



Student Voices: Peer Support in Module Selection for Online Education Students

Sinéad Lynch and Sarah Blacoe-Dyas

Dublin City University

Due to online students having limited face-to-face interactions with their peers, thus reducing opportunities for knowledge transfer and peer-to-peer mentoring. As a result, this project centred on creating an opportunity for these students to meet in an online setting and allowing for interactions with their peers.

Introduction and Context

At the beginning of each academic year, students in DCU Connected Humanities programmes (Online Education) choose from a wide selection of modules across multiple disciplines (e.g., Psychology, Philosophy, Sociology, History, and Literature) to study for the following two semesters.

Due to the online nature of their studies in these programmes, students had minimal opportunities for face-to-face interaction with peers, reducing the ability for knowledge transfer and discussions around module selection.

To seek help in deciding which module is most suitable for their needs, students commonly used programme-oriented social media platforms (e.g., Facebook pages and WhatsApp groups) to find out about prior students' experiences on specific modules.

The high volume of questions on these platforms specifically related to module selection indicated a need for students in these online programmes to have a place to synchronously and asynchronously discuss their lived experiences and feel heard and supported by their peers.

To address this, the student voices module discussions were created. The discussions aimed to create an opportunity for students to meet in a online synchronous group setting.

The initiative was first discussed with the DCU Connected Humanities Programme Chairs to ask for support and their input into the development of the idea. The idea was further discussed at the annual Programme Board meeting, allowing staff across the programmes to discuss the initiative and add suggestions and support.

Research and Development

The student voices module discussions were intended to provide an online meeting place for students to share their educational experience.

Academic staff supported recruitment of student volunteers through posting adverts on student facing forums to ensure all students were aware of the opportunity.

To help with organisation, a Google Drive was created with folders for examples of presentation slides, guidelines for presenting the discussions, and information on dates, times, and volunteers.

A WhatsApp group was set up to allow for easier communication between organisers and the group, and had the secondary effect of a creating a community and atmosphere of peer support among the presenters.



SHARE YOUR VOICE

WILL YOU BE OUR VOICE?

2023 STUDENT VOICES

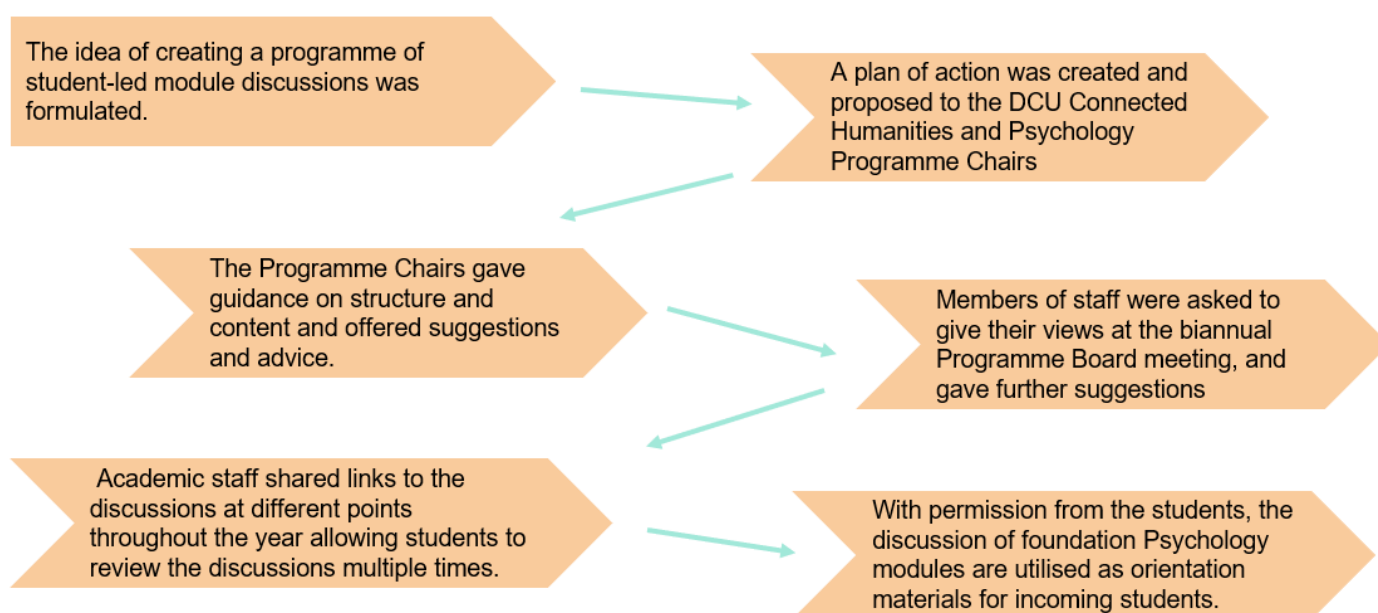
These informative sessions provide students with an inside perspective of student's experiences of each module and help the student make informed decisions about their module choices for the following academic year.

