

STUDENT VOICE: A GUIDE TO INVITING & INCORPORATING STUDENT PERSPECTIVES IN COLLEGE DECISION MAKING

OFFICE OF EDUCATION POLICY AND PLANNING

VP EDUCATION



Inspiring Life-Changing Learning

STUDENT VOICE AS VALUE-ADDED TO COLLEGE DECISION MAKING

At Camosun College, students are at the centre of everything we do. In an effort to better meet the needs of students and introduce a diversity of perspectives into the decisions Camosun makes, leaders are encouraged to invite, listen to, and where appropriate, act upon student input, ideas, and perspectives.

Student voice is defined as “students’ agency to exercise, and institutional inclusion of, thoughts, ideas, and opinions in shared governance and related processes and environments that drive decision making” (Templeton, Smith, & MacCracken, 2018, p. 9). In order to effectively incorporate student voice, students need to feel that they are capable of being part of college decision making and that the college makes an active effort to not only listen to students, but also act based on what students share (Templeton, MacCracken, & Smith, 2019).

While Camosun takes pride in existing opportunities to invite student perspectives, there’s a recognition that more can be done elicit student voices and incorporate them in college planning and decision making. The hope is to create opportunities for increasing levels of involvement whereby students can become collaborators, partners, and possibly even leaders in college decision making endeavors.

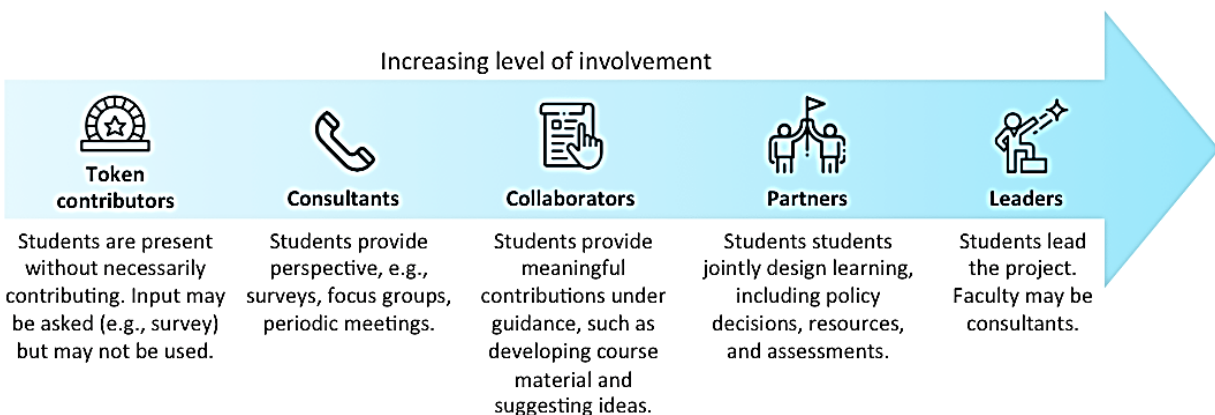


Figure 1: Maturity Model of Student Voice (Flynn, 2020, University Affairs)

The benefits of incorporating student voice in college decision making cannot be understated. Research by Quagila (2016) argues that when students have a voice in their educational journeys, they are seven times more academically motivated. Moreover, gathering student input from members who are part of equity-seeking groups (e.g., visible minorities, students with disabilities, LGBTQ2+, gender diverse, religious minorities, etc.) provides college leaders with a diversity of perspectives that would otherwise go unheard (Solomon, 2012). By creating a space in which diversity of perspectives is seen as “value-added,” college leaders can further meet the needs of our diverse college community and engage more students in life-long learning (Harper & Quaye, 2009; Felten et al., 2013; Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2015).

