Evaluation of a Students as Partners Approach in Phase 1 of the Earth Science Experiential and Indigenous Learning (EaSEIL) Project

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Context: The EaSEIL Project

The students as partners approach is embedded in the context of the Earth Science Experiential and Indigenous Learning Project (EaSEIL). Through collaborations between students, staff, and faculty from several units at UBC, EaSEIL seeks to reframe and transform our thinking, teaching, and practice around field-based experiential learning. Three pillars inform the process: Indigenous Perspectives, Accessibility and Inclusion, and Systems Thinking. The project uses a "community of practice" model to engage participants in professional learning and to co-develop contextualized resources, tools, guidelines, and curricula.

Who are the team Members?

A variety of students, faculty and staff make up the members of this project. Their positionality and experiences are equally variable.

Student Partners		
	Project appointment	Program/Level
S1	Full time	Environmental Science/ Undergraduate (final year)
S2	Full time	Engineering/ Undergraduate (second year)
S3	Part time	Oceanography/ Graduate (final year)
S4	Part time	Natural Resources Conservation & Education/ Undergraduate (recent graduate)
S5	Part time	Geology / Undergraduate (final year)
S6	Part time	Urban Forestry/ Undergraduate (final year)
S7	Part time	Earth and Ocean Sciences/Undergraduate (second year),

Project Leadership Team Members					
	Institutional Role	Teaching/Faculty Development Experience (years)	Identity		
PL1	Research Track faculty	10+	Woman	Non-Indigenous	United States
PL2	Tenure Track faculty	5-10	Man	Indigenous	United States
PL3	Tenure Track faculty	5-10	Man	Non-Indigenous	Canada
PL4	Science Instruction support specialist	5-10	Woman	Non-Indigenous	United States
PL5	Postdoctoral scholar	5-10	Woman	Non-Indigenous	Colombia/Canada

Student Partner Engagement (Summer 2022)

The student partners engaged in multiple activities aimed at engaging them in professional development and involving them in co-designing/developing resources for the EaSEIL projects.

- Weekly EaSEIL student community of practice meetings – 3 parts: (1) updates/feedback on individual work; (2) professional development; (3) information sharing or community building
- One-on-one meetings (students and supervisor, advisors, or instructors)
- Project team meetings or collaborative working meetings
- Surveys/interviews about their experiences as part of the program

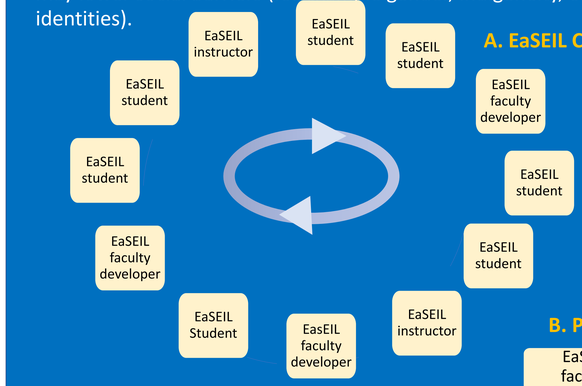
Projects	Project Leaders			Course Instructors				Students						
	L1-LL	L2-SM	L3-SBS	L4/I1-SP	L5/I2-BG	I3-SL	I4-JD	S1-JZ	S2-CL	S3-WF	S4-CW	S5-AS	S6-PS	S7-DO
1-Literature review	S	S	A		A			L	C		C	C		
2-Virtual Field Trip	S		A					A	L	A	A	C	A	
3-Accessibility Guides	S	A	A		A			A	A				L	
4-Identifying content for new Indigenous-centered course				S	S					L				L
5-Indigenous topic-Workshop	S	A	A	A				A	A	A	A	A		
6-Indigenous Student Engagement Event	S			S						L				
7-Plant Guide with Indigenous Language	S	A				S			L					
8-Course student survey data analysis	S	S					S	L						
9-Resource Guide for Instructors Indigenous		S										L		
10-Data Analysis for Instructor Survey	S	S						L						
11-EaSEIL Website Creation	S	S	A		A			A	A	A	A	A	A	A
12-Building survey in Qualtrics	S	S										L		

Theoretical Framework: Students as Partners

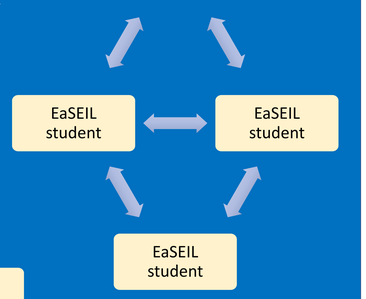
Using a Students as Partners (SaP) model, EaSEIL strives to foster students' sense of belonging, enrich their identity development as disciplinary experts, and incorporate their needs and experience in shaping field-based courses. They engage in co-development of curricular and instructor support resources and offer their perspectives. In this model, students, faculty and community members are equal partners in developing field-based learning opportunities that emphasize the values of reciprocity, respect and dialogue (Bovill & Bulley, 2011; Cook-Sather et al., 2014).

