



ENGAGING STUDENTS IN QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES

A project of the COED Curriculum Working Group

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INTRODUCTION

This project report is the result of a project investigating ways in which current Ontario students and alumni are engaged in quality assurance (QA) processes across the post-secondary institutions developed from a Curriculum Working Group Meeting of the Council of Ontario Educational Developers (COED). As college and university provincial QA systems matured, we noted a growing awareness of the importance of having a diversity of voices informing and supporting these systems. The resulting exploration focused on student engagement in cyclical program review processes and on enhancing these opportunities.

Key functions of the cyclical review of post-secondary programs are to assure quality for accountability purposes and to encourage program development. To address these functions, the review involves collecting and analyzing data from multiple sources, drawing conclusions, and developing plans for future development. Since the only source of information involving a holistic, integrated experience of the program overall is the students enrolled—they represent an essential component of the review process.

Students are well positioned to articulate their perceptions and expectations of the program, and can confirm if these are successfully understood, developed and realized. For example, a program name or area of focus may be misinterpreted by incoming students, who can readily communicate this mismatch to facilitate improved accuracy in student recruitment and program promotion. Only students can communicate the *experienced* curriculum of the program. This includes feedback on sequencing within the program curriculum, possible overlap and/or redundancy in content, and how the experience of the various components are experienced as an integrated whole. Students can provide early warning and insights into issues of concern, and offer constructive and inventive suggestions to solve problems within the program, and to provide feedback that can improve course content and sequencing, not necessarily imagined by program instructors.

Ontario university and college programs have been required to undertake QA processes for decades. However, with increasingly mobile students and faculty, as well as concerns about the quality and transferability of credentials and expertise internationally, QA requirements continue to evolve and become more alike across jurisdictions. QA processes have shifted focus from primarily cataloging metrics such as resources and throughput of students, to a focus on program outcomes for graduates and society with multiple indicators to monitor program quality. This fundamental shift requires input from an increasing number of sources and continues to evolve locally and internationally.

Each public college and university in Ontario is responsible for the quality of its own programs, and establishes internal policies and procedures to address provincial requirements resulting in a variety of

approaches to implementation across institutions. The diversity of these practices and the perceived effectiveness of these approaches across Ontario has not been compiled, and forms the objective for this project. The project equally sought to create a resource for the Ontario community on strong student engagement practices that could be shared within the college and university sectors, as well as with external QA organizations.

This project aimed to:

- Identify the most common ways students are currently engaged in QA processes across Ontario, so that it may be possible to evaluate the sufficiency and efficacy of these modes of engagement.
- Discuss the challenges or barriers institutions report experiencing in engaging students more meaningfully.
- Identify and compare practices across institutions included in the research project.
- Generate ideas and share a set of recommendations for advancing meaningful student engagement back to the Ontario educational development and QA communities.

In the following sections, we first briefly describe our project methodology and share the findings of the research. Next, we extrapolate these findings to connect with literature on student engagement in QA. In so doing, we place a particular focus on the spectrum of engagement and factors of influence that contribute to the institutional perceptions and culture around student perspectives. We conclude by offering a set of suggested guidelines for practice in engaging students in these processes, and some implications for further inquiry.

METHODOLOGY

Data collection for the project took place in two phases. In phase one, an environmental scan was conducted in the form of a survey to identify practices currently in use across Ontario to collect student feedback. Phase two followed up with semi-structured interviews for in-depth information.

The following research questions guided our efforts:

- In what ways are institutions currently engaging students and alumni in their QA practices? Which of these methods are perceived to be most effective, and why?
- How do institutions attempt to capture a diversity of student voices?
- How is student feedback provided through these processes responded to or followed up on?

- What strong institution-specific practices have been developed that could be shared and emulated or replicated?

Once survey questions were agreed upon (see Appendix A), and Research Ethics Board approval granted through all of the four project members' institutions. The survey was then distributed in September–October 2018 through several email listservs to engage our target audience, which were staff sufficiently familiar with their institution's QA practices to provide a representative viewpoint. The information sought required detailed knowledge of practices across programs within a specific public college or university. The listservs selected were of interest to a specialized population of primarily QA staff, educational developers, and curriculum developers involved in promoting effective teaching, curriculum, and QA often with direct involvement. The information sought required detailed knowledge of practices across programs within a specific college or university. Distribution channels included the Heads of Quality Management, Curriculum Developers' Affinity Group, College Degree Operating Group, and Council of Ontario Educational Developers listservs. The aim was to have one representative response from each college and university in Ontario.

We limited the scope of our outreach to colleges and universities within Ontario, in recognition of the distinct governing bodies, regulations, and practices operating across the country. Focusing the analysis of provincial practices was also consistent with our original goal of sharing the results back to the COED community from which the project originated.

Upon completing the survey, respondents were asked if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up phone interview for the second phase of the project. Semi-structured follow-up interviews were conducted during the spring of 2019 by project members, in order to probe more deeply into the institutional practices to engage students in QA identified in the survey (interview questions presented in Appendix B).

