

Advancing Students
and Education Strategy

Student Ambassador Partnership



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE



Strategy team reflection

When the Office of the Provost team started the development of the *Advancing Students and Education (ASE) Strategy* in early 2022, we wanted to make sure students were partners in this process, and with us every step of the way.

We invited a group of seventeen students to work with our team in the Office of the Provost as part of an innovative new Ambassador program.

The ambassadors actively promoted engagement activities to the wider student community, led consultation with fellow students, supported other all-University activities, and provided their own insights and feedback at every stage of the strategy development process.

Here, they share with you the experience they had in contributing to the strategy development.

We are immensely grateful for our students' insights and input, which have helped to shape the direction of education and the student experience at the University.



Who were our ASE¹ Ambassadors?



In April 2022 our student ambassadors were engaged through the Students@Work team, which coordinates employment for students across the University.

From 54 applications, 17 student ambassadors were appointed.

The ambassadors were trained in peer-led consultation, facilitation and engagement techniques, and event coordination.

Back R-L: Marina Gabra (2nd yr BA), Dorothy Chung (4th yr MEng), Louise Li (4th yr BComm, DLang), Jasika Verma (3rd yr BSc), Elizabeth Robin (2nd yr MEng), Sher Maine Tan (PhD Microbiol)
Front R-L: Omkar Kishor Auti (3rd yr MEng), Calvin Tan (4th yr MEng), Bianca Galvin (1st yr BDes), Jamie Kennedy (BA, Hons), Trevor Wan (1st yr BComm), Patrick Truong (2nd yr MBiotech)
Not pictured: Anila Mahita (2nd yr BBiomed), Vinu Gunetilleke (2nd yr MEng), Kulanthi Salgado (PhD AgriSci), Donna Ferdinando (1st yr BA), Aayush Phillips (3rd yr BComm).

¹ ASE¹ stands for 'Advancing Students and Education'.

Ambassadors led the strategy's student consultation

Ambassadors considered the emerging ideas for the strategy and decided they should focus student consultation on ideas to help students make connections with each other and develop a sense of belonging. They designed and led their own activities to gather student feedback on this issue.



The part of the process I enjoyed the most was getting to understand the issues students face, but also trying to provide solutions to them. We talked a lot about disconnect, but I guess in a way, we are connected by some of the issues we face AND by the passion we have to change them”

— Marina



The design was all developed together with Ambassadors and staff which made it simple for us to understand and fun”

— Patrick



I liked brainstorming ideas that could be implemented in the future, and being able to share all wild, wacky and unrealistic ideas. I love the enthusiasm for progress, change and improvement”

— Bianca

Ambassador events

The ambassadors' events were run as pop-up stands at two Discover Unimelb events:



The ambassadors welcomed students and introduced the ASE Strategy.

Discussion prompts for students included:

"Have you heard about the Advancing Students & Education Strategy?"

"The ASE Strategy is working to improve the university experience for students"

"We are here trying to make things better for students at the University, we have some ideas but we're interested to hear your ideas"

"What if the university grouped you into houses like Ace / Spade / Heart / Diamond? Would that have helped you make friends?"

"Why are we asking about friends? Research shows the more connected you feel, the more likely you are to have a positive university experience"



Students were given two lego pieces to vote on a question asking:

Which of the following would most help you make friends & connections at university?

- Common free time with all students
- Intensive / block subjects
- Immersive cohort experiences
- Being assigned a house group
- More interactive learning experiences

"Use your Lego pieces to build the future of the University of Melbourne student experience!"



Students reflected on two poster board questions:

- "How did you make friends & connections at university, what was most helpful?"
- "What has made you feel disconnected at university?"

"Is there anything else you think we should know?"

Who they spoke to



I enjoyed learning how to interpret and analyse the deeper theme and meaning of someones opinion. For example, they say they hate online classes but being able to connect that with others' opinions to realise that it might be the lack of interaction that makes them feel like they don't belong or there isn't a community at Uni"

— Dorothy



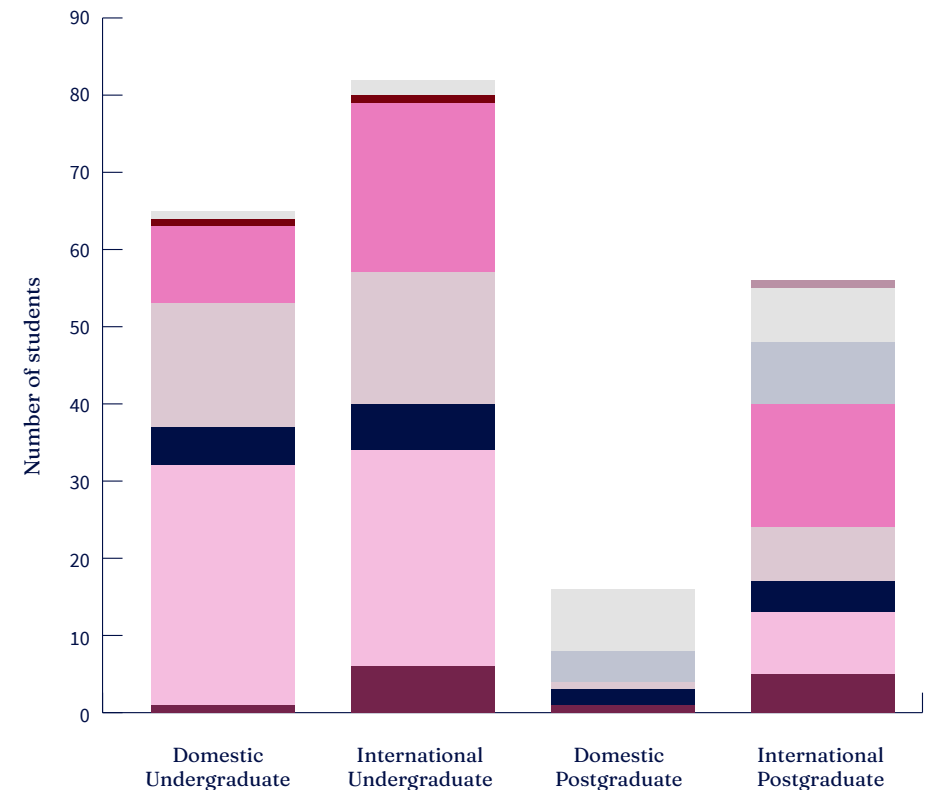
I felt that this was a really great way of getting the opinion of students from different demographics. One thing I learned from the experience was that there is not a one size fits all solution to why a student feels disconnected from the university. Everyone had such widely differing experiences, stemming from different areas of life. In the future I will continue to search for opportunities like this, where I am able to positively contribute to the experiences of other peers"

