

# Co-creation on campus – students shaping their own student experience.

Mags Chalecka-Harris,  
Student Life Services, Massey University, New Zealand

## Abstract

*Student engagement is a hard beast to tackle. We wanted to move on from just consulting a small group of students on their experience to co-creating this experience. We wanted to open up new channels to give students opportunity to have a voice in student experience, but also to empower them to shape it. Massey University partnered with Student Association to set up a Campus Co-Lab and the team decided that user-centred methodology would be the most suitable to use in the university setting. The method allowed a diverse range of ideas, from both students and staff, to be proposed and resulted in projects that neither of the partners would have been likely to initiate, but which have enhanced the student experience.*

## Context

Student engagement is a hard beast to tackle. Over the last few years, there has been a shift in how universities are actively engaging students to not only participate and learn in class but also within their university community. Massey University recognised the need for students to have more input into their student experience. In the past, many projects have been initiated to improve students' experience on our campus, and some of them failed due to the lack of buy-in and participation from students. This was not only disheartening, but also not efficient use of our student service resources. We wanted to evolve the traditional way the university manages projects and to capitalise on the strengths of all the students and staff. We strived to move on from just consulting a small group of students on their experience to co-creating this experience with them, and to be able to not only see their engagement, but also provide them with the sense of ownership of their campus. By doing this, students would create the university community in the way that suits them. We wanted to open up other channels to give students opportunity to have a voice in student experience, but also to empower them to shape their student experience.

## Conceptual framework

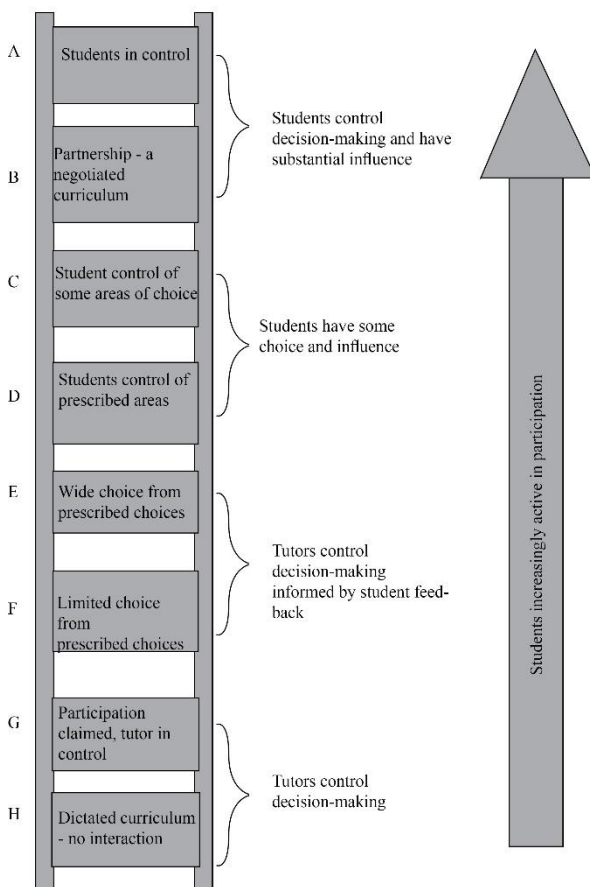
Students are becoming more and more pulled towards co-creating and co-designing of not only their learning but also their student experience (Collis and Moonen, 2005; ESU, 2008; McCulloch, 2009). Encouragement is given to students to transform from a passive to an active student, who is more engaged and involved with their university, takes an active part in shaping

his/her own university experience (Bovill and Bulley, 2011) and is becoming an active citizen with a potential to change his/her community (Wilkinson and Scandrett, 2003).

*Ladder of participation*

Arnstein (1969) designed a model of citizen participation, which includes eight levels of participation where citizens might place themselves when engaging with their communities. Bovill and Bulley (2011) have adapted this model to make it more relevant to the university environment and student involvement.

**Figure 1: Ladder of student participation in curriculum design**



Bovill and Bulley (2011)

Even though this model applies to teaching methods in the classroom, it can be easily applied to what student services do. Levels A and B are especially of interest in this context. They indicate that students can have control of decision-making process and are encouraged to influence the projects and operation of student services. Level B shows that we can work collaboratively with students and staff to let the projects that relate to student experience happen. This way students have a strong voice and are participants in the projects where their input is valued equally to the input of staff. Level A is where our university initiative - Campus Co-Lab - aspires to be, allowing students/staff to drive the projects, and facilitating and mentoring them along the way.

### *Development of a co-creation methodology*

A team of around fifteen staff and students developed Campus Co-Lab collaboratively over the course of 2015/2016. The team was initially tasked with creating something that helped students voice their opinions and influence Massey projects. The team realised that students wanted more than another consultation technique, they wanted something that would allow them to implement their own projects, which would enhance their student experience. Secondly, for staff and students to co-create, open sourcing the student experience so that everyone, especially the students, were empowered to create their own Massey. The team also wanted to implement something, which would allow students to develop their skills, and utilise the knowledge they have gained while studying at university.

