Social Work Constituency Council Solution Paper

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This analysis concerns the Social Work Constituency Council (SWCC) at a local university, which exists to keep the student body well informed of relevant information. The analysis examined the perspective of stakeholders who consist of officers, students, faculty, staff, the Deans, the School of Social Work, and the Local university. Currently, the SWCC feels their problem is lack of student participation. Bylaws exist which clearly articulate the goals of the SWCC and participation is not a goal. However, the analysis revealed the following needs and capacities, solutions, and recommended option.

Needs (in priority order)
- To keep the student body informed
- To represent student views
- To be a liaison between student body and the Dean
- To improve communication process from year to year: officers
- To orient new students to the SWCC
- To encourage students to take an active role in their school
- To provide additional support for officers in the form of more workers
- To provide easy access to SWCC info such as dates/times of meetings
- To continue to be creative with special events/programs to appeal to more student’s interests

Capacities (in priority order)
- Motivated & enthusiastic officers such as the President of the SWCC, who is open to change
- Local university has current technology in the form of a technology class, a computer lab, and a SWCC web page.
- An advanced technologies student willing to lend a helping hand
- An Advanced Technology Professor willing to link the SWCC Web page to the School of Social Work web page
- A Dean who is actively involved with the student body
- A willing faculty who “steps up to the plate” when asked
- A supportive UTA paid advisor whose job is to oversee the seven Constituency Councils
- A supportive voluntary faculty advisor from the SSW
- Six other supportive Constituency Councils on UTA’s campus
- A supportive administration who created the SWCC
- A budget of $1300 from UTA’s governance office

Stakeholders

Five solutions
1) Create policy and procedures manual
2) Update web page and create a virtual community
3) Integrate web page into the existing Technologies class
4) Implement a volunteer driven e-mail campaign
5) Integrate web page and student roles/responsibilities into new social work class curriculum
Recommendations
Utilize all five solution options.

Introduction
The Social Work Constituency Council (SWCC) is one of seven Constituency Councils at the Local university (see Appendix A). The purpose of the Constituency Councils (CCs) is to represent the views of students and to provide relevant educational services and unbiased information to the student body. The CCs can also make recommendations or enact legislation that is consistent with the interests of the student body. The seven CCs were “created by Student Congress and are funded by student services fees allocated through Student Congress” (Leadership Handbook). The Student Government office supports the CCs by providing them with a full-time paid advisor, a constitution, and a budget every year not to exceed $1300 for newsletters, parties, recruiting, meetings etc.

