Student Voice
Australia

Case Study Examples
linked from the STEPUP Principles
Mapping Tool

Working in Partnership to Enhance Students' Digital Experience at UQ

The University of Queensland's Student-Staff Partnerships program (SSP) is dedicated to establishing sustainable partnerships between staff and students as part of the University's everyday work practices. The Student Representation arm of SSP assists academic and professional divisions to conceptualise and establish platforms for student representation that suit both the needs of staff members and their student cohorts. The program operates on a belief that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to student representation can be limiting, and each division, school or faculty should develop methods for student voices to be heard in a way that is as inclusive of as diverse a range of students as possible.

In March 2019, UQ's Information Technology Services (ITS) division collaborated with the SSP team to design and implement a more coordinated and consistent method of gaining student feedback. The resulting Digital Environment Student Advisory Board consists of 10 students from across a range of faculties, and it encompasses a diverse range of domestic, international, undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Student members of the board meet every fortnight to help ITS staff in the planning, design and development of a whole range of projects. Student members of the group receive a grant payment for their time and expertise (provided by ITS). Student members are also responsible for collecting wider student feedback in the form of surveys, interviews and feedback sessions, and members are asked to analyse and reflect on this data in resulting board meetings. This is a crucial step as it means that the wider student feedback collected is analysed through a student-centred lens, as are any subsequent recommendations. In this way, ITS ensures that student voices play a crucial role in every stage of the design, development and review process of the work they undertake at the University.

This model demonstrates an effective method of placing students at the heart of the key-decision making processes that have such a profound impact on their university experience. It moves beyond traditional approaches to committee representation in which a small collection of student reps are asked to sit on committees and governance groups that consist mainly of staff members; in turn meaning that student voices are minimal and can be muted. By making students a crucial part of the governance and planning of the division, ITS has been able to demonstrate to the wider student body its commitment to improving the digital experience of every student at the University.

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Collaborating with the Student Guild to Enhance Partnership in Academic Governance at QUT

Like many Australian universities, QUT is creating and enhancing student representative networks, training and resources to support students as partners in academic governance. Based on a series of interviews and co-design sessions, Students as Partners in Academic Governance established four project aims: increase engagement of diverse student representatives; raise awareness about student representation; increase opportunities for partnership; and project sustainability. The team sought to address a lack of student engagement, which is a barrier to authentic partnership and shared decision making at QUT. Initially the team created a database of university, faculty and school student representatives' contact details to facilitate communication. Whilst there are still gaps in the database, this was an important first step towards increasing representatives' engagement. In partnership with the newly-elected QUT student guild, the team then: co-designed and co-hosted student representative network (SRN) meetings, social catch ups and training; created an online support group; and drafted handbook content. These activities sought to increase engagement by removing barriers such as a lack of understanding of representatives' role and responsibilities, and decision making processes. Student representatives were also invited to facilitate a session at the Student Leadership Conference.

Co-designing and co-facilitating training and conference workshops challenged representatives to think deeply about their role. Together we made pedagogical choices about how to prepare student representatives and raise awareness of the opportunities and challenges of acting as a voice for diverse student populations. Student representatives spoke publically and facilitated discussions, growing their confidence and voices. The project team supported the SRN to draft a terms of reference (ToR). The casual consultation processes encouraged representatives to write subsections. This role modelled how representatives can consult and empower others. It also familiarised representatives with the ToR structure and genre features. The SRN's draft ToR will be submitted to University Teaching and Learning Committee for feedback, which will hopefully be a catalyst to conversations about how to share decision making power.

The Students as Partners in Academic Governance project has supported a productive partnership with the student guild and developed a core network of highly engaged representatives. Given student representatives are typically in their roles for only twelve months, the challenge lies in extending and sustaining engagement. Encouragingly, the SRN has already broadened its purpose and is now acting as a student group that senior leaders tap into for strategy and policy feedback. Next steps involve working with staff to share good practice, and develop processes and resources that support Faculty to partner with students.

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University of the Sunshine Coast's Student Governance Structure

The new student governance structure at USC enables students and the university to work towards authentic and sustainable partnership in decision making. It aims to enable students to be active partners in shaping their learning experience, to build skills and to amplify and diversify the student voice at USC.

