

Spring 2004

## UA1B2/1 Student Government History

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### Recommended Citation

DeLeon, Nadia, "UA1B2/1 Student Government History" (2004). *Student/Alumni Personal Papers*. Paper 64.  
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## Student Government History

Upon becoming President of WKU in 1956, Dr. Kelly Thompson created the Student Advisory Council. Its function was to give him advice on students' opinions and needs. In 1962 Dr. Thompson directed the council to form a more functional student organization. They worked for one year, but the project failed. In 1965 an independent group of students began to meet off-campus with the purpose of setting up a student government. The college administration refused to recognize them. Dr. Thompson expressed his concern with a sound plan and a representative government, pointing out that "the Communist Party has schools where people are sent to become leaders in Student Government". The Dean of Students, Charles A. Keown, organized on-campus meetings. The administration presented the student body a suggested foundation plan for a campus Student Government. Students stopped attending the off-campus meetings probably because of fear of reprisals. In April 29th 1966, the student body voted to approve the constitution of the Associated Students, formed to "represent the student body more effectively, to further the interest of the student, to act as a link to the



administration for the students, and to uphold and promote the ideals, principles and objectives of the university". In May 18<sup>th</sup> the first president was elected. Since then, there have been 39 presidents. The first woman President was elected 1971. In April 20, 1982 the first African American president was elected, who also happened to be a woman.

In October 1969 1,500 students signed a petition for a Vietnam Moratorium in which teachers were asked to cancel classes on October 15<sup>th</sup> or discuss American war policy in class. ASG Congress voted to endorse the Moratorium. In November of that same year a committee was formed to find retailers that would give students discounts. By 1972 student discard cards were issued. In 1982, WKU students had access to discounts that included pizza, Captain D's, music stores, flowers, and The Bride House. A second constitution for ASG was passed in 1970. The proposal contained a divisive "Code of Rights". Among other things, the code stated the students' "privilege to live

either on or off campus as they so choose". The new constitution was passed with a new body for student rights, but without a written code.

In 1971 "The Films of John Lennon and Yoko Ono" were to be shown at D.U.C. The Dean of Students suddenly cancelled the show after reading a review of one of the clips: "The Fly", in which a fly crawled over a nude female body. The film was considered inappropriate for the University to co-sponsor. ASG attorneys called the action 'blatant censorship and prime restraint in violation of the freedom of expression guaranteed by the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment of the Constitution'. A few student organizations, like the Church of Christ Student University Class, expressed their favor for the Administration's reaction in a couple of letters. ASG followed the opinion of the vast majority and sued WKU's Administration. In May 1972, the District Court ruled in favor of the Administration's actions made in "good faith and legitimate concern". ASG appealed. However, in 1979 the Washington Supreme Court declined to hear a challenge to WKU officials.

In 1973, ASG organized a "Free University" program. It incorporated 13 evening courses for which there was no registration, no payment, and no credit. The courses included philosophy, creative writing, bicycle and car repairing, quilting, yoga, and a "Bullying your way through life". Qualified community volunteers taught the courses. The program was based on the principle that there are people who will learn because they want to learn.

