

The Campus Senate:

EXPERIMENT IN DEMOCRACY

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Does not the worst evil for a state arise from anything that tends to rend it asunder and destroy its unity, while nothing does it more good than whatever tends to bind it together and make it one?

Plato, *The Republic*



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IFI PROFILE OF STOCKTON STATE COLLEGE*

One notices almost immediately in the Stockton profile the low scores on both Democratic Governance (DG) and Institutional Esprit (IE). The esprit score is particularly interesting in that administrators and faculty share the view that esprit (which might also be called morale) is very low on the campus at the present time.

The Democratic Governance (DG) score is particularly low for students and faculty, while administrators see the democratic governance of the campus in a more favorable light. Ordinarily, when one finds large discrepancies between the administrators and the faculty on scales such as DG and IE, as well as on Self-Study and Planning (SP), it indicates that there is a communication problem on the campus of some magnitude and often a lack of agreement on the goals and objectives of the institution. In this campus, there seems to be strong agreement on the purpose of the institution, as indicated by the high concern for Undergraduate Learning (UL). This is clearly a student-centered idea of undergraduate learning, as exemplified in the items that make up the UL scale, but there is quite a bit of disagreement as to what sort of campus in terms of organization, leadership, and power would best fulfill the objectives of a student-centered program.

*Based on 80 faculty responses, 37 student responses, and 44 admin-

There are several questions in the Democratic Governance scale that give some interesting clues as to where the problem is located. The first of these is "In general, decision-making is decentralized whenever feasible or workable." On this question, 61% of the administrators strongly agree or agree, whereas only 42% of the faculty and 37% of the students agree. Fifty-six percent of the faculty disagree or disagree strongly with the statement, suggesting that there is a real disagreement on campus as to the decentralized nature of decision-making. (IFI data we gathered from the members of the Campus Council at Stockton basically support this disagreement. The Council members appear to be more typical of the campus than representatives of "fringe" elements.) Another interesting item from the Democratic Governance scale is "Power here tends to be widely dispersed rather than tightly held." Eighty-eight percent of the faculty disagree or strongly disagree with that statement, and 75% of the administrators disagree or strongly disagree; while 76% of the students disagree or strongly disagree. This suggests that the campus is in agreement that power is tightly held, probably by the administration. If there is this agreement and everyone saw the result as productive, there would be no necessary problem. But in this particular case, there is some basic anxiety concerning the amount of power and the lack of initiative that the faculty and students are able to develop. (On the item "Governance of this institution is clearly in the hands of the administration," 87% of the faculty agree, 71% of the students agree, and 70% of the administrators agree. Quite clearly,

of the faculty might be quite interested in developing their own strong

then, this faculty is not used to situations in which a strong administration runs things.)

As some other evidence for this communication problem, on the item in the Self-Study and Planning (SP) scale, "There is a long-range plan for the institution published for college-wide distribution," 45% of the faculty say yes, 38% of the faculty say no; while 67% of the administrators say yes. This suggests that there is such a plan, but that the faculty basically has not been informed of its existence and that the faculty has not been involved in its development.

The Concern for Innovation (CI) on the campus is one of the strong points of the institution's score. There seems to be widespread agreement that this campus is to be different in mission and conception, and it would seem that there is considerable possibility of developing something unusually creative on this campus.

One of the difficulties is seen in the Institutional Esprit (IE) scale, under the item "Most faculty consider the senior administrators to be able and well qualified." Thirty-five percent of the faculty agree or strongly agree with this statement, whereas 63% either disagree or strongly disagree. On the other hand, 63% of the administrators agree with the statement, and 35% disagree or strongly disagree. This suggests that there is a minority group within the administration that realizes that large numbers of the faculty do not consider the senior administrators to be able and well qualified. Indeed, it is possible that no "perfect" administrators could meet the standards of a group of faculty like this.

