



Class Representative

HANDBOOK

MUSA
—
2018

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An Introduction for Class Representatives

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CONGRATULATIONS ON BEING ELECTED!

Thank you for taking up the opportunity to be a Class Representative. You will have the amazing opportunity of being able to actively affect positive change on your course by being the advocate for your fellow students.

Massey University and MUSA have a mandate to gather and respond to student voices, and the Class Representative system is one way to address academic issues. As a student Class Representative, you will have the opportunity to be one of these voices by sharing the experiences of your class, and act on new initiatives to make changes to improve your student experience.

So, look forward to the work you'll be doing this semester and remember that MUSA is always here to support you in supporting your fellow students.



How do I use this handbook?

The purpose of this handbook is to offer you guidance on your new role as a Class Representative. It gives you insight into the choices you will be making and actions you will be taking, as well as on how to think about them. Mainly, this is intended to help you be an effective Class Representative so you can get as much out of this experience as possible.



Why do we need class representatives?

The existence of a Class Representative in a course creates the opportunity for students to give feedback to lecturers in an effective manner. This informal communication channel enables lecturers to understand students' opinions and constructs the opportunity for issues to be resolved as early as possible. Also, having a Class Representative ensures that students have their voice heard, enhancing the whole learning experience.

Benefits Empowerment

You take active part in determining the direction of your own and your peers' education. By doing this, you will become aware of larger issues influencing your education.

Skills Development

Through MUSA training, you will improve your transferable skills, such as: critical thinking, communication and mediation skills, all crucially important for you to be effective in your role.

Become Connected

Not only will you get to know the students in your class, you will build relationships with your lecturers (who are not your enemies) and will also interact with Massey staff. Last but not least, MUSA executive and staff are the people that will ultimately be there to support you 100% when you need it (even if not).

Celebrate

MUSA knows that putting yourself in the front line takes guts and commitment. We will give you a certificate of service and a reference for your CV. We also have whopping big parties at the end of the year for all MUSA volunteers (of which you are one). Even if you are a student representative only in Semester 1.

How to be a Class Representative

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Role and responsibilities

As a Class Representative your responsibilities will be to:

- Attend MUSA's 90-minute training session which will prepare you to start your journey as an effective representative and give you a chance to meet with other student volunteers and reps.
- Check that course content and structure is consistent with stated objectives, Stream, handouts, assessment load and the University Calendar.
- Be available and approachable for your fellow students, able to hear their concerns and issues and to gather their general feedback.
- Cultivate a good relationship with your lecturer/s
- Identify that an issue brought to you is indeed an isolated, academic issue that affects more than one individual.
- Refer any personal and/or non-academic issues to MUSA's advocacy service

Please also read MUSA's Class Representative Policy, by visiting: www.musa.org.nz/class-reps



First steps

Make sure your class knows who you are and how to get in touch. Write your contact details on the whiteboard or point your classmates to the Class Rep directory on the MUSA Website. Establishing a strong presence is a vital first step but it needs to also be maintained throughout the semester.

Areas to focus on

Ultimately, you will be playing a role in improving the learning experience your course offers, not only for you and your class but for all its future students. The student learning experience is the overall experience of all academic areas of a course. Enhancing it will allow students to get the most out of their courses and apply what they learnt to their lives outside of the classroom. Understanding that a student's learning experience is affected by many areas of education will be vital to your success as a Class Representative.

Appendix 1 P15 shows 6 areas of your course that you need to examine: Curriculum, learning resources, teaching and learning process, assessment and feedback, student progression and achievement, and guidance and support.

Bearing in mind how each area affects the student learning experience, you may want to ask yourself and/or the class the following questions about your course:

Curriculum

- How is the course organised?
- How clear is the timetable?
- Is there a curriculum outline provided?
- Are classes useful?
- Were learning expectations clearly outlined?
- Did the learning outcomes actually correspond to what you learnt?
- Were you satisfied by the modules that were offered?
- How are the modules structured?
- Was the course challenging?
- Do you feel your course is making you more employable?