In addition to trying to learn more about these practices, the questions included additional prompts, for example, why specific practices had been identified as most effective, who or what drove student engagement at their institution, what barriers to student engagement had been observed, and whether or not the respondent felt that the current level of student engagement at their institution was sufficient.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The survey was distributed through various Ontario college and university listservs that we knew would connect us to our target audience, which were individuals sufficiently involved in an organization's QA processes to be able to identify commonly used practices and methods at that institution. The majority of the respondents (55%) had roles directly related to QA at their institutions, and all demonstrated

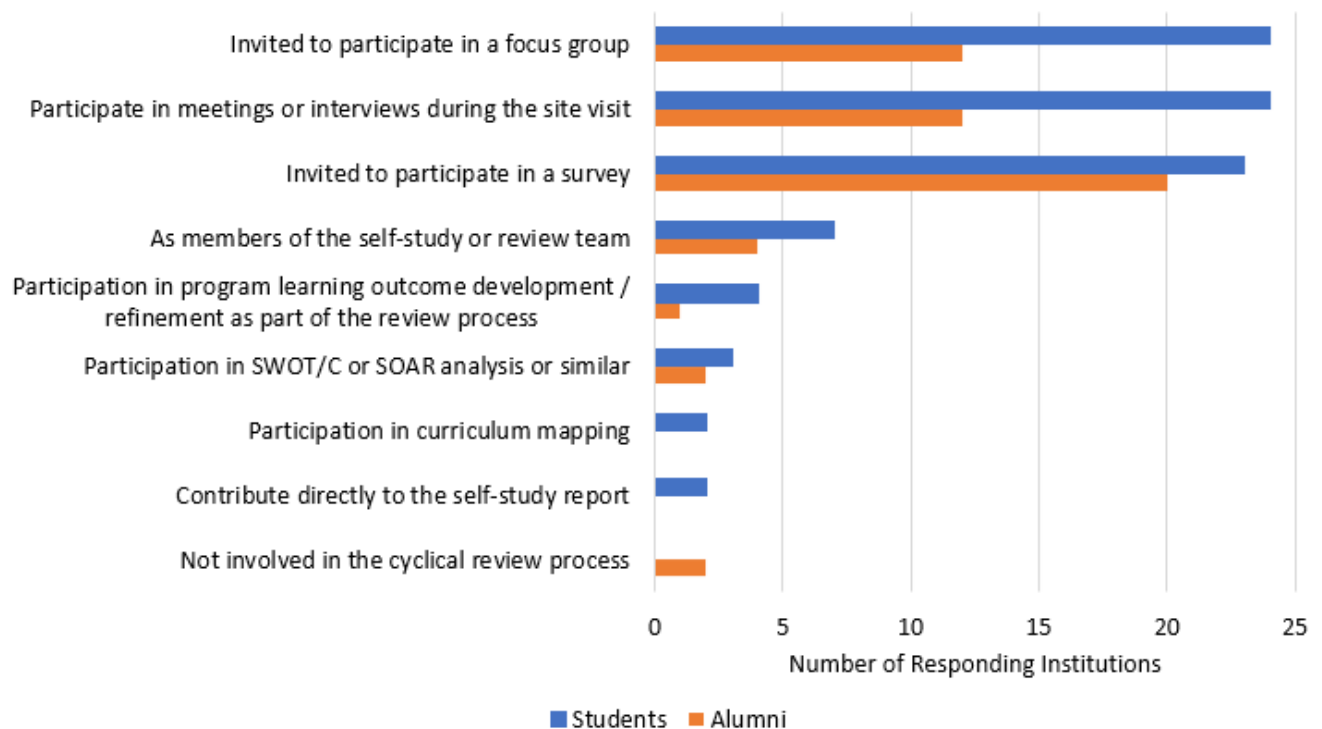
sufficient familiarity with these processes at an institutional level in their responses that suggested we had reached the audience that we intended to through our distribution channels.

The survey received 25 responses, representing 11 out of 22 Ontario universities (50%) and 14 out of 24 colleges (58%). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nearly one third of respondents 9 of the 25, which enabled us to probe further into specific institutional practices described only briefly in the survey itself.

Almost all institutions surveyed involve students in program review through surveys (19/25), focus groups (20/25) and during the visits from external review committees (20/25) as summarized in Figure 1. It was least common to have students participate in processes such as SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) or SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results) that examine a program’s strengths and opportunities for improvement, learning outcome development and review, and in curriculum mapping activities. The majority of the institutions represented also sought the participation of alumni in their review processes, primarily through survey, focus group and site visits.

Figure 1

Nature of Student Involvement in Quality Assurance Processes Across Institutions



Cockburn (2006) characterized three ascending levels of student involvement in QA and enhancement activities, comprising *Opportunity* (to participate in events), *Attendance* (attending an event), and *Engagement* (attending and able to effectively contribute). The most common forms of involvement selected by survey respondents (i.e. site visit meetings, focus group attendance and survey completion)

were consistent with the first level, *Opportunity*. Less commonly, students participated in activities requiring *Engagement*, such as contributing to the cyclical review self-study report, or participating in curriculum review activities such as learning outcome development, or curriculum mapping. The data was very similar for alumni engagement, with invitation to participate in surveys as the most common form of involvement. This analysis would suggest that the engagement of students in QA processes at most Ontario institutions is largely performative. However, it may be helpful to recall that the implementation of the Ontario Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) began in earnest in 2012, thirteen years after similar initiatives in the United Kingdom (UK), and eighteen years after the United States (US) (Harvey & Williams, 2010).

Results largely confirmed our expectations. We noted that the most common forms of participation (e.g. site visit meetings, focus group attendance and survey completion) were the types of involvement that Cockburn (2006) and Elassy (2013) characterize as *Opportunity* or *Attendance*, rather than *Engagement*. Less frequently, students participated in the more involved activities such as contributing to the review of self-study reports, or participated in curriculum review processes such as the development of learning outcomes or curriculum mapping. The data was very similar for alumni engagement, with invitations to participate in surveys being the most common form of involvement.

