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ORGANIZED STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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## **Abstract**

The objective of this project was to recommend ways for the National Union of Dutch Students (LSVb) to improve communication within the union as well as to maintain and increase their membership. The methods employed in this project were purposive interviewing of LSVb board members and representatives of the local unions, as well as random sample interviewing of students at various universities throughout the Netherlands.

ORGANIZED STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION  
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Abstract, Authorship Page, Executive Summary, Introduction, Project Definition, Dutch Political System, Historical Background of Dutch Educational System, Landelijke Studentenvakbond, Changes to Dutch Educational Policy, American Educational System, National Association of Graduate-Professional Students, NAGS Organization and Membership, Conclusions, Methodology, Result and Recommendations, References, Appendix B, Appendix C, Appendix D, Appendix E

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## **Executive Summary**

This project, entitled Organized Student Involvement in Higher Education, consists of four major parts: research, interviewing, analysis, and results. The goal of this project was to recommend ways for the National Union of Dutch Students (LSVb; for more information, see Appendix A) to improve communication within the union as well as ways to maintain and increase its membership.

To attain this goal, background research was conducted on the Dutch higher education system and the LSVb. This research was done to understand the recent changes in the Dutch education system as well as to become familiar with the structure and organization of the LSVb. Research was also conducted on an American student union, NAGS (for more information see Appendix B), and interest groups to understand how NAGS maintains and increases its membership and also to understand the policy of interest groups. After the research was complete, it was followed by the conducting of interviews.

Purposive interviews with the five board members of the LSVb were conducted to determine their views regarding membership and communication. Next, purposive interviews with representatives of various local unions were performed to find out their views regarding communication issues and their relationships with the LSVb. The last set of interviews were interviews with randomly chosen students at various universities throughout the Netherlands. These interviews were conducted to determine what would attract students to join a student union such as the LSVb. Next, a thorough analysis of the interview data was completed.

Content analysis was utilized to analyze the interview data. This involved finding repeated patterns and themes within the data collected. The data were thoroughly analyzed to understand the views of the respondents and were then compared to determine any differences in opinion. This thorough analysis of the data allowed for some helpful recommendations.

The recommendations formulated involve the LSVb creating a workgroup consisting of representatives of the local union whose focus is on communication between local unions. Another recommendation was for the local unions to increase promotion in order to attract new members. Many students were not aware of the existence of the unions; therefore making it impossible for them to join the unions. Another recommendation was for the LSVb and the local unions to offer more incentives in order to maintain and increase membership.

## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

Since the early 1960's, all students in the Netherlands have had the right to receive higher education. To make this work, the Dutch educational system has traditionally been a highly centralized system, with the Ministry of Education at the helm. The Ministry is responsible for policy making and providing the students with stipends. To assure their rights, and to attain appropriate benefits in a rapidly growing and changing system, students organized into unions, such as the Landelijke Studentenvakbond, or LSVb. In the beginning, student unions were simply pressure groups, holding frequent demonstrations to gain influence. Until approximately ten years ago, the unions did not hold much influence within the government. The unions have now transformed into interest groups, which work together with the Ministry of Education in deciding national education policy. Among the accomplishments of these unions are lobbying, increasing the quality of education, reducing cuts in student stipends, and providing transportation cards for students.

In the 1990's, the government began to decentralize the university system. Decentralization resulted in a loss of student influence within the universities' administrations and led to a perception of decreased need for national unions, which has led to a reduction in active union membership at the local and national level. Students have been forced to focus more on their studies due to the fact that they now must complete them within a five year period while traditionally they had unlimited time. Therefore students have less time, motivation, and desire to join student unions. Moreover, local unions tend not to work together, or even to communicate with each other and the national union. This lack of communication and loss in student interest has



made it more difficult for the LSVb to address student issues. Recognizing the need to re-establish cooperative action by local unions and the national organization, the LSVb has requested a study of the communication needs and membership issues of the union. The goal of this project is to recommend to the LSVb ways to improve the communication within the union as well as ways to maintain and increase its membership.

To achieve this goal the project employed interviewing the LSVb's administration, representatives of local unions, and Dutch students. The administration's opinion and the views of the local unions were ascertained through purposive interviews. Random interviews of the students were conducted to understand more clearly their perceptions of student unions. After completing a thorough analysis of the interview data, the authors recommended ways for the LSVb to address communication and membership issues.

The LSVb's role in serving students is changing as the educational system shifts away from a nationalized education policy. Adapting to this new political landscape should be a top priority for the LSVb if it intends to continue to serve student interests as it has in the past. The recommendations made in this study are intended to help the LSVb to adapt to its new role.

