Sharing our stories: Human Library

2020 National Students as Partners Roundtable
2020 Students as Partners - Human Library

The Human Library bookshelf

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Professional reflection creates opportunities for growth for everyone

Liz MC Neill, Flinders University

I love learning and I especially LOVE seeing that light bulb turn on above student’s heads. Conservations in classes, at breaks with students, at conferences and even on social media can lead to innovative assessment ideas.

There is a fine balance between facilitating knowledge growth and asking for input from students who don’t know the content, however it can also deepen learning. Post teaching reflection enables tweaking and fine-tuning for the next cohorts experience.

To fully engage with students as partners, the academic/teacher needs to be vulnerable as everything is up for feedback. Being continually open to improvement through the eyes of students keeps me loving what I do. It is far too easy to forget they are at that beginning level of knowledge and understanding and miss important steps that bridge the concept. Forget not seeing the forest for the trees, it about planting the trees in the first place to they can watch them grow!

Reflecting and working with students have led to fun activities such as using Lego as team building and communication skills development; getting students to vote on assignment weighing in their rubrics; self-reflection pre and post topics; quick competitive quizzes at the end of classes and many more.

I consider myself an old nurse, new midwife and have been teaching health care students since I was a 2nd year nursing student last century! My past lives – army reserve medic, Contiki cook overseas, palliative care to critical care nurse and all in between, radio admin, perpetual learner. Liz Mc Neill
Boundless horizons: A story of growth and learning

Shefali Dorepalli, Deakin University

The winter of 2018 saw me making my way through my first trimester at Deakin University, guided by my lecturers, mentors, and most importantly, members of the Division of Student Life, who were always ready to provide support with a smile. My second winter in Melbourne, I began working as a Student Partner with Rachel Waite on a Social and Cultural Engagement Framework, to be applied to engagement initiatives across the university.

Throughout my work on this project, I have felt valued and empowered to share my ideas as a co-creator and have honed my skills in communication and problem-solving. I am also involved as a Senior Orientation Ambassador, a PASS Leader in the Peer Assisted Study Sessions Program and as a Faculty Peer Mentor, all roles that I greatly enjoy. My story is one of finding and following my passion and of constant learning. My belief in our collective ability to grow in leaps and bounds when challenged and supported has been strengthened through my involvement as a Student Partner. It has been an exercise in empathy, a gift of collaboration and a wonderful opportunity for professional and personal reflection.

I am a third-year Bachelor of Biological Science student at Deakin University, and have been involved with the Division of Student Life in a variety of roles since July 2019. I am passionate about cultivating a space on campus and online for respectful, enjoyable student engagement.

Shefali Dorepalli
From touchpoint to pulse point: Student-Staff Community Response during COVID-19

Vicky Simao, UNSW Business School

It’s the wake of the COVID-19 lockdown, and plans for our first-ever Community Engagement Committee (CEC) has gone from a new students-as-partners initiative taking shape – to a key touchpoint to respond to the immediate and emergent needs of the student body.

This Committee, which includes President representation from 25 UNSW Business School Affiliated Societies, has raised current concerns stirring within the community at a time of unprecedented change and disruption.

With four CEC’s to date, conversations have tackled hard-hitting topics raised by the Student CEC, including online education, quality and support; industry impacts and work-integrated learning preparedness; community building in isolation; and questions of the future of learning and employability in 2020-2021.

Similarly, the faculty has sought the Student CEC’s input on feedback to help inform solutions to best provide our 16 000 students with the support and structure they need as students study online – locally and internationally.

With chapters of experience within the education sector across communications, engagement and teaching, Vicky’s mission is to empower students through students-as-partners initiatives. As a child, Vicky’s dream job was to be a ‘book writer’. Today, she’s excited to become a book – with a special SaP story hot off the press from the UNSW Business School. Vicky Simao
190 days of being a staff partner, and counting

Naima Crisp, University of Queensland

Student as Partners seems easy: you have students and you have staff. They come together to transform the education system like a super hero team each with their own super power. So what happens when you have not figured out what your staff super power is, but your student super power is slowly slipping away?

When Naima graduates the world is at her finger tips, so when she receives her dream job offer on the same day, she feels on top of the world. What she doesn’t realise is the challenge that is yet to come – navigating the same rooms on campus and being part of the same conversations, but now sitting in a different chair, the staff partner chair.

It has been 190 days. Her experience as a student partner feels outdated with the changes in 2020, but still she does not quite feel like a fully-fledged staff member at the university. Naima wonders whether this feeling of being in the in-between is ever going to go away, and does she really want it to?

