

Pedagogical Partnerships

A HOW-TO GUIDE

for Faculty, Students, and Academic Developers
in Higher Education

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HOW MIGHT YOU MANAGE THE CHALLENGES OF PARTNERSHIP?

We have focused in the majority of this text on the promises and possibilities of pedagogical partnership, but it is also important to name and address the challenges we and others have encountered. In this chapter, we identify the most common challenges to developing pedagogical partnership. These include managing everyone's complex schedules and lives, differentiating teaching assistants and student partners, considering diversity of identities and roles, acknowledging and managing the emotional labor involved in partnership, and what to do if something challenging happens.

What are the most common challenges to developing pedagogical partnership?

Bovill et al. (2016) identified three complex and overlapping challenges to engaging in pedagogical partnership: resistance to co-creation of learning and teaching; navigating institutional structures, practices, and norms; and establishing an inclusive approach. We summarize each of these challenges here.

There are many forces that can prompt resistance to change and innovation, the first challenge to developing pedagogical partnership, and the forms of change and innovation that pedagogical partnership require can be particularly challenging. Among the forces that work against embracing pedagogical partnership are faculty members' own experiences as students, the expectations of current students, and inherited practices from colleagues (Hughes and Barrie 2010). Two factors in particular that "determine innovation resistance are habit toward an existing practice and perceived risks associated with the innovation"

(Sheth and Stellner 1979, 1). Custom and common practices alongside “the perceived personal and institutional risks of redefining traditional [faculty]–student roles and relationships inform the challenges [faculty] and students experience in co-creating learning and teaching” (Bovill et al. 2016, 199).

Faculty are often concerned about finding time for pedagogical partnership work on top of already heavy workloads. They may wonder how students can contribute meaningfully to designing learning and teaching when those students do not have subject or pedagogical expertise (a concern shared by many students). And they might wonder whether or not students should have a voice in elements of learning such as assessment. Students also have worries about what they bring to partnership, how much emotional and intellectual labor, and time, are required, and how to navigate the complexities of the role that can lead to resistance, including why they should step out of their (often comfortable) traditional role in order to engage in co-creation and how they as students will benefit from this different approach.

Paul Trowler and Ali Cooper (2002, 229, 230) note that faculty assumptions regarding the “nature of students in higher education (including their abilities and preferences)” and “what is, and is not, appropriate practice in teaching and learning situations” can influence their receptivity to innovation. Lynley Deaker, Sarah J. Stein, and Dorothy Spiller (2016) point to the tendency of faculty to resist forms of professionalization that they may experience as oppressive (see also Quinn 2012). Endeavoring to understand the potential sources of both faculty resistance (Ntem and Cook-Sather 2018) and student resistance (Keeney-Kennicutt, Gunersel, and Simpson 2008) can help address those resistances. As Kelly Matthews (2019, 4) suggests, we can welcome questions about partnership that might seem like resistance as an opportunity to engage in a “shared thinking process that brings new people into the partnership conversation as we think together about supporting, growing, and sustaining genuine partnership praxis.”

A second common challenge to developing pedagogical partnership is how to work within and in some cases against institutional structures. While some institutions seek innovative change, others may adhere to

institutional structures, practices, and norms that are in tension with co-creating learning and teaching. Partnership challenges “existing assumptions and norms about working and learning in higher education, and offers possibilities for thinking and acting differently by embracing the challenges as problems to grapple with and learn from” (Healey, Flint, and Harrington 2014, 56). As Bovill et al. (2016, 200) argue, “Even at institutions where teaching is a high priority, an orientation towards co-creation may be novel since it falls outside traditional views of student and [faculty] roles.”

Similarly, many of the expectations and practices structured into institutions do not accommodate partnership, either conceptually or literally. As Beth Marquis, Associate Director (Research) at the Paul R. MacPherson Institute for Leadership, Innovation and Excellence in Teaching at McMaster University in Canada, notes:

“ I’ve heard people raise questions about how partnership fits with established institutional practices—everything from the need to have pre-established learning outcomes on a syllabus through to documentation for career progress (e.g., we have a spot for “supervision” on our forms, but co-curricular partnership doesn’t really fit anywhere and thus has to be squeezed in/left off). The notion of students as co-inquirers also isn’t really clearly reflected in things like ethics forms or grant processes. (Personal communication)

Rigid role boundaries are an additional institutional structure that can pose a challenge that can make it difficult not only to embrace partnership approaches but also to develop “more nuanced and complex conceptions of identity that go beyond the dichotomous ‘student/staff’ binary” (Mercer-Mapstone, Marquis, and McConnell 2018, 18). The questions we pose in chapter 2 are intended to help with navigating that challenge.

A final challenge Bovill et al. (2016, 203) identified is “how to strike a balance between inclusion and selection (Felten et al. 2013).” In most cases, although there are exceptions, faculty are typically the ones who

invite students into pedagogical partnership. As Bovill et al. (2016, 203) argue, “This raises difficult questions of how they determine whom they will invite and which students have the capacity to contribute.” We discuss this in some detail in chapter 7, focused on curriculum-based pedagogical partnerships, but it is a theme throughout the book, especially as the literature on equity-focused pedagogical partnerships expands (Cook-Sather 2019b; Cook-Sather and Agu 2013; de Bie et al. 2019; Marquis et al., under review; Gibson and Cook-Sather, forthcoming; Marquis et al. 2018b).

How might you manage everyone’s complex schedules and lives?

This is by far the most difficult logistical challenge of pedagogical partnership. Finding literal meeting times and making the emotional as well as intellectual space for pedagogical partnership work requires planning and flexibility and a capacity to sit with complexity and uncertainty.

What is the best way to approach scheduling?

Scheduling is always complicated, and when you are working with complex faculty, student, and program director schedules in which you are trying to integrate a new set of activities, it is even more complicated. A practical way of managing this logistical challenge is to plan as far in advance as you can, knowing that some shifts may be necessary once terms get underway.

In the SaLT program, Alison endeavors to match student and faculty partners who plan to engage in classroom-focused partnerships in the semester prior to the onset of their partnership work. In chapter 5 and in the [“Inviting Faculty and Students to Participate in Pedagogical Partnership”](#) resource, we include examples of messages to send to prospective faculty partners to try to get a sense of who might participate. Once program directors have a sense of faculty partners, typically fifteen to twenty per semester in the SaLT program but smaller at some places and potentially much larger at other institutions, they can reach out to invite student partners so they have the right number of participants and can have all partners matched, at least provisionally, before any

given semester begins. For the most part, faculty working with students in curriculum-focused pedagogical partnerships do their own selection and scheduling with only two, three, or, at most, four or five people involved, if they are outside of class, and everyone involved if they are within classes.