Learning resources

- Are there adequate library and computing facilities?
- Do you have access to materials you need? For example, books, lab equipment and art materials?
- Did departmental facilities meet your expectations?
- Was the lecture material easily accessible?
- Were resources adequately available?
- If you are studying a practical course, do you have access to the right resources?
- Are you aware of/do you know how to use the resources available to you?

Learning and teaching process

- Were you consistently/sufficiently guided to practice your skills throughout your course?
- Are you able to learn in a way that suits you?
- How would you rate the teaching?
- Are there any forms of learning you would like in addition to lectures and tutorials?
- Do you find the lectures a satisfactory method of imparting information?
- Did you find the size of your tutorials conducive to further learning?
- Did you feel your department/course prepared you sufficiently for your assessments?
- Is teaching material up-to-date?
- Do you understand lecture contents?

Assessment and feedback

- Does the assessment adequately and fairly represent the content of the course?
- Was the course fairly marked?
- Do all the lecturers grade to the same standard?
- Do you receive adequate feedback from your assessments?

- Was the feedback received useful and appropriate after assessments or course work? Are there too many exams or assessments?
- What is the frequency of coursework and assessments in each module?
- Is the assessment criteria clear to you?
- Are you given enough time to prepare for assessments?
- Is the style of assessment appropriate?
- Is there too little or too much continuous assessment?

Student progression and achievement

- Do you feel you have improved by completing this course?
- Would you like to progress to the next level?
- Can you measure your own personal progress through your course?
- Has your course made you more employable?
- Are you able to move from one module to the next?
- What are you getting out of studying this course?

Guidance and learner support

- How much support are you getting with your work?
- How much support are you getting from staff?
- Was academic support readily available?
- Is there a place/person you can get help from if you're struggling with the subjects?
- Are staff and students aware of the channels for dealing with issues?

How to be a good Class Rep

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Be Approachable

We can't stress enough the importance of making yourself known and available to the students you are representing. A good Class Rep will try to get feedback from as many course students as possible before presenting it to their lecturer/s.

Communicate effectively

As well as being approachable, Class Reps need to communicate effectively. Closing the feedback loop by acknowledging any complaints and feeding back the action you have taken can be as simple as a short email or a conversation after class. This is an extremely important point as effective communication can help others feel that you are truly hearing them and taking their voice seriously.

Respectful practices

Dealing with any issues and feedback forums in a professional and respectful manner is an expected part of being a Class Rep. Mediating forums and meetings can sometimes be something you will need to do.

What not to do

We really appreciate you standing up for your fellow students, but there are a few things that you should not do, as being a student is your first priority. If encounter a situation described below, or is just confused on what to do, please contact MUSA and we will help you navigate it:

- At no time are you a dumping ground for personal problems.
- At no time, you should let class rep. duties impact negatively on your studies (See MUSA if that is the case).
- Do not deal with harassment cases.
- Staff employment issues are not your responsibility.
- Don't demand favours because of your position.
- Don't focus on the negative.

- Don't take on serious, formal complaints. Bring them immediately to the right people (MUSA Advocacy can help you).
- Don't go public with issues, problems, complaints. If in doubt, keep things anonymous.
- Don't deal directly with issues of harassment and/or discrimination. Refer these immediately to the staff liaison and/or MUSA Advocacy.
- Do not discuss your lecturer's performance, any grievance against staff, any harassment, bullying and/or non-academic issue.

Facebook

Setting up a course Facebook page is a great idea to establish strong ongoing communication about the quality of student learning experience. However, this does not mean it will work for everyone in the class. Nevertheless, here are a few tips for working with online forums.