The CC’s provides programs, publications, and polices to the student body. SWCC programs included social functions such as: 1) “Faculty Flipper Cookout” where the faculty serve free burgers and sodas to the students twice a year in the courtyard at the Social Work School; and 2) “Fun Night” to honor graduation seniors. Each of these programs provides the students and faculty alike to become acquainted with one another in an informal setting to facilitate communication. The SWCC provides academic/educational programs. The SWCC provides this service when they have speakers at their bi-weekly meetings. In the past, popular speakers have included Dr. Jane Hickerson speaking on issues in private practice and Bart Bernstein regarding social work and the law. The SWCC recently acted as a liaison between the Dean of the School of Social Work and the student body to advocate for new furniture and plants for student lounge. It is necessary for the CCs to facilitate a positive relationship with the Dean of their schools. Many times the CCs is one of the few forums the Deans have in order to communicate widely with the student body or to obtain the necessary students to implement a new function or event. The SWCC has a close working relationship with Dean Hernandez. For instance, Dean Hernandez agreed to participate in a fun SWCC activity called “The Big Dean Switch.” This event consisted of Dean Hernandez and one student changing roles for a morning. The Dean went to the student’s class and the student attended to the Dean’s functions. During the class break Dean Hernandez went looking for coffee in the faculty lounge only to get ‘booted out’ since he was a ‘student’. He eventually ended up in the student lounge where he discovered the students did not have a coffee maker. Feeling students should not be denied coffee and hot chocolate, Dean Hernandez purchased a coffee maker and supplies for the students to be housed in the student lounge. In addition to these programs and events, the SWCC also contributes to the community in the form of accepting donations yearly for various non-profit organizations such as the local Night Shelter and they also participate in student government functions such as Homecoming Spirit Week and the Activities Fair. Each CC is required to provide publications to their school each year (Leadership Handbook). In fulfilling this function, the SWCC publishes the Social Work News twice a year. Topics in the spring 1999 issue included: SWCC Officer elections, a message from Dean Hernandez, scholarship information, a biography in memory of Dr. Souflee, and a list of upcoming social work school events (Social Work News, 1999). Topics for the spring 2001 issue include: Internet training, Dr. Schoech to chair 5th Annual Technology
Conference, a message from Dean Hernandez, and a successful NASW Conference 
(Social Work News, 2001)(see Appendix B). The CCs provide policies. “CC members 
contribute to University wide policy making by participating in many important 
committees.” Such committees include: Advisory Committee; Who’s Who Selection 
Committee; Election Committee; and the Chancellor’s Council Award Committee. 
The CC’s are open to all enrolled students who maintain a grade point average of 
2.0 or greater. Each council has a voluntary faculty advisor from their school who assists 
with program planning, leadership building, and budgeting issues when necessary. In 
addition, Local university has hired a full-time advisor who assists, when called upon, 
with all seven CCs and participates in the annual Leadership Retreat. “At the heart of 
everything are the students. Constituency Council’s must tune in to the needs of their 
Constituents” (Leadership Handbook). The CC’s must reflect the needs of their student 
and not just the needs of the CC’s officers. Some ways of communicating with the 
student body include providing educational speakers at bi-monthly meetings, 
implementing fun recreational events, and publishing a bi-yearly newsletter.

This paper will: 1) define the SWCC problem in more detail showing the 
discrepancy between the perceived SWCC need and the real need; 2) identify the SWCC 
needs and capacities; 3) describe five viable options, which address the needs while 
utilizing the capacities; 4) define the concept of a virtual community; 5) identify steps on 
how to proceed; and 6) make recommendations. This solution paper is important because 
the SWCC exists to serve the students and the SWCC clearly seems to be expanding its 
role to include student participation, and in the process not fulfilling its potential in 
reaching its goal. Try to state the problem in a positive light rather than a negative light.

Description of the problem

According to Katrina Watland, the 2000-2001 President of the SWCC, the 
SWCC’s problem has been lack of participation on the part of the student body. The 
influx of new officers with their abundant enthusiasm asked for assistance in the form of 
needs assessment to best understand their problem. While doing the needs assessment 
by-laws were discovered which clearly spell out the SWCC’s goals. The by-laws, which 
were created by Local university, do not state participation is a goal but rather one of its 
functions. Therefore it was determined the client (SWCC) does not understand the nature 
of their problem. Their problem is determining how best to meet the goals set forth by the 
by-laws. The goals of the by-laws are: 1) to represent the views of students; 2) to be a 
liaison between student body and the Dean; 3) to provide relevant educational services 
and activities; 4) to provide accurate, unbiased information; 5) to discuss matters 
pertaining to the student body regarding either the School of Social Work or The 
University; and 6) to make recommendations or enact legislation that is consistent with 
the interests of the student body. The SWCC exists to maintain a well-informed student 
body but goal confusion and instability have kept them from recognizing these goals. 
Instability exists with communication problems with the officers from year to year. 
Previous officers do not communicate with new officers so every year they “reinvent the 
wheel” so to speak and continue to use ineffective means of communication with the 
student body. Since officers only serve for one year there is high turnover, no stable form 
of communication, and no training.
The SWCC wants to get students informed by attending meetings, publishing relevant information, participation in special events, providing educational speakers, announcing scholarships, announcing job opportunities, and networking. “Students miss out on so much,” says Katrina Watland. Katrina gave an example of the Student and Legislative Day. “Students did not know it was happening” even though the officers advertised with fliers and placed an announcement on the listserv. According to P.A. Pritchard-Howell a former 1997-1998 SWCC officer. “Some students do know what it is, they do not know what its purpose is, and some do not know that it even exists. Also there is a lot of apathy on part of the students because they do not see any benefits.”

