



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

Jose Victor D. Jimenez\*  
*\*De La Salle University-Manila*  
*jose.victor.jimenez@dlsu.edu.ph*

**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 actions 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

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The decades after the Second World War, particularly the 1960s, saw the rise and surge of student power, which had taken on an international dimension. Waves of student protests had raged in developed states in Western Europe, communist countries in Eastern Europe, the United States, and Third World countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. A confluence of social, political, demographic, and educational developments had

precipitated the protest movements. For sure, the circumstances of the emergence and growth of student movements varied from country to country (Altbach, 1991).

The political leadership in the Philippines had grappled with the challenges posed by the eruption of student protests. Students waged a struggle against the unrelenting intervention of the United States in the political, economic and military affairs of the Philippines. They likewise



held rallies and demonstrations to denounce the actions of the government authorities, who were subservient to the American demands, and school authorities.

Student activism had swept across the campus of De La Salle College. Spurred by student rights and academic freedom put the student activists and the administration of the College at loggerheads. The student activists took the opportunity to express their fervent desire and clamor for a nationalist education, and assailed the institution for catering to the elitist student clientele. Faced with such a dilemma, the administration of the College resorted to the creation of structures, formulation of new programs and modification of certain rules and regulations.

There exists no analytical treatment of student activism at De La Salle College from the late 1960s to 1972, much more an interpretation from a theoretical standpoint. The studies on the subject are merely historical sketch of what happened during the period under consideration. The articles that were printed in the *La Sallian*, a student publication of the school, presented reports and commentaries on the burning issues that confronted the student activists.

This paper appropriates the structuration theory, a sociological construct which was formulated by British sociologist Prof. Anthony Giddens. Prof. Giddens defined structuration as "the structuring of social relations across time and space" (qtd. in Heracleous and Hendry, 2000, p. 1259). Departing from the structuralist tradition and the human agency-based explanation, he posited that agency and structure are "not two independently given sets of phenomena, a dualism," but "represent a duality" (qtd. in Yates, 1997, p. 161). He argued that "structure is both the medium and the outcome of practices it recursively organizes" (Giddens, 1982 p. 21). For Giddens, humans are "knowledgeable agents" operating in specific contexts, not just pawns of forces - whether economic or social - larger than they are," (qtd. in Yates, 1997, p.160) whose actions shape the structures, which influence human actions. He went on to say that these structures consist of "rules and resources," which human actors utilize as they interact with the structures. Yates (1997, p.161) remarked that human agents always have the "ability or 'power in the sense of transformative

nationalism, the La Sallites were drawn into the protest actions and bewailed the critical issues that derived from within and from without. The issues relative to the tuition fee increase, the Brother Becker case, the NROTC controversy, the

structure (De La Salle College) shaped the actions of the agency (student activists) and how their actions influenced or affected the structure. To provide a historical context of the study, the writer deems it proper to discuss briefly student activism in the Philippines, taking into account the beginnings of the student protests, the involvement of students from different schools and the issues facing the activists. The historical method, that is, the descriptive-analytical method, is employed in interpreting how the phenomenon had affected the institution and the student activists. capacity,' to act at odds with such structures, whether intentionally or unintentionally, and thus to undercut or even to initiate change in the structures."

This paper seeks to analyse student activism at De La Salle College from the late 1960s when the Student Council was actively involved in the issues affecting the studentry and exerting serious efforts in raising the student awareness up to the time before martial law was declared on September 21, 1972. Exploring the "recursive relationship" between the agency and structure, this paper is a modest attempt to explain how the



## 2. STUDENT ACTIVISM IN THE PHILIPPINES: A HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The relatively inert students of the forties and the early 1950s, were apparently unperturbed by the developments in the local and international arena. Towards the close of that decade, student activists came to the fore. The Filipino students organized protests against the Americans who continued to intervene in the Philippine affairs even after the United States had proclaimed the independence of her former colony on July 4, 1946. In the early 1960s, students staged rallies and demonstrations, assailing the continuing infringement of the Philippine sovereignty by the United States and the subservience of the Philippine government authorities to the dictates of the foreign power. There was an upsurge of student protests by the late sixties. From January to March 1970, more violent protest rallies were mounted against the Marcos regime, which came to be known as the First Quarter Storm (Agoncillo, 1990).

The University of the Philippines was the hotbed of student activism. Students from the non-sectarian schools, including the Mapua Institute of Technology, the Far Eastern University and the Lyceum of the Philippines, and such sectarian schools as De la Salle College, Ateneo de Manila, University of Santo Tomas and San Beda College joined the protest movements. The agitation stretched from Greater Manila to the Visayas and Mindanao (Damo-Santiago, 1972).