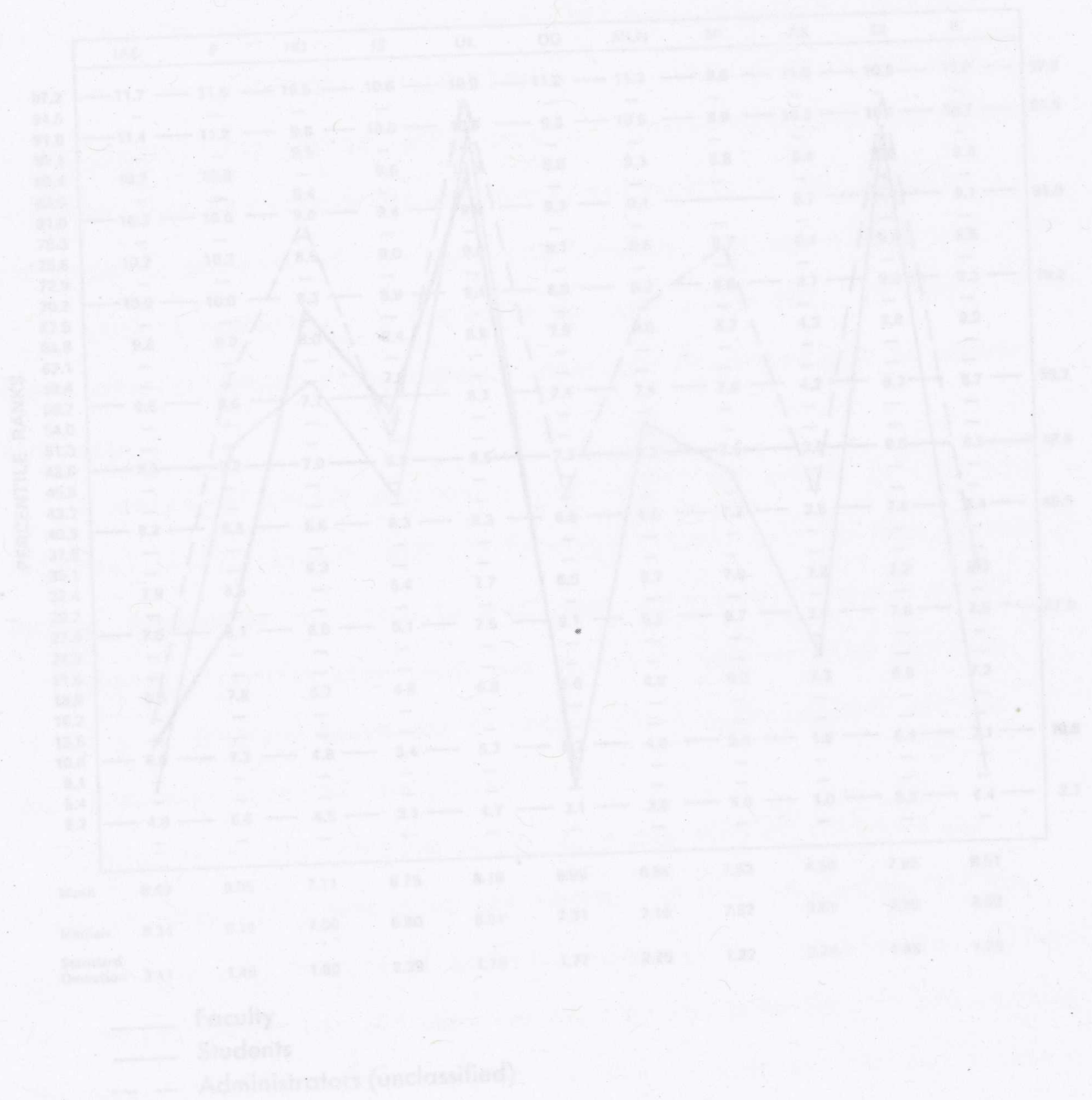
The potential for better morale and loyalty comes in the question "Although they may criticize some things, most faculty seem loyal to the college." On this item, 85% of the faculty agree, and 77% of the administrators agree. This suggests, then, that there is a widely held admission that the faculty do like the institution and that they want it to be better, but perhaps on their own terms rather than the terms laid down by the administration. Similarly, there is a strong return on a question regarding the existence of a sense of community on campus with feelings of shared purposes. Fifty-seven percent of the faculty agree with that statement, and 51% of the administrators agree. On the other hand, faculty morale is low, as agreed to by 80% of the faculty and 65% of the administrators.

