

UQ Student Representation

MDP Program Committee (Faculty of HASS)

What are the main aims of the committee? Why is the student voice so critical in achieving these aims?

The Masters of Development Practice Committee is comprised of academic and administrative staff from across the 3 Schools that teach into this interdisciplinary post graduate program, alongside Faculty administrative representatives, and the elected domestic and international student representatives. The committee meets at least 4 times a year as a group, and makes decisions related to program and curriculum design, annual events (including the annual lecture, a research symposium and social activities), budget allocation, program marketing and communication, and alongside other issues.

Across each of these issues, consideration of students' perspectives, issues and concerns is vital. For example, in undertaking revisions to our course offerings and program structure, it has been vital to have insights from students actually enrolled in these courses. It is students that are best placed to tell the committee which courses complement each other, for example, and where there are any cases of course content duplication etc. Students are also best placed to inform the committee about the hopes and aspirations of the post graduate student cohort, and how the academic and administrative team can best meet these needs. Here, having at least one domestic and international student representative is vital, especially given the needs of these different cohorts.

More broadly, the Masters of Development Practice is committed to equipping students to become graduates who have a diversity of communication and dialogic competencies, so that they can enter their profession as effective change agents (whether that be in the private or public sector, or within a community organisation). Ensuring students are at the table in the committee enables the program director and key teaching staff to gain a better understanding of the needs and aspirations of students, including the support and skills training they require to achieve this outcome.

Over the many years I have been the director of the Masters of Development Practice program, I have found the student representatives to be highly engaged in the responsibilities of committee work. Indeed, some of the most vital social and community building activities are only made possible – and indeed brought to life in the

most creative and engaging of ways – on the basis of effective student representatives.

What benefits have staff members gained from effective student representation?

The Masters of Development Practice has undergone significant review in the last 3 years. Effective student representation has been vital in directing this process, and in providing a sounding board and check in about proposed, and subsequent implementation, of changes. Importantly too, student representatives are able to ensure a two-way flow of information between the committee and the student cohort, ensuring students are kept abreast of changes in the program, as they happen. This has been vital to support students to understand changes in the program, and support them in managing anxiety that such change can engender.

Effective student representation has also been vital in building a dynamic annual program of events, which is radically enhancing the student experience. For example, in 2019 the student representatives have taken the lead – and working closely with the program director and some academic staff – in development of a series of social and professional development events. This includes regular morning teas, alongside a grant writing workshop, an Industry and Alumni dinner, as well as a CV and career narrative workshop.

Feedback from students indicates these events are adding significant value to the student experience, including preparing students for professional life after graduation.



What kinds of responsibilities do the student reps have as part of their role? What strategies have you employed to carry out your duties effectively?

Our primary responsibility is to sit on our program's Management Committee as representatives of the student voice. We also feel that, perhaps most importantly, it is our responsibility to facilitate opportunities for community building amongst our cohort in a way that is responsive to student needs. This means that creating space for and encouraging student engagement and participation is key. We hold a weekly tea during which students connect with each other, can share their hopes and ideas for the future of the program, and can voice any concerns with their studies. All of the other events we have held/will hold have emerged from this space. In response to requests to expand our practice community networks, we have decided to launch an Annual Alumni and Industry Networking Event. Similarly, as many students voiced the need to develop grant writing skills, we hosted two grant writing workshops, during which we collectively worked on a grant application that secured funds for the networking event. We have also held a gathering at a restaurant on campus to offer a fun, social opportunity for making connections. Our most effective strategy for fulfilling our responsibilities has been emphasizing open and frequent communication - with each other,

our wonderfully supportive program convener and with fellow students. Practically, this has meant holding weekly meetings, creating a shared representative email account and using Google docs to collectively create anything from meeting agendas to emails to students.

Would you encourage other students to undertake representative roles?

Serving as a student representative allows you to make a positive difference in your fellow students' learning experiences and to take ownership of your own. Like anything, the more you put in the more you get out. As a student representative you become more connected with your cohort, program convenor and program teaching staff. It is also an excellent opportunity for professional practice including: organizing and hosting events, participating in a working committee, representing a community and working collaboratively.

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