
Student-led inclusion: students listening to students' voices in NBS

"It is so important for course teams to involve the students when exploring how to enhance inclusivity in the learning environment and the university experience as a whole."

Area of Focus

The course team and student representatives utilised the CERT mentor and Course Rep structures to ensure BME students and International students feel as integrated into the course and NBS as early as possible.

Context

Students from BME backgrounds comprise over half the cohort; and one third of students on the course are international. A first-year BME course rep, Ra-Venne, had noticed that BME and international students had lower attendance than others, and felt a certain responsibility as a mature, BME student and a newly elected course rep to offer support.

Approach

The Course Leader holds a meet and greet at the beginning of each year, to help the course reps and CERT mentors to get to know each other and the core teaching and support team. She introduces to them the processes and channels by which they will engage in the feedback cycle and asks them to generate thoughts of how to improve the course and the experience as a whole. Reflecting on their first impressions, the students often suggest additional ways to foster a sense of belonging. Ra-Venne came forward at one of these events to suggest ways that he could be helpful in gathering the less-heard student voices. Throughout the year he engaged in conversations with his peers: he then utilised his roles as Course Representative and CERT mentor to work alongside the course teams to address the reasons behind low attendance and engagement.

Interventions

As a course rep for his year group, Ra-Venne made a point of speaking to students who appeared to be participating less than others. After a conversation with a fellow Caribbean student, Ra-Venne was able to discover that he had not completed the weekly assignment due to shift work at his part-time job. Ra-Venne ascertained that holding down one or two jobs whilst at university was not uncommon amongst BME students and has since then been having discussions with the course team to make reasonable adjustments to the timetabling schedule to support work-life balance.

Similarly, Ra-Venne in his role as CERT mentor helped build peer relationships and a sense of belonging among students, for example, helping students to meet and work with peers from different backgrounds. The intention behind this method of small actions is to lay the ground work so that when the CERT mentors move on or graduate, there is a culture of belonging and community within the courses and across NBS.

Impact

The students that Ra-Venne interacted with last year have good attendance rates this year and are now part of a group on social media where ideas and messages are exchanged regularly.

The course team have made small but vital changes to support students with differing needs. A crucial factor has been the course team's determination to take the student voice seriously and collaborate. Ra-Venne's involvement has set a vital precedent which gives student reps the platform and empowerment to contribute to Success for All.

Challenges and next steps

It is always challenging to engage the disengaged. Ra-Venne gives this advice to others who are looking to build a community within course teams: smaller steps can go a long way; rather than creating a big strategy for changing something, it works best if everyone offers a little change which adds up to a bigger impact.

Contact details

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