Evaluation of the Widening Participation Student Ambassadors Initiative
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EVALUATION OF THE WIDENING PARTICIPATION STUDENT AMBASSADORS INITIATIVE

Project Report for Office of Widening Participation, Western Sydney University

PROJECT REPORT
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FF</td>
<td>Fast Forward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFF</td>
<td>First Foot Forward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEPP</td>
<td>Higher Education Participation Program</td>
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<td>OWP</td>
<td>Office of Widening Participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>PATHE</td>
<td>Pasifika Achievement To Higher Education</td>
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<td>STEPS</td>
<td>Strive Towards Educational Participation and Success</td>
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<td>WP</td>
<td>Widening Participation</td>
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<td>WSU</td>
<td>Western Sydney University</td>
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We thank Prue Adams and Flora Zhong for their research support and expertise in qualitative and quantitative data gathering and analysis respectively. Particular thanks are due to Prue for her extensive work on the Final Report.

Finally, we acknowledge the support of the School of Education and Western Sydney University who provided the infrastructure and support services required to conduct this evaluation.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction
The Office of Widening Participation at Western Sydney University delivers more than 50 programs in schools and around the university that aim to increase young people’s educational engagement and aspirations for higher study. These programs are particularly focused on students from low SES backgrounds, and equity groups identified by the Bradley Review (2008) into higher education. These are supported by WSU students who have received training as Student Ambassadors. Although evaluations of specific programs and impacts on school students have been undertaken, there has never been a focus on the Student Ambassadors themselves, on their experiences and perceptions of the program, and the impact of their contributions. This evaluation aims to fill that gap.

The Student Ambassadors deliver programs to ensure that educational and life pathways are open to young people of all backgrounds and circumstances; however Student Ambassadors’ own experiences within these programs and the impact of program participation on their own academic, social and civic outcomes has, thus far, been overlooked. Many of the Student Ambassadors themselves have experienced challenges to participation in higher education that parallel those of the school students with whom they work. Further, participation in the program as Student Ambassadors is likely to enhance their own engagement in higher education.

Accordingly, the purpose of this project was to evaluate the impact of Western Sydney University students’ participation in the WP Student Ambassadors program in terms of their self-efficacy beliefs, academic and professional resilience, professional skill development, civic and social awareness, connectedness to community and academic outcomes. These dimensions of impact were evaluated through a mixed-method, multi-cohort evaluation over the course of the 2016 academic year.

As one of the aims of this research project was to explore how engaging with low-SES/high-need primary and secondary school students as role models may have influenced their sense of civic and social responsibility, this research can directly inform the future practice of WP program in increasing students’ sense of community connections with the Western Sydney University academic community as well as the broader Western Sydney region.

Research aims
The project aimed to evaluate the impact of participation as Student Ambassadors in widening participation programs at Western Sydney University on the Student Ambassadors themselves. It aimed to gauge their self-efficacy beliefs, academic and professional resilience, professional skill development, civic and social awareness, connectedness to community and academic outcomes.

Research design and method
The evaluation was designed as a mixed-method, multi-cohort evaluation over the course of the 2016 academic year. Online surveys used a range of validated scales that measured the constructs of self-efficacy beliefs, academic and professional resilience,
professional skill development, civic and social awareness, connectedness to community and academic outcomes. Interviews were designed to elicit extended accounts and reflections on their experiences from the Student Ambassadors, or from stakeholders on their views of the impacts on the Student Ambassadors with whom they had worked.

- Current Student Ambassadors (Cohort 1) completed pre-survey and post-survey at two points in time, before and after they worked in widening participation programs in 2016. (See Chapter 3)
- Previous Student Ambassadors (Cohort 2) completed an online survey about their previous experience as Student Ambassadors. (See Chapter 4)
- A subgroup of previous Student Ambassadors (Cohort 3) were interviewed about their previous experience as Student Ambassadors. (See Chapter 5)
- A range of stakeholders working in widening participation initiatives and OWP (Cohort 4) were interviewed for their insights into the Student Ambassador experiences. (See Chapter 6)

Findings

The evaluation found that students and stakeholders were in agreement that the Student Ambassador program was highly beneficial for both ambassadors’ personal and professional growth. Further, it has immediate and ongoing impact for Western Sydney University and its wider community. In addition, the evaluation found that working as a student ambassador helped participants to achieve the university’s Graduate Attribute: ‘demonstrates comprehensive, coherent and connected knowledge’ (Appendix 10) and directly contributed to their future professional careers.

Students universally cited their high regard for the aims of the program and were proud of their own contributions to those aims. Working with young people was personally rewarding and they could see visible changes in those young people which, in turn, impacted on their own efficacy beliefs and broader sense of self. In general, students left the program because of graduation and many would have liked to continue with the program if their personal and professional circumstances would have allowed.

The key focus was to investigate the impact of participation in the Student Ambassador program on students’ self-efficacy beliefs, academic and professional resilience, professional skill development, civic and social awareness, connectedness to community and students’ academic outcomes. These were evaluated via qualitative and quantitative data collection from the following cohorts:

- Current student ambassadors [survey data];
- Student ambassador alumni [survey and interview data];
- Program stakeholders [interview data].

Prior to addressing these key aims, we believe that it is important to highlight student participants’ perceived benefits of project participation that sit outside these measures.

Altruistic and personal benefits

While students identified the pragmatic benefits of gaining professional experience and earning money, the majority of students prioritised altruistic benefits such as helping
young people and making a difference in their lives, engaging with and giving back to the Western Sydney community, and the satisfaction and enjoyment the experience gave them. This seems to have been stronger for Western Sydney University students than in previously reported research on such programs overseas. For current Student Ambassadors these altruistic motivations significantly increased by the end of their first year as Student Ambassadors. Student Ambassador alumni also described how altruistic reasons for participation strengthened through their period of involvement, and stayed with them during the years following their experience.

Student Ambassadors identified numerous aspects of the experience as personally rewarding and enjoyable. They felt that they were making a difference in young peoples’ lives by inspiring them towards higher aspirational goals, often sharing their own parallel stories in their work with young people. They took the responsibility of being role models for young people seriously and were touched when young people looked up to them in this way. They enjoyed interacting and working with peers in other disciplines from across the university. They increased their knowledge of and appreciation for the rich cultural diversity of the region and of the university. They were proud to represent the university in schools and the wider community. This links with the WSU Graduate Attribute: ‘understands and engages effectively with the culturally and socially diverse world in which they live and will work.’

**Professional skill development**

Professional skill development was seen by all cohorts as both a motivation for and an outcome of participating in the Student Ambassador program. These included valuable soft skills like leadership, communication, interpersonal skills, flexibility, responsibility, teamwork, time management and initiative taking. The development of profession specific skills such as engaging and working with young people, seeing their potential as individuals, and applying knowledge acquired in an academic context were also seen as valuable skills acquired through the program, particularly in relation to teaching, social work and nursing careers which were the most frequently reported courses in which Student Ambassadors were enrolled. This facet of the evaluation links to the following Graduate Attributes: ‘commands multiple skills and literacies to enable adaptable lifelong learning’ and ‘applies knowledge through intellectual inquiry in professional or applied contexts.’

In relation to communication and interpersonal skills, students specifically identified developing the ability to listen, talk, connect and engage with diverse audiences, as well as public speaking and presentation skills, and the confidence to speak to strangers, to articulate their own ideas, and to work collaboratively to solve problems.

These student self-assessments of professional skill development were echoed in the observations of program leaders who saw student ambassadors developing a broad range of skills over time as their confidence grew with exposure to a wide range of people and experiences.

**Increased self-efficacy beliefs**

Self-efficacy refers to the strength of a person’s belief in their abilities to achieve goals and complete tasks. Increased self-efficacy was evident across all cohorts and is a significant impact from participation as Student Ambassadors.
Increased confidence, self-worth and openness were identified as key personal attributes developed through their participation in the program. Student Ambassadors also felt increased confidence in themselves as leaders which they attributed to improved interpersonal and communication skills and leading successful collaboration with diverse groups of people, and their ability to find solutions in difficult situations. Program leaders also observed these qualities develop in the Student Ambassadors over time. This links with the Graduate Descriptor: ‘is a self-reliant learner who works effectively in groups and teams.’

Feeling you can make a difference in the community was seen as a significant outcome of being a Student Ambassador. Moments where the Student Ambassadors saw how they were making a difference in an individual young person’s life were powerful experiences that affirmed their sense of self-efficacy.

The experience of telling their own stories and seeing the effect these stories had on the young people and the way the young people perceived them, gave the Student Ambassadors a sense of agency and affirmed their identity as successful and effective people in the world, sometimes reawakening and expanding their own sense of future possibility.

Through their work as Student Ambassadors, alumni felt included in and part of the university, the western Sydney region, and for some, with particular cultural communities. Feeling the value of their work and pride in their contribution strengthened this identification and bolstered their sense of self-worth and potential.

Alumni reported increased confidence in themselves and their ability to engage, succeed and effect change personally, socially, academically and professionally as a result of their experience as Student Ambassadors. They experienced pride and satisfaction in helping others, in particular young people. While our quantitative measure of self-efficacy was concerned strictly with the domain of Personal Effectiveness and Locus of Control (Figure 10), an unanticipated outcome was that students’ sense of self in relation to personal values and impact also increased.

**Civic and social awareness and connectedness to community**

By and large, students’ sense of civic and social awareness was enhanced as a result of their experiences as student ambassadors. This was strongly the case with alumni and stakeholder interviews and implicit in the survey responses of current students and alumni in terms of motivations and reasons for recommending the program to others. Exposure to and engagement with a wide range of people, cultures, and levels of disadvantage through the program led to greater understanding of the barriers to education as well as its potential to transform the lives of individuals and communities, and a greater appreciation of their own situation as university students. Further, the firsthand experience of the impact they have as student ambassadors in encouraging and inspiring young people towards higher aspirational goals fostered an ongoing interest in, and commitment for some, in continuing this kind of work.

Increased connectedness to community was also evident. Shared narratives and direct personal engagement with school students led to increased identification with the broader Western Sydney community and increased pride in representing and promoting the university and what they perceived as its genuine and inclusive approach to widening participation in Western Sydney. A sense of belonging and pride in the
university was often fostered through the experience of working as a Student Ambassador.

Current Student Ambassadors demonstrated a strong civic and social awareness and desire to give back to their communities (connectedness) with their top motivations for becoming an SA being the desire to help young people improve their futures, and the belief that young people are the key to the future. The biggest shift in motivations for current Student Ambassadors was the addition of ‘Promoting WSU’ and increased significance of ‘Serving as representative of WSU’ as motivating factors through the year of their engagement as Student Ambassadors. This suggests that current students developed an increased sense of institutional belonging, as measured by identification with and connection to WSU, by the end of their year as Student Ambassadors. While the survey does not establish a causal link, interview results from alumni support this probability.

Academic and Professional Resilience and Academic Outcomes

Academic resilience measures students’ ability to deal with setbacks, failure and adversity within a learning environment. Although the study was unable to measure direct links with academic outcomes, alumni reported that their retention and resilience were impacted. They acquired greater confidence in their ability to engage and achieve academically. Academic behaviours as measured by attendance did not show significant variations. Students sometimes became more passionate and committed to their chosen careers, and the academic pathways that would lead them there. Program leaders also recognised that increased confidence in the Student Ambassadors led to increased retention and academic resilience.

Challenges and suggested improvements to the Ambassador program

While the students and alumni surveyed and interviewed were highly positive about their experiences as Student Ambassadors, some common themes emerged as they identified challenges and made suggestions for improvement.

Organisational aspects included the distribution of work which was identified as an issue by both current students and alumni. Many of them would have liked increased opportunities for work, requesting both more frequent and more consistent work. They were aware of the uneven distribution of opportunity, and a number were disappointed that they were not rostered on as much as they would have liked to be. While communication was identified as an issue by several current students, it was also identified by program leaders who rely on responses from Student Ambassadors regarding their availability.

Increased or enhanced training was also identified as an area that could potentially be improved. Greater clarity about the aims of the program and the roles of Student Ambassadors within each program and more targeted debrief and feedback sessions would have been appreciated by some Student Ambassadors.

Further there were suggestions from both alumni and program leader interviewees to broaden the scope of recruitment to include a wider range of faculties (i.e. beyond teaching), and also to increase opportunities for teaching students to participate. These apparently opposing suggestions were motivated by the strong perceived value of the program for students from all faculties in broadening their personal and professional
development while at university. Widening recruitment was seen to be a way of improving the program by increasing the range of role models, study and career options available to participating school students.

**Recommendations**

*Recommendations for Western Sydney University and Australian Government, funding Higher Education Participation Program:*

The Student Ambassador program should be continued, expanded and celebrated as it not only encourages school students to move into Higher Education but also fosters professional and personal growth for the Student Ambassadors themselves.

*Recommendations for the Office of Widening Participation:*

1. Recognise and promote the benefits of working as a Student Ambassador in developing a wide range of skills and dispositions amongst Western Sydney University students. The experience is potentially transformative and the aspirational focus of WP activities has reciprocal effects on WSU students as well as school students. Encourage the university to recognise learning that takes place outside courses, for example by working with other sections of the university to (i) map the reported impacts of Student Ambassador work against an expanded version of WSU Graduate Attributes (Learning Transformations), (ii) develop promotional materials that identify the impacts and effects that Student Ambassadors have in their work as ‘aspiration agents’ with young people across the region (Media Unit).

2. Investigate submitting an application to have voluntary Student Ambassador activities recorded on the Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement given the contribution the role makes to the extension of the experience of the student’s program of study. However we note that some Student Ambassadors participation is paid and some is voluntary so this may not be feasible.

3. Recognise that Student Ambassador work is taken up within a network or ecology of outreach activities conducted by the university. While many of these are associated with OWP, students and alumni identified related activities offered by other sections of the university that they took up that had similar intent to connect with young people in ways that encouraged them to envisage and work towards their futures.

4. **Ongoing data collection for program evaluation:**
   a. While the quantitative elements of project evaluation demonstrated some shift in key student outcomes over the year of their participation, interpretation was compromised due to low numbers of participation and the restrictions of two time points. We recommend that OWP continue to administer the pre-/post- surveys at two time points annually. Further, we recommend that the program staff incorporate survey completion into program training and completion, to increase participation. We recommend that this quantitative data be captured as a mandatory component of participation in the Student Ambassador program at several time points. Time point #1 (pre-/baseline survey) should be prior to their orientation session as a new Student Ambassador at the start of the academic year. The second time point (post- survey) should be at conclusion of the calendar year of ambassador activities. For ongoing ambassadors, we recommend that follow-up surveys (post- surveys) should be
readministered at the start and end of each subsequent year of student participation. In this way, the program can capture both short and longitudinal impact, particularly useful for some of the psychosocial measures included in the instrumentation which may take longer than one academic year to exhibit effect. Surveys should be accessed via student email addresses to ensure matching of pre and post surveys.

b. We further recommend the addition of self-reporting measures of academic outcomes within the pre-/post- survey given the challenges associated with accessing students’ official university transcripts for the purposes of tracking academic change. This might include an item measuring global self-report as well as a proxy measure of academic self-concept.

5. Expand recruitment of Student Ambassadors to include students across the breadth of university schools and courses. Mixing with other Student Ambassadors was highly motivating for current university students and increased their sense of institutional belonging both while they were WSU students and subsequent to graduation.

Recommendations for University Student Support Staff:

1. Given students’ reports of learning about university support structures and programs via their participation as a Student Ambassador, rather than through standard, mainstream methods of university orientation and communication, we recommend that the university continue to monitor and improve these strategies.
CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Widening participation is and has been central to the mission, ethos, practice and reputation of Western Sydney University since its inception. It will continue to be at the core of the institution’s strategy and its development and growth.

(Widening Participation Plan 2016-2017)

The Office of Widening Participation at Western Sydney University delivers more than 50 programs in schools and around the university that aim to increase young people’s educational engagement and aspirations for higher study. The widening participation agenda is ‘vital for social justice and the economic competitiveness of our region and the nation’ (WPP 2016-2017, 3). Programs are designed to increase access, sustain engagement and enhance success throughout the student lifecycle. Many of these programs are particularly focused on students and schools from low SES backgrounds, and equity groups identified by the Bradley Review of Higher Education (2008). Early intervention is a key principle of Widening Participation programs, as evidence suggests that working with students at the youngest possible age has the greatest impact on educational aspirations and academic motivation. Access programs delivered by OWP target students in schools from Year 5 through to Year 12 and range from on campus Taster Days, Uni Days, in-school workshops, rural visits, HSC tutorials and conferences, through to theatre, journalism, debating and soccer clinics. Programs are supported by current Western Sydney University students, who are called Student Ambassadors in most programs. Some are paid, some are voluntary and some complete their placement as a course requirement.

The Student Ambassadors deliver programs to ensure that educational and life pathways are open to young people of all backgrounds and circumstances. Although evaluations of programs and their impacts on school students have been undertaken, there has never been a focus on the academic, social and civic outcomes for the Student Ambassadors. This evaluation aims to fill that gap by investigating the experiences and perceptions of Student Ambassadors of widening participation initiatives at WSU, and the impact of their contributions on themselves, their studies and the university. Many of the Student Ambassadors themselves have experienced challenges to participation in higher education that parallel those of the school students with whom they work. Participation as Student Ambassadors has the potential to enhance their own engagement in higher education.

Accordingly, the purpose of this project was to evaluate the impact of Western Sydney University students’ participation in the WP Student Ambassadors program in terms of their self-efficacy beliefs, academic and professional resilience, professional skill development, civic and social awareness, connectedness to community and academic outcomes. These dimensions of impact were evaluated through a mixed-method, multi-cohort evaluation over the course of the 2016 academic year.