The team decided that user-centred design methodology (Abrams, Maloney-Krichmar, & Preece, 2004) was the most suitable to use in our university setting. The process focuses on the end user, and involves users at every step of the process in order to develop product that best suits their needs.

### *Development of the Campus Co-Lab philosophy and the process*

Campus Co-Lab is a process that students and staff can use to bring and implement their ideas to enhance the student experience on the Wellington Campus.

The philosophy is that students are involved in all steps of the process. Those steps might include initiating the idea, brainstorming, creating a quick cheap prototype, gathering feedback and implementation. The process is iterative and might require several feedback cycles before the final product is launched. Campus Co-Lab works on the principle that no idea is a bad idea and the idea fits within our scope it will be given an opportunity to be developed. The idea initiator is encouraged to bring other collaborators to work on the project, whether for the whole project, or just specific tasks. Campus Co-Lab provides a facilitator, who ensures that the project stays on track, and also brings knowledge of the campus operations. The facilitator guides project leaders and collaborators through the idea development process based on user-centred design principles, with particular focus on the needs of the user, iterative development and starting with affordable small-scale trials. Because of the iterative nature of this process, the initial idea might evolve into something that hadn't been thought of previously, which is why the input from other collaborators and constant feedback are important.

### *Development of Campus Co-Lab space*

One of the tools for facilitating the process and enabling the principles of Campus Co-Lab to spread widely was the establishment of a physical space. To create a space, in a bold move the Student Association co-located with some Student Services in a large open plan office. The group includes staff from Career and Employability, Campus Recreation, Student Life, Chaplaincy and the Student Association's manager, clubs, events and advocacy staff. Student Association's executive members still have a separate office to ensure their autonomy. This co-location almost immediately created new collaborations.

### **Outcomes of Campus Co-Lab projects**

Campus Co-Lab approach was soft launched in the Semester 2, 2016 and it is only in the past year that we have been able to observe the full cycle of academic year and students' involvement in Campus Co-Lab projects. Since its beginnings eighteen projects went through at least the research part of the Campus Co-Lab process with seven projects having been completed or ready to leave the nest. In keeping with the philosophy, all projects had students involved but not all ended up student led. The method allowed a diverse range of ideas, from

both students and staff, to be proposed and resulted in projects that neither of the partners would have been likely to initiate, but which have enhanced the student experience.

### *Diversity of projects*

Projects that were submitted to the Campus Co-Lab have been very diversified. The examples include: a *Te Reo Speaking Group*, a *Fruit and Veg Co-op* – where students have access to affordable fresh fruit and vegetables right on the campus’ door step, the *Wā Collective* – where students can purchase menstrual cups at a subsidised price, just to name a few. Such a broad range of projects carried different sets of challenges and a cookie cutter approach to each project was not appropriate.

### *Embedding projects in the existing university structure*

For projects to be completed successfully they not only need to have a buy-in from students but also ability to be incorporated into “business as usual” or spin off as their own entity. *Bikes on Campus* found its place in the Massey Wellington gym; our university café is selling keep cups, a move that was initiated by the *No Throw* project; the *Wā Collective* has become its own non-for-profit business and is collaborating with the Student Association to provide a high demand product. A key finding for us and pivotal to the success of Campus Co-Lab projects is to find a “home” for them within the university at a relatively early stage of the process.

### *Students develop their skills*

Students not only learn about the user-centred design process but also actively use/develop skills implementing components of this e.g. managing a team, how to lead a project, time management. This is consistent with the university’s focus to provide students with opportunities to hone their graduate attributes - enterprise skills, exercising leadership, self-management, digital literacy and community engagement.

### *Unexpected outcomes*

- The biggest surprise to the Campus Co-Lab team was how other departments adopted our philosophy. Many now incorporate co-creation within what they do, involve students more and seek our expertise. Our main café collaborated with students over its look and feel as part of a revamp, the library sourced student feedback in an iterative way when it started hiring out device chargers, the student engagement forum is being run in a more participatory way – these are just few examples of how things have changed on our campus.
- We found students are willing to engage with Campus Co-Lab, however not always in the way we anticipated. It appears students are more comfortable in participating in component of the project, rather than the whole project and usually are not inclined to lead the project themselves. This might be in part to students being time poor, but also may reflect feeling overwhelmed by how projects are more complex than they anticipated, and also some risk aversion about not succeeding in seeing a project right through.

### **Where to now?**

- Campus Co-Lab is continuously evolving and is a project in and of itself. We are in the process of reflection and gathering feedback from students about their understanding of Campus Co-Lab as well as their potential entry points of their engagement with us. Creating discrete entry in points in a project will allow more students to participate.
- Because there is interest from other campuses at Massey to incorporate our co-creation principles and set up other co-labs, we are testing whether our process is scalable and transferable.
- We are exploring ways to collaborate with the incoming Student Association executive team each year, and how to encourage them to use Campus Co-Lab as a mechanism to solicit student voice.
- The Campus Co-Lab team is looking at upskilling ourselves in sprint design and lean product design, so that we can deliver projects faster to fit better with the university cycle, and to create the quick prototypes in a more efficient way.
- A discussion is under way as to whether the team could become facilitators for other departments of the university to co-create ideas and/or generate the conversations that would allow non-tokenistic student voice to be heard.

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