

The Whole Student Experience

Summary of virtual panel event held on December 2nd, 2021



Creating a holistic and personalized student experience requires instructors and facilitators to think about factors affecting student success beyond the content taught in the classroom. Improving the whole student experience – before and beyond graduation – includes robust supports for student wellness, healthy campus culture and community, developing key skills, co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities, and the involvement of interdisciplinary perspectives in their learning.

Panelists:

Faith Ogunkoya: Manager, Black Student Success Centre (BSSC)

Nancy Doubleday: Director, Water Without Borders Graduate Diploma Program; Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy

Kyle Ansilio: Educational Developer, Faculty of Engineering; Program Lead, MacChangers

Sue McCracken: Associate Dean, DeGroote School of Business

Panel Questions:

Why is representing the whole student experience important to incorporate into your teaching and build into your students' experience?

How have students influenced and responded to your department or faculty's plan to support flexibility through their academic year?

What barriers have you encountered in trying to build flexibility or support holistic student experiences? How have you adapted to overcome some of those challenges?

What role can students, faculty, and university leadership play in contributing to or supporting a holistic student experience?

5 Key Takeaways from the panel

1. It is important to bring students in as true partners in spaces where they are not traditionally involved in order to better identify and respond to their needs [30:09-30:35].
2. Forming learning communities is a top priority in translating words into action [39:40-40:10].
3. Meet students where they are as much as possible: create a culture where students feel safe in sharing the difficulties they experience in their learning and co-create plans accordingly [52:31-53:33].
4. Ask questions about access: who is stepping forward to share their voice and engage with the resources and opportunities that the university provides? Who isn't? [1:09:26-1:09:34].
5. Encourage peer-to-peer engagement for mentorship, soliciting feedback, and facilitating the creation of safe spaces [1:09:38-1:09:52].

Some key takeaways from each panelist

Faith Ogunkoya: Manager, Black Student Success Centre (BSSC)

- African and Caribbean Faculty Association of McMaster (ACFAM) wrote the Black Excellence Strategy, recommending the strategic hiring of Black faculty members across all faculties and black-focused scholarships, fellowships, mentorship programs, and fundraising efforts [18:19-18:58].
- Black student wellness as a high priority; partnership with Student Wellness Centre so that students can be served by a Black counselor if desired [20:30-49].
- Encouraging community-building through a tiered Black student mentorship program in which first year students are mentored by upper year undergraduates, who are mentored by graduate students, who are in turn mentored by ACFAM members [23:41-24:47].
- Importance of understanding Black students as change-agents instead of simply “listening to the student voice”; birth of BSSC came about because students came forward and asked for the resources needed to support their success [26:37- 27:11].

Nancy Doubleday: Director, Water Without Borders Graduate Diploma Program; Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy

- Focusing on the cultural component of complex systems is the pathway to transformation [32:44-33:01].
- Effective learning communities should be inclusive, destabilize hierarchies, and operate upon key ground rules [34:03-34:39].
- Need to move away from rigid structures of teaching and learning and think more creatively and openly to encourage student engagement [36:24-37:44].
- Making workflows less energy- and time-intensive to create space in our schedules that is dedicated to forming learning communities, conducting research, etc.; thinking about new configurations of responsibility that can support interdisciplinarity and make learning more holistic [37:44-39:28].

Kyle Ansilio: Educational Developer, Faculty of Engineering; Program Lead, MacChangers

- Important for the university to give students the opportunity to collaborate with people with different educational backgrounds and lived experiences in order to challenge their biases and open up new perspectives [42:20-42:43].
- Traditional methods of evaluating students are efficient but not reflective of how they are expected to perform in the workforce. Co-op placements and a focus on developing soft skills should be baked into the curriculum in order to better equip students beyond graduation [43:34-45:27].
- Collaborating with student partners means making decisions as a team; it is more important to use feedback to deliver material that students can fully engage with rather than to prescribe to a set of predetermined “best practices” [47:25-48:21].
- Students are more likely to give a student partner honest feedback about a course than they are to the instructor directly [48:56-49:25].

Sue McCracken: Associate Dean, DeGroot School of Business

- Students learn at different paces and need different supports at different stages in their learning. Accordingly, programs can allow students the flexibility to fast-track or take extra time to complete their degrees [58:24-58:50].
- Important to consider the reasons that not all students access the extra-curricular and co-curricular opportunities that are available to them and work to address potential barriers [59:45-1:00:39].
- Potential to be more creative in blurring the lines between the curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular in terms of what is required to graduate [1:01:10-1:01:33]. Facilitating a more holistic learning experience could mean allowing involvement in outside projects, case competitions, etc., to count towards a degree [1:06:46-1:07:18].



**BRIGHTER
WORLD**

Referenced Resources:

[Black Student Success Centre](#)