It is often the case, though, that a last-minute course change undoes all that planning, or a faculty member might decide at the last minute that they want to participate, and that's where the flexibility has to come in. Alison also endeavors to plan the weekly meetings with student partners during the summer or over winter break, but last-minute schedule changes often necessitate rescheduling these meetings once the term is underway. Also, because of the number of student partners per term and the complexity of everyone's schedules, as well as Alison's desire to ensure that all student partners have sufficient time and space to speak during meetings, she typically schedules three or four separate meetings per week. She attends all the meetings, but student partners attend only one meeting per week.

How might you think about time?

Time is at the root of the scheduling challenge. But time is not a simple quantity. As Cook-Sather, Bovill, and Felten (2014) noted, one of the questions faculty most frequently pose about pedagogical partnership goes something like this: "I have enough to do already without having to set up all these meetings with students; wouldn't it be quicker to do this on my own?" We reproduce in the box below the response we generally offer to this question:

"It depends on how you think about time. People typically find time for the things they consider most important. Working with students as partners in the design or revision of a course probably takes more time than doing these alone. However, time investments up front can pay off later as students take a more active role in the learning process (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009), and working in partnership with students rather than working against them actually saves time as students assume more responsibility for

the learning, as well as sometimes the teaching, that happens in a class. The time you spend creating and building partnership that enhances student engagement and accountability is time you save later on: repeating or clarifying when students don't understand; reviewing with students during office hours; responding to drafts of student work; and coping with the frustrations of teaching disengaged students."

—Cook-Sather, Bovill, and Felten 2014, 17

Time spent in pedagogical partnership working through curricular and pedagogical questions can not only save time later in the ways described above, it can also be a source of energy and inspiration that makes time *feel* different. If all participants conceptualize and contribute to facilitation of pedagogical partnership in the ways we discussed in chapter 4, the “[Ways of Thinking about Listening](#)” resource, and the “[Ways of Conceptualizing Feedback](#)” resource, focusing in particular on listening, affirmation, and constructive feedback, all the time spent not only on pedagogical partnership but on all aspects of work can feel more fulfilling.

Should you insist on differentiating teaching assistants and student partners?

This will depend on your context. Berea College has considered this question deeply, because of their unique structure, and their discernment process is useful to everyone. Leslie Ortquist-Ahrens, director of Berea's pedagogical partnership program, explains how they thought through this question:

Each year between 150-200 students serve as teaching assistants, learning assistants, or tutors for their labor positions at Berea College. As my colleague, Anne Bruder, and I puzzled about how to pilot a pedagogical partnership program, we decided to start with those faculty members who were already assigned teaching assistants, most of them in a first-year writing sequence taught by faculty from across the disciplines with a TA unlikely to be in their

field. To do so would ensure that each faculty member and each student had a partner, and it would guarantee that their schedules would line up (one of the biggest challenges otherwise) so that students could observe at least one class a week. In the pilot for the program, all pairs consisted of faculty members and their assigned or chosen TAs.

While this arrangement satisfied most participants—in fact, many found it gave them new and exciting ways to work well with one another—we, as program co-facilitators, did have some qualms. A first set of concerns involved what were inherently complex role definitions and power relationships. Navigating the dual roles TAs/student partners inhabited proved challenging at moments for a few, and it became important for partners to name their current mode or role very intentionally as they engaged in one aspect of the work (e.g., serving as a teaching assistant) vs. another (serving as a partner). Students wondered aloud with their faculty partners, if they should be serving as the TA or as the partner at various moments in class or in dialogue with one another, and, for a few, this was distracting. Other partners found the movement between roles unproblematic and fluid. For most faculty participants, the relationship established with a student partner who was also a teaching assistant provided insight into how to build a better and more productive relationship with any teaching assistant in the future. In fact, we have heard this insight echoed again and again, whether or not a faculty member has worked with a partner who was a TA or not.

A second area of concern for us involved the power dynamics in play for students who had complex and ongoing relationships with faculty partners as their TAs (who would be evaluated in that role, though not in the student partner role) or as those few students in the faculty member's field who might take a course from the faculty member in the future. Students wondered together in the group meetings whether sharing something with a faculty partner that was hard to hear might negatively affect an evaluation in the future. To date, participants have not reported problems around

these power dynamics in practice, but we are remaining vigilant, and we call faculty-TA partners' attention to the potential challenge they could face and encourage ongoing open dialogue.

But another major area of concern that emerged as we sought to use a pre-existing teaching assistant program to structure student-faculty partnerships was even greater than these. Because many, many faculty members don't have a TA or tutor assigned to work with them, they would never be able to participate in a promising and rich experience, unless we were able to develop a way for students to participate without being TAs. This challenge led us to reassess how we might establish partnerships for faculty and students who weren't already in a working relationship. A course promised to allow for broader access to the program for both those with and without faculty/TA relationships.

—Leslie Ortquist-Ahrens, director of the
Center for Teaching and Learning and
director of faculty development at
Berea College, United States
(personal communication)

Berea College's structure is rare, and it is unlikely that many institutions will have exactly the same challenges, but the questions Leslie raises are ones everyone should consider. For instance, navigating the dual roles of TA and student partner might be smooth and fluid for some students, as has been the case at Berea thus far, or it might put students in very difficult and even detrimental positions, if they and their faculty partners are unable to develop a productive partnership dynamic. A student in the latter situation who plans to major in that discipline could feel vulnerable and even decide not to pursue a degree in that major, which would be a very unfortunate and even damaging outcome of pedagogical partnership.

A related problem is that, since many TAs do grading, having the same person in the role of TA and student partner might unintentionally reproduce the power dynamic and hesitation to share candid feedback that students enrolled in the class can experience with professors. In

contrast, a student partner with no “stake” or evaluative role in the course can work in a liminal space with faculty to share their learning process and feedback.

An additional concern is that, very often, students who are selected as TAs in a course are those who have succeeded in that coursework in the past (understandably so—a student who never quite understood a major threshold concept in the field would probably not make the best support for their peers struggling with this same threshold). But it can be extremely valuable to work in pedagogical partnership with those students who do not feel confident in the discipline, or who have struggled through their academics, because they may more clearly be able to identify challenging moments in the class and notice peers who face those same struggles.

A further consideration is whether the insights of a student familiar with the content, and in fact playing a role in helping students learn it, will be able to offer the perspective of someone distant from or unfamiliar with the content. As we have mentioned, the vast majority of faculty partners in the SaLT program have found it useful to have student partners not in their disciplines. Those who have not found this arrangement useful have tended to be looking for content-focused rather than pedagogy-focused conversations. The exception, of course, is in advanced courses and in curriculum-focused partnerships. At McMaster University, enough faculty members have found working with students in their disciplines to be beneficial that the Student Partners Program offers faculty the choice of whether they would prefer a student partner in their discipline or one from outside the discipline.

