



## STUDENTS AS PARTNERS

### WHAT IT IS AND HOW TO IMPLEMENT IT IN TEACHING

#### WHAT IS IT?

Students as Partners (SaP) is a framework of direct engagement that provides an opportunity for students to coexist or co-construct a partnership when working with faculty. The goal of SaP initiatives is to eliminate the gap that has been built over the years between students and faculty in terms of working together or establishing a partnership. SaP aims to facilitate engagement between faculty and students by building meaningful relationships between both groups of the university community. One way this can be achieved is by allowing students to have a voice and share their perspectives on things that can help benefit everyone on campus including both students and faculty.

#### WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Traditional approaches to teaching in post-secondary contexts focuses on the hierarchical and asymmetrical relationship between “faculty” and “student.” To foster a culture of partnership between students and faculty, it is important to move away from models of teaching and learning which treats students as consumers and education as a product. These models enforce passivity and leave students feeling powerless regarding what they learn and how they learn. By contrast, SaP provides a framework that asks us to find new ways of working together that disrupts this hierarchy and empowers students to become active partners in their own education. This framework has positive implications for learning because it motivate students, provides a learning space that is built on trust, brings us into community together, and challenges both parties to take responsibility for the teaching and learning happening in our classrooms and institutions (Healey, et al., 2014).

From a faculty perspective, SaP allows instructors to better know their students and engage them in the learning process. This transformative way of working together does not ask faculty to put aside their disciplinary expertise, but place it in conversation with the diverse, valued lived experiences of students. It is important to remember that when working in partnership, contributions from both students and faculty are equally valued. Therefore, the different ideas and projects that are constructed by SaP initiatives need to include both students' and faculty's perspectives to have a successful partnership.

#### HOW CAN INSTRUCTORS WORK WITH STUDENTS AS PARTNERS IN THEIR TEACHING?

For instructors who are interested in implementing SaP initiatives into their teaching practice, here are some suggestions to keep in mind:

1. **Build relationships with students via pedagogical transparency.** Demystifying the teaching process goes a long way to developing student-partnership relations. Transparency can be as small as sharing the reasoning behind certain pedagogical choices or even workshopping new approaches with students. By allowing students to gain insight into your teaching processes, students can begin viewing themselves as our colleagues instead of merely our pupils.
2. **Recognize, value, and center student expertise in these collaborative partnerships.** It is important to remember that professors are just one of many experts in a classroom. Every student has their own abilities and knowledge to contribute to the learning experience. While they may not have the same responsibilities as faculty, students should be given equal opportunities as instructors to contribute to their own learning.

3. **Ensure students have opportunities to provide active feedback throughout the course.** Active feedback goes beyond the course evaluations authorized by the university at the semester's end. This practice establishes a dialogue between students and professors that aims to create a more accessible course for its current participants. Students can be incentivized to provide active feedback through the provision of participation marks and/or an anonymous, online submission portal (i.e., Google Forms)..
4. **Provide opportunities for collaboration in assessment design.** Full partnership in establishing the methods of assessment is not always possible, particularly when the syllabus must be submitted prior to the first class. However, this does not mean that there is no room for partnership between students and faculty in this regard. For example, students can be consulted on what testing format (i.e., multiple-choice, or long-answer questions) they prefer, or a list of essay topics could be co-constructed as a class rather than created solely by the professor. The point is to conscientiously incorporate chances for students to take more active roles in their learning experience.
5. **Practice self-reflection throughout this entire process.** Although the use of the term “self” may seem counterintuitive within the context of student partnership, self-reflection is an important tool to encourage faculty to help “bridge the gap.” Turning inwards to reflect on one’s own pedagogy is key to creating the metaphorical space required for the above-mentioned practices. Incorporating the student perspective is difficult without some self-analysis or critique.

#### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (Internal)

York University. Reflective Classroom Observation Programs: Students as Partners in the Teaching Commons. <https://www.yorku.ca/teachingcommons/reflective-classroom-observation-programs/#:~:text=Students%20as%20Partners%20in%20the%20Teaching%20Commons>

#### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (External)

##### Explore in 15-30 Minutes

MacPherson Institute. (2015, April 23). *Mick Healey – “Students as Partners”* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TNKhQghFV1Y&t=3s>

Students as Partners. (2022). *Students as Partners*. The University of British Columbia. Retrieved December 1, 2022, from <https://sap.ubc.ca/>

Student Voice Australia. (2021, May 31). *Students as Partners at Victoria University – Student Voice Australia Symposium 2021* [Video]. YouTube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vD\\_8xgciFWc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vD_8xgciFWc)

UNSW eLearning. (2019, December 17). *2019 National Students as Partners Vox Pops* [Video]. YouTube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PA\\_to-LVxqE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PA_to-LVxqE)

USW Students as Partners. (2021, August 18). *Some of the common misconceptions about Student Partnership* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjylWmuRcrg>

WSU Students as Partners. (2020, July 6). *We Are The University: Students Co-Creating Change (HUMN 3108) | A New Subject at WSU* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqEkI5mlKm8>

##### Explore in 30-60 minutes

Cook-Sather, A. (2012). Lessons in Higher Education: Five Pedagogical Practices that Promote Active Learning for Faculty and Students. *Journal of Faculty Development*, 26(1), 1-7.

Judd, M-M., & Szücs, B. *Student-staff partnerships: seven strategies for adopting inclusive practices*.

Times Higher Education. Retrieved December 3rd, 2022, from

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/studentstaff-partnerships-seven-strategies-adopting-inclusive-practices>

Matthews, K. E. (2019). Rethinking the Problem of Faculty Resistance to Engaging with Students as Partners in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 13(2), 1-5.

Moore, J., Ewell, E., & Miller, S. (2021, December 3). *Students as Partners*. Center for Engaged Learning. Retrieved November 14, 2022, from

<https://www.centerforengagedlearning.org/resources/students-as-partners/>

### Explore in 60+ minutes

Godbold, N., Hung, T-Y., & Matthews, K.E. (2022). Exploring the role of conflict in co-creation of curriculum through engaging students as partners in the classroom. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 41(4), 1104-1118.

<https://doi.org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.1080/07294360.2021.1887095>

Healey, M., Flint, A., & Harrington, K. (2014). Engagement through partnership: Students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education. York: Higher Education Academy. Retrieved from

<https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/engagement-through-partnership-students-partners-learning-and-teaching-higher-education>

Steckley, M., Fortin, E., & Minic, A. (2022). Exploring representation (EDI) in Students as Partners (SaP) initiatives: a case study of equity, diversity and inclusion in the Students as Partners Program (SaPP) at Carleton University. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2022.2104944>

## Would you like to learn more?

Contact us at Teaching Commons for additional resources, handouts, applications, courses, workshops, examples, advice, assistance, one-on-one consulting, and everything else related to teaching and learning. We are happy and eager to assist you!



[Teaching Commons](#)

[Yelin Su](#)

[Robert D. Winkler](#)



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1050 Victor Phillip Dahdaleh (formerly TEL) Building, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, ON M3J 1P3



416.736.2100 ext. 55754



Created by Lauren Wilson, Zainab Chaudry, Teddy Dobbs, Corina Vitantonio, [Lisa M Endersby](#), [Matthew Dunleavy](#), [Andrew Molas](#), & [Robert D. Winkler](#)



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