## **Chapter 2 - Background**

### **2.1 Project definition**

In this project, we investigate the relationship between students and the LSVb board members. The purpose of the study was to investigate students' opinions of the communication within the union and the membership benefits of the LSVb and compare them to the LSVb board members' perceptions of those issues. The goal was to present recommendations for the LSVb to improve communication within the union and maintain and expand its membership by better addressing the needs of its members.

### **2.2 Dutch Political System**

To understand the role of the LSVb in the Dutch educational system, it is important to understand the political system under which it operates. The Dutch political system is based on a neocorporatist model. Graham K. Wilson defines neocorporatism as a system where policy is made and implemented in a partnership between the government and interest groups (Wilson, 1990). Interest groups represent the interests of specific organizations, people, industry, labor, or even students. In a neocorporatist system interest groups form a quasi-coalition with the government. National policy decisions are made through a process of "consultation, negotiation and compromise" between the government and interest groups (Wilson, 1990). This coalition produces an extremely stable system by reducing the "number and irresponsibility" of demands placed upon the government (Wilson, 1990).

In contrast to these benefits, critics have also cited major shortcomings to a neocorporatist system. Wilson remarks on two of these: rigidity and unwillingness to compromise. He illustrates rigidity by explaining that a neocorporatist state lacks the

mobility of capital and labor that quickly changing economic circumstances require (Wilson, 1990). In other words, the partnership between the government and the interest group ensure the nation a stable political and economic system. This same partnership however, may hinder the nation in times of economic turbulence, since any changes in policy require the consent of the government and the interest groups involved. The time and effort required in obtaining these consents slow the reaction rate of the nation when economic conditions call for rapid change.

Wilson states that the more economically successful a neocorporatist nations become, the less willing they become to compromise with interest groups (Wilson, 1990). Interest groups work in partnership with the government to ensure that the interests of both are respected. Therefore, the political and economical system prospers from this relationship. However, a government that has prospered economically and politically from this arrangement may become less willing to compromise with the interest groups; they have already reaped the benefits from the partnership and any further cooperation could hurt the government's interests.

The Dutch political system, or poldermodel, shows neocorporatist trends (Wilson, 1990). The poldermodel is an accumulation of agreements between the government and the various interest groups. Early in the 1900's, parliamentary conflict erupted over discussions of social welfare, education policy, and voting rights. This brought on a compromise between all the major ideologies-the Socialist, Liberals, Catholics and Protestants (Mommen, 1998). This paved the way for politics for the rest of the century, in where decisions were based on negotiations between government and the different interest groups. This model allowed the Dutch people to adapt to the major political

changes of the 20th century efficiently, i.e. the 1960's revolts and the 1980's recession. According to Maurice Mommen, the name poldermodel was created as a way to describe the Dutch system; in essence it is the decisions reached by the negotiations between the interest groups and the government. The problem with the poldermodel is that the name was created after the system was formed, making concise definition of the system almost impalpable (Mommen, 1998).

The nationalized education policy of the Netherlands shows many of the traits associated with neocorporatism, including the shortcomings. Special interest groups, including the LSVb, work with the government to create a single national education policy. Since the education system is a product of Holland's neocorporatist state, the LSVb must adapt to phenomena such as rigidity and unwillingness to contribute. However, Holland's education system has not always been neocorporatist. Its roots are decisively not neocorporatist and the system continues to evolve today (Mommen, 1998).

### **2.3 Historical Background of Dutch Education System**

Historically Holland's education system has been extremely different from its present neocorporatist leanings. Until the mid-1960's, eligibility for higher education was limited to a small, elite group of students. These students were selected at a young age (usually around 10 or 11 years old) to attend university preparatory schools. At the age of 18 or 19 they took a comprehensive final exam. Upon passing this exam they were eligible to enter any field at any university. This system was inexpensive. However, the major drawback was its limited nature. Only a very small elite segment of the population had the opportunity to attend universities (Steiner, 1986).

The Dutch changed their educational system again in the early 1960's because of this exclusive nature. The intent was to open higher education to the general population. Under the new system, students entered preparatory school at a later age, even if they were not initially selected. This resulted in a higher percentage of students attending preparatory school (Steiner, 1986).

These reforms offered a larger number of students more opportunities for higher education. The universities became overcrowded, however, due to an inability to adapt to the influx of new students. Classes became much larger, making it harder for the students to interact directly with their professors (Steiner, 1986).

At the end of the 1960's, the students revolted to gain influence by demanding the democratization of universities. Changes were brought to the traditional university structure in which the administration and professors completely controlled university policy and administrative decisions. In the new system, a committee of students, professors, and staff members approved or disapproved new measures to be taken, giving students direct influence within universities.

The LSVb was founded in 1983; its purpose was to represent students in the government ([WWW.LSVb.nl](http://WWW.LSVb.nl), 1998). The LSVb was originally a pressure group. In 1989, the Minister of Education, Deetman, was reluctant to listen to the students. Students held massive demonstrations to gain influence in deciding the national educational policy. Deetman's successor made it possible to talk with the students; he wanted to prevent future demonstrations and he believed that the students' input would be valuable in making policy decisions (Mommen, 1998). The LSVb now had the

opportunity to lobby for student issues directly with the Ministry of Education and gave students a voice in the educational policy of the Netherlands.

#### **2.4 Landelijke Studentenvakbond (LSVb)**

The organizational structure of the LSVb consists of 22 local unions at various universities throughout the Netherlands (for more information, see Appendix A). Each year, five students are elected to an executive board and are given a year off from their studies to become full-time directors of the LSVb. A four to six member board supervises each local union as well. Each board member is responsible for coordinating workgroups and must also concentrate either in a particular issue or a specific duty (e.g., media, finances, relationships with local unions, etc.). To become a member of the LSVb, students join the local union at their particular university or become actively involved in one of the workgroups of the LSVb. Every six to eight weeks, the LSVb board members have a council meeting with the local unions to discuss current issues and future plans (<http://www.lsvb.nl>).

The increase in influence has forced the LSVb to change from a revolutionary organization to a more formal lobbying interest group. The LSVb's advises the Ministry of Education on educational policies from the perspective of the students. Their main concerns are the quality of education, student financing, student housing, and student influence. This change has brought a major reduction in the membership of the LSVb. Having become a more formal and less revolutionary group, they are less known to the students, the media, and society. The recent changes to the Dutch national educational policy have also forced students to focus more on their courses; therefore, the students have less time and desire to join an organization such as the LSVb.

## **2.5 Changes to Dutch Educational Policy**

In 1993, the Dutch government again instituted major policy changes. The national educational system was decentralized, in emulation of decentralized American system. The Dutch envy the American system because they see many small independent American universities addressing the needs of their students better than the large centrally-controlled Dutch universities (Steenverten, 1998). Steenverten believes that by adopting a decentralized system of their own, the Dutch could better address the needs of students.

In 1994, a coalition of Democrats, Socialists, and Liberals reduced the budget for higher education by 1.5 million guilders (approximately 750,000 U.S. dollars). To compensate for the financial reductions, the Minister of Education limited the amount of time for which students are financed by the government. If the students do not complete their studies within a six-year period, they have to reimburse the government. Students' stipends were also reduced, forcing more students to obtain part-time jobs. To justify these changes, the Minister promised to improve the quality of education.

In 1997, a new law reorganized the administrative structure of Dutch universities and essentially abolished the democratic structure. A three member board of directors at each university is responsible for making all administrative decisions and is advised by two committees, one of which is composed of students. If the board of directors does not follow the advice of the student committee, they must provide explicit reasons for having done so. The second advising committee is composed of professors and other staff members of the university. The board of directors does not, however, need to provide reasons for disregarding this committee's recommendations (Knippenberg, 1998).

Since the LSVb is involved with the national educational system, the Union must learn to adapt to all of these changes. This involves learning to work within an American-style education system based on decentralization.

## **2.6 American Educational System**

Unlike Holland's neocorporatist system, the government of the United States is pluralist. The American national education system naturally reflects this distinction. In a pluralist system, numerous interest groups, often representing the same interest, compete with each other to influence the national government (Wilson, 1989). There is little long-term cooperation between individual interest groups or between interest groups and the government. The interest groups compete or cooperate with each other for short-term gains in influence. A system of "consultation, negotiation and compromise" between the government and these competing interest groups does not exist (Wilson, 1989).

It is within a pluralist system that student unions exist in the United States. Thus an individual union coexists with a pluralism of many other competing unions. They compete not only for influence within a university or the government but also for constituents. This competition ensures that American student unions are extremely concerned at attracting and retaining a constituency.

The LSVb can adopt the methods of American student unions of attracting and retaining a constituency. This is especially important since the Dutch government is adopting pluralistic ideas. A study of an American student union, such as the National Association of Graduate-Professional Students, is important to understand the methods used to attract and maintain members within a pluralist system.



## **2.7 National Association of Graduate-Professional Students**

The National Association of Graduate-Professional Students was created in 1986 at Ohio State University (for more information, see Appendix B). The first national meeting of graduate students associations was held in March 1987 at Washington State University. This meeting established the National Association of Graduate-Professional Students (NAGS) and elections for its first officer's board was held. The board is composed of a conference coordinator, an information exchange coordinator and six Regional Coordinators (<http://www.nagps.org/NAGPS/index.html>).

In 1989, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) regulation, Section 127, exempting students' stipends from taxation, expired. In response, NAGS joined forces with the Graduate Student Coalition Against Tuition Taxation (GSCATT). Together, they lobbied Congress to waive tuition taxes for graduate students. This partnership succeeded in winning the lobbying campaign and also illustrated the importance of having a permanent national graduate student association. The groups merged before NAGS's national conference in Miami, Florida in 1989.

