

# Research Summary: Exploring Students' Perceptions of Student-Faculty Partnership (Phase 2)

## Study Rationale

Student-faculty partnership has been defined as “a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants [students and faculty] 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, Bovill, & Felten, 2014, pp.6-7). Given the documented benefits of partnership for both faculty and students (Cook-Sather & Luz, 2015; Marquis et al., 2016; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017), several programs and initiatives have been designed to support such work at colleges and universities. In many cases, however, these programs exist on the ‘fringes’ of academic culture, with only a small number of students participating (Felten et al., 2013; Flint, 2016; Moore-Cherry et al., 2016). At the same time, the perceptions of students who have *not* participated in such programs remain comparatively under-studied, and we thus know little about how they view the relative accessibility of partnership initiatives.

Against this backdrop, and building on a pilot study (Marquis, Jayaratnam, Mishra, & Rybkina, 2018), the present research explored how students at four universities understand partnership and perceive formal partnership opportunities on their campus. In particular, it investigated the following research questions:

- How do students understand the concept of student-faculty partnership? Are there differences in understanding between students who have participated in student-faculty partnership programs and those who have not?
- What factors influence students' interest in participating in partnership programs?
- What barriers prevent students from participating?

## Methodology

- Following ethics clearance, undergraduate and graduate students at four universities with established extracurricular partnership programs were invited to complete an online survey that included multiple choice, ranking, and textual response questions.
- The four universities included a small, liberal arts college in the United States, a mid-sized research-intensive university located in mid-England (UK1), a large research intensive university located in South England (UK2), and a mid-sized research intensive university in Canada.
- Online interviews were also conducted with partnership program directors to help us contextualize the survey data.

## Respondents

- We received 501 responses to the survey (259 from the Canadian institution; 111 from UK1: 114 from UK2, and 17 from the US institution). Of these students, 66 had taken part in the partnership program at their university and 434 had not. One did not specify.

## Key Findings

The survey generated data relating to the following broad themes:

### Understandings of student-faculty partnership

Respondents who had and had not participated in formal partnership programs offered broadly similar understandings of factors that were important to partnership. Highly ranked factors included the following:

- Authentic engagement and commitment on the part of all partners
- Trust
- Openness to diverse experiences and points of view

In contrast, the following features were positioned by respondents as less important to effective student-faculty partnerships

- Sharing of power
- Sense of belonging
- Shared responsibility for outcomes

### Motivations for participating

Amongst respondents who had taken part in their institution's partnership program, the following features were most commonly positioned as motivators of participation:

- Interest in contributing to teaching and learning at their institution
- Interest in the projects involved
- Belief that participating would help meet future academic/career goals

Respondents who had not participated in the programs on their campus frequently indicated the following factors might encourage them to apply for partnership opportunities:

- Financial compensation
- Career advancement opportunities
- Interest in the projects involved

Some minor differences were observed between respondents from different institutions (e.g., 'academic credit' was more commonly selected as a motivator at the Canadian institution than at the UK institutions).

## Barriers to participation

Alongside these motivators of participation, students also noted a range of barriers that make it *harder* for them to participate in student-faculty partnership opportunities. Key barriers included:

- Lack of awareness
- Believing they lack relevant experience
- Being busy with other commitments

Again, some minor differences were observed between respondents from different institutions (e.g., lack of awareness was more prevalent at the Canadian institution than the UK institutions)

## Next Steps

- A manuscript that describes the findings in greater detail is being finalized, and will be submitted for publication shortly. Preliminary findings were also presented at the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education conference in June 2018.
- Program directors will be provided with high-level summary reports of the findings from their institutions, so they can consider the implications of these for their own partnership programs.

## References

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