The activists took part in militant organizations such as the Kabataang Makabayan (Nationalist Youth) and the Movement for Democratic Philippines (MDP), among others. The radical students eventually held key positions in student publications and student council (Calderon, 1971).

A number of factors precipitated student protests in the Philippines. The Filipino students were stimulated by the global phenomenon of student activism and the black rebellion and the worker strike movement in the United States. Technological advances and broad circulation of the periodicals and facilitated the awareness of the events obtaining outside of the country, specifically the student rebellion. In light of the expanding

knowledge, students challenged the existing conditions (Isidro and Ramos, 1973; Corpuz, 1969; Sison, 1989; Agoncillo, 1990).

The discontented students were critical of the administration of the schools and political leadership. On academic matters, they censured the lack of academic freedom, the rising cost of education, the inferior quality of school facilities and instruction, unfair school rules and regulations. In regard to the national problems, the government was reproached for the decline of peace and order, the rampant graft and corruption, and the feudal nature of the society, to name a few. (Damo-Santiago, 1972; Lopez, 1969).

## 3. THE STRUCTURATION OF STUDENT ACTIVISM AT DE LA SALLE COLLEGE

### *3.1. The actions of the human agents*

In the late 1960s, one of the issues brought up by the students had to do with the “prevalence of the affluent on campus.” It was a question of whether “wide cross-section of the public” could be “represented” (Gonzalez & Reyes, 1980, p.10).

The students urged the College to adopt a “more nationalistic” posture. Specifically, they contended that considering that De La Salle was a “Philippine institution, why were its principal administrators Americans, its textbooks written by foreigners, and the prevalent mode of instruction English?” They went on to raise the point of what the “highest priority of the best educational institution” ought to be: was it “purely academic program” or “one which achieved a greater balance between social responsibility and academic involvement?” (Quirino, 1986, p.211).

Buoyed by the nationalistic spirit, the student activists boldly condemned the “presence of ‘clerico-fascists’” in private educational institutions. They called for the “Filipinization of education by ousting non-Filipino presidents of schools, colleges, and universities,” and appointing qualified Filipinos to head the institution (Evasco, 2011, p. 88).

The student activists clashed with the administration over the Brother Becker case. In the afternoon of Friday, December 6, 1968, the established campus routine was interrupted when more than 600 students held a four-hour demonstration to show their support for Brother Edward Becker FSC, who was dismissed from the



College. The leaflets that were circulated by the students in the morning of that day divulged the ostensible imputations hurled by the Brothers' Community Council against Bro. Becker: "1) Bro. Becker, Guidance Counsellor, gave a 'subversive' talk on Student Power sponsored by LIOFCO last Monday, December 2, 2) Bro. Becker supposedly was an 'adviser' of the Commerce Freshmen 01 that boycotted its class at the end of last semester, and 3) Bro. Becker's presence is considered 'inimical' to the 'interests' as defined for De La Salle College by the Brothers' Community Council." Dr. Waldo Perfecto, academic vice-president, "castigated" the dissenters for "failing to get all the relevant facts, adding that Brother Becker's "presence in the university was a matter for the Brothers' Community Council to decide and not by the student body." The demonstrators were not able to hold an audience with Brother Gilbert, president of the Brothers' Community. Brother Francis Garvey, Dean of the School of Liberal Arts, rebuked them for "making asses of yourselves" and told Arthur Aguilar, Student Council chairman, that the Becker case "was a community affair and that the case was more complex than the students thought." While the demonstrators were awaiting the SC Executive Board who went to Greenhills to get the side of Brother Becker, Santiago Sta. Romana, SC vice-chairman for external affairs, was lambasting the administration. At some later time, Brother H. Gabriel Connon, FSC, issued a memorandum, saying the information embodied in the mimeographed sheets were "inaccurate" and not a correct statement of facts." Anthony Aguirre, LIOFCO secretary, instantaneously refuted the memorandum, arguing that he had confirmed the veracity of the details set forth in the leaflets ("Students Strike!," 1968, pp. 1, 3).

The Becker case provided the students the opportunity to raise their demand for academic freedom and the enjoyment of their rights. In a meeting with Brother Gabriel and Dr. Perfecto in the morning of Sunday, December 8, 1968, Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Aguilar managed to veer the dialogue from the Becker case, declaring that the "issue was only incidental and the Becker case was merely a catalyst, the 'final straw' so to speak which ignited student protest over school policies." Aguilar then presented the following demands:

"1) Guarantee of the freedom of expression.

2) Freedom to post and hand out leaflets without harassment.

3) Abrogation of the *No Smoking rule*.

4) Abrogation of the Minimum Requirements for Academic Freedom (a Magna Carta for La Salle).

5) Standing Student-Faculty Committee to adjudicate in times of crises.