The student governance framework was designed to facilitate a productive relationship between the institution and the student body, and includes a tiered scaffold of student-led groups, committees, and associations from different spheres of the student experience. The USC Student Senate structure replicates staff governance structures to enable students to be an engaged and active voice in institutional change processes.

USC's Student Senate is comprised of the following elected representatives:
- **Two** Student Representative Council (SRC) Co-Chairpersons (Undergraduate academic experience);
- **One** Postgraduate Students' Association (PSA) Coursework representative and One HDR representative

(Postgraduate experience);

- Student Guild President and Vice-President (Clubs and Societies) (social, welfare, advocacy and student experience);
- **One** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Leadership Committee representative (Indigenous student experience);
- **Two** USC Campus representatives (represent the different needs of our multi-campus institution);
- **One** USC Council student representative (to establish a connection between the Student Governance Framework and the University's Governance system);
- **One** International student representative (International student experience).

Each representative on the Student Senate is connected to a tier 2 group who represent a broad area of the student experience. As at July 2019, USC launched a customised an online system for students to opt into the 300 student representative roles. These formal roles include: institution-wide representation for each program at every year level, and each school at our multi-campus university, along with roles for indigenous and international students in each of the 18 student-led student-governance groups.[1] With a soft launch from late July to late August 2019, 70 students have registered for the extended SaP program, with 75.7% of students who signed up (53 students) registered for Student Representative roles (other roles include Student Volunteers and Student Leaders). These students are already undergoing interviews and training for their roles.

From the beginning, and throughout the project development, it was essential to create authentic partnerships. Establishing executive interest from the conceptualisation phase, and working as a student-staff partnership, was critical in receiving funding, in guiding the development, and arriving at the implementation phase. Without the executive buy-in or funding support, it would have taken longer or may not have been possible to establish a holistic framework that incorporates the diversity of the student experience. With this support, and the network of partnerships, there was resilience when some of the key executive staff and students departed USC during the project development.

The inaugural meeting of the Student Senate – the top tier of our student governance framework – occurred in September 2019. At this meeting, elected students have already established an intent to partner with the University in developing a mental health strategy and agreed to host a planning day in November to comprehensively develop the Senate's 2020 strategy. This bottom-up, tiered model will encourage authentic student engagement, encouraging and empowering students to be active partners in shaping their university community.

This model has been adopted as part of USC's wider students as partners (SaP) strategy to encourage authentic student engagement across our multi-campus, regional University. Ultimately, we hope to see increased student retention through engagement, enhanced sense of belonging from first year, and a positive impact on graduate outcomes due to enhanced graduate attributes and employability.

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Curtin University Course Representative System Pilot

In late 2018, the Curtin Student Guild started discussions around the potential for a Course Representative System. This was driven by a number of factors. We identified the potential to improve the feedback channels through which students could communicate with the University. We also saw an opportunity to improve engagement and communications between the Guild and the wider student body.

At present, there are a number of options available for students to give feedback. Among these are contacting the University and Guild directly, talking to lecturers or unit coordinators, submitting formal complaints, or making submissions to eValuate and other feedback surveys. While these options are important, they all come with a number of barriers. Discomfort with reaching out or directly contacting professional staff; a sense of disconnect with the outcomes of the feedback; intimidation at the prospect of making formal complaints. In this project, the Guild would establish a student representative for each course in the university. While the Guild does have faculty representatives, we acknowledged that it was near impossible for that one rep to capture the vast perspectives and experiences of all students in their faculty. The benefit of the Course Rep system is that these reps can more accurately represent the best interests of their constituents, being in the same course themselves.

Coincidentally there had recently been changes to the University's Courses Quality Manual to include new Student

[1] Exceptions to this are in the membership of the Student Guild and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Leadership Committee which have their own rules for representation of minority groups.

Consultative Committees (SCCs) that were to be established in each academic faculty. The manual specified that these committees were to 'support the use of student feedback in continuous improvement of course and unit quality and the student experience' and the membership was to include at least eight student members representing a range of cohort demographics'. We saw a clear opportunity to marry the Course Representative System with these new SCCs. In early 2019, we began discussions with the university around how we could embed course reps in the official governance structure of SCCs. The faculty of Science and Engineering volunteered to pilot the course representative system and Semester 2, 2019. In August, 2019, the Course Representative System Pilot Proposal document was noted at the University Teaching and Learning Committee for trial in the faculty of Science and Engineering.