In addition to identifying the forms of student involvement, respondents were also asked to comment on the perceived effectiveness of these practices. Many respondents indicated that focus groups generated more meaningful feedback than surveys, but also that it was the practices that their institution *did not necessarily engage in currently*, such as involvement in curricular review processes, that they thought would be more, or most, effective. We also thought it was noteworthy that in the open-ended, “do you have any other comments?” question posed at the end of the survey, there was recognition by several respondents that current institutional processes were minimal, and could evolve to be more significant. It was common for respondents to distinguish between current practices and ideal, or prospective, practices and to indicate that the evolution of methods for engaging students in QA processes was a work in progress.

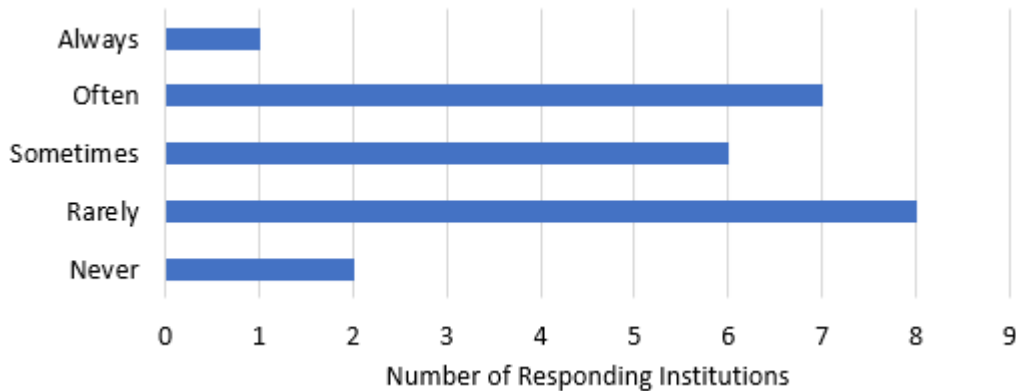
Participants were also asked about efforts to represent diversity in the types of students included in QA processes. Figure 2 highlights responses to the question, which suggests that when most institutions were still working toward a more engaged model of student involvement generally, that diversity (broadly defined) of involvement was a goal not yet fully realized. Commonly, representation of diverse program learners included, but was not limited to, first generation students, international students, mature learners, indigenous students, and transfer students. We recognize that since these questions were developed in 2017, postsecondary institutions have intensified work in diversity, equity and inclusion and continue to expand their understanding of intersectional diversity in academic communities.

Respondents were provided with an opportunity to contextualize their survey choices after each question. Comments in response to this question suggested participation alone was sometimes a

struggle, and that ensuring a diversity of voices was aspirational with the focus being more on availability and willingness of students to participate.

Figure 2

Extent that Institutions Attempt to Ensure Representation of the Diversity of Their Student Body in Quality Assurance Processes



When asked the question, “Are there any ways in which students at your institution are presented with the results of the cyclical review?,” the results revealed very few institutions had a process in place to “close the loop” on how student feedback, or the review process more broadly, would be used to improve program quality. 63% of institutions indicated no formal mechanism in place to share the results of cyclical review processes back to students.

Our analysis of the survey responses revealed three emerging themes a) commonality/ variability of engagement b) institutional/programmatic culture, and c) closing the loop.

COMMONALITY/VARIABILITY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Variability was found across and within institutions. QA practices may not be centralized, and may depend greatly on the extent to which an individual program or department *chooses* to engage their students. Representative comments include, “this really differs from department to department,” or “the level of involvement varies depending on the program.”

INSTITUTIONAL/PROGRAMMATIC CULTURE

Institutions reporting a deeper or more authentic engagement of students in their QA processes reported having an institutional culture that viewed students as more active participants (actors or partners); a connection often made by the respondents themselves.

CLOSING THE LOOP

This theme is notable predominantly for an absence of instances. There were limited examples of institutional processes or practices to *close the loop* or follow-up on feedback provided by students from our initial data collection, unless formalized as a recommendation in the report from an external review committee. This appears to confirm the limited concept of students' roles as "information providers" (Paraschivescu, 2017), rather than actors with agency in the review process. This perspective was observed in choice of language such as "students were used as survey participants," which may have been an unfortunate choice of language, but which was consistent with the view of students as passive.

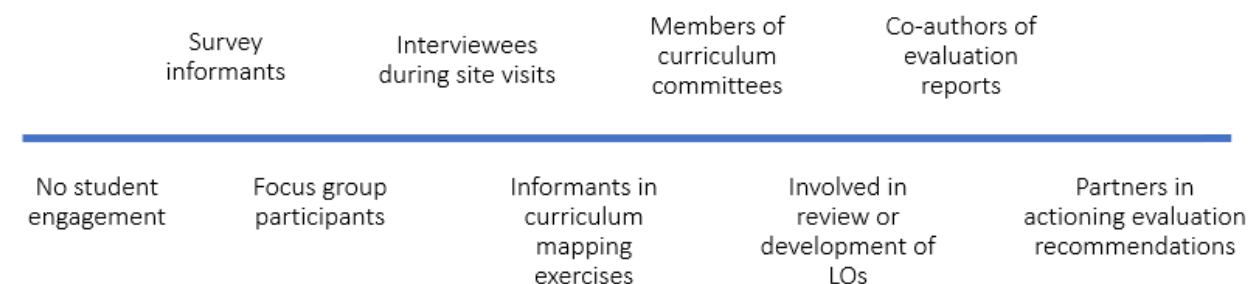
Our analysis of survey responses strongly aligned with many of the themes appearing in the literature on student engagement in QA, and specifically cyclical review processes (Alaniska & Eriksson, 2006; Elassy, 2013). Most notably, a recurring approach taken in the literature on student engagement in QA is to theorize or view the level of student involvement through the lens of a spectrum or hierarchy, which we discuss in the following section.

