



STUDENTS AS
CO-CREATORS

A Curriculum Design Collaboration

GPHN Newsletter: A Collaboration between The Postgraduate Students and Alumni

Student Partners: Fabia Hannan Mone, Zahistha Begum Raj Gafoor, Mali Price, Sania Zerine Juhi, Wai Yin Ng (Erica), Robert William Neil Ward, Abass Alasa, Folorunso Bolanle Elizabeth.

Academic Partner: Dr Regina Keith

School of Life Sciences

Academic Year 2022-2023

Students as Co-Creators: Working in partnership report

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Student collaborators: Fabia Hannan Mone, Zahistha Begum Raj Gafoor, Mali Price, Sania Zerine Juhi, Wai Yin Ng (Erica), Robert William Neil Ward, Abass Alasa, Folorunso Bolanle Elizabeth *All are current MSc students studying Global Public Health Nutrition (GPHN)*.

Project: GPHN Newsletter: A Collaboration from The Postgraduate Students and Alumni

Where did the inspiration to do the project come from?

The University of Westminster is committed to providing students with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in today's digital age. The university's courses are constantly updated to reflect the latest trends in technology and learning. This ensures that students are always learning the most relevant skills and knowledge, and that they are prepared for the challenges of the modern workplace. Our Course Leader, Dr. Regina Keith, has over four decades of experience in the health and nutrition sectors internationally, she and the teaching team in collaboration with students over the last ten years, have integrated university core values of compassion, internationalism, employability and innovation (moving research into action) into the MSc Global Public Health Nutrition. The MSc GPHN (Global Public Health Nutrition) covers a global remit of addressing malnutrition in all its forms and it is a course with a diverse background of students where over 80% of the students are international. After graduation, students are often recruited by leading NGOs like WHO, UNHCR, UNICEF, SAVE The Children, School Food Matters etc. Our Alumni are encouraged to return to share their experiences, with more than 10 alumni visiting lecture classes a year. They are actively following the vice chancellor's request by changing the world in small steps every day.

Last year one of our Alumni won the University Recent Graduate award and another came second in the Big Idea in 2020. Meeting these inspirational alumni have encouraged us to submit this project to harness these lessons more often in a way that can be captured, through meeting with more alumni and starting a course newsletter to promote sharing and opportunities. Our course leader has wanted to create one for years but did not have the time to do so. During a meeting with students and the CL we agreed to submit a SCC bid to move from an idea to action and make the newsletter idea a reality. Learning from each other and from our alumni is integrated deep into the fabric of the

MSc GPHN programme. Our alumni also mentor present students and offer internship roles within their organisation when they leave. We wanted to make such sharing easier and hence the idea of adding an employability meeting was added to the idea of the newsletter. The staff and students want to ensure more alumni feed into employability opportunities and share their experiences in getting jobs and how they have found their present roles. These would improve our chances of getting a job after we graduate while supporting more alumni to share their voices in a regular way, especially those that cannot come back to teach in the UK. It would really be helpful to open up a better way of communicating with the alumni and demonstrate the success of our graduates not always captured through other systems already in place.

What did you set out to achieve?

We wanted to firstly arrange alumni meetings with current students to learn from them and find out what they thought of our ideas. When students from international settings graduate, they don't always get to share their experiences as much as UK based alumni. So, we aimed to connect with our international alumni through a google response sheet and through links our course leader had already established. We also aimed to establish a list of alumni interested in taking part in the creation of GPHN newsletter or sharing their stories. We wanted to determine from the alumni what information did they feel they would have liked when they finished and what should be included in a newsletter, as well as how long it should be. Learning lessons from these students would enable us as new graduates to have more support when searching for work in the present recession and come up with innovative solutions that could be weaved into the course and the newsletter and future alumni engagement. We also wanted to explore if any skills should be added to our course and when these should be added. We asked alumni to share what challenges they encountered searching for work and how they overcame these challenges. We also wanted to know what skills they had been given which they found helpful to feed into the course revalidation process. Also linking our class to more alumni, we hoped we could share jobs and opportunities like PhD, research collaborations, conferences, congress etc. We wanted to acknowledge our students and alumni with their success stories through our GPHN Newsletter. We wanted to be able to publish our newsletter in September 2023 when the new student started to inspire them to continue with the work and connections.

How did students and staff work together on this project?