In 1990, during the fourth annual NAGS conference in Chicago, the NAGS's Board of Directors hired a professional management firm to organize its database and help with member communication. NAGS also introduced a credit card service, a health insurance plan, and a Consumer's Guide for Graduate Students as incentives for their members.

With the election of a Republican Congress in 1994, NAGS found itself fighting proposals to reduce governmental financial aid to students. In doing so, NAGS devoted thousands of hours to collecting and distributing information to undergraduate and

graduate students, faculty, and administrators through an electronic mail network of almost 15,000 individuals. They were able to defeat most of the proposals. Thus, NAGS was recognized for its communication efforts, its cooperation with higher education associations and its advocacy efforts.

NAGS has been successful in both representing its membership in the government and also in providing its membership with the services they desire. To understand the success of NAGS, it is important to study the organization's structure. Central to NAGS's success is the responsibilities that its leadership carries. The leaders have an effective way of communicating with all the members, ensuring all participants have a voice in union policies, which is important to their success.

## **2.8 NAGS Organization and Membership**

The administration of NAGS is divided into two sections. A board of directors is elected at every national assembly and six regional boards of directors are elected at each regional meeting. The responsibilities of both the regional and national board of directors are to ensure that the organization runs efficiently. Both boards contain positions, which allow NAGS to communicate efficiently with its members. The information exchange coordinator produces and distributes the national newsletter and promotes the electronic mail network among the members. The human diversity coordinator recruits members from different student groups. The regional coordinators provide the board of directors with a report of the events and activities of their respective regions either through an electronic list or a regional newsletter and are responsible for the recruitment and retention of members in their region (<http://www.naaps.org/NAGPS/index.html>). Presently the LSVb does not have positions whose duties include those of the information

exchange coordinator, human diversity coordinator, and regional coordinators of NAGS. If the LSVb focuses more on these assignments, the communication within the union could be greatly improved.

The mission of NAGS is to "share information among existing graduate/professional student organizations, to foster the development and growth of organizations, and to further the interests of graduate/professional students" (<http://www.nagps.org/NAGPS/index.html>). Membership in the National Association of Graduate-Professional Students is available to all graduate student organizations in the United States, and any student, organization, corporation or institution dedicated to supporting the association's mission. As of June 1997, NAGS had 146 Graduate Student Associations, representing nearly 750,000 graduate students across the United States. Additionally, the organization is affiliated with more than 50 educational affiliates and has more than 20,000 individual members. (<http://www.nagps.org/NAGPS/index.html>). NAGS has been able to increase its membership by their notable lobbying efforts in graduate students' issues, and attracting members with tangible incentives. To better understand the membership issues a study of incentives and individuals' willingness to contribute is imperative.

## **2.9 Organizational Maintenance and Incentives**

Membership maintenance is one of the most important aspects of an organization; it includes survival, maintaining communication, and ensuring that members are contributing their efforts and resources (Wilson, 1995). Maintenance is threatened by a loss of members, a decrease in incentives, extreme time demands, and conflicts over goals. The officials of the organization must be aware of these threats and must try to

minimize them, by avoiding or resolving conflicts over duties and incentives (Wilson, 1995).

Membership incentives include any benefits or opportunities offered to the members of the organization in exchange for the time and effort the member is willing to put forth. There are four general kinds of incentives: material incentives, specific solidary incentives, collective solidary incentives, and purposive incentives (Wilson, 1995).

Material incentives are tangible: money or items on which a monetary value is placed. Wages and salaries, fringe benefits, reductions in taxes, and discounts on services are all material incentives. There are two types of material incentives: exclusive benefits, to which all members are entitled and individual benefits, which are awarded to specific individuals. Exclusive material benefits are useful in gaining new members and retaining members, but they are not useful in motivating members to take on more work. Individual material benefits, however, ensure that members are giving their time and effort (Wilson, 1995).

Specific solidary incentives are intangible offerings that may be given to or withheld from certain members. In fact, the value of these incentives is directly related to the fact that they are withheld from some people. Offices and honors are some typical specific solidary incentives, to be important, these incentives cannot be given to every member. Collective solidary incentives are intangible rewards that exist under the preface that to be enjoyed by anyone; a group must enjoy them. These include the fun of being in a group and the feeling of togetherness. Although it is difficult to put a value on

solidary incentives, they are often more appealing than material incentives due to their immediate availability (Wilson, 1995).

Purposive incentives are also intangible and originate from the gratification one feels from helping a worthy cause. These incentives depend on the objectives of the organization, and can be enjoyed by all members, even those who do not contribute much effort. Strictly speaking, the effects of purposive incentives do not depend on how others see the recipient. People with strong convictions should contribute without regard to others' opinions, which does happen, as in the case of an anonymous donation. However, practically speaking, people who contribute to a worthwhile cause generally do so for their own personal satisfaction as well as for the recognition of their strong beliefs and generosity. This is why purposive incentives are so appealing (Wilson, 1995).