The IFI profile for Stockton, then, reveals an exciting, dynamic institution which is in its stages of "growing pains." Clearly, some rapprochement will have to be reached between the various campus constituencies, particularly the faculty and the administration. Most students seem very uninterested in questions of campus decision-making and probably cannot force a reconciliation between faculty and administrators.

The IFI profile from Council members suggests that they are representative in points of view of the campus as a whole, but whether or not the entire faculty, the students, and the administration will come to recognize the Council as a legitimate and important device in campus affairs can not be concluded from the profile itself. Indeed, it looks as if many of the faculty might be quite interested in developing their own strong

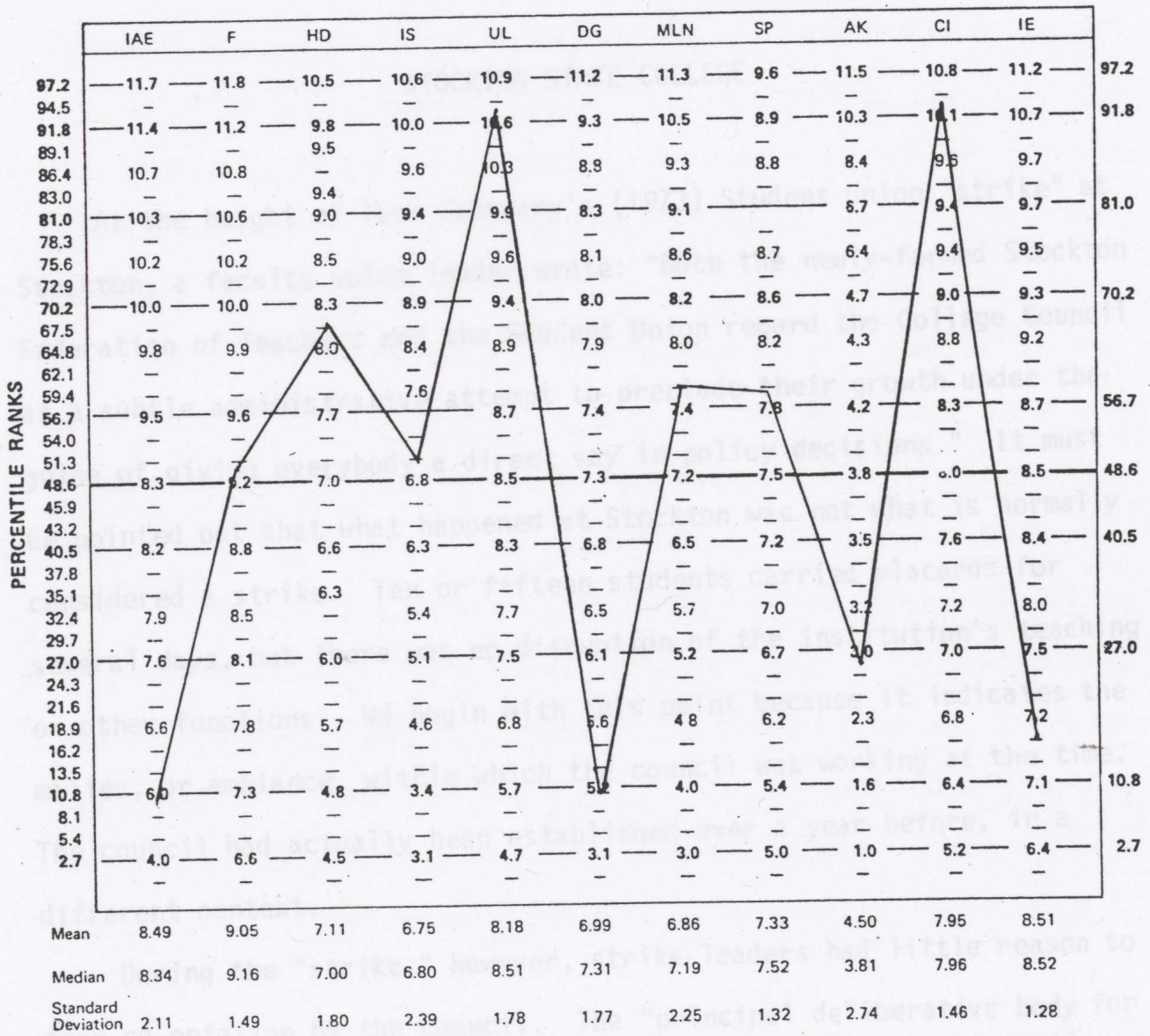
organization, perhaps a faculty senate or a union. One would suspect, however, that several years from now the esprit scale will be higher at Stockton and either the democratic governance scale will be higher, or the institution will be in serious trouble.

