

Developing and listening to students' voice through (re)building Student-Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC)

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Overview of the project:

The previous format of a staff-led school-wide undergraduate SSLC showed low engagement from student cohorts across disciplines, thus limiting the class representatives' (CR) ability to present a coherent student voice on their peers' student experience. This impedes staff in understanding SSLC feedback to adjust course delivery and provide support, widening the gap between staff and student. During Academic Year 24-25, in response to a new policy, I had the opportunity to revamp SSLC from a staff-led to student led within the Malaysia campus with the goal of enhancing the effectiveness of these meetings. Pedagogic literature (see poster) on student-staff partnerships showed the benefit from student-staff collaboration, for example, increasing understanding of the "other's experience" to enhance student-staff connection.

In this project, I worked in partnership with Student Officer (SO) to identify contextual nuances of applying a UK-based policy within a Malaysian context and co-designed a support structure mechanism that students would respond to. During my informal meetings with the SO, I provided process-level feedback, focusing on enhancing his strategies and developing skills (Winstone et al., 2016) that would help him support CRs (further details in the poster). Through strengthening the communication network between staff → SO → CR → students and helping students' representatives (e.g., SO and CR) understand the goal and their key responsibility, this effort helps instil a sense of agency in them to engage with their peers and staff to bridge the gap through meaningful discussion during SSLC.

Impact and evaluation of student-led SSLC

At the end of the academic year, a focus group discussion (N = 4) was conducted to gather feedback from CRs on their perspectives and experiences with this initiative. Thematic Analysis was conducted to answer the question "What is the impact of a student-led SSLC?" and identified four major themes.

1. Peer-led environment

- Positive changes were noted in a student-led SSLC. A discipline specific, smaller setting creates a comfortable environment that facilitates open-communication and dialogue among peers and the student officer
- This shift to a student chaired SSLC makes CRs feel at ease and creates a sense of relatability. CRs who shared class experience with SO felt comfortable in expressing their comments. CRs within the same discipline helped each other clarify or build upon each other's feedback, thus enriching the quality of the message conveyed to staff

2. Student leadership and development

- Through chairing and moderating SSLC, the SO's presence promoted a comfortable and engaging environment for student to engage with staff.
- SO enhanced his visibility through initiating contact and checking-in with CRs across disciplines. Participants agreed that key attributes of a SO to facilitates the processes and mechanisms to achieve the goal of SSLC. Since this is a new process that was implemented, the SO plays a crucial role serving as the first point of contact for the

participants and aids communication among peers. This process strengthens the CR network and flow of information, thus preparing for a conducive SSLC.

3. Reducing barriers to student engagement

- Asian (e.g., Malaysian) tertiary students are reticent to speak up. Although silence in Asian culture indicates respect and contemplative engagement it can lead to communication breakdown (Le, 2024). In this context, students saw staff with reverence and that creates anxiety, so they were afraid to speak out of line or unintentionally say something offensive. This highlights that a staff-led SSLC had an unseen element of tiered hierarchy structure, in contrast a student-led SSLC introduced a flat hierarchy that allows students to feel more relaxed and willing to participate (Theme 1).
- Students don't see visible follow up actions after feedback, they receive an ambiguous response or see feedback actioned with a delay that benefits the next cohort but not them. These factors deter them from being willing to provide feedback in the future.

4. Good practice to enhance student engagement

- Students emphasized the need for a stronger, more consistent feedback loop between SSLC members and the wider student cohort. They felt they could gain cooperation from their cohort if they had responses to their feedback to deliver to their peers.
- Students expressed interest in connecting with staff beyond the classroom, this was seen to strengthen relationships and promote openness. This finding supports the idea that relational trust enhances formal feedback processes, and that creating space for authentic, non-hierarchical interactions can make students more comfortable speaking up in structured settings like SSLC meetings. Although students understand that some of their concerns may not be addressed, there is value of achieving mutual understanding through dialogue and seeing visible change

The project identifies factors that promote student engagement and areas of reflection to create opportunities for staff to engage moving forward.

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