To facilitate efficient communication and collaboration, an email group encompassing both students and staff was established. Additionally, an exclusive WhatsApp group chat was initiated solely for student communications. The email group's purpose revolved around disseminating crucial information, addressing student inquiries, and keeping track of deadlines. To maintain synchronization, regular meetings were conducted, fostering dialogue between students and staff to assess progress and generate innovative concepts. An excel chart was kept with interactions and deadlines and project activities.

A pivotal responsibility for students was to establish contact with alumni of the GPHN program, pinpointing individuals eager to contribute to the newsletter. This initiative was streamlined through the creation of the Google form, which was then disseminated via email and LinkedIn, gathering pertinent contact details from alumni. A dedicated WhatsApp group chat was also instituted, fostering direct communication between students and alumni. Also, the alumni met in classes were recruited to help in the task. Many alumni expressed interest, but time was a challenge for many. Hence many meetings were online or out of uni hours after work.

Two inclusive on-site meetings with alumni were convened, engaging students, staff, and alumni, to agree the newsletter's aspirations and objectives and content. Two employability events were also convened including food (pizza) to focus on job opportunities that students can achieve after this degree. During these sessions, alumni graciously shared their experiences and insights, pivotal in shaping the forthcoming newsletter. Concurrently, staff members provided unwavering guidance and support, nurturing students throughout the entirety of the process. Student led the events the management and coordinating of the events with some support from the academic partner. Student partners assumed the role of motivating their peers' active involvement in meetings and networking occasions. As an academic staff member, Dr Regina was always available to answer questions from students and alumni. She was quick to respond to inquiries and always made herself accessible to those who needed her help.

What kind of impact do you anticipate that your work may have on learning and teaching going forward (specific to your course/module or in a broader context)

The main goal of our work was to create a list of alumni who are interested in participating in and hosting employability events with current students and alumni. This has been created and is already being used as we collect material for the newsletter.

We also wanted to create a newsletter for GPHN through this SCC project, which would be a long-term benefit for both students and alumni. The newsletter draft is being edited and will be launched as planned at the induction on September 20th in the University when we will be the alumni launching the newsletter, we will establish a 2023 24 committee from that induction and offer mentoring from alumni who have agreed to join this project. We have fed in the skills requested from alumni which include cv and interview skills to happen in semester 3 rather than in semester one and a writing retreat to be established in July to support thesis writing. The course leader has agreed to incorporate these sessions into the degree. Alumni also requested support to publish their research. The new research methods module has changed from a 10,000-word thesis to a 4–5000-word article which will help students write more effectively.

As students ourselves, we have a unique first-hand account of what worked for us and what did not. We hope that the ideas we have developed will increase engagement and opportunities for employability. This will inspire other teaching methods and techniques, making learning more enjoyable and worthwhile. This initiative also provides a way for current and former students to connect, which can help students build confidence and develop valuable transferable skills. We gained skills in using tools such as online survey platforms and publishing apps and the importance of gathering contact details before students finish classes in April. We have also made friends for life and have really enjoyed the social space with each other the alumni and our course leader Dr. Regina.

Any lessons learned from working in partnership?

Collaborating with academics can be challenging for postgraduate students, especially when it comes to meeting deadlines. The scheduling and report submission timeline should be reconsidered, as July-September is a crucial period for dissertation submissions. However, the experience has been ultimately rewarding. For PG SCC projects we think the deadline should be end of August or early September. Also we have more time to engage in activities from August, we wish we had this project from the start of the year so we could have planned the activities better.

Working with academics and alumni is an excellent learning opportunity for students. We met amazing Alumni some are leading health and nutrition in their countries others have completed their PhD and are teaching themselves. Some have gone on to work in advocacy or urban farming, we were surprised how many different avenues were possible. However we were saddened that these experiences are not captured by the University. Maybe that is our next challenge to improve how the university tracks progress of international graduates as we would all like to keep in touch with Dr. Regina and the University. Establishing connections with our alumni has already opened employment and intern opportunities for the students in the SCC and the wider class. Hence we feel the project was worth the extra time and effort we put in. This project would have lacked depth and detail if it had been a solo effort. Working in collaboration has taught us to use the talents and skills of others, which we may still be developing. The goal of this SCC project is to create our first GPHN newsletter. This has been a remarkable journey in our Westminster and academic experiences, as we will lead the launch. You are all invited to attend on September 20th (room still to be confirmed) at 4 pm in 115 New Cavendish Street. We feel proud and excited for the future.