— Calvin

Students who participated

Faculty

- Architecture, Building and Planning
- Science
- Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences
- Arts
- Business and Economics
- Education
- Fine Arts and Music
- Engineering and Information Technology
- Law



Key findings

- Clubs and societies were really popular for making strong connections
- Students want to talk to people more in person, they want connection and more interactive opportunities

- Online learning was really problematic in providing interactions amongst peers. Academic stress was a driver in creating disconnection, along with a sense of lack of curriculum coordination and communication

- It isn't true that students don't care. They want to be together and want access to opportunities, even if they don't take up each one. Having a number of opportunities will allow the time for students to balance taking advantage of them, alongside their study and other commitments.



I want other students to know that they should get involved. Getting involved allows them to see what is happening but to also be *part of* what is happening. It also broadens their mind, giving them a different perspective to uni life”

– Sher Maine



I would like to encourage other students to participate in such events and programs to boost their confidence while interacting with students and peers. It would also give them the opportunity to bring change in the system and challenge the less explored areas of the system”

– Omkar



I felt like I was given an opportunity to make a real impact on the direction of the University”

– Trevor



It was an eye opening experience to discover how many students share the same concerns and ideas for improvements, the same likes and dislikes. We are not alone in our opinions, desires and needs”

– Bianca

Ambassadors were surprised by the level of engagement from students and the depth of discussions.

They reported that students:

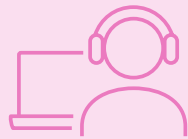
- had lots of opinions about what they wanted and what they cared about
- wanted to know how soon they could expect changes to happen, what could they personally do and what were the ambassadors doing to help?
- Often didn't think that their opinion would have a serious impact.

How ambassadors supported the consultation



Workshops

Ambassadors assisted the facilitator at all of our student and staff expert workshops, and gave their own input too.



Online strategy forums

Ambassadors helped guide and stimulate discussions in each online forum, and provided their own ideas and reflections.



Full day symposium

Ambassadors helped run a full day Evolving the Melbourne Curriculum symposium.

Two ambassadors spoke as part of the *Curriculum Hallmarks* panels on 'What we teach' and 'How we teach'.



I liked getting to know so many other people and contributing my thoughts for a better future student experience”

— Jasika



I most enjoyed speaking on the panel at the Evolving the Melbourne Curriculum Symposium. Getting out there, getting reactions, hearing new ideas and challenging people on old ones”

— Jamie



It was really eye-opening for me to hear from and interact with SASS staff and their concerns regarding clarity of services for academic staff and students. I feel students don't hear about concerns from the staff front enough and it was definitely super insightful to hear the concerns and passionate responses about areas of improvement”

— Louise

How ambassadors supported the consultation



Focus groups

Ambassadors participated in a focus group to test ideas about student services and support



Town hall

Ambassadors supported the town hall, sharing some of their experience of being an Ambassador and their reflections on the themes of the strategy.



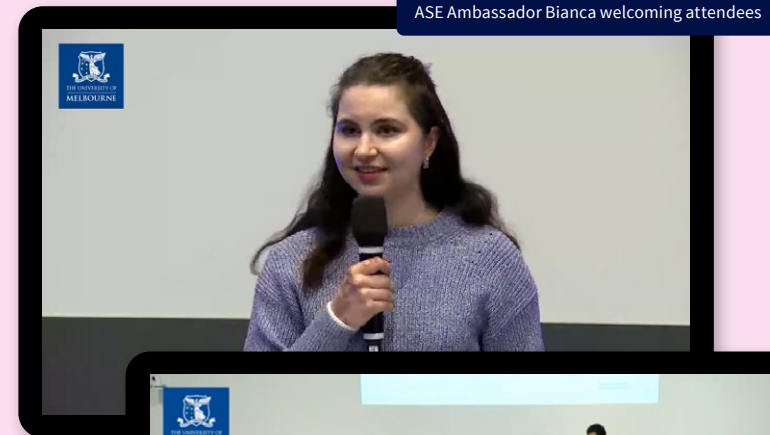
I enjoyed being able to give, and talk about, opinions and hearing everybody else's throughout the process"

— Beth



I do think our participation made a difference to the student input because it was a direct voice and insight into our student experience. What I really appreciated is that in each session, the staff who ran them actually made sure to understand the points we brought up as opposed to paraphrasing them or superseding it with input from the University"

— Marina



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