

Voting Rights

Involving students makes this SGA successful

By Lisa Sheaffer

Every American's equal right to vote is one of the United States' founding principles, but many universities have failed to recognize the voice of an important minority—the students. One exception is **Utah Valley State College** where the Student Government Association has secured voting rights on every major voting body on campus, including faculty committees, restoring the essential right to vote to the students.

All in Favor

Whether it's the curriculum committee or the campus calendaring committee, there's one mainstay at UVSC—an SGA representative is there ready to listen, learn, and vote. At least one SGA member sits on each of the 23 standing committees responsible for the major decisions affecting the student body and the university as a whole. "Every aspect of the university is touched by the committees we sit on," says Swen Swenson, SGA president.

Former UVSC President Dr. Kerry Romesburg, believing that a system of "shared governance" was essential for the learning process, initiated the SGA's presence on campus committees. Later presidents followed in his footsteps only to discover that shared governance worked to their advantage. "As they go before groups of other students or the college legislature, they can say we have student involvement in these decisions, and it carries some weight," says Phil Clegg, director of student leadership and activities and SGA advisor.

Faculty members have grown to appreciate the new perspectives that students bring. "The committee looks forward to that perspective," Clegg says. "They may not always agree with it or they may not always do what that student mentions should happen, but they really are interested in having the student's input and involvement."

However, despite this welcoming attitude, it's still intimidating for students who have never sat on a committee before. Swenson admitted he felt out of place when he sat on his first committee three years ago. Now, as a trustee with voting rights on the President's Council,

which includes the university president and vice presidents, he feels differently. "The faculty respects my opinion," Swenson says. "Sometimes meetings are by invitation only, and when I'm asked to attend, it takes the intimidation away because they want to know my opinion."

While the UVSC SGA has been successful in many ways, they face problems similar to other SGAs, namely difficulty receiving recognition from the student body.

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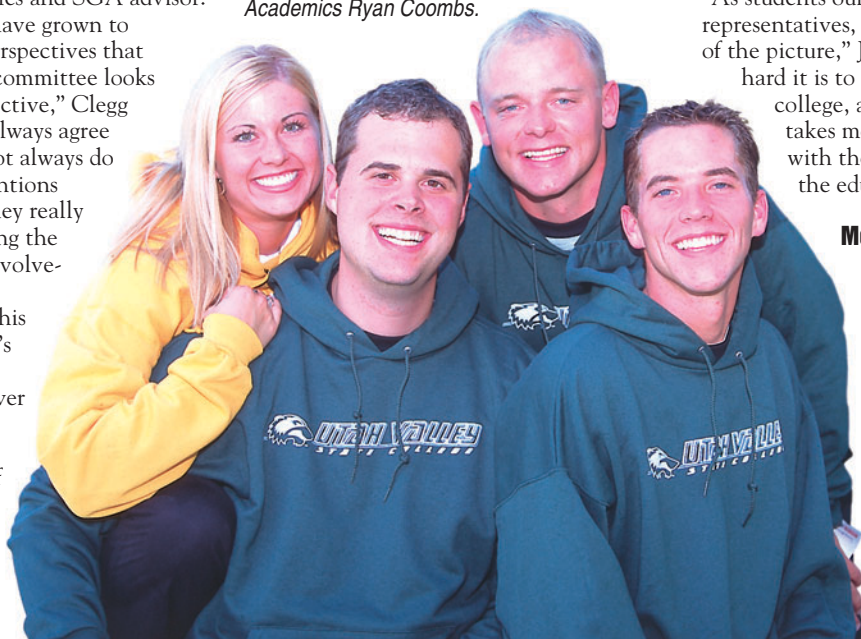
"I know the majority of the students are aware of the fact that there's a Student Government on campus and that they do have student representatives," says Robb Juhlin, SGA vice president of student life. "However, I don't think they know exactly how we represent them."

As a result of this relationship, the SGA is working toward incorporating the student body more effectively. "One of our goals this year is to better inform the students in



For more on student governance, see "Test Your Administrators II" on page 25.

UVSC's SGA officers: (l to r) VP of UV Clubs Alexis Valgardson, Student Body President Swen Swenson, Student Body VP for Student Life Robb Juhlin, and Student Body VP for Academics Ryan Coombs.



regards to how we represent them, and if they have any concerns, they can use us to represent their voice," Juhlin says.

Swenson made it his personal goal to get more in touch with the student body in an attempt to represent their true opinions and needs. "I expect us to be more informed on student opinion," he says. "We want to be the student body's voice, not just the voice of 23 SGA members." Swenson plans to implement pop-up on-line surveys, create a feedback link on their web site, and host barbecues where students are encouraged to complete short surveys to gauge their knowledge of SGA events and find out what else SGA can do.

A Costly Endeavor

In addition to voting rights on committees, the UVSC SGA also sets the student fees. "Being able to participate in the student fee allocation process isn't a power but a privilege and a serious responsibility," Juhlin says. "We're here to represent and serve our student population, and by sitting on committees, holding fee-setting responsibilities, and doing much more, we're fulfilling our purpose as their student leaders."

The student fees go toward supporting activities on campus, the sports programs, and the student union. Every department or organization that depends on support from student fees goes before the SGA and makes a presentation explaining what they plan to do for the students in the coming year and what they did with the money to benefit students the previous year. After meeting with the campus groups, SGA makes a recommendation and sends it to the President's Council where the final decision rests; however, the SGA's recommendation is usually accepted. "In the eight years that I've been here, I've never seen an SGA recommendation turned down," Clegg says.

The SGA takes extreme care when it comes to making a student-fee decision. "As students ourselves and as student representatives, we're able to see both sides of the picture," Juhlin says. "We know how hard it is to be a student paying for college, and we also know that it takes money to provide students with the tools and means to ensure the education they deserve."

More to Come

Although it's in with the new, it's not necessarily out with the old. SGA plans to continue its shared governance with the faculty. "We're one of the only schools that implements shared governance on every level," Swenson says. **SL**

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