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Feature Story

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“Students as partners:” it’s more than a trendy hot topic

Relating to students as partners signals a culture where students are meaningful members of the university community.

By Kelly Matthews

University communities want to nurture meaningful and lasting relationships with students. That is the why the students-as-partners conversation is a hot topic. But we risk over-promising and under-performing without the right leadership.

Naming each student as a partner is a powerful idea that creates new ways of thinking and working, moving us beyond the unhelpful students-are-customers mindset. Relating to students as partners signals a culture where students are meaningful members of the university community.

In Australia in the past few months alone, the University of Adelaide hosted over 100 students and staff from eight countries at the fourth annual International Students as Partners Institute. The fifth annual Australian Students as Partners Roundtable at UNSW brought together people from 14 Australian universities along with colleagues from New Zealand, the UK, and China. The research is growing too. For example, a literature review published in July on benefits of engaging in partnership (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1360144X.2018.1545233>) reads like a QILT indicators (<https://www.qilt.edu.au/about-this-site/student-experience>) jackpot.

Genuine partnership (<https://mulpress.mcmaster.ca/ijsap/article/view/3315>) takes work. It demands a willingness to re-imagine learning and teaching as a collaborative endeavour (<https://journals.studentengagement.org.uk/index.php/raise/article/view/380/338>) with all students. Real partnership enables productive conflict that underpins creativity, innovation, and co-creation.

Is there commitment to genuine partnership with students in your university?

Institutional commitment means creating the opportunities for all students to be partners through an array of practices, pedagogies, and programs that reach students and staff, both in and out of the classroom. It is a commitment to adopting an expansive conception of partnership with students that is a values-based practice (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10734-018-0257-y>). It is a ten-year plan, not a quick win.

Thoughtful leadership and a clear vision on how students are positioned within your university are key.

How are leaders in your university enabling a culture of student partnership?

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ALTF 2019 Legacy Report here (<https://altf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/ALTF-Report-2019.pdf>)

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