My place. My voice: Student narratives about engagement and belonging in a higher education institution
Dr Jane Skalicky & Stephanie Taylor, University of Tasmania

In recent years, student engagement and belonging have received increasing attention in higher education research and institutional discourses, particularly within the context of student retention and success. With student populations becoming more complex and more diverse, higher education institutions are now realising the importance of students' academic and social engagement and sense of belonging within their university community as key contributors to the overall student experience and to academic success and retention.

The My Place.My Voice project at the University of Tasmania was designed as a process for undertaking broad consultation with the University's student communities about how to create a sense of community and belonging for students at the University, outside of the traditional learning environment. It was further designed in order to guide a future model of student engagement, participation and representation at the University. All students enrolled at the University of Tasmania in the latter half of 2018 were invited to participate in the My Place.My Voice project via a range of platforms including: facilitated, focus group workshops, in-person and online surveys, Facebook postings and discussion boards, and online video interviews. Across all platforms, the focus was on two main themes: creating a sense of connectedness and belonging for students at the University, and empowering students to engage with the decisions and issues they would like to influence at the University. This presentation describes the rationale and methodology of the My Place. My Voice project and considers in detail the student voice relating to the student experience of and views about engagement and belonging within the University of Tasmania context.

Learning outcomes
- A student’s sense of belonging needs to be understood within the context of what belonging and connectedness means from a student perspective;
- Students want to be able to influence issues and decisions that affect them at university, particularly in relation to creating a stronger university community;
- Students provide a valuable perspective to the discourses that are part of a university’s decision-making processes.
- Being invited to share their viewpoints also sends a message to students that their views are important and valued by the university.
Presenters

Dr Jane Skalicky, University of Tasmania

Dr Jane Skalicky is an Education specialist with a research focus on student learning, engagement and success in higher education. For the past ten years, she has held senior leadership positions at the University of Tasmania with institutional strategic and operational responsibilities in key areas relating to student retention and success. Currently, Jane is Director of the Student Retention and Success portfolio of the University’s Academic Division, leading a team of staff and student leaders across the portfolio areas of Student Learning, Equity and Access, and Employability. Within this position, she has used her extensive knowledge of student populations and understanding of factors that impact students’ retention and success to lead the development of key institutional strategies and policies. She has been instrumental in establishing networked partnerships across the University, to ensure that student support services and programs are relevant to the changing needs of students and curriculum and strategically delivered to areas of most need and impact.

Stephanie Taylor, University of Tasmania

Stephanie Taylor is the Executive Director of the Student Experience portfolio at the University of Tasmania with strategic responsibility for the provision of high quality student experience and services across the institution. Working in partnership with the Academic Colleges, University Divisions and students, the portfolio spans the delivery of a broad range of services and initiatives which underpin the student experience including: wellbeing and safety, retention and success, first and second tier student service and information, Indigenous student support, student orientation and first year transition, engagement and events, sport and recreation, and student living.