The pilot was communicated to academic staff by the Dean of Teaching and Learning and the Director of Student Experience in the faculty. In week 2 of semester 2, 2019, the Guild sent out an email to all Science and Engineering students requesting expressions of interest. Selections of the reps were made by the Guild Executive committee and outcomes were subsequently communicated within two weeks of the close of nominations.

The Vice President - Education conducted a session of 'Representatives Training' for the new reps that aimed to give an understanding of the Guild and University governance structures, what the role of a Course Representative is, and how to effectively communicate feedback and escalate concerns. The reps were also given a number of prompt questions to start considering in the lead up to the first SCC meeting. The SCC meeting itself was organised around those prompt questions, collecting specific feedback from students before it was opened up for general feedback. The feedback was collected and is currently in the process of being compiled into a report to be presented to the faculty Teaching and Learning Committee for consideration. The second SCC meeting has been scheduled for late October, where updates on the feedback given in the first SCC meeting will be presented.

This project is still largely in its infancy, and the Guild has many ideas for expansion and improvement of the Course Representatives System.

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Celebrating and Engaging Student Voice – a student led approach at RMIT

In August 2019 the inaugural Have Your Say Day – Student Voice Summit was a collaboration between RMIT Student Union (RUSU) and the RMIT University Student Life Team. It was an opportunity to demonstrate public consultation in action and allow emerging student-leaders to engage directly with the current university and RUSU leadership.

Our goals

1. Reminding students that their voices are of value in RMIT's community.
2. Helping students build their skills and confidence in sharing their voice.
3. Providing a platform to collect student ideas for new RMIT initiatives.

Pre-Summit, RUSU and RMIT identified the following challenges to productive engagement with student's voice:

- Insufficient visibility of student voice initiatives.
- Excessive formality when engaging with students.
- Limited opportunities for two-way dialogue.
- Failure to "close-the-loop" by communicating outcomes to students.

How
Being student-led allowed student-leaders to shape the event structure, set the tone, level of formality and key activities for the event. Attended by club leaders, student academic representatives, RUSU representatives and student media organisations.

Key Activities

- **Keynotes** – staff and student-leaders shared insights into influencing change
- **Breakout Discussion Sessions** – finetuning ideas in a safe and collaborative environment with their peers and trained student facilitators.
- **Q&A Panel 'Your Questions Answered'** – ask questions and share ideas with RMIT senior staff and student-leaders

– using a combination of interactive learning platform GoSoapBox and direct audience questions.

- **Social Networking** – building a peer network.

Key Themes

- Increased demand for sustainable actions.
- Big focus on student-leader training and development.
- Ideas generated to improve support services for students.
- Ongoing challenge of increasing awareness/communication of present services and activities at RMIT.

Highlights and Takeaways

- Pre & Post-Event surveys are a valuable opportunity to gauge hot topics and student voice satisfaction.
- Showcased the great value of student-staff partnership when engaging student voice.
- Curated tickets increased opportunities and accessibility for under-represented cohorts on campus and ensured inclusivity.
- Commitment to a student-led approach created a safe environment that generated uninhibited ideas with potential for impact.
- Attendance of senior RMIT executives, including the Vice-Chancellor sent a powerful message to students on RMIT's commitment to hearing and learning from student voices.
- 150+ registered attendees rated RMIT 7/10 for valuing students' voice.
- 100% of surveyed attendees felt more confident in sharing their voice.

Post event, we collated all ideas, questions and feedback that were shared throughout the event. This information will help the Student Union inform priorities for 2020. It was also distributed to Heads of Departments at RMIT to help share student's voice and encourage staff to use student voice to co-design activities and programs in future.

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Forging Student Staff Partnership at UWA

In 2017 the UWA Student Guild and the University of Western Australia entered into a partnership to improve the student experience of students studying at the University. This student partnership agreement (SPA) is the first of its kind in Australia and has its roots in similar arrangements reached between universities and student unions in the United Kingdom.