(based on faculty scores at 27 competition group institutions described in the 1977 Professions Yearbook Report)



STOCKTON STATE COLLEGE—TOTAL INSTITUTIONAL INSTITUTIONAL FUNCTIONING INVENTORY

Distribution of Scale Means, with Percentile Equivalents
(based on faculty means at 37 comparison group institutions described in the *IFI Preliminary Technical Manual*)

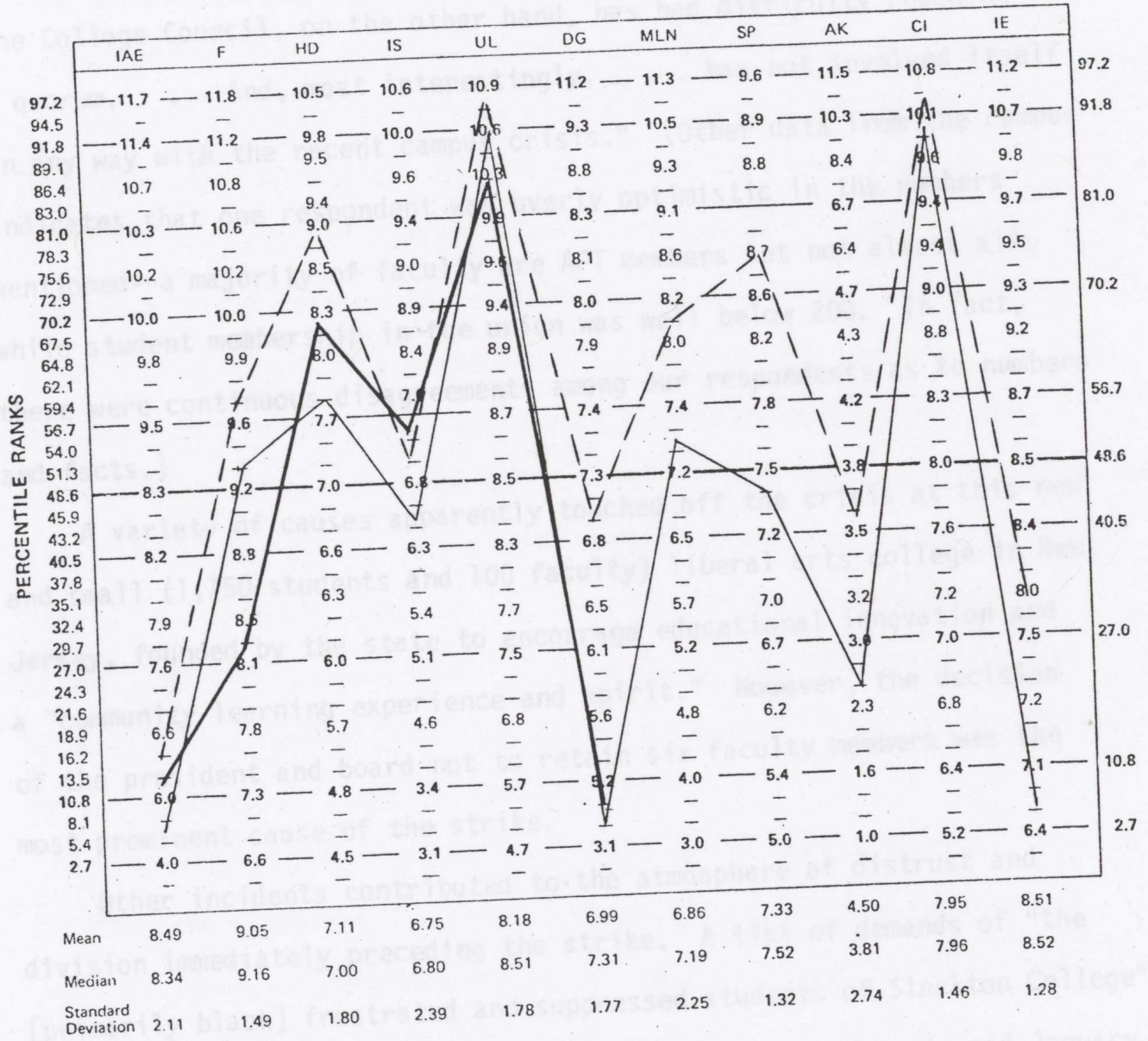


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STOCKTON STATE COLLEGE—DISTRIBUTION BY SUBGROUPS (Total institutional sample)

INSTITUTIONAL FUNCTIONING INVENTORY

Distribution of Scale Means, with Percentile Equivalents
(based on faculty means at 37 comparison group institutions described in the *IFI Preliminary Technical Manual*)



— Faculty
 - - Students
 . . Administrators (unclassified)

STOCKTON STATE COLLEGE

At the height of last February's (1973) Student Union "strike" at Stockton, a faculty union leader wrote: "Both the newly-formed Stockton Federation of Teachers and the Student Union regard the College Council as a subtle administrative attempt to preclude their growth under the guise of giving everybody a direct say in policy decisions." It must be pointed out that what happened at Stockton was not what is normally considered a strike. Ten or fifteen students carried placards for several days, but there was no disruption of the institution's teaching or other functions. We begin with this point because it indicates the milieu, or ambiance, within which the council was working at the time. The council had actually been established over a year before, in a different context.

During the "strike," however, strike leaders had little reason to fear co-optation by the council. The "principal deliberative body for the internal affairs of the college," narrowly escaped voting to disband itself (spurred on by sympathetic student union supporters in the council) and continued to function, but mainly on the sidelines.

As one participant observer wrote in early March after the storm had abated somewhat from his point of view, "College Council is being