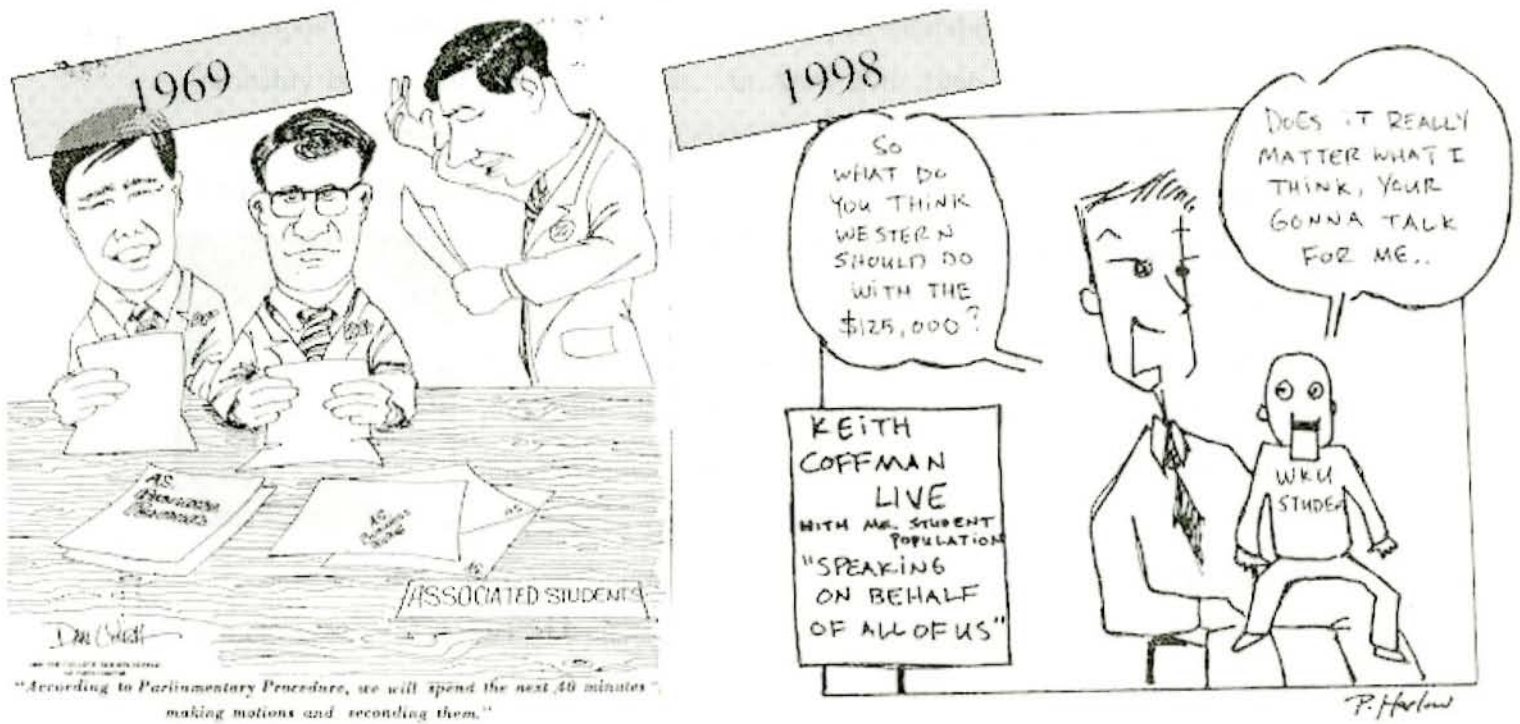
In 1982, ASG successfully passed a resolution asking for co-educational halls. In March 1988 the ASG Legislative Research Committee drafted a 'scandalous' proposal for the Administration to provide condom vending machines on WKU dorms. In 1989 ASG organized a rally that overthrew the administration's decision to implement a lottery system to assign dorms, which would not allow students to keep the same room over time. After three years of Student Government lobbying, Fall Break was established in 1992. That same year, ASG voted to change its name to Student Government Association and succeeded in giving a student health insurance option to Western students. A year later, SGA and WKU Police organized the Emergency Calling System.

Throughout the years, SGA has passed resolutions asking for everything from crosswalks to campus lighting, from typewriters to an all-night computer lab. There have



been resolutions providing for sheltered shuttle stops, and even a resolution made in 1997 asking the University to supply paper towels in all public restrooms in D.U.C. In 38 years of history SGA has done everything from bringing numerous concerts and speakers, to establishing and revising faculty evaluations since the 1970's.

Even though SGA's achievements are immense, the organization has always faced lack of interest and even disapproval from a large portion of the student body. Throughout the last decade, SGA has suffered serious issues with its member's attendance. The minutes from 1996 indicate that 56 representatives missed three or more meetings. In October 21<sup>st</sup> 1997, the College Heights Herald interviewed a member who hadn't attended SGA meetings since Sept. 9<sup>th</sup>. Contrary to SGA's constitution provisions, he had not been contacted about his absences. His opinion about SGA was clear: "It's just a big game, a social group".



SGA stands today as an integral part of the university and has a hand in the day-to-day decision-making. Even though SGA efficiency has been affected by members who weren't the least concerned with representing the student body, the fact is nowadays we all enjoy many privileges and rights that would previously have been considered luxuries and were achieved by the efforts of many students who really did work for the wellbeing of all WKU students.