These four kinds of incentives differ in two ways. First, they vary in how they are able to constrain or direct individual behavior. Although material incentives rarely provide the desired effect (individuals differ in their value of a dollar), they are more concrete and produce a more visible effect than that of intangible incentives, especially those that can be given to or withheld from members. Second, they vary in the extent to which they depend on the objectives of the organization. People motivated mostly by monetary incentives will not be interested in the purposes of the organization. However, those motivated by purposive incentives will be extremely concerned with the goals of the organization (Wilson, 1995).

These incentives are vital for an interest group to attract and retain its membership. The LSVb currently provides solidary and purposive incentives; however, the union could increase its constituency by offering more material incentives. In

addition to retaining and recruiting members, interest groups must also be concerned with the contributions and participation of existing members.

## **2.10 Individuals' Willingness to Contribute**

The collective action paradox, also known as the Olson Problem, named after the economist Mancur Olson<sup>1</sup>, offers an explanation as to why people will not contribute to achieving an organization's goal. The first part of the collective action paradox is the free-rider problem: if a person can benefit from collective action without contributing anything, he or she is getting a "free ride" due to the efforts of those who actually contribute. Thus, the "free-rider" will not join the organization. The second part is the trivial contribution problem; if people feel that their contributions do not amount to much compared to the needs of the organization, then they will not be motivated to contribute because they will not feel they are helping the organization accomplish its goals (Wilson, 1995).

There are different factors that influence individuals' willingness to contribute to an organization. The first is individual temperament. Some people will contribute even if they are aware that their contributions have a very small effect on the organization. On the other hand, some people overestimate the importance of their contribution and therefore are less likely to free ride on the contributions of others. The second factor is organizational learning. By joining an organization, people will learn more about the organization and what is expected from them. The people who find the organization's objectives interesting and the incentives appealing will remain and become active in the organization. A final factor is the perception of a threat. People are more motivated by

<sup>1</sup> Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965). The Olson Problem is referred to as the collective action paradox.

the possibility of a loss than that of a gain. This is true even if the loss and the gain carry the same value (Wilson, 1995). The perception of a threat is a critical motivator, particularly in unions.

Olson offered two solutions to the collective action paradox. The first is social pressure, in which people will donate effort and money if they participate in a small group situation. Because they are meeting members face-to-face, they will feel pressured to contribute to avoid criticism from group members if they do otherwise. The second solution is the offering of selective benefits that can be given and withheld from specific members if they donate effort or money to the organization (Wilson, 1995).

To address membership issues, the LSVb must learn to solve the collective action paradox. A strong and active membership will enable the union to continue to serve Dutch students in its newly evolving role within Holland's changing government.

## **2.11 Summary**

The Netherlands is moving away from its traditional centralized education system to a decentralized system similar to that of the United States, resulting in a loss of student influence. The most recent changes to the system, which limited the number of years students receive government financing and reduced the amount of the stipends, have forced students to focus more on their studies. Students now have less spare time and consequently, less interest in joining an organization such as the LSVb.

Since their origin in 1986, NAGS has been successful in representing students in Congress and in serving its members. By maintaining an effective means of communication and offering incentives, the organization has been able to maintain and

increase their membership. This goal of this project is to recommend ways for the LSVb to improve communication within the union and maintain and increase its membership. Since the LSVb represents students in the Dutch government, learning the methods employed by NAGS would help the LSVb adapt to the changes in the educational system and successfully serve its members as it has in the past.



### **Chapter 3 - Methodology**

To address communication, growth, and maintenance of membership within the LSVb, we employed three methods. The first method was collecting data from the board members of the LSVb through interviews. In particular we focused on their relationships with local unions and background information on the union. The second method was interviewing members of the local unions. We tried to understand the unions' feelings toward the LSVb and their expectations of the LSVb. The next method was interviewing students at various universities in Holland. This informed us of the students' attitudes toward the LSVb and their local unions. Two informal interviews were also conducted to obtain more information about the Dutch educational system and its recent changes.

In interviewing the five board members of the LSVb, the first questionnaire contained questions regarding information about the recruitment of new members (for more information, see Appendix C). We determined the methods employed by the LSVb to attract members and the current incentives offered by the LSVb. The second questionnaire ascertained the structure of the LSVb, the recent changes in the Dutch educational policy, and the means of communication between the national and local levels (for more information, see Appendix C). These questions helped us to understand the background of the LSVb, the effects of the changes in the educational system, and the need for improvement of communication within the union.