The sessions have received great feedback from students with almost 500 students taking part in previous years.

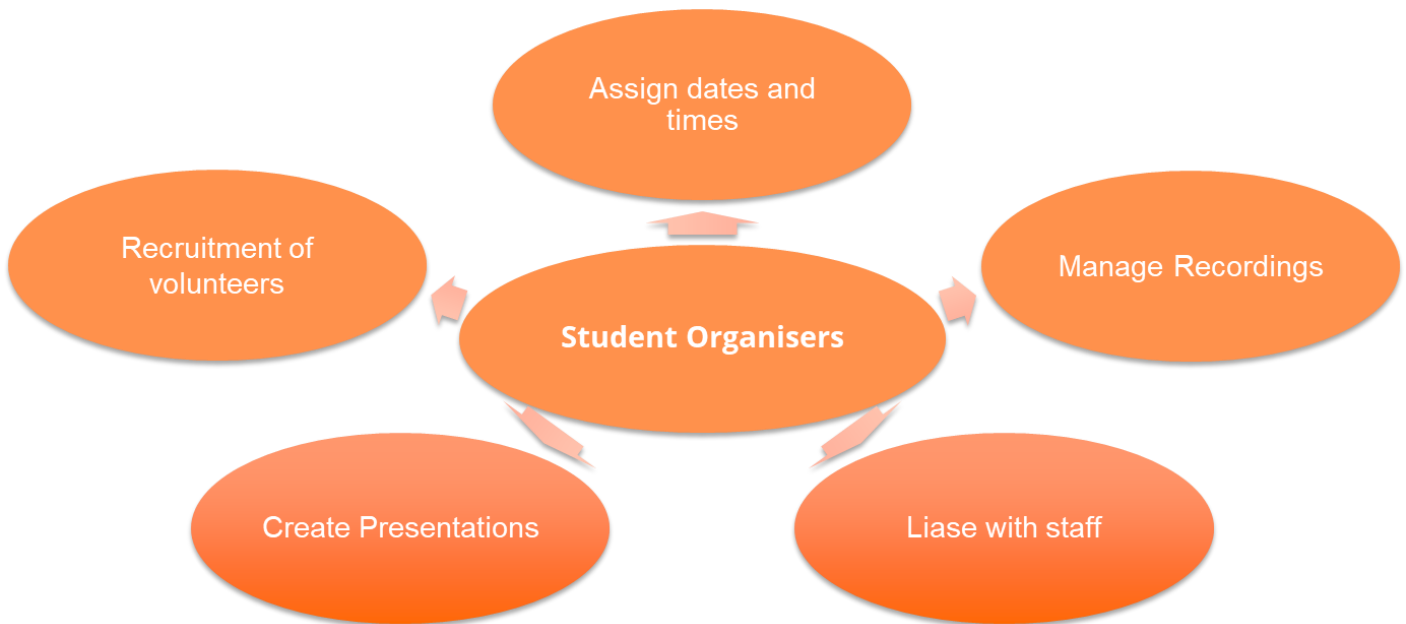
Will you be a Student Voice?
Your experience will help another student shape theirs
Contact us on the attached numbers/email addresses.

Actions Taken During Project

Action	Brief Description
Action A	The idea of creating a programme of student-led module discussions was formulated.
Action B	A plan of action was created and proposed to the DCU Connected Humanities and Psychology Programme Chairs.
Action C	The Programme Chairs gave guidance on structure and content and offered suggestions and advice.
Action D	Members of staff were asked to give their views at the biannual Programme Board meeting, and gave further suggestions.
Action E	Academic staff shared links to the discussions at different points throughout the year allowing students to review the discussions multiple times.
Action F	With permission from the students, the discussion of foundation Psychology modules are utilised as orientation materials for incoming students.