In addition to scheduling and time, what about energy?

Planning for the emotional and intellectual demands of partnership is a less obvious dimension of this work, but no less real. A number of years ago, a new faculty member who participated in the SaLT program said that she found participating in pedagogical partnership some of the most stimulating intellectual work she had undertaken. Having the opportunity to analyze her pedagogical practice was deeply invigorating for her and has been so for many faculty.

While many faculty are energized by the work, some find the anticipation of it, and sometimes the work itself, stressful and exhausting. The same is true for student partners, who regularly report that this is some of the most demanding intellectual and emotional—and the most meaningful—work that they undertake as undergraduates, but that it can also be intellectually and emotionally draining. Marquis, Black, and Healey (2017, 727) found that exhaustion was a theme in their research as well. As one student put it: “on an interpersonal level the partnerships can be a little taxing when you are confronted with like direct conflict . . . or you’re working with someone who doesn’t really want to change.”

It is helpful for everyone involved in pedagogical partnership work to remind themselves and one another that the intensity of the work is temporary, and the goal is to generate a set of insights and approaches that can be developed over time, not all at once. Being reminded that an experience is bounded often helps people generate energy and focus. Taking regular opportunities to reflect, too, as we discuss in chapters 4 and 5, can help participants gain perspective and feel re-energized.

What considerations might you take into account regarding diversity of identities and roles?

Pedagogical partnership intentionally and radically complicates traditional roles and relationships (Cook-Sather 2001), and in so doing, it both throws institutional and wider social identities into relief and calls for the forging of new identities (Mercer-Mapstone, Marquis, and McConnell 2018). Part of the complexity in all of this is that people who might seem the most likely to take on partnership roles might actually reinforce some of the traditional identities and relationships structured by institutions of higher education. Likewise, those who take on partnership roles are likely to have multiple identities, roles, and relationships that might overlap and even be in conflict with one another. Finally, once partners forge particular pedagogical relationships, they may be loath to expand those to include others. We discuss these considerations below.

How do you get a diversity of student partners, not just the “best” students/frequent flyer students whose voices are already represented or attended to?

Often when Alison listens to colleagues talk about developing a pedagogical partnership program, she hears a familiar refrain: Let’s start with those students already in leadership positions. This is an understandable impulse. Students in those roles already have some experience working within the institutional structures in roles other than “only student,” they may have developed some capacity and language for talking with faculty and administrators, and they have demonstrated investment. The problem is that they may also be the people whose voices are always heard, who have access already, whom institutions of higher education were designed to serve, and who have figured out how to navigate and succeed in higher education.

In chapter 5 and in the [“Inviting Faculty and Students to Participate in Pedagogical Partnership”](#) resource we discuss how program directors might invite prospective student partners or respond to their requests to participate. The first point we make is about how the SaLT program got started: through focus groups and other discussions that included traditionally underrepresented and underserved students and focused on how to support the development of more inclusive and responsive classrooms. This kind of framing from the outset, similar to what Smith College did (in identifying a commitment to designing a support structure through which their faculty members and student consultants could engage in pedagogical partnerships around bias interrupters and inclusive curricular development) or what Florida Gulf Coast University did (in focusing on the potential of pedagogical to foster belonging for students and faculty) sends a strong message that the pedagogical partnership program will invite and value a diversity of voices.

In addition, when asking faculty for recommendations for student partners, it is important to be clear about the explicit and implicit goals of the program—e.g., to facilitate dialogue across differences of identity, position, and perspective (Cook-Sather 2015); to develop a more inclusive learning environment (Smith College); to foster a sense of belonging (Florida Gulf Coast University); to create multiple initiatives through

which students and faculty co-create teaching and learning—so that those recommending student partners think about a diversity of students to recommend. The sample messages inviting faculty to recommend student partners for participation in pedagogical partnership included in chapter 5 and in the “[Inviting Faculty and Students to Participate in Pedagogical Partnership](#)” resource offer examples of language that can signal clearly to faculty what particular partnership programs emphasize.

It is also useful to be aware of students’ perceptions of facilitators and barriers to seeking out partnership opportunities. Students in a study conducted by Beth Marquis, Ajitha Jayaratnam, Anamika Mishra, and Ksenia Rybkina (2018) identified the following facilitators of becoming involved in pedagogical partnership work: flexible program structure, perceived approachability of faculty partners, previous experience, and established networks. Barriers to participating that students identified included: lack of time available to dedicate to partnerships, perceived ineligibility for and competitiveness of positions, and lack of awareness of student-faculty partnerships. Marquis et al. (2018b, 76) recommend that those who facilitate pedagogical partnership programs find ways “to take into account the variable levels of confidence that students might have had a chance to develop as a result of their experiences and social locations.” Program directors, faculty partners, and student partners can all give these factors consideration and develop approaches for encouraging students who might not otherwise feel inclined or qualified to participate.

Finally, we recommend that you ask student partners for recommendations, particularly for students whose voices are not generally heard. Students will not only have perspectives on who those people might be in their particular institutions but will also benefit from the opportunity to give that question careful consideration or reconsideration in the context of pedagogical partnership.


What might you do about peer relationships between student partners and students enrolled in classes?

Complex, multiple relationships are likely if not inevitable at small institutions but can happen anywhere. As we mentioned in chapter 5, we

emphasize in the SaLT program the importance of students keeping their faculty partners' confidence while also offering to share student feedback anonymously with faculty partners. Here we expand on the challenge of maintaining professionalism, friendship, and transparency.

When student and faculty partners meet to establish the goals and parameters of their work, as discussed in chapter 4, as well as in chapter 6 for classroom-focused pedagogical partnerships, they need to be clear on what role the student partner will play in the class—how actively involved they will be, in what ways, if any, they will interact directly with students enrolled in the class, etc. These initial agreements will frame any interactions student partners have with students enrolled in the course. If the faculty partner feels strongly that the student partner should be in dialogue only with them and not with students enrolled in the course, it might be helpful for the student partner to proactively explain that to any peers or friends who are in the class, indicating that their pedagogical partnership is with the faculty member, and while they can listen to and share anonymous feedback from their friends, they cannot be in conversation with their friends about what faculty partners say. If faculty partners are comfortable with more communication between the student partner and students enrolled in the course, then the proactive approach is to make that clear and explicit.