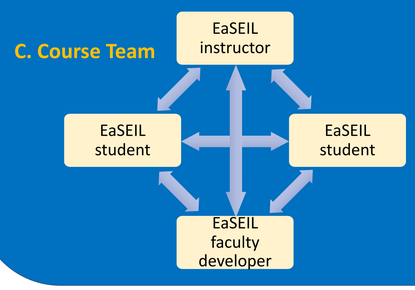
While developing this project, we have had to be aware of the push and pull of trying to give the students partnership status and the difficulties of doing so. We are aiming to create a community without hierarchy, however this is difficult to achieve with students who are used to a much more hierarchical relationship.

It is helpful that some subgroups of the project might share identities that may lower social barriers (for example gender, indigeneity, or other identities).



Student partnership opportunities took different forms as illustrated. Students partnered with EaSEIL leadership team members, instructors, and peers both within project-based teams and within a larger EaSEIL community.



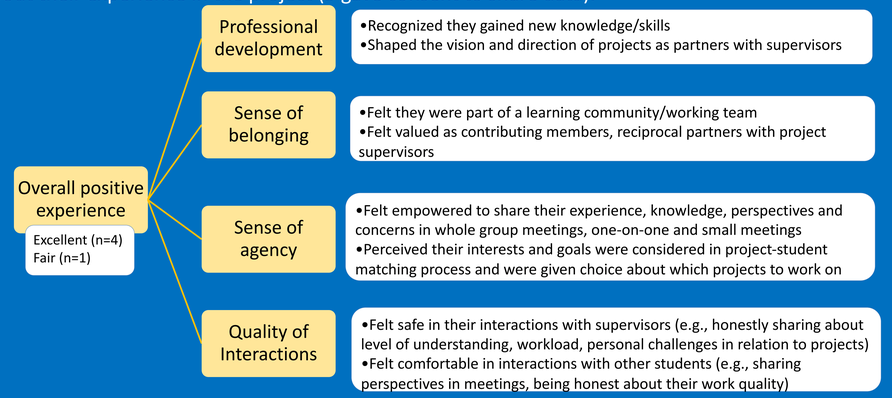


Lessons Learned & Recommendations

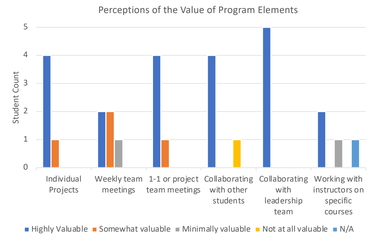
1. Projects too diverse for 'common experience' sharing between students→ **acknowledge explicitly**
2. Tools helping w/project management negatively impacted student experience→ **minimize documentation requirements**
3. Confusion across multiple project supervision and mentorship sources→ **Provide clear, consistent, & written expectations/guidelines for students collaborating across multiple projects and people**
4. Partnerships w/instructors did not meet goals→**Provide central guidelines/expectations or support for student-instructor partnerships (accountability, support, mentorship)**
5. End of program reflection tool facilitated clarity around expectations→**Provide reflection tool at the start of program**

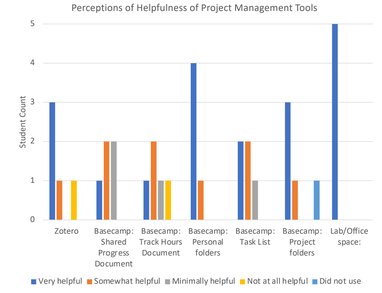
Student Experience

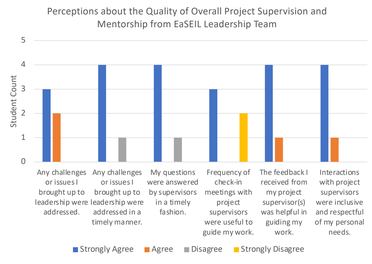
Seven students completed (at the end of their summer appointment) an online anonymous survey about their experience in the project (5 gave consent to share data).



- Two students reported feeling they could have received more guidance/direction in some projects
- One student reported not feeling comfortable sharing with supervisor challenges in collaborating with other students about the quality of their work/contributions.
- Students found value in most program elements, but their perceptions of value about weekly meetings (e.g., too long/frequent) and partnering with instructors to work on specific courses (e.g., minimal interaction) were mixed.







- Overall, students perceived project management tools (e.g., available office space, personal/project folders, Zotero) were very helpful to organize their work and communicate about it. But they signaled some tools (e.g., shared progress report and hour tracking documents) were not too helpful.
- Most students had a positive perception about the overall quality of project supervision and mentorship from the leadership team. But some students highlighted that the frequency of meetings with project supervisors and/or timeliness of supervisors response could be improved.

Next steps/Phase 2:

- 5 students continued on in roles, though project shifts
- Restructuring of student reporting and orientation materials
- Formalizing leadership agreement around common supervisor/advisor-student-instructor expectations
- Reconsidering student-instructor partnerships in light of staff capacity

Acknowledgements

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References

Bovill, C., and Bulley, C.J. (2011) A model of active student participation in curriculum design: exploring desirability and possibility. In: Rust, C. (ed.) Improving Student Learning (ISL) 18: Global Theories and Local Practices: Institutional, Disciplinary and Cultural Variations. Series: Improving Student Learning (18). Oxford Brookes University: Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development, Oxford, pp. 176-188.

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