



Presented at the DLSU Research Congress 2014
De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines
March 6-8, 2014

The First Sparks of Student Activism at De La Salle College, 1968-1972

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Abstract: In the decades following the Second World War, the flames of student activism engulfed the different regions of the globe. In the Philippines, the students mounted tempestuous protest rallies in the 1960s and the 1970s, denouncing the continuing intervention of the United States in the Philippine affairs and the actuations of government and school authorities. The socio-political ferment permeated the walls of De La Salle College. Propelled by nationalism, the La Sallites were actively involved in protest actions which assailed the burning issues obtaining in the local and international arena. De La Salle student activists clashed with the school administration on matters pertinent to the tuition fee increase, the Brother Becker case, the NROTC issue, and the student rights and academic freedom. The activists sounded the call for a nationalist education and impugned the elitist orientation of the institution. In accommodating some of their demands, the administration of the College created structures, formulated programs and revised certain rules. This paper draws on Prof. Anthony Giddens' structuration theory to analyze student activism at De La Salle College from the late 1960s when the Student Council figured prominently in the issues confronting the student body and marshalled its energy towards raising the student awareness up to the time before martial law was declared in 1972. Delving into the "dialectical relationship" between the "agency" (student activists) and the "structure" (school), this study explains how that relationship changed over time. It endeavours to establish how the structure shaped the actions of the agents and how the actions of the young people produced or reproduced changes in the structure. It treats of student activism in the Philippines to show how it impinged on De La Salle students. In explicating the institutional change, the historical method, that is, the descriptive-analytical method, is employed.

Key Words: student activism; structuration theory; protest; Student Council; De La Salle College