

Working as partners: a student-staff collaboration in the redesign of a major biomedical capstone course

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Within higher education, students' ability to contribute to the design of teaching content, courses, or curricula is frequently overlooked, but recent attention has emphasised the need to partner with students in the co-production of teaching and learning (Healey *et al.*, 2014; Mercer-Mapstone *et al.*, 2017). This presentation outlines our experiences of a student-staff partnership project to re-design a major biomedical capstone course.

BIOM3200: Biomedical Science is an undergraduate capstone course for students studying Biomedical Science at the University of Queensland, and is taken by over 450 students each year. The course has not been well reviewed by students in previous years, with most perceiving the content to be irrelevant to their expected graduate careers. To address this issue, our project aimed to engage student partners in the re-design of the capstone course to improve the student experience for future cohorts.

In April 2018, five student partners were recruited to participate in the course re-design: three Biomedical Science Honours students, who had previously completed BIOM3200; a Biotechnology Honours student; and a fourth year Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery student. Drawing on Cook-Sather and colleagues construction of Students as Partners (SAP), emphasis was placed on establishing "a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualization, decision-making, implementation, investigation, or analysis" (Cook-Sather, 2014). Consequently, the student partners and staff collaboratively set the project parameters and allocated tasks. This involved collectively brainstorming the course assessment, resources and activities, and then jointly compiling or developing these components.

As a result of this partnership a significant number of resources (36) were developed including: assessment tasks; criteria sheets; how-to-guides; submission templates; case scenarios; and on-line lectures. The student partners were able to gain tangible skills and understanding in project management, teaching pedagogy, resource procurement and development, and team work. In addition, four of the student partners chose to tutor into the course this year. The staff also found working with the student partners to be rewarding, as the students were able to draw on both their disciplinary knowledge and their experiences of learning to collaboratively develop assessment and resources that would enable future cohorts to have a positive learning experience. Although, staff acknowledged some difficulties managing student-staff dynamics, these were outweighed by the benefits of working with student partners.

In summary, both the student partners and staff developed an appreciation of the value of working in partnership to re-design curricula. The student-staff partnership had clear benefits for the student partners, staff and future student cohorts.

Cook-Sather A. (2014) Student-faculty partnership in explorations of pedagogical practice: a threshold concept in academic development. *International Journal for Academic Development* **19**, 186-198.

Healey M, Flint A, Harrington K. (2014) Engagement through partnership: students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education (pp. 1-77): The Higher Education Academy.

Mercer-Mapstone L, Dvorakova SL, Matthews K, Abbot S, Cheng B, Felten P, Knorr K, Marquis E, Shammass R, Swaim K. (2017) A systematic literature review of students as partners in higher education. *International Journal for Students as Partners* **1**, 1-23.