Twelve-year-old Naima wanted to be a golf-course designer, but twelve years later she is in the Student-Staff Partnership Team as a Project Officer. It is hard to sum up those missing years, but in short it involved: five different degrees, an accidental SaP research opportunity, and numerous partnership projects. Naima Crisp
Teaching an old dog new tricks: engagement with students as mid-career professionals

Nick Pascual, Deakin University

Returning to tertiary study after a 17-year absence can be a daunting experience, particularly when juggled with full-time professional employment and a global pandemic, while living nearly 700km away from the nearest campus. Early feelings of excitement and optimism quickly turned into many late nights wondering why I was voluntarily submitting myself to additional scrutiny and workload.

The opportunity to join the School of Health and Social Development’s Teaching and Learning Committee has been instrumental in helping me feel part of “Team Deakin”. It’s provided me with the opportunity to share how teaching practices have positively (or negatively) impacted my learning and provide feedback on Deakin’s rapid transition to all students studying through the cloud.

It has also allowed me to develop deeper connections with teaching staff, as well my fellow undergraduate representative, which has increased my confidence as a mature age student and motivated me to aim higher. It’s exposed me to new ways to share my knowledge and experience across the school and in my professional network, and will support the goals I set at the beginning of my post-graduate journey.

Nick Pascual is completing a Master of Public Health at Deakin University. He has 20 years’ experience in the health sector, including 15 years in health policy at the Commonwealth level, with specific experience in rural and remote health, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and primary health care. Nick Pascual
My story towards an Active Partnership

Aleksandra Trifkovic, Victoria University

I began my journey at Victoria University two years ago, an experience that has provided me with insight into tertiary education and pedagogical transformation. As a student exploring education theory, a natural passion rose in me about the purposes for and of learning, with particular attention on the 21st-century student. I explored the competing societal and economic demands of students and the implications of this on their acquisition of knowledge.

During the third year of my studies, I had the opportunity to become a “Connected Learning Officer” (CLO) which is a Student as Staff role. As a CLO, I began my journey providing technical support to academic staff in the Learning Management System. This role began with completing administrative tasks, creating online interactives and then being involved in design teams. Within these teams, I contributed to the transformation of tertiary units to 4-week ‘blocks’, working alongside education professionals to develop and redesign curriculum. The nature of my role transitioned and I began making suggestions for the timing of assessments and the clarity of instructions provided to students.

This experience has taught me the value of collaboration and innovation within academia, setting me on a path of becoming an expert within the field and a contributor to change in education and my community.

As a student studying education and humanities, I have developed an interest in student success and pedagogy, leading me to my role at Victoria University. My interests are the exploration of culture, art, and the environment; I pursue these by visiting regular exhibitions and historical sites within our community and internationally. Aleksandra Trifkovic
Educative humility

Nicola Parkin, Flinders University

In this story, everyone gets to say for themselves what learning ‘is’. Learning, after all, is as personal as it gets. When we share our learning with others, we ‘teach’. This, I think, is educative humility.

For 18 months I have been coordinating and teaching postgraduate studies in Higher Education. I am a professional learning designer; my ‘students’ were academics. My expertise is in the methodologies, not the curriculum.

So the only fitting approach was to work in partnership. I overlaid the existing course aims and learning outcomes with three programmatic methodologies: co-creating the curriculum, ongoing portfolio work, and active engaged enquiry. Then, we just jumped in and started figuring it out. In one topic we agreed to do a collaborative self-study; in another, we created educational artefacts with explanatory power; in another, we designed activities, taught and assessed each other. Moderated self-assessment and continuous feedback wove through everything. For some it was too different and they dropped out. Those that persisted really worked hard; they ‘owned’ their learning and awarded themselves well-deserved high grades.

What did I learn? I should declare the methodologies and philosophy before enrolment, and take more time unpacking the philosophy and methodologies, including the difficult work of self-assessment.

I work at Flinders University as a Learning Designer, as well as occasionally teaching in higher education studies. My particular interest is in how we bring a philosophy of learning and teaching into meaningful concrete practice. I am also completing my Doctor of Education thesis. Nicola Parkin
Learning from students: Listening to what biomedical science students wants and what works?

Dr Isabelle Lys, Australian Catholic University

This partnership started in 2018 in a second-year Biomedical Science, Human Genetics study unit at one Australian University in Queensland. As educators, armed with discipline knowledge and teaching knowledge and training, we feel we know what is best and what works for students. That is not always the case. What happens when a student wants to change a workshop? That notion was tested when a student came up with another idea for teaching Human Genetics. They redesigned a Human Genetics workshop and that workshop was subsequently made part of the curriculum for national delivery. The student was surprised and honoured to have their idea utilised and framed for national delivery.