After acquiring information from the LSVb board members, our group interviewed members of ten local unions. The questionnaires were similar to those used when interviewing LSVb board members so we could compare the responses (for more information, see Appendix D). The first questionnaire enabled us to determine the

methods adopted by the local unions to attract new members and the benefits offered. The second questionnaire provided us with information about structure of the local unions and the relationship between the LSVb and the local unions, in particular regarding communication between the two levels. Our respondents were chosen using a reference sampling technique. Reference sampling involves utilizing an initial contact to reference additional contacts. Each new contact then supplies additional contacts. This method is continued until the repetition of themes or references is encountered (Berg, 1998). The LSVb board members recommended our initial respondents to us and then each respondent gave us further contacts from their unions.

After acquiring the local union members' views, we interviewed random students from different Dutch universities (for more information, see Appendix E). This enabled us to determine their knowledge of the LSVb and what would attract them to join an organization such as the LSVb. We ascertained their perceptions of what the LSVb offers students and also learned what services and incentives they expect the union to provide them. We also determined what the students believe should be the LSVb's main focus for national policy. Our respondents were selected using a random sampling technique. This technique involves choosing random subjects from a population (Berg, 1998). Student contacts were made independent of the LSVb to exclude biasing the results. By interviewing these students we obtained their needs, desires, and general perceptions of student unions.

The two informal interviews helped us to understand the changes to the Dutch educational system. The first interviewee was Maurice Mommen, a previous LSVb board member and current political science student. Mommen explained the

development of the poldermodel and the recent changes in educational policies. The second respondent was Drs. Knippenberg, a student counselor from the Technological University of Delft. He gave us more information on the recent changes to the administrative structure of Dutch universities. He was the chairman of the university council of TU Delft when the democratic structure still remained and is currently employed as an independent counselor who provides advice when conflicts arise between students and the university. Knippenberg explained the structural and organizational differences between the democratized system and the decentralized system and how these differences have affected students' influence and interests in educational policy. The data obtained from these two informal interviews were used as background information. The responses acquired from LSVb officials, local union members, and students then had to be analyzed.

## **Chapter 4 - Data Analysis**

To correctly analyze the results from our interviews we employed content analysis. Content analysis condenses and systematically compares data for patterns (Berg, 1998). The analysis detected consistencies and patterns of themes within the students' responses. These consistencies represented the general views of the students and the local unions. Next, these data were compared to similar data obtained from the board members of the LSVb. Any contradictions or similarities were discovered through content analysis.

Recommendations for helping the LSVb were developed by comparing the responses of the LSVb officials to those of the students and the local unions. This comparison illustrated most contradictions and similarities between the students' and administration's views. Through correctly identifying these contradictions and similarities we were able to address problems in maintaining and expanding membership and communication within the union.

By interviewing the LSVb board members, we acquired data regarding the union's organizational structure, information on the Dutch national educational system, its history and the recent changes, communication with the local unions, and membership issues (for more information, see Appendix C). The five-member directive board of the LSVb consists of a president, a vice-president, a secretary, a treasurer, and an administrator. Each board member specializes in a topic of educational policy (e.g., students' rights, quality of education, student financing, and media). The LSVb has 22 local unions through the Netherlands, and has a total of 3% of students as members. The LSVb board members all agree that it is important to attract more members, but believe it

is the responsibility of the local unions. They feel their main responsibilities are their lobbying efforts and providing local unions with information about the educational policy so they can better serve their students. The board members all agree that communication with the local unions is insufficient, but they explain that they are busy lobbying and are trying as much as possible to keep their members satisfied. They feel that the council meetings with all the unions are monotonous and could run more smoothly, but see no other way in which to run the meetings. The only service they provide the students is the studentenline, a phone number for students to call when they need help. However, they admit that they do not receive as many phone calls as they would like, perhaps because the local unions also have student helplines.

Interviewing ten local unions gave us the perspectives of the different union members with regards to communication with the LSVb, the services offered by the unions, and ways to attract new members. Although they range from 80 members to 3,000 members, we found many similarities in their responses. All of the local union members we interviewed recognize the importance of attracting new members and are currently working on promotional campaigns. They feel that most of the responsibilities of attracting new members fall upon the local unions. Many of the interviewees feel that the communication with the LSVb is inefficient. They find it difficult to contact the LSVb board members and also find that messages do not get relayed. These members are dissatisfied with the amount of personal contact between the national and local levels. Many respondents also agree that the LSVb must be more open to suggestions from the local union members regarding union policy.

When we interviewed random student at Dutch universities, we found that many respondents are not aware of the LSVb or of the local unions at their universities. The students who do have knowledge of the unions feel that the unions should make students more aware of what they accomplish and what they are able to offer students. These students are also aware of the incentives offered by some of the unions, but many are not attracted by those benefits. Recognizing patterns in this interview data allowed us to form recommendations for the LSVb.