In any case, faculty partners need to be aware that this is a challenging aspect of pedagogical partnership for student partners, especially in residential educational institutions, where students spend their lives sharing space, food, time, sleep—where they are always together. Likewise, student partners need to develop a heightened awareness to ensure that they are not unduly influenced by what their friends might have to say. This complexity can be an ongoing topic of conversation between faculty and student partners, and it is an issue that program directors will want to address in the regular meetings of student partners. Sophia Abbot, former student partner in SaLT and former fellow for collaborative programs, the Collaborative for Learning and Teaching at Trinity University, Texas, describes how she navigated this complexity:



I navigated this somewhat myself, and then navigated it even more when I was in classes with faculty with whom I'd partnered and found myself still translating the goals of my professor to my peers and working as an advocate between the professor and students. It's a role that's hard to escape and especially complicated by the small school setting, which means one may interact with one's faculty partner (past or present) in many different roles and relationships. (Personal communication)

What are the benefits and drawbacks of staying in the same partnership over time (i.e., for more than one semester)?

Many faculty who work with a student partner for one semester want to continue with that same student partner in the next or in a subsequent semester. There are both benefits and drawbacks to this approach.

The benefits are that faculty have developed a rapport with the student partner, the student partner has learned about their faculty partner's pedagogical commitments and goals, and the partners therefore have a foundation on which to build. There is a sense of trust, empathy, and safety, and there is not the need to start over, build a new foundation, and invest the emotional labor that a new partnership demands. For student partners, staying in the same partnership builds a sense of empowerment and expansion. They can contextualize any new pedagogical issues that arise and see growth and change over time that they can feel excited to support and affirm, and they can build on the foundation they have established to work on different aspects of teaching.

The drawback of this approach is that neither faculty nor student partners have the opportunity to gain a different perspective, and variety is part of professional development for both partners. The faculty partner does not have the opportunity to learn from a different student's perspective, and the student partner does not have the opportunity to see different disciplines, teaching styles, and classroom dynamics. Particularly if student partners are hoping to continue in education, they do not have the opportunity to think about all of this diversity in relation to their own pedagogical commitments and aspirations.

Therefore, we recommend that faculty and student partners consider what the greatest benefit will be of continuing a partnership or starting afresh. They can discuss this question with other faculty and student partners, with the program director, and, of course, between themselves.

What kinds of emotional labor are involved in partnership?

Most students and faculty embarking on pedagogical partnership are focused on the intellectual and professional labor that will be required. However, pedagogical partnerships involve both anticipated and unexpected emotional labor on the part of faculty partners, student partners, and program directors. Acknowledging this from the start makes experiencing and carrying the weight of that engagement less surprising and more manageable.

What kind of emotional labor might faculty partners experience?

The emotional labor faculty partners experience depends on many variables and can evolve and shift over the course of partnerships. Prior to and when first embarking on partnership, faculty partners might experience a kind of anticipatory anxiety and disorientation. For instance, as we mentioned before, some faculty in the SaLT program talk about having a sense of “anxious expectancy of classroom observation as a (real or perceived) form of benevolent surveillance” (Reckson 2014, 1) and experiencing “the disconcerting presence in the classroom of a student consultant” as an “unnerving conjunction of counselor, coach, and court stenographer” (Rudy 2014, 2). Faculty partners might feel uncertain, vulnerable, and self-conscious at the thought of a student sitting in their classes to observe the teaching and learning and talking with them about their pedagogical or curricular practices. Reflecting back on the start of her partnership, a faculty partner in SaLT wrote: “Before I began meeting with my consultant, I have to admit that the prospect of opening my classroom to the critique of another was intimidating. I felt vulnerable and more self-conscious about my teaching than I ever have before” (Conner 2012, 8).

These are understandable feelings. Faculty rarely emerge from “pedagogical solitude” (Shulman 2004) and even more rarely (unless they are in

the field of education) talk in deep and extended ways with students about teaching and learning. Furthermore, most visits to a faculty member's classroom are for some form of evaluation, so it is difficult not to carry that expectation over to pedagogical partnership and student partner observations. Until faculty and student partners establish frames, modes, and rhythms for classroom visits and weekly meetings, as we discuss in chapters 6 and 7, faculty partners may feel all of what participants in the SaLT program describe above and more.


Once faculty partners do get to know their student partners, though, and learn how to work together, they will likely find, like the majority of faculty members in SaLT and other programs, that they experience a shift from investing emotional labor to benefitting from emotional support. The faculty partner quoted above, who felt disconcerted by his student partner's presence, came to experience his student partner as "an inside/outside character in the class, a liminal and unexpected figure foreign to traditional teaching and central to raising pedagogical awareness" (Rudy 2014, 5). Instead of continuing to feel anxious about being under surveillance, the faculty partner quoted above who worried about being monitored found that her student partner "offered observation without judgment—a rare gift—and along with it, a sense of camaraderie and shared purpose" (Reckson 2014, 1). And finally, the faculty member who had felt vulnerable and self-conscious found that she moved to a place where "the sole feeling that washes over me is gratitude" (Conner 2012, 8). While most faculty experience this shift, not all do, and program directors, student partners, and faculty themselves should be prepared for a range of responses to the emotional challenge of this work.

In addition, the emotional labor faculty partners might experience will vary depending on the nature of the course or the pedagogical issues upon which they focus. Is it a course they have taught many times and about which they feel relatively confident? Is it an entirely new course about which they already feel overwhelmed and uncertain? Is it an elective within which they have a fair amount of freedom, or is it a required course in a sequence upon which other faculty depend? Are they concentrating on aligning assessment with pedagogical approaches, or are they focusing on what pedagogical approaches make their classroom more

inclusive and responsive to traditionally underrepresented and underserved students? All of these will contribute to the sense of emotional labor that faculty need to invest in and through the partnership.


As we discuss in chapter 6 and in the “**Gathering Feedback**” resource, it can be particularly challenging to hear student perspectives through midterm feedback. It is important that the faculty partner prepare for this and that student partners consider how best to support their faculty partners and help interpret student feedback. One of the reasons this process is so emotionally charged is that students are rarely asked to offer feedback and so they can have a lot of pent-up feelings. An important lesson to take from this, and a way to help mitigate the intensity of the focused feedback offered at the midterm moment, is to have more opportunities for feedback scattered throughout the term, as we discuss in chapter 6 and the “**Gathering Feedback**” resource.

