Sharing our practice: 2020 SaP Case Studies

2020 National Students as Partners Roundtable
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Using SaPs to bridge the gap in equity participation within academia

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MURI aims to bridge the gap between equity and non-equity members of academia by providing professional, academic training in parallel to informal peer-peer mentoring. To this end, the initial program was launched in 2011 and transitioned to a student facilitated (2014) and student coordinated (2015) program through various iterations for 10 years. The partnership work was initially set up by a team, which included Beverley Miles, based on the scholarship of Angela Brew.

The Program works by engaging with University academics who support the program pro bono through mentorship of interns to either i) start and complete their own research project or ii) join their pre-existing projects. The students are required to meet strict equity criteria defined by the Australian Government’s HEPPP Scheme. Selected students are invited to also attend weekly workshops that improve student soft skills and to conference-style events designed to mimic the authentic experience of a professional, academic space. Every year, the MURI alumni are invited to join the MURI team as Partners. The new team re-evaluates/re-designs the programme on a needs-based basis for the next cohort based on previous cohort evaluations.

The programme has seen great success with 9 out of 10 interns recommending it to their peers. All university faculties are represented in through staff/student cohorts allowing for inter-disciplinary research activities. Interns returning as partners have successfully applied for funding (recognised by guaranteed funding from 2018 onwards) and implement strategies to improve visibility of MURI across its networks. However, cross-sectional evaluations are limited alongside strategies that will see the programme elevate to state-wide or national-level visibility.
The Peer Assisted Courtroom

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Peer Assisted Courtroom Sessions (PACS) is an initiative developed by law students with the support of the PASS program under the Division of Academic & Student Engagement at the University of Adelaide. The SaP group created and launched PACS to provide law students with an option to practice their advocacy skills in a supportive environment, distinct from extracurricular competitions. While such competitions are valuable, their competitive nature does not support the kinds of plural learning opportunities that can be found in PACS. In this environment, asking questions, admitting confusion, and collaborative approaches to problem solving are acceptable and encouraged.

PACS involve students taking on the role of lawyers and judges in a courtroom environment. Students work collaboratively with their peers to develop arguments and refine their advocacy skills during a fast-paced mock hearing. Sessions encourage evaluative performance and skills, rather than a focus on who won or lost each case. The driving aim of the program is to run activities which encourage students to engage with the law, their peers, and advocacy, beyond the requirements of seminars and lectures.

Sessions for the program were held in the Supreme Court building of South Australia in 2019, and the second pilot was successfully shifted online, during semester one COVID restrictions. Guest presenters included winners and finalists of Australian mooting competitions, and a Supreme Court Justice. The program has received support and praise from law academics.

Students leading this program continue to refine the material and structure of the sessions. Across the past 12 months, PACS pilot projects have run in support of two individual courses. All students involved have indicated in post-pilot feedback that they are interested in taking part in future versions of the program. The program is intended to be launched to all law school students next semester.
Working with Student Teachers on the development of an Educational Research Journal

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Student Teacher Education Research (STER) is an Irish Higher Education partnership project, that hosts an annual conference, a peer-reviewed e-Journal and a Podcast Series aimed at promoting and sharing student teacher research. The project is run by a student-staff team of volunteers (preservice teachers in their third year of study and one teacher educator). It is extra-curricular, meaning participation holds no academic credit. Drawing upon Khan-Sullivan and Heron’s model of partnership (2020, p 348), the approach to partnership adopted is a ‘process/product’ approach in that it is a project-based partnership, with a specific outcome. Empowering students requires us as teacher educators to move away from the ‘ideology of immaturity’ that positions students as less capable (Grace 1995). Each year student-teachers work with the staff member to peer-review journal articles, facilitate question and answer sessions at the conference, construct research questions for the podcast interviews, create marketing material for the project and help organise the events. In doing so they adopt different roles and refine and/or expand the offering of the project.