The agreement was initiated by the newly appointed Vice-Chancellor of the University and the Guild President and provides both commitments that the organisations work towards, and expectations which act as the basis of the relationship. The Partnership has three commitments, that apply to staff and students alike:

- to promote a receptive, and accessible institutional culture
- to actively engage and contribute to the education experience, and the advancement of knowledge and extracurricular activities
- to foster strong, supportive and effective student leaders

To achieve these, there is an accompanying framework of expectations for the partnership, including:

- Collaboration in research, teaching, learning, facility design and developmental opportunities.
- Genuine efforts to the fulfilment of our commitments to one another.
- An engaging, supportive, and rewarding university experience.
- To be able to share one's voice, be heard and generate positive change.
- Respect for the views, opinions and beliefs of others.
- Recognition and celebration of the University community's diversity.
- Effective and relevant feedback to be actively sought after and provided.
- Celebration of merit, achievement and excellence in the pursuit of shared goals.

The agreement has been successfully operationalised by the Guild and the University, and has led to involvement of student in decision making in the university, and in its governance structures. The Guild maintains a close relationship with

the University Executive, and works closely with the DVC (Education) at a strategic level. Each year the DVCE and the Guild President set an action plan for the partnership, agreeing on key priorities to be delivered in the year. The partnership is also active in affecting change in committees of the university - the Guild and the Executive have often co-authored papers to committees of the university, resulting in changes of University policy that improve the student experience, and promote equity for students. Elements of the approach are also captured in the university's 2025 Strategic Plan, positioning the involvement of students in decision making as a strategic priority of the university.

At UWA, the Partnership has been an effective way to raise the profile of the student voice, and for the university to make decisions which are aware of and responsive to the needs of students. This case can be considered an early example of student partnership in Australia.

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UWA Class Representative System Providing Grassroots Feedback

In 2018 the UWA Student Guild established a class representative system at the University of Western Australia. In this system, academics can opt to have student representatives in their unit who provide feedback on the running of the unit. In the first semester of the system's pilot, almost all class representatives and unit coordinators reported that they believe the program had a positive impact on the experience of students studying the unit.

The Guild coordinates the recruitment, training, support and recognition of these representatives. Students are invited to complete an application to become a representative, detailing their experience and interest in the role. From here, 2-6 representatives (depending on the enrolment of the unit) are selected on merit by the Guild, while ensuring a gender balance and balance of international and domestic students. These representatives complete a two hour training session, training them on key skills such as negotiation and providing feedback, alerting them to university policy, support available, escalation procedures, and student equity. Throughout the semester these students will collect feedback from their cohort and meet with the unit coordinator to discuss the feedback, and how the unit may be improved. Where appropriate, issues are escalated to Faculty Societies and the Student Guild for resolution. The Guild regularly touches base with class representatives to ensure that they understand what they need to do, and to respond d to any queries. The Guild also recognises this as leadership experience, crediting the hours volunteered to the students' academic transcripts.

Class representatives also play a key role in fostering collegiality amongst cohorts. Exemplary representatives at UWA have hosted revision sessions across the semester, inviting students to study together, and have hosted social events to build community.

UWA's Class Representative System is still in its infancy but has already had enabled students to provide continuous and constructive feedback to academics at the University. This both raises the student voice at a grass-roots level, and has improved the student experience.

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Student Rep Briefings at LTSU

Student reps receive briefings prior to attending Committee meetings. It is important to ensure that student reps understand the role of the Committees that they attend and their role and responsibilities as a Committee member. Prior to Committee meetings, students will be asked to read through the required material for the meeting. This is generally circulated one to two weeks prior to the meetings. Students are encouraged to approach a Student Advocate with any questions that they have about the material prior to the Committee meetings. Student reps will also have the opportunity to meet with the Student Advocate to discuss key content and objectives or requirements of the upcoming Committee meeting. Students will also be given an opportunity to meet with them after Committee meetings in order to discuss any issues that arose or any questions that they may have relating to their position as Committee members.

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Topic/Course Reps at Flinders University

In Semester 2, 2018, Flinders University piloted topic level representation across three Colleges: Science & Engineering; Business, Government & Law; Nursing & Health Sciences. In 2020 all six Colleges will begin a proposed model of Student Academic Representation that includes Topic or Course Representation.