The emotional labor of pedagogical partnership will also vary for faculty partners, as everything does, not only based on the nature of their work with their student partners but also on the ways that various aspects of their identities intersect with the values and norms of their field, their institution, their department, and individuals on their campus, including their student partners. Faculty partners of color in particular have talked about the emotional labor in which they must engage in so many arenas, most intensively, typically, in supporting students of color. Working in partnership can be a relief. One faculty partner in the SaLT program, a woman of color, who taught courses in the humanities that enrolled a majority of students of color, explained that for her students “to see my consultants, who were both students of color, come in and to know that students of color can be authorities in the classroom, was incredibly transforming and powerful for the students who were actually participating in the class.” Working with these student partners of color, this faculty member felt able to share the emotional weight she felt, and she voiced her relief at recognizing that she “can share the responsibility for what happens in the classroom with students . . . [and she need not] be the only voice speaking” (quoted in Cook-Sather and Agu 2013, 279). A faculty member in the natural sciences described her work with her student partner, also a person of color, in similar terms:



[My relationship with my student partner] supported the “bravery” needed to question the traditional boundaries of what is discussed in an undergraduate physics class. Whereas many humanities classes can encourage critique of which authors are included or excluded from a syllabus and why, or how societal factors influence the construction of a canon, the self-view of physics as a linear accumulation of objectively-necessary skills, and of success in physics as based solely on aptitude in these skills, can restrict discussion of social issues in the classroom. (Perez 2016, 2)

However, not all faculty of color experience partnership this way. A student partner, also a person of color, reflected:



New POC faculty have trouble letting go of their perceived all-encompassing control. My partner had very specific ideas about how she wanted everything to go, which led to inflexibility. I think sometimes new faculty insecurities get the best of them and lead them to a very defensive/resistant attitude. (Quoted in Ntem and Cook-Sather 2018, 89)

The emotional trajectory from anxiety and vulnerability to greater comfort, confidence, and gratitude, and the variation in kind and intensity of emotional energy invested that depends on interactions of identities, can be further complicated by pedagogical disagreements, destabilizing feedback from students enrolled in the course, or other challenges that arise. For instance, one faculty partner described the frustration she felt and the emotional effort it required “to disentangle my consultant’s interpretations of the classroom from her observations.” Although this was initially exhausting and frustrating, the emotional effort this faculty member invested yielded “many useful and unexpected lessons” (Anonymous 2014, 1). This is certainly the potential payoff of emotional investment.

Indeed, once faculty learn to work with their student partners, the vast majority describe feeling that they can share the emotional weight of teaching with their student partners. In the words of one faculty partner in the SaLT program: “Just talking to someone every week really energized me to fully commit to my own teaching goals and made me think about how I can do better at what I am doing and what kind of identity as a teacher I want to develop” (Oh 2014, 1). Nevertheless, the emotional labor will feel different for each faculty member, and we urge student partners and program directors to keep this in mind.

What kind of emotional labor might student partners experience?

Faculty partners’ sense of being able to share the emotional weight of teaching with their student partners is mirrored in student partners’ descriptions of carrying that weight. If we had to identify one experience that is most unexpected among student partners, it is this experience of the emotional labor required for the role. Many students seek out the role because they are interested in teaching and learning or because they want a meaningful, well-compensated job on campus. Virtually none of them realizes ahead of time how much emotional labor will be involved.

For many student partners, the emotional labor will begin, like faculty partners’, with a sense of uncertainty and anticipation regarding this new role and how to do it “right.” Reflecting on her work, one student partner in the SaLT program wrote: “When I participated in the student consultant orientation before embarking on my journey of partnerships, I listed one of my apprehensions regarding participating in partnerships as *using the wrong words or tone to communicate with my faculty partner*” (Mathrani 2018, 2). The deep respect for faculty and high levels of awareness the vast majority of student partners bring to this work contribute to their capacity as student partners and contribute, as well, to the emotional labor involved in doing the partnership work.

Another aspect of the emotional labor for student partners is related to self-confidence and sense of capacity. The role of student partner itself, with its insistence on student knowledge, capacity, and agency, is so anomalous and unfamiliar for most people that it takes some time

to adjust emotionally as well as intellectually. Another student partner in the SaLT program wrote: “My faculty partner was incredibly knowledgeable in her field and I felt a little intimidated. What did I have to offer?” (Alter 2012, 1). Students in every institution for which Alison has consulted, whether small liberal arts institutions or large state schools, have expressed this uncertainty and have felt a huge emotional weight lifted when they are reminded that they are in the role *because* they are students as well as people with a wide range of lived experiences and insights to share.

Student partners will have these and other worries—about approaching their partners in the best way, about what they have to offer, and more. We recommend that student partners try to keep in mind that the emotional labor they invest in attending to these important questions, while potentially draining at first, can become energizing as they experience themselves growing into the role. We also recommend that they remember to affirm their efforts and achievements early and often, and that their program director offer such affirmation, too. Their faculty partners may not be as consistent in doing so, although many are, not because they do not value their student partner’s efforts but rather because they are managing their own emotionally demanding process.

The emotional labor continues as student partners grow into the shift in role and responsibilities that being a student partner requires. At their first meeting with their faculty partners, they will need to tune their attention to the faculty partner’s level of comfort, receptivity, flexibility, and more and to develop or refine ways of engaging that are at once respectful of the faculty partner as a person and a professional and productively challenging. Student partners cannot decide those things for themselves; they have to figure them out in relationship with their faculty partner. One student partner, Amaka Eze, describes this process in an excerpt from an essay she wrote about her four different partnership experiences:

“In my first partnership, the professor with whom I was paired focused in her research and teaching on areas that are of interest and importance to me, too. However, this professor did not find

the approach to classroom observation typically employed by SaLT student consultants to be a good fit for her needs. At first I found this unexpected challenge disorienting, as I had been prepared to follow the guidelines offered to student consultants to help me navigate my first partnership. But after my first week of in-class observation, the professor asked me to change my note-taking style to better fit her classroom comfort.

While I don't purport to understand the complexities of professorship, I can empathize with the kinds of anxieties that might surface as one enters into a new teaching environment, intensified by being observed by a student consultant. To avoid undermining the development of trust and the miscommunications that can arise when people feel vulnerable, I came back with a new system for observational notes that focused entirely on the kinds of thematic pillars that emerged from class time, as opposed to any direct commentary on her teaching strategies. I re-focused my attention, drawing on the same attentiveness but representing what I saw differently, so that it was more directly linked to my faculty partner's pedagogical commitments.

The approach I developed emerged only after a series of difficult conversations between Alison, director of the SaLT program, and the professor with whom I was working, and me. I had to revisit my expectations regarding the best way to reflect the classroom environment and dynamics back to my faculty partner, and it was important that I find a way to do that through which I could continue to try to build trust with her. Through listening carefully to how she spoke about her pedagogical goals and looking for examples in class that appeared to be supporting students' pursuit of those goals, I was able to focus my observations in a way that felt more manageable to my faculty partner and thereby allowed us to focus on analyzing how she could continue to create structures for the kind of student engagement she hoped for."