SPECTRUMS OF ENGAGEMENT

As noted above, our analysis of survey and interview data indicated variability in the extent, and nature, of approaches to student engagement. What made this finding interesting was that the variability across Ontario institutions was not nearly as notable as the variability *within* institutions. This is to say that there appeared to be a wide range of approaches to student engagement in QA processes across institutional programs, and even within programs themselves. Informed by the models of engagement found in the literature on this topic, plotting this range of approaches on a spectrum of student engagement (Figure 3), showcases this variability.

Figure 3

Spectrum of Student Engagement in Quality Assurance



At the far left are programs with no student engagement in any aspect of the QA process. It should be noted that in our survey, there were no institutions that indicated a complete absence of student

involvement in their QA processes. Moving to the right, we see programs that request the input of students via surveys and focus groups, which our data revealed, as expected, to be the most common form of student involvement. Continuing along the spectrum, a richer form of student involvement includes their role as informants and actors in the program via testimonials shared during site visits from external reviewers and via contributions to curriculum mapping exercises. Further to the right are more sustained levels of engagement where students are asked to share their perspective-based expertise as committee members and in aspects of curriculum development processes. Finally, at the far right end of the spectrum appears collaborative opportunities where students co-author the outcome of evaluations and co-own recommended actions that follow the evaluation process.

Moving along the spectrum one quickly notices a change in the nature of student engagement, from a role of informant, to representative, to expert, and finally to that of collaborator. Helpful in making sense of the approaches to student engagement represented along this spectrum, Elassy (2013) and Alaniska and Eriksson (2006) have defined four categories:

1. Student as an **information provider** – where they are solicited for feedback on their experience or specific input on a theme as requested by a program.
2. Student as an **actor** – where they serve as an informant of the learning experience, but equally offer input and recommendations for change.
3. Student as an **expert** – where their experience and insight is valued at equal footing via inclusion as full members of planning and decision-making committees.
4. Student as a **partner** – where students are collaborative partners in the work of QA, the reporting of results and the planning and actioning of recommendations.

While student engagement in some form is an integral part of QA, Elassy (2013) emphasizes the benefits for both the program and for the student when sustained collaborative opportunities for student engagement are built into each step of the QA process (such as those where the student serves as expert and/or partner). Program benefits include a stronger sense of program community and collective interest in the success of the program and its members. Benefits for participating students include more in-depth knowledge of their discipline, experience with committee-related work, and the development of teamwork and leadership skills. Living these benefits via engaging students as experts/partners requires a concerted effort to recognize and overcome the inherent power dynamic between students and faculty/staff members that often diminishes the weight given to the feedback and contributions made by students (Brooman, Darwent & Pimor, 2015; Stalmeijer et al, 2016). This also aligns with the benefits involved in community building as described by Stalmeijer et al. (2016), who suggest the active engagement of students (and staff) is essential to the creation of a constructive culture of QA and program enhancement. The findings of this research project appear to echo the important role of institutional culture, as this was consistently mentioned in surveys and interviews as a catalyst for intentional student engagement or the reason why engagement persisted.

FACTORS OF INFLUENCE

Student engagement in institutional QA processes is shaped by factors associated with institutional culture, context and capacity, all of which are subject to influence and change. Whether or not an institution is inclined toward including students as partners in QA activities—to engage students and grapple authentically with their input—is rooted deeply within the motivations and values with which the institution and its members undertake QA processes and quality improvement efforts. Additional factors at play include the power dynamics and trust relationships within a program, or between the various levels of those involved in the review. Student engagement in QA activities is also determined in part by contextual factors emanating from internal and external QA policy frameworks, and by the availability of the human and financial resources required to mount and maintain effective student engagement in QA processes.

In endeavouring to assess an institution’s cultural orientation toward QA, it is useful to consider how colleges and universities conceive of QA processes. Whether seen more as mechanisms for a more refined understanding of a program of study, engagement in curriculum development, the improvement of academic community (Ashwin and McVitty, 2015), or more as a set of obligatory practices to be approached in performative, perfunctory ways in satisfaction of accountability requirements. If the prevailing culture situates QA processes primarily as an opportunity for structured and informed communal analysis of the strengths, weaknesses and future directions of a program for the benefit of those who teach, research and learn within its bounds, then students will more likely be seen to have authentic and unique perspectives and shared responsibility for the consequences of collaboration. This orientation reflects a meaningful sharing of power tied to “...a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualization, decision-making, implementation, investigation or analysis.” (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014, pp. 6-7).

Certainly, however, students are not always fully accepted as partners in QA processes (Coates, 2005) and institutions do not always think of QA processes as more than ritualized exercises in accountability that are best constrained to the efforts of a small circle of contributors. Mann & McLeod (2009) looked at the socio-cultural realm of QA activities to examine facets of academic culture, disciplinary power, and evidence of excessive focus on performativity, which can contribute to disconnection for students and an inclination to cast students as outsiders, consumers or customers rather than members of an academic community. Klemenčič (2012) commented that “...conceiving students as customers does not preclude student participation, but it fundamentally transforms it” (p. 645) and is associated with more infrequent or superficial engagement of students in QA activities.

