

Opinions and Attitudes of Students on the Goals of USP

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A brief survey was carried out in 1984 to obtain data that might be useful to staff and students of the University of the South Pacific (USP) concerning the degree to which student opinions, attitudes and group organisation affect the achievement of the goals of the University, especially regionalism. The questionnaire also explored what students know about the goals and objectives of the University. The items for it were extracted from the University Charter (as in USP's 1980 Calendar, p. 302) and the statements of the then Vice-Chancellor, Dr. James Maraj, (ibid pp. 57-58) about what the University should be.

I attempted to obtain an equal number of non-Fiji and Fiji full-time students for comparative purposes. Of the intended 50, some 45 students filled in the questionnaires. The sample was done on a volunteer basis. 66.6% of the persons who filled in the questionnaire were male and the same percentage were full-time students. 81% were in the 17-34 years age range. There was an almost equal number of single and married persons. Most (62.2%) of the subjects were Fiji citizens and 71% of those in the sample had been studying at USP between 1 and 4 years.

Most of the students (93.3%) in the sample agreed that "USP is a regional institution" and "serves as a major resource centre for development for its member countries", but only (77.7%) agreed that "USP is concerned with the quality and standards of its own academic scholarship".

The goal: "USP will serve as a major resource centre for development for its members" received the most numerous response (46.6%) as the most important goal of the University. Of the 22 persons who gave this response, 8 were Fijians, 4 Fiji-Indians and 10 non-Fiji students. The high proportion of non-Fiji students suggests a difference between them and Fiji students in how they perceive this goal.

The goal: "that USP will continue to strive to be a regional institution" received the least favourable rating as an important goal for the University. Of the 16 persons who rated this goal as least important, 9

were Fijians, 3 Fiji-Indians and 4 non-Fiji students. The high proportion of Fiji students again suggests a contrasting perception of this goal in comparison to non-Fiji students. Fiji students seem to be less concerned about the goal of regionalism than non-Fiji students.

I aimed to test the students' knowledge of what the University has planned and is doing about its goals. 95.5% of the students were aware of "expanding the Extension Services in the region", but only 16.6% were aware of plans for "the transferring of Preliminary I work to Extension Services".

The University activity which interested students most was "expanding the Extension Services in the region" which was followed closely by "strengthening the vocational orientation of first year degree and diploma programmes", which seems to reflect a preference for practical-oriented goals.

In a section for voluntary expressions of ideas only 17 of the 45 students commented. In regard to the University goal of promoting regionalism, 5 suggested how it might be achieved more effectively (for example, one student suggested that the Vice-Chancellor should continue to come from outside Fiji to prevent domination by Fiji, which would defeat the ideal of regionalism). Ten commented on the University goal of maintaining its academic standards. Of these 10, 7 expressed dissatisfaction with the limited range and insufficient practical nature of the present courses. Of the goal relating to serving the member countries of the region, the only comment was one which said that tertiary education should be taken to the people wherever they are. The findings suggest that many students are preoccupied with course work rather than University goals.

It was suggested that the present organisational structure of student groups is not conducive to promoting regionalism. The students' ethnocentric interests were assumed to be the major factor causing this problem.

The findings of all sections in the questionnaire suggest a consistent pattern of opinions and attitudes among the students in the sample. Most agree with the goals of the University, but the ethnic origin of the students seems to influence the degree to which they prioritise particular goals. Students from outside Fiji respond more favourably to regionalism than Fiji citizens. This could be an important problem for the University

to consider.

Thus, although students generally agree with the ideal of regionalism, they have yet to acquire regional attitudes appropriate to the ideal of committing themselves to activities outside their country of origin. The present organisational structure of the student bodies such as USPSA and other groups may not facilitate this ideal of regionalism. For example, cultural groups encourage students to separate into ethnic groups but few organisations (e.g. Christian Union, USP Arts Association) encourage the mixing of students of different ethnicity in order to promote regionalism. Even the sporting clubs tend to be organised according to ethnic groups. Fijians tend to be dominant numerically in rugby, Indians or Solomon Islanders in soccer, and so on. The problem for the University is to create organisational structures that support regionalism, whereby students are expected to mix in certain situations and learn to get along with one another. There seems to be an over-emphasis on national/ethnic groupings at present on the USP campus. Reorganisation seems necessary. So if regionalism is to be fostered, a reorganisation of student clubs' ethnic composition and the encouragement of cross-cultural understanding seems appropriate and necessary.