## **Chapter 5 - Results and Recommendations**

Because of the recent changes in the Dutch education system, students have expressed less interest in joining student unions. Since they now have limited time to complete their study, students are more focused on finishing their study and are less willing to contribute to organizations such as student unions. The LSVb must address this problem in order to maintain and increase its membership. One way to address the problem of maintaining its members is to improve the communication between the LSVb and the local unions and between the local unions themselves. In order to increase its membership, we recommend that the LSVb offer more incentives to its members. This will attract students to join the union as well as convince the current members to remain in the union.

In order to improve communication, we suggest that the LSVb form a workgroup to improve communication with the local unions. The workgroup will be composed of representatives of different regional groups. Each region will be composed of four or five neighboring unions to decrease traveling costs and facilitate communication between regional members. This will help the local unions to be aware the activities of other unions and help them learn from each other. The representatives will be responsible for presenting the chairs of this group with a report of their activities and for the recruitment and retention of members in their region. The coordinator of the group will be responsible for maintaining and promoting either a telephone or an electronic mail network between all the local unions. It will also be his responsibility to keep the LSVb board members informed about the regional activities. The workgroup will provide more communication between the LSVb and the local unions and will also help inter-union

communication. The group will also allow local unions members will to focus more on policy decisions at the council meetings, rather than giving reports of their activities.

To serve the wider student population, the LSVb should develop a job bank. The job bank will consist of the creation of a database consisting of information from industries and employers about open positions and the resumes of students. Students will be able to access information from this database through either the studentenline or through the Internet. Students who call will be offered a list of employers who are looking for the skills, which they possess. Companies will benefit from participating in the job bank because they will be introduced to more candidates and may also receive lists of students who are qualified for their needs.

In order to increase its membership, local unions must provide the students with material incentives. Fewer students are joining student unions simply for their idealistic views; therefore, offering incentives is a sure way to attract new members. The development of contracts with local businesses will provide more services to students. Local unions that do not currently offer help with housing can contact real estate agencies and obtain lists of available properties close to the universities/colleges and possibly receive discounts for students. Contracts with school supply stores could also offer students discounts in return for membership.

Local unions can also provide academics services such as tutoring; upper-class union members will help incoming students adapt to the changes and help them with academic-related questions. They should prepare annual course evaluations in which participants of the different courses will assess the courses and professors to assist the students in choosing courses. The offering of study rooms for union members would also



aid the students academically. Local unions could also become more involved with other clubs and organizations to understand and address the issues of the students. A coalition of clubs, organizations and unions could be used as a way to pressure the universities' administration and acquire more influence in administrative decisions.

Another way the LSVb and the local unions could expand their membership is by increasing promotion, especially toward first year students. Many students are not even aware that the unions exist. We suggest that throughout the year, especially at the beginning of the school year, the local unions increase promotion by, for example, handing out pamphlets describing exactly what the unions do to help students and the services they have to offer them. The distribution of promotional items such as flags, posters, and T-shirts would also be helpful for those unions who can afford it. The LSVb and the local unions should also promote themselves when they use their influence to accomplish something within the government or the universities. The unions help improve the quality of education and also offer services to the students. If students are not aware of this, they will have less interest in joining and remaining actively involved in the unions.

The creation of a workgroup of representatives of local unions will help the LSVb improve communication within the union. The job bank and increased incentives will provide students with more reasons to join the union or remain actively involved. Increasing promotion will also expand the membership by making students aware of the LSVb and all that it accomplishes. These recommendations are feasible and useful for the LSVb to improve communication within the union and maintain and recruit members.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Landelijke Studentenvakbond (LSVb) National Union of Students of the Netherlands**

The LSVb was established 28 May 1983. The organization is a recognized partner for the Ministry of Education, and consulted by all of the parties in the field of education. Their objective is to represent student's interests in higher education and to provide the best possible system for all. The LSVb has more than 15,000 voluntary members between their 22 local chapters. The LSVb provides its members with healthcare plans, housing information and facilitate a forum for discussions of student's issues. Their budget of almost 500,000 guilders from membership fees contributions from governmental and private organizations. Also, an executive committee consisting of five members heads the Union.

Elections for the executive committee members of the LSVb take place yearly. A commission nominates candidates based on interviews. However one can still be elected if not nominated by the commission. The executive committee of the LSVb focuses on areas such as education and income. Committee members then write policy statements regarding those areas to be discussed at their board meetings. The members of the local student unions meet with the LSVb board every six weeks. The LSVb also has an advocacy network to handle students' legal problems.

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## **Appendix B**

### **National Association Graduate-Professional**

The NAGS is an association of more than 140-graduate students association in the United States of America. The NAGS provides a communication link between all of its members for the discussion of graduate student issues. The NAGS helps their member organization to grow and develop. It also provides many services to its members, including a health plan, credit card services, a Graduate Student consumer Guide, and a career/job bank. They work together with other national organizations to lobby graduate student issues in Congress.