superseded in its functioning by several distinct groups. All but a few faculty members are now members of the American Federation of Teachers. Several hundred students are members of the Student Union. . . . Almost as many have joined the anti-militant Stockton Students Association. The College Council, on the other hand, has had difficulty reaching a quorum. . . . And, most interestingly, . . . has not involved itself in any way with the recent campus crisis." (Other data from the campus indicates that one respondent was overly optimistic in the numbers mentioned--a majority of faculty are AFT members but not almost all, while student membership in the union was well below 200. In fact, there were continuous disagreements among our respondents as to numbers and facts.)

A variety of causes apparently touched off the crisis at this new and small (1,750 students and 100 faculty) liberal arts college in New Jersey, founded by the state to encourage educational innovation and a "community learning experience and spirit." However, the decision of the president and board not to retain six faculty members was the most prominent cause of the strike.

Other incidents contributed to the atmosphere of distrust and division immediately preceding the strike. A list of demands of "the [primarily black] frustrated and suppressed students of Stockton College" (as one respondent put it) were rejected by the president in mid-January. The demands included the firing of a financial aids officer and a campus security guard, and extension of financial aid benefits. The students

in the Student Union were also irritated by the president's decision in November, 1972, to veto the College Council's proposal for allocation of student activity fees.

The College Council's inability to prevent the brewing conflicts from spilling out or to act after they did boil over might be partly attributed to the problem of representing very diverse constituencies, its own limited view of its function, and a perception some of its members shared with the strikers that the President should not veto council decisions.

The council was formed in October, 1971, over a year before the crisis began. Its founding was seen as an additional means of developing a community spirit in an innovative and creative educational setting. Most of Stockton's faculty possess the Ph.D. One gets the impression of a faculty not much lower in intellectual caliber than those at the best institutions in the country. Many of the faculty are also oriented towards non-traditional educational philosophies, and were attracted by the college's self-designed major options, flexible time schedules, non-traditional grading system, and interdisciplinary thrust. Others are more traditional in their outlook, which produces some faculty tensions.

