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Student-Faculty Partnerships in Curricula

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Student-Faculty Partnerships in Curricula

There is a growing movement to not only *include* but also *involve* students in curricula decision making. Students in higher education have challenged the notion that they are customers receiving a transactional education and instead call for higher levels of participation and agency in their learning (Matthews et al., 2017). Students collaborating with institutions, programs, and faculty to design curricula is a framework known as students as partners or student-faculty partnerships. At Portland State University, student body president Nya Mbock in 2021 has called for more student involvement with faculty in curriculum (Swordfisk, 2021) suggesting the opportunity for more collaboration of students and faculty within curricula.

Positive outcomes of student-faculty partnership include increased student engagement, motivation, and ownership for learning, a positive shift of power dynamics between faculty and student (toward more equitable power), engagement and empowerment for students who are historically excluded, and increased student confidence and self-determination (Cook-Sather, et al., 2014; Matthews et al., 2019; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017).

With any approach to curricula, there are times when the intention of including students may potentially end up harming students. Specifically, when people engage in work designed to center and share power with students it is important to set intentions, to be transparent, and to reflect on an intentional practice of acknowledging how power affects the partnership. Without these intentional pieces, partnership work may end up tokenizing students and essentializing the student experience (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; de Bie et al., 2021). As a result, and despite good intentions, partnerships can reinforce the inequitable learning environments for students that they seek to disrupt. For example, partnerships may focus on an increased sense of belonging for students which may be problematic when the institution students are being invited to feel connected with has a

history of erasure and colonization for some student populations (de Bie et al., 2021).

Here are three examples of partnership approaches you can include in your own practice:

- **Student-faculty course design**

A student or group of students collaborate with the faculty on the design of a course. This might include a redesigned syllabus, elements of a course such as course outcomes, a course assignment, or an entire course.

- **Student's creating and choosing**

This might include having students choose the weekly discussion topics, students suggesting and creating quiz questions, using student's social bookmarking annotations to shape course content, or having students actively collaborate to create course content (Cook-Sather et al., 2014).

- **Partnerships in assessment**

Invite students to identify grading criteria for an assignment or final essay or invite students to co-assess their own final presentations. Another example is to bring a rubric with past student papers (used with permission) and have current students grade the papers based on the existing rubric. Have a discussion about the grading rubric and invite students to offer suggestions on adapting the rubric for their course term.

Designing Your Course

- Begin by reflecting on how you currently involve students in your curriculum.
- Create a list of when students get to make decisions within your curriculum. (This may be none).
- Acknowledge this is an iterative process and never really ends.
 - If none, consider starting with a negotiated syllabus.
- Reflect on the level students make decisions and identify opportunities to increase student involvement:

- You may already have assignments you'd like to engage with students. Hold a discussion with students in class to determine course learning outcomes and discuss how the assignments you've created will help the class reach their goals. Be prepared to make small changes to assignments based on the class discussion. Small changes are expected as every class you have will have different students in it.
 - You may wish to extend this discussion a bit by holding a discussion with students in class to determine course learning outcomes *and* how they want to collectively reach those outcomes. Create assignments around this discussion collaboratively with students.
- Provide a diversity of materials, the formats of which remain consistent from week to week.
 - For example, you may provide lecture slides, supplementary texts, and external videos covering the information being taught each week; from this collection, each student can choose which items are most useful to them in their studying and has reliable access to their preferred materials for each new topic.
 - This is applicable to any lecture or discussion based course.
- Create opportunities for identity expression.
 - When discussions and assigned work have room for identity expression, a student has the opportunity to apply the material to their own lived experiences, and apply themselves more directly to the material. This application of material allows for engagement of more parts of the brain, greater communication between them and deeper integration of the learned material into long-term memory (Johnson, et al., 2006). Deeper understanding comes from the associations that are made through reflecting, creating and experimenting--actions that allow a student to express their identity.
 - By providing ample room for identity expression, the student voice can be integrated into your course, creating an environment where students can feel more comfortable

discussing, sharing ideas, working with a team and developing their critical thinking skills.

- Develop a syllabus that reflects your values, the values of your course and the values of the institution as a whole.
 - A comprehensive, organized and useful syllabus can immediately tell a student what to expect from a course, whether or not it will be a good fit for them, and how you plan to teach, communicate and engage with them.
 - Somewhere in the syllabus should be a list (or where within the course D2L/Canvas a list is located) of linked resources for the class and the school, along with any other relevant resources (where to find cost-considerate course materials, necessary technology, internet access).
 - Starting out the syllabus with a land acknowledgement and an acknowledgment of bias, providing a statement concerning unforeseen circumstances/emergencies in a student's life and discussing how you will handle/work with that student shows your commitment to, and awareness of, culturally sustaining teaching.

Learn More Elsewhere

Several student faculty partnerships examples from across the world include university programs from across the United States, Canada, Hong Kong, New Zealand, England, Pakistan, Malaysia, and Israel (Cook-Sather & Wilson, 2020).

Each program approaches partnerships depending on the needs and people participating.

- [Examples of student-faculty partnership programs at other universities](#)
- [Promoting equity and justice through pedagogical partnership](#)

- [Engaging students as partners in learning and teaching : a guide for faculty](#)

References

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