Evaluative research on the project (2018, 2019) indicates that the positioning of students as partners was considered to be a positive acknowledgement of the valuable contribution students can make to Higher Education. Students valued the opportunity to collaborate with each other and felt that the skills they developed through collaboration would be important for their future roles as teachers. From a staff perspective, I came to understand that what makes partnership ‘meaningful’ is the duty of care that develops between staff-student partners, along with a genuine and unpretentious interest in achieving the shared outcome. However, taking a partnership approach was not without its challenges; the time required to develop ‘meaningful’ partnership is in short supply in higher education; uncertainty is inevitable and sometimes overwhelming for staff; managing power dynamics is a complex and active process and rarely allowed for all parties to hold power equally – even with the best intentions.
The work(out)shop: applying circuit training theory to design studio workshops

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Pedagogic discourse on design studio recognises that “to prevent students from being off-task whilst waiting to speak with tutorial staff, the development of resources, particularly digitally-based ones, is essential for keeping students engaged, focused and motivated during the class period” (Pektas 2012: 692). Design studio classes typically span five hours or more, meaning sustained student engagement is challenging. To sustain momentum during class Dr Alanya Drummond developed twenty strategic thinking videos that are experienced in a circuit-training arrangement dubbed the work(out)shop. This work(out)shop initiative sits at the fulcrum of two students-as-partners pedagogical approaches: peer-to-peer learning and reflective practice. The videos are not ‘flipped’ (for prior completion); rather they are played synchronously and sequentially during studio time. During the videos, students engage in critical thinking prompted by interactive activities at sequential group learning stations. The videos are experienced in peer groups of three, prompting real-time critical dialogue and peer-to-peer evaluation in a way that is psychologically stimulating and supportive, prompting both reflection and rapid decision making. The work(out)shop is inspired by high-intensity-interval-training theory in which the body responds to short bursts of varied activities. The work(out)shop is good practice because the videos promote the learning of disciplinary content in an interactive, collaborative manner that bridges analogue and digital modes, to achieve active learning outcomes for students. With digital resources keeping students engaged and on-task, tutorial staff are free to roam around the studio, talking to students individually and in their smaller working groups, assisting them to work through problems and reviewing their work; this type of learning also gives tutorial staff the chance to identify areas that need greater explanation and teaching, and those which have been successful and the students have responded to (Masdéu & Fuses 2017: 13).
Metaphors for student-staff partnerships: insights from the Bachelor of Creative Intelligence and Innovation (UTS) Course Team

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In the Faculty of Transdisciplinary Innovation (FTDi) at the University of Technology Sydney, there was a strong desire to re-imagine learning and teaching governance models to be more creative and inclusive. With the founding of a new Course Team model comprised of teaching staff members and students, there was an opportunity to co-create new processes for student representation.

Students from the Bachelor of Creative Intelligence and Innovation (BCII) were invited to partner with staff members in exploring how student representatives might better facilitate the flow of information between student body and those in decision-making roles; how student diversity can be better represented in decision-making situations; and how students can feel that their voices are being heard, listened to and learnt from. This bespoke process was used to elect the first group of student representatives at the end of 2019 before the launch the Course Team at the beginning of 2020.

As opportunities for making connections with peers and staff became increasingly disrupted with Covid-19, the student members of the BCII Course Team stepped into the vital role of building cohesiveness within student cohorts, as well as maintaining two-way communication link between BCII staff and students. Each of the student representatives took on leadership over a stream of activity, developing new insights and advancing our collective understanding of the student learning experience.

A new pattern of interaction emerged in the BCII Course Team – a hybrid relational configuration – one that went well-beyond the notion of ‘student representation’ or a crisis response to Covid-19 disruption. We share some emerging metaphors describing our team’s work, seeking to communicate our evolving partnership relationship in ways that capture the vibrancy of our interactions and the incredible value of the student member contribution. Through these metaphors, we wish to explore what possibilities might open up if student participation is thought about in new and creative ways.
A students as partner approach to maturing student representative training at QUT: Co-creation of a digital induction handbook

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Student and staff at QUT are partnering to mature student representative training that empowers students as equal partners in decision making. This approach is underpinned by QUT students as partner guiding principles—relevant, inclusive and respectful—and collaborative inquiry model (Shaw et. al, 2017).

