

# Students as Learners and Teachers at a Hispanic Serving Institution

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Alyssa G. Cavazos and Lesley Chapa

This initiative is both a research and programming initiative that aims to promote student success by encouraging authentic teaching and learning partnerships between students and faculty members across academic disciplines. We aim to transform teaching practices in direct response to the experiences, knowledge, and insights of our student population. Most importantly, we aim to transform students' sense of belonging, resilience, and educational growth as we build inclusive pedagogies across the university. Students serve as paid pedagogical consultants in faculty members' courses across academic disciplines under the Center for Teaching Excellence. The goals for the initiative include: 1. **design** and implement a students as pedagogical partners initiative, 2. **facilitate** student-faculty pedagogical partnerships to enhance teaching and learning for all students, and 3. **assess** the impact of a students as pedagogical partners on faculty teaching improvement and on student partners' educational growth and resilience. The pilot initiative consisted of three interconnected phases.

**Phase I: Focus Groups Analysis**—The first phase of the initiative focused on establishing a foundation for the program through secondary research and focus groups with students & faculty. The focus group questions were informed by literature centered around pedagogical partnerships and inclusive and equity-based pedagogies. We conducted focus groups with both students (n=13) and faculty members (n = 6). Through student focus groups, we were interested in seeing whether UTRGV's educational values for inclusivity, equity, accessibility, and diversity had been reflected in their learning experiences. Through faculty interviews, we were interested in learning how receptive our faculty members are to student feedback. Due to the pandemic, however, these conversations were conducted via email. A key finding suggested that the majority of students hesitate to provide faculty with feedback and 50% of faculty stated there is no value to student commentary. This along with other insights illustrate the pertinence of the SaLT program within the institution as it can combat the power dynamics in our learning environment and bring us closer to providing an education that is reflective of UTRGV's values. A call for application for both students and faculty members was sent out at the end of the Spring 2020 semester.

**Phase II: Summer Orientation**—The second phase of the initiative consisted of developing guided documents on student-faculty partnerships and the development of a pedagogical framework to share with student and faculty participants. We received a total of five faculty applications and eight student applications for the student-faculty partnerships. To review the student applications, we considered their interests in the program and insights on student feedback. Ultimately, we selected five students to serve as pedagogical consultants and paired them with a participating faculty partner. During the summer, we held an orientation for the student and faculty partners. Our guest speaker Dr. Alison Cook-Sather, a prominent scholar in the area of student pedagogical partnerships, facilitated two conversations on how to establish and develop student partnerships. During the summer orientation, we also shared our own pedagogical partnership framework and discussed the guided documents we developed.

**Phase III: Implementation (faculty and student partners)**—The pilot initiative was implemented during the Fall 2020 semester. The student and faculty partners met weekly to discuss their goals for observation and feedback. Students also met with us on a weekly basis to discuss and present on their teaching observations and feedback. All of these conversations were conducted via Zoom. We also collected weekly reflections from students and monthly self-assessment reflections, which will inform

how their experiences as teaching consultants shaped their sense of belonging, resilience, and educational growth. We met with faculty partners on a monthly basis and we collect regular reflections from faculty partners on their experiences with the pedagogical partnership. These reflections were submitted on Microsoft Teams or via e-mail. Faculty and student partners also worked on a collaborative document on eliciting student feedback and providing meaningful feedback on teaching and learning. After serving as teaching consultants for one semester, student partners also designed a document on best teaching and learning practices to share with faculty members across the university. Teaching partnerships impacted faculty participants' teaching development and students' learning agency and academic growth.

#### Deliverables:

We would like to highlight deliverables we accomplished within the past year:

1. We presented findings from our research in a paper titled, "Exploring the Impact of Student Pedagogical Partnerships: Building Equitable Spaces for Teaching and Learning through Student Voices at a Hispanic-Serving Institution" at AAC&U's 2021 Conference on Diversity, Equity, and Student Success.
2. We presented about our program at the UT System Academy of Distinguished Teachers Virtual Teaching Conference earlier this month.
3. We wrote a manuscript and submitted it to a journal on the framework we developed to guide our partnership in teaching and learning.
4. We are currently drafting a manuscript informed by our analysis of the pilot program, which includes reflections from both student and faculty partners, respectively.
5. The student partners in our pilot initiative developed a document on teaching and learning that we shared with the University community at the end of the fall and beginning of Spring semesters.
6. The faculty and student partners collaborated on creating their own document on best feedback practices
7. Informed by the findings in the pilot initiative, we are designing, implementing, and assessing a second iteration of the student partnership program informed, which are scheduled to take place this summer 2021 and fall 2021 semesters.

We believe that student partnerships can have a transformative impact on the teaching and learning culture at institutions of higher education. Student partnerships have the power to shift mindsets and elicit institutional change on teaching that truly reflects an inclusive, equitable, and collaborative effort between teachers and students. We, as educators, need to be open and receptive to the feedback, accept being challenged by our students, and commit to teaching revisions directly informed by their feedback.