As one of the aims of this research project was to explore how engaging with low-SES/high-need primary and secondary school students as role models may have influenced their sense of civic and social responsibility, this research can directly inform the future practice of WP program in increasing students’ sense of community connections with both the Western Sydney University academic community as well as the broader Western Sydney region.
Previous Research

Widening Participation programs have been comprehensively studied, particularly in the UK and Australia since government policies in each country aimed to increase higher education participation for students from under-represented backgrounds. There has been a proliferation of literature in the last decade with numerous books (e.g. Burke, 2012; Harwood, Hickey-Moody, McMahon & O’Shea, 2017; Murray & Klinger, 2014; Nolan & Marshall, 2016; Shah, Bennett & Southgate, 2015), and peer reviewed articles in journals including Studies in Higher Education, Journal of Further and Higher Education, The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education among others. Research attention has been directed towards the young people who are the targets of these programs and in the effectiveness of programs to encourage them to plan futures that incorporate university enrolment. However, the workforce of current university students who work part-time as Student Ambassadors in these programs has been largely overlooked. They may be mentioned in passing as part of the organisational structure and delivery of widening participation programs (e.g. Skene, 2010) but are not themselves of interest to most researchers. One exception is the review of UK Widening Access Initiatives by Sanders and Higham (2012) for the UK National Union of Students, which examines how current university students are involved in both widening access programs, and in retention and success for students from disadvantaged backgrounds once they get into university. Ambiguity in terminology is sometimes evident due to the breadth and variety of engagements though ‘Student Ambassador has emerged as a ‘catch-all term’ for university students working in a variety of ways in outreach programs (Sanders & Higham, 2012, 12). Gartland suggests that, in contrast to sustained mentoring or coaching relationships between young people, ‘ambassador’ often signals a ‘less intense relationship’ of engagement through campus visits, summer schools, and project-based learning opportunities (2014, 26). Importantly, even brief encounters can be instrumental in young people’s decision-making as Student Ambassadors are seen as ‘warmer’ sources of information about the university, in contrast to ‘cold’ official sources (Gartland, 2014, 30). Their interactions with young people take place in a ‘social space’ that is to some extent ‘between institutions’ and more like friendship than institutional information delivery (Gartland, 2014, 32). However it is also important that they are equipped to provide accurate information about university qualifications, progressions and other aspects of university life.

Although student ambassadors may be overlooked as just part of the apparatus of delivery for widening participation programs, they can also be considered as crucial components of what Harwood et al have recently called ‘the ecologies of learning’ that are required to develop viable pathways to university for disadvantaged students (2017, 194). They suggest universities must create ‘pedagogic lines’ that assist young people to imagine futures, and create opportunities for universities to promote a sense of ‘kinship’ with young people in order to impact their feelings, fears and imaginations (2017, 194–195). Sanders and Higham suggest that current university students are ‘key catalysts’ who can help change young people’s attitudes and expectations of university, contributing to a crucial sense of ‘belonging’ that is necessary not only for enrolling in university but also for ensuring retention and success at university (2012, 3). These studies emphasise that the decision to enter university is not a straightforward or entirely rational process of decision-making, requiring correct information and good
advice. Rather aspiration to enter university is a complex and formative process that takes place over time. It engages feelings and emotions, and a shifting sense of one’s identity, as well as logical planning for the future.

It requires young people to ‘desire, imagine, articulate and pursue alternative futures’ (Zipin, Sellar, Brennan & Gale, 2015, 230). University is not necessarily seen positively, with some young people becoming dubious about ‘school-to-university-to-career’ pathways, worried about HE debt, and subject to ‘cruel optimism’ about their futures (Zipin & Dumenden, 2014). Zipin et al. emphasise that the process of developing liveable and rewarding futures requires young people to draw on ‘multiple social-cultural resources’ (Zipin, Sellar, Brennan & Gale, 2015, 230). Student ambassadors are among the socio-cultural resources that young people can draw on. They can assist in building the ‘funds of aspiration’ that Zipin et al. (2015) argue are crucial for young people endeavouring to imagine futures that transcend the present. Student Ambassadors could be considered, in the words of Harwood et al., to form part of the ‘pedagogical lines’ that must be established between universities and schools. This might entail, for example, assisting young people with limited experience of universities to expand their imaginations beyond images that shut them out – for example, of universities as places that are ‘unbelievable,’ ‘anxiety’ producing, ‘imprisoning,’ ‘overwhelming,’ or ‘isolating’ (Harwood et al., 2017, 158-168). These studies provide new and important ways of thinking through the work that current university students do to engage young people with Higher Education but they do not explicitly address that work, or the contribution of Student Ambassadors.

Recently a small number of studies in Australia, UK and USA have turned directly to the experiences of student ambassadors (Fleming & Grace, 2015a, 2015b, 2016, 2017; Gartland, 2014, 2015; Nickson & Henriksen, 2014; Taylor, 2008; Ylonen, 2010, 2012). Most of the studies are small in scale and adopt a mixed method design incorporating surveys and interviews. In all of the programs that have been reported, the term Student Ambassador is used to describe current university students who are employed in paid or voluntary capacities to work with young people who are prospective future students, however they are also referred to as mentors, guides, recruiters, and leaders. The work they do may be located on or off the university campus, and often takes place in schools. In all of these studies, Student Ambassadors work with high school age students.

Raising aspirations amongst school students who may not have considered attending university is the key focus for all of these projects. This goal is often reflected in the titles of such programs. For example, the large-scale ‘Aimhigher’ partnership programs were delivered across 42 areas of England from 2004-2011. They enabled localised interventions to encourage first generation students from disadvantaged backgrounds to attend university. The intention of the project was to recruit Student Associates ideally from state schools to work with specifically targeted students over an extended period of time to raise aspiration and provide support (Gartland, 2014, 28). STEM specific outreach programs were the focus of Gartland’s studies (2014, 2015) at two London universities where Student Ambassadors worked to increase peoples’ interests in courses in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (including Medicine). She notes that recent UK government policy has shifted from a broad ‘raising aspirations’ agenda, to a more specific focus on students as ‘consumers’ in a differentiated education market (2015). This has had direct impacts on the work and relationships that Student Ambassadors develop with the young people. Her
ethnographic research included observations of activities, participation in meetings and interviews or focus groups with 112 school students from disadvantaged schools and 32 student ambassadors from the two universities. Importantly, she found that although Student Ambassadors are positioned by their universities as positive ‘role models’, this is poorly understood and it is not inevitable that successful university students are positively received by school students. The activities in which they are involved can exacerbate differences, for example when Student Ambassadors are invited to schools to deliver Syllabus related extension lessons in Maths and students recognise they are not as skilled as their own teachers, or when they are required to discipline school students. Depending on the design and nature of activities – the Student Ambassador programs can inadvertently emphasise and entrench differences between the two groups.

Gartland suggests that in contrast to formal teacher-like contexts, which were often preferred by schools, more informal experiential and problem based learning opportunities on campus, where Student Ambassadors shared the learning and provided resources, enabled ‘warm and open relationships’ to develop (Gartland, 2015, 1205). Both current school students and Student Ambassadors who had participated in such programs when they were at school stressed how they could imagine new ways of being, new potential identities or subjectivities, as university students. It is also important to note that some school students may be disinterested in university and where student ambassadors are directed to work with such students, the relentless focus on university entrance as the sole determinant of educational success risks undermining the confidence and credentials of non-university pathways (Gartland, 2014, 34). Furthermore, structural factors that exclude disadvantaged young people from particular professions are obscured in initiatives that focus predominantly on individual aspiration (Gartland, 2014, 39).

Enhancing workplace skills is the explicit focus of Ylonen’s study of Student Ambassadors in the Aimhigher programs delivered across 4 universities in South East London (2010, 2012). The impact of the scheme on the ambassadors themselves was the focus of her investigation into gains in transferable skills and competencies that they might take into their futures. In her initial study (2010) interviews with 11 Student Ambassadors and 2 coordinators across 2 universities suggested that outspokenness, confidence, enthusiasm and communication skills were seen as important for ‘good’ student ambassadors, these were the qualities that many of the participants wished to develop through their participation. Many reported that they had become less shy or self-conscious and had improved their confidence as a result of the experience. The second study expanded across four universities and incorporated focus groups with 19 students and online pre/post surveys with 100 students in the first round, and 84 in the second round. This study asked whether the scheme offered an ‘ideal part-time job’ for students who were able to earn money at the same time as they had a personally rewarding experience. Student ambassadors reported that increasing their ‘employability’ and the financial rewards were very important to their decisions to apply, but they confirmed that during their involvement with the program, altruistic reasons became as important as instrumental reasons. Encouragement and motivation of students was seen as important.

In another study looking at an Aimhigher initiative in a northern city, Taylor identifies the design of learning activities and selection of Student Ambassadors as critical factors (2008). She reports that such programs can inadvertently deepen notions of ‘them’ and
‘us’ between school students and the university students who worked with them. The program she investigated entailed a ten-week tutoring program in disadvantaged schools. Her interviews with 7 undergraduates, and focus group with 6, focused on how students ‘market’ their universities to potential enrollees. Although all of the interview participants recognised that they had enhanced their CVs and acquired valuable skills, knowledges and experiences, for many of the mostly middle class university students in the study it seemed that class divisions were deepened as they asserted that university was ‘not for everyone’ or that school students should ‘scale down’ their expectations (2008, 162). They also tended to pathologise and trivialise issues facing disadvantaged schools and students, and emphasised divisions between their ‘protective’ upbringings and smooth pathways to university and those for these students. Notably, their training had emphasised potential dangers and disruptive scenarios which drew their attention to issues of discipline and disorderliness rather than the complexities of aspiration and achievement for educational success in such contexts. She suggests that participants could consider their own educational pathways and the complexities of school to university transitions more critically in their preparation for such work, and that students from working-class backgrounds should be recruited into such programs to reduce the risk of ‘dis-identification’. She concludes that altruistic reasons for participating may be receding as instrumental reasons are becoming more important when the degree is increasingly ‘an investment that must pay off’ (2008, 165-166). Issues of program design, ambivalence and class difference raised by Taylor are important considerations for student ambassadors involved in widening participation programs.

Despite the mixed results reported in these case studies of Aimhigher programs, the use of student ambassadors has been identified by previous Aimhigher directors as one of its most important legacies. There was consensus that young people were better able to see university as a ‘viable goal’ when they could relate to people from similar backgrounds and close to them in age so they could ‘picture themselves in their shoes’ (Waller, Harrison and Last, 2015, 11). Along with summer schools on campus, which were the most effective initiative, student ambassadors were crucial for ‘demystifying’ higher education for young people.

Recruiting for diversity was one of the themes that emerged from an interview-based phenomenological study by Nickson and Henrikson in Texas (2014). They interviewed 15 student ambassadors, all from middle-class backgrounds, and saw them as ‘catalysts’ in promoting enrolment at university and the sense of confidence and belonging that can ensure students stay on to graduate. Student Ambassadors were seen to contribute to a more diverse pool of students, particularly Hispanic and African American students. They tend to be carefully screened for demonstrated leadership capabilities and seniority and become highly visible as leaders on campus through their involvement in a range of activities, and willingness to be the ‘face’ of the institution. Personal growth was significant in all their accounts of their experiences.

Several studies in Australia have contributed to the literature on the importance and experiences of student ambassadors for widening participation programs. In Western Australia, Skene (2010) reported on the Aspire UWA program with 24 schools characterised by significant Indigenous or new arrival student populations in low SES areas across the Pilbara region and outer-metropolitan Perth. Whilst focusing on the ‘nuts and bolts’ of delivery of the program, her short paper includes Student Ambassadors as the instrumental means of delivery without delving into what the
experience means or the impact that it has for them. Nevertheless, the program design emphasises that the selected Student Ambassadors are ‘former pupils of the school’ who are deployed to talk about their own university studies, to be camp leaders for rural students, to be on-campus leaders of activities, and to visit schools in order to conduct activities, help students and ‘chat’ with them. They have leading roles in all facets of the program, and their alumni relationships with schools provide Principals with the opportunity to ‘share in the success of their former students’ (2010, 81).

In Canberra, Fleming and Grace have published a series of papers (2015a, 2015b, 2016, 2017) about Student Ambassador experiences in the ‘AspireUC’ program at the University of Canberra, including its subsidiary program for Indigenous students. Activities they were involved in included campus-based residential programs, shorter visits and tours of the university, visits to schools and supporting transition programs for commencing university students. University students were recruited from similar backgrounds to the targeted school students across 37 high schools, in the expectation that they would be effective role models for youth from rural and financially disadvantaged backgrounds. The application process included written applications, interviews and training. The active contribution of Student Ambassadors to program success is signalled by the title of ‘Aspiration Agents’ given to participants. They are positioned as role models, similar in age and background, with the capacity to foster a sense of ‘belongingness’ for young people who have limited experience of university (2016, 302). The evaluation focused on benefits and unintended consequences for the participants, in the domains of personal, academic and future professional lives. Research design relied on two small scale exploratory questionnaires. The first study included 39 questions, including both Likert scale responses and three final qualitative open-ended responses and was conducted with 12 students at the end of the academic year, who had averaged 14 months as Aspiration Agents program. The second study used a modified survey in a pre-post design, across one academic year, with 14 students in the first round before they had begun and 8 students at the end of the year after they had worked as Aspiration Agents. However, as only 2 of the final round of students had completed the pre-survey, reliable findings about changes in individuals across the year could not be identified. Students were required to rate ‘self as a person’, ‘self as a student’, ‘self – pertaining to Graduate Attributes’ and ‘professional future’. Findings were that altruistic reasons or ‘helping’ rated most highly in their reasons to participate, with the more instrumental reason of developing ‘leadership skills’ closely following. The opportunity to articulate and reflect on their own experiences of transition and experience in higher education may have enhanced academic domains by developing ‘enhanced organisational skills, study habits and commitment to completing their degree’ (Fleming & Grace, 2016, 314). Institutional ‘belonging’ emerged in this study as an area warranting further inquiry.

Much of the literature summarised in this section influenced our design and analysis of data in the qualitative component of this Evaluation of the Western Sydney University Student Ambassador Initiative. Further discussion can be found in Chapter 5 and 6 of this report.

**Western Sydney University Context**

The Office of Widening Participation at Western Sydney University delivers more than 50 programs in schools and around the university that aim to increase young people’s
educational engagement and aspirations for higher study. These programs target students and schools from low SES backgrounds, and equity groups identified by the Bradley Review into Higher Education (2008). These focus areas match the three precursors to increased participation that the Bradley Review identified: awareness of higher education, aspiration to participate, and educational attainment to allow participation (2008, p. 40). Although Western Sydney has long had a Schools Engagement office, since 2010 there has been an expansion of programs and the creation of the Office of Widening Participation funded by the Higher Education Participation Partnership Program. Partnerships between universities and primary and secondary schools are central to HEPPP funded programs. Since its inception Western Sydney University has been the largest beneficiary of HEPPP funding1.

Widening participation programs are staffed by current WSU students who work alongside OWP staff, supporting them in program delivery. Their responsibilities vary depending on the program in which they are working. The purpose of this project was to evaluate the impact of Western Sydney University students’ participation in the WP Student Ambassadors program in terms of their self-efficacy beliefs, academic and professional resilience, professional skill development, civic and social awareness, connectedness to community and academic outcomes. These dimensions of impact were evaluated through a mixed-method, multi-cohort evaluation over the course of the 2016 academic year.

Aims and Key Questions of this Research

The project aimed to evaluate the impact on the Student Ambassadors themselves of their participation in widening participation programs at Western Sydney University. It was hypothesized that the WP Student Ambassadors program contributes to university students’ growth, including enhancing academic and professional resilience, strengthening professional skill, impacting on academic outcomes and increasing sense of belonging to community, thus raising students’ sense of civic & social responsibility.

1 HEPPP Participation Allocations 2010-2016 <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/34983>
CHAPTER 2 – DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Of the limited empirical studies that have been conducted focusing on Student Ambassadors themselves, the majority have relied on focus groups and interviews, and at times, combined this qualitative inquiry with a pre and post survey for current Student Ambassadors. The current study implemented a mixed-method design where interviews and pre and post surveys were utilised to determine the impact of serving as a Student Ambassador on the Ambassador themselves. In addition, a multi-cohort design was adopted in order to obtain a thorough representation of the dimensions of impact from the perspective of current Ambassadors, alumni Ambassadors and key stakeholders.

Methodology

The mixed-method evaluation had three components organised around discrete cohorts.

1. Pre and Post Participation Survey for 2016 ambassadors

An online survey instrument using a pre-/post- quantitative design, or time sampling strategy, was devised for the project. The survey included a combination of original items and previously-validated scale measures of:

- **Motivations** for deciding to become a WSU Student Ambassador;
- **Academic Resilience** (Martin & Marsh, 2006; 6 item scale); Academic resilience measures students’ ability to deal with set-backs, failure and adversity within a learning environment.
- **Education and Career Aspiration** (Yeung & McInerney, 2005; 7 items in two sub-scales); Both educational aspirations and career aspirations are driving forces linked to enhanced educational outcomes. Educational aspiration may lead to lifelong learning while career aspirations may push an individual to work for better employment opportunities (Yeung & McInerney, 2005, p. 540).
- **Civic Responsibility** (Furco, Muller & Ammon, 1998) to the Western Sydney Community (10 item scale); Modifications were made to this original scale to measure students’ sense of connection to the Western Sydney community, their sense of civic awareness and civic efficacy.
- **Personal Effectiveness and Locus of Control** (Richards & Neill, 2000; ‘ROPELOC’ measure includes 45-items in 14 sub-scales plus one additional set of control items); Items measured students’ sense of a range of their own abilities relevant to outcomes associated with the Student Ambassador program, such as leadership, cooperative teamwork and their ability to take personal responsibility for their actions.
- **Academic behaviours** [via self-report], including missed days of classes.

