

Advice for Embarking on or Enhancing Students as Co-Creators in your SLCE Work

Everybody

Know that where we are is “real,” is our community, which we are shaping and being shaped by. Let’s agree to stop talking about the “real world” as somewhere and somewhen other than right here and right now.

Pay attention to and when needed change our language when it enshrines non-co-creative identities and systems. Students are not “just students”; academic titles can evoke hierarchy; being and doing “with” generally invites co-creation whereas doing “for” and “helping those in need” generally shuts it down.

Extend grace to ourselves and to one another as we undertake the challenging journey toward ever-deeper co-creation.

Students

Don’t assume you are not welcome (e.g., at a conference, as a co-author). Start with the assumption that you are and find people who agree with you. We think you will find many SLCE practitioner-scholars who are looking for co- relationships.

You don’t have to wait for a role to be created or for an invitation to the table. Take the initiative in proposing new ideas, creating leadership opportunities, reaching out to faculty/staff and community partners, calling the questions that need to be asked, and giving voice to a vision.

Be entrepreneurial in looking for funding to support your co-creative efforts and for outlets to share your learning. Make connections with your academic studies whenever you can. Seek out undergraduate research grants and check out the student-only *Undergraduate Journal of Service Learning and Community-Based Research* (as well as other SLCE journals, including *Partnerships*, the *Journal of Applied Learning in Higher Education*, and the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*). Take a look at the SLCE Future Directions Project (www.slce-fdp.org), which actively seeks the thinking of anyone and everyone interested in SLCE as a contribution to shaping the future of SLCE.

Clayton, P. H., & Stout, A. (2017). Students as co-creators of SLCE, supplement. Elon, NC: Center for Engaged Learning, Elon University.

Community members

Consider how student leaders might help deepen your partnerships with faculty/staff, organize the work of SLCE students, support the coming together of multiple organizations, etc. Approach students who volunteer or work with you in other ways to talk about how they might collaborate with you to connect your organization with SLCE on one or more campuses.

Keep in mind that, in your interactions with faculty and academic institutions more generally, you are modeling for students how to co-create: how to claim power and voice, how to work across different organizational cultures, how to say “yes” responsibly and “no” when appropriate, how to hold not only yourself but also others accountable, how to find your way through conflict, etc. They are watching. And they likely have something to teach you and faculty/staff along these lines as well, so be sure to watch them too.

Students as co-creators means that the co-inquiry at the heart of democratic approaches to learning and change involves them as well as you and your colleagues and faculty and staff. Establish and hold open spaces for them to inquire with you and help them understand the central role of inquiry in change processes.

SLCE programs

Spend some time with the program examples shared in *Students as Colleagues*. Let yourself be inspired (but not limited) by them and think well beyond logistical tasks such as driving the vans, taking notes in meetings, or staffing the front desk as you imagine possibilities for student co-creation of SLCE.

Don't think you have to be able to pay students to serve as co-creators in order to go down this path. In fact, whether you have such funding or not, consider (sincerely!) framing their work not as employment but rather as opportunities to provide leadership, to develop as leaders, to contribute scholarship, etc.

Co-design and co-facilitate with students (indeed, all partners) opportunities for professional development and capacity building related to coming together as co-creators.

Faculty / Staff

Don't underestimate what students can bring to all aspects of your shared work. Be open to developing new ways of working with them, and embrace both the joy and the challenges that will come.

Be authentic in collaborating with students as co-creators. Don't give in to the temptation to “use” them to “do the SLCE part of the course” or the parts of a research project you are least interested in.

Consider developing Independent Study or other credit-bearing / academic structures for co-creation with students as a way to frame these relationships in intellectual not (primarily or only) logistical terms.