading to sewers being blocked hence creating sanitation problems. Delay of HELB loan also affects the student, as they cannot afford to eat in the kitchen all the time.

Games and Sports

The Universities provide Games & Sports for students for their health and also to nurture their talents. The universities also provide coaches and tutors for various games. However lack of adequate equipment, coaches for some specific games, inadequate fields, lack of swimming pools and old equipments for sports, lack of funds and grounds for sports facilities impedes the provision of games and sports services to students.

Students Organizations and Clubs

Universities provide students opportunities of electing their leaders whereby they get a chance of running their own government, which helps them mitigate for their colleagues. In this manner the students are represented at the Council and Senate. The students are able to organize recreation e.g. discos, movies, cultural nights etc.

However in the process the antagonism with university authorities and also they faces problems of leadership, finances and wrong priorities.

Clubs and Societies

These forms a forums where students who have common interest come together to

share their interests, vision etc Clubs and Societies help students to know each other better and solidify their relationship.

The clubs and societies faces a myriad of problems chief amongst them officials squander money, division amongst members, split of clubs due to conflicting interest, formation of many clubs, conflict in leadership and lack of funds to run clubs.

Health Services

Clinics within the university cater for students' health. In the provision of services the clinics suffer a myriad of problems such as lack of medicines, lack of facilities like x-ray, dental equipment, some lack-in-patient facility, inadequate staff (for night or weekend). Also prevalent is lack of ambulance or problem with the available ambulance, complaints by students on medical fee, HIV/Aids stigmatization

There is also the problem of medical insurance, payment of hospital bill for admitted students, funds to buy special medicines, treatment of uncommon disease.

Students with Special needs (physically challenged persons)

In providing services there is lack of adequate staff to assist students with special needs in their mobility. The blind, lame, deaf have inadequate facilities to ensure prompt delivery of services to this group of students for example their movement to library and other key areas

The university lack funds to cater for them, also there is lack of special rooms for them and it is also difficult to understand them.

Counseling services

Counseling services is very important to the student community. However the Students suspicious of counselors and hence they avoid counseling. Also there is inadequate staff, rooms for counseling. Therefore counseling services is therefore always done under a crisis hence creating crisis counseling, common feature in public universities.

Chaplaincy services

This helps in handling spiritual welfare of

students. However there is inadequate staff for each religious group and also lack of facility (room) for worship hence sometimes one religious group is favoured.

Choir

All public universities have choir. Otherwise funds to support choir trips and favour by the university administration is clearly lacking. The choirs also lack uniform to compete internationally.

Career development services

Wrong admission in various general programmes whereas PSSP gain



UoN Catering Staff

admission to programmes of their choice with slightly lower grades

Enforcement of Rules & Regulations

Lack of adherence to rules & regulations and hence students on suspension remain on campus and do not go home creating fear among other Students Inability to enforce rules, as students do not report these other students since they are their comrades

Some of these issues are what usually lead to riots in our public universities e.g. accommodation, health unit services, games and sports, security.

The Vice Chancellor's Committee on causes of disturbances/riots in public universities recommended as follows;

Accommodation:

University should scrap the requirement that all candidates admitted for undergraduate studies be offered accommodation in the university halls of residence. Accommodation services should be delinked from other university operations.

Entrepreneurs should be encouraged to make available alternative accommodation facilities for students near each university campus to give students a choice on where to stay.

The cost of shared accommodation should be reviewed to avoid over charging for each room

The roles of wardens, custodians/janitors and the entire administrative structure of hostels should be re-conceptualized for improvement of services.

Catering Services

The system of Pay-As-You-Eat (PAYE) should continue to be used in university Catering services.

The HELB should improve its method of identifying the poor and needy, and provide an adequate allowance to ensure that they are able to feed themselves in the university catering service.

Universities should develop and implant a mechanism for allowing students to deposit money for food over an agreed

period of time:

All staff in catering services should be enabled to improve their performance and interpersonal relationships through training.

Cooking in hostel rooms should be banned except in designated places. Universities should create kitchenettes and cooking halls for students who wish to prepare their own meals.

Joint Universities Committee on Students Welfare

The Committee consequently advised that the Vice Chancellors of Public Universities should establish a permanent Committee of the universities to be reporting to the Vice-Chancellors on the state of students' unrest in the universities.

It was proposed that the Committee be called JOINT UNIVERSITIES COMMITTEE ON STUDENTS WELFARE. The terms of reference of the Committee shall be derived from the spirit of their report under the guidance of Vice-Chancellors.