

STUDENT FACULTY PARTNERHIP PROGRAM OVERVIEW

In the Student-Faculty Partnership program, facilitated by Dr. Virginia Pitts and established at DU in 2017, students and faculty members learn and work together as partners in addressing the question of how we can create more engaging, inclusive, learning-rich environments for every student.

The premise of this program:

- Students and faculty members can learn much from each other regarding the experience of teaching and learning
- It is through dialogue and sharing of different perspectives that this learning from each other can occur.

Goals of program:

- **Engage students and faculty as co-inquirers** who learn and work together to analyze and improve educational practice.
- **Foster open and constructive student-faculty dialogue** to promote understanding, empathy, and connection.
- **Involve students with diverse experiences, identities, and perspectives** in creating an inclusive, engaging learning environment here at DU.

How the program works:

- Students and faculty are “paired up” as partners for a quarter.
- Each week throughout the quarter:
 - Students visit their faculty partner’s class and take detailed observation notes (usually related to a focus question/topic that they and their faculty partner are interested in exploring)
 - Student-faculty partners meet with each other to discuss their respective observations, wonderings, and insights.
 - Students meet as a group to support each other in this work and discuss what they are learning from this experience.
- Student partners design (in collaboration with their faculty partner) and facilitate a mid-quarter focus group/survey of the students in their faculty partner’s class, and then discuss the results with their faculty partner.
- Students are paid for their participation in the program to honor the fact that they are bringing a very valuable perspective/expertise to this partnership work

WHAT MIGHT YOU LEARN FROM STUDENTS?

What are your wonderings about what it’s like to be a student now?

If you could ask a student anything about their experience of your class (or their experience of DU, or their experience in general), what would it be?

(Please write your answer(s) on a post-it and share it in the space below.)

PROGRAM EVALUATION METHODS

Each year, students and faculty are invited to do **closing reflections** (in writing or via one-on-one conversations with the program facilitator) to support our program evaluation efforts, answering questions such as:

- What have been some of your favorite things about this whole experience and/or what moments from this experience especially stand out for you?
- What have you learned through this partnership work and how has it impacted you? How has it affected – or how will it affect – your approach to teaching or working with students, if at all?
- What would you want others at DU to know about what this experience was like? Is there anything you learned that you with everyone at DU could know?
- If someone were to ask you “Is this program something DU should continue to invest in, and why?”, how would you answer?
- Based on your own experience, what advice would you have for future partners to help them get the most of out this experience and be most successful in this work?

WHAT WE’VE LEARNED

Since the program’s inception in 2017, **79 faculty members and 64 students have participated in this program**. Closing reflections, as well as participant comments throughout the program and observations /anecdotal evidence collected by the program facilitator, indicate that both student and faculty participants find the experience to be valuable/rewarding/impactful:

- **Students and faculty indicate a highlight of the program is the relationship they develop with their partner.**

Students and faculty talk about how this partnership relationship is strikingly different from the relationships they typically have with each other, in that it allows them to step out of the typical, hierarchical power dynamic into a trust-based, collaborative, two-way relationship in which they genuinely care about each other, feel heard/valued, and are working toward a common cause.

- **Because of the nature of these relationships, students and faculty members develop greater empathy for, and understanding of, each other.**

Faculty members talk about how participating in this program allows them to get a better understanding of how students experience DU and their courses. Students talk about how this humanizes their professors, and how they now understand how complex teaching is and how much their professors really do care and try, and about how they will carry this empathetic perspective forward with them.

- **Students and faculty talk about how this work will change their approach to teaching and learning moving forward.**

Faculty members appreciate getting feedback that is specific to their particular context, make changes in their teaching/pedagogy as a result of their participation in the partnership, and say that, moving forward, they will be more attuned to the student experience in their course.

Students talk about how this will change the way they relate to their professors moving forward - they now see faculty as being more approachable, will be more intentional in working constructively to help create a better learning experience for themselves and others, and feel they have developed skills in communication and observation and giving feedback that will allow them to do so. They also say this will change the ways in which they engage in their coursework (in large part because they now have a better understanding of the “why” behind the pedagogical decisions their professors made).

- **Both students and faculty indicate that participating in this program gives them a greater sense of efficacy.**

Faculty talk about how it is validating to get feedback from their student partners regarding what is working, and, at the same time, come to recognize the ways in which continued growth/improvement is possible. Students talk about how being a part of this program helps them see that they really can make a difference – that is, that their voice matters, and that, through engaging with faculty members constructively, they actually can affect real change.

- **Both students and faculty value the opportunity to connect with others in the DU community through this partnership work.**

In addition to the relationship students and faculty members develop with their own partners, student partners say an additional highlight of this work is the weekly meetings with other students and sense of connection they feel there ... and, similarly, faculty members appreciate the opportunities they have during the quarter to meet with other faculty members who are part of the program and how that allows them learn from and connect with peers across DU.



IN THE WORDS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

- “Teaching at the end of the day is not about us, it’s about the students. And if we want to be effective teachers, I think we need robust ways to continue to understand the lives of students, how they are experiencing the world, how they’re experiencing education, how they’re experiencing their classrooms.” – faculty partner
- “A lot of us get into teaching and into the academy because we want to have meaningful relationships with students. Ironically, in teaching, you don’t always get that opportunity, even with your best efforts. One of the greatest joys of this was just getting to know [my student partner] and building a relationship with her, hearing her experiences, and having that just be a really fun dynamic. I feel like I was able to get to know who she is and where she’s going. That to me is just a real joy.” -- faculty partner
- “As we know from scholarship on teaching and pedagogy and curriculum - and I am generalizing a bit here - a lot of that work is very focused on teachers and what teachers are doing, but rarely do we hear from students. And I firmly believe that we should hear from the people who are most affected by the thing, and the thing in this question would be our classes.” – faculty partner
- “My partnership taught me that there are professors at DU really do care about their students and their teaching. This partnership has helped me grow and come out of my shell a little. Overall, this partnership has really made me reflect on my role as a student and as a person who communicates with my friends and my professors.” – student partner
- “As a student, you often feel so powerless, like nothing you do matters. But this experience has made me feel like I really **can** make a difference.” – student partner
- “One really positive thing about this was the ability to talk with a faculty member at a level that felt like we were peers and that we were working together on a common cause. So often it can seem like you have different aims and that you’re both coming at this from such different standpoints, but you both really want the same thing - everyone wants the students to learn and everybody wants the professor to teach. The student faculty partnership gave me specific insight into that, that we are on the same team, even if I’m a student in a class where I’m getting grades from the professor. So that was a big deal; it’s kinda a path toward being able to actually see learning as a process of collaboration instead of one person lording over the other.” – student partner

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