The NAGS was established in 1987. The association is arranged in six different regions throughout the United States. Each regional Board of Executives is responsible for holding an annual meeting in which amendments to the constitution and regional activities are planned to be presented at the National meeting. The national Board of Directors is responsible for organizing an annual meeting in which amendments to the constitutions are voted on and the budget is approved for regional activities. For more information on the association please contact:

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## Appendix C

### LSVb Board Questionnaire One

1. What is your name?
2. Where did you go to school?
3. What was/is your course of studies?
4. Could you tell me how you got involved with LSVb?
5. What is your position in the LSVb?
6. Tell me some things you've learned as a result from being involved with the LSVb.
7. In your opinion, what are the main objectives of the LSVb?
8. Does the union have a role in the daily life of the students and if so how?
9. What services does the union directly provide students?
10. Are students involved directly in the union and if so how?
11. Is it important that students be involved directly with your organization, or can it serve them without their active participation?
12. What incentives are there for current student members to become and remain actively involved?
13. What do you expect your members to provide to the union?
14. What are the incentives for non-members to join the union?
15. Does the Union serve non-member students?
16. In your opinion is it important for the Union to attract new membership?
17. If so, What presently is the union doing to attract new members?
18. In your opinion is there anything further the LSVb can do to attract new members?
19. Do you think students should be in direct contact with the national unions? If so, in what form?

## LSVb Board Questionnaire Two

1. What is the organizational structure of the LSVb?
2. Can you compare the role of the National Union to the roles of the local Unions on a national level?
3. Can you compare the role of the National Union to the roles of the local Unions on an individual student level?
4. How do the two levels communicate?
5. How is the leadership of each local union selected?
6. How is the leadership of the national union selected?
7. Who are your members? Is it all University/ Colleges students? Are professors allowed to join? Non-students? Former Students? Sympathetic citizens?
8. Tell me how the national educational policy of the Netherlands has changed in the past few years?
9. What is the LSVb's role in deciding Netherlands's national education policy?
10. Has the role of the LSVb changed due to political changes in the last 10 years and if so how?
11. How does the LSVb fulfill its role?
12. What do you think is the most important part of LSVb policy?
  - Student financing
  - Quality of Education
  - Students' influence?
13. What do you think is the biggest threat to the future of the LSVb?
14. Is there anything further you would like to add that you think would be important to our study?

## Appendix D

### Local Unions Questionnaire One

1. What is your name?
2. Where do you go to school?
3. What was/is your course of studies?
4. Could you tell me how you got involved with your local union?
5. What is your position in the your local union?
6. Tell me some things you've learned as a result from being involved with the your local union.
7. In your opinion, what are the main objectives of your local union?
8. Does the union have a role in the daily life of the students and if so how?
9. What services does the union directly provide students?
10. Are students involved directly in the union and if so how?
11. Is it important that students be involved directly with your organization, or can it serve them without their active participation?
12. What incentives are there for current student members to become and remain actively involved?
13. What do you expect your members to provide to the union?
14. What are the incentives for non-members to join the union?
15. Does the Union serve non-member students?
16. In your opinion is it important for the Union to attract new membership?
17. If so, what presently is the union doing to attract new members?
18. In your opinion is there anything further your local union can do to attract new members?
19. Do you think students should be in direct contact with the national unions? If so, in what form?



## **Local Unions Questionnaire Two**

1. What is the organizational structure of your local union?
2. How is the leadership of each local union selected?
3. Who are your members? Is it all University/ Colleges students? Are professors allowed to join? Non-students? Former Students? Sympathetic citizens?
4. Can you compare the role of the National Union to the roles of the local Unions on a National Level?
5. Can you compare the role of the National Union to the roles of the local Unions on an individual student level?
6. How do the two levels communicate?
7. Do you feel that the communication between the LSVb and the local unions is sufficient?
8. What is the purpose of the Council meeting every six weeks?
9. What is the LSVb's role in deciding Netherlands's national education policy?
10. Do you feel the LSVb is fulfilling its role?
11. What do you think is the most important part of your local union policy: Student financing? Quality of Education? Students influence?
12. What do you think is the biggest threat to the future of your local union?
13. Is there anything further you would like to add that you think would be important to our study?

## **Appendix E**

### **Student Questionnaire**

1. What is your course of study?
2. Do you belong to a student union? If not, why?
3. Have you heard of the LSVb? (if no skip to question 8)
4. What do you think is their main purpose?
5. Are you satisfied with their work?
6. What do you believe their role is in deciding National Education Policy?
7. What do you think should be their main focus for National Education Policy?
8. What is the role of students in deciding National Education Policy? And what is their role in University policy?
9. If you do not belong to a student union, what would attract you to join?
10. What attracted you to join your local union? (if member)
11. What do you think are good incentives (benefits) to join?
12. Does your union offer you any benefits?
13. Is there anything you would like to add that you think would be important to our study?