6) Rejection of premise that Filipino students are immature.

7) No haircut inspection.

8) Adoption of the Unlimited Cut System for Juniors, Seniors, Terminals and Honor Students.

9) Right to withdraw from courses with or without credit at any point in the semester with or without approval of the Dean.

10) A seat and vote in the Academic Council" (Adm'n-SC Bargaining. . . , 1968, pp. 1, 3).

The tuition fee increase incited uproar among students. When the Board of Trustees resolved to increase the tuition fees for the College Department in school year 1970-1971, the Student Council under the leadership of Francis Estrada objected to such a move. The students nonetheless paid their tuition "under protest" (The President's Report 1969/1971).

For school year 1971-1972, the administration proposed another tuition fee increase. Clemente Garrucho, Student Council President, opposed the proposal and negotiated for a Php50 cutback in the tuition fees for the first and second semesters of that school year (Ngo and Ejercito, 1972).

In the concluding meeting of the Local Council on Tuition and Fees, Garrucho, representing the student body, remonstrated against the proposal of the College to increase tuition in the college department, expressing his view that "it may be proper to charge the P50 increase for incoming freshmen but not for students who have already entered De La Salle College (Tan, 1972, p. 5).

The NROTC issue stirred up a hornet's nest. On July 17, 1971, around 600 cadets refused to attend the NROTC drill. The refusal arose from the cadets' "dissatisfaction with the present NROTC system" and manifestation of their "protest against the hazing of Shore Patrol trainees by probationary officers." In a resolution, the Student Council backed the cadets' boycott of the NROTC. Among the demands that the Committee against NROTC was poised to publicize included the





scrapping of the NROTC drill system, abolition of the haircut and uniform regulation and removal of "all the officers' ranks" and the DNST staff who was responsible for the 'atrocities that have been going on for the past years under the theory of command responsibility,' to name a few ("Cadets boycott drill; post 14 basic demands," 1971, p. 1).

On August 6, 1971, some demands of the midshipmen were propounded before the freshmen and sophomores in an assembly organized by the Student Council, Faculty and Administration. The demands underwent revision.

"1) Consultation and subsequent approval of the tripartite community be done as standard procedure in the event that the DNST desires to move drill elsewhere other than the De La Salle Manila campus.

2) Cadets whose hair touches on collar and whose sideburn cuts exceed beyond the lower tip of the ear be required to wear appropriate hairnets.

3) Cadets be allowed to wear moustache and beard.

4) Absences during the past boycotts not be counted so that everyone can start anew.

5) Replacement of drill with socio-civic action like mass work, physical fitness, teaching in urban areas, etc.

6) Cadets be treated as ordinary students during ordinary days. This means that midshipmen transacting business at the DNST not be required to adhere to military decorum. (No saluting.)

7) Summer training be given by the DNST as an option for those who would not like to undergo the staggered basic program of two years.

8) That cadet attendance be made according to the exact number of minutes or hours missed.

9) That cadet officers be forbidden to use vulgarities as matter of style during drill practices; that such moral indignation be strongly denounced.  
Due Process

10) That due process be granted before any midshipmen is dropped before a student officers appointed by the Commandant or Brigade Commander and three midshipmen appointed by the SC President.

11) That the DNST shoulder fifty percent of uniform costs for midshipmen.

12) That drill hours be made a maximum of two hours per drill day.

13) The abolition of the ten peso NROTC fee" ("Mass work, 2-hr. drill, approved, 1971, p. 1).

The hair regulation continued to draw the ire of the students. Butch Garrucho, Student Council President pressed for an "official boycott of drills" last Saturday, January 29, 1972 (Pico, 1972, p. 1)

### 3.2 *The Actions of De La Salle College*

In addressing the charge of "elitism," the College formed the Development Office, which was directed initially by Mr. Jorge Revilla and subsequently by Mr. Antonio de las Alas, Jr. The office took charge of the undertakings under the five-year development program and was mandated to enlarge the scope of the student aid program (Connon & Reyes, 1980).

Responsive to the nationalistic demands of the student activists, the College, during the incumbency of Brother Connon, set up a Textbook Writing Committee, which was mandated "to produce a series of accurate, well-written texts which emphasized Filipino values and setting rather than the American cultural oddities of roller coasters and six-shooters." In 1970, the Committee managed to "draft" or "publish" works on "Aesthetics, Biology, Chemistry, Economics, English, and Philosophy." In the elementary level, a series of Pilipino manuals, which incorporated the language arts into Social Studies, were entitled *Isang Bansa, Isang Wika*. Fusing the four language arts of English, the English series were called *Let's Learn English This Way: An Integrated Approach* (Connon & Reyes, 1980).

