

Faculty of Humanities Student Consultative Committee Case Study

Summary of the initiative

A Student Consultative Committee (SCC) was originally created in 2020 composed of 26 members across three schools and included a mix of both undergraduate and post graduate students. Both online and face-to-face platforms were offered to cater for remote and offshore learning as well as COVID enforced restrictions.

The initiative was created to offer students an 'in the moment' opportunity to provide feedback and raise concerns regarding their education.

With only one staff member involved, it was not feasible to facilitate such an initiative. The widely diverse membership resulted in situations where a Master of Teaching and a Bachelor of Arts student would be in the one room challenged with conflicting and differing study periods, feedback, and experiences. Students were not receptive to providing feedback to a staff member and the initiative was unable to engage certain cohorts such as Construction Management students.

The SCC was reimaged in August 2021 within the faculty of Humanities, timed specifically to intercept the rise of student complaints that typically appear mid to late semester. Facilitated by Humanities student Athina Hilman, employed as a student staff member to kick start this initiative, it falls under the Students as Partners umbrella. The SCC aims to affect change in the Humanities faculty and encourage students to engage more within and across the faculty.

A goal of the SCC is to erase the stigma that students feel alone in their thinking and challenges by getting together to talk about things in a safe, peer lead environment. The consultative sessions involve discussions based on information gathered in a feedback survey completed by students. This feedback is collated and presented to the Pro Vice Chancellor in the faculty of Humanities, and Heads of School. The responses are delivered back to the students who responded to the survey and took part in the consultative sessions.

Through her SCC group sessions Athina found that students are more willing to open up when they know they are not the only ones wanting to express particular feedback. "In a group setting people are more willing to talk about things and feel more comfortable because they know that someone else is feeling the same way", she adds.

How are students engaged as partners?

The consultative sessions are led, by students, for students with the Curtin employed student involved in all committee processes from development, facilitation, and follow-up. So far, Athina has worked in partnership with Curtin staff in the faculty of Humanities to design and distribute surveys to students aimed at identifying needs and concerns of Humanities students that are then discussed in depth in a consultative session.

What was the impact of engaging students as partners?

This student led approach has worked more efficiently in Humanities with student's feeling 'safe' talking to another student, particularly the Construction Management cohort who have responded positively to the consultative sessions. This cohort expressed their interest in continuing the consultative sessions each semester because they feel like they are being heard. They were initially concerned that the facilitator would tell the teaching staff of their complaints but relaxed once they understood that everything they discuss remains anonymous. This type of initiative has helped reduce student's anxiety about giving negative feedback without repercussion.

Athina has received positive responses from students around campus who have taken part in the consultative sessions. Seeing the student representative around campus and being stopped to ask how they are going has resonated with the students that they haven't been forgotten and that their concerns are being addressed.

What United Nations Sustainable Development Goals are being addressed through this initiative?

The Student Consultative Committee is addressing the UN Sustainable Development Goal #4 of Quality Education through the consultative sessions that aim at ensuring student complaints are heard and resolved. It also addresses Goal #3 of Good Health and Wellbeing by reducing students stress and anxiety over challenges they face within their course by providing a safe space for them to voice their concerns.

What are the next steps for this initiative?

The next step is to engage more Student Partners to help collate the feedback obtained during consultative sessions and provide extra support to facilitate a broader range of sessions across the faculty of Humanities, extending to other faculties across Curtin.

Athina plans to continue to be a support for Humanities students and intends to increase the presence of the consultative initiative. Further expansion is intended to include online students and tailor the sessions to be more relevant to the online experience and the different issues and challenges they may face.

To increase awareness, Athina intends to advertise the consultative sessions with posters and announcements to help build awareness and create a first point of contact that bypasses the need to be referred through a third person channel.

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