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Enhancing Student Partnerships within a Centre for Teaching and Learning

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Final Report Summary (Roy, J., Chittle, L., Ismail, E., & Kustra, E.)

There is a growing emphasis on student partnerships to improve the educational experience of students (Currin, 2017; Miller et al., 2001). Student partnerships can be defined as a “collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualization, decision-making, implementation, investigation, or analysis” (Cook-Sather et al., 2014, p. 6-7). The purpose of our study was to understand the role of student partners in centres for teaching and learning (CTL), and to examine the benefits of such partnerships. The research team consisted of a partnership between undergraduate and graduate students as well as a CTL director. Interviews were conducted with 12 past student employees of the Centre. These data were also analyzed to identify challenges and ways in which these partnerships could be enhanced to promote skill development. From the study, 8/12 participants identified themselves as partners; 2/12 were unsure if they were partners, and 2/12 stated that they did not conceptualize themselves as such.

Participants indicated a number of roles and tasks they engaged in such as: curriculum mapping, LMS testing, event support, qualitative research, literature reviews, participating in conferences, conducting interviews, GA/TA Network, giving presentations, providing training, mentoring, and coordinating projects. Participants were able to identify a range of transferable skills that they were able to develop while working at the CTL. These skills included, though were not limited to: professional development, teamwork and collaboration, leadership, qualitative research, networking, and mentorship. Participants also indicated that they transferred these skills into other avenues of their professional lives. Beyond the skill development student employees experienced, we also learned that these partnerships greatly benefited the CTL by: (1) fulfilling roles and completing tasks; (2) keeping projects on time; (3) creating partnerships that gave voice to students in the CTL; and (4) enhancing the teaching and learning culture on campus.

Through this research we identified four common challenges experienced by student employees. The first challenge we identified was communication. One student stated: “I am from a different country, so there was a communication barrier. I got lots of motivation [at the CTL], I got lots of space to grow myself and grow my communications”. The second challenge related to time as students wished that they “had more hours to work with CTL. It was a very short period of time... I wanted to get more involved in projects and events”. The third challenge discovered was a lack of collaboration/interaction with fellow students and staff. Many students wished they had more opportunities to work with other full-time staff members, faculty members, and other students working at the CTL. Lastly, students wished they had better background knowledge and context before commencing their employment at the CTL.

The Centre intends to implement enhanced orientation for student employees, provide more opportunities for students to work with different staff and students, and increased detailed feedback regarding the students’ roles and responsibilities throughout the contract.

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