Other students were motivated and encouraged that students can contribute to the curriculum and be active in their learning. Though this student has transferred to a different course at a different university now that partnership remains till today. Perhaps future co-creation and delivery with students should be encouraged each year and winning teaching designs rewarded and celebrated? This form of partnership may encourage entrepreneurship, creativity, deeper learning and experience for both teachers and students who continue to work on a lifelong journey forward learning from each other.

Isabelle is both a research scientist and academic in tertiary education. She believes that teaching and learning is a lifelong journey for not only for students but also for educators. Dr Isabelle Lys
I have been involved in a number of projects and programs throughout my career that I would have once said took a Students as Partners approach. However, I had my “lightbulb moment” last year when I started a new project with an entirely different approach that completely changed my thinking.

Prior to this, I understood the principles of student partnership at a conceptual level, but I lacked the practical tools that would help me to translate the concept into actual authentic partnerships. The “game-changer” tool for me was Deakin’s Students as Partners Participation Matrix.

The SaP Participation Matrix offers a tool to establish a tangible outline of the type of partnership role that the student will be playing at particular stages of the project. This was a game-changer for me, as it allowed me to easily communicate expectations to both the Student Partner and project stakeholders from the beginning of the project.
I’ve been teaching and researching for many years at Deakin University and I’m always enlivened by student engagement and see it as core to my role as an academic.

I have been involved in facilitating student partnerships in a range of activities such as the establishment of Deakin University’s Burwood Community Garden, the Health Promotion Student Society and most recently, engaging meaningful participation and exchange with student representation in the School Teaching and Learning Committee.

I’ve enjoyed exploring and documenting effective processes to ensure student representatives feel engaged, valued, have a voice, and enjoy their time on the committee and I am happy to share these stories.

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I am a Lecturer and Course Director, Master of Health Promotion, in the School of Health and Social Development. My areas of interest are in social, cultural, gender diversity, climate, equity and justice. I am also current Chair, Board of Governance, Women’s Health in the North. Teresa Capetola
The week the students saved us

Melissa Zaccagnini, University of Wollongong

The day is Monday 16th March. We were two weeks into program delivery and had a moment to breathe a sigh of relief. The sigh would not last long. COVID came....

We had 173 one hour study sessions and 50 hours of Learning Coop Peer Coaching to move online in two weeks. Our team was not as familiar with the technology as we would have liked and we knew it wasn’t just a case of doing the same thing online – it needed to evolve. To say we were in shock is an understatement.

Enter our Student Leaders. The Learning Coop became a central focus for UOW in the flip to remote mode. Our Learning Coop Peer Coaches moved from face to face to remote over a weekend. They co-created the protocols, scripts, training and content on succeeding in a remote learning environment while they were operating. A team of Senior PASS Leaders delivered 9 trainings over 3 days to 80 of their fellow student leaders. They then continued to create resources and advise each other for the duration of the semester. Over 1000 students benefited from their effort.

We knew our Peer Leaders and Peer Coaches were the heart of our programs and we have always valued their role greatly, however, this experience showed us that their partnership, collegiality and passion is truly the foundation of all we do.

Melissa works as a Manager across Peer Learning and Transition programs at the University of Wollongong. Melissa also takes an active role in Peer Programs conversations nationally and internationally as Senior Trainer at Australasian Centre for PASS, Managing Editor of the Journal of Peer Learning and involvement in STARS Networks. Melissa Zaccagnini
Supporting student-partners to drive SaP initiatives across University portfolios

Ali Asgher Ali, Macquarie University

The SaP Programme I joined aimed to reduce the equity gap in academia. As an equity student, I felt siloed from the University community and so recognised the need to integrate the program into the University portfolio. The difficulty lay in identifying innovation strategies and in my personal struggle of learning to recognise my unique place within the University as a Partner, which I felt conflicted with my role of being a student. Reaching out for help in this headspace requires courage – luckily, it was the university that reached out to me. I was pleasantly surprised with the mentorship I received and was emboldened to contacting research centres, departments, and faculties that did not yet engage with our Program; then, for the first time, we saw representation from every University faculty across campus and integration of the Program into the University website the following year.

It is imperative for staff to engage early with student-partners and ensure that they feel supported enough to implement strategies to drive SaP initiatives. Historical foundations of academia lead equity students to believe that the institution is beyond reach. Early engagement and support of Partners feeds forward a chain of peer-peer support that lasts.

