



GOOD PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

STUDENT EMPOWERMENT, ENGAGEMENT AND REPRESENTATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS





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Student Empowerment, Engagement and Representation in Higher Education Institutions

This booklet has been elaborated within the frame of the StEER-Leb project, an EU co-funded project that aims at boosting student empowerment, engagement and representation infrastructures in Lebanese universities.

Within the frame of this project, students and staff from European and Lebanese universities participated in shadowing visits in Europe in order to share their experiences, debate and exchange good practices.

This booklet gathers the main good practices identified by the StEER-Leb teams.

The good practices are categorized in three sections:

1. Student representation
2. Student participation
3. Students activities and events

The good practices have been elaborated during the shadowing visits by teams composed of staff and students from EU and Lebanese universities. The second phase of the project, and more specifically the capacity building activities, aims at developing resources and tools in order for universities and students to implement these good practices.

For more information about the StEER-Leb project: www.steer-leb.eu

1. Student Representation

1.1. Representation Systems

<p>Title of the good practice</p>	<p>Involving students in the university governance</p>
<p>Description</p>	<p>Increasing the participation of students in the decision-making process and ensuring active participation of student representatives in the governance of the university through a well-established representation system. The influence of student representatives on the university governance also contributes to the enhancement of the trust of students in their representatives and the credibility of the representation system.</p> <p>The below system of students' participation in the decision-making process is suggested:</p> <p>Students as members of university boards: student representatives should be part of the university board and have the same rights as all other board members, including the right to vote.</p> <p>Student representation structures: clear representation systems among universities such as councils, senates or government. Structures are officially recognized by the university and have clear by-laws mentioning their rights and duties. Their participation (level, modalities, etc.) in the decision making process is clearly defined in the by-laws.</p> <p>Meetings and communication with the central administration: students are invited to upper management meetings for consultation or voting.</p>
<p>Potential challenges and suggested solution</p>	<p>The main obstacle identified is the resistance of the central administration. The modalities and the role of students in the university governance should be well prepared in advance in according to a clear and transparent policy that would lead to the university buy-in.</p>
<p>Title of the good practice</p>	<p>Identifying the most appropriate modalities of student representation</p>
<p>Description</p>	<p>Elections: Elections form the most popular modality of student representation. Students are asked to vote for their representatives. Elections can be organized at the institutional level or at the academic unit level.</p> <p>Elections are organized according to clear procedures: number of elected candidates, type of election (name or list),</p>

	<p>eligibility criteria for candidates, etc. Campaigns are conducted by candidates to present their visions and programs as student representatives.</p> <p>Draws: This modality is mainly a transition method between a system without representation structure and the organization of elections. It contributes to the development of a favorable environment for student representation, especially in universities where elections are a source of clashes and problems.</p> <p>Nominations: This modality consists in the nomination of student representatives by the university according to specific criteria such as GPA, engagement in the universities activities, personality traits, etc.</p>
<p>Potential challenges and suggested solution</p>	<p>Political clashes and confrontations: When it comes to elections, given the Lebanese political context and the affiliations of students to political parties, this modality could lead to political clashes and confrontations between students representing different parties. This is the most recommended modality to prepare students to become active citizens, however, the draws and nominations could be a transitional modality to prepare the ground for clash-free elections and consequently could be better adapted to prepare the university community for future elections.</p> <p>Luck over merit results: In the case of draws, the selection of representatives is based on luck and not on merit or skills of the candidates. A possible way to face such a challenge is to uphold merit while setting candidacy eligibility criteria and to have students themselves in a given program work on encouraging specific/preferred candidacies.</p> <p>University administration biased results: The nomination modality is the less popular since the nominated students are not always the most engaged to promote the interests of the student body, they may be perceived as promoting and serving the interests of the university, and consequently, they may face important difficulties in earning the trust of other students. The nominated students are not considered as legitimate representatives since they have been chosen by the university administration and not by the students themselves.</p>
<p>Title of the good practice</p>	<p>Class Delegates</p>

Description	Voting for a class delegate per year that will represent the interests of a specific degree/academic program. This modality may allow a greater number of students to be involved in the governance and decision making processes at the university. The representation would then be diversified and representative of all academic programs. The <i>interchange of representation</i> among students since they change every year would contribute to inducing new dynamisms, new perceptions and perspectives, and new blood every year to the student representation paradigms.
Potential challenges and suggested solution	<p>Class delegates may focus on very specific academic issues more than the general concerns of students. The span of time given to student delegates might be binding to achieve high impact results.</p> <p>Class delegates could be also contact points for global student representatives to have a clearer idea about students' concerns and expectations at the university, department and class levels. A well-studied and well-structured handover between delegates and delegate-elects might respond to the time constraint challenge.</p>

1.2. Credibility of Representation Systems

Title of the good practice	Withdrawal from party affiliations of student representatives
Description	To be eligible to submit their candidacy to become student representatives, students should be free of political affiliations. This aims at ensuring that political life is separated from university life and avoiding political clashes.
Potential challenges and suggested solution	Students affiliated to political parties might object to this practice. In this case, the university administration should be aware of the consequences of imposing such a decision and conduct communication campaigns to further explain it.
Title of the good practice	Training and workshop for candidates
Description	Students who run for elections participate in trainings and workshops in order to acquire specific skills that they need during their mandate such as communication, conflict resolution, management skills, etc.

	The objective is to provide future representatives with the needed resources and tools to conduct their activities.
Potential challenges and suggested solution	Students may be more focused on increasing their popularity rather than enhancing their soft skills.
Title of the good practice	Campaigning and agendas
Description	Before the elections, candidates are advised to make campaigns to get the students to know them more through debates, speeches, videos, graphics, etc. During the “campaign period”, candidates communicate closely with students and present their action plans. Students will be consequently able to vote for ideas, visions and programs. The main objective is to provide students with more opportunities to advocate for their vision and ideas and reduce the impact of the pre-existing popularity of candidates on the elections’ results.
Potential challenges and suggested solution	Bylaws of each university and politics might compromise the possibility for candidates to conduct their campaigns on campus. A dialogue between the central administration and students should take place to prepare clear regulations for campaigns: authorized topics, use of social media, duration of the campaign, etc. Material and a specific place for students to conduct their campaigns, organize meetings could also support the process.
Title of the good practice	Evaluation of student satisfaction
Description	In order to keep representatives accountable for their duties, students should be asked to evaluate them on a regular basis based on the level of performance and achievements.
Potential challenges and suggested solution	Not all students might take the time and exert the effort of filling the evaluation forms. Hence, surveys can be promoted on all social media platforms, i.e. student emails, SMS, university application, campus posters with QR codes.
Title of the good practice	Publishing minutes of meeting
Description	After each meeting, student representatives should disseminate the minutes (on their social media, specific platforms for student representatives, university websites, etc.).

<p>Potential challenges and suggested solution</p>	<p>In some cases, the minutes might include sensitive matters. A clear policy should be adopted regarding the publication of meeting details.</p> <p>Not meeting on a regular basis can cause potential delays in drafting the minutes. The student representatives should designate a note taker in charge of drafting and disseminating the minutes. This person could handle this responsibility for a defined period of time or be designated only at the beginning of each meeting. The publication of the minutes of meeting may be also included in the student guides and rules and regulations.</p>
<p>Title of the good practice</p>	<p>Feed me feedbacks</p>
<p>Description</p>	<p>Feed me feedbacks is the title of a good practice that consists of a mouth shaped box (real or online) where students can put any complaints they have.</p>
<p>Potential challenges and suggested solution</p>	<p>Students may hesitate to share their real complaints. This challenge could be reduced by authorizing students to submit their feedback anonymously.</p> <p>In order to encourage the participation of students and ensure the efficiency of this practice, it is important that student representatives have a real influence on the university governance and the opportunity to present the expectations of other students. If students know that their feedbacks have no chance to be taken into consideration, they will not be encouraged to share their opinions. A completely transparent feed me feedbacks would be recommended in order to have aspired results.</p>

2. Student Participation

2.1. Promoting Student Engagement and Participation

<p>Title of the good practice</p>	<p>Organizing events that introduce all the activities</p>
<p>Description</p>	<p>Students would organize an event on campus to present the existing activities, clubs and programs. This is an opportunity to meet all other students and encourage them to be part of these activities. Such events can be organized at the beginning of each academic year or semester.</p>

	Students can also have a specific place/room where all information about student clubs and initiatives are presented and promoted.
Potential challenges and suggested solution	Not many students might be interested to attend; however, contests can be organized offering several prizes for students to encourage their participation. Activities can include music performances and games that would attract passing by students.
Title of the good practice	Mandatory civic engagement courses and hours
Description	Inclusion of mandatory civic engagement courses in the curriculum as part of the General Education courses to enhance student's knowledge about engagement. Within the frame of these courses, students have to undertake some volunteering work, join clubs or organize special activities for other students. After completing the course, students choose if they want to continue to perform these engagement-related activities. The course would be mandatory but with more flexible conditions than other courses in terms of exams and deadlines.
Potential challenges and suggested solution	Students may join a club they do not like, and have a wrong perception about student engagement. To avoid such a consequence, students should have a wide array of options from which they can choose. In parallel, campaigns to raise awareness about the benefits of volunteering can encourage students to be more committed to the program.

2.2. Recognizing Student Engagement and Participation

Title of the good practice	Mention of merit/credits addition for engagement
Description	Upon completion of certain activities including but not limited to assuming representative roles or being involved in students clubs or activities, students are awarded additional credits, mentions, or a specific attestation/recommendation letter, etc. In order to acquire recognition, a minimum number of engagement hours should be covered. The ultimate benefit of recognition is to optimize employment profile at the recruitment stage.
Potential challenges and suggested solution	Some students might fake proofs of engagement. In order to avoid this, further restrictions on documentation can be placed such as the necessity of providing pictures, reports, attendance sheets, clear deliverables report, etc. MOU

	between NGOs and universities can be also established for a better communication between them and clear engagement deliverables.
Title of the good practice	Contest participation (Reward Incentives System)
Description	Run a contest to encourage the participation of students in volunteering work along with recognizing engagement in events through giving rewards. The objective is to recognize the engagement of students and valorize their commitment.
Potential challenges and suggested solution	Students may only participate in order to win prizes. This could compromise the objective of preparing students to become engaged citizens. Prizes should be symbolic, only highlighting engagement.
Title of the good practice	Volunteers of the year during major events at the University
Description	This practice suggests to offer the best volunteers of each year a trophy or a certificate during a major event at the university (annual Gala Dinner, commencement ceremony, founders day, etc.) Other forms of appreciation can be given by spreading the news among students (peer-to-peer education). Pictures of students along with their success stories can be posted on campus.
Potential challenges and suggested solution	The selection process of students to be awarded should be elaborated in advance. It may be challenging to evaluate the engagement of a high number of students and the selection should be based on specific criteria. The objective is to promote students engagement and not create a competition between students. Another option could be to award students for delivering specific projects or activities as an appreciation of teamwork and cooperation.

2.3. Developing favorable conditions for student councils and clubs

Title of the good practice	Stable/fixed annual budget
Description	<p>At the beginning of each year, the university allocates a fixed budget for the student council and student clubs in order to freely implement their projects.</p> <p>It is advisable to have clubs ran by students. If they have their own allocated budget, they can become more creative, learn</p>

	time management skills, organizational skills, in addition to other soft skills.
Potential challenges and suggested solution	The lack of trust might sprout between the club and the university administration, especially for handling and spending the money, in addition to the difficulty of defining and providing a budget for the student council. The trust, however, can be built through a well-developed strategy approved by both sides. For example, the amount can be given gradually upon ensuring the implementation of the council's activities. Financial reports should be submitted to the administration of the university after each event and the university would decide accordingly whether to continue funding the council or not. The budget could be frozen for a period of time if the club is inactive. Each club should report existing events with justification of expenditures. Clubs would be closed if they prove to be inactive and would be rewarded upon showing activity and productivity.
Title of the good practice	Workshops and trainings for students
Description	Students participate in workshops and trainings to improve and develop transversal skills: communication, international and intercultural skills, management skills, leadership, etc. These skills will be an added value to manage student clubs and activities and to become active citizens in the society at large. In addition, students can get a certificate of participation in the workshops and trainings and add them on their CVs.
Potential challenges and suggested solution	It may be challenging to elaborate training curricula and to identify experts to deliver the sessions. Academic units, continuing learning centers and HR offices of universities may contribute to the implementation of the sessions. The training material developed within the frame of the StEER-Leb project is also a useful resource.
Title of the good practice	Flexibility for engaged students
Description	Students can miss a course or have a deadline extension in case they have a commitment related to their activities as representatives or clubs' board members. Absences of students engaged in a volunteering event who have to skip classes could be also justified.
Potential challenges and suggested solution	There is a risk for engaged students to miss many courses and compromise their studies. Clear rules should be defined in

	order to make sure that engagement is an added value for students. Constraints/limits should be elaborated, especially for the number of authorized absences.
Title of the good practice	NGO offices in universities
Description	This practice encourages the presence of NGO offices on campus that work actively in partnership with the university. Students volunteering in these NGOs will have a space to conduct their activities on campus.
Potential challenges and suggested solution	It might be difficult to find a space for the NGOs' offices. An NGO open space (for more than one NGO) could be established. StEER-Leb Development Rooms/ Centers could be also used to host NGO offices and material.

3. Students Activities and Events

Title of the good practice	City engagement
Description	This practice aims at having a SO-SO committee (Student-Oriented Staff-Oriented) to represent the university in the municipalities. The purpose is to come up with new facilitations in the city for university students such as improving public transportation means through building up a model of itinerary and timetable for the university or organizing a cycling pathway.
Potential challenges and suggested solution	This is a challenge as it does not currently exist. A plan and a timeline are to be set up to ensure the formation of a committee and the implementation of a clear plan.
Title of the good practice	Co-worker student
Description	A co-worker student is a student who takes part and helps the instructor in researching, writing articles for newspapers or magazines, preparing material for the laboratory or relevant field.
Potential challenges and suggested solution	Challenges might include student's lack of commitment or time due to study load and projects. The university might not afford to pay all co-worker students. However, reimbursement can be deducted from university fees. Students can be given billable courses. It is also

	important to recognize students as authors of their own writings.
Title of the good practice	Mentorship program
Description	The mentorship program consists of senior students who provide assistance and guidance to prospective students. It can also include a hotline where students can contact mentors at any time for general questions and inquiries.
Potential challenges and suggested solution	The main challenge may be to ensure a continuous commitment of mentors. To facilitate the implementation of the program, a space could be allocated in order for mentors to meet prospective students on a regular basis.
Title of the good practice	Campus life activities
Description	Campus life activities include allowing students to organize events and activities on campus (social, fundraising, awareness, solidarity, etc.)
Potential challenges and suggested solution	The main challenge might be in securing a budget and the organizational and management skills to implement such projects. The university can allocate a yearly budget for these activities. Students can also work on fundraising to find sponsors or apply for grants allocated by international organizations for instance. Additional workshops on fundraising and projects management would help students implement these activities.
Title of the good practice	Life hacks and useful tips session
Description	This session consists of setting a specific time every week for a workshop on general knowledge to help students in their future life where academic staff and students have the opportunity to exchange helpful ideas and practices and improve public relations.
Potential challenges and suggested solution	The challenge lies in finding the proper time for academic staff to attend the sessions. However, students can prepare the sessions with some help from the administration. In order to increase the number of attendees, mandatory presence can be a condition for a certain number of sessions throughout the courses.
Title of the good practice	"Buddy" program for International Students

Description	The “Buddy” program is a program where a local student is paired with an international student to help him/her integrate easily in the university (educationally) and socially within the country. They also help them learn the local language, find touristic places, be familiarized with the infrastructure of the university and the country in general. They can organize a welcome meeting and a campus tour in order to explore what are the library services and where the different buildings are, etc.
Potential challenges and suggested solution	Challenges lie in finding a local place for international students where they can meet and in finding more volunteers. In order to find more volunteers willing to become “buddies”, the university can grant them certificates, credits, points, or else. Campaigns can also be of help where the university hosting international students can send e-mails, put posters on campus, distribute flyers to the students and give academic rewards for volunteers.
Title of the good practice	Orientation session and guidance for newcomers
Description	In this practice, senior students and representatives are advised to explain to newcomers about the services provided by the students support offices and help them with their course selection and registration along with a campus tour.
Potential challenges and suggested solution	The challenge remains in finding volunteers and enhancing the role of students’ representatives in such activities. Suggestions to tackle this issue include granting students (or volunteers in this case) certificates, credits, or points and allowing students representatives to lead the process by giving a speech or promoting the event, etc.
Title of the good practice	Simulation programs and competitions
Description	This practice aims at giving students the opportunity to stimulate real life experiences (NGO, IGO). This will help them gain communication skills, soft skills, knowledge, and much more.
Potential challenges and suggested solution	The challenges lie in finding committed volunteers, local students to train, and a budget. International grants can be sought after to cover the expenses and credits and other rewards can be offered in order to overcome the possible challenges.
Title of the good practice	Festival for all majors

Description	Organization of a big event where students from all majors are represented on campus for a day or two. Booths that demonstrate the technologies of each major are to be prepared by students with the assistance of their relevant faculties. The demonstration can include posters, brochures, visual aids, and other helpful materials.
Potential challenges and suggested solution	Volunteers should have enough time for such an activity. Faculties should encourage this festival by allowing students to be absent from classes on these days.
Title of the good practice	Media program for recognition
Description	In order to highlight student volunteering and engagement, this practice suggests the creation of segments for youth on TV and Radio channels.
Potential challenges and suggested solution	Proper arguments should be given to these channels in order to accept such a suggestion in cooperation with the relevant department from the university.