

The Historical Background of the National FFA Board of Directors

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Introduction/Need for Research

Since the FFA's establishment in 1928, the organization has had a board of individuals to make significant decisions on its behalf. The National FFA Student Voice Committee recently discovered that there are few to no summative documents describing the history and structure of the national board. The committee aims to discover the historical relationship between the National Board of Directors and the Board of (National) Student Officers, particularly questioning why the two groups collectively meet but vote separately. This historical research analyzed archival documents to obtain the chronological timeline of the board's meeting history.

Theoretical Framework

This study followed the historical social constructivism framework. This framework follows Vygotsky's ideas, which outline the impact of cultural aspects and social interactions on educational organizations and systems, such as the National FFA Board of Directors (Iqbal, 2024). Following this framework, this study posed the following questions:

1. How have the practices of the National FFA Board of Directors and Board of Student Officers evolved over time to meet the organization's needs?
2. How is the student voice of the organization still being honored at the national level?

Methodology

The historical records used for this study were derived from the *eArchives* database, "National FFA Organization Minutes" (Indiana University, 2025). These archives are housed by Indiana University. Eighty-seven records from 1928-1953 were analyzed for changes in meeting and voting structure. A spreadsheet was kept to organize meeting dates, attendees, and key events. A chronological conclusion was written at the end of the research process.

Results/Findings

The first recorded meeting minutes in the Indiana University database documented a meeting of the FFA "Board of Trustees" that occurred on November 18, 1928 (National FFA Board of Trustees, 1928). The board consisted of the student officers, the President, four Vice Presidents, and the Student Secretary, along with three adult officers, the advisor, executive secretary, and treasurer (National FFA Board of Trustees, 1930). Until 1930, the Board of Trustees governed the organization, making substantive, impactful decisions at the national level.

In 1930, the National Advisory Council was formed, with its first description appearing in "By-Law VI" of the 1930 constitution (National FFA Board of Trustees, 1930). The purpose of the National Advisory Council was to serve as an advisory voice to the National Advisor and to assist in administering the organization. The council included the National Advisor as chairman and four state supervisors of agricultural education (one from each region). The 1930 FFA constitution states that "the National FFA Advisory Council shall possess the power of approval at all times of the actions of the Board of Trustees and delegates to the national convention" (Board of Trustees, 1930, p. 5). Thus, the Board of Trustees and the National Advisory Council were to work together to govern the organization.

A primary focus of the Board of Trustees was the decision to award American Farmer Degrees to applicants. In 1939, a discrepancy occurred between the Board of Trustees and the

National Advisory Council over the approval of American Farmer Degree applications (National Advisory Council, 1939). Fifty-one applications were overruled for approval by the Advisory Council. The council respectfully claimed that the board's "lack of knowledge" hindered the judgment of the applications (National Advisory Council, 1939, p. 5). The National Advisory Council believed their actions should be final and that the national advisor should not have the power to reverse their decisions. Once this occurred, the National Advisory Council and the Board of Trustees began working together to approve degree recipients, with the council recommending to the board which candidates should be approved (National Advisory Council, 1941). Until 1951, the two groups made recommendations regarding the organization to one another for approval, engaging in both separate and joint meetings (National Advisory Council, 1944; National FFA Board of Trustees and National Advisory Council, 1945, 1950).

In 1951, the "Board of Directors" replaced the FFA Advisory Council (National FFA Board of Directors, 1951, p. 1). However, the Board of Directors still consisted of the FFA advisor chairman and 4 state agricultural education supervisors. Also in 1951, the "Board of Trustees" became the "Board of Student Officers" (Board of Student Officers, 1951, p. 1). However, the Board of Student Officers still consisted of the National President, four Vice-Presidents, the Student Secretary, the Executive Secretary, the Treasurer, and the Advisor.

In 1952, the Board of Directors accepted the Board of Student Officers' recommendation on the relationship between the two boards (National FFA Board of Directors, 1952). Those recommendations included eight items. (1) The officers shall submit recommendations for items of business to the directors for review and action. (2) Officers should meet with directors when possible to explain their recommendations. (3) When needed, regional directors should act as consultants to the officers. (4) The student officers should receive publicity for decisions. (5) The board of directors should not give up its authority, but shall serve as a review and counseling body. (6) Minutes shall be kept separately between the boards during joint meetings. Officers should act on business first, then the directors. (7) If possible, the FFA president, or another officer representative, shall be present at all Board of Directors meetings. (8) Regional conferences will have a report given to them by the regional FFA Vice Presidents (National FFA Board of Directors 1952). Since 1952, the Board of Directors and Board of Student Officers have worked together diligently to make decisions for the organization at a national level. The thoughts and opinions of the officers are considered while upholding the power of the Board of Directors (National FFA Board of Directors, 1953). This model was upheld and is used today.

Conclusions/Implications

The FFA Organization has always possessed a national "decision-making" group, the first being the "Board of Trustees" consisting of the national officers, national advisor, treasurer, and executive secretary. An advisory board has assisted in making decisions for the organization since 1930. This structure of an advisory "Board of Directors" cooperating with National Officers is still seen today (National FFA Organization, 2022). The Board of Directors still reviews American Degree applications and receives recommendations from the Board of Student Officers. The theoretical framework of social constructivism raises concerns over the structure of the national student voice of our organization. If the structure hasn't changed in nearly 100 years, is the structure still best serving the student body of our organization today? Thus, this study suggests that the Student Voice Committee conduct additional research to examine the evolution of the dual board and the effectiveness of the student voice in national decisions.

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