—Amaka Eze, student consultant in SaLT
(Eze 2019, 1-2)

Student partners will need to think, throughout their partnership, about what they feel very strongly about and want to persist in finding ways to address with their faculty partners and what, for their own health and well-being, they might need to let go. As one student partner in SaLT explained: “I have learned to let things go (for my own sanity) and also the beauty of re-adjustment. [My faculty partner and I] spent weeks reframing our relationship/what she wanted me to do for her, which has resulted in a much more fruitful partnership” (quoted in Ntem and Cook-Sather 2018, 88).

Another catalyst for emotional labor is the insight student partners will gain into what happens “behind the scenes”—how hard faculty work, the kinds of pressures they are under, the way institutions can function to dehumanize. This glimpse behind the scenes may, as it has done for student partners in the SaLT program and other programs like it, cause student partners to feel greater empathy for faculty—another kind of emotional investment they might not anticipate. Student partners can feel overwhelmed, frustrated, indignant, and a desire to be helpful on their faculty partner’s behalf. They might find themselves becoming “faculty advocates,” as one student partner in the SaLT program put it, who feel compelled to stand up for as well as support faculty. This impulse and the capacity to act on it can carry over into relationships beyond the pedagogical partnerships, as Yeidaly Mejia (2019) describes in an essay she wrote about how the skills she developed as a student partner equipped her to address a complex set of issues in a course in which she was enrolled.

There is also emotional labor in handling the way in which partnership contrasts other experiences. As student partner Alise de Bie (de Bie and Raaper 2019) writes:

“My most positive experiences of partnership have also been the most devastating because they created a stark and significant discrepancy: There was now a wider and more visible and felt gap between my typical experiences of harm on campus (and within the medical system) and the possibility—arrived at through partnership—that

things didn't have to be that way and could, very feasibly and concretely, be different.

This contrast has been noted by other student partners in a variety of ways (see Cook-Sather and Alter 2011, for instance), and it also requires attention and processing. In her blog post (de Bie and Raaper 2019), de Bie raises an important set of questions from which the above excerpt is drawn and which can inform such processing.

Like faculty partners of color, student partners of color have described the particular emotional labor they experience. If a student partner is a person of color working with a faculty member who is white, they may experience one kind of emotional labor. One student partner in the SaLT program, a person of color, explained: "Many people, faculty included, are unused to checking their privileged identities regularly. When student partners ask this of them it can be overwhelming and again lead to defensiveness" (quoted in Ntem and Cook-Sather 2018, 89). That defensiveness requires, in turn, more emotional labor from students. Another student partner in SaLT, also a person of color, reflected:

“We've seen in the consultant meetings how emotionally vulnerable some of my peers are willing to be in our partnerships in order to think about justice [and] racial or gender equality. It's very moving to see my peers give themselves so much, give so much of themselves in their partnerships to make professors understand, to give professors perspective on their experience. (Student partner quoted in Ntem and Cook-Sather 2018, 92)

Students of color working with faculty members of color might find that the emotional labor takes a different form. Student partners might not have realized the extent and intensity of the demands on faculty of color, whose reaction to them might be like that of the faculty member quoted above who found solace and support in her student partners of color and realized she need not be the only voice speaking to issues of equity and inclusion. On the other hand, student partners might encounter unexpected forms of resistance from their faculty partners that result

from discrepancies between their sense of the responsibilities of faculty of color and the sense those faculty members have themselves of the appropriate amount of time and energy to invest.

It is essential that student partners never feel that they need to do this emotional work alone. Consider creating a buddy system whereby experienced student partners are paired with newer student partners or two new student partners are paired to provide regular support and a confidential space within which to confer. One of the most important functions of the regular student partner meetings is to get support from other student partners and the director of the program. Student partners should never hesitate to share what they experience, wonder about, worry about, and want to celebrate. No struggle and equally no accomplishment is too big or too small for this forum. In many partnership programs, faculty, staff, or student facilitators of these weekly meetings ask student partners to respond to prompts that make space for student partners to capture, reflect on, and process their emotions and thoughts. If student partners find themselves needing such space, they can suggest a prompt to whoever is facilitating the meetings. Likely as not other student partners will need, and certainly they will benefit from, the creation of such space for reflection and processing. One SaLT student partner reflects on her experience of emotional labor and the importance of naming, affirming, and compensating it:

“ [Working in partnership makes] invisible things visible. I know I have been doing a lot of emotional labor here since the beginning, I know that, I will name that, but it’s usually been unrecognized institutionally. . . . [Partnership] makes that work visible. It’s paid. And then discussing it in the weekly meetings and feeling like we are all doing this work. So we’re being affirmed in doing this work for the institution and also for each other. (Student partner quoted in Cook-Sather 2018b, 927)

It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the emotional demands of partnership, but one of the key functions of the weekly student partner meetings

is to help reframe everything that happens as a learning experience that prepares student partners not only for professional life but for life, period. It is these reframings and reminders, current and former student partners reiterate, that make the emotional labor required for this work manageable (Eze 2019; Mejia 2019).

What kind of emotional labor might program directors experience?

The vast majority of the emotional labor for program directors takes the form of supporting student partners and faculty partners. As the faculty and student partners with whom program directors work will experience the emotional labor described above and other forms, program directors will need to be present to and supportive of them. Program directors are the people who see more than one side of the partnership work: the student side through the weekly meetings with student partners, the faculty and staff side through whatever interaction program directors might have with them, their own experiences as a faculty or staff member, and the institutional perspective regarding what implications individual partnerships and this work collectively can have.

The most regular demand on program directors' emotional energy—and equally the most energizing aspect of this work—will be the weekly meetings with student partners. It requires deep, genuine attention to support their partnership work, and while it can sometimes feel like being present in that way requires more energy than program directors themselves have, if they think of those meetings as times for sharing responsibility—one of the premises of partnership—even the most demanding, difficult meetings can become energizing and strengthening.

Occasionally, a misunderstanding or some kind of tension may arise between student and faculty partners. As we discussed in chapter 5, it is important that faculty and students know that program directors are there to support them and help mediate any difficult situations that arise. In her role as director, Alison has occasionally met with faculty and student pairs together, or with faculty and student partners separately, to talk through these misunderstandings and tensions. In the majority of cases, revisiting the premises of pedagogical partnership, affirming

each person's perspective, and helping them better understand the other's perspective will help partners get back on track.