Students as Leaders

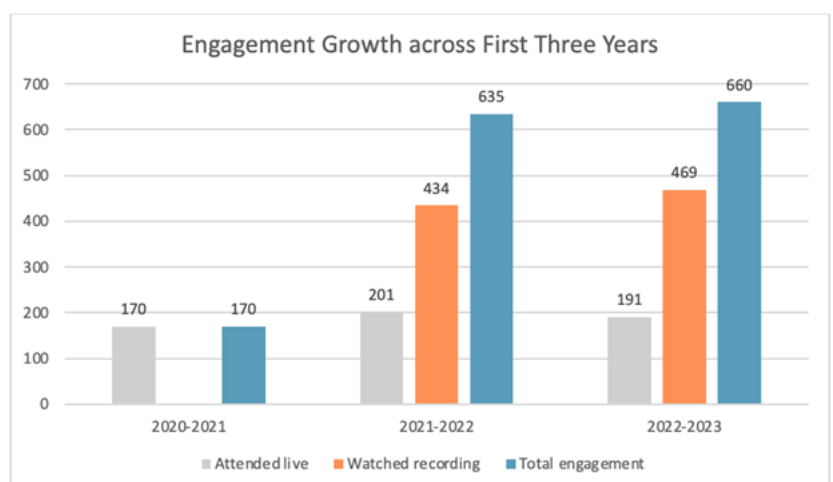


After year one, feedback from the students who had attended the discussions showed that people would have liked to have recordings of the talks. However, following discussion among the student presenters, only the presentation part of the discussion was recorded with a second Q&A portion remaining unrecorded for privacy. Listening to student feedback and creating recordings had an immediate impact on the number of students who engaged with the programme.

Feedback from presenters at the end of year one found they would prefer to wait until the end of the academic year to do the presentations. This practice began in year two.

From the organisers, the biggest challenge was scheduling and being available to attend the discussions to give support. Additional organisers were recruited each year to combat this.

Academic staff gave input into what they believed would help centre the student voice while keeping a focus on the module materials.



Additional co-organisers came on board in the second and third year, increasing the available support for the volunteers and creating more opportunities for student leadership. Working in teams or pairs, students were able to combine their knowledge and experiences to offer more rounded feedback.

First time presenters were teamed with previous presenters to reduce nerves and to help with understanding what to expect. Students helped each other create presentation slides for the talks, these are then saved in a shared drive at the end of each year to help with inspiration for the following year.



[Student Voices—Tips for Peers Video](#)


Students shared their lived experiences with their peers to offer tips, give suggestions, and answer questions about upcoming modules.

Presenters of the discussions found that as well as enjoying sharing their module experiences, it helped them build presentation skills and confidence.

TIPS:

- Try to engage with as many tutorials as possible.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions.
- Take advantage of the numerous supports provided by DCU.
- Engage with your assignment feedback and follow up with your marker if you need clarification on anything.
- Join the PY100 WhatsApp group for peer support and connection.

While those who watched and asked questions were delighted to have the knowledge and experience of their peers, and the opportunity to meet new people.



STUDENT VOICES ON PEER SUPPORT

[Student Voices on Peer Support Video](#)

The discussions contributed to the sense of belonging and community; allowing students to get to know people in a non-academic setting and feel more supported on a personal level.

Reflections on Engagement

Student volunteers found creating and giving a presentation to their peers has helped with their confidence in their abilities, making them less nervous and more comfortable creating presentations and speaking publicly during graded presentations in their degree.

Each co-organiser added their own flair and talent to the design making it more well-rounded with a better focus on the student voice and ensuring different perspectives are included.

Participants said having an understanding of what was ahead of them in the modules had reduced anxiety, and allowed them time to prepare.

The overwhelming support for the discussions has shown the importance of student-led connections for online education students.

The interest in the discussions led to the creation of a society for online education students, a place for people to feel connected and supported through zoom chats, study groups and meetups.

"I know presentations are a part of the later modules, so this will help me!"

Sam (first year student)

"I love being part of this every year, it's great to help people make their choice."

Sarah (final year student)

Ongoing Staff Support

Academic staff provided training to ensure GDPR processes were followed when recording the module discussions.

A GDPR disclaimer template was provided to be shown at the beginning of each module discussion.

Recruitment adverts were shared by staff in forums to encourage students to volunteer as presenters.

Academic staff were available to support organisers and students with training or reviewing of information to ensure students felt comfortable presenting.

Encouragement of the students involved in the project both as organisers and volunteers was offered throughout.

Student Feedback and Acknowledgements

"I watched all the discussions this year. I just found them so interesting !"

Eimear (first year student)

"Thank you all so much, now I know what to choose !"

Justin (first year student)

"I just watched the talk...amazing!!! Can't thank you all enough for sharing all your journeys and tips. I found it so, so helpful, thank you!" hank you all so much, now I know what to choose!"

Chris (third year student)

"It really helped to be able to chat with someone who understood my point of view as a student."

Carole (second year student)

"I can't wait to start my modules now!"

Elaine (third year student)

Thank you to everyone who helped and supported this project, particularly:

Dr. Chloe Beatty for reviewing and adding suggestions to this case study.

Contributors

Patricia Cross
Jamie-Lee Kelly
Sinead Ledwidge
Sinead Coughlan
Davis Sibanda
Sandra McGuffin
Nell Fingleton
Sarah Dwan

Academic Support

Dr. James Brunton
Dr. Leeann Lane
Dr. Sinéad Eccles
Dr. Sophia Pallaro
Ms. Shirley O'Brien

And especially to the volunteers and participants of the Student Voices Module Discussions.