Student and staff partners observed that synchronous, facilitated training takes place at the beginning of each semester, however students are recruited into their representative roles at different timelines across faculties and divisions. The team reflected that the ad hoc nature of onboarding and lack of handover between representatives were barriers to student engagement in academic governance, so planned to develop a self-guided resource available at any time. This aligns student representative training with the QUT blended peer leader training program (Menzies & Tredinnick, 2017) and the strategic priority of creating a digital campus (see QUT Blueprint 6).

At focus groups and co-design sessions students and staff identified the handbook purpose and content. It was agreed the purpose was to help students: understand their representative role and responsibilities; access past representatives’ tips; and become aware of support services. Students as partner interns and staff then co-wrote content, and invited student representatives to contribute reflections, tips and videos. Feedback was also sought from staff partners.

The Vice-Chancellor and student Guild President welcome students to their representative roles. These statements sit side by side at the start of the handbook, highlighting QUT’s commitment to partnership. The handbook also includes: role and responsibilities; network events, training and online discussion; mentor program pairing students with academics, including conversation prompts for mentoring meetings; how to prepare for, participate in, and close the loop after committee meetings; common policy topics; support services; and recognition processes.

The online handbook was developed in Articulate Rise, an approved eLearning application that is accessible from any device. This minimised printing costs and enabled continual iteration based on feedback. It was important to evaluate reach, so short links were created to track access. Next steps are to share the handbook via the university website, to raise awareness and visibility of student representation across the university.

References


SaP Curriculum negotiation: Can democratic topic selection reduce engagement and inclusiveness?

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In 2018, we introduced a Student as Partners (SaP) to a second-year biochemistry course, to empower students and enhance engagement. At the time we thought long and hard about the ethos of our partnership with students, considering what components are required to create a genuine partnership and what was the appropriate level of student participation? Our partnership was two-fold: to allow students to vote on a selection of topics for part of the course, and, to design and negotiate part of the assessment. This case study focuses on involving student in the curriculum through democratic voting for two of six topics in the course.

The goal was to enhance student engagement by allowing them to choose what they wanted to learn, and we assumed that a democratic vote was the fairest way to decide which of the six topics was taught. Students’ agreed that being able to choose topics increased their engagement and they felt empowered (80.5%, 87%, & 82.5% in 2018, 2019 & 2020, respectively), however, this was not necessarily the case for all students. Student reflections revealed that some were less engaged when their topics were not chosen, for example, “Since my topics were not chosen, I wasn’t as engaged or interested,” while others expressed sheer relief, “I’m glad the winner was not enzyme kinetics”. Other students suggested that an imbalance in the numbers of students enrolled in different degree programs influenced the topic selection, “I know a lot of participants in the class are doing biomedical science which swayed the choice in their favour”. Indeed, approximately half of the students in the course were enrolled in the Bachelor of Biomedical Science and one of the topics, protein therapies, has been the top choice each year.

These finding have unearthed an inequality in our approach to topic selection that we didn’t anticipate, resulting in reduced engagement for some students and so, less inclusive. We are now exploring a blended online learning approach where every student can choose and learn their chosen topics.

1. Reflecting you your current SaP approaches, are they inclusive and equitable, as well as engaging?
2. What measures have you put in place to ensure that your partnerships are inclusive and equitable for all students?
3. For the future, how can we ensure that our student partnerships are not only engaging but also inclusive?
Demystifying the marking rubric

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Aim: Marking rubrics can be confusing and complicated to a beginning university student, regardless of entry point. Some are clear and others are confusing without clear identification of where marks and weighting sits.

Participants: As a way of helping to demystify the marking rubric, I started working with both undergraduate and post graduate students to decide on where they thought the weighting should be and make changes to the elements prior to starting the assessments.