Topic/Course Rep model
As current students, Topic and Course Representatives are ideally placed to provide insight into the student experience of learning and teaching, both what is working well and where improvements can be made. By working in collaboration with academic staff, topic reps are not only able to represent the views of their fellow classmates, but also to work in partnership with staff to enhance learning and teaching for all involved. The opportunity to be involved in continuous, low level dialogue with Topic and Course Coordinators as the topic is rolling out means that the student perspective can be taken into consideration immediately, allowing for small adjustments to be made in real time.

Opportunities for student representatives can begin at course, year or topic level (as appropriate to the course of study students are engaged in). Such a system is seen as having huge value for giving a wide number and range of students the opportunity to have a voice in enhancement of quality and their student experience. In addition, and importantly it also develops a broad base of students with the experience, ability and confidence to progress through to College and University committees and senior governance roles. It provides opportunity for many students to participate in a capacity closely matched with their level of experience and to develop skills in representing fellow students.

The role of a Topic/Course Rep is to:
- Act as a **point of contact** for students in their topic.
- Act as a **communication channel** between staff and students.
- **Represent fellow classmates' views** and opinions on matters relating to learning and teaching.
- Provide **constructive feedback** to academic staff about teaching quality and assessment, course content and university facilities according to the thoughts and opinions of the class.
- **Continuously improve the student learning experience in partnership** with academic staff by **helping create** solutions to problems.

A Topic Representative from the 2018 reported the following:
"…*Overall, this is a great program and should definitely be rolled out over all topics. Definitely will be doing it again if given the chance.*" (Topic Representative, 2018).

Training
An important element of a Topic Rep system is comprehensive training. All Topic Reps are expected to attend a 2.5 hr training session to ensure that they understand their role and how to be as effective as possible. Training is based on support materials from Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland11 (SPARQS) and the National Student Engagement Project12 (NStEP, Ireland). Training includes:
- Developing an understanding of the TR role.
- How to be an effective Student Rep and gather student opinion.
- Discussion of the Student Learning Experience and how TRs can use it to improve the collective experience of their topic.
- Skills development (ABCD of Effective Feedback, communication, networking).
- Supports available for TRs (links to other University services they can use themselves or refer other students onto).

FUSA recruits 'Student Trainers' through expressions of interest. These Student Trainers are former Topic/Course Reps (students) who deliver the Topic/Course Rep training to their incoming peers. This includes one full day of training which covers the purpose and skills involved in training, student learning styles, and hands-on practice. Student Trainers are paid as a casual Level HEO4 employee for this session and for all training they then deliver.
In this Train the Trainer Session students:
- Understand the specifics of being a trainer.

- Learn and develop skills required to deliver training.
- Gain an understanding of adult learning styles.
- Learn about and develop self-reflection skills.
- Learn and practice the 2.5 Topic/Course Rep training to deliver to their peers.

Recognition
All Topic Reps receive formal recognition for their role through the Flinders University Horizon Award program and a certificate of acknowledgement at the end of the Semester signed by the DVC (Students). Through their participation as Topic/Course reps students are exposed to opportunities for professional development and personal growth. The program aims to assist TRs to gain skills in leadership, networking, critical thinking, decision-making, communication, negotiation, organisation and diplomacy. As such, once TRs attended training and completed their TR role they received formal recognition for their work through the Horizon Award Program (80 Horizon Award points) and received a certificate of acknowledgement at the completion of the Semester.

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UNSW Arc Board Chair & SRC President Crossover

UNSW student representatives are uniquely supported by the structured changeover of senior student representative positions. The student organisation, Arc @ UNSW, student Chair position operates within one financial year, whereas the Student Representative Council President position operates within one calendar year. This means that changeover of one occurs during the halfway point of the other's term. The Arc Chair and SRC President work closely together advocating to UNSW's management on issues of importance to the student cohort. Therefore, having one with experience able to mentor the other is extremely valuable for their personal and professional development and allows them to be more effective student representatives.

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Arc @ UNSW Annual Dinner

Every year, UNSW's student organisation, Arc @ UNSW, holds a dinner in order to thank employees and supporters. At this dinner, outgoing student directors that have completed two years as student directors on Arc @ UNSW's board are formally recognised for the contribution they made to the direction of Arc and the broader student community. This formal recognition demonstrates to students that their contributions were as valuable as the non-student directors and that they are perceived as equals.

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