



Student Representation in Lebanese Universities: The Bitter Truth

*An Article by
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If you went ahead and asked any student in a Lebanese University what their level of satisfaction regarding their student representation is, their answer would be they either are not satisfied or simple don't care. There is a common thread or pattern of problems that can be seen amongst all Lebanese Universities that vary in severity and effect. And because student representation and engagement are a vital key to development and participative citizenship, the elimination and reduction of those obstacles is a must. The most important problems facing student representation in Lebanese universities would be students' mental module, political interference, limitations and lack of power.

One of the major problems that student representation face in Lebanese universities would be the mental modules of the students themselves. A lot has been said about changing students' elections, reshaping them, giving them another meaning. People want a shift in the way students vote, but how can we do this without changing their approach to students' matters? Let's have clubs who talk about social equality, ecology, science, economy, students' activism. Let these clubs reshape the role and the scope of the council. And let's wait. Wait 5 years maybe.



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

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We might succeed in reshaping the mentality, we might fail. If we fail, let's have a different approach. It might seem hard. We might fail again. At least we should try.

Another prominent problem that student representation face is the electoral method used in elections. While different universities have different electoral laws, a common trend amongst many universities in Lebanon is the domination of politically affiliated candidates in student councils. Political parties collectively lobby for their candidates in universities by building on that affiliation to get votes instead of lobbying for their candidates based on their qualifications and agenda. This makes it much harder for highly qualified independent candidates to gain votes since they would be alone in running up against entire political parties.

Lastly, another problem would be that students are facing resistance from the universities' administrations when submitting requests and voicing their opinions that they consider to be of utmost importance. With the university's power of denial and approval, the students are often left feeling helpless. It is known that both parties (the university and students) have different perspectives, but that shouldn't lead to conflict, nor does it imply that the students are always right or the other way around. That's why student representation exists: to bridge the gap between the administration and the students. Yet, with their lack of power, the students are to be considered advisors rather than really change makers.

For student empowerment and representation to become more valuable, student representatives must have more say in the decision-making process. In other words, they must be able to participate in the decision-making process. Students representatives must have the power to vote with or against decisions that affect them directly or indirectly.





Which is why, when students find that their university is not cooperating with them, they are finding new ways to voice their concerns: manifestation, protests or finding weaknesses for the university and facing the administration with them.

All of those three major problems can be solved by raising awareness on the issue of social participation and responsibility and the importance of student engagement and empowerment in creating a new vision and future for the next generations in which students are a prominent part of decision making.

This article has been written in the framework of the second capacity-building activity of the StEER-Leb project, that took place in March 2020 at the University of Rouen-Normandie.