A select number of open-ended items were also included in the online survey instrument to provide students with the opportunity to discuss program expectations and career aspirations (pre-survey) as well as reflect on the key benefits of the program and its preparation and utility for their professional lives (post-survey) (see Appendices 1 & 2 for surveys).
In line with final ethical approval to commence research, the pre-survey was opened in late April and closed three weeks later in mid-May. The post-survey opened in at the conclusion of the OWP programs in mid-November and remained open for four weeks, in efforts to secure maximum numbers for recruitment.

2. (a) Survey of Student Ambassador alumni (pre-2016)

The online survey of alumni student ambassadors comprised three discrete sections: demographic information; reflections about their University experience; and information about their achievements since leaving University.

Firstly, participants were asked to provide key demographic details such as their country of birth, gender and degree completed at Western Sydney University. Secondly, participants were asked to reflect back to their time as a Student Ambassador. Key information about the nature of their ambassador work was collected, including the ambassador programs they were involved in and the time period of their involvement. Participants were asked to identify what motivated them to become ambassadors, and identify their initial goals of becoming involved versus the gains they actually made at the end of their work as an ambassador. Open-ended questions invited participants to share the most enjoyable aspects of being an ambassador, what they were most proud of, and suggestions for improvement to the program.

Finally, the key constructs identified in the survey for current ambassadors were also included in the alumni survey. Alumni student ambassadors were asked to provide a retrospective self-reported measure of the influence of program participation on each of the areas of interest. Specifically, summative items associated with each of the above outcomes of interest were provided and former ambassadors were asked to respond on a 4-point Likert scale indicating how much or how little impact their participation in the student ambassador program had on that outcome. The inclusion of a select number of open-ended items provided opportunities for participants to expand on these scale ‘ranks’, reflecting on perceived benefits of the program and its preparation and utility for their professional lives (see Appendix 3 for survey).

2. (b) Interviews with Student Ambassador alumni (pre-2016)

A subgroup of alumni students (n=11) volunteered to participate in interviews with the project team, with selection based both on survey responses, ensuring a varied group of participant experiences, outcomes and programs. Interviews targeted the perceived influence of the ambassador program on alumni students’ university experience, inclusive of how and in what ways their attitudes to study, and associated study behaviours and course choices, may have changed. Questions also targeted alumni’s professional skill base, exploring the ways in which serving as an ambassador may have strengthened and enhanced this set of skills. Furthermore, interviews included discussion of participants’ sense of community connection, both with the WSU academic community as well as the broader Western Sydney community, to explore how engaging with low-SES/high-need primary and secondary school students as role models may have influenced their sense of civic and social responsibility (See Appendix 4 for interview protocol).
3. Interviews with key stakeholders

A small number of interviews (n=14) were conducted with stakeholders with interests in the WP Student Ambassador program, mainly comprising coordinators of key WP programs. The aim of interviews with program leaders was to provide feedback as to how and in what ways the ambassador program contributes to academic, personal and professional growth of university students. Accordingly, interviews focused on perceived positive outcomes for the university students who work as Student Ambassadors (see Appendix 5 for interview protocol).

Recruitment

Alumni and current student lists and university email addresses were provided by OWP. Additional contact details (non-university email and telephone numbers) were supplied by the Office of Advancement and Alumni to facilitate communications with alumni whose university email addresses had expired. Email invitations were sent to university email addresses for current students, personal email addresses for alumni, and follow up phone calls to alumni were also employed to increase survey participation rates (see Appendix 8 for invitation to participate). Stakeholder recruitment followed the advice of OWP Managers, who supplied names and contact details of key people involved in the programs. Potential participants were contacted by email and invited to participate.

Ethical requirements

Approval was secured from the Western Sydney University HREC on April 12, 2016. An amendment was subsequently approved to offer a small incentive ($25 Coles/Myer Gift Card) to reimburse Student Ambassador participants for their time, and in order to increase response rates and therefore boost the integrity and validity of the findings (see Appendices 6 and 7 for HREC Approvals).

Participants

The multi-phased mixed-method evaluation targeted the following cohorts.

Cohort One: Current Student Ambassadors

The small group of WP Student Ambassadors who commenced in Semester 1, 2016 was surveyed on key outcomes associated with program success. In the first wave of data collection, 32 current student ambassadors provided complete, usable surveys and are included in this analysis (58% response rate). At time two, 18 of them completed a post-survey (56% response rate for eligible participants). Amongst the students who completed surveys were students from several priority groups for widening participation: first in family to attend university (38%), Pacific Islander heritage (22%). All participants were local students, rather than international students. The majority of respondents (81%) always spoke English at home, and 38% reported that one or both of their parents/carers were born in Australia. Teaching and Health Science were the most common courses for Student Ambassadors. Fast Forward, STEPS and First Foot Forward were the most common programs within which respondents had worked as Student Ambassadors during 2016. Results are presented in Chapter 3 of this report.
Cohort Two: Student Ambassador Alumni

Past Student Ambassadors were recruited to complete an online survey. There were 48 respondents (39 female, 9 male; aged 19 to 42 years) who completed the survey. Amongst the alumni were students from several priority groups for widening participation: first in family to attend university (44%), Pacific Islander heritage (8%), had been in out-of-home care (4%), or were young carers (6%). The majority of respondents (82%) were born in Australia with 75% reporting they always speak English at home. 48% reported that they had one or both parents born outside Australia while only three participants were International students. Teaching and Health Science were the most common courses for Student Ambassadors. Fast Forward, First Foot Forward and STEPS were the most common programs within which alumni had worked as Student Ambassadors. Results are presented in Chapter 4 of this report.

Cohort Three: Student Ambassador Alumni interview subgroup

A subgroup (23%) of the alumni survey respondents was also interviewed to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences and reflections as Student Ambassadors. Alumni were invited to nominate themselves for follow-up interviews in the final section of the online survey. Eleven alumni (eight women and three men) were interviewed. Interviews ranged in length of time from 24 mins to 44 mins. They had completed, or were currently enrolled, in the following courses: Bachelor of Applied Science and Environmental Health, Bachelor of Nursing, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Social Work, Bachelor of Medical Science, Bachelor of Community Welfare, Bachelor of Laws/Bachelor of Social Science, Master of Laws, Master of Teaching (Primary). Semi-structured interview prompts (see Appendix 4) were drawn on in each interview to ensure comparability of analysis, and also allow the interviewer to clarify and extend emerging areas of interest to the study. All interviews were conducted by the qualitative research assistant working on the evaluation. Results are discussed in Chapter 5 of this report.

Cohort Four: Stakeholders

Stakeholders identified by OWP Managers were invited to participate in interviews about the nature and specific impacts of the programs they coordinated on student ambassadors, and young people. Importantly, although these cohorts were discrete in the research design, there was slippage between second and third categories of participant. Two of the OWP Program leaders had previously worked as Student Ambassadors and they provided additional insights from the alumni perspective about their own experiences during stakeholder interviews.

Interviews with stakeholder participants followed a parallel process as alumni interviews, utilising an interview protocol designed for program managers. Interviews were transcribed, coded and annotated using an iterative process and drawing on the coding scheme used with alumni interviews. All interviews were conducted by the qualitative research assistant working on the evaluation.
**Research sites**

Surveys were conducted online within the secure Qualtrics portal. Face to face interviews with stakeholders were conducted in meeting rooms within the Office of Widening Participation building, or in the Student Recruitment Building, Werrington North campus, or via Zoom video-conferencing facilities. Alumni interviews were held face to face on WSU university campuses, or by telephone or Zoom where these proved to be more convenient for participants.

**Data Collection**

Data collection and organisation of surveys was managed within the secure Qualtrics online portal. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed to ensure a complete and accurate record of responses. Quantitative data collected by surveys from WP Student Ambassador alumni group and by interviews with key stakeholders is stored in non-identifiable form. Current WP Student Ambassador data has been collected in a coded, re-identifiable form so as to provide trend growth data. Identifier data collected from each participant was replaced with codes and the information identifying individuals will be securely stored and only used to match data over time. All quantitative information collected about participants has been pooled, and only aggregate data is included in this report. Qualitative data has been reported with pseudonyms for participants from alumni and stakeholder cohorts.

**Data Analysis**

Quantitative analysis took the form of descriptive, bivariate and, where possible, multivariate analysis to determine key trends across the cohort(s). Thematic analysis of both interview and open-ended survey item data allowed for emerging understanding of the more nuanced influence of the WP Student Ambassadors program on students’ academic, professional and social/civic outcomes. This data was synthesised at the conclusion of 2016 to provide a comprehensive program evaluation.

Qualitative data analysis entailed a process of coding and annotating transcripts of individual interviews for significant themes and patterns, according to the a priori or pre-set codes established through literature into widening participation and student ambassador schemes, and emergent codes that were derived from the data and unique to this study. Codes were adjusted and refined through the process of analysis and precise sub-themes were identified (see Appendix 9 for coding scheme). Top level coding focused on six key themes: *Academic engagement, Aspiration/Imagined futures, Belonging, Challenges, Personal aspects* (including personal, work-related and interpersonal skills and qualities), and *Rewards*. Each of these was manually coded and tracked through the individual interviews with sub themes identified and annotations identifying ambiguities, interesting comment and exemplary quotes. Following preliminary analysis of the 11 alumni interviews, each of the six themes was analysed across all interviews. Findings are reported according to themes, in the Chapters 5 and 6 below.
CHAPTER 3 – SURVEY RESULTS: CURRENT AMBASSADORS

Results from the pre- and post-surveys with current Student Ambassadors are presented in this Chapter. Extended discussion of these results is presented in Chapter 7.

Participants

Cohort One: Current Student Ambassadors

The small group of WP Student Ambassadors who commenced in Semester 1, 2016 was surveyed on key outcomes associated with program success. Using the lists provided, 55 students were emailed an invitation to participate in the first wave of data collection. Of these, 32 current student ambassadors provided complete, usable surveys and are included in this analysis (58% response rate). All 32 students were invited to participate in the follow-up survey at time two, with 18 providing complete, useable surveys at this second time point (56% response rate for eligible participants).

Looking at the demographic data for the cohort of Student Ambassadors who completed the survey in April (n=32), 38% reported that one or both of their parents/carers were born in Australia with 81% reporting they always speak English at home. All participants were local, as opposed to international, students and 28 (87.5%) were full time students at the time of data collection, with only 4 students (12.5%) undertaking part-time study. Of this initial cohort, 34% identified as the first in their family to attend university. While the survey did enquire into students’ status as carers, no participants reported serving as a young carer or as an out-of-home carer.

In terms of students’ study pathways, the four most commonly-reported degrees undertaken whilst serving as a Student Ambassador were: (1) Bachelor of Arts (Pathway to Teaching) (12%); (2) Bachelor of Health Science (12%); (3) Master of Teaching (12%); and (4) Bachelor of Business and Commerce (12%).

Only three of the initial 32 student participants reported having participated in Office of Widening Participation (OWP) programs offered by Western Sydney University when they were K-12 students.

The hours students (n=30, 2 did not respond) anticipated working throughout the year as a WSU Student Ambassador ranged from 2 to 25 hours per week, with eight hours per week being the most commonly anticipated number of working hours (n=4, 16%). However, looking at the group of students who participated in November/December round of data collection (n=18), reported hours ranged widely between 1 to 50 hours per month (see Table 1). Table 2 indicates the various OWP programs on which this cohort of Student Ambassadors reported working.

2 Students were able to choose multiple programs; hence total numbers exceed the final participant cohort (n=18).
Table 1. Average working hours per month as a WSU Student Ambassador

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5 hours</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 hours</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 hours</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 hours</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20+ hours</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N=18.

Table 2. Type of Student Ambassador Program and Number of Participating Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fast Forward</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEPS - Strive towards educational participation and success</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Foot Forward</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future for All program - Partnership with Western Sydney Wanderers</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LODESTAR and Polestar programs for Out-of-Home-Care children, young carers and Care Leavers - including KiC Club</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WP Ambassadors</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES mentoring program - Youth Encouragement Support</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazine Program</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Success</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee Programs / Conference</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATES</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books in School</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Tutor for Fast Forward, STEPS and other WP programs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WISE program – Women in Science &amp; Engineering</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N=18.
Findings

1. Motivations
Within the cohort of 2016 Student Ambassadors, participants (N=32 for pre-survey and N=18 for post-survey) were asked to select and rank their top 5 motivations from a series of different motivations provided. Table 3 lists the abbreviations for each of the response options provided. A desire to help young people improve their futures and a belief that young people are key to the future (abbreviated as ‘HelpY’ and ‘KeyF’, respectively) were students’ most frequently-cited motivation both at the start and end of program participation. Other commonly-reported motivations across students’ Top 5 motivations at pre- and post- data points were to gain professional work experience (‘Work’) and because they enjoy working with young people (‘Enjoy’). Promoting Western Sydney University (‘Prom’), which was not ranked highly as a motivating factor for pre-survey participants, appears in rankings of both the Top 4 and Top 5 motivating factors for students participating in the post-survey (see Figure 1) Similarly, serving as a representative of Western Sydney University which was cited as a Top 5 motivation only by pre-survey participants, featured as a Top 3, Top 4 and Top 5 motivating factor for students in the post-survey. This result suggests that students felt an enhanced sense of connectedness to and identification with the university at the time of the post-survey. Whether this can be attributed to the students’ experience as a student ambassador or their experiences of being a university student more generally cannot be determined from these results.
Table 3. Abbreviations for motivation items.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MakeF</td>
<td>To make new friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HelpY</td>
<td>I want to help young people improve their future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GiveC</td>
<td>To give something back to the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WorkX</td>
<td>To gain professional work experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy</td>
<td>Because I enjoy working with young people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MyCV</td>
<td>To improve/enhance my CV.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EarnM</td>
<td>To earn money.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prom</td>
<td>To promote Western Sydney University.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RepWSU</td>
<td>To serve as a representative of Western Sydney University.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KeyF</td>
<td>Because I believe that helping young people is key to the future.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Top 1 to Top 5 Motivations for Becoming a Student Ambassador

Note: N=32 for pre-survey and N=18 for post-survey.
2. Goals and gains
Participants were asked about anticipated skill development from working as a Student Ambassador. Towards this end, they were presented with seven different skills (abbreviations provided in Table 4) and an option of ‘other’ where students were able to indicate another skill development of their choice. In the pre-survey, students ranked the Top 3 skills they hoped to achieve throughout the year and in the post-survey, they ranked the Top 3 skills that they believed were their greatest gains from serving as a Student Ambassador.

Table 4. Abbreviations for gain items.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comm</td>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead</td>
<td>Leadership Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach</td>
<td>Teaching Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WorkY</td>
<td>Enhanced ability to work with young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spec</td>
<td>Specific skills for your field of study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orgnz</td>
<td>Organisational skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netwk</td>
<td>Networking; Potential job opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Other (Please specify)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Figure 2, Leadership skills ('Lead'), ability to work with young people ('Work'), communication skills ('Comm') and specific skills for their field of study ('Spec') were ranked in the top 1-3 skills that students in taking the pre-survey hoped to achieve and these skills also appeared across the top 3 gains for students participating at the end of the program. In the pre-survey, leadership skills were ranked as top 1 (n=11) and top 2 (n=10) gain by the largest number of students. In the post-survey, the most commonly-reported gains were the ability to work with young people (n=8; Top 1) and leadership skills (n=5; Top 2).

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3 Two students in the pre-survey provided text responses in this ‘other’ category: ‘inspiring kids to give everything a go’ and ‘promoting what I believe to the public’.

3 Two students in the pre-survey provided text responses in this ‘other’ category: ‘inspiring kids to give everything a go’ and ‘promoting what I believe to the public’.
3. Academic behaviours

In order to investigate students’ academic behaviours both at the start and conclusion of their engagement as a Student Ambassador, students were asked to report on the frequency with which they missed mandatory class activities in the previous month (see Figure 3). Numbers of students reporting full class attendance grew from 69% in the pre-survey to 72% in the post-survey. Among the 10 students who reported having missed class in pre-survey (see Figure 4), over 40% reported that they had been sick, with an additional 22% reporting that they had been working. Students in the post-survey reported ‘looking after family members’ as the most common reason (40%) for having missed classes.
Figure 3. Frequency of Missing Mandatory Class Activities

(a) Pre-survey

Frequency of Missing Mandatory Class Activities in Last 4 Weeks (Pre)

- None: 22, 69%
- Once: 4, 13%
- Twice: 2, 6%
- 3 times: 0
- 4 times: 0
- 5 or more times: 1, 3%

Note: N=32 for pre-survey;

(b) Post-survey

Frequency of Missing Mandatory Class Activities in Last 4 Weeks (Post)

- None: 13, 72%
- Once: 3, 17%
- Twice: 0
- 3 times: 0
- 4 times: 2, 11%
- 5 or more times: 0

Note: N=18 for post-survey.
Figure 4. Reasons for Missing Mandatory Class Activities

(a) Pre-survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sick</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in my job</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking after family member</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t see any value in attending</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t feel like going</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holiday with friends/family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n=10 for pre-survey. As participants could select more than one option, total reported responses > 10; n=5 for post-survey.