- Let the students and lecturer know during class that you have set up a page
- Be clear that the Class Rep is the admin, not the Lecturer
- Make sure everyone understands that the page is only for discussion about the general course, not a clarification
- Make the page private in order to maintain class confidentiality

THE ABCD OF EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

Below are some tips to help you understand how to feel confident talking with academic staff.

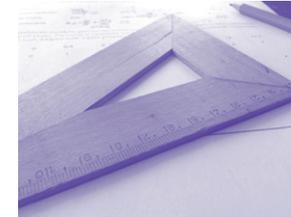


Image by Dawid Malecki on Unsplash

Accurate:

When commenting on the learning experience, be specific, and provide evidence for what you are saying. Avoid

sweeping generalisations or emotional language. If you have a survey that tells you 67% of people don't like the feedback they receive, don't tell staff that 97% don't like it.

Balanced:

Don't just pass on negative comments to staff, even if that is mostly what you are hearing from students. Say positive things too. This helps soften the blow and makes you look more professional.

Constructive:

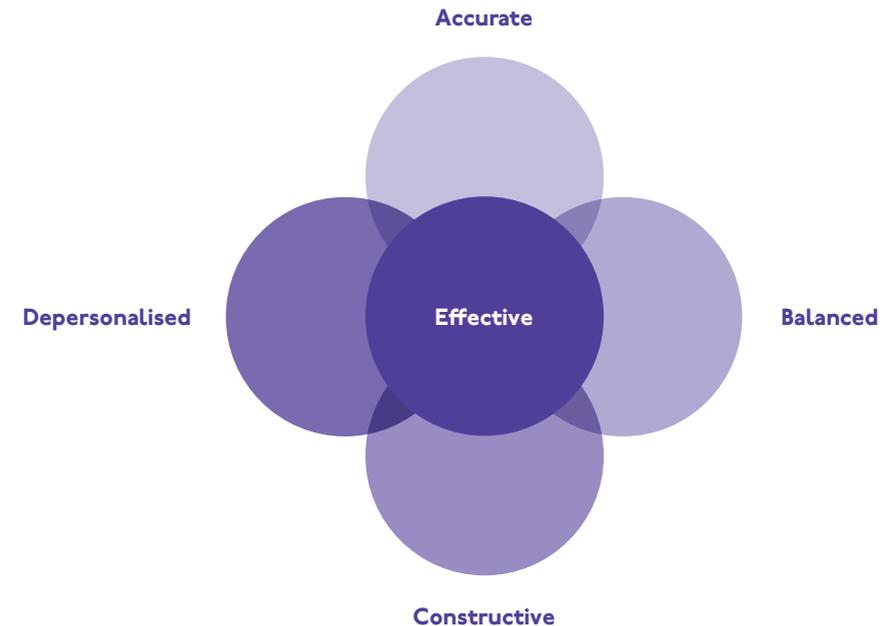
You are not just here to identify the problems; you are also here to help find a solution too. If you raise an issue, make a suggestion at the same time - this also helps you to look professional.



Image by Dawid Malecki on Unsplash

Depersonalised:

Even if students think that a member of staff has done something wrong, it's always hard to make or receive personal comments. Try not to mention anyone by name in meetings, talk about the class and the impact on the learning experience. You may want to arrange a specific meeting with other staff to raise issues like this.



If you are ever unsure about anything, please talk to us as we are more than happy to help you.

Problem solving

Firstly, **clarify** how the issue presented to you has affected the student learning experience of the class. **Identify** whether the issue is relevant to your role as a Class Rep. If not, you may need to contact MUSA's Advocacy Service or the Centre for Teaching and Learning and **refer** the issue to them. Otherwise, you may progress to **resolve** the issue by booking a time to meet with your lecturer/s. In this meeting, you should present the issue from the students' view and propose any solutions you may have. The process from here will involve diplomacy between you and the lecturer/s to find and agree on a reasonable solution. Make sure to take note and **report back** to your classmates.

Will I be all alone?