Method: In week one of the topic, first year students vote on the weighting of the marking rubric elements after a discussion of the assessment. They were given options of 2.5, 5, 7.5, 10, 15, 20, 25 and 30% as weighting options. Once tallied, the mean results become their assignment rubric weighting. This voting requires them to think about which element needs to be a focus.

Post return of the marked papers, students are offered an opportunity to provide feedback on the marking rubric weighting again to determine any changes with rationales.

Results: Student conversations included the juggling of what they would find easier to write as opposed to what they didn’t know and needed to challenge themselves in learning more.

Overall there were minimal post marking modifications. However due to many students initially wishing referencing was only worth 2.5%, these was removed in subsequent cohorts and stays at 5% with the quality of sources added the different elements across the rubric.

The other initiative that has developed from this rubric weighting activity is to enable student the opportunity to anonymously peer review one of the assignments. Each student submits their own paper and then marks, three other student papers in a double-blinded process. The final marks are proportion between their submission and their marking consistency between the three peer markers.
We Are The University: Students Co-Creating Change

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We Are The University: Students Co-Creating Change is a new elective unit of study (offered for the first time in July 2020) for any student at Western Sydney University (WSU), enrolled in any degree. It’s a third year unit, co-created with 10-15 student curriculum partners (the idea, the aims, outcomes, assessment, approval process, learning guide, promotion etc), and it works in partnership with our Academic Senate’s Education Committee (EC). It has been 2 years in the making.

The aim of the unit is that students study the university – both generally (as an institution that is a practical and scholarly object of inquiry), and specifically, in that students learn about their University (WSU) and how students are involved in co-creating educational change. The partnership with EC is for many reasons: (i) EC can commission projects as part of the unit’s assessment so there is an investment by senior leaders in the success of the unit; and (ii) students have an opportunity to use those projects to see inside the business of universities. In addition to the project itself, students are exploring, discussing, critiquing, challenging what they learn about how the university engages in partnership with students, and doing this alongside engaging with scholarly debates about the contested purpose of universities. Students work in groups to undertake a project – supported by Coaches – university staff who guide the project and help to frame and re-frame students’ professional learning as partnership. Students pitch their projects to the broader university publics, and members of EC act as a panel to judge the most persuasive and compelling pitches for recommendation to a meeting of the full EC. Students work is available in a digital archive so it can be built upon each year by future cohorts.
Yam Jams (Yammer Live Chats curated by Student Partners)

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Yam Jams is the name we give to Live Yammer Chats at Western Sydney University. During early COVID-19 period, across 5 weeks, our group of student partners co-hosted 6 Yam Jams on different topics chosen by them, based on their experiences of transitioning to learning online. These included:

- **Opportunities for partnership**
- **What criteria do students and teachers use to gauge a successful (and enjoyable) online session?**
- **How can we do assessment differently, and why should we want to?**
- **Teaching content v. engaging students: a real problem or false dichotomy for the new digital reality?**
- **Student Partners in the collegial review of teaching and curriculum: exploring the case for and against**
- **What helps student to use, and act on, assignment feedback?**

The Yam Jams are a way for staff to have access to students’ experiences on a platform that is traditionally for staff – Yammer. Before the live 1 hour Yam Jam itself, the students collaborate on developing a set of questions and a direction for the conversation. Participation by staff in the Yam Jams was mixed and uneven. Some topics invited participation from 40 or so staff; others, a little over 10-15. In one case, there were more student partners than staff which affects how students see staff wanting to engage with them. The feedback we received from staff was that they enjoyed having access to students’ experiences of their learning (as it was unfolding) but they were frustrated themselves about not being able to find the time to engage with student partners in the ways they would have liked. The posts from each Yam Jam are developed by the student partners into an e-Poster which become part of the suite of professional development resources for broader use and circulation.
Be Here, Be Heard: Reshaping Arts (BHBH)

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Be Here, Be Heard: Reshaping Arts (BHBH) is a student-led, faculty-facilitated initiative for Arts students at the University of Melbourne. It creates conversations to engage a holistic view of students’ perceptions and experiences of their educational journey. By acknowledging diversity, intersectionality and mutual respect, BHBH fosters student-led vision towards creating dynamic and inclusive partnership, and a sense of community within the faculty of Arts.

