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Partnership with students for a whole of school approach to wellbeing

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Context

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- Primarily post-graduate students:
 - Juris Doctor (JD) – Masters level law degree (3-4 years)
 - Melbourne Law Masters (MLM) – Master of Laws (LLM) open to students with a prior law degree and professional experience, and specialist law masters open to students with an cognate undergraduate degree and relevant professional experience (1 year full-time, up to 4 years part-time)
 - Both domestic/ Australian students and international students are enrolled in each program
 - RHD students, primarily PhD, some Masters



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Partnering with students

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Student Partnership

- Student partnership is not a ‘silver bullet’ for wellbeing initiatives
- But student partnership does create opportunities for:
 - active engagement that benefits both students and faculty
 - reactive learning through feedback on both sides
 - development of trust, which is key for lasting relationships



Cultivating partnership with students

- **Formal**

- Through faculty/ school committees:
 - Wellbeing committee
 - Committees for programs
 - Student group representative council
- Working groups
- Focus groups

- **Informal**

- Student groups, group leaders
- Individual students
- General feedback
- Forums, gatherings



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Formal partnerships

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Formal student partnership via faculty/ school structures

- **Example: Student Equality and Wellbeing Committee (SEWC)**
 - **Membership:**
 - ADT&L (chair); School Executive Director (deputy chair)
 - Staff in equal opportunity liaison roles (international/ESL; indigenous, gender, LGBTIQ, disability, later law – students as parents/ carers, career change)
 - Wellbeing officer and supervisor
 - central University representation: Director, Wellbeing
 - Six student representatives
 - Reflect JD, MLM and RHD students
 - Also international students, later law



SEWC Terms of Reference

- To advise and assist Melbourne Law School (MLS) in the implementation, review and evaluation of the University's equal opportunity policy in relation to MLS students and academic programs
- To advise and assist MLS in the development, implementation, review and evaluation of policies, strategies and practices to support student equality in line with University policy
- To advise and assist MLS in the development, implementation, review and evaluation of policies, strategies and practices to support and enhance the physical and mental wellbeing of MLS students
- To provide a forum for discussion of issues relating to student equality and wellbeing
- To make recommendations of principle or policy on any of these matters to the Dean, the Deputy Dean, any Associate Dean, the MLS or any other MLS board or committee as appropriate



Example of formal partnership in action

- Wellbeing issues surrounding weekend take home examinations
 - Raised by students, supported by a survey run by a student group
 - Taken up by SEWC and JD Committee
 - Joint working group set up to review, prepare report with recommendations
 - Consultation through 2017 with students and staff
 - Recommendations presented early 2018 and amendments made to extensions guidelines in time for Sem 1, 2018, to allow for extensions for students with parenting/ carer commitments over weekends; for students who could not forego weekend employment for financial reasons; for students who are religiously observant; plus a 'catch-all' category for issues similar in impact



Other examples of formal partnership in action

- Amendments to wording of Guidelines on extensions and special consideration to explicitly recognise family violence as a ground for eligibility
 - Student survey presented, formal advocacy at SEWC
 - Amendments agreed and implemented
 - Letter of support prepared by MLS to Graduate Students' Association on student group's request



Why did these partnerships work?

- There were formal mechanisms for students to raise the issues:
 - Committees, with established, relevant terms of reference
 - Preparatory work with committee chairs/ relevant staff to advise students about making their case (valuable learning experience)
 - Full discussion of perspectives, stakeholder issues with staff and students before a decision is taken
 - Often good outcomes for students (can advertise to their members what they have achieved through advocacy)
- Note: the answer is not always in the students' favour, but there is still learning through the process, for staff and students!



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Informal partnerships

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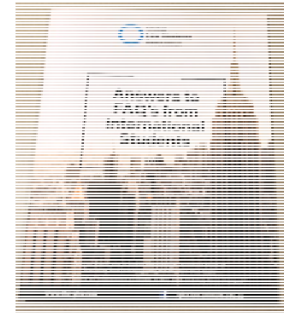


Informal partnership with students

- Most productive with a group of students with a common interest
- But can still work with an individual student who can mobilise other students and/or staff
- Greater variety of ways to create informal partnership, eg. simple gatherings; semi-formal forums/ focus groups; direct communication with stakeholders; lobbying (may lead to formal action via committee structure; behind the scenes/ low profile engagement)



Examples of informal partnerships in action



- FAQ Guidebook for international students
 - Initiated by Global Law Students Association (GLSA)
 - GLSA members came up with questions to be addressed
 - Discussed with AD T&L at annual welcome meeting (transition for incoming student group leaders)
 - Some of the queries were really challenging: balance between reassurance and accurate information; required careful drafting and extensive negotiation with the Student Visa team
 - Fantastic resource for a growing number of our students!



Other examples

- Welcome to country with subsequent wellbeing-focused Billibellary's walk led by local Indigenous elder
 - Standing room only, with as many staff members as students
- 'Pay it forward' noticeboard at RU OK Day
 - Student initiated, with active engagement on the day
 - Great messages, and transferred to wall in Student Enrichment Centre throughout the recent exams period



Why did these informal partnerships work?

- Relationship building with students and student leaders
- Emphasise 'win-win' mentality, eg. GLSA FAQ Booklet
- Building of trust, so that students learn they can raise matters and that there is good-will on behalf of faculty, even if they don't always get the answer they initially think they want
 - Assists in resolving matters quickly and efficiently where they do arise
 - Opens the channels of communication



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Hints and Tips ...

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- Educate students about their roles on committees and how they work
 - MLS will be doing this more formally in 2019 with a resource pack and training session, including on limits of the role of students
- Cultivate relationships with representatives of student groups during the year and emphasise the importance of good ongoing relationships during transition between outgoing/ incoming student group leaders
 - Word of mouth from outgoing student leaders makes for an easy transition and continued building of good-will and trust
- A quick response to issues raised between meetings builds trust and confidence
 - Invite feedback, express thanks when you receive it, and act on it – word spreads!
 - Promote gains made through continuing monitoring and improvement – students that know and have confidence that we engage in this proactively will more likely give feedback
- Open forums allow student leaders to bring in other students, and for any students to have their say: doing something like this even once a year can really illuminate current issues and inform committee work



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Questions?

If you want to get in touch, email
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Thank you

