

Exploring University Student Volunteering in Widening Participation and Outreach

Katy Treskin Fernandez Head

University student volunteers critically support and facilitate many university led pre-tertiary engagements in schools and communities to increase access and participation in higher education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students from low socio-economic status backgrounds (LSES) and regional and remote areas. The motivational drivers for the many University students choosing to volunteer in equity focussed widening participation and outreach initiatives are multifactorial, relying on a matching of expectations as part of a complex psychological contract¹. The paper invites 4 students who have recently volunteered for pre-tertiary/pre-access Widening Participation and Outreach (WPO) initiatives at the University of Sydney, some of whom represent the different cohort groups traditionally targeted, to explore their motivations, critically reflect on their experience of volunteering, reflexively examine their social positioning, consider their perceptions of impact and frame their own stories.



Photo: Matty Williams

Methodology

Utilising a biographical narrative approach, 4 individuals: Elaine, Emily, Djanala and Campbell will edit and reframe their own higher education and volunteering stories in their own words as co-authors. The research will be conducted collaboratively, with volunteers suggesting dialogue prompts and key questions that through qualitative focused individual and group interviews will be analysed to draw out key themes relating to: motivations to volunteer in widening participation and equity programs, their individual experiences volunteering, their perceptions of personal and collective impact and their experiences getting into and going to University.



Campbell

Gender: Male

Background: Third Generation Australian

Degree: Bachelor of Arts /Bachelor of Education (Secondary Humanities and Social Science)

Birth Year: 1994

Home: Kangaroo Valley, NSW

Entry to University: UAC

Djanala

Gender: Female

Background: Aboriginal - Luritja

Degree: Bachelor of Arts /Bachelor of Education (Secondary Humanities and Social Science)

Birth Year: 1997

Home : Hurstville, NSW

Entry to University through: Cadigal Alternative Entry Scheme



Elaine

Gender: Female

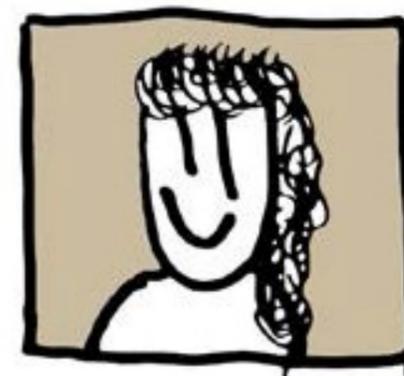
Background: Burmese/Chinese

Degree: Bachelor of Arts/ Bachelor of Law

Birth Year: 1994

Home: Fairfield, NSW

Entry to University through: Broadway Alternative Entry Scheme



Emily

Gender: Female

Background: Australian

Degree: Master of Teaching

(Secondary Science)

Birth Year: 1992

Home: Wollongong, NSW

Entry to University through: UAC undergraduate application



Implications

This practitioner (volunteer) led narrative approach may usefully enable the tensions between notions of altruistic service, competitive differentiation and employability- or enlightened self- interest to be explored. Volunteers will also be invited to critically reflect on the extent to which they feel their volunteer experience supported the development of University of Sydney specific graduate attributes of:

- cultural competence (to work productively, collaboratively and openly in diverse groups and across cultural boundaries)
- an integrated professional, ethical and personal identity (to build integrity, confidence and personal resilience)
- the capacity to positively influence (to be effective in exercising professional and social responsibility and making a positive contribution to society)²

These voices may speak to challenges of navigating levels of privilege, ambition, forms of capital³ and constructed identities in what is a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) new reality. By listening carefully, we might avoid the potential reproduction of inequality, antithetical to the purpose of volunteer facilitated widening participation and outreach engagements.



Photo: Matty Williams

¹Megan Paull, Maryam Omari, Judith MacCallum, Susan Young, Gabrielle Walker, Kirsten Holmes, Debbie Haski-Leventhal, Rowena Scott, (2017) "Matching expectations for successful university student volunteering", Education + Training, Vol. 59 Issue: 2, pp.122-134

²The University of Sydney, (2016) "2016-2010 Strategic Plan", <https://sydney.edu.au/dam/intranet/documents/strategy-and-planning/strategic-plan-2016-20.pdf> p 32

³Bourdieu, P. (1986) 'The Forms of Capital', in J.G. Robison (ed.) Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education. New York: Greenwood Press, p 242