No! MUSA walks with you. So, will your fellow class reps., and ultimately, the department as well. Solving issues at the lowest level and in a timely manner is in everybody's interest, and you will find that your lecturers and the staff-student committees are more than open to hear genuine issues regarding academic matters.

If you are ever unsure about anything, please talk to us as we are more than happy to help you.



Contacts



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Who is MUSA?

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MUSA

Massey University Students' Association (MUSA) is your independent Student Association which is run by students for students with the aim to ensure that you have the best possible time at University.

Each year, students are elected onto the MUSA Executive and these students set to achieve constructive change within the University, while aided by a competent body of employed staff.

Advocacy service

The MUSA advocates are here to support students to overcome academic or welfare challenges big or small which may arise during their tertiary journey.

This free service is confidential and independent from Massey University. It is a safe space where you can understand your rights and options through support and advice, including referrals to appropriate services.

Qualified social workers Kerry Howe have the experience and resources to support you through any issues that might occur from dodgy landlords, academic grievances, to a financial hardship grant for those moments when an unforeseen and temporary situation pop up.

Contact MUSA's Advocacy Service

Kerry Howe
advocacy@musa.org.nz
(06) 356 9099 ext. 86070
Student Centre - Room 2.22

OTHER SERVICES PROVIDED

Accommodation

MUSA offers an accommodation service with an up-to-date listing of flats available. To see flats that may be available, please contact:

Pauline Karam
adminassist@musa.org.nz
(06) 356 45000

Clubs

MUSA supports over 70 clubs on the Manawatu campus. Whether you want to play board games, or floorball, or conserve wildlife, there is a club for you!

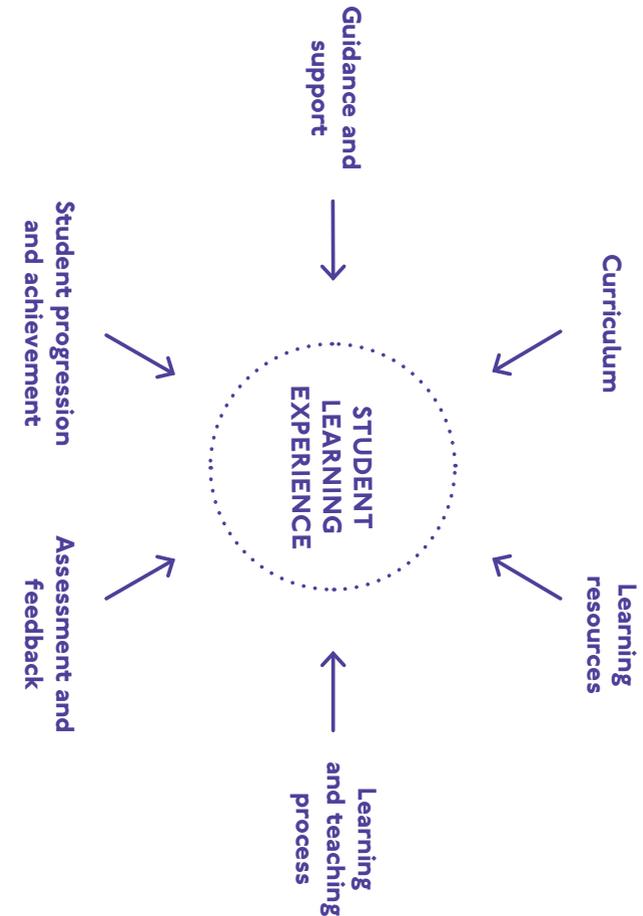
To see all clubs in the Manawatu Campus, please access: www.musa.org.nz/clubs/directory

Equipment hire

MUSA has a variety of equipment available for hire (free) by student groups, including:

- A lounge to host your event
- BBQs
- Tent
- Digital Camera
- Digital Projector
- Boardroom
- PA system

To book, please go to www.musa.org.nz





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STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION
