Pathways to Integrating Student Voice in University Decision-Making Processes

Excerpt taken from:

A Co-creation Approach to Integrating Student Voice in Decision-Making Processes Imagining Student Housing Co-design Project at OCAD University

By Sabrina M. Benoit and Lucy M. Song

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Student Engagement.

Create avenues of meaningful participation for students to become involved in these decision-making processes from the very first day of their student journey (e.g. committee members, policy reviewers, working group members).

Build Relationships.

Develop long-term, sustainable partnerships with students.

- Always compensate students for their time and efforts (e.g. honorariums, extra credits, grocery gift cards, etc.).
- Create accessible materials and onboarding systems/mentorship to understand the bureaucratic nature of the institution (e.g. comprehensible BoG meeting minutes).

Nurture Trust.

Transparent reporting of the challenges the university is facing and where the university needs student support.

- Practice mindful listening and action student input.
- Answer student questions with openness and curiosity to facilitate productive conversations on their inquiry.
- Commit to the process by checking in on the student leaders–trust is built over time.

Recruit Students from the Start.

Include students in every step of the decision-making process, and not merely ask them to review the end product. Model the Double Design Diamond Approach (Design Council, 2003):

- Discovery – include students in understanding the problem.
- Definition – include students in defining the problem.
- Development – include students in developing possible solution(s).

- Delivery – include students in choosing and delivering the solution(s).

Create Channels for Student Connections.

Support students in engaging with their peers and for elected student positions, engaging with the students they represent (i.e. their constituents).

- Provide tools to document, synthesize, and present their observations and findings.
- Connect students to events and opportunities on a university and provincial level.

Resource Sharing.

Utilize the university's resources and privileges to support student initiatives.

- Invest in resources for students who are pursuing projects and research that support the collective student experience.

Endorse Student Hiring.

Hire students with lived experiences before defaulting to third-party contracts who facilitate their own focus groups and market insights.

Invite Students to University Improvement Research.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS) is a comprehensive ethical framework guiding research involving humans in Canada. While it primarily serves to protect participants' rights and welfare, it can sometimes be a barrier to certain research methodologies, including co-design. The university's exemption from REB review could be used to support student co-design research initiatives that support its quality assurance and improvement, citing TCPS Article 2.5.