Concurrent Session J
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Session 6
Pulse: The Student Voice – The Need to Listen
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Peter Barnard is the Student Success Project Officer within the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Education) at Southern Cross University. He has worked in the higher education sector in a variety of professional roles since 1994, ranging from Admissions Manager, Student Centre Manager, Student Recruitment, to agile project teams implementing institution wide IT systems. He developed the load management tools SCU used for many years prior to moving to a trimester model. Peter works alongside the Student Engagement and Retention Team and focuses on institution wide strategies regarding the student experience. He is currently enrolled in a Masters of Business Analytics at Deakin University.

Pulse is a unique on-line real-time interface for students to post feedback (positive and negative) to the university and to ask questions. Posts and responses from Southern Cross University (SCU) are available for all to see, and students can agree or disagree with the post. Students can post anonymously or log in to receive a personalised reply. Pulse is an intuitive, quick and transparent communication channel between students and the university, designed specifically to better understand and improve the student experience. It has become an excellent mechanism for university management to become aware of and understand the issues important to students. After more than two years of operation and thousands of posts, Pulse is now an important tool embedded in the psyche of the institution, loved by students, loved and hated by staff.
This distinctive channel of communication has made the university much more transparent and accountable, which has led to its share of supporters and detractors, resulting in significant but positive cultural changes within the organisation. Pulse is administered by the recently formed Student Engagement and Retention Team with complaints, comments and commendations being forwarded to relevant staff including members of executive for noting/approval. It has given SCU the opportunity to respond to student feedback in a new and timely way and ensures the institution can be communicated with at an individual level, yet providing a platform in which all students participate in the discussion.

An internal review was conducted in 2015 to determine the measurable and perceived impacts of Pulse, and to decide if it should continue. The most contentious issue was the ability for students to post anonymously (65% of posts) and the subsequent impact on staff morale as students were free to say what they wanted (after moderation). This anonymity is a double edged sword giving students a platform to freely express whatever they like, but at the same time giving them the safety to post honest feedback and questions without fear of retribution. This remains Pulse's greatest strength as well as its greatest area of conflict. During the internal review 76% of respondents wanted Pulse to continue.

Students do feel like they have a voice with Pulse and can directly see how the university is genuinely concerned about their experience, whilst at the same time being able to communicate how complex some issues are to resolve. It has created a more collegiate relationship between staff, as well as between staff and students on their shared journey.

This session will cover the evolution of Pulse, the pitfalls and highlights, and the lessons learnt along the way.