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I completed my Bachelor in Medical Sciences majoring in Human Biology, Chemistry, and Biomolecular Sciences after which I pursued a Master of Research (Neuroscience) at Macquarie University. Aside from scientific research, I have 5 years’ experience in peer-teaching and SaP delivered programmes. 

Ali Asgher Ali (@ali_asgher_ali)
Kickstarting University-Wide Student Partnership at Your Institution

Dr Mollie Dollinger, La Trobe University

It started as the typical pesky squeak from a recent PhD graduate. I was new to La Trobe University and I was working for a Pro Vice-Chancellor who I knew had an interest in student partnership. In meetings and weekly catchups, I tried to play it cool, offhandedly mentioning the benefits of partnership or casually plugging a new program I had heard about at another university. I could tell she was listening, albeit while juggling the usual business as usual aspects of her division. And sure enough, a few months in, she looked at me and said, “Ok Mollie, put together some your ideas on partnership.” As I raced back to my office, I realised I hadn’t asked if she wanted a word document or a PowerPoint... figured I’d better make both.

Two years on, La Trobe University has a suite of programs aimed to support student partnership. The benefits of starting a new portfolio from scratch are we’ve been able to design complementary and scaffolded programs and offerings. Our programs include ‘Students Mentoring Staff’ program, student-staff co-design workshops known as CoLabs, and university-based work-integrated learning placements. Best of all, every staff member, whether they have a student-facing role or not, and all students from across our regional campuses, can get involved.

I am the Academic-Lead of the Student Partnerships Portfolio at La Trobe University. I completed my PhD in 2018 from The University of Melbourne’s Centre for Study of Higher Education. My research areas include student-staff co-creation, participatory design methodology, and learning analytics. Dr Mollie Dollinger
Students as Partners ethos at USC transforms students from change-takers to change-makers.

Donna Thompson and Belinda Brear, University of the Sunshine Coast

**USC Students as Partners:** Since adopting a Students as Partners ethos at USC in 2018, interactions with students have completely transformed. Traditionally, USC had a Student Liaison Group of about 16 “uber” students, this group served as a platform for executive staff to notify students of changes occurring within the University. Since introducing a University-wide Students as Partners ethos, the student voice has diversified, no longer are just a select few students being ‘consulted’ in the decision-making process, the student voice has amplified, and students themselves have become the change-makers. USC students are involved in all decision-making processes regarding issues that concern them. Furthermore, Students Reps bring concerns from the wider student voice and partner with the university to introduce and implement changes to improve the overall student experience.

**Framework implementation:** USC has implemented a three-tiered, student-led, student governance framework. The USC Student Senate has 17 student groups representing the following cohorts: Each of the Schools, Student Guild, High Performing Student Athletes, campus groups, Indigenous Students and International students.

**Challenges:** managing expectations (addressed through additional executive training), participation in smaller groups, contribution of members can differ

**Strengths/Benefits:** addressing student concerns efficiently during COVID, flexible approach to implementation of the framework.

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I am the Team Leader for Careers and Employability at USC. In 2017-2018 I developed the USC Student Governance Framework in partnership with 81 students. Since then, I have harmonised USC co-curricular activities into one Leadership Award program with embedded employability skills and a Students as Partners ethos. Donna Thompson

I am the Student Partnerships Officer at University of the Sunshine Coast (USC). I am responsible for USC’s co-curricular recognition program the Student Leadership Award, PASS Program and the Student Governance Framework. With over 8 years’ experience in Higher Education student engagement, I am passionate about enhancing students’ employability. Belinda Brear
After having an extremely positive high school experience, I entered university life eager to gain leadership opportunities and to develop collaborative relationships with staff. This led to my appointment as Social Media Manager for the Deakin Health Promotion Society, and eventually to my role as a Student Representative for the Faculty of Health. Within this role I participate in Teaching and Learning meetings, speaking to agenda items and working alongside staff to provide a student perspective on topical issues.

For me, COVID-19 has reinforced the importance of the dialogue between students and staff. As this is a dynamic and unprecedented situation, checking in on student reactions to staff decisions is integral to ensuring equity and satisfaction. Being a part of this process, and specifically sharing feedback on the transition to online learning, has helped me to reflect on my own learning processes. Having my opinions valued and being treated as an equal by staff, many of whom I have been taught by and look up to, is an extremely positive thing to come out of 2020. I hope to continue this process of being a student partner in the future!

I am a responsible and enthusiastic 21 year old, currently undertaking my final year of a Bachelor of Public Health and Health Promotion. I am passionate about equity in health, positivity, inclusivity, and human rights. I hope to work in areas such as LGBT health and senior health in the future. Elizabeth Curran