Early in the first year of Stockton's existence, the original 55 faculty decided not to organize an autonomous faculty government, although the faculty did meet as a group. The College Council was to be the primary vehicle for deliberation and direction in all-college

policymaking. This strongly communitarian attitude permeated college life and may be reflected in the faculty's decision during the first year not to opt for a collective bargaining agent, as other faculty in the New Jersey college system had done. (It was only during the second year of the college's existence, prompted by the non-retention decisions, that unionism became a serious option for the Stockton faculty.)

Although Atlantic County is sparsely populated (accurate numbers were hard to find), some of the student body come from that county and 8.5% are black. The range, in ability and background, is great, causing many challenges for teachers from excellent but conventional graduate schools. Forty percent of the students are over 26 years old, and the state is reportedly expressing a growing interest in improving occupational and career programs for them. Other data suggests that the students are decidedly upwardly mobile. According to one faculty survey, for example, four out of five students were considering post-graduate or professional work. No student government aside from the College Council exists; however, a student union, relatively unsupported by the majority of students, was emerging.

The Council until recently was composed of twelve students, ten faculty, and eight staff. A new proposal for Council membership was just passed. The president was, and continues to be, excluded from membership under the Council's by-laws. While representation was relatively evenly distributed, the process by which representatives were selected was highly unorthodox, in terms of our questionnaire data.

Representatives were selected by lottery from the large number of volunteer candidates turning in petitions carrying the names of ten supporters. It was felt the procedure insured that everyone interested had an equal chance to serve, but during the strike it was denounced by faculty union members and student leaders of the strike and was apparently a factor in the Council's problem with legitimacy. A faculty union organizer said the procedure prevented "real faculty and student leaders from stepping forward." Another faculty member and a Council representative said the present system made it too easy to be chosen and allowed "the possibility for uninterested and, perhaps, less than competent people to find themselves sitting on the College Council." A contrary point of view held that this particular representation style prevented a situation where the Council would be composed of a multiplicity of self-interest groups, each claiming to be the legitimate spokesmen for the students, faculty, and staff members. The pattern is being modified in fall, 1973, to allow a large Council membership and a combination of lottery -- and elected positions.

In addition, several faculty objected to the broad-based representation and inclusion of clerical and other nonacademic staff on a council which would deliberate academic/educational policy.

For a body which was conceived as a potentially influential force, our respondent Council members increasingly tended to see the Council's role as quite limited, and they were reluctant to test Council powers.

The Council is organized into three standing committees--Instruction,

Co-Curriculum, and Administration. The standing committees are empowered to organize task forces, consisting of both council members and non-council members, for the purpose of investigating specific issues or performing specific tasks. The Council as a whole is obliged to meet at least once each month, at which time it hears and takes action on the reports of the standing committees and task forces and considers other issues brought before it.

During the 1972-73 academic year up to and through the crisis period, the Council tended to deal mainly with relatively short uncontroversial tasks and peripheral issues. For example, they chose a school nickname, consulted on improving the sports and recreation program, planned graduation ceremonies, helped the school newspaper move towards independence, and administered various contracts with outside agencies. It took up only three really controversial issues--grading policy, the hiring of a vice president, and allocation of the student activities budget--and it steered clear of many more difficult policy areas which the president had recommended that it consider early in the year (for example, the issue of tenure and rehiring policy). To this extent, relationships with the president have never been determined in areas in which he has asked them to delineate policy.

The Council's problems of speaking for diverse constituents may have been one cause of its circumspection, or this may have been caused by a natural desire for immediate acceptance by "being a winner," which led to the passage of noncontroversial issues at the expense of controversial

but more significant ones. In addition, President Bjork's administrative style may have been another factor that contributed to the Council's cautious behavior.

Stockton's president, Dr. Richard E. Bjork (political science), is a former vice-chancellor of the New Jersey Department of Higher Education, and is said by some to rule Stockton with a heavy hand. From his statements and from interviews, one gets the immediate impression that he sees his role as that of a "broker" between external constituencies and authorities, and internal groups. In addition, he sees the chief executive as an educational leader, provocateur, but most importantly, an educational manager. (Stockton is one of a small number of institutions working in the area of management systems under support from the Exxon Foundation.)

