

A MANIFESTO FOR Student-Staff Partnerships and Equity

INTRODUCTION

This manifesto was created by a group of students and staff at the National Students as Partners Roundtable, 23-25 November 2021. It is grounded in our lived experience and we acknowledge that you may not agree with all of it, or it may not be applicable to your situation and that's OK! The manifesto is intended to be aspirational and some of the principles may not be achievable depending on your context and constraints. We're not claiming to have all the answers and we hope you will join us in this collective journey, by offering your thoughts and feedback via 21C@westernsydney.edu.au.

Our starting point is that we believe that partnership can be a pathway toward socially just higher education. We have a strengths-based ethos, where we view diversity as a resource in and for partnership practices. We draw on intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2017), which means paying attention to multiple, compounding forms of identity-related injustice, and also to what can be lost or hidden when we identify groups to assign people to. We acknowledge the plurality of knowledges, and in particular, in our Australian context, we recognise Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and that higher education must be decolonised.

The manifesto is framed as a series of questions in order to prompt thinking when designing and working in student-staff partnerships.

HOW IS THE PARTNERSHIP DESIGNED?

Design opportunities for equitable decision making from the beginning i.e. don't bring in students as an afterthought or once the project has started. Consider flexibility too - so that students can access and give input to the project in different ways.

WHO IS DOING THE WORK?

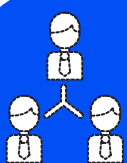
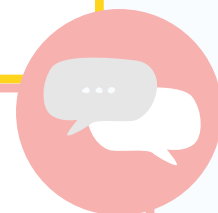
Student-staff partnerships for equity should not just be the work of students and educators from diverse backgrounds, it is everyone's responsibility. We need to recognise the demands placed on the people least served in higher education in having to educate others about diversity, and that this additional labour often leads to burnout.

WHO ELSE, BEYOND STAFF AND STUDENTS, COULD BE INCLUDED IN THE PARTNERSHIP?

What role does the community outside of the University play? Currently, many groups are underrepresented in higher education. Is it enough to speak to students and staff from these groups, or should we be working with these communities more broadly?

WHOSE VOICES ARE BEING HEARD?

Universities (and curriculum, pedagogies and assessment and extra-curricular activities) serve some people better than others. Paying attention to those least well served in higher education is a question of equity and a lens to bring to partnership work. Centering voices who have been historically oppressed and marginalised, silenced, excluded, or missed is an important equity principle.



HOW WILL PEOPLE'S WORK BE ACKNOWLEDGED?

For extra-curricular partnerships, it's important to consider payment for student partners, as well as casual staff, in order to value their time and ensure students and casual staff from diverse backgrounds (e.g. with caring responsibilities) can participate. Some partnerships take place within the curriculum (e.g. as part of a taught course) and in those cases payment is not appropriate as students are receiving academic credit.



HOW MIGHT THE PARTNERSHIP ENGAGE IN 'EVERYDAY ACTIVISM'?

Educators and students may not necessarily identify as 'activist' or see their partnership initiative as 'activism' but their work can be understood as such, especially where it seeks to challenge and/or disrupt the status quo. Consider also whether similar terms such as 'everyday advocacy' or 'everyday allyship' might be productive for your partnership.



HOW IS THE PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE SUPPORTED BY UNIVERSITY LEADERS AND STRUCTURES?

Student-staff partnerships for equity need to be supported by university leadership and structures in order for them to have the best chance of success. Leaders need to enact / embody the ideals of their mission / strategy, and to be open and honest about where power / privilege sits and that it is bound up in race, gender, class, sexuality, disability, age etc. However we also need to be aware of attempts to co-opt the partnership to mould it to institutional imperatives. Also, be prepared for pushback if you are challenging the norms.



HOW WILL YOU MAKE SPACE FOR 'STAYING WITH THE TROUBLE'?

To borrow a phrase from Donna Haraway, to avoid tokenistic and surface responses to equity issues we need to 'stay with the trouble' and acknowledge past, present and potential future harms. It's important to discuss why you are doing the work, what diversity, equity and inclusion mean for your particular partnership, and to create a supportive, reflective, respectful space for learning, making mistakes, changing understandings, and challenging assumptions.



Manifesto created by:

Sakinah Alhadad, Griffith University
Max Ashcroft-Smith, Western Sydney University
Amani Bell, University of Sydney
Jenna Condie, Western Sydney University
Emily Fuller, Newcastle University
Meenakshi Krishnaraj, University of Sydney
Kelly Matthews, University of Queensland
Brooke Mees, Western Sydney University
Evelyn Nguyen, Western Sydney University
Sam Pitman, Charles Sturt University
Bailey Wemyss, University of the Sunshine Coast

References:

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