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UNCOVERING EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE FINAL YEAR UG DISSERTATION - SUPPORTING THE STUDENT RESEARCH JOURNEY AND ENHANCING THEIR GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES

Abstract:

The aim of this study was to understand the experience of Applied science undergraduate (UG) project supervision. The final year UG research project has been coined the pedagogy of the 21st century. The diversity of supervisory styles is a key strength of project modules but is a source of student perceived inequality of experience in a high stakes terminal assessment. This project engaged final year UG students in a collaboration designed with inclusivity and partnership in mind. Student 'researchers' were equal partners and project evolution was led through their involvement in all aspects; study design, methods, resource development and dissemination of the outputs.

The overall goal and impact of the project was to provide structure and support to dissertation students and supervisors alike by developing research informed resources that are accessible, engaging and student centred. Three themes were regularly identified; education, practical and emotional support. A key finding was that the student-supervisor relationship strongly influences student experience, satisfaction and success. However, whilst 75 % of students strongly agreed that a good student/supervisor partnership positively affects the success of the final project, only 40 % felt strongly that they had managed to build a partnership with their supervisor. The team used the emergent themes to pull together a 'making supervision work' help guide, a visual model of how the student-supervisor partnership can support the development of skills and progression towards independence. To support this further, a list of discussion points were put together by student researchers aimed at making supervision more effective without making the process a prescriptive one. The answers are personal to each supervisor/student pair but the use of a standard set of questions provides parity, clarity and structure.

This project is readily scalable and we strongly believe that this strategic collaboration will see improvements in the student/staff experience of UG supervision.

Keywords:

Undergraduate, Research, Science, Perceptions, Expectations, Partnership, Education

JEL Classification: I29, I23