President Bjork seems to be a careful administrator, deliberate and cool in his actions. His relationship with the Council seems to be direct and unevasive. Demands from aggrieved groups are met with considered, clear statements of fact and intention, albeit with some controversy and disagreement.

Although the handbook on governance presents a clear picture, our respondents indicated that decision-making channels were unclear at Stockton. The responsibilities of the faculty, students, and administration, as well as the College Council, were felt to be undefined and ambiguous. It may be that some did not want to accept the handbook's statements. This uncertainty, coupled with the major problems developing

in retention and tenure policy, left the institution with few procedural precedents for deliberating conflict. Yet, things did get done even with this uncertainty.

Earlier in the year, Bjork had sent back some of the demands of the "frustrated and suppressed students" (only a small fraction of the students were ever involved) and had revised the proposed student activity fees allocation of the College Council. At that time, in late November of 1972, he wrote to the president of the Council indicating the difficulties of maintaining executive leadership in participatory governance: "It probably is unrealistic to expect that anyone's recommendations, including even the careful ones of the College Council, will always be accepted as stated. . . . I would only hope that the College Council will understand that when I change its recommendations, I do not do it capriciously but only with reason. I have always welcomed the opportunity to share my reasons with members of the Executive Board [of the Council], with the Co-Curriculum Committee, and with you. Even when we disagree I would like to believe that we can respect both our differing reasons and conclusions."

During the crisis the always-fragile authority which the Council represented disintegrated internally at the same time as it was being challenged by the president to develop new responsibilities. Some members of the Council evidently felt that it had been compromised in the eyes of its constituencies by its failure to initiate bold responses to what were seen by some as provocative presidential actions, and by

its consequent appearance to more radical forces of accommodating and rubber-stamping Bjork's decisions.

"Student attendance is not what it should be," reported a participant observer in late January, 1973. ". . . [One] possible reason is the increasing disillusionment of many council members with the seeming paucity of important issues given to the council for consideration. . . . The general atmosphere is quickly becoming one of futility, through disappointment over the lack of effective responsibility." Though the vote to disband failed to gain the constitutionally necessary two-thirds majority, the Council seemed to be increasingly unsure of its proper role.

The "strike" and the feelings of hostility died down with the issues originally provoking it remaining little changed. One of the six faculty was rehired, and the College Council was neither abolished nor voluntarily disbanded. However, the general dissatisfaction with the Council sparked a reform movement led by a faculty council-member to restructure it along more representative lines.

Under this plan, which was recently approved, Council membership will be boosted from 30 to 40 (an increase of eight students and two staff, with no change in numerical representation of the faculty). Five faculty and ten of the student representatives will be elected by their constituencies. The remaining members will be chosen by lot from those petitioning in order to give those "who are interested in Council but not in running for election a chance to be selected." The

number of petition signatures required for candidacy will be raised to 25. The plan also requires the Council to meet twice, rather than once, a month. The Council will also be further opened to extra-council and community input.

While these changes will certainly make the Council a more representative, and conceivably even a more influential body, even the proposal's staunchest supporters feel their success is contingent on a change they cannot directly influence. "If the Council is ever to achieve the lofty responsibilities stated for it in our handbook," said one faculty council-member last February, "the groups that have traditionally made all the decisions in a college must be ready to forego some of their 'power'." He might have added that future Councils may also have to decide to exercise their delegated powers to the fullest.

Perhaps because some people care so deeply about the college, communication and trust are seemingly difficult problems for this campus. The notion of community, and cooperative action between faculty and administration, has broken down, especially between the first-year faculty and the president. The situations described above can be seen more as a battle over the distribution of roles, responsibilities, and power at Stockton than as a confrontation over any particular issue. Stockton is a young, dynamic institution suffering from inevitable growing pains. Many of these are faced in the Council, but with very little spirit of mutual understanding and trust. Perhaps these qualities emerge with age and experience. Certainly, given the energy and intelligence of its

members, the Council could become a central and cohesive element of a new and vital campus. The new plan for representation, plus more desire to work together, could bring this about.

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