Two faculty members from Arts Teaching Innovation (ATI) assist students by providing them a safe space for their discussions and enabling subsequent communications with other faculty members. Students are recruited by a call for participation through formal faculty channels and student networks. Participating students decide the narrative, and the theme of discussions. The participation is completely voluntary and allows confidentiality and anonymity.

Over one year of its establishment, BHBH has had one student-led symposium on solution-based issues, and a few faculty wide presentations, attended by both students and staff. Students meet regularly in person, and on Zoom during Covid19 to continue these conversations. This initiative encourages students to take lead for co-designing student experience and assessing teaching and learning as a reflective process. It supports collaborations between academic staff and students in terms of developing teaching and learning practices. As a direct result, the student perspective is actively contributing to subject designs and teaching activities. Furthermore, student articles are being published online, and collaborative research outcomes from this project are being compiled.

This initiative builds on and extends the experiential nature of student engagement. BHBH acknowledges students as co-creators of their educational experience. Thus, students are viewed as an inherent part of educational process and members of academic community. Aspects like student voice as an agency, student partnership in co-creation and student ownership of this project make it attractive to students within the faculty.
Enhancing QUT Peer Programs through deep and diverse opportunities for student-staff partnership

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Since 2014, QUT has engaged a students as partners approach to the design, development, and management of its distributed peer programs community. Fundamental to peer learning facilitation, is the recognition that peer leaders are partners in providing support for learning that contributes to student retention and success. Further, and in line with QUTs institutional approach to students as partners (Shaw et. al, 2016), we have engaged peer leaders as collaborators in designing respectful, inclusive and accessible peer programs, that respond to the needs of their peers within their own communities. As a result, we are growing a network of experienced peer leaders who take on student program coordinator and student peer trainer roles within their own programs.

In 2018, peer leaders at the QUT Student Leader Retreat, identified the need for a more cohesive university-wide peer learning community to enable peer leaders from across programs, to connect, share facilitation practices and experiences, and tackle challenges together. Further, they recognised that while they have unique insights into the diverse issues students face, there is limited opportunity to share their knowledge with decision-makers or service providers or influence QUT support for learning service design and delivery. In responding to this critical gap, the idea of an Alliance of Peer Programs was conceived.

The Alliance of Peer Programs (APP) students as partners project is exploring the purpose, feasibility and value of a body that is both representative of the diverse peer programs across QUT and cohesive in influencing decision-making processes that impact support for learning services. Its goal is to represent the collective learning, achievements, and challenges of the QUT Peer Programs Community in governance and decision-making, and aims to:

- Build connections with the QUT Student Representative Network (SRN), Program Coordinators Network and the student leader community more broadly by sharing knowledge, practices and learning.
- Establish a partnering relationship and role in QUT Student Success Group (SSG) governance to contribute to the design and facilitation of support for learning services; through opportunities for participating in, and influencing, strategic decision-making.
- Feed back to the peer programs community, the broader SSG and university decisions that impact support for learning, to enrich peer program design and facilitation.

References

Students as Partners and Community Leaders: integrating clubs and societies in faculty engagement

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UNSW Business School Clubs & Societies Affiliation is a community engagement initiative launched in 2019. Affiliation offers UNSW Business School authentic two-way partnership with 25 student-lead communities to deliver shared value and collective impact on the broader community of 16,000+ local and international students. The focus? To work closer and better together for the student community. This initiative has served as a backbone during COVID disruptions, allowing the faculty to be responsive to student needs with mutually formed student-faculty initiatives to support the wider student community.

