The peak of partnerships: UA and CAPA working together to improve campus safety

Oral, Students as partners

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Abstract:

Addressing sexual violence in universities has been an ongoing issue for many years and has often seen university administrators at odds with student leaders. Students have felt that their voices haven't been heard by senior leadership and that change, or action, has not occurred sincerely or quickly enough. Universities have sometimes responded to this criticism arguing that the complexities of their organisations can mean progress takes longer than anticipated. However, as conversations about sexual violence have amplified over the past few years there has been a welcome increase in collaboration between universities and students on this issue.

In this presentation, two peak bodies in the sector – Universities Australia and the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations – talk about how we have worked in partnership as part of the Respect. Now. Always. initiative. We discuss the benefits and challenges of working together.

The partnership between our two organisations is unique because it puts aside the historical tension between ‘the establishment’ and its students on the critical issue of student safety and wellbeing. While both organisations represent different stakeholders, our partnership works because of each party’s commitment to:

- working towards a common goal
- flexibility
- trust
- transparency
- open communication
- honouring organisational objectives
- recognising organisational limitations and differences.

We offer insight into how we have reached agreement on complex pieces of work and the lessons we have learned along the way.

Biography:

Renee is the policy lead on the university sector-wide initiative Respect Now Always that aims to prevent sexual assault and sexual harassment in universities. Prior to this role,
she worked in gender equality policy and research for the Commonwealth Government. Renee’s academic and professional background is in psychology and she has worked in the community and government sectors supporting victims of family violence and sexual assault.

Natasha is the National President of the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations, the peak representative body for Australia’s 400,000+ postgraduate students. She is the past president of the Monash Postgraduate Association. Natasha is also a doctoral student in the Monash University School of Social Sciences, and her dissertation examines how the sexual division of domestic labour is promoted by news reporting of scientific findings.