(b) Post-survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sick</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in my job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holiday with friends/family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking after family member</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n=10 for pre-survey. As participants could select more than one option, total reported responses > 10; n=5 for post-survey.
Included Scale Measures; Pre-/Post-Comparisons

An important outcome of this project was to attempt to ascertain students’ growth in academic and social domains over the course of their year as participants in the Student Ambassador programs. Towards that end, students were asked to respond to a series of items measuring their (1) academic resilience (Martin & Marsh, 2006), (2) education and (3) career aspiration (Yeung & McInerney, 2005), and their sense of (4) civic responsibility (Furco, Muller & Ammon, 1998) each measured on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). Figures 5 to Figure 7 summarise the results based on the 18 students who completed both the pre- and post-surveys.

Students’ reported academic resilience (Figure 5) showed an increase across the two time points, albeit statistically insignificant, from a mean of 4.28 (SD=0.91) to 4.63 (SD=0.97). Looking across various demographic sub-cohorts of student participants, when comparing those who reported a Pacific Islander identity (n=4) to non-Islander students (n=14), the increase of academic resilience for non-Islander students (0.42 points from 4.32 to 4.74) was four times more than the reported increase for the Pacific Islander students (0.08 points from 4.17 to 4.25). Neither of these changes was large enough to be statistically significant.

Looking at the cohorts of native (n=15) and non-native English (n=3) speakers, academic resilience for non-English speaking background students decreased from mean score of 4.44 to 4.22, while the English speaking background students experienced an increase in reported academic resilience from 4.26 to 4.72. Likewise, neither of these changes for these sub-cohorts was statistically significant.

Figure 5. Academic Resilience.

Note: N=18, t(17)=1.42, p=0.18
Figure 6 shows a slight and non-significant decrease in students’ education (0.3 points) and career aspiration (0.09 points) between the pre- and post-surveys. Again, examining sub-cohort differences, the reduction in education aspiration was larger and statistically-significantly different for the cohort of Pacific Islander students, decreasing from a mean score of 4.63 to 3.69 \( t(3)=3.638, p<.05 \), as compared to a negligible change for the non-Islander cohort (\( M=4.89 \) for pre-survey and \( M=4.77 \) for post-survey, \( t(3)=0.584, p=0.57 \)).

**Figure 6. Education and Career Aspiration**

![Bar chart showing education and career aspiration for pre and post surveys](image)

*Note: \( N=18, t(17)=1.60, p=0.13 \) for education aspiration; \( t(17)=0.68, p=0.51 \) for career aspiration.*
4. Civic responsibility
Students’ sense of civic responsibility was measured via three factors, including connection to the community, civic awareness and civic efficacy (see Figure 7). Connection to the community showed a slight increase in mean scores, with differences approaching statistical significance, whereas students’ sense of civic awareness and civic efficacy remained at near identical mean levels.

Figure 7. Civic Responsibility.

Note: $N=18$, $t(17)=-2.02$, $p=0.06$ for connection to the community; $t(17)=0.16$, $p=0.87$ for civic awareness; $t(17)=-0.31$, $p=0.76$ for civic efficacy.
In line with previously-reported results, an examination of sub-cohort differences in reported civic responsibility showed decreases across the three factors of civic responsibility for the Pacific Islander students \((n=4)\) and increases for the non-Islander students \((n=14)\) (See Figure 8). The increase in students’ sense of connection to the Western Sydney community from a mean of 4.29 to a mean of 4.82 for non-Islander cohort was large enough so as to be statistically significant \([t (13) = -2.411, p < .05]\).

**Figure 8. Civic Responsibility for Pacific Islander and non-Pacific Islander students**

(a) Pacific Islander Heritage

(b) Non-Islander Heritage

*Note: n=4 for Pacific Islander heritage group; n=14 for non-Islander group.*
Similar examinations were run for students who reported being the first in their families to attend university ($n=4$; see Figure 9). As can be seen below, mean reported scores for this cohort were lower at both time points than the students who were not ‘first in family’ to attend university. Interestingly, all three factors of civic responsibility decreased over the year of participation in the Student Ambassador program for the small cohort of ‘first in family’ students, yet none of changes were large enough so as to be statistically significant. In contrast, for those students coming from families in which another family member had attended university, reported community and civic awareness increased over the year, with increases in reported connection to the Western Sydney community being statistically significant ($t(13)=-2.58, p<.05$).

**Figure 9. Civic Responsibility for ‘First in Family’ students**

(a) First in their family to go university

![Civic Responsibility (First in Family)](image)

(b) Not first in their family to go to university

![Civic Responsibility (Not First in Family)](image)

*Note: $n=4$ for first in family; $n=14$ for not first in family.*
5. Personal effectiveness
The online pre- and post-surveys also included measures of reported personal effectiveness, including students’ sense of locus of control (abbreviated as ‘ROPELOC’ below). Items were measured on a 6 point Likert scale, ranging from 1=false, not like me to 6=true, like me. The full measure consisted of 15 subscales, summarised below in Figure 10.

Over the year of participation in the Student Ambassador programs, students’ reported outcomes generally decreased across the 15 subscales, with three notable exceptions: time efficacy, internal locus of control and control items. Though students ranked leadership skills as one of their top gains of program participation (see Figure 2) and indicated that their confidence had been enhanced by program participation (see Table 5), their self-assessment across the ROPELOC measure suggests that their perceptions of their leadership abilities and general confidence developed in a contradictory direction. Across all mean changes, students’ reported decrease in open thinking (from $M=7.20$ in pre-survey to $M=6.74$ in post-survey) was large enough so as to be statistically significant [$t(17)=2.25, p<0.05$]. External locus of control remained the same between the two time points.

Figure 10. Review of Personal Effectiveness, with Locus of Control (ROPELOC)

Figure 10a. Subscales 1

ROPELOC Scales, Set 1

Note: $N=18$, $t(17)=0.22$, $p=0.83$ for active involvement; $t(17)=1.49$, $p=0.16$ for cooperative teamwork; $t(17)=0.89$, $p=0.38$ for leadership ability; $t(17)=2.25$, $p<0.05$ for open thinking; $t(17)=0.89$, $p=0.38$ for quality seeking;
Figure 10b. Subscales 2

ROPELOC Scales, Set 2

Note: $N=18$, $t(17)=0.69, p=0.50$ for self-confidence; $t(17)=0.86, p=0.40$ for self-efficacy; $t(17)=1.38, p=0.19$ for social effectiveness; $t(17)=0.20, p=0.84$ for stress management; $t(17)=-0.39, p=0.71$ for time efficacy.

Figure 10c. Subscales 3

ROPELOC Scales, Set 3

Note: $N=18$, $t(17)=1.86, p=0.08$ for coping with change; $t(17)=0.30, p=0.77$ for overall effectiveness; $t(17)=-0.14, p=0.89$ for internal locus of control; $t(17)=-0.00, p=1.00$ for external locus of control; $t(17)=-0.33, p=0.74$ for control items.
When the ROPELOC measures were examined by participant sub-cohort across the pre- and post-surveys, it was found that while non-Pacific Islander students’ ($n=14$) perceptions of their self-confidence grew slightly from $M=6.69$ to $M=6.71$, the trajectory for Pacific Islander students ($n=4$) showed a decline, with a mean difference of 1 point on the 6-point scale ($M=6.25$ in pre-survey; $M=5.25$ in post-survey). A number of additional factors also decreased by 1 point or more for this participant cohort, including the measures of ‘cooperative teamwork’ ($M=6.92$, $M=5.92$; non-significant), ‘open thinking’ ($M=7.00$, $M=5.67$; $t(3) = 4.38$, $p<.05$) and ‘quality seeking’ ($M=6.83$, $M=5.67$; non-significant). By comparison, where ROPELOC factors did show a decline in mean scores for non-Pacific Islander students, differences were smaller than 0.3 points.

6. Recommend program

Recommendations and Feedback on the Student Ambassador Experience (Post-Survey)

In the post-survey, students were asked whether they would recommend the Student Ambassador program to others (Figure 11). Nearly 90% (16/18) of participants gave a positive response. With the exception of a single student who had responded that they would not recommend participation, participants elaborated upon their responses in an open ended item, summarised in Table 5.

Figure 11. Frequency of Students Recommending Others to Become a Student Ambassador

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Would you recommend becoming a Student Ambassador? (Post)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, 16, 89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, 2, 11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: $N=18$. 
The majority of participants cited gaining skills/confidence and the rewarding feeling of making a difference in the lives of young people as the key reasons for recommending participation in the Student Ambassador program. Being a Student Ambassador was viewed by participants as being an ‘extraordinary experience’, and a ‘dynamic job, that is not repetitive or boring’. Students outlined a sense of great reward through encouraging high school students to work towards university entry. Furthermore, some participants specified gains related to understanding the current student experience, seeing ‘the struggles and triumphs of today’s youth’.

Participants valued meeting ‘amazing’ people – university peers with a similar mindset about community building and education. Two students specifically mentioned the benefit of reflecting on their role as educators, enabling them to ‘visualise [their] own career path’ and to ‘understand in more depth about education and how truly important it is for everyone’.

Table 5. Reasons to recommend other students to become Student Ambassadors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary Theme</th>
<th># Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Ambassador is a great opportunity to develop confidence and gain various skills (e.g. social, leadership, teaching, and team work) that are not taught in the classroom.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is a rewarding experience through helping young people and making a difference in the lives of other people within the Western Sydney community.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is a dynamic work where students get to meet new friends.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Student Ambassadors foster community engagement and interaction within universities which is a way to return (to university and community).</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching/interacting with young people helped the Ambassadors themselves to better understand the importance of education and their own career development.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To earn money.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very unreliable with hours and a short notice were given for work.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N=17.
7. Enjoyment
An additional open-ended item asked students about the most enjoyable element of being a Student Ambassador at Western Sydney University; Table 6 summarises the resultant themes. Echoing elements of the previous responses, just over 60% of participants (n=11) described a feeling of personal reward gained through encouraging students’ educational/career aspirations as the most enjoyable element of serving as a Student Ambassador. One Student Ambassador described this as a process of reflecting with young people on their own ‘personal journey within uni’ so as to give them ‘an insight into what uni life is’. Participants saw their ambassador role as providing high school students with ‘hope and a taste of further education’, demonstrating, through their own journeys, that university was a ‘realistic goal’ that ‘they would be able to achieve’. Their sense of enjoyment came from inspiring and educating the young people.

Ambassadors also described the enjoyment gained through working with young people and sharing information on their own areas of interest (n=4). For example, one Student Ambassador commented that they ran a Journalism workshop for students and enjoyed ‘teaching the children about all the activities related to journalism’. In addition, many participants appreciated being part of a team of individuals working to make an impact in the community (n=3).

Table 6. The most enjoyable part of being a WSU Student Ambassador

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging/inspiring students towards higher aspirational goals (e.g. higher education, future career success).</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with young people in their areas of personal interest.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting people (e.g. who have similar aspiration for future).</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team work/collaboration.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To offer help in the community; community engagement.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to use initiative.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The work for Student Ambassadors is varied and enjoyable.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N=17. One participant may mention more than one theme.
8. Improvements

Students were likewise asked about elements of the Student Ambassador program which might be improved. As can be seen in Figure 12, over half of participants indicated full satisfaction with the program (e.g. no elements for improvement [n=10; 56%]. The eight students who did indicate room for improvement (44%) provided specific suggestions in an open-ended item which followed, summarized in Table 7. The most common area offered for improvement (n=5) was related to the organisation/allocation of shifts of work as an ambassador. As one student indicated, ‘The distribution of shifts was confusing’, and the program could benefit from a ‘more efficient system’ for allocating work. Ambassadors wanted a regular shift arrangement so as to plan for their work in a given week/month.

A minority number of students (n=2) also outlined communication challenges with administrative staff. One student described having received multiple calls to participate in shifts even after having provided an indication of their (un)availability. A single participant suggested providing opportunities for current Ambassadors to participate in program development, so as to gain additional skills in working with the community.

Figure 2 Improvements to Student Ambassador Experience

Is there an aspect of being a WSU Student Ambassador that could have been improved?

Yes, 8, 44%
No, 10, 56%

Note: N=18.
Table 7. Suggested Improvements to Student Ambassador Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shift organisation: providing regular shifts and/or a more efficient system of allocating work.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved communication between the Project Officers and the Ambassadors, specifically around work availability.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for further development, involvement in project management for those interested in community development.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training course to explain what to expect and how to best serve in the role of an Ambassador.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: N=8.*

These results will be discussed in greater detail in our concluding chapter. The following chapter will examine survey results from the cohort of alumni students.
CHAPTER 4 – SURVEY RESULTS: ALUMNI AMBASSADORS

Results from the surveys with alumni Student Ambassadors are presented in this Chapter. Extended discussion of these results is presented in Chapter 7.

Participants

A total of 48 Student Ambassador Alumni (39 female, 9 male; aged 19 to 42 years) completed the survey. 82% were born in Australia with 75% reporting they always speak English at home. 48% reported that they had one or both parents born outside Australia while only three participants were International students.

Of the 48 participants, no one self-identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, while 4 (8%) self-identified as being from a Pacific Islander Heritage.

44% of participants identified themselves as ‘First in Family’ to attend University, with two participants reporting they had previously been in out-of-home care, and three were young carers.

The most common degree undertaken whilst serving as a Student Ambassador was a Bachelor of Arts (Pathway to Teaching) (27%), followed by a Bachelor degree in Health Science (17%), Master of Teaching (15%) and a Bachelor degree in Law (13%) and Arts and Social Science (13%).

The Student Ambassador programs that the participants had contributed to are listed in Table 8. Fast Forward was the most common program experienced by the Alumni participants. 8% had finished serving as Student Ambassadors approximately 3 years ago; 13% 2 years ago; 15% 1 year ago; and 13% less than 1 year ago. Except four students who were unable to recall the hours they worked as a WSU Student Ambassador, 44 students worked 1 to 56 hours per month on average as a WSU Student Ambassadors with the majority working between 1 to 10 hours monthly (see Table 11 for details of working hours).

Table 8. Type of Student Ambassador Program and Number of Participating Alumni

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fast Forward</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Foot Forward</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEPS - Strive towards educational participation and success</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WP Ambassadors</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATES@UWS</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES mentoring program - Youth Encouragement Support</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future for All program - Partnership with Western Sydney Wanderers</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LODESTAR and Polestar programs for Out-of-Home-Care children, young carers and Care Leavers - including KiC Club</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9. Average working hours per month as a Student Ambassador for Alumni

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5 hours</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 hours</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 hours</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 hours</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20+ hours</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings

1. Motivations
Participants (N=48) were presented with ten different motivations (see Table 5), and asked to rank their top 5 motivations to become a Student Ambassador. Figure 13 presents the top 5 motivations for becoming an ambassador for the alumni.

As Figure 13 shows, there seem to be common motivations reported by the alumni, with those related to young people being the most important driver, as ‘to help (HelpY)’, ‘to enjoy working (Enjoy)’ and ‘to recognize the importance of helping young people to improve their future (KeyF)’ appear most frequently across the top 5 motivations. Giving back to the community, earning money, and improving students’ CV are also important motivations for them to become Student Ambassadors.

Figure 13. Top 1 to 5 Motivations for Becoming a Student Ambassador, for Alumni

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason identified</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduated</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study commitments didn’t provide time</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The unit finished</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wasn’t contacted about work</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moved to a new role as the Ambassador role didn’t provide enough income</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moved to a new job that the Ambassador role helped me obtain</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clash between class and program</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The most common reason driving the cessation of working as a Student Ambassador (Table 10) was that the student graduated and therefore was no longer eligible to work as an Ambassador.

**2. Goals and gains**

**Table 11. Upon commencement, identified goals of working as a Student Ambassador**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership skills</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching skills</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced ability to work with young people</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking: potential job opportunities</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific skills for your field of study</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational skills</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 12. Upon completion, identified gains from working as a Student Ambassador**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced ability to work with young people</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Skills</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership skills</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific skills for your field of study</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking: potential job opportunities</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational skills</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11 and Table 12 reveal that, initially, alumni became ambassadors to gain skills in leadership, teaching and working with young people. At the end of their work as an ambassador, the most frequently reported skills gained were in working with young people followed by communication, teaching and leadership.
Figure 14. Frequency of alumni reporting the impact of being a Student Ambassador

![Bar chart showing the frequency of alumni reporting the impact of being a Student Ambassador.](chart.png)

Note: N=47; AB: Your ability to deal with set-backs or failure within University; AQ: Your aspirations to further your qualifications or perform higher in your University degree; AJ: Your aspirations to obtain a good job or influencing the type of work you wanted to undertake in your career; UC: Feeling like I was a part of the University community.

Figure 14 shows that the majority of alumni believed that being a Student Ambassador has high to significant impact on their further qualification (M=2.94, SD=0.82), aspirations for a good job (M=3.13, SD=0.88) and feeling as a part of the University community (M=3.06, SD=0.87). In terms of their ability to deal with set-backs or failure within University, 57% of students believe that being a Student Ambassador had no or minimal impact (M=2.28, SD=0.97).

3. Enjoyment

Table 13. Alumni’s most enjoyable part of being a Student Ambassador

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enjoyable parts</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interaction with diverse people, including young children, students, staff and team members</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The rewarding feeling from helping people, e.g. revealing the university life to the students, motivating students for further studies, and witnessing the changes of students</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to share the story of the student ambassadors themselves</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting involved in the university and local community</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaining practical experience working with children</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sense of recognition from colleagues and peers within the university</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note: \( N=45 \). The total number in the table is more than 45, as one participant may have mentioned more than 1 enjoyable part to be improved. The same applies to other open ended questions.

Table 13 demonstrates that alumni reported that interacting with a diverse range of people and the satisfaction of helping people were clearly the best aspects of working as a student ambassador.

4. Improvements

Figure 15. Improvement on Being Student Ambassador

Table 14. Aspects of Student Ambassadors that could be improved

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects</th>
<th>( N )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More consistent opportunities of work</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being more organized from the administrative perspective, e.g. roster planning &amp; email reply to inquiries</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training regarding the value of the work for Student Ambassadors</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation of appropriate materials/session to benefit targeted students</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company of another Student Ambassador on visits to local high school</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: \( N=13 \).

Figure 15 shows that the majority of alumni believed that no improvements to the student ambassador program were required. Of those who did suggest improvements, ‘more consistent opportunities of work’ was recommended (Table 14).
5. **Benefits**

Table 15. Impact on alumni’s ability and career progress from being a Student Ambassador

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling you can make a difference in the community.</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your leadership capability.</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your effectiveness in communicating and operating in social situations.</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your skills to cooperate in a team situation.</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your open mindedness and ability to think about things in a different way.</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your confidence and belief in your personal ability to be successful.</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your ability to find solutions in difficult situations.</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of social issues that affect our communities.</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your ability to work hard to make things happen.</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying effort to achieve the best possible result.</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-control and calmness in stressful situations.</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficient utilisation of time.</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your ability to cope with change.</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling connected to the broader Western Sydney area where I worked as a Student Ambassador.</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking responsibility for your actions and success.</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your overall effectiveness in all aspects of life.</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel like external forces determine or control my own success.</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: N=46.*
Table 16. Benefit on your career

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skill development</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General comments on skill development, e.g. ‘Gained new learnt knowledge and practical skills related to my career’.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership skills</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and interpersonal skills</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving skills</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management skill</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technological skills and literacy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaining experience of working with young children which contribute to participants' future career as a teacher</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No benefit or not sure about the benefit</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Ambassador experience motivated him/her to continue to work with young children and learned how to help the youth to identify difficulty and found the solution.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing confidence</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping them to position themselves in the community and inspiring them to pursue professions within the community</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *N*=39.

Table 15 shows that alumni reported that their work as a student ambassador had an impact on numerous and diverse career-related skills. The top 7 skills listed in Table 17, with a mean over 3, are rated as being ‘Highly Impacted’ by their role as student ambassador.

The themes generated from the open-ended question regarding the perceived benefit on alumni’s career are presented in Table 16. The most frequently cited benefit was the development of skills, which is then broken up in a range of specific skills, followed by gaining experience with young people to enhance their future teaching career.
The themes generated from the open-ended question regarding the perceived benefit on alumni’s life in general are presented in Table 17. Similarly, the most frequently cited benefit was the development of skills. Interestingly, the second most frequently cited benefit was inspiration and hope for their future career and life.
6. Contributions

Table 18. Contributions that Student Ambassador Alumni are most proud of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contribution</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To help others</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspiring students to the opportunity of post-school education</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting goals and letting them know that they could achieve their goals</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing them with career information so that they know many opportunities are available and helping them to find pathway to their dream jobs</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making differences, e.g., improvements on academic results, getting quiet students to engage in the activities, and discovering ones’ own potential.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help in Disability Support Service</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in different OWP programs by developing and teaching in the workshops, leading the activities and assisting the staff</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing knowledge through different programs to under privileged students</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to represent and promote WSU</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to talk with different people</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building relationships with schools</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N=38.

The themes generated from the open-ended question regarding alumni’s proudest contribution as a student ambassador are presented in Table 18. The capacity to help others, namely young people toward the end of their schooling career, was identified as the most significant legacy of their work as a student ambassador.
7. Recommend program

Figure 16. Would you recommend becoming a Student Ambassador to other University students?

![Pie chart showing recommendations]

Note: N=46.

Table 19. Reasons to recommend other students to become Student Ambassadors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It gives rewarding feeling and pride.</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is a valuable experience that enabled them to gain knowledge out of textbook, build up skills (management skills, networking skills and job etiquette) and confidence.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement within university and bigger community</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the opportunity to interact with young children would be beneficial for students who would like to become a teacher in the future</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being a Student Ambassador is a well-paid job</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N=31.

Figure 16 tells us that all but one alumnus would recommend becoming a student ambassador to other students. Only one student who did not recommend Student Ambassadors to other students, because he/she treated Student Ambassador as a job for income, and it provided ‘[n]ot consistent at all in hours. Only good if it’s for extra
income not a main source of income’. The two most frequently cited reasons to make this recommendation included the sense of satisfaction and pride it provides, as well as the acquisition of knowledge and skills that may not be gained via traditional methods of learning.

These results will be discussed in greater detail in our discussion and concluding chapters. The following chapter will examine interview results from the cohort of alumni students.
CHAPTER 5 – INTERVIEW RESULTS: ALUMNI

Participants

Eleven alumni who provided contact details within the alumni survey also participated in extended interviews that provide in-depth insights into the diverse experiences of Student Ambassadors. Eight participants were female and three were male. Four of the participants had been born outside Australia, and two of the students were international enrolments. The range of courses they represent is more diverse than the proportions of alumni respondents to the online survey. For example, just two out of eleven were on a pathway to teaching (via BA/ Pathway to Teaching and MTeach (Primary), representing less than 20% intending a career as school teachers compared to the 44% enrolled in these courses in the survey alumni cohort.

Work with school students featured in all of their responses, with Fast Forward (high school) and First Foot Forward (primary school) programs of on-campus visits and activities most frequently mentioned. Extent of participation ranged from just several times a semester, for less than a year in a single program, to experiences over several years in a range of programs.

Movement between programs was apparent, and included programs administered outside OWP such as Reading Ambassadors administered by The Academy, Pathways to Dreaming, or the first year student retention initiative Mates@UWS. The most active students built diverse portfolios over extended periods of time including both paid and voluntary experiences, sometimes acquiring experience in leading teams. Even the least active participants found their experience valuable and would have liked more frequent opportunities. One of the participants worked with the PATHE (Pasifika Achievement to Higher Education) program. Participants are identified with pseudonyms in the following discussion.

Findings

Interview transcripts were transcribed and manually coded for pertinent themes that appeared across different participants’ interviews. The coding scheme included a priori or pre-set codes derived from published studies into widening participation and student ambassador schemes, and emergent codes that were derived from the data and unique to this study. Codes were adjusted and refined through the process of analysis and precise sub-themes were identified (see Appendix X for coding scheme). Interviews were analysed independently from survey data (see chapter 7 for synthesis discussion).

Discussion in this section addresses themes and sub-themes that are evident across all the interviews. They are organised, as in earlier sections, from most significant to least significant. Significance for the qualitative themes has been determined by the extent of discussion relating to each theme across all the interviews. In order of significance they are: Personal Aspects (including personal attributes, work-related and interpersonal), Rewards, Belonging, Aspirations, Challenges, with the least significant theme, in that it was least commented on, Academic Engagement.
1. Personal aspects

This theme brings together the diversity of aspects that the alumni perceived as being of personal benefit to them in terms of their personal growth or enhancement of personal qualities. These included aspects clustered around Personal attributes, Work-related skills and Interpersonal skills.

(i) Personal attributes

Personal attributes refer to individual differences in characteristic patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving. These include perceived individual differences in particular personality characteristics such as sociability, trust, reflectiveness, self-efficacy or self-belief, and clusters of characteristics that might be understood as demonstrating maturity or leadership. The Student Ambassador program both drew on pre-existing qualities that the participants brought as assets to their experiences, and it enabled them to develop new dimensions of personality through their experience.

Pre-existing personality attributes that participants felt they brought with them included innate qualities, and those they had developed in previous settings. Ana for example described herself as inherently ‘quite flexible in my approach to people’. Brenda described her maturity and experience as assets that enabled her to show ‘initiative’. Carmen saw herself as ‘friendly’ and ‘patient’ and said ‘I’ve always been a leader.’ Dev was naturally ‘jovial,’ or ‘happy-go-lucky.’ Gabriela saw herself as bringing an ‘optimistic’ outlook and ‘adaptability’ to the role, while Hanna was a ‘very open and encouraging’ person. Inga brought an ability ‘to understand’ others and to ‘make people feel comfortable.’ Despite the personality assets they brought into the program, that may have contributed to their selection as participants, all of them spoke at length about how these and other aspects of their personalities grew or shifted through the experience, supporting Dev’s insight that ‘nobody is a born ambassador. You actually develop and grow into that character.’

Participants also noted personal traits that were disadvantages that they brought with them, and that changed through their engagement. Increased confidence was mentioned by five of the participants. Brenda who worked in First Foot Forward, identified confidence as a quality that increased through her time in the program:

Confidence, definitely. I thought I was quite confident, but children are a different dynamic, and especially primary school age, where they don’t have a filter. They will say how it is or ask the question that I’m usually not used to. ... Confidence in terms of presenting, public speaking, being in a situation that might be planned in a sort of way but it doesn’t turn out like that, so having to be flexible. (Brenda)

Inga described developing confidence as a major outcome of being a Student Ambassador. This was largely achieved through meeting the other students who were working alongside her. Confidence for her was about her entire sense of herself as a student, in relation to the multiple demands that university study made on her. Getting her own struggles into better perspective helped her anxiety to diminish and gave her more confidence in her own abilities to cope with her studies. This sense of increased self-efficacy gave her more control over her circumstances, so that just working hard was the best response:
I was never as confident I think before I came. As I was going through school, I always got more confident in things. But I don’t think I was especially confident in myself. Just because I always found it hard to do things, I was always struggling with my education and that sort of thing. I kind of felt like I was the only person in the world that was struggling. It sort of didn’t comprehend for me that everybody is in the exact same position, everybody’s got to study, everybody’s got to do this, everyone’s got to do that. Some people have part time jobs. It kind of just didn’t compute for me. But then I came to Fast Forward and just uni in general I think. It became more obvious that everybody else was in the same position I was. Everybody was getting that Monday quiz and everybody was struggling in the last two days before the exam. Everybody was putting their assignments in really late. Everyone was doing the midnight dash. So, it wasn’t just you. It made me realise that okay, just stop trying to be the special snowflake. Everyone’s having trouble. You’re not the only person that’s struggling. That really helped me and I sort of stopped struggling after a while because I realised that everyone’s the same as me so it doesn’t matter. Just work hard, do what you can do and that’s all you can ask.

Ed described how the experience as a Student Ambassador had increased his confidence so that now, as a student member of The Academy, he is:

a lot more just generally outgoing and willing to put my hand up to volunteer or assist with things... I’m a member of The Academy at the uni and once a month they’ll send out a newsletter with volunteering opportunities and stuff. Normally I will at least send an email off to one of them at least every month or two to sort of see if there’s anything I can do. I feel like if I didn’t get involved with the student ambassador programs that’s something I wouldn’t have been too confident just putting my hand up for.

Gabriela described herself as ‘invincible’ due to the increase in confidence that she had experienced through her involvement as a Student Ambassador:

I think I feel more - I don’t know how to put it but I guess like invincible. I used to feel like I was insignificant in a way or less worth because I wasn’t doing so well academically or had nothing else - I couldn’t really do anything else. But after the whole experience I think I’ve gained more confidence overall and I’ve learned more possibilities in terms of career and education.

She describes this increased sense of self-efficacy as a ‘positive mindset’ that is very different from how she had previously felt. At school, she had thought that ‘when I didn’t do too well I thought I was really doomed’ whereas now ‘whatever happens at the end of my current degree it’s okay, I know I have other possibilities as well’. She attributes her sense of self-worth and aspiration to pursue further education in large part to her experiences as a Student Ambassador with OWP.

Hanna had lacked confidence prior to her experience and over an extended engagement in various programs changed her sense of self-efficacy and recognition of her own potential:

I always limited myself... because I thought I was not smart enough or I was not capable enough. For [my supervisor, program officers] to actually just go over what I have done in the last two years, like my roles, what I have completed, what I have achieved - just goes to show that I am definitely capable to go out there in the
community. I always lacked to see potential in myself and this program definitely helped me. Definitely helped me a lot to see these types of potentials.

Ebony, who plans to be a teacher and was involved in a wide range of activities, also found that patience was a quality she developed through her experiences as a Student Ambassador:

I think I’m probably a little bit more patient than I was before because we had to let the kids get to the stage where they were happy for you to be there. You couldn’t force them which, when you’re giving up your time one hour a week or whatever it was, can be a little bit frustrating but you see - you saw over that period of time, how you just sitting there and going, okay, I’m here if you want me, and then they were more willing to come and talk to you which was nice.

Responsiveness and openness to the perspectives of others, including children, were also important personal qualities that developed through their experiences:

The children basically taught me a lot. They had big dreams and nothing would ever stop them. Some of them were quite - very ambitious. It was very enlightening for me. To walk away from that, it was a breath of fresh air. It’s given me a different outlook on life really. (Brenda)

...Being able to be a little bit more open to listening to kids when they want to come to you, not so much you forcing yourself into situations where they don’t want you there. (Ebony)

Participants also learned greater openness to unfamiliar situations and contexts, signifying greater confidence in one’s capacity to cope. Two international students commented specifically on how the program had assisted them. Faiyaz identified a sense of increased confidence and willingness to engage actively with other students that he developed as a result of being a Student Ambassador:

When I joined as a student ambassador I felt like communicating with my fellow students more rather than staying at the corner and saying nothing. (Faiyaz)

Dev, who worked with First Foot Forward, identified a gradual shift in his capacity for new experiences:

I am kind of more into the open person, who is willing to accept and experience new changes ...This program gave me those qualities, where I was constantly thrown into the new environment and strangers and all of those things. (Dev).

A growing sense of maturity, expressed through a combination of different qualities, was also highlighted by Dev. He described himself as 'like a big kid' when he began but as he progressed through Fast Forward and various other programs he became ‘more sincere, to be honest...I’ve become very sincere and a very mature or grown up person...more responsible ...grounded.’

(ii) Work-related skills

Although most participants could clearly identify personal attributes that were enhanced by their participation, it was in the domain of work-related skills that they were most explicit about the value of Student Ambassador experience for their personal and professional growth. Workplace skills have been a consistent theme in previous studies of Student Ambassador experiences, with Ylonen (2010, 2012) emphasising the
transferability of skills into professional future lives. The students in the Western Sydney University programs stressed a wide variety of work-related skills that they had developed through the program ranging from specific skills in goal-setting, time management, delegation and working in teams through to skill sets that were suited to careers that would involve working with children and communities.

The two participants enrolled in teaching courses framed their Student Ambassador experiences in the context of their intended future careers. The experience directly contributes to Ana’s sense of professional identity and priorities as a teacher:

[It has] helped me to set some professional expectations. ... it’s helped me to see the profession in practice and think about what I want to do and be. It’s also, since I’ve had the opportunity to teach and take students on excursions and do goal setting with them and do a variety of these things, it’s allowed me to bring what I’ve seen into my professional practice and I’m very thankful for that. (Ana)

From a professional stand point, it helped me see that young people are individuals. You have to approach them as individuals and you have to focus on their learning and their engagement rather than the trappings of are their uniforms on correctly or this or that. It was honing in on who they are as young learners or potential - you know as they engage with their future life pathways rather than just seeing them as a sum total of what they were there today. A bored, tired, hungry, disinterested young person. (Ana)

Direct links were made by participants to a range of other work-related skills. Identifying personal goals and working in teams were important for Carmen, as were a range of ‘little’ work related skills:

It was actually really interesting, filling out the payslip. I've never filled out a payslip before. ...Just little skills and to be on time, that was a big thing. (Carmen)

Pragmatic work-related skills were also important for Jamila, who had limited experience prior to become a Student Ambassador:

It was one of my first office-y roles, like even learning about how offices are structured, and little administrative things work, and behind the scenes stuff which I didn’t really know about before. (Jamila)

Time management and planning skills were important for most of the participants. Dev states that he is now ‘managing in a better way, full time study and full time work.’ Ebony found that while the Student Ambassador program increased the pressure on her time, it also developed her skills in organising her time efficiently:

I think I’m a lot more organised just because having to study full time and then there was a period of time where [programs] overlapped. So, I was volunteering twice a week and then working on top of that, so I had to be super organised, having to write everything down... It was just trying to organise your life a little bit better than I had been previously, ... that was something that I've definitely taken out of it and something that I still do now. (Ebony)

Time management skills developed within the program are seen to be directly transferable into particular professions, notably nursing:
Time management skills of course because we have to organise the event; we have to prepare everything; make sure that everything is ready.... Time management skills because as you know the ratio in nursing is not as good at the moment so we really need to manage our time for us to be able to attend to or to care for all our patients. (Faiyaz)

Delegation is a strategy for managing time that was named by Inga as a crucial work related skill that she developed through her experience as a Student Ambassador.

I was never very good at delegating. I was always the kind of person that took on everything myself and I used to get really, really overwhelmed with everything and I was just - I used to just freak out all the time because I didn’t have anywhere to go. I didn’t have any time for anything. But I definitely learnt how to delegate and to put aside the least important tasks in order to favour the more important tasks and get them finished. (Inga)

Breaking down tasks into ‘steps’ is also important for Inga, and necessary to keep her work manageable:

You kind of need to have steps. You need to realise the plan. You need to start thinking smaller in that regard. Which I found really funny because I’m actually sort of the person that wants to get everything done all at once. I definitely think that I brought a more scaled back view of the world. ...[Now] I’m well, can we just get one done first? Rather than doing everything all at once. Because then we’re just going to fall over and not going to be able to get back up again.