Summary of analysis: Needs and capacities

Relevant history of the problem

The lack of communication on the part of the SWCC has been an ongoing problem for years. The officers receive no training for their jobs. They are required to attend a Leadership Retreat during the summer but this is more of a social gathering rather than a learning environment. The lack of SWCC officer training has lead to instability and a lack of adequate communication among the officers and for the student body as well. Every year the new officers use the same forms of communication that the prior officers did with the same ineffective results. For the past few years the SWCC has an ineffective form of communication in the form of fliers (see Appendix C), which are posted around the school to announce speakers and meetings. They also put fliers into all 800 mailboxes, which is time consuming and a waste of paper and ink. It takes a minimum of 35 minutes to put the fliers into mailboxes and 20 minutes to post fliers around the school for the bi-weekly meetings. The SWCC has the existing technology in the form of a computer lab, a technologies class, and student e-mail accounts, but technology is only utilized when the SWCC posts the meeting dates and times to the listservs.

System/ environment/ stakeholders.

Systems theory suggests that examining the internal and external aspects of any system can enhance an analysis of that system. The CC system consists of the SWCC, it’s officers, the Student Government, and it’s student members. The environment consists of students, faculty, staff, and the administration in Local university’s higher learning environment.

Stakeholders include the officers who gain very little for their efforts. If they are lucky they can put their leadership experience on their resumes to impress potential bosses and some obtain limited recognition from students and faulty. The students are stakeholders as well since it is their fees, which fund the SWCC. In actuality, the students (unbeknownst to them) are the biggest stakeholders at Local university. There is so much information that needs to be conveyed to them and they are only coming into contact with a minuscule amount. In addition, the students do not know the SWCC is there to be their advocate. The Dean of the SSW is a stakeholder since this organization is the group of students he calls on in implementing new events and programs. The Dean relies on the SWCC to “get the word out.” The faculty are also stakeholders because they are asked by the students and encouraged the Dean to participate in student events such as the now semi-annual cookout. In addition, the School of Social Work and the city are also stakeholders.
stakeholders since it was the school, which created the SWCC. The University created the CCs so the student body could have a council, which could accurately represent their views, keep them informed of relevant information, and advocate for student issues. **Good list of stakeholders. A better listing of the needs of each stakeholder would help.**

**Relevant assumptions**

*This analysis is build on some assumptions that were not able to be researched to verify if they were true. The first is that some people refer to Local university as a “commuter school” as many students do not live in the area but commute to school from either their homes or their jobs. Once they leave campus they do not come back until it is time for their next class. A second assumption is the advertising, while well thought out, is not effectively reaching the vast majority of students. Some students never read the fliers in their mailboxes nor do they look at the numerous fliers attached to the walls and doors at school. A third assumption is the constraints the field placement places on students. Students have to attend classes, do their assignments, read their books, and perform their required field hours in addition to working, and having full lives at home. The field placement hours create additional stresses in the student’s lives and leaves little room for thankless voluntary work at school or educational meetings. A fifth assumption is students are not connected to the list serve because they did not know how to log on.*

**Decision involved regarding problem**

The decision regarding time is left up to the SWCC officers. Time in this case refers to time involved in undertaking special events and meetings to keep the student body informed of relevant information. Both the officers and the students are impacted. The officers are the ones impacted the most since they are the ones donating their time to “to do it all”. If few members are involved in the organization, as is the case currently, then the officers literally do everything for the organization. Most officers are balancing school, work, and full home lives in addition to their voluntary serve to the SWCC. For the most part the officers try to utilize their limited time in the most efficient manner.

The SWCC officers decide whether or not to utilize modern technology. Since the listservs go out to the vast majority of people at the school, student and faulty are most impacted by this utilization of modern technology. The SWCC advertise their special events and educational meetings on all the listservs at the School of Social Work. The SWCC President posts the announcements to the faulty listserv herself then she e-mails Don Capps who then posts it to the Bachelors, Master’s, and PhD listservs. The SWCC does have a web page but they did not know about it. The web page has not been updated in one and a half years. Currently, the technology aspect of communication is not being utilized to its maximum advantage.