These works were undertaken in light of the bilingual education program that was instituted three years before the implementation of the government's National Bilingual Education Policy in 1974. The national bilingual program sought to "develop the oral and written proficiency of students in English and Filipino." Brother Andrew Gonzalez strove to promote the Bilingual Program (Evasco, 2011, p. 93).

Acting on the charge of "indifference towards the national heritage" (Connon and Reyes, 1980), Brother Gabriel FSC applied for Filipino citizenship "even as the Christian Brothers considered the wisdom of having a Filipino Christian Brother take the helm of their flagship school in the near future" (Evasco, 2011, p. 89). House Bill No. 1119 conferred Filipino citizenship on Brother Gabriel "in recognition of his devotion to the mission of educating Filipino boys for the past twenty eight years" (Evasco, 2011, p. 89).



The administration acceded to practically all the aforementioned demands articulated by Aguilar except for that demand for the right to withdraw. Some conditions were attached to two earnest requests. As regards the second point, the students could post "anything on the bulletin board, provided he give the contents of the poster on a piece of paper to the Dean of Student Affairs for purposes of information." Concerning the eight point, the administration allowed the grant of the unlimited cut "only to the previous semester's honor students on two conditions: upon approval of the Bureau of Private Schools concerning the system, and upon parents' permission." With reference to the question of course withdrawal, the administration effected "no change in the previous ruling" (Adm'n-SC Bargaining. . . , 1968, p. 3).

The students emerged victorious in their battle for student representation in councils and committees. Starting the school year 1970-1971, the president of the Student Council De La Salle College was given a voice in the governance of the school by allowing him to sit on the Board of Trustees (ex-officio) and the Academic Council and various committees of the school. In so doing, the Student Body was recognized as a "distinct entity on campus with co-equal status if not function or competence." There evolved the concept of a "tripartite academic community" whereby policies and decisions were made by "consensus while respecting the individual functions, powers and competencies of each sector." Under this set-up, the students were regarded as "equal partners in the enterprise of academic life without the faculty however surrendering any of its powers to determine matters of academic policy and standards (The President's Report 1969/1971).

Much as De La Salle College wanted to increase the tuition fee, it could not do so as it was bound to await and respect the decision of the Local Council on Tuition and Fees. The council was comprised of representatives from the student body and faculty and administration sectors, and was under the supervision of Dr. Demetria Pugante of the Department of Education. There was an instance wherein Dr. Pugante decided in favour the students. As one article put it: "The vote of Dr. Pugante was considered as the deciding factor in the settlement of the controversial tuition fee" (Tan, 1972, p. 1).

SC President Clemente Garrucho, Faculty Association President Prof. Salvador Gonzalez,

Academic Vice-President Bro. Andrew Gonzalez, and Cdr. Ochoco, superintendent of the NROTC units in the Greater Manila area met on August 10, 1971 to address the foregoing "amended demands." Seven of the thirteen aforementioned demands were granted. The first stipulation was officially accepted, but "...and subsequent approval of ..." was stricken out. The question of absences on the days when students boycotted the drills was approved but only the absences during the boycotts staged last July 17 and 31 were considered. The questions of wearing moustache and beard, summer training to be provided by the DNST, cadet attendance and giving due process before a "midshipman is dropped" were unresolved. On the subject of funding the cadet uniform and scrapping the NROTC fee, the demands were rejected due to financial constraints ("Mass work, 2-hr. drill, approved, 1971, p. 1).

In an effort to settle the controversy on the haircut regulation, Brother Andrew Gonzalez met with Commandant Braulio Balbas Jr. and Dean of Student Affairs Bienvenido Valdes on January 12, 1972, seeking a re-evaluation of the haircut policy. For his part, former Chief of Staff Manuel Yan issued instructions to all major service commanders, stipulating what he called "maximum tolerable" haircut for all units of PMT and ROTC. The directive spelled out that "beards, goatees and moustaches" were not allowed (Romero, 1972, p.1).

In their assessment of the Garrucho administration, Ngo and Ejercito (1972) adverted to the deferment of the implementation of the haircut rule.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Prof. Giddens' structuration theory is useful in analysing the phenomenon of student activism at De La Salle College. In examining the interplay between the student activists (agency) and De La Salle College (structure), the study explains why and how the interaction was affected or influenced. Reacting to the institutional structure, the student activists as "knowledgeable agents" mounted vigorous protests against the tuition fee increase, the Brother Becker case and the NROTC controversy, fought for the affirmation of their rights and academic freedom, agitated for a nationalist education, and assailed its elitist orientation. The human agents had demonstrated their "transformative capacity" as they had



challenged the existing rules and regulations and the manner by which the administration exercised control over its “rules and resources” and had been instrumental in the creation of new structures, the formulation of new programs and revision of school rules.

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