Student participation in a range of QA and improvement efforts throughout the five- to eight-year review cycle is also influenced by contextual expectations for student engagement set in the QA process standards of the institution and by its external governing bodies. These contextual influences can be

located within the institutional QA policies, processes and practices, as well as signalling from arms-length QA bodies and accrediting bodies that set expectations for student engagement in QA activities. Within colleges and universities, the values and priorities of academic leaders also inform the approach to including student voices in processes conducted throughout their term of study. The United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland and Norway serve as examples of QA systems that promote consequential engagement of students. In the UK, the 2018 Quality Assurance Agency quality code stipulates that institutions should engage students individually and collectively in assuring and enhancing educational quality through, primarily, systems of student feedback and collective representation. Documentation from the Irish Higher Education Quality Network (2009) assumes that student participation in QA is conducive to quality improvement, that students possess unique and valid knowledge, that participation is an obligatory aspect of belonging to an academic community, and that students should co-create rather than merely receive their education. In Norway, student partnerships are a requirement for standing in the National Centre for Excellence in Education (Helseth et al., 2019). In Ontario, the Quality Assurance Framework (2021) and Guide (2019) of the Ontario University Council on Quality anticipates student input such as the inclusion of student feedback on courses data and encourages student engagement in QA processes, but only “where consistent with the institution’s own policies and practices” (2019, p. 42). While the Guide advises that it is best practice for the self-study to show active involvement of students in the agenda-setting, the self-analysis, and the preparation of the report, as well as in meeting with the external review(s), these are recommended, rather than required practices. Internal and external QA guidelines that set high expectations for the engagement of students in QA processes in authentic rather than performative ways, are conducive to encouraging a commitment to self-regulation and improvement rather than to public accountability and reporting, and aligned with the idea that quality improvement is a dialectical conversation. Consequential conversations within academic communities that include students are “...not something that can be regulated, but something that occurs through critical engagement.” (Harvey and Newton, 2007, p. 232)

The capacity of a college or university to engage students in QA processes also varies and influences the extent to which student involvement occurs. Limitations in access to necessary financial and human resources can frustrate student participation in QA processes, and conversely, committed resources can enable effective practices. Student engagement requires access to financial resources, as well as to experts with the time required to support student recruitment, selection, orientation, and participation in QA processes. Documentation and communication are key to the effective engagement of students who need to understand their role and responsibilities relative to other contributors throughout the span of their engagement, and need to trust that their contributions are taken seriously and acted upon. Resources are required to ensure that students are well prepared to contribute, are coached appropriately throughout the process, and that someone will follow up on student input once it is solicited. Harvey (2003) emphasized that delays or barriers to the communication of outcomes of student participation in QA will further frustrate the authentic participation of students and compromise trust in the processes. As Isaeva et. al., (2020) have shared, “for the partnership to work, students need to feel that their ideas are taken seriously, and their feedback makes a difference to the quality of education that the university provides” (p. 83). When students feel that they are more involved, they

take on more responsibility and invest greater effort in their contributions (Cook-Sather et al., 2014), and will be better informed on the goals and purposes of QA processes, the complexities of the relationships, traditions and systems under study, and perhaps have the opportunity to develop more nuanced understandings of where, when and how improvements can and cannot be made by the program faculty or the larger institution.

PRINCIPLES OF STRONG PRACTICE FOR ROBUST AND SUSTAINED ENGAGEMENT

Through the collection and analysis of our survey data, the conversations we were privileged to have during the follow-up interviews, and the process of making connections between our work and existing literature, we have been able to identify some principles of strong practice for engaging students in QA processes. One of the original goals of this project was to be able to provide practical recommendations to those working in QA in Ontario around how to more authentically engage the students at their institutions. With that aspiration in mind, we present the following recommendations.

PRESENCE IN GOVERNANCE

Ensuring that students have a representative voice on all institutional committees and councils whose mandate includes academic planning and assurance of quality. This is a mechanism for ensuring the student perspective is heard and taken seriously in conversations about program quality. While it is typical for there to be an opportunity for limited student participation on governance committees such as the Senate, it is less common for students to have a voice on program-level curriculum committees, or on cyclical review committees. Involving students in all levels of governance related to academic quality can support the development of an institutional culture that views students as partners in decision-making.

EMBEDDING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT INTO POLICY AND PRACTICES

Embedding expectations for student engagement into QA policies and practices can develop more consistent and widespread practices across an institution. Policies and processes can involve students on governance committees, on self-study or curriculum committees, as participants in the self-study preparation process, and in the external review or site visit. Prompts can be added to a self-study template that ask a unit to outline how students were involved in the preparation of the document. Codifying these forms of student engagement in institutional documents can help to address the issue of variable cross-institutional practices raised consistently during our data collection. While it is important to provide some flexibility and autonomy to units to engage students in ways meaningful within their field or discipline, setting expectations of student involvement into these guiding documents can assist in developing a consistent framework. This also allows institutional review of the program self-study to comment or question the scarcity of student input and involvement.

COMMUNICATING THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Further to the previous recommendation around embedding opportunities or requirements for student engagement into policies and practices, it is important that the value of the student voice and perspective in QA processes is communicated to administrators, faculty, staff, and external review committees. One of the ways that communicating the importance of student engagement can be accomplished is by providing guidance and support to units in developing strong survey and focus group questions, encouraging student involvement in the self-study process, and ensuring that there is student representation during the external review. The importance of student engagement can be included in resource documents, such as self-study handbooks, information provided to review committees, and on institutional QA websites. When students are invited to participate in QA processes, the importance of their perspective should be explained. Documents, resources, and communication during the process should identify how the relevance and value of the student voice benefits not only the program and the university, but also the students themselves.