Work related skills were seen to be transferable generally into the workplace, and more specifically into particular professions. Time management, goal setting, planning and implementation were all impacted by Student Ambassador experiences.

(iii) Interpersonal and communication skills

Leadership as a broad concept is mentioned in previous studies into Student Ambassador’s experiences (Grace & Fleming, 2015a, 2015b, 2017; Nickson & Henrikson, 2014).

The Western Sydney Student Ambassador alumni tended to explain their growth in leadership qualities through newly acquired interpersonal and communication skills. For Dev, leadership qualities equal being ‘able to speak in public’. Faiyaz suggested that leadership is also ‘more than just communication skills’. It includes a spectrum of qualities such as ‘team work’ and ‘improvisation’ that were developed through the program. Gabriela linked leadership to communication because it requires ‘listening and working in a team - incorporating ideas.’

Specific communication skills were mentioned by most of the participants. Ana talked about how important it is to be a skilled and responsive communicator when opening conversations with young people:

It’s about listening and supporting others when they talk. So for example, if a young person says ‘I don’t know why I’m here. This is stupid, I don’t understand.’ Taking a few moments to say ‘Look you might not get something out of it today but stick with it. There’s other things, what are you interested in?’ Then using that as a
way to build up conversation. So good communication skills both with speaking and listening. (Ana)

Ebony who, like Ana, planned to become a teacher also talked about the specific requirements of communicating with children and young people in responsive and empathic ways. When the planned activities were not working well with particular groups of students the Student Ambassadors learned to recognise and respond to their needs and preferences:

A lot of them were involving bits of paper and getting the kids to write things on bits of paper but our kids were making paper aeroplanes out of them and throwing them at each other.... We realised that they liked more physical stuff so we’d take them in groups for walks around the school. The teacher said it was all right for us to do that and we’d go and do it outside. We ended up playing a couple of games outside just as an incentive for them to get them through what we had to do. Then, even just a few times, it was asking the kids, okay, what do you want to do here and they’d just put music on and we’d sit there and talk because we’d run out of stuff to do very, very quickly and we had them for an hour. (Ebony)

Being able to speak to a wide variety of other people was an important facet of the experience. For Brenda, this is about communicating with stakeholders:

I think communication, so being able to communicate at different levels. Speaking to - yeah, so the teachers, all the different stakeholders that are involved in putting the event together, and then speaking to the children, speaking to my team, the team members that were working with me. So different communication styles, I guess.

For Dev, learning to communicate with ‘strangers’ was like overcoming a ‘phobia’:

Yeah. I mean, everyone has got social anxiety or phobia, I guess, up to some extent, when you are thrown into a bunch of strangers. You don’t know how to start to talk to people. But after doing all of these things where you always meet strangers - in these kind of projects at UWS you always meet strangers. Then you break that fear of how to communicate or how to initiate any conversation.

Ed, who worked in Fast Forward and First Foot Forward as well as Mates@UWS and as a Reading Ambassador with The Academy, described how communication and confidence were interlinked in his experiences:

I also think it’s enabled me to be able to communicate with a more diverse range of people in terms of culture, age, so I’ve been forced to network with a number of people there and that’s only increased my confidence and communication skills.

Hanna was previously reluctant to speak about her ideas at all and acquired the capacity to do so through her work as a Student Ambassador:

I know that before coming in this ambassador, I was always hesitant. Always, if I had an idea or if I had something that I wanted to say, I would always be hesitant or reluctant ... not say anything - just let it go with the flow.

Participants acquired more nuanced understandings of how to moderate their styles of communication with different audiences and in different contexts through their Student Ambassador experiences. For example, Carmen’s awareness was raised about
different levels of formality that should be used when talking with people in particular roles. One of the supervisors had mentioned to the group ‘the way a student came back to me and started talking…it wasn’t very respectful’. Carmen explained that:

*I found that very interesting. There are different ways to speak to everyone. The more I work I find within the university no matter what program it is, everyone’s very mindful of that, that we’re students learning how to be in a workplace. I found that very valuable.*

Interpersonal skills included the capacity to work effectively and collaboratively with teams of people to solve problems, including regrouping in the midst of events where that was necessary:

*We were working in teams there, it was you’d talk to the other people and they were all from different degrees so we all had different backgrounds, and going, okay, what are we going to do with these kids, we have no idea what we’re doing. We’d just work in together to try and fill the hour up and try and actually get the kids to get something out of it not just us wasting an hour of their time.* (Ebony)

Ebony described this capacity as being able to show ‘initiative’ in a team.

*I think that was more us taking our own initiative and going, okay, this isn’t working, we need to do something else here, and working together as a team to try and actually get a positive outcome for the students and make them feel like they had done something positive with their time.* (Ebony)

Formal presentations skills were improved through working as Student Ambassadors. Hanna noted that before her experience as a Student Ambassador she had been ‘confident in myself, but not confident in presenting’. In her first experience she froze:

*I definitely knew what I was going to talk about. Then when it actually came to presenting I froze. I was like, oh my gosh I don’t know what to do. Everything that I had in my mind, I forgot. Yeah, so presentation skills...* (Hanna)

After her experiences with PATHE, she had overcome these fears and felt more confident and comfortable presenting to others. But as she stresses, she didn’t do any of this on her own. Rather it was the supportive environment that she worked within that made the difference for her:

*I didn’t do it by myself. I did it with the team. I did it with the constant training. I did it with constant encouragement from my supervisors, from other ambassadors as well... My ideas, my mentality - it’s definitely changed, and, yeah, for the better.* (Hanna)

2. Rewards

Rewards were the second most frequently asserted themes in the alumni interviews. These were organised into the two categories of altruistic and pragmatic rewards, reflecting themes that had emerged in earlier research (Gartland, 2014, 2015; Taylor, 2008; Fleming & Grace, 2015a, 2015b, 2017, 2016; Ylonen, 2010, 2012). Previous studies presented conflicting findings about students’ motivations and rewards for participating as Student Ambassadors. Taylor (2008) and Gartland (2014, 2015) argued
that although students may have articulated altruistic reasons they were keen to develop portfolios of experiences that would enhance their CVs and position them better in a competitive graduate workforce. Ylonen (2010, 2012), whose interests was in employability and Student Ambassador part-time jobs, found that pragmatic rewards were more significant drivers of students’ participation. Nickson and Henrikson (2014) noted that Ambassadors acquired higher public profiles on campus. Fleming and Grace (2016) suggested that altruistic rewards were unintended but valuable outcomes for students working in such programs.

(i) Altruistic

Altruistic rewards included helping people, making a difference. These were sometimes linked to their personal histories. There was a sense of paying it forward or giving it back so that other young people could reap the sorts of benefits that they had experienced. Ana describes how similar programs had assisted her as a child:

I had benefitted from programs in my youth in the US, having glimpses at university and so on in a variety of different forms. Whether it was summer camps or different programs working with uni students in community projects and things like that. So it was really important for me to kind of continue that chain of being involved and volunteering. To do it with a good altruistic mind set knowing that I had a high value of the involvement that these volunteers in my past had given to me and hoping that with that realisation I could share that with young people as well. (Ana)

Inga had benefited from Fast Forward herself, and recognised that it had made a difference to her decision-making:

I remember when I was in high school and I was never sure if I was going to go to uni or if I was just going to go into work or whatever. I wasn’t really too sure on that. So, having someone that had been in their position come in and help them decide and show them basically what they could do in uni and all that kind of stuff. It was really good. Fast Forward helped me a lot when I was in high school so I would like to put that forward as well. (Inga)

As a student who had received a scholarship to help with her university studies she wanted to ‘return the favour.’

Gabriela wanted to participate because she had not had these opportunities and recognised their value:

I was never given the opportunities that the student ambassadors give the young people these days. So for me it was giving something that I didn’t have or I couldn’t have and it was a big deal because I wish I had that then. So being able to give it to them was a big deal for me. (Gabriela)

Several of the participants explicitly described how this was an ‘opportunity to give back’ (Brenda). Carmen said she wanted to give back ‘the same appreciation’ that our teachers give to us and the time of day they give to us’ and to ‘give back those kinds of values.’ Giving back to younger kids and talking to them about education were very important rewards for Carmen. For Ebony, it was important to see the effects:

You could tell that you were making a difference to the kids because you saw them over a long period of time and a lot of these kids were from families where they didn’t
Rewards in the future were also anticipated by Carmen, as she imagined that some of the young people who she influenced may change their life paths as a result of meeting her:

> I’m not just taking an education and running. I’m giving back to the community and it’s nice to be able to think that in 10 years’ time when I’m an actual alumni and I’m working and whatnot that maybe those students might have come to university whether it’s this university or another university. That’s still the future of Australia and it’s nice to know if I had an impact on them. (Carmen)

As an international student, Dev saw his experiences as an opportunity to help others who may also be floundering as he had been in his first semester:

> I did not know anyone. That is one of the things that motivated me to help other people, including international students or anyone - just high school kids or anyone. Because when I came down, I thought I was thrown in, deep down, kind of thing, where I don’t have any helping hand to pull me out. Or maybe there would be. There were so many facilities for the students. There were so many services, helping things, but I didn’t know where to find. I had to really... to find out, to search, to look out for the help. That’s the reason I wanted to help students, to show them that these are the challenges and these are the helps available for you.

Particular moments were evident when they had made a difference in a young person’s life, as Carmen describes:

> One student, she was just like tell me more and we went into this and into that. Then it got a little personal, our conversation. It was beautiful. She was like I’m really glad that I met you today ... thank you. I was like thank you. It’s nice.

> Yeah, it’s just bringing that wisdom. It’s nice. It’s a nice feeling. (Carmen)

Seeing the effects on students was very important for Jamila, as this is when it all ‘comes together’:

> That’s when I was like I get it, this is actually - it’s all coming together, and seeing the students - when you see the students come to university and be like I want to go to university or like I want to do... just having a vision when they otherwise wouldn’t have. They wouldn’t have seen it as an option for them. That’s what was cool, when you see the students who never considered it as an option.

Participating as a Student Ambassador had widespread positive impacts. Grace described it as ‘really rewarding’. Ed described the work as ‘a pretty fulfilling experience’ particularly as the young people he worked with were ‘actually from non-English speaking backgrounds and - so lots were refugees and migrants.’ Inga found it ‘fun.’ Jamila found it gave her ‘pride’ in the university and her region. For Jamila, it was meaningful:
Meaningful for obviously the participants in the program, and seeing it like you’re -
the things that you’re doing are having a meaningful effect on someone else. There’s a
clear cause and effect kind of relation that you can see, but also in terms of me as the
task that I’m doing, being meaningful to myself, like are my experiences actually
counting...Being of worth and having that feeling, I don’t know, to yourself:

Some described how the experience had impacted on their emotions. Dev said ‘I
personally felt that - I mean, I was almost helping students. I felt very emotional.’ Ebony
would feel sometimes that she didn’t want to go but would always feel better about it
afterwards. Gabriela felt ‘very positive’ after each session and felt this was quite a
breakthrough as she saw herself as a quiet person. Carmen also remembered that it
made her ‘feel better’:

*I remember being much happier when I finished the program. You’re working with
young children. You just feel better. That’s one little impact I guess or big impact.*
(Carmen)

(ii) Pragmatic

Pragmatic rewards include income, part-time meaningful work, making friends,
compatibility with study, general work-related skills, work experience and increased
employability through building a CV. Some of the Western Sydney students worked as
volunteers and as paid workers across a range of programs at the university. In the
interviews they did not always differentiate between programs that were delivered by
the Office of Widening Participation and other sections of the university, such as The
Academy. These students tended to generalise about the impacts of all these programs.
Carmen and Gabriela appreciated being paid for the work. Dev appreciated the ‘free
food’. Jamila found the convenience of an on-campus job important because it was more
flexible with her degree. For Ed, though ‘we all need money to survive, ...you can be
doing something good for somebody else’ at the same time. Faiyaz appreciated that the
cost of working with children checks were covered by the university.

Participants were aware that the Student Ambassador experience was beneficial for
their careers. Ana described that it had ‘made me more marketable or employable in
Western Sydney.’ Dev explained that ‘in today’s market, every employer - they look for
their employees to be like this, so that they can contribute to the organisation.’ He felt
his success in getting a graduate job offer was directly related to his enhanced CV which
included certificates showing his achievements. The qualities he had developed through
his Student Ambassador experience were just as important:

When I went to the job opportunity for my new grad option, if I’m not wrong, out of -
UWS has almost 700 or 800 international students and I was one of them. For me, to
get the job was a big step. Because none of those international students got a job in
the first round, and I was the only one who got the first round offer letter. By doing
that, definitely I had proven that, yes, I had all of these qualities... I didn’t realise that
it would have a longer term and a serious, positive impact on my career.

Faiyaz also found the experience enhanced his resume and felt that employers looked
favourably on him as a result because he ‘didn’t have a hard time looking for a job’ when
he graduated.
Dev also described that the Student Ambassador and other experiences had brought him a high profile across the university and beyond:

People started noticing me for participating in all of these projects at UWS, I had various opportunities to represent UWS internationally or nationally and everywhere. ... Overall, it’s amazing how one opportunity or one thing would lead you to another and another and it would completely change your life.

Becoming a Student Ambassador contributed to participants’ knowledge of the university and the region. Carmen stressed that:

First I have to say I think it was just understanding my university more. I was a young student. I came straight from high school to university and getting into that was great, understanding the university. (Carmen)

Participants who had grown up outside Australia mentioned that the experience helped them to adjust. Faiyaz described how it helped him ‘get to know the culture more’ and helped him develop his English skills. Ana, who was intending to become a teacher, said that it helped her learn more about Australian young people:

Having grown up in another country and working - coming here as an adult working in a corporate sector, I had never really dealt with young people. Not dealt with them but engaged with young people or had become involved in my community working with youth. I was really interested in having those experiences because personally they are important to me. (Ana)

Some participants became Student Ambassadors initially because of course requirements, particularly those who were intending to become teachers and were completing placements in the community engagement unit Classrooms without Borders. Although they enrolled for what would seem to be pragmatic reasons in a mandatory course unit, how they talked about the experience emphasised the intrinsic rewards. Ebony describes how it reinforced her sense that teaching was her vocation.

I know with the Classrooms Without Borders one where we were helping the kids with their homework, there was this girl, she was in about Year 8 and she was really, really struggling with her maths work. I sat down next to her and going through different ways that she could do it and then you could see at one of them, this lightbulb went off. She was so excited that she’d figured out how to do it and she actually asked me, can you write me more questions, and so I sat there and I wrote a whole lot of questions and she did it and she was so happy with herself. I thought, yeah, this is what I want to do, yeah. (Ebony)

The experience gave Ebony insight into ‘how schools ran from the inside’. She felt ‘a lot more prepared to go into a school environment’ as a consequence. She has a much more detailed sense of the work that teachers do:

I’ve sat in staff rooms and things like that now and seen how the teachers talk to each other and how they sit in there with their big bundles of resources for the kids, how much work it actually does take to put into a lesson.

Carmen found the experience professionally rewarding as well, because it gave her different perspectives than those of her law degree.
Law doesn’t really teach you how to look after a screaming child or - it doesn’t teach you that stuff. Dispute resolution, we handle it like lawyers, not like humans. It’s a whole different thing and talking to a teacher about it, talking to a psych student and just knowing someone else outside of that is really interesting. ...It’s that approach that comes from all different people. It’s a people approach and it’s not just what you learn in a textbook. It’s how people contribute to the issue and all the issues are because of people so people can fix it as well.

For Jamila, the professional benefits related to her future career in community welfare and her connections to the community:

I met a lot of the community elders who have such high - or strong influences in the Pacific Islander community, which will really help in the long run if I am able to get my foot into juvenile justice. With the Pacific Islanders, I’m able to bring in the elders as well and then maybe create some sort of program that would talk about more about our traditions and our cultures and our values, bringing - because a lot of these juvenile - or young people in juvenile justice system, it’s because they are distant from their culture ... or they have a whole different mentality of what their culture is. So, that’s one benefit.

3. Belonging

Previous researchers have identified ‘belonging’ as an outcome of Student Ambassador experiences. Sanders & Higham (2012, citing Andrews et al., 2012) describe it as ‘a true win-win-win situation’ which impacts on student retention because of an increased sense of belonging for new, potential and current students. Nickson & Henrikson (2014) found that a sense of belonging was accompanied by a sense of responsibility to others that kept Student Ambassadors engaged in their courses and college. Being an Ambassador helped them to fit in and be part of something bigger than themselves. Some UK studies (Gartland, 2014, 2015; Taylor, 2007) have suggested that impacts may vary when Student Ambassadors were from similar or different class or cultural backgrounds to the students they are working with. Fleming and Grace (2016) stressed that their ‘Aspiration Agents’ became more committed to their university through their experiences. Although previous studies emphasise ‘belonging’ to a particular institution, the Western Sydney students also commented on how their sense of association with the broad region of western Sydney was impacted by their experiences. However they tended to give broad ranging explanations of what belonging meant to them that did not always clearly discriminate between Student Ambassador experiences and their overall experiences at the university. The findings in this section are organised as: institutional belonging, including a sense of trust, pride and increased knowledge of the university; regional belonging, expanding their perspectives of western Sydney including countering negative stereotypes of the region; and cultural belonging which could include any references to background factors that made the Student Ambassadors feel more or less like they belonged with the students they worked with.