The most energy-depleting experience program directors may have is when a faculty or student partner does not experience the program director's efforts as genuine or successful, and does not trust or believe them for whatever reason, no matter how hard they might work to create such trust; the program director may feel that they cannot find a way to reach that person. In these situations it is essential that program directors have trusted colleagues to talk to about the emotional drain of these dynamics. If they try to carry the emotional weight alone, it is likely to enervate them and eclipse the rest of their work. It has certainly been the case for Alison that when a single person or partnership is struggling, it is difficult to keep in mind that the others are doing wonderfully well.

Finally, program directors may experience the emotional labor of working to create, sustain, or grow a program that may be countercultural in their institutional contexts and that may have to compete for resources. Because pedagogical partnership work is human, relational work, there is virtually no aspect of it that does not require negotiation. Furthermore, because by design, as well as by default, pedagogical partnership often exists in liminal spaces, the lack of stability, a source of freedom and flexibility on the one hand, can also create a sense of unmooredness (Ahmad and Cook-Sather 2018). In regard to this form of emotional labor it is helpful to be in dialogue with other directors or people who can serve in the role of consultant, as Alison does for numerous institutions. Alison and her colleague, Arshad Ahmad, reflect on their choice to take on this emotional labor:



The sense of responsibility that prompted us to risk embracing leadership of teaching and learning institutes committed to pedagogical partnerships among students, faculty, and staff . . . [informs] our stories. . . . [We hope these] reveal a deeper understanding of risk and uncertainty as they intersect with responsibility in relation to the professional choices we have made to help us better navigate in forging new and more widespread

pedagogical partnerships. (Ahmad and Cook-Sather 2018, 2)

What should you do if something challenging happens?

Because pedagogical partnerships require intense and demanding emotional as well as intellectual work, there are likely to be moments of tension, challenge, miscommunication, or other stress. This is not only because the partnership work itself is intensive but also because when the perspectives of students and teachers are brought into dialogue around issues of teaching and learning, rather than kept largely separate from one another and focused on content from their respective angles, and when people endeavor to work across differences of identity, position, and perspective (Cook-Sather 2015), issues arise that otherwise might have remained invisible or unnamed. As Floyd Cheung, director of the Sherrerd Center for Teaching and Learning and the pedagogical partnership program at Smith College suggests, “Properly handled and with a little luck, confronting concerns via the partnership model might address some problems that may never have come to light in any other way” (personal communication).

The first thing to do when challenges arise is to remind those involved to return to the basic principles that underpin partnership and to remind them that pedagogical partnership is first and foremost a relationship, that all relationships need intentional work to make them functional, and that tensions or challenges usually have their origin in some assumption or misinterpretation or some gap in communication. Virtually any challenge, if left unaddressed, can fester and undermine confidence, trust, productivity, and the potential of pedagogical partnership. When addressed as a learning opportunity, however, virtually any challenge can contribute to realizing the goal of pedagogical partnership: to facilitate dialogue across positions and perspectives that deepens understanding in all directions and helps make teaching and learning as engaging, effective, and inclusive as they can be.

If faculty or student partners experience a challenge or some form of discomfort in relation to pedagogical partnership work that feels sensitive

and especially vulnerable-making for that person or for the other person or people in the partnership, we recommend that they address it first in confidence with the program director. If there are personal, ethical, or legal implications beyond the scope of the partnership program, the program director needs to be made aware of those and manage them through the proper institutional and legal channels. For less dire but nonetheless tricky situations, the program director may have a sense of larger context or particular complexities with any given faculty member, student, class, or department.

While the general recommendations above apply to both faculty and student partners, we offer some more specific scenarios below to help you think about what such processes might look like.

What might faculty partners do if something challenging happens?

The majority of challenges that faculty partners have experienced have had to do with clashes of expectations between them and the students enrolled in their courses or between them and their student partners. Clashes of expectations between faculty and the students enrolled in their courses are often surfaced or made explicit because the pedagogical partnership encourages forms of analysis, feedback, and dialogue that might not unfold otherwise.

One such challenge is brought into relief by the presence of the student partner. Sometimes students in a course approach a student partner with concerns rather than going directly to the faculty member. Even if a faculty member has indicated a desire for such mediation, they can sometimes change their minds or grow concerned about this. If faculty partners encounter such a challenge, we recommend that they have a candid conversation with both their student partner and with their class to clarify hopes and expectations. Such a challenge, while it might first appear to be a problem, might actually turn out to be a useful occasion to make hopes and expectations, and reasons behind them, more explicit to students.

A second example of a challenge some faculty partners experience concerns the observation process and the accompanying notes. We

mention in chapter 1 that a common assumption faculty partners make is that they will be under surveillance by their student partners, and the observation notes can either dispel or exacerbate that fear. Upon receiving their first set of notes, some faculty partners can feel relief and excitement at the focus and the useful detail offered. Others can feel overwhelmed by the detail and even more vulnerable. It is up to faculty partners to decide and convey what form, kind, and extent of notes are most helpful to them. We encourage faculty partners to give the detailed, time-stamped descriptions and analyses a try, but if such notes are too overwhelming or otherwise not useful, faculty partners can agree with their student partners on another approach, such as short reflections on the key pedagogical issues the faculty partner identifies.

A final example of a challenge that some faculty partners experience is a disagreement between themselves and their student partners regarding pedagogical practice. These can arise around personal or disciplinary commitments and can cause tension. One faculty partner describes her experience of such a conflict:

“From the beginning of our partnership, I realized that my consultant’s view of the ideal classroom differed from my own. I was indeed getting a new perspective, but I wasn’t sure how well the consultant’s perspective mirrored the experience and expectations of other students in my classroom. As a student of education, my consultant was bursting with ideas for how to run a classroom. The ideal classroom that she described involved a spirited and free-flowing discussion, punctuated by activities that further fueled student engagement. My classroom, in contrast, was punctuated by periods of silence as my students struggled to digest difficult material before offering a contribution to the discussion. How to interpret these silences and their implication for the classroom experience became a point of contention between me and my consultant. What my consultant interpreted as confusion and disengagement, a problem in need of a solution, I interpreted as a necessary part of learning philosophy. Where my consultant saw confusion, I saw students slowly beginning to master the

material, improving in both reading comprehension and in their ability to raise effective criticisms. At first I found it frustrating attempting to disentangle my consultant's interpretations of the classroom from her observations. In spite of this initial frustration, my consultant and I worked together to find ways to make our partnership productive, and I gained many useful and unexpected lessons through the process. Perhaps the most useful insight concerned the role of silence.”

—Anonymous 2014, 1

A challenge such as this, born of a pedagogical disagreement, can also become a source for learning and growth, as this faculty member makes clear, but only if faculty engage with the challenge or disagreement in a productive way (Abbot and Cook-Sather, under review).

All of these examples illustrate the importance of clarifying assumptions and commitments. Any one of them could have devolved into a greater challenge because of lack of communication and clarification. But when faculty partners remain engaged and work to clarify, the outcomes are productive.


