

Kitchen's Advice: Do Homework

University administrators often view themselves as mentors to aspiring student leaders, even though throughout much of their relationship an administrator and a student might be on opposite sides of every issue.

Susan Kitchen, vice chancellor for student affairs, regularly deals with students who want changes in everything from campus dining to parking. In a recent interview with The Daily Tar Heel, she shared her thoughts on effective student leadership.

DTH: What makes an effective student leader?

Kitchen: I appreciate somebody who has done their homework and who attempts to collaborate. You've got to do both.

Once you've done your homework it has to be a conversation about how to improve.

DTH: Do you ever lose respect for student leaders?

Kitchen: I don't lose respect because I think you have to learn how to do this ... It's OK to ask questions.

DTH: Do you ever feel like administrators can be a bit paternalistic?

Kitchen: I say to new student leaders, particularly to new student body presidents, 'Here's how I operate, and you're going to have to trust me.' And usually things work out ... If we agreed on everything, one of us isn't doing our job. The worst thing that happens is that students will make the administration an adversary, and the administration will wait students out.

I think you have to understand how decisions are made and the difference between decision-making and input ... For every new thing that you want, you have to give up something else. Even within administrations there's competition for dollars.

DTH: Low student voter turnout is nothing new. Do administrators use the number of votes a student body leader gets as leverage?

Kitchen: What I like to do is remind elected student leaders just how many people did elect them. It's kind of a humbling experience. It's up to them to gain more support.

There is not a student voice, and it's the same thing with administrators. There are diverse groups, backgrounds and opinions. It's not like we're cookie-cutters and we all think the same.

DTH: What about student leaders who take strong activist stances versus just collaborating and cooperating?

Kitchen: I guess that's where doing your homework is helpful. I think that one of the things that I didn't understand as a student leader and it even took me some time as a staffer, is that administrators don't have as much power as I thought they did. Persuasion and influence lead to more long-term results. That's true for any members of an organization.

DTH: Do you think administrators would prefer to have no student input?

Kitchen: It would make my job a lot harder ... (but) I don't think you should make decisions based purely on polls. (I could be really popular if I said) 'Let's have kegs!' ... I'm not here for popularity. I'm an educator ...

Student government leaders, at their best, wrestle with that as well.

DTH: Do administrators try to dupe students?

Kitchen: It's foolish. It only works in the short term ... Duping students leads to a bad reputation.

DTH: What are three things every student leader should know about dealing well with administrators?

Kitchen: Do your homework. Go to the closest point that a decision gets made. Maximize the things where you agree and find another ally on places where you don't agree.

Hoops and Hurdles: Can Student Leaders Make Things Happen?

With student elections on the horizon, you can bet you'll hear student body president candidates talk ceaselessly about the impact student government has on University policy.

Granted, student leaders have an impact. Students should definitely care enough to vote for the next student body president. But student leaders are limited in what they accomplish directly because the real power on campus lies with administrators.

So before selecting the student, and in effect his or her staff, who will represent your voice on committees across campus, investigate what methods the student must use to succeed and what hurdles he or she faces in getting things done.

And when you cast your ballot on Feb. 9, know what, not just whom, you're voting for.



'Student Government' a Misnomer

"Student self-governance" has always been touted as a venerable and historically strong tradition at the University. Students supposedly have the autonomy within legal limits to organize and do what they want without fear of interference from administrators, trustees, faculty or staff members.

This idea of student self-governance holds true for some organizations. The Asian Students Association and the Outing Club run themselves. The Carolina Athletic Association has kept a tight grip on basketball ticket distribution for years. And the bank fraud scandal surrounding the Order of the Grail-Valkyries, a UNC honorary society, last year was an example of student self-governance run amok.

Yet the one organization that derives its very title from the concept of student self-governance is one of the least likely to fit its description. UNC's student government has very little power to make something significant happen on its own, unlike a truly self-governed institution. Almost everything significant has to get approval (and funding) from administrators. Student government had to push administrators to open the Undergraduate Library 24 hours a day; it never would've happened without administrators' permission. Despite success, however, even the most effective student government does not "govern." At its worst, it loiters for a year in its Suite C offices. At its best, it negotiates with University administrators to get things done.

At the same time, administrators, despite having a lot of influence over what happens on the campus and ability to make changes, are bound as well. Because UNC is a public institution, our administrators, Chancellor Michael Hooker included, are not responsible only to the students on this campus. They have other bosses, namely the state government and N.C. taxpayers.

With all of the complex ins and outs of student government and its relationship with the administration, it's amazing anything ever gets done. But it does, thanks largely to those who search for a method to the madness.



NAHAL TOOSI
EDITORIAL PAGE EDITOR

I recently interviewed three former student body presidents, Calvin Cunningham (1995-1996), Aaron Nelson (1996-1997) and Mo Nathan (1997-1998). After the initial hellos, throughout the reminiscing of their glory days, and before the eventual group hug (in which I took no part), I learned a few things about what an effective student government has to do within the system to get what it wants.

When we vote for our student body president, we do not elect an independent leader with the power to create University policy. Instead, we elect a student who, through committees, conversations and public forums, relays concerns and ideas to University administrators. In this setting, he bargains, perhaps begs and sometimes threatens, to get anything from more bike racks to a revamping of the advising system.

The student body president appoints negotiators as members of the executive branch. Some outrank others, many don't get along and all claim to serve student interests. Among and within the branches, especially between Student Congress and the executive branch, there is a lot of negotiation about exactly what demand, idea or concern to relate to the people in South Building, the UNC system's General Administration or the state legislature.

"Not all students agree," Calvin Cunningham said. "I think you're constantly working for points of consensus and legitimacy."