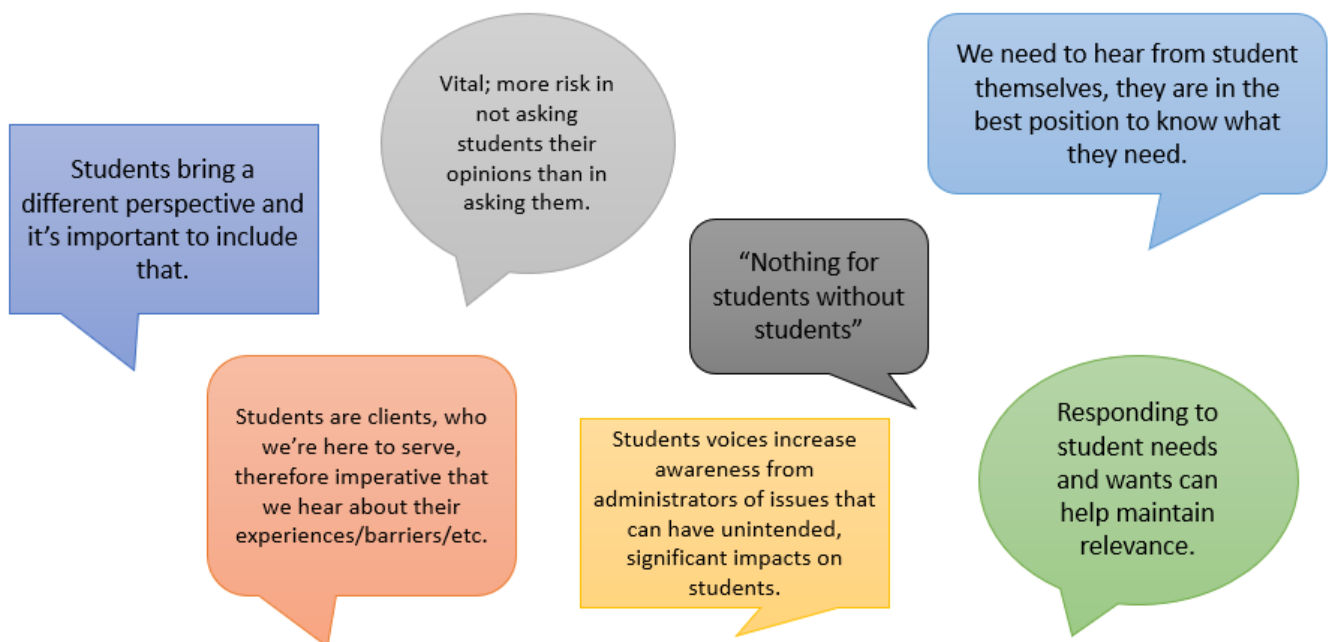
A PRINCIPLES-BASED APPROACH TO STUDENT VOICE

Camosun College embraces the following principles with respect to incorporating student voice in decision making.

1. Students are the core of Camosun's mission as a college. The diversity of Camosun's student body is an asset.
2. Camosun values the diverse ideas, perspectives, and lived-experiences of students and asserts that these are important to be heard and acknowledged.
3. Camosun College is committed to providing opportunities for students to voice their opinions and ideas regarding important college matters and initiatives.
4. Where and when appropriate, student voice will be considered and/or incorporated in important college matters and initiatives.

IN YOUR OWN WORDS – THE VALUE OF STUDENT VOICE TO CAMOSUN COLLEGE

Camosun College leaders shared the following thoughts regarding the inherent value of student voice:



BEST PRACTICES AT CAMOSUN: WHAT ARE WE ALREADY DOING?

Camosun already has various opportunities for students to share their perspectives and be active participants in college decision making processes. Formal opportunities include participation in the Camosun College Student Society (CCSS), Education Council (EdCo), Board of Governors (BoG), and EdCo's Policy and Standards Committee (P&S). In addition to seats at

decision making tables, the college invites students to participate in its annual Student Experience Survey which takes the pulse of the student body on a number of key issues.