What might student partners do if something challenging happens?

It is common for student partners to have a concern about a faculty partner's pedagogical practice. We recommend that student partners bring these concerns to the weekly, confidential meetings with the program director and other student partners, where they can get a sense of whether the reaction is a personal, individual one or whether others share the concern. Either way, student partners can work with the group on how to address the concern in a respectful and productive way with their faculty partner or, if it seems better for the partnership and the students enrolled in the course, they may choose not to address it and think about how to turn the struggle they are having with the practice into a learning experience for themselves. Many student partners have found this process to affirm their concerns and equip them with language

and confidence to address them, and just as many have realized that their concerns stemmed from assumptions they were making or lack of understanding of the professor's or others' perspectives, and get just as much from that experience. For instance, one student partner felt strongly that her faculty partner should be looking for more opportunities for students to participate in discussion until she realized that she was imposing her own preferred way of learning on others. We include her explanation of this realization:

“ I had always known that there were different kinds of learners and that different students had different learning styles. But there was always some part of me that believed my way of learning—through discussions—was superior. As I stepped back and analyzed this belief, I realized I had assumed that people who didn't speak frequently in class were perhaps the slightest bit lazy or the slightest bit dull. . . . After analyzing . . . mid-semester feedback from [my faculty partner's] class and realizing the assumptions I had been making, I no longer thought my quieter classmates were lazy or less motivated and no longer did I worry they weren't getting enough out of their college education. Instead, I began to realize that their classroom experiences and desires were just as valid as mine, and it was that “aha” moment that forced me to stop thinking about my role as “identifying opportunities for discussion” and see it instead as an opportunity for “seeing moments of learning.” (Gulley 2014, 2)

Another form student partners' concerns can take is when a faculty member appears to be engaging in a pedagogical practice that the student partner worries is detrimental to students for other reasons, such as causing discomfort or intellectual and emotional harm to students already underserved by higher education. Another student partner explains such a scenario:



During one of the weekly meetings . . . [my faculty partner] shared an idea he had for a class he was planning to teach next semester: that he wanted to start the class with a very difficult assignment to show the students they had a lot to learn. However, he said he did not want to tell the students the assignment was intentionally difficult. I thought this lack of transparency was not ideal in the classroom, and I believed professors should always be transparent with their students. I did not talk about why I believed this—partly because I wasn't sure, I just felt it—I just told him I believed so. After talking about this uncomfortable conversation in my weekly student consultant meeting, I figured out why I felt this idea was not ideal for the classroom. The next time I met my faculty partner I told him I had thought about our previous conversation and the reason I did not agree with his idea was that making an intentionally difficult assignment would disproportionately hurt students from marginalized backgrounds. Students who are questioning their place in a natural science classroom will immediately be discouraged if they are not given any reason for such a difficult assignment. When I framed my belief this way, with a clear reason behind it, my faculty partner immediately changed his focus and began to think about his practice differently. (Mathrani 2018, 5)

In both these cases, student partners had a strong feeling or belief and experienced a challenge because that feeling came into conflict with a faculty partner's practice. Both worked through those concerns, with their faculty partners and with support in the weekly meeting of the program director and student partners, and both were able to find ways of managing the challenge that respected everyone involved.

A third challenge that student partners might face is when their faculty partner asks them to take on responsibilities outside the parameters of the partnership. This can be completing the readings for a course,

for instance, or making copies or some other administrative but not pedagogical or curricular task. It can also include doing extra research or writing with and for the faculty partner that were not part of the agreed upon set of responsibilities the faculty and student partners discussed at the outset of the partnership or as it unfolded. If a student partner feels that a faculty partner is asking such things, they can begin by trying to address the concern directly with the faculty partner. If that does not resolve the issue, the student partner should consult with the program director, who can either offer advice for how to address the issue with the faculty partner or talk with the faculty partner directly.


Other challenges may emerge in other contexts and with different groups of participants. The ways to address them generally have qualities in common, however: reflect and communicate, rather than make assumptions and try to manage the challenges alone.

What might program directors do if something challenging happens?

Program directors will find themselves mediating the kinds of challenges described above. Most important is that they try to get a sense of each partner's perspective and experience and support both. Because most of these challenges emerge as a result of some assumption or misinterpretation or some gap in communication, the program director's primary role is to clarify different perspectives and to support communication. This can include meeting or talking with student or faculty partners separately or mediating a conversation between them. In either case we recommend framing the challenge as an opportunity for deeper understanding of differences—of perspective, of experience, of goal—and deriving greater insight from the differences to take forward into future learning and teaching encounters.

While the majority of challenges program directors manage will be of the kind described above, less often, but occasionally, they may experience faculty partners questioning or rejecting the premises and practices of the pedagogical partnership program. In these cases, the first step is to try to negotiate directly with the faculty members involved. If this does not work, it is important that program directors also seek support from

trusted colleagues and, if there are programmatic or institutional implications, from senior administrators. Alison and her colleagues, Cathy Bovill and Peter Felten, addressed this issue, and we reproduce their advice:



How should participants and facilitators manage the intersection of different perspectives and the disagreements that can arise at those intersections?

Welcome them. Listen carefully to them. Learn from them. We are used to having differences and disagreements divide us, but a key goal of student-faculty partnerships is to elicit contrasting perspectives and then to use those to foster deeper understanding and clarify or expand practice. (Cook-Sather, Bovill, and Felten 2014, 181)

Can partnerships fail?

When supporting colleagues and institutions in developing pedagogical partnerships, Alison often gets asked what happens when partnerships fail. From our perspective, a partnership can only fail if you don't show up and don't engage. Otherwise, virtually anything that happens can offer insight that can inform teaching and learning.

In order to turn whatever happens into a learning experience, it might be necessary to seek the support of the program director or others. Sometimes moments of miscommunication or vulnerability can feel like failure, but if they are addressed, they can be turned into insights. As Anita and Alison discuss in relation to resistances and resiliencies that student partners have experienced, what begins as self-doubt and a sense of having failed can turn into a clearer sense of what needs to be addressed and revised to allow learning to happen (Ntem and Cook-Sather 2018).

References related to managing the challenges of partnership are included in the [“Selected Reading Lists”](#) resource.

YOUR TURN

What are the most common challenges to developing pedagogical partnership?

How might you manage everyone's complex schedules and lives?

Should you insist on differentiating teaching assistants and student partners?

What considerations might you take into account regarding diversity of identities and roles?

We note the various kinds of emotional labor involved in partnership. Which of these do you anticipate in your context, and are there other kinds you can imagine?

What should you do if something challenging happens?