ENSURING STUDENTS BENEFIT

While the benefits of engaging students in QA processes are clear, how this engagement benefits the students themselves should be seriously considered. Moving beyond basic incentives to elicit student participation such as entry to draws when completing online surveys or serving pizza to focus group participants, consideration of how student engagement may lead to growth and skill development is important. For instance, when serving as a member of a committee, each student can be assigned a faculty mentor to help provide context to institutional governance and support the student as they undertake committee work. Committee, task force and working group contributions can equally serve as student Curriculum Vitae and/or co-curricular record builders. Given the greater push for students as actors and partners in the work of QA, also consider compensating students for their contributions. This may take the form of an honorarium or if sustained engagement is set to take place over a full term, perhaps even a contract payment as a student consultant.

CLOSING THE LOOP

Our survey data and the relevant literature frequently position students' role in QA processes on the lower end of a hierarchy or spectrum where they are invited to provide feedback via a survey or focus group, and/or meet with the review team during a campus visit, but their involvement frequently ends there. One way to extend the engagement of students throughout the cyclical review process is to ensure that they are informed, or better still, invited to discuss the results of the cyclical review. It is a common stage of the review process for the academic program or department to respond to the review committee's findings and recommendations in determining a course of action for the future. How often are students engaged in this phase of the review process? Students can lend an important perspective on, for example, proposed changes to program curriculum, or solutions to challenges being experienced

in the program. Where students have been contributors to the cyclical review process via survey or focus group participation, or in attendance at external review meetings, it should be our obligation to “close the loop,” and provide them with information, at minimum, or the opportunity to participate in the discussion around what changes are implemented following the cyclical review. In certain contexts, they may even be invited to collaboratively contribute to the actioning of program/curricular related changes. Unit coordinators or directors could contact students via email, invite them to have a conversation about the review process, or involve them in the post-review recommendation implementation to “close the loop,” and signal that their engagement in the process is valued and more than a one-off invitation to complete a survey or attend a meeting.

SHARING EXAMPLES OF EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

One of the things that we hoped to accomplish through the interview portion of our data collection was to be able to probe further into innovative examples of student engagement practices that were referenced in survey responses. Through these conversations, we learned of institution-wide partnership models wherein students are considered as actors within university processes, rather than a receiver of them. Developing an institutional culture that views students as partners or actors is key to developing a successful model of authentic and sustained student engagement. We believe that more opportunities within the province to share strong practices such as this should be developed and encouraged. 2019 saw the creation of a conference, the Student Voices in Quality Assurance Symposium, hosted by Humber and Centennial Colleges. That is an excellent example of how knowledge mobilization can play a role in strengthening student engagement practices system-wide. Formal or informal Communities of Practice related to QA such as the Curriculum Working Group Meeting of the Council of Ontario Educational Developers (COED) that sparked this project, are another mechanism for this idea exchange.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

This research project aimed to contribute to the growing body of literature on engaging students in QA processes specific to the Ontario context. By conducting an environmental scan of current practices within Ontario in 2018 and linking it to the related literature, we aimed to provide those engaged in post-secondary QA with a continuum of participation and strategies to more meaningfully and systematically engage students in program reviews.

Data collected from both survey results and follow-up interviews identified that in many cases, strong practices of student engagement were isolated or specific to a program or department, rather than representative of an institutional commitment to students as active and engaged participants or partners in continuous program improvement. The role of the broader institutional culture in shaping the depth of student involvement in QA processes has been highlighted above. The engagement of students in QA processes (and beyond QA) needs to be institutionalized in university policies and

practices in order for it to be sustained and become a part of an institutional culture, rather than a one-off or ad hoc initiative.

We believe that further research or contributions on this topic could focus on case studies of how institutional cultures have been shifted or created to engage students more meaningfully as partners in QA processes and beyond. These case studies could profile practical ways, some of which we have tried to identify in the previous section, staff working in and with QA can help to facilitate this shift through the incorporation of engagement practices that deepen student involvement.

The most common ways students are currently engaged in QA practices across Ontario falls short of recognizing the centrality of their perspective and experience of the working program. Barriers to engagement of students may not be insurmountable if we are prepared to hear and engage students as key players and partners. We have identified strong practices above and principles for consideration to promote robust and sustained engagement to begin, or to continue the dialog.

We hope that this report, as an outcome of our research project, will prove useful to institutions in facilitating conversations, enhancing practices, and developing new ideas for ways in which students can be more meaningfully involved in the continuous improvement of academic programs and discussions of academic quality.

