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A Pilot Deliberative Poll & Deliberative Polling® Training

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Reference Paper on the Topic of Deliberation: Universal Hall Membership

From a paper written by a Hall Warden of the University of Hong Kong dated 20 November 2003

Note: Some names of persons and organizations have been removed in order to detach the association of ideas with individuals.

- The Working Group on Hall Education under the Committee on Student Affairs has produced the Report on Hall Education in January 2003. Section 9 of the Report on Hall Education, entitled “Universal opportunities for participation in Halls”, has explicitly accepted the premise that hall education is “a unique and precious opportunity for personal, social and intellectual development and should be made available to as many HKU students as may wish its benefits...” (Paragraph 9.2) It also asserts that life in halls is “a major educational opportunity and a distinguishing feature of the tradition and identity of Hong Kong University: it should therefore be available as the ‘birth-right’ of all our undergraduates.” (Paragraph 9.3)
- The Report then goes on to explain that, because of the current shortage of hall places, the “comprehensive, or universal admission system” could only be achieved within the next decade, “as more Halls are constructed and flat-type residences are sought.” (Paragraph 9.4) ... [I would argue that] we can achieve comprehensive and universal opportunity for hall membership in another way.
- My proposal is that all students, when they enter this University, would be required to join one of the halls, and we can first try out this system with first year students. “Halls” in this context includes residential and non-residential halls. Students can either join a hall as residential members, or as non-residential associate members of residential halls, or as members of non-residential halls. If a student joins a residential hall as an associate member, he/she will be provided with the opportunity to live in the hall as a summer hall member. “Summer hall” in this context does not mean mere “summer residence”, it means a comprehensive summer programme with educational activities and hall functions.

- According to the Report on Hall Education, there are 2,753 full-time first year students in 2002/3 (Paragraph 9.22), and 32% of all full-time students are living in residential halls (Paragraph 9.23), so we can assume, for calculation purposes, that there are 881 first-year students living in halls, and another 1,872 need to be accommodated if the universal hall membership system is to apply to first year students. Appendix I of the Report shows that there are currently 3,092 residential hall places excluding student flats. The ratio, or pressure, for residential halls to absorb all 1,872 first year students into its system is only 10:6, or for 10 current hall residents to take care of 6 associate members. Even if the universal system is to be expanded to cover all undergraduate students, the ratio would still be about 10:18, which is not astronomical.
- Appendix I of the Report also shows that there are 210 students belonging to non-residential halls in January 2003. If, under the proposed system, the number of students would also be spread to current non-residential halls, the pressure of numbers on residential halls will be reduced. Moreover, the comprehensive system should also allow for voluntary withdrawal of hall membership with good reasons, so the final number will be further reduced. My guess is that we need only to work with a 10:5 or 2:1 ratio.
- Using this ratio, a big hall with around 400 residents needs to take care of 188 associate members, which is not difficult. During summer months, more than half of its regular residents would either graduate or move out of the hall. We can then use these places to accommodate non-regular hall residents, form a student organizing committee to run a programme of activities similar to normal hall life, and appoint summer hall tutors to help the students. If the comprehensive system is adopted, the hall can simply accommodate all 188 associate members into its annual summer hall programme.
- At present, associate members of a Hall need to pay \$200 as affiliation fee. This can become a significant resource when a universal system is adopted. If a hall would absorb 188 new associate members, the income from affiliation fees would be \$37,600 per year.
- Existing Student Association officers may not be willing to take care of too many associate members. If so, a new team of tutors and student organizers should be formed, within each hall under the warden, and possibly also under the student body, to focus on the organization of summer hall activities and affiliated member affairs. The amount of income generated from affiliation fees should be able to cover this.
- Not too many associate members may want to participate actively during term times. If they know they will have a golden time during summer, their demand on the student body would not be great. I suppose a hall can invite some of its associate members to join their high tables, champion fights, and the like, using a rotary system.
- Viewed from another angle, existing student associations can take the large pool of associate members as a new source of talent. At the very least, when vacancies arise due to withdrawal of hall membership, they can fill up the places quickly and efficiently.
- Some might argue that compulsory hall membership is not desirable, but I would argue that provided there are plenty of choices in the system, and that students who really want to opt out be allowed to do so, the idea is intellectually sound. I want to point out that universal hall residence was a must in the early history of this University, our Students' Union and all Hall Associations still adopt a compulsory membership system, and many Universities adopt a

compulsory college system. If hall education is really an integral part of university education, I do not find any harm for adopting a universal system.