The decision regarding communication processes falls on the shoulders of the officers. Previous and current officers have utilized the poster/flier (Appendix C) form of communication with the student body along with the listserv. A few of the past officers even went so far as to consistently post speaker meeting fliers on the back of bathroom doors to capture the attention of students in the restroom. The SWCC is encouraged by the Dean to utilize the almost new bulletin boards throughout the School of Social Work but past experience has lead them to believe that few students give the boards any real attention. Therefore, officers continue to past fliers on chalkboards, walls, stairwells, and on glass doors much to the dismay of some faculty members. Recently Katrina stuffed
all 800 mailboxes with fliers telling the student the exact steps to take to sign up for their listservs as well as the benefits of being on a listserv (see Appendix D). Katrina thought that if the students knew how to log on to the listserv then they would be able to get SWCC announcements. Students are the ones who are impacted by the officer’s choice of communication. Current and past communications have been time consuming and ineffective.

The SWCC officers make the decision regarding accessibility. The officers decide where and when the meetings are to be held. Officers, students, faculty, and speakers alike are impacted by accessibility in regards to meeting location. Usually for the sake of student convenience, the meetings are located on campus at the School of Social Work Complex. The officers call the social work administration and book the newly renovated speaker room in building B. The officers try to be flexible with the dates and times of the meetings in order to accommodate as many students as possible. Most of the time this is done by looking at the list of classes and determining which two days of the week has the most classes. Next the officers check their schedules to see which of these two days will allow them to attend. There is little flexibility if meetings are continues to be held on campus as opposed to an Internet chat room. The meetings must occur between classes from either 12n-1p or 4p-5p to allow student to meet their first priority, which is attending classes and learning. More student input would allow the officers to make this decision as various other options might then be explored.

Funding is another decision made by the SWCC officers. Funding impacts both students and officers. The SWCC officers work together to formulate a yearlong agency to obtain funding. This agenda with its programs and special events is then budgeted by the Treasurer. The Treasurer submits the budget prior to the beginning of fall classes to the Student Government offices. The Student Government office will then approve budgets not to exceed $1300. The budgets are somewhat standard and need to include paper for advertising, refreshments for parties etc. Funding impacts both students and officers. $1300 may seem like a lot of money but it goes fairly quickly when free pizza is supplied at meetings. In addition, if the officers decide to change the agenda and use the money for different events they have the flexibility to do so. The current forms of communication, which include paper and ink, do not seem cost effective.

The officers, students, and the advisor decide which educational events and social events would best capture the attention of the students along with what types of events would offer the student the most enjoyment. Everyone involved in the decision is impacted by this decision, as are the Dean and the faculty. More student input is needed to make this decision appeal to a broader audience.

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- To keep the student body informed
- To represent student views
- To be a liaison between student body and the Dean
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- To encourage students to take an active role in their school
- To provide additional support for officers in the form of more workers
• To provide easy access to SWCC info such as dates/times of meetings
• To continue to be creative with special events/programs to appeal to more student’s interests

Capacities (in priority order)
• Motivated & enthusiastic officers such as the President of the SWCC, who is open to change
• Local university has current technology in the form of a technology class, a computer lab, and a SWCC web page.
• An advanced technologies student willing to lend a helping hand
• An Advanced Technology Professor willing to link the SWCC Web page to the School of Social Work web page
• A Dean who is actively involved with the student body
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• A supportive voluntary faculty advisor from the SSW
• Six other supportive Constituency Councils on UTA’s campus
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Descriptions of options
The first option is to create a policy and procedures manual for the officers. This would give the officers a method of carrying information over from one year to the next. It would facilitate communication from year to year, which would fulfill a need and it will also provide stability. As previously noted, the officers from the 2000-2001 school year did not know someone from the 1999-2000 school year created a webpage for the SWCC. The only disadvantage of a manual is that it would be time consuming initially to put the manual together. This option meets the of improving the communication process from year to year for the officers while the SWCC officers are still motivated and open to change.