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L'engagement des étudiant.e.s dans les processus d'assurance qualité

1. Type d'établissement
 - Collège
 - Polytechnique
 - Université
 - Autre (svp précisez) :

2. SVP indiquez votre rôle principal dans votre institution
 - Conseiller(ère) en pédagogie
 - Assurance de la qualité
 - Spécialiste de curriculum
 - Autre (SVP précisez) :

3. Comment les étudiants actuels sont-ils impliqués dans le processus d'évaluation cyclique dans votre établissement? (Choisissez toutes les réponses pertinentes)
 - En tant que membre de l'équipe d'autoévaluation du département
 - Contribue directement au rapport d'autoévaluation
 - Participation aux rencontres et entrevues associées à la visite d'évaluateurs externes
 - Participation aux analyses SWOT/C ou SOAR ou similaire
 - Participation aux développements / améliorations des résultats d'apprentissage
 - Participation à l'analyse de cursus et développement du curriculum
 - Invité à participer à un sondage portant sur leurs expériences
 - Invité à participer à un focus group portant sur leurs expériences
 - Les étudiants dans mon institution ne sont pas inclus dans le processus d'évaluation cyclique
 - Autre (SVP précisez)

Commentaires (SVP utilisez la case ci-dessous pour partager des informations contextuelles à votre réponse ci-haut) :

4. Comment les anciens étudiants sont-ils impliqués dans le processus d'évaluation cyclique dans votre établissement? (Choisissez toutes les réponses pertinentes)
 - En tant que membre de l'équipe d'autoévaluation du département
 - Participation aux rencontres et entrevues associées à la visite d'évaluateurs externes
 - Participation aux analyses SWOT/C ou SOAR ou similaire
 - Participation aux développements / améliorations des résultats d'apprentissage
 - Participation à l'analyse de cursus et développement du curriculum

- Invité à participer à un sondage portant sur leurs expériences
- Invité à participer à un focus group portant sur leurs expériences
- Les anciens étudiants dans mon institution ne sont pas inclus dans le processus d'évaluation cyclique
- Autre (SVP précisez)

Commentaires (SVP utilisez la case ci-dessous pour partager des informations contextuelles à votre réponse ci-haut) :

5. Parmi les possibilités d'impliquer les étudiants dans les processus de révision cyclique que vous avez identifiées ci-dessus, lesquelles sont, selon vous, les plus efficaces ? Pourquoi ?
6. Quelles stratégies utilisez-vous afin d'encourager la participation des étudiants à évaluation cyclique des programmes? (Choisissez toutes les réponses pertinentes)
 - Travailler avec l'association étudiante
 - Travailler avec les dirigeants des facultés afin d'identifier les opportunités
 - Reconnaissance de la participation dans un relevé ou attestation de bénévolat
 - Utiliser du temps en classe afin d'obtenir de la rétroaction des étudiants
 - Une journée de réflexion ou un évènement départemental connexe
 - Exploiter les réseaux sociaux
 - Exploiter le système de gestion de l'apprentissage
 - On ne possède pas de mécanismes formels pour encourager la participation des étudiants
 - Autre (SVP précisez)
7. Fournissez-vous l'une des récompenses ci-dessous afin d'encourager la participation des étudiants? (Choisissez toutes les réponses pertinentes)
 - Prix par tirage au sort
 - Cartes cadeaux
 - Nourriture
 - Notes de participation
 - Reconnaissance par une attestation de bénévolat
 - Aucun prix n'est fourni pour la participation des étudiants
 - Autre (SVP spécifier) :
8. Quels ensembles de données institutionnelles liées aux étudiants sont couramment utilisés pour informer le processus d'évaluation cyclique dans votre établissement? (Choisissez toutes les réponses pertinentes)
 - Données concernant le progrès des étudiants, leur abandon, les taux de graduation

- Données de l'Enquête nationale sur la participation étudiante (National Survey of Student Engagement - NSSE)
- Données reliées au NSSE (CLSSE, BSSE, FSSE)
- Indicateurs de performance clé (KPI)
- Sondage des étudiants qui commencent leur première année à votre établissement
- Sondage des étudiants qui terminent leur dernière année à votre établissement
- Sondage des anciens étudiants
- Évaluations de cours
- Données reliées à l'emploi
- Données gouvernementales (ex. statistiques d'emplois du MESFP)
- Données concernant des catégories spécifiques d'étudiants (ex. étudiants internationaux, étudiants nécessitant des accommodements, des étudiants d'immersion)
- Autre (SVP spécifier) :

9. Dans quelle mesure votre établissement tente-t-il d'assurer la représentation de la diversité (p. ex. étudiants de première génération, étudiants de l'étranger, étudiants adultes, étudiants autochtones, étudiants en transfert) de votre corps étudiant dans le processus d'évaluation?

- Toujours
- Souvent
- Parfois
- Rarement
- Jamais

Commentaires :

10. Avez-vous une politique ou un processus d'interprétation et de réponse aux commentaires très négatifs, désobligeants ou irrespectueux des étudiants?

- Oui
- Non

Commentaires :

11. Possédez-vous un mécanisme ou un processus pour suivre les préoccupations sérieuses des étudiants concernant leur programme (ex. des évaluations injustes)?

- Oui
- Non

Commentaires :

12. Possédez-vous des mécanismes afin d'assurer que le corps professoral ou les unités académiques s'engagent avec la rétroaction des étudiants durant les processus d'évaluation cycliques?

- Oui
- Non

Commentaires :

13. Le programme est-il tenu de donner suite aux recommandations relatives à la rétroaction des étudiants ?

- Oui
- Non

Commentaires :

14. Existe-t-il des façons de présenter aux étudiants de votre établissement les résultats de l'évaluation cyclique ?

- Oui
- Non

Commentaires :

15. Existe-t-il quelque chose non discutée dans les questions demandées que vous vouliez partager avec nous à l'égard de la participation des étudiants dans les processus d'évaluation cycliques dans votre établissement?