(i) Institutional belonging

Pride in the institution had increased as a result of the Student Ambassador experience. Alumni identified many features that they felt were unique to Western Sydney
University, and set it apart from other local universities. Dev described it as ‘more helping, more connected...more positive, more personal’ than the university he had studied in overseas. Carmen thought the cultural diversity of the university was ‘awesome’ and that ‘Western Sydney University is Western Sydney. We’re helping all these different groups and nationalities and religions unite.’ Jamila suggested that the programs she had worked in demonstrated that ‘the university cares about the community even if they’re not committed to the university’. Ed described the university’s extensive involvement with schools as a way of ‘giving back to the community.’ He elaborated that ‘we’re not all just about getting good research grants and pumping out graduations. It’s about giving something back as well.’ He acquired ‘a sense of identity’ within the university and the community. Brenda described herself as ‘impressed’ and ‘amazed’ by the breadth of opportunities made available to current and future students. Carmen felt ‘a little more proud of walking out of the university campus like I’ve contributed to this university as well.’ Dev felt that he was ‘part of a family’ at the university and that even though he came as an international student his fear was ‘completely eradicated.’ Faiyaz also described the university as ‘a smaller community’ and said that the Student Ambassador experience had created ‘a family kind of network with the staff and other ambassadors.’ Ebony found that the way she looked at the university became more positive and felt ‘more connected to the community and to the university.’ Jamila thought that there had been a sort of ‘complex of like you don’t tell people you go to Western Sydney’ whereas the ‘ambassadors had more of a sense of being very proud of Western Sydney, and we know the good stuff that the university is offering and can do.’ It was ‘super cool’ to meet ‘likeminded students from different faculties and studying different things across the university.’ All of this enhanced her sense of belonging to this institution.

Ana detailed how the Western Sydney approach to widening participation did not just cherry pick the most academically successful students but worked with a range of students over an extended period of time. She said that ‘It’s about who you are and who you want to be’.

Where other universities might be looking at students who have demonstrated academic ability as potential students for the university, Western Sydney is looking at the same thing but it’s not an exclusive approach. It’s not just the students who a demonstrated acumen in maths and science for example. It’s looking at potential and it’s looking at being a partner with students to develop that potential in whatever area it might be. That’s fantastic because it’s looking at the student as a year six student who may not be doing well in their academic work but has a real spark for leadership or has a real spark for being a kind and considerate student. I see those as being quite valuable because not everyone is going to be the top in their science program. I don’t think these outreach programs or these invitations to the world of tertiary education should be exclusive because it’s not only about your grades... At WSU this particular program wasn’t hard wired to academic results. It was more about development of the whole student and I value that greatly. (Ana)

Carmen stressed the student-centred focus of Western Sydney University, and has drawn on her enhanced knowledge of university facilities with her own family:

I think just knowing about the university. My cousin, she’s 16 now. She’s entered Year 12. I’m like have you been to orientation day? Has your high school done this
I just ask her more and I know it’s towards Western Sydney so I’m probably a little bit more biased about that but it was actually good to talk to other university students and be like does your university do this? No. Why not? You start to question those things and over four years you realise how much student-centred we are compared to the other universities. (Carmen)

Inga’s sense of belonging to the university had begun years earlier when she had been a school student involved in Fast Forward. This grew even more when she worked as a Student Ambassador in that program as a university student.

The university and the region were conflated for some of the alumni. Ed for example said that a new ‘sense of identity has really become engraved in me of Western Sydney and of Western Sydney University… That’s not just at university itself. It’s obviously also the general Western Sydney community, working with these schools and people from refugee backgrounds et cetera.’

(ii) Regional belonging

Regional belonging manifested for people who already saw themselves as ‘insiders’ to western Sydney, and for those who began as ‘outsiders’. For students who had not lived or grown up in western Sydney, the program gave them an opportunity to engage differently with students and communities. Ed said that he had ‘forgotten about the Western Sydney stigma’ since being at the university. Ana said for her it had been like ‘walking on another planet sometimes’ but that her limited perspective had expanded through the opportunity to get to know western Sydney neighbourhoods that were very different from her somewhat insular inner city neighbourhood:

I live in the inner West of Sydney and my sphere of engagement was very very limited to my neighbourhood, to my immediate community. This program allowed me to move out further West if you will and engage with communities I had never been to. Not for not wanting to but I didn’t grow up here, I don’t have any friends out there. I don’t have any connections there and personally it allowed me to make a deeper connection with the real community. A broader community rather than just my back yard. (Ana)

Through her experiences with students in high poverty schools, Ana came to recognise other ‘riches’ that they bring to their learning. She now has a new ‘vision’ of the region:

It just doesn’t mean that there’s a lack of money. It means that there’s a richness of many many many other things. Whether it’s cultural diversity, whether it’s just interesting young students who do the best with what they have whatever it is. It’s given me this great vision into Western Sydney.

For her, the Student Ambassador experiences meant that she could feel ‘very honoured and privileged to be able to see beyond the headline.’ As a teacher in western Sydney she feels she will be better ‘able to separate a lot of negative attention from the real job of teaching and supporting students’.

Dev who arrived as an international student knowing nobody developed a sense of belonging to the region as well as the university:
I proudly call myself a Westie. Yeah, I don’t want to go anywhere else and I live in Western Sydney and hopefully I will live, forever, in Western Sydney. Yeah, I feel it’s more homely and you see a lot of like-minded people. A lot of non-judgmental people.

(Dev)

Jamila’s sense of pride extends from the university to the region to which she belongs. She describes herself as having a ‘kind of western Sydney pride’ and forming community with other Student Ambassador in the behind the scenes work. She described the staff at Widening Participation as also ‘having that mentality,’ this meant that ‘they knew the potential of Western Sydney and young people in Western Sydney.’ Jamila uses ‘we’ to identify with students who might be dismissed by outsiders’ perspectives:

...being able to work with young people, and trying to get them to have that same pride instead of letting what other people say affect them or bring them down about Western Sydney. I really like being like hey, you know, these are all the good stuff that we have. It’s actually really cool to be from Western Sydney despite what other people tell you that you shouldn’t feel proud about Western Sydney. (Jamila)

Inga also describes herself as a sort of ambassador for the region, overcoming negative representations through her manner and presence:

I think that I change other people’s opinions being so well educated, so well spoken, so able to articulate my thoughts. So, I think I change opinions of what other people think of Western Sydney. (Inga)

Even though she had grown up in western Sydney and her parents were immigrants, Carmen developed a powerful appreciation of the enormous cultural diversity of the region. Although she had a strong sense of belonging to her own Maltese Catholic community, she did not see this as ‘multicultural’. Coming to Western Sydney University and working as a Student Ambassador opened her to this diversity:

I know it’s going to sound a little weird but you never know until you see it. You know how Western Sydney’s multicultural? I never grew up multicultural. I grew up in my little community and my family was quite narrow and that’s it. (Carmen)

(iii) Cultural belonging

Feelings of cultural ‘belonging’ or ‘not belonging’ arose in terms of the extent to which participants saw themselves as similar or different from the young people with whom they worked. It often entailed overcoming stereotypes and what the participants came to see as media bias against economically impoverished or culturally diverse communities. Ed had ‘opened his eyes’ to the diversity of the region, with people from different backgrounds and life experiences meaning that ‘you definitely can’t paint them all with the same brush.’ Jamila also learned of the diversity within young people from the region:

I came in being like yeah, I know young people from Western Sydney, but I didn’t realise actually young people from Western Sydney and different parts of Western Sydney are actually really different. Getting to know how different young people - groups of young people think.’

Inga found a sense of belonging with people who did not come from her own community but were like her. She described how this increased ‘my connection to my community as
well.’ She learned that ‘they’re not really actually trying to hold me back. They’re all trying to lift me up and try to make me realise that I can do it as well.’

Ebony described herself as growing up in a very ‘Anglo’ area and found that the opportunity was very valuable for ‘getting into different areas of Western Sydney a bit and seeing how complex and not complex things are at the same time, seeing how different and similar people are’. She learned to see ‘how you get all these people who live really differently to how I do but then you see them do the same things you’re doing and you go, okay, they’re not that different.’

Although Carmen identified herself as growing up in western Sydney and was from an immigrant cultural background herself, she had new experiences as a Student Ambassador with students from other cultural groups:

> I remember one year we had primary school and a group of young Muslim girls. I’ve never been around young Muslim girls. It’s just a whole different demographic that I’ve never been around. I was really cautious. By the end of the day I was like cool, I know - not like I did anything wrong but I know that it’s okay now. (Carmen)

Through her experience, she learned to feel much more comfortable with cultural difference. Learning to live with diversity featured in her extended account of being a student at Western Sydney University. It also impacts on how she thinks about community and her intentions to work in the community legal sector because she has developed a more nuanced understanding of the young people she might encounter: ‘They’re not the stereotype that you hear that is bad on the media. The media misconstrues everything. It’s nice actually to meet those students who are just lovely and want to give it a go.’

Hanna evaluated the programs she was involved in through their suitability for the community that she belonged to. She describes it as putting ‘a part of us’ into the program:

> A lot of the content that they were putting in, yes, it did align with what the frameworks of the university wanted to see, but it also aligned with the perceptions and ideas and how Pacific Islanders think, in terms of the approach. How we approached this type of content - is this content relevant, and how we can pull our narrative, how we can pull Pacific Islander - I don’t know how to explain it, but how we just - yeah, how we put a part of us in this type of content. (Hanna)

4. Aspiration

The fourth most significant theme in the alumni interviews was aspiration. This is a very complex concept that has been the focus of considerable academic research and public policy over the last decade. It is the principle goal of the Widening Participation initiatives, and underpins the HEPP funding that makes these initiatives possible. Therefore it is unsurprising that it featured strongly in the interview responses from alumni. Alumni described how their own aspirations had been impacted through their experience, and they expressed their views about how they perceived the programs impacting on young people’s aspirations.
Raising aspiration is not merely a matter of supplying correct information and familiarising young people with university campuses and courses. It is a long-term complex process that requires the development of relationships between the university, schools, young people, their families and other organisations. It engages feelings, emotions and imagination, and entails a shifting sense of identity so that young people begin to see themselves as having the capacities and resources to be successful at university. It has been described as an ‘emergent’ quality for such students, who begin to ‘apprehend the present-becoming-future’ beyond the limits of what they may already be familiar with in their families and communities (Zipin et al., 2015).

The Review of Higher Education (Bradley et al., 2008) described aspiration as putting university on the ‘radar screen’ for potential tertiary students from underrepresented communities (p. 40). This assumes that these young people might not know about or ‘see’ university at all on the ‘radar screens’ of their futures. It is crucial that young people develop ‘images’ of university, so they can imagine that university is ‘a place for them, rather than a place for other people’ (Harwood et al., 2017, 195). Students need to know that people ‘like them’ have made it, sometimes despite the odds. They need to know about alternate pathways and options within the university. The Student Ambassadors and the narratives that they can tell about their own experiences are central components of the ‘ecologies of learning’ (Harwood et al., 2017) that are required in widening participation initiatives.

Barriers to university are wider than the individual student’s perspective. Family and community tend to be concerned about expenses, uncertain about the professional value of tertiary study, and sometimes acutely aware of the underrepresentation of people of their ethnicity, social class or local area (Harwood et al., 2017; Somerville, Gray, Reid, Naidoo, Gannon & Brown, 2013). Young people may fear that university will be just like school but bigger and more alienating, or that university will be another place where they will ‘fail’ at schooling (Harwood et al., 2017). Once again, the lived experiences and insider knowledge of the Student Ambassadors can address these concerns in a more intimate and friendly way than brochures or other sources of information.

The Student Ambassadors’ responses on aspiration, including how they saw themselves impacting on the aspirations of young people, fall into four categories. Initially, they tended to make broad comments about aspiration that were associated with self-belief and self-concept. These are discussed as General comments. Personal narratives featured very strongly in their accounts of raising aspiration. They use their own stories to build bridges into the future for the young people. Sometimes they share details about their own lives, where they reference their family backgrounds, or their educational histories when they at school or beginning university. These have been discussed below as Telling my story. Sometimes they talk about the influence they are having in the present within their work as Student Ambassadors, discussed here as Influencing others as a Student Ambassador. Sometimes they refer directly to images of the future, discussed here as Imagining the future. These categories sometimes overlap, when participants compress all of these features into a single train of thought.

(i) General comments on aspiration
The Student Ambassadors refer to aspirations in many different ways through the interviews. These include some diffuse and general comments that stress the capacity of all young people to find success at university. Individual differences and circumstances disappear in these broad claims about the difference that aspiration makes. For example, Ana says ‘their future is limitless’ and Hanna says she tries to convey that ‘you could achieve whatever you really wanted to’. For Hanna, university is a way of expanding opportunities that are ‘so wide if we just open and we don’t limit ourselves’. However, a problem that many scholars have identified with this form of reasoning is that the onus is then placed entirely on the individual student and their desire to succeed. There is no recognition in these sorts of comments that sometimes there are obstacles that extend beyond just self-belief and hard work. Nor that educational institutions may share some responsibility for their students’ success. The risk is that failure to succeed is understood as lack of aspiration or aptitude at the purely individual level. Zipin et al (2015) call these dominant or ‘doxic’ views of aspiration, that misrecognise that some of the factors mitigating against success are arbitrary or culturally and institutionally constructed. The effects can be seen in the long term in attrition rates for students who enter university from underrepresented cohorts, but leave with a financial debt and without a degree.

Inga, who had been involved in Fast Forward as a high school student, has a different understanding of what young people need to know beyond just having stronger self-belief. She outlines the pragmatic information that they need:

If you want to have help then there’s going to be help for you. If you want to be on your own then obviously they’ll leave you alone. But there’s definitely a very strong support network in - I know that there’s a very strong support network at Western and there’s probably support networks in other universities as well (Inga).

Inga’s description points out that students do sometimes need help, that this is normal, and that there are strategies in place at this institution to assist all students. There is no stigma attached in her account to seeking help.

Dev also describes pragmatic information that he feels he would have benefited from at his university overseas. He needed explicit insights into decision-making processes: which university, which course, which futures:

If somebody would come from the university who would share their experience, then it would have been much better. In terms of deciding which university to go to, what course to select, what are the futures and all? I personally found, it’s very personal - the experience was very personal. (Dev)

Importantly for Dev, although information about universities and courses would have been available, what he wanted was more ‘personal,’ he wanted to hear of their ‘experience.’

Sometimes the role of the Student Ambassador is to reassure young people. Carmen says that in answer to the many questions that high school students asked, she will ‘tell them look after this, look after that, don’t worry about that, life will continue, look towards university, all these different things’. Ed would have liked support that boosted him by giving him ‘that extra push to set that goal a little bit higher’ so this has become part of the work of encouraging young people that he can do as a Student Ambassador.
(ii) Telling my story

Sharing personal experiences was central to the way that the Student Ambassadors worked with young people. They talked about their own school and university experiences, and sometimes about the difficulties they may have had in accessing education. They tended to identify closely with the young people in these stories. For example, Jamila says ‘if you’re working with a young kid from Western Sydney, I was that same young kid.’ Ed described himself as ‘first in family’ and remembers that coming to university was ‘a bit of an identity crisis’. He didn’t have a high ATAR score but is now completing an Hons year. Although Ed’s family had left school early and worked in unskilled jobs he understood that ‘that doesn’t mean that’s what I have to do.’ Even though other people may not have expected this sort of future for him, he says ‘it doesn’t mean that you should discourage yourself.’ Among his peers, Ed stood out as ‘one of the only people from my group to take the risk and do it.’ Sharing personal experiences and stories with young people has a positive effect on the Student Ambassadors. Gabriela describes how it positively reframes how they see themselves, through the eyes of the children and program:

> We may think of ourselves as we did really crap in our HSC or we’re going nowhere in life. But then in the eyes of the children and students we are role models and they’re like, wow, you’re in university, you are an ideal person in a way, someone to look up to. (Gabriela)

In telling their stories to the young people, the Student Ambassadors sometimes find that their own stories and perceptions of themselves change through the process. Student Ambassadors sharing stories with each other as well as the children also had positive and reciprocal effects. For example, when certain western Sydney locations tend to be demonised, the shared stories of Student Ambassadors from those locations became very positive:

> We all come from different parts of western Sydney region. Some of us come from Mount Druitt, Campbelltown, some of us come from Liverpool, Blacktown, Penrith. Just for them to know that we are not defined by our location, yeah, definitely inspires them and encourages them to know that, yes, just because we live in this area - One of the ambassadors I was with during that time doing that workshop, she’s actually doing her Masters in Psychology and she lives in Mount Druitt. They said, oh, isn’t Mount Druitt like a bad place, and stuff like that? Isn’t it not - it’s like another ghetto area? (Hanna)

As this recounted story suggests, positive stories that are shared by people who live in marginalised locations reinforces the new story that success should be possible wherever you live. As Hanna says, they learn that ‘Location does not define us’.

A sense of isolation from tertiary education in their childhoods is expressed in various different ways and ascribed to different causes. Carmen described how ‘she had no one to talk to’ as she was first one to go to university in her immigrant family. Her family and community seemed different to the people she has since come to think of as ‘academic.’ Although she stresses that they did not have financial difficulties, the indicators of differences that she draws upon (dress, speech, conduct) suggest classed differences between working-class and professional/ middle-class families:
Language differences are an important element of first in family narratives and a crucial part of the story Carmen shares with the young people she works with. She describes them as belonging to the generation where ‘their parents have money, they’re beautiful, hardworking but they can’t speak English. Mum and dad can’t come to teacher interviews because they can’t speak about it.’ She reassures them that ‘it’ll get better’ and uses her own family as evidence. She says: ‘You’ll help them eventually. My mum taught her mum English. I taught my brother English, my dad English.’ The young people are positioned, like she was, as potential informal educators within their own families. Her story turns a potential deficit into a positive moment of recognition and capacity-building. Although this is a ‘burden’, it is one that Carmen and these young people ‘all share as a generation of Australians and that’s really important’.