Specific to schools and departments, college administrators employ a variety of strategies to invite student ideas, perspectives, and feedback. A non-exhaustive list includes:

- ✓ Student representatives for each program of the schools who meet monthly with Dean/Director to discuss relevant educational issues
- ✓ Student representatives on school/departmental advisory committees
- ✓ Involving students in the planning of orientation at the start of the semester
- ✓ Surveys to students on what their needs are with respect to specific needs that can enhance their educational experience
- ✓ Informal feedback gathering strategies such as feedback gathered in classrooms, mini-feasts, and check-ins with students

When thinking about engaging with students, it is also important to think about the amount of effort needed to organize initiatives and the how effective they will be in achieving their purpose. Conversations with students and administrators indicate that some approaches that take the most amount of effort to organize do not always result in the most robust feedback and engagement from students.

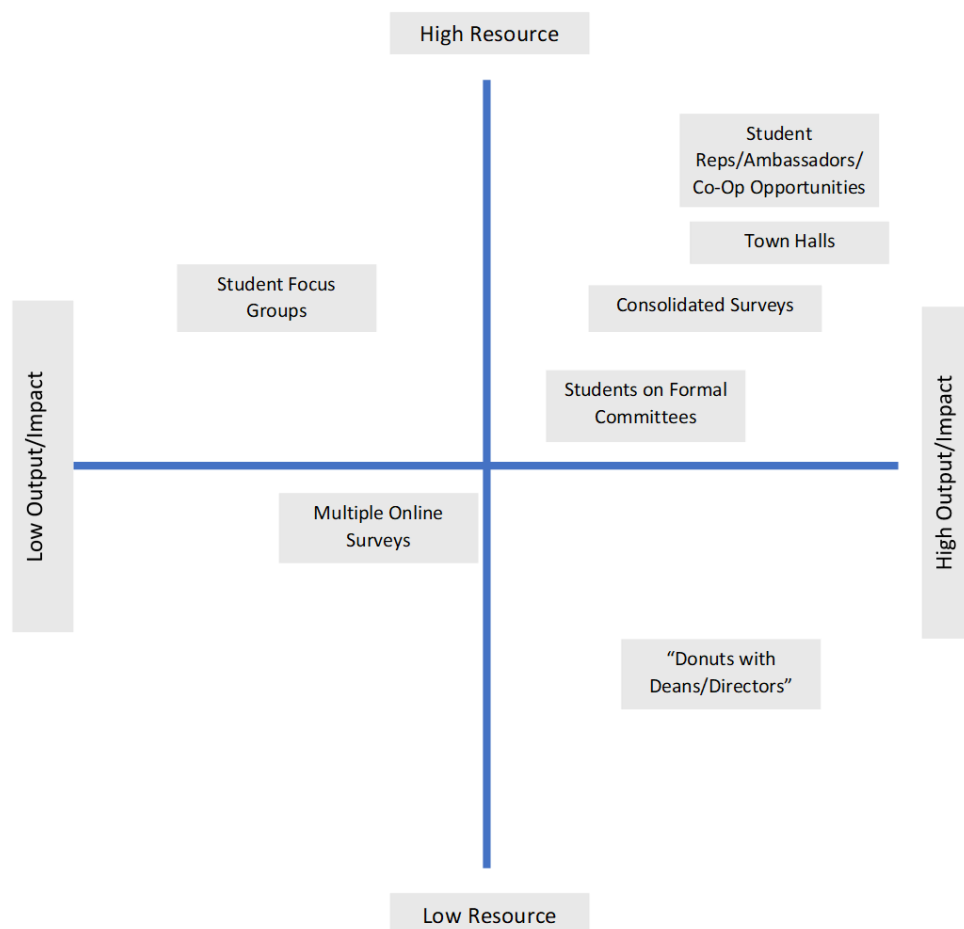


Figure 2: Student Voice Initiatives: Resource Investment & Feedback Output Matrix

Flynn (2020) identifies several ways student input and voice can be used to influence a variety of college functions. Being intentional about how and why student input is gathered and involving students in important initiatives at the college will better meet the needs of students.