- Nevertheless, to give as many choices to students as possible, I suggest that when students apply to this University, all of them would also be asked to apply to the halls, with the following options:
 - They can select a number of halls in order of priority, including non-residential halls;
 - For each of the halls chosen, they can also choose to become a resident during term times, or a resident during summer time.
 - If they do not want to enter any of the halls, they will have to submit an explanation.
- Admission to halls, whether for regular residence or associate membership, or for membership of non-residential halls, follows the current system of get-together, interviews, transferal to lower choices, etc. The only difference is that at the end of the process, all students would be offered membership in a certain hall. Student flats can continue to function, to accommodate students (who may already be non-residential member of some halls) who desperately need a place for residence.
- The main beauty of this universal system is that, at the end of the day, every student is a hall member, and there will not be any cognitive gap between hall members and non-members. Stigmatization will be removed, and if there are complaints from teachers, administrators, fellow students, and even community members on hall experience, everyone has to bear them, and everyone has to work on them. This is education for everyone.

Some responses to the proposal in January 2004

Note: From some hall wardens' response upon invitation by the Committee on Halls.

- There is a general support of Universal Hall Membership as a matter of principle and vision, and we all hope that this could be implemented sooner rather than later.
 - However, we are also conscious that “membership” is a matter of rights and duties. It would be difficult for us to move into the scheme without a closer examination of rights and duties of an expanded community of affiliated members. There are responsibilities as well as resources implications that we have to assess.
 - Meanwhile, the real challenge of universal hall membership lies in the “universality” or compulsion of the membership. I do not see how we could experiment such challenges in a partial implementation where membership is still voluntary.
 - I hope the concerns I expressed here would not be regarded as anything negative against the idea of universal hall membership. This is a rather fundamental change and we would like to see better preparation for a real success.
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- Very sound idea, but there are practical difficulties.
 - Need to identify the difficulties and then solve them one by one.

- Perhaps a working group should be set up to look into this.
- We find this scheme very interesting and deserves our support. Unfortunately, our Hall depends very much on summer commercial lettings to balance out books. We couldn't join the scheme but would like to re-iterate our moral support.
- In conclusion, Our Hall supports the initiative and meaning of the scheme but will choose to take some time to discuss among the SA and the administrative staffs before deciding on the proposed program.
- There was a detailed discussion on the pilot scheme for universal hall membership at the recent hall retreat on 18 January 2004. I believe it is a worthwhile scheme which deserves discussion at a more formal channel such as a meeting of the Committee on Halls.
- Upon discussion with the student associations and tutors alike, we support the idea of universal hall membership but not the summer hall programme, as we believe these are two separate issues.

From the minutes of the meeting of the Committee on Halls held on 2 March 2004

Note: Some names have been removed in order to detach the association of ideas with individuals, besides some nominal sub-editing.

- The Committee TOOK NOTE of the following comments on the universal hall membership,
 - that the core of the concept of universal hall membership was the compulsion of membership. This could not be piloted and would require a thorough review of the fundamental issues (such as the rights and duties of affiliated members, the purpose of such kind of hall education, and resources implications) before moving ahead;
 - that the Working Group on Hall Education had considered the idea of automatic membership, with reference to the practices of other universities, and had concluded that it was not worth pursuing. It was considered that the current practice of allowing students to choose joining a hall or otherwise had great merits and should be upheld;
 - that there existed a gap between some students' expectation of hall life and that of halls and if students were forced to become hall members, this would only further intensify the problem;
 - that universal hall membership might cause adverse impact on non-residential halls in terms of hall applications;

- HEARD in response from the proposal writer,
 - that under his proposal of universal hall membership, halls included both residential and non-residential halls and it was believed that this would help boost the popularity of non-residential halls, instead of the other way round;
 - the difference between compulsory and automatic hall membership. The suggested scheme intended to provide all students the chance to gain first-hand experience on hall life, so that they could make an informed decision on whether hall education was suitable for them. Students would be allowed to opt out, if they so wished;
 - that the idea of associate membership was actually an extension of the existing concept of non-residential hall membership. All the privileges suggested were not new, except the one which gave explicit priority for associate members to move into the hall when vacancies arose;
 - that it was imperative for halls to reach out to the entire student population so as to bridge the gap between members and non-members about the value of hall life. Moreover, given the many benefits of our hall education, it should be made available to a wider group of students;
- CONCLUDED that it was pre-mature for the matter to be further pursued.

From the minutes of the Joint Halls Development Committee meeting held on 1 April 2004

Note: Joint Halls Development Committee (JHDS) was a committee formed by students “to discuss the strategic development of halls and hall education”. According to the description of JHDS itself (in April 2004), its composition included all HKUSU hall association chairpersons, Union Council hall members, and the Union’s University Affair Secretary as well as its Vice-President (Internal). The following minutes have been sub-edited without changing their original meaning.

- We agreed that hall education is carried through life experience, so it is difficult to imagine what would happen and how hall education would change if all undergraduates become hall members.
- It is difficult to serve so many u-mates with current resources.
- Some of us thought the proposal is alright.
- Follow-up tasks:
 - Bring the discussion to the hallmates.
 - Get the opinion of students who are not living in halls.