The second option is to update the webpage and have it become a virtual community. The current SWCC web page located at (http://www.uta.edu.student_orgs/swcc) (see Appendix E) has not been update in a year and a half. The webpage not only needs to be updated to include current information but it will also need to be updated on a regular basis. It will need to be updated immediately following important events and activities to include photos and names of people who have won awards. In addition, it needs to include a link to the list of student discounts and information on accessing the multiple listservs at the SSW. The bylaws and policies and procedures manual (option 1) could be posted to the site so that they are easily communicated to new officers and members. This updated web page has a multitude of advantages: 1) it would give stability to the SWCC; 2) it would communicate information to the student body, faculty, the administration, as well as prospective new students; 3) it would be cost effective; 4) it would take little time; 5) updating the web page takes little expertise; 6) it requires few people to update it; 7) the School of Social Work (SSW) has the technology already; 8) it would reduce the workload for the officers; 9) it would
allow for quick access to information; 10) it would improve the quality of service; 11) it would allow for better communication between the officers and the student body which leads to a higher morale for the officers by making them feel they are on the cutting edge of technology (Schoech, 1999); 12) it would allow for not so easy to obtain information being accessed quickly; and 13) it would create a virtual community (Schoech, 2001). A virtual community consists of:

Existing geographical communities based on physical proximity, communities of interest, communities based on religion, philosophy, or political outlook, communities driven by particular social or economical issues, companies and partnerships (http://netculture.about.com/internet/netculuture/library/weekly/msub16.htm) (see Appendix F).

According to the Internet:

People in virtual communities use words on screens to exchange pleasantries and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, conduct commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, feud, fall in love, find friends and lose them, play games, flirt, create a little high art and a lot of idle talk. People in virtual communities do just about everything people do in real life, but we leave out bodies behind. You can’t kiss anybody and nobody can punch you in the nose, but a lot can happen within those boundaries. To the millions who have been drawn into it, the richness and vitality of computer-linked cultures is attractive, even addictive (http://www.well.com/user/blr/texts/Vccivil.html).

Examples of virtual communities can be found on the web page of the University of Pennsylvania Alumni Association, (http://www.alumni.upenn.edu/) (see Appendix G) and The Virtual Community for Substance Abuse Training web page at (http://www.neias.org) (see Appendix H). The benefits of these volunteer membership organizations include minimal action, they are good for sporadic involvement and they are updated quickly with award and event information. A virtual community replaces some or all face-to-face communication, which is perfect for a commuter school like Local university. In addition success is easy to measure. The feedback and evaluation mechanisms can include: 1) the number of hits on the URL; 2) the number of people who join the SWCC and it’s committees on-line; and 3) a beginning and end of the semester survey, completed by technology students, which would then be placed into a report and given to the Dean of the SSW at the end of each semester (Schoech, 2001). The disadvantages initially would be the amount of time to make the basic web page into a virtual community and any training time for new people to update the web page. Once it was up and running, so to speak, the upkeep would be minimal. This option would meet the following needs: 1) to keep the student body informed; 2) to represent student views; 3) to be a liaison between the student body and the Dean; 4) to improve communication from year to year with the officers; 5) to orient new students to the SWCC; 6) to encourage students to take an active role in their school; 7) to provide additional workers/volunteers; 8) to provide easy access to SWCC information such as dates and times of meetings; and 9) to continue to be creative to appeal to more student’s interests.

In addition, it would touch upon the following capacities: 1) utilizing the SWCC
President who is motivated and ready for change; 2) utilizing current technology at Local university; 3) utilizing the current technologies student; 4) utilizing the technology professor; and 4) getting the Dean involved and excited about being on the cutting edge. The faculty Friday approved technology as an “Area of Excellence for the SSW”. So the student virtual community would help further this emphasis.

The third option is to utilize the existing required Technology class at the School of Social Work. The SWCC web page should be integrated into part of the class curriculum. The advantages include: 1) it would give stability to what?; 2) it communicates the basic structure of the SWCC to whom?; 3) students can join the SWCC on-line and sign up for committees as well; 4) the SSW already has a technology class in place with a fully equipped computer lab. This option does not have any disadvantages. This option would orient new students to the SWCC and keep those students informed. It would utilize the current technology at the SSW.