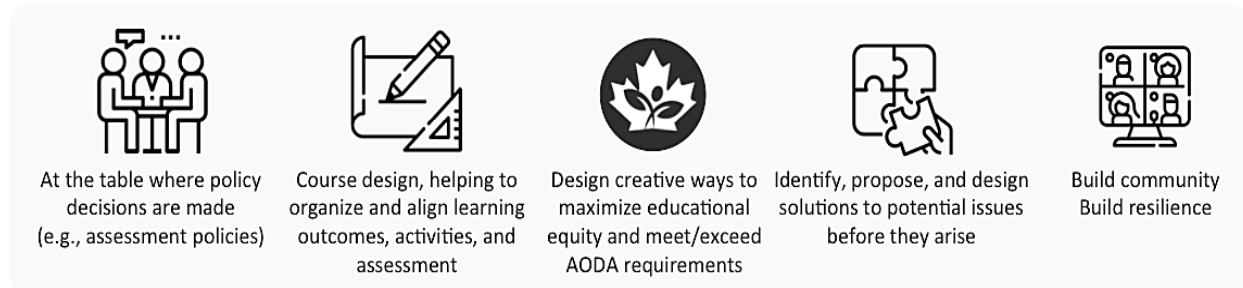


Figure 3: College issues that can benefit from student perspectives and involvement (Flynn, 2020, University Affairs)

STRATEGIES ON GATHERING STUDENT VOICES

Remember that students are often busy, sometimes inundated with requests to provide feedback, and will only be interested in matters that they believe are pressing and important. Make sure to:

- ✓ Advertise the student engagement initiative well in advance. Students are increasingly using social media to keep on top of college initiatives so consider connecting with the college's communications team to post events and opportunities on the college's various social media platforms.
- ✓ Be direct and succinct in your requests. Ask clear questions that solicit feedback on one singular or thematic issue at a time.
- ✓ Provide incentives for students to participate! Providing food and refreshments or a chance to win a prize will entice more students to participate.
- ✓ Use multiple student engagement approaches. Some students are happy to complete a survey. Some may want to provide more nuance through a focus group or informal discussion. Some may want to actively participate on a working group or committee. If possible, allow students to get involved in multiple ways.

CONSIDERATIONS ELICITING INDIGENOUS STUDENT VOICES AND PERSPECTIVES

We are living in a time of Indigenous resurgence. While Indigenous communities continue, as they always have, to strive to uplift their inherent rights to Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty, Canada continues to acknowledge Indigenous rights, as outlined in Section 35 of the Constitution, 1982, and the United Declaration of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), adopted by British Columbia (BC) in 2019. It is time, in all sectors of BC and Canada, for us to seriously consider what it means to incorporate UNDRIP, into all laws and policies in BC, as well as what it means to uplift the Truth & Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Calls to Action.

By the very nature of Canadian education systems, Indigenous students continue to experience systemic, covert and overt racism when attending post-secondary institutions. Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Native American) students attend Camosun College, from many Indigenous Nations. These students come to us with dreams to improve their lives, as well as that of their families' and communities'. They come with a shared history of colonialism as well as strong voices for the changes they want to see at Camosun College.

In seeking out Indigenous student voices, it is important to consider trauma-informed approaches, including the importance of the 5 R's (<https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/the5rsonline/chapter/the-5rs/>): relationships, respect, relevance, responsibility and reciprocity. Indigenous students are much more likely to share their voices in spaces where relationships are established and where there are systems in place that ensure their voice matters and will be utilized to create plans and actions for meaningful change.

TYING IT ALL TOGETHER: INCORPORATING STUDENT VOICE IN YOUR DECISIONS