The mission of the Affiliation framework:

- **Support and strengthen macro and micro student communities**: diverse peer-to-peer engagement throughout the lifecycle; building a sense of place, identity and belonging

- **Foster initiatives to organically build career and learning communities** through Schools/Majors of study and cluster networks across consulting, social impact and investment and entrepreneurship.

- **Facilitate meaningful, collaborative connections with industry and Alumni** with support of the UNSW Business School Career Accelerator, to provide students a diverse range of career development experiences outside the classroom.

- **Elevate the role of Society Executives through community leadership roles**, most notably, as representatives in the newly formed UNSW Business School Community Engagement Committee (CEC)

**Formed in 2020, the Community Engagement Committee (CEC)** is a monthly student-staff touchpoint that seeks open discussion with our Society leaders and two-way feedback on the student experience. Agendas are mutually discussed, with Student Partners taking roles as Chair, General Secretary and Timekeeper. Minutes are reported back to the Dean and Deputy Dean (Education) and action points are addressed collaboratively with society representatives.
#FASSfromhome Students as Partners Communications Team: Building an online community during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Students as Partners has been vital to the University of Sydney Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences’ (FASS) response to disruptions in community engagement, health and wellbeing and social connection caused by our rapid transition to online teaching in the wake of COVID-19. Through our Communications Team Program, a partnership of staff and students aimed to develop an online community, reduce social isolation, and promote peer-to-peer connections and student-staff interaction in an informal digital environment called #FASSfromhome.

Students co-created communication activities including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter takeovers sharing ‘a day in the life of studying’, study tips, photo collages, staff interviews, and online promotion of social and academic activities. The #FASSfromhome campaign was highly successful reaching 89,374 people. 100% of student partners reported that peer-to-peer student communications were an important part of our institutional response and enabled students to connect with vital information about studying online. 80% of student partners reported developing skills in written communications, digital literacy and leadership.

“Sharing my perspective on how to handle the transition to online learning via Facebook and other platforms was a really valuable aspect of volunteering for the FASS Communications Team... it was especially rewarding to see many of my friends at USyd... respond with enthusiasm, thanks, and their own advice/tips!”

“I was part of the FASSfromhome Collage which really shared and instilled a sense of solidarity between students and wider community. It was a positive impact as students were given the message ‘you are not alone, we’re all in fass together’.”

The program demonstrates the importance of Students as Partners in forming “communities which foster a culture of partnership” and transcending physical barriers to meet the challenges imposed by the pandemic (Mercer-Mapstone et al. 2017, p.19) while empowering student partners’ through extra-curricular skills-building opportunities readying them for a digitised world.
Empowering Learners at Griffith University

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The Empowering Learners Project utilises a SaP approach to promoting wellbeing by considering how we design learning environments that support student agency and empowerment, both within and external to the curriculum. It is about exploring the holistic experience of students and identifying how we best work with students to support their sense of belonging, autonomy, competence and purpose while concomitantly, developing their confidence in learning within and beyond Griffith.

The project constitutes a series of co-created sub-projects which include (but are not limited to):

- ‘Our Griffith’ student engagement portal which harnesses the student voice to encourage a sense of community and belonging, provide a virtual community for key messaging and support initiatives which promote wellbeing.
- ‘Student Support’ resource directory is co designed to enable a relevant and easy accessible one-stop-shop for student support.
- Fostering Educational Wellbeing facilitates the co-creation of resources supporting educational wellbeing for our learners. This SaP project builds agency in our student leaders as student mentors are provided with opportunities to acquire and consolidate knowledge about learning as a precursor to co-creating the student-facing resources.

Adopting an SaP approach to underpin the Empowering Learners Project facilitates increased collaboration with the student cohort and also across academic and professional services by connecting this project on wellbeing in the curriculum with wider University initiatives which focus on student mental health and wellbeing. Moreover, the development of an interdisciplinary student focused learning and teaching platform provides an essential conduit for cross organisational coordination and communication and assists in the overall promotion of student empowerment and engagement in the curriculum as part of our Students as Partners approach (with a wellbeing focus at its core), for supporting the wholistic development of our students.