16. Si nous avons d'autres questions, seriez-vous disposé à nous parler davantage de vos stratégies?

- Oui
- Non

Veillez fournir votre nom, titre de votre poste, établissement et adresse courriel ci-dessous :

Student Engagement in Quality Assurance Processes

1. Institution type:
 - College
 - Polytechnic
 - University
 - Other (please specify):

2. Please indicate your primary role within your institution:
 - Educational or Faculty Development
 - Quality Assurance
 - Curriculum Specialist
 - Other (please specify):

3. How are current students involved in the cyclical review process at your institution? (Select all that apply)
 - As members of the self-study or review team
 - Contribute directly to the self-study report
 - Participate in meetings or interviews during the site visit
 - Participation in SWOT/C or SOAR analysis or similar
 - Participation in program learning outcome development / refinement as part of the review process
 - Participation in curriculum mapping
 - Invited to participate in a survey
 - Invited to participate in a focus group
 - Students at my institution are not involved in the cyclical review process
 - Other (please specify):

Comments (Please use the box below to share contextual information about your response above):

4. How are alumni involved in the cyclical review process at your institution? (Select all that apply)
 - As members of the self-study or review team
 - Participate in meetings or interviews during the site visit
 - Participation in SWOT/C or SOAR analysis or similar
 - Participation in program learning outcome development / refinement
 - Participation in curriculum mapping
 - Invited to participate in a survey
 - Invited to participate in a focus group
 - Alumni at my institution are not involved in the cyclical review process

- Other (please specify):
Comments (Please use the box below to share contextual information about your response above):
5. Of the opportunities for engaging students in cyclical review processes that you identified above, which do you believe are most effective? Why?
 6. What strategies do you use to encourage student involvement in cyclical program review? (Select all that apply)
 - Working with Student Union / Association
 - Working with faculty leaders to identify opportunities
 - Acknowledgement of participation on co-curricular record
 - Using class time for obtaining student feedback
 - A day of reflection or related departmental event
 - Leveraging social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook)
 - Leveraging learning management system
 - We have no formal mechanisms by which we encourage student involvement
 - Other (please specify):
 7. Do you provide any of the following incentives to encourage student involvement? (Select all that apply)
 - Draw prizes
 - Gift cards
 - Food
 - Participation grades
 - Acknowledgement on a co-curricular record
 - No incentives are provided for student involvement
 - Other (please specify):
 8. What student-related institutional data sets are routinely used to inform the cyclical review process at your institution? (Select all that apply)
 - Data on student progression, attrition, graduation rates
 - National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) data
 - NSSE-related data (CLSSE, BSSE, FSSE)
 - Key Performance Indicators (KPI)
 - Incoming student survey
 - Exit survey
 - Alumni survey
 - Student course evaluations
 - Employment related data

- Government related data (i.e. MAESD employment statistics)
- Data regarding specific student groups (i.e. international students, students requiring accommodations, immersion students)
- Other (please specify):

9. To what extent does your institution attempt to ensure representation of diversity (e.g. first generation students, international students, mature learners, indigenous students, transfer students) of your student body in the review process?

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

Comments:

10. Do you have a policy or process for interpreting and responding to highly negative, derogatory, or disrespectful feedback from students?

- Yes
- No

Comments:

11. Do you have a mechanism or process for following up on serious concerns that are raised by students about their program (e.g. unfair assessments)?

- Yes
- No

Comments:

12. Do you have mechanisms to ensure that faculty or academic units engage with the feedback provided by students during the cyclical review process?

- Yes
- No

Comments:

13. Is there a requirement for the program to address recommendations related to student feedback?

- Yes
- No

Comments:

14. Are there any ways in which students at your institution are presented with the results of the cyclical review?

- Yes
- No

Comments:

15. Is there anything not captured in the questions asked that you want to share with us about student engagement in cyclical review processes at your institution?

16. If we have additional questions, would you be willing to speak to us further about your strategies?

- Yes
- No

Please provide your name, position title, institution and email address below:

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How are students involved in the cyclical review process at your institution? (surveys, focus groups, involvement in self-study team, participation in curriculum mapping, engaging alumni etc.). Possible prompts, use when relevant:
 - a. Could you tell me more about this practice?
 - b. Could you tell me more about the people and the steps involved?
 - c. Could you tell me how students respond to this approach to engage them?
 - d. How did you learn about or develop this practice? Is this practice based on work developed elsewhere? Could you refer us to the original source?
2. Of the opportunities for engaging students and/or alumni in cyclical review processes that you identified above, which do you believe are most effective? Why?
3. An emerging theme from the survey data is that there is considerable variability within a single institution in the ways and in the extent that students are engaged in quality assurance processes. This has us wondering about the role of departmental, faculty, and institutional culture in shaping student engagement. Do you observe this variation at your institution?
 - a. If we were to view student engagement along a spectrum from minimal to no engagement on one end to deep and diverse engagement on the other, where would you place student engagement in QA processes along this spectrum at your college/university?
 - b. Do you observe any trends by discipline, program or other themes?
4. Who (if anyone) or what (i.e. policy) drives student engagement in the cyclical review process?
 - a. What are barriers to engagement?
 - b. What have been the levers for engagement?
5. What is your sense of how different stakeholders (admin, faculty, students, others) view the current level(s) of student engagement?
 - a. Do these respective stakeholders feel the current level(s) of student engagement is appropriate?
 - b. How would you ideally engage students and alumni in cyclical review?
6. How are alumni usually involved in the cyclical review process at your institution?
7. Have you experienced any review study teams under pressure to present a cleaned up or 'cherry-picked' view of their program and minimize or disguise underlying challenges?
 - a. Could you tell us a little more about related incidents? (We may need to remind the participant that we'll remove any info that would identify them, the program, or their institution).