Demystifying tertiary experiences was very important. For example, Brenda describes how she shared her experiences of living on Hawkesbury campus while she did her first degree, because ‘not every uni student has experienced that.’ It is ‘another dynamic that comes into the uni world’ that she was able to pass on. There was a strong sense that the Student Ambassadors were ideal sources of knowledge about university:

> [Students] know about the university life better than anyone else, so if you’re going to run activities about what university life is, or the university experience is, they should be asking university students for that material and the best way to do it, because they’re the ones that know the best. (Jamila)

Misinformation about university had also featured in their previous experiences. The Student Ambassadors are well placed to counter this:

> When I was in high school my teachers were like you don’t get any help in uni, everything’s all on your own. I get to uni and I’m panicking about the fact that oh my god I’ve never done everything on my own. I usually have a teacher there or someone to help me. Then of course when I got there I was oh this is easy, what are you talking about? There’s a whole support network, I don’t know what you’re going on about. (Inga)

Other alumni also referred directly to the range of support services offered by the university, including help with essay writing and the first year program Mates.

Personal stories also included narratives about influential people in their lives. Hanna, who identified herself as from a Pacific Islander background, talked about her grandfather as her greatest influence:

> He said that because I was lacking in seeing potential in myself and confidence in myself, in my career. I didn’t feel like...I am smart enough or good enough, or had the potential to go into education. I think I should just work...He really instilled and reiterated the importance of education. He said that...the only way that will help you see your full potential and see your full capabilities is education. Then when I actually came to uni. All I could think of is what he just told me. (Hanna)
Her recognition of her own feelings of uncertainty, and of the influence of one person in her intimate network, has made Hanna empathetic towards the young people she works with.

(iii) Influencing others as a Student Ambassador

Influences on young people included references to particular activities and events, as well as general comments. Many of them used the term ‘role model’ to describe the influence they felt that they could have on the young people. Carmen describes this as ‘amazing’, noticing in her work with primary school children that ‘when you do this they do look at you... they would act like me.’ They were often not much older than the high school students they worked with, so felt a sense of being ‘in your shoes’ as Carmen put it, when they spoke to them. Dev felt like more than a mentor, almost like a ‘brother’ to them, giving them information, advice, and assistance with their own informed decision-making processes. Inga said that many of the schools were similar to her old school so she already knew ‘the ins and outs’ such as which groups of students would pay attention and which would not. She could ‘target’ her influence more effectively towards them.

Ana described the sense of responsibility she felt, and how this required her to think about her own life and how it might provide illustrations of what might be possible:

*My behaviour, my speech, everything that I did was a potential influencer for these young people. So it allowed me to think of personal experiences I had going through school and university, sharing with them about my professional, my career decisions.*

(Ana)

Gabriela described the students as initially confused, lacking crucial understanding about the purpose and context of university. They were often making their first visit to the university, and reminded her of herself and her first encounters:

*They didn’t know what the possibilities were, what uni could do for you and there was not one straight rule. You could enter uni so many ways. You could do something first, come to uni or vice versa and that was the same thing that I shared [i.e. my story], except they were able to be enlightened by their experience whereas I didn’t really have that.*

(Gabriela)

Brenda, who was of Pacific Islander background, felt a particular connection with the students of that background. Her influence lay in the extent to which she could relate to them, and thereby have a greater impact. Rather than seeing this as a hierarchy, she described this as a reciprocal relationship:

*I guess I was able to relate to a lot of the Pacific Islander children that were in the primary schools that I engaged with. In that way I know that they were open. They felt that they could relate. I felt I could relate to them too.*

(Brenda)

Scholarship in this area suggests that establishing relationships is crucial for aspiration-building work. The alumni described how they built connections and established commonalities across culture, class, age, language, location, particular school or school sector. These connections enhanced their capacity to positively influence the young people with whom they worked.

(iv) Imagining the future
Working as a Student Ambassador meant engaging with concepts of potential futures and aspiration with younger students and, at the same time, reflecting on one’s own future, often leading to an expanded sense of personal possibilities. Many of the Student Ambassadors reimagined and revised their own plans for the future as a direct result of these experiences. Jamila talks about this as a process of getting her thinking more about her own future, asking herself: ‘What do I want to do? What is it that I want to do?’ The school students also challenged the Student Ambassadors about their choices. For example, a student asked: ‘Why do you want to be a lawyer when you’re really into taking photos?’ Jamila thought this was a ‘good point’ that made her think differently about her future. There were many points in the Ambassador program that made her rethink her decisions because, she realised, ‘there’s actually so much that you can do in life, in uni, in higher education, in whatever you want to do.’ Her experience as a Student Ambassador broadened the scope of her own future. This was a process of ‘discovering with the students as well… discovering all these awesome opportunities.’

The ‘ambition’ of students was inspiring for the Student Ambassadors. Reflective activities for school students would prompt the Ambassadors to reflect on their own aspirations for the future. Brenda described how her thinking about the program turned around: ‘I engaged with the program thinking that I could offer something, and realising later on that it provided a lot of insight for me.’ The children became her teachers in that ‘they had big dreams and nothing would ever stop them.’ Brenda found this ‘very enlightening’ and a ‘breath of fresh air.’ She recalled a moment when she suddenly realised that a question in a workshop activity could be equally applicable to her own life. The question ‘If money wasn’t a limitation then what would your goals be in life, or what would you strive to be?’ provoked her into deeper reflection about her own goals and possibilities. The ‘big picture’ became important when a student asked her ‘out of the blue’ what her ‘dream job’ would be. To that point, she said she was ‘so embedded in everyday life and family life and study life, you kind of forget’. In answering the student’s question, she had to think about and imagine her own potential future.

Several of the alumni changed through courses through their time at university, as they clarified their goals and recognised their passions. This also meant activating their imaginations about the sorts of futures they saw for themselves, becoming clearer and more strategic about how they might get there. Hanna had ‘just wanted to work with youth in general’ but through working as a Student Ambassador saw herself working in the future with Pacific Islander youth in juvenile justice. This became her new ‘life-long goal.’

Ed also changed his ideas about the future from ‘general thinking’ about ‘this will get me a good job, good money’ to thinking more deeply about what he wanted to achieve in his life ‘as a person.’ He changed his degree from business and marketing to social work. Before university he had seen himself as ‘a person floating in the world’ and the Student Ambassador experience has helped him ‘connect the dots.’ Jamila realised that she enjoyed working with young people, and began to imagine a future pathway where sometime ‘down the track’ she would like to train as a high school teacher because it’s now ‘where I want to go.’ People who already planned to become teachers also experienced a firming up of these desires. Ebony’s initial choice of course and career were quite random. She said ‘I just basically picked something because…I can’t think of anything else and I’ll start something and if I don’t like it, I’ll change later on.’ Working
as a Student Ambassador meant that she could imagine herself more clearly as a future teacher, and that teaching became ‘what I actually want to do with my life.’

Student Ambassadors were required to assist young people to systematically imagine and plan for their futures. Ebony describes how it meant bringing career planning into the open and making it explicit for them:

> We had some of the girls go, ‘I want to be a nurse when I’m older but I don’t think I could get there’, and we’d go, ‘Why?’ They couldn’t tell you why. We’d go, ‘Maybe you could if you did these things and these things and these things’ and they seemed to take a lot from that. (Ebony)

The Student Ambassadors worked to help young people to draw out and articulate their vague desires for particular futures. The friendly relationships and open communication with Student Ambassadors were more important for this than any specific program ‘materials’ or ‘activities.’ Ebony describes this as a process of opening up about the future, and getting beyond ideas that are just in their heads:

> We got a lot of the kids to open up and talk to us about what they wanted to do later in their life. Whether they wanted to go to university, whether they wanted to go to TAFE, or anything like that. A lot of them did have plans for the future but they were in their head and they thought that they actually couldn’t get there. I think we did help them see that they could get there but I don’t think that was necessarily the materials that we had, the activities and things like that. (Ebony)

Student Ambassadors worked as ‘aspiration agents’ who can bridge past, present and future for the young people and for themselves. They provided ‘hot knowledge’ (Ball & Vincent, 1998; Smith, 2011) about university life that is based on feelings and direct experience, in contrast to ‘cold’ formal knowledge provided through other sources. This is ‘word-of-mouth’ or ‘grapevine’ knowledge that comes from expanded networks. They help young people who may have ‘emergent’ aspirations that extend beyond family and community histories, as that help young people to ‘desire, imagine, articulate and pursue alternative futures’ (Zipin et al., 2015, 230).

### 5. Academic engagement

Connecting academic outcomes with participation as a Student Ambassador is extremely difficult and beyond the scope of the qualitative component of this study. This gap is evident in other literature on such schemes, however Andrews, Clark and Thomas report improvements in degree attainment and graduate outcomes for mentors (Andrews et al., 2012, p. 91). At Western Sydney University, the varying periods of time that people worked in widening participation programs and the diversity of these programs mean that it is impossible to link participation directly with academic achievement, however the Alumni survey allowed participants to self-report how they perceived the work had impacted on them academically. Most of the alumni who agreed to be interviewed had worked as Student Ambassadors several years prior to their interview, and had since graduated from the courses they had been enrolled in at the time. They were clearly all successful students. Most of the participants were enrolled in subsequent degrees or outlined their plans for future additional study during the interview.
In the qualitative interviews, participants were prompted to reflect on the impacts of the experience on their lives, on benefits they had experienced, and on how the experience may have changed the ways they thought about themselves. Potentially, engagement with their own studies at university could arise at any of these moments in the interviews. In general, participants had little to say about this theme, relative to the other themes that have been discussed. Two of the participants made no comments about their own academic engagement. Some of their reflections addressed broad issues related to academic success, such as moments when goal setting or planning for the future became explicit through their Student Ambassador experiences. Access to support and networking are also associated with retention strategies and feature in some of the alumni accounts. They became aware of specific resources that they drew upon these as they needed to in their own degrees through their work as Student Ambassadors.

(i) Goal setting and career planning

Through the time they worked as Student Ambassadors, many of the alumni clarified their academic and professional goals, and became more deliberate in their career planning. This in turn, increased their academic engagement and sometimes their academic achievement. The correct choice of course is crucial for university retention (Webb, Wyness & Cotton, 2016).

but sometimes finding the right course takes time or requires an indirect route. As Gabriela notes, ‘there is not just one way’ and ‘you don’t have to be the one thing.’ Her trajectory demonstrates the strategic approach to career and education. She had been expected by her family to go to ‘one of the top’ universities like her brother, but didn’t do well enough in her HSC to go to university and instead began with a Diploma in Science at Western Sydney University College. She then jumped directly into the second year of Bachelor of Medical Science at WSU and is now studying a Master of Biological Sciences (Advanced) at ANU. Working as a Student Ambassador meant that she learned about different possibilities:

\[
I \text{ know that I could work after this and then do medicine after or I could just do research and then start working. There's so many possibilities and there is no time limit. (Gabriela)}
\]

As noted previously, several of the alumni changed courses and this was linked by them to improved academic outcomes. For Ed, his change in degree had ‘positive effects on both my educational outlook and performance.’ Ebony’s motivation and commitment to her studies in teacher education has increased because of her knowledge of the constraints of the employment market for graduating teachers. She puts in more ‘effort’ and takes her studies more ‘seriously.’ Her academic results have improved, and although she cannot be sure of the effects of the Student Ambassador work on her results, the story she tells about academic improvement begins with her role as a Student Ambassador.

\[
I \text{f I want a job, I have to work a lot harder while I'm at university to try and secure a job afterwards. My marks in the last few years have gone up. I don't know whether they're connected or not but my marks in the last couple of years have gone up quite a lot... because your marks do, at the end, make a difference to the actual career and the actual job that you can get (Ebony)}
\]
Engagement with the university, with their own futures, and with education in general featured in many alumni accounts. These were more expansive than individual personal growth, and encompassed new perspectives on education that emerged through working as a Student Ambassador. Gabriela described this as the democratising and inclusive role of education:

*I guess I’ve kind of known that education is important, but it just really emphasised how powerful education really is. I guess it’s true that it doesn’t discriminate with anyone. You could be from any race, any culture, any religion, you can look like - you can believe in whatever you want, but education will not discriminate you from that.*

*(Gabriela)*

Better understandings of academic pathways were important for long term career planning and recognition of the continuing potential that university might have in their lives. Gabriela described this in terms of ‘so many possibilities’ and ‘no time limit.’ Jamila said that she feels that ‘I’m not done studying’.
University retention is impacted by social as well as academic factors (Webb et al., 2016).

Several of the alumni reinforced that the network they had established through the Student Ambassador had been very important for supporting them at university. Hanna described this as ‘building relationships with ambassadors and students from other campuses’ and stressed this has expanded her friendships at university. It meant she was ‘never lonely’ on any campus as there would always be people she knew there. Inga still talks to some of the people she met as a Student Ambassador and found it helpful to share experiences about ‘exams and what we had going on in our lives’ with peers. This created a ‘really strong community of people that were willing to just drop everything and turn to your aid if they had to.’ This was a surprise to her and was not something she had expected. It has to be experienced for oneself: ‘You can say that there’s a strong support network all you want but no one really listens to you until they experience it themselves.’ She had heard however that this was a characteristic of the university but was even stronger than she had anticipated: ‘people were telling me oh Western Sydney’s got a really strong support network and a really strong log for their students to cling on to when they’re in the depths of the water.’

Dev who had begun as a shy international student talked about a general sense of confidence that he acquired which he also linked to improved results. Increased confidence meant that he was more able to approach university staff members when he was having difficulties with academic requirements. He moved from feeling ‘reluctant’ and ‘fearful’ of his lecturers in his first semester, to being more engaged as he progressed through his degree: ‘I was not hesitant to stop them on their way out and say, yeah, I have a question. Do you have a moment to help me out, to solve the problems?’ He explained his improved grades as the result of being more able to ask questions when he did not understand what was required. Working as a Student Ambassador enabled him to ‘eradicate’ his fear, and take up new challenges in his educational journey.

6. Challenges and improvements

The final overarching theme that emerged in the alumni interviews was specifically around challenges they had experienced in their work as Student Ambassadors at Western Sydney University. Their comments include reflections on their own experiences and explicit recommendations as to how widening participation programs and administration might be adjusted and improved. They also provided insights into how the widening participation programs relate to other parts of the university and schools. The discussion in this section has been organised in two sections as Program organisation and Student Ambassador role. There are some overlaps between these themes and it must be noted that the alumni were recalling their experiences from between two and four years earlier. Although the precise details may not be accurate and many facets of administration are likely to have changed, they nevertheless offer some useful suggestions and insights into the experience from the point of view of Student Ambassadors. Importantly, while the comments discussed in the sections below pertain to the details of programs and roles, Jamila drew attention to an overall
need for Student Ambassadors to understand more about ‘the principles of widening participation, or why it is important’ and how it ‘is making an impact.’

(i) Program organisation

Although several of the participants note that their training had been sufficient, others expressed desires for more training for particular programs and opportunities to debrief after them. Pre-engagement training would ensure that they have a clear understanding of the purpose of each particular program and the ‘tailored objectives for each event.’ They need to know, in Brenda’s words, ‘the bigger picture’ and what they are trying to achieve with each event. For Ana, knowing the ‘key messages’ or ‘key outcomes’ for an event would give direction and enable the Ambassadors to measure their own success on the day.

Ebony missed the training day for YES mentoring because it was on while she was in classes but suggested an information pack could be also sent out to ensure that Ambassadors knew what they should be doing. She suggested that behaviour management would have been helpful pre-training for that program, however Taylor’s research (2008) suggests that training Student Ambassadors to expect poor behaviour can pathologise disadvantaged students before they even meet the university students who are supposed to be working with them. Debriefing was also seen as important. As Carmen put it:

*Don’t underestimate the value of those pre-sessions and the post follow up sessions. ...It’s nice just to vent, that kid was annoying or that was really great or what you did probably wasn’t the best way to approach that situation. I think maybe just a little bit more constructive and more this is where you get the skills from today and you review on it.*

As well as program or event specific training and debriefing, alumni raised the possibility of more general opportunities. Ed suggested that it would be beneficial to offer ‘general professional development opportunities’ to anyone who has worked as a Student Ambassador. These could be ‘booster sessions’ that could help them keep up their confidence and encourage them to keep putting themselves forward for such opportunities. Faiyaz also suggested that experienced Student Ambassadors could be involved in the orientation and training of new ambassadors so they could share their experiences, provide insights and answer questions from new Ambassadors.

Communication was mentioned several times by alumni. It was seen to be very important in keeping them engaged and informed about the programs they were working in. Ebony made a direct comparison between two ongoing programs she was involved with. In one of them, a weekly wrap-up email was sent out to the Student Ambassadors involved in the program, the program leader was prompt in addressing issues arising at the school level, and was open to inquiries and questions from the participants. In the other program, she felt quite disconnected and as though she couldn’t send emails or raise issues. Given that some aspects of the program were ‘quite
tough,’ she suggested that just ‘an email every once in a while going, how’s it going. Even that would have been nice, just to check in.’

Time spent working as Student Ambassadors was a key issue for many of the participants. As noted, the alumni who agreed to be interviewed had varied levels of engagement with the programs ranging from infrequent to extensive. The majority of them would have liked to work more often or for longer. Their responses about how they stopped working as Ambassadors sometimes revealed a sense of discontinuity. Ana described it as ‘opportunities just