

Relevance of Student Representative Councils in Malaysian Higher Education: The Case of Universiti  
Utara Malaysia

*(Perkaitan Majlis Perwakilan Pelajar di Pengajian Tinggi Malaysia: Kes Universiti Utara Malaysia)*

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ABSTRACT

This research paper explores the relevance of student representative councils (SRCs) in higher education institutions with a specific focus on Universiti Utara Malaysia. By analyzing the functions, effectiveness, and contributions to student engagement and campus life, this study aims to provide insights into the meaningful role SRCs play in shaping the student experience and fostering a vibrant campus community. This study will also take into consideration the general opinion of students toward the significance of the SRC body and attempt to redefine the capacity of such an entity. The study uses first and secondary qualitative data to obtain the results. The results found that SRC institutions were still relevant in Malaysian universities if there is a quick response rate in solving student issues.

Keywords - Student Representative Council, Leadership, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Organization, AUKU 1971, Welfare.

ABSTRAK

*Kertas penyelidikan ini meneroka kaitan majlis perwakilan pelajar (MPP) di institusi pengajian tinggi dengan tumpuan khusus di Universiti Utara Malaysia. Dengan menganalisis fungsi, keberkesanan dan sumbangan kepada penglibatan pelajar dan kehidupan kampus, kajian ini bertujuan untuk memberikan pandangan tentang peranan bermakna JPP dalam membentuk pengalaman pelajar dan memupuk komuniti kampus yang bertenaga. Kajian ini juga akan mengambil kira pendapat umum pelajar terhadap kepentingan badan JPP dan cuba mentakrifkan semula kapasiti entiti tersebut. Kajian menggunakan data kualitatif pertama dan sekunder untuk mendapatkan keputusan. Hasil kajian mendapati institusi SRC masih relevan di universiti Malaysia sekiranya terdapat kadar tindak balas yang cepat dalam menyelesaikan isu pelajar.*

Kata Kunci - Majlis Perwakilan Pelajar, Kepimpinan, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Organisasi, AUKU 1971, Kebajikan.

## INTRODUCTION

Student Representative Council (SRC) is the voice of students and represents all students' views on academics and issues related to student affairs at the University (ISMS,2020). The main goal of the SRC is to ensure that student voices and interests are heard and represented in the educational institution, contributing to a positive and inclusive campus environment.

Under AUKU 1971, in addition to emphasizing the establishment, maintenance, and administration of the university, it also provides for the establishment of the Student Representative Council and the Student Body under the Universiti Utara Malaysia Constitution. AUKU 1971 is an act of Parliament enacted by the Malaysian government which was approved by the king in 1971. It is also an act partly under the legal authority of the Ministry of Higher Education (Malaysia) to provide for the establishment, organization, and management of Public Universities and Colleges and matters related to it. Among the content that is often highlighted is related to financial management and student autonomy in fighting for matters related to welfare. So that means any organization including the student representative council is enshrined under AUKU.

The Student Representative Council also plays an important role in the functioning of educational institutions. These student-led organizations are integral to the overall educational experience. One of the main functions of SRC is to fight for the rights and needs of the student body. SRC members act as the voice of the students, ensuring that their concerns and grievances are heard by the school administration. This advocacy role is particularly important for several reasons.

First, SRC actively engages with students, gathering feedback on various academic and non-academic matters. This feedback is then used to identify issues that need attention, such as concerns related to curriculum, campus facilities, or student services. By bringing these concerns to the administration, SRC contributes to a more responsive and student-centered educational environment (Nyundu. 2015)

Second, the SRC often plays an important role in shaping institutional policy. They participate in discussions and decision-making processes, ensuring that students' interests are taken into account. For example, Prof. Dr. Syed (2019) states they might support fair grading policies, better mental health services, or equitable access to educational resources.

In essence, the SRC serves as an important bridge between students and administration, creating channels for dialogue, feedback, and action. Through their advocacy efforts, they help create a more inclusive

and student-oriented learning environment.

## RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

The study's findings will contribute to the academic records regarding student and youth leadership in Malaysia. It will increase public understanding of student organization dynamics and its impacts on the higher education experience. Existing studies on youth leadership do not specifically pinpoint formal organizations such as student representative councils but instead choose to focus on individuals and societal groups. The main objective of this study is explores the relevance of student representative councils (SRCs) in higher education institutions

Furthermore, knowledge of student representative council dynamics in Malaysia is scarce, in fact, studies in this field are based on African countries (Joha 2020). Hence, this paper will be among the first to study the role and significance of such a body in Malaysian universities. The findings may be used for the Unity Government's Student Empowerment movement. The characteristics which are determined to be positive and productive should be carried over to the upcoming student union establishments.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper uses a Qualitative method to study the relevance of student representative councils in Malaysian higher education. The study gathered non-numerical data and existing texts. This method is most common in social study research as it analyses existing texts, such as archives, letters, newspaper articles, novels, and postcards. This paper will use a mixture of both first and secondary data.

The first-hand data will use surveys with specific questions that cater to the topic at hand. The collected data will be used to analyze the preferences and opinions of 100 students in UUM toward the SRC. The research will also utilize the focus group method with participants from diverse backgrounds and ideologies within UUM. The focus group will engage in open and moderated discussions which provide an in-depth understanding of their opinions regarding the roles and effectiveness of SRC.

The paper also considers secondary data sources such as academic papers, books, articles, reports, government reports and data, media and public records, historical documents, and other relevant data. These data sources are considered for reviewing the

functions and roots of SRC establishment.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section is considered as the most important section of the full paper and demonstrates the contribution of the presented.

### Functions and Responsibilities of SRC

Within AUKU itself, five functions of SRC are outlined in clause 10. Among the functions are to foster a spirit of corporate life within the university, to organize welfare facilities in recreational, spiritual, and religious activities as well as supply meals and refreshments, undertake student welfare activities, and represent students in anybody in which they are elected and to undertake any activities given at any time. From the guidelines given within the AUKU, the responsibilities of the SRC are highly dependent on how much the university intends to include them in the decision-making procedure.

In the case of SRC UUM, they are considered highly involved in decision making. This is due to the fact that two SRC members are elected to be part of the university's senate, an academic body that has control of the university's direction in research, examinations, and academic distinctions. This means that the SRC at UUM has a responsibility towards the academics of their students. Issues related to examinations, academic calendar, and graduation should be brought up in senate meetings.

Furthermore, from the focus group interviews, UUM students agree that all welfare issues would be listed as a function of the SRC. These include issues related to student accommodation, health, and facilities. Students also felt that actions following the death of a student's family member should also be part of the SRC's responsibilities. Another function of the SRC listed by students is to spread important information from university management to students. From looking at SRC UUM's social media, this has been done through posters and media statements. Some of the information included is the opening and closing of cafe's, transportation schedules, and changes or updates in the examination schedule.

It can be said that the SRC functions as a helpdesk for students with multiple members holding portfolios. Students are able to connect directly to the SRC members through their personal or organizational social media. All questions, requests, and complaints can be channeled directly to them through these

platforms. Students too expect the SRC to be alert to all issues within the campus.

### Contributions of SRC

The contributions of SRC UUM can be divided into three main areas; academic, welfare, and student development. Firstly, the academic contributions of MPP UUM are closely related to the examination schedule. Among the changes made to the examination schedule is for law students. Priorly, examinations for law students were arranged randomly and there were no determined gaps between exams. Hence, the SRC representative from the School of Law together with the Examination Unit re-arranged the examination schedule so that a minimum of two days would be given between law exams. Next, when the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) released an official command for all public universities to halt all exams on weekends, the command directly impacted UUM's academic culture. UUM had always held examinations on all days of the week including public holidays. If examinations were not held on weekends, it would either extend the examination period another week or it would mean that examinations would be held at night. The SRC gathered the opinions of the entire undergraduate student community and received responses that 92% of students hoped that exams could still be held on weekends. Hence, the SRC made an official plea to the MoHE and successfully encouraged MoHE to retract their command. Third, SRC also successfully changed the mode of study from physical class to online class for a period of one week while students were traveling back home for the Eid Aidilfitri holidays.

In the case of welfare contributions, SRC MPP prides itself on many welfare initiatives. Among them is the "Raya No Hunger" initiative in which more than 800 packs of free food were distributed to students who could not return home for the Aidilfitri holidays. Similar initiatives were done around examination and study week time in which free pens, snacks, and breakfast were distributed to students. The SRC also takes student's health very seriously. They have continuously raised funds for students who have fallen ill, gotten into serious accidents, or unfortunately passed away. These efforts have helped the receiving student to pay for medical bills or ease the burdens of the family members. Furthermore, the SRC has eased the procedure for students to apply for accommodation, make complaints regarding bus services, and improve facilities such as prayer halls, ceiling fans, and road safety. The SRC has also provided airport transportation services on multiple occasions for international

and Borneo students due to the fact that e-hailing services to airports are very costly. As a whole, welfare contributions by SRC UUM are benefitting the students.

Finally, the student development contributions of SRC can be divided into multiple sectors. However, one similarity in all sectors is that all students involved in these activities will gain event management skills and experience. For instance, SRC UUM along with their secretariats has organized national, state and university-level programs with multiple VVIP personnel such as the Prime Minister of Malaysia, the Home Minister and the Ministry of Youth and Sport. Furthermore, the SRC has ensured that facilities in the sports center are constantly made available for the students, such as the swimming pool, the kayak boat house, the go-cart, and the badminton courts. SRC has also been involved in meetings that discuss the maintenance of sports facilities. SRC UUM also assists the university mosque in conducting spirituality programs for students. Lastly, volunteer spirit is instilled within students through mission trips that help citizens facing natural disasters. Among them is when floods occurred in Johor during March of 2023, a total of 60 students alongside SRC assisted residents of Johor impacted by flash floods (The Star, 2023).

All in all, SRC UUM offers contributions to help build up the capabilities of students while also assisting and easing students' lives on campus. While a majority of the SRC's contributions are of their own initiatives, some are also derived from the requests of students and staff

#### Approval rate of SRC

The approval rate of SRC members was recorded through a survey among students. The overall results showed that students were satisfied with the performance of the SRC. A majority of the students cited that the SRC was responsive in solving students' problems and Students felt as though visible responses through social media messages, comments, and posts were a key part of keeping the SRC's image. Furthermore, students often listed instances in which the SRC would provide free goods or services. Acts like offering free pens, breakfast, and food made students appreciative of the SRC's efforts. Furthermore, students felt as though the SRC's efforts to minimize or avoid past issues from repeating are applaudable. For instance, the university had previously faced issues with cafes closing during holiday times. Hence, SRC's media statements which pushed for cafes to be open were seen as a positive move. Overall, the approval ratings of the SRC are heavily reliant on their social media activity. It can be

seen that a curated image for the SRC is important in up-keeping its approval ratings.

#### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the relevance of SRC bodies are highly reliant on the approval and acceptance of the student population within a particular university. If students still choose to refer and reach out to SRC for assistance, then the relevance of SRC is still vital. In the case of UUM, the SRC's responsibilities are especially clear when looking at the academic contributions they have made. While offering free meals and organizing programs are achievable among clubs and societies, the SRC is the only body that is capable of entering senate meetings and convincing staff to make drastic changes. Another key point is that the relevance of SRC also depends heavily on their social media presence. SRC social media is the main reference point for a majority of the students, hence it is important to keep it updated. Overall, SRC bodies are still relevant at UUM for the time being.

The visibility of the SRC is paramount for its success in representing, advocating for, and serving the student body. The dimensions explored through representation, trust, communication, participation, community building and accountability of visibility for the SRC's efficacy. As educational institutions strive to create a positive and inclusive environment, efforts to enhance the visibility of the SRC should be prioritized, recognizing it as a cornerstone for an empowered and engaged student community.

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