

Submitted: 15 September 2023  
Accepted: 17 November 2023  
Published online: 2 April, TAPS 2024, 9(2), 101-104  
<https://doi.org/10.29060/TAPS.2024-9-2/CS3140>

# Engaging students to co-design and co-deliver an interprofessional program

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Despite agreement on the importance of Interprofessional education (IPE) for health professional education (HPE), best practice in developing and implementing IPE remains ambiguous. Students are important stakeholders and can be allies in IPE, but much of their potential in the development of curricula remains untapped.

In 2022, the University of Notre Dame, Australia (UNDA) partnered with the University of Tasmania (UTAS) to engage students in the co-design, implementation, and delivery of a program to support the development of interprofessional practice for preclinical medical students from the Doctor of Medicine (MD) and final year paramedicine students. The COVID-19 pandemic was a catalyst to re-imagine different ways of learning and teaching in this area. This paper aims to describe the process of and opportunities for involving students as partners (SaP).

## II. METHODS

Expressions of interest were invited from student cohorts attending a previous iteration of the program. Four student partners across the professions were recruited.

A collaborative workshop provided an initial opportunity for student and staff partnership. The workshop intended to nurture relationships through dialogue and reflection. Student evaluations from previous programs were reviewed and themes were highlighted for discussion.

Opportunities were provided for students and educators from both professions to express individual opinions and perspectives from their own experiences of the program.

The major themes that arose from the student experience were the importance of experiential learning through simulation and the importance of having dedicated time for clinical skills practice. The opportunity to engage in interprofessional education was a consistent theme. Educators and student partners discussed the meaning of “success” in an interprofessional program and whether certain pedagogical models and program design could enhance learner outcomes.

## III. OUTCOMES

Engagement of students occurred in various ways (Figure 1) and resulted in co-developed learning outcomes for an updated Rural Trauma week (RTW), focusing on the assessment and management of the patient, understanding the differing roles of each profession, and the impact of communication and teamwork of interprofessional teams on patient outcomes.

Students co-designed and reviewed the sequence of program elements. The program commenced with building the learner’s knowledge base through online delivery of lectures and pre-reading materials.

Student partners were also involved in the development of learning activities, including case-based discussions.

The case-based discussions intended to provide opportunities for the application and integration of knowledge from the pre-reading and lecture materials. The content was developed alongside an expert clinician, with academic faculty members providing feedback. Students co-facilitated the case-based discussions with an expert faculty partner.

Specific hands-on skills practice was delivered using an interprofessional, near-peer model for facilitation, with final-year paramedicine students acting as tutors for pre-clinical medical students, under the supervision of expert facilitators.

The week culminated in simulation scenarios, with paramedicine and medical students working alongside each other to better understand the role of each profession and the impact of communication on the patient journey as they managed a range of presentations.

Finally, student partners considered approaches for the evaluation of the program, reviewed the evaluation instrument, and suggested how to optimise response rates. Participating students from both professions rated the interprofessional approach used in RTW highly, with the simulation session being rated *Above Average* and *Excellent* by 95% of students. Student partners were similarly positive when reflecting on their experiences.



Figure 1. Opportunities for SaP in IPE

#### IV. DISCUSSION

There is an emerging impact when cultivating learner agency is prime, and meaningful learning relationships between students and staff develop (Matthews, 2018). Students have potential to be partners in learning and teaching in higher education, becoming more than just passive consumers, acting as change agents to help bring about educational transformation (Healey et al., 2014).

The faculties desired to engage students as partners in the reimagination of RTW. Cook-Sather et al. (2014) described student and staff partnership as “a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally but not necessarily in the same ways”. It is a disruptive

cultural shift from institutions making decisions to a more collaborative mindset where staff and students are working in partnership as colleagues and collaborators with shared goals (Matthews, 2018). Students may not be content or pedagogical experts, but their expertise lies in their lived experience of being a student. They understand learner needs and how the learning experience can be enriched. In our case study, one of our medical student partners had worked as a paramedic before studying medicine. His paramedic experience provided unique perspectives to the discussions and planning.

*“As a former paramedic now studying medicine, I have experienced how each side appears mysterious to the other in what they actually do, or how they contribute to*

*the patient. Our attempts in writing these cases have been to broach this gap, which I felt was received very well.*” – Medical Student Partner

Engaging students of both professions in the co-design and delivery of the program also fostered further interprofessional collaboration which is an important step to interprofessional practice. Collaboration between Australian medicine and paramedicine undergraduates is uncommon. Although interprofessional practice is seen to be increasingly important in health care, health systems remain fragmented in the face of increasing complexity. Application of SaP in our example fostered staff-student relationships within a profession, but also between students and staff from other professions leading to an increased sense of interprofessional collaboration.

The use of SaP pedagogy is lacking in inter-institutional and cross-disciplinary initiatives (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). Whilst our case study provides an “outcomes-focused” example of SaP’s application in IPE, translation of theoretical aspects of SaP into an HPE context can benefit from better integration of scholarship from other disciplines where the “process” of SaP has been further developed (Barradell & Bell, 2021).

## V. CONCLUSION

Students can have a powerful influence on shaping health professional education through shared success in preparation for interprofessional practice. Engaging students as partners in the co-design of a cross-institutional, interprofessional education activity was a valuable experience for staff and students. Students can be an important ally in interprofessional education. The ideas of “respect, reciprocity, and shared responsibility” in student partnership will provide a foundation for the same values to be shared in interprofessional practice.

### Notes on Contributors

Dr Claudia Ng is a lecturer in the MD Program at the University of Notre Dame Australia (UNDA) and is currently completing a Masters in Health Professional Education. Claudia co-authored this manuscript and presented at the Asia Pacific Medical Educators Conference in 2023.

Dr Aishah Moore is Co-Head of Curriculum, MD Program at the University of Notre Dame Australia and a General Practitioner. Aishah co-authored this manuscript.

## Acknowledgement

Dr Samuel Bulford is a sessional academic at UNDA and an expert facilitator in the RTW program. Mr David Donato is a lecturer in Paramedicine at UTAS and an expert facilitator in the RTW program. SB and DD contributed to the collaborative workshop. Dr Gisselle Gallego is the Senior Research Fellow at the University of Notre Dame, providing input into research design and analysis of qualitative data arising from the project.

Student Partners, Sidney Flego, Katarina Needham, Matthew Dowsett, and Anthony Salole were involved in the co-design and facilitation of the RTW 2022.

Professor Michael Brydon, UNDA, Associate Professor Andrew Dean, UNDA, and Ms Suzanne Avis oversaw the running of the 2022 RTW program.

The facilitators and staff at Lithgow Clinical School and UTAS Campus were involved in the logistics and running of the program.

## Funding

The project was funded by a UNDA Seed Grant for Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in 2022.

## Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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