The fourth option is to put in place an e-mail campaign structure capable of communicating key ideas and issues to the student body. It would consist of different volunteers e-mailing groups of volunteers to communicate inexpensively and quickly to the student body. An example of an on-line volunteer group is the United Nations Information Technology Service at (http://www.unites.org) (see Appendix I). The advantages include 1) no funding; 2) little expertise; 3) students have e-mail accounts through the school; and 4) it takes only a few people. In addition, this e-mail campaign could help locate volunteers to update the web page. The only disadvantage is it would be time consuming in the beginning only. This option keeps student informed, represent the student’s views, and provide the officers with additional help/workers. In addition it would utilize current technology.

The fifth option is to include the SWCC information into the new class curriculum. Dr. Hegar is currently creating a new class called Introduction to The Profession of Social Work. The curriculum would mention to students their role and responsibilities as social workers as per the Code of Ethics. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics states:

Social workers should contribute time and professional expertise to activities that promote respect for the value, integrity, and competence of the social work profession. These activities may include teaching, research, consultation, service, legislative testimony, presentation in the community, and participation in their professional organizations (http://www.naswdc.org/Code/ethics.htm) (see Appendix J).

The advantages include; 1) motivated students; 2) educated students; 3) no cost; and 4) little time. The only disadvantages would be if the SWCC and student roles and responsibilities could not be integrated into the curriculum because Dr. Hegar had completed her curriculum already. This option would orient new students, keep them informed, and encourage students to take an active role in their school. This option would utilize current technology and confirm the faculty is “willing to step up to the plate” to support the SWCC.

How to proceed

In order to implement the above solutions to address the problems with the SWCC, the following steps should be followed: 1) a policy and procedures manual should be
created by the 2000-2001 officers prior to the beginning of the fall semester. The 2000-2001 officers should sit down and lunch with the 2001-2002 officers to go over the key points in the manual before the fall semester starts; 2) the web page should be updated and the new officers trained in updating web pages this summer; 3) the SSW administration should be approached about integrating the SWCC web page into the existing Technology class within the next week; 4) the Advanced Technologies student should speak to Dr. Hegar about integrating student roles and responsibilities, regarding the SWCC, into the new Introduction Into Social Work class next week; and 5) a volunteer e-mail campaign structure should be started this fall. In addition, the above options should be presented to Dean Hernandez, Associate Dean Cobb or new Associate Dean Galan, the current 2000-2001 officers, and the new officers for the SWCC 2001-2002 school year in a sit down lunch at Emilio’s Restaurant, across the street from the School of Social Work (for convenience) at everyone’s earliest convenience.

Recommendations

All five options presented should be utilized to help the SWCC achieve its goals and it’s purpose for its existence. Once again the options include: 1) a policy and procedures manual; 2) an updated web page and ultimately a virtual community; 3) integration into the Technologies class curriculum; 4) an e-mail volunteer campaign; and 5) integration into the Introduction to Social Work class curriculum.

Additional issues

In order for the SWCC to meet it’s goals and be a successful volunteer member organization the above options should be implemented. The SWCC may face a few issues, which could impede implementation. First, the SSW’s Dean and faculty might not want to make any changes to the Technology class and the Introduction to Social Work class curriculums. Second, the existing officers may not want to make a policy and procedures manual, start an e-mail campaign structure, or update their web page even though they are motivated and enthusiastic about change.

Conclusion

In conclusion, technology alone is not the solution for the SWCC problems. The SWCC had the technology in the form of a web page but they did not know it existed. Therefore, the solution has to be more than just technology (Schoech, 2001).

I think your examples need to be further explained in your paper. For example, how does an email campaign structure work and what types of problems does it work well on. Also, some examples of how a virtual community works would be very useful for people who have never experienced a virtual community. For example, you mention chat meetings, but never follow through on how they might work, issues involved, etc.
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