So levels of negotiators try to bargain for Program A and Plan B with an administration that itself is layered and reports to North Carolinians and their representatives. That administration has its own programs and plans, too. Consider the ongoing Master Plan, which will revamp the look and structure of the campus. That plan will go from level to level and administrator to administrator for critique, review and implementation. Students year after year have to keep up with this plan on a consistent basis.

Time certainly complicates the matter. A student body president and his staff have a year to make a difference on campus. Administrators have an undefined amount of time, and they know they can wait students out. So student government leaders must prioritize. What first? Finding the money for a free-standing Sonja H. Stone Black Cultural Center or trying to get satel-

lite television service for the Student Union? What can be done quickly, and what can be started for others to finish?

The creation of a Student Fee Audit Committee is an example of prioritization and continuation. Calvin Cunningham's administration wanted students to have more sustained control over changes in student fees, not to mention influence on how many services students received for every dollar they put into the system. Cunningham proposed the Student Fee Audit Committee, Aaron Nelson's administration set it on a successful track, and Mo Nathan's and current Student Body President Reyna Walters' administrations have kept it going. Since its founding, the committee has served as an important check on student fee increases.

Thus, effective student government measures outlive their creators' time in office. Good student body presidents think beyond the fact that they won't have to face re-election and try to do what they can or at least set a base for what they want so those that follow them can work things out. At the same time, they implement the successful and good plans of their predecessors - always in the interest of the students.

"Give people something to believe in," Aaron Nelson said. "Surround yourself with good people and trust them."

Even with exceptional trust, everything comes at a cost. Money is the lifeblood of our institutions, but information is the discriminate pump that determines where it flows. A student government that is well-informed (and relies on more than biased administrators to get information on issues) is one that is well-equipped to back up its proposals or cry out against others' ideas.

But besides doing their homework to prepare for numerous meetings, student leaders also face the challenge of informing the students they represent about their activities and getting information from students about what they should be doing. Some do this well; others don't. Either way, the student leaders often must choose a side based on the information they have, even if it makes them unpopular.

"Everyone has an issue, but you're not necessarily responsible to a particular community," Mo Nathan said. "The key to learning what's going on at this University is consistent effort. But you can lose particular students' viewpoints. And that's why you have to make every effort possible to stay in touch with as many people as possible."

When Calvin Cunningham supported a \$400 tuition increase during his tenure, he faced the wrath of many dissenters, including some members of his administration. But Cunningham says today that information from all sides of the debate, including reports and conversations, influenced his decision to support the increase.

Cunningham read about how the University had slipped from the first tier of institutions with

high faculty salaries. He saw anecdotal evidence when prestigious UNC faculty left for better-paying jobs elsewhere. Cunningham said the libraries were canceling subscriptions to certain journals because of low funds, and they needed new technology. But before supporting higher tuition, Cunningham pushed for and received a provision for aid for financially needy students. "My argument was that if we're going to have a tuition increase, let's earmark it," Cunningham said. "Let's know dollar for dollar where it's going."

Student governments are not totally powerless or dependent on sympathy from administrators to accomplish things. As Cunningham put it, student government has a "quiver of arrows" when it comes to strategy. Which arrow it uses depends on the situation. Thereby, calling out and occasionally embarrassing an administrator is an option, as is compromise. Student leaders have been known to get their share of administrators fired as well as save a few jobs.

Student leaders who give administrators good publicity often get what they want, as do those who threaten to circumvent the relationship altogether and go to an administrators' superior.

UNC has an interesting set-up because as a member of the Board of Trustees, the student body president is, in effect, the chancellor's boss. Student body presidents know they can always appeal to their fellow trustees on the board to accomplish something that the chancellor might not appreciate.

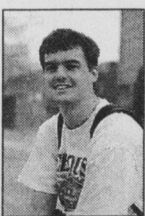
Such strategies have been known to work at times and fail miserably during others. It took several years worth of continuous student effort to start the advising system's revamping. It took a short discussion between Aaron Nelson and Chancellor Hooker to get students half a day off of class to help clean the campus after Hurricane Fran in 1996.

Some student leaders have jumped into bed with administrators (figuratively). Others, such as Student Body President Bill Bates (1975-1976), have "declared war on the University administration." The relationship fluctuates every year, but overall, the student voice at this University has gotten louder and more intense. A more active and concerned student body typically gets more accomplished. The last time students electrified the University was earlier this decade when they rallied for a freestanding BCC. But it is idealistic to think that beyond the small, esoteric activities students undertake, "student self-governance" means students govern themselves. The "governing" role that student government plays today is miniscule in comparison to the representative and negotiating roles it takes on year after year.

Nahal Toosi is a senior journalism and mass communication and political science major from McKinney, Texas. You can reach her at ntoosi@email.unc.edu.

HOW CAN STUDENT GOVERNMENT BE MORE EFFECTIVE?

"If (student government) is gonna be the voice of the students (it) ought to have regular meetings within campus districts. At least that would provide a more open opportunity for students to get out there and get things done."



KEVIN NOLTE
Senior, History, Winston-Salem

"They should have something like meetings or somewhere where they would get a better idea of what the student body as a whole wants and want issues are important."



NADIA IRVINE
Sophomore, Business, Baltimore, Md.

"I think it'd be good if student organizations got together in general. I'm totally clueless about what's going on with some of the organizations."



PAUL SCONYERS
Junior, Communications Studies, Durham

"They should make their objectives a little more public."



LESLIE SMITH
Junior, History, Sanford

"A lot of stuff goes on that's not totally representative of students. There's a little mudslinging that goes on. The people in (Student) Congress should find out what students want. I don't really know what goes on in there - you have to go out of your way to find out."



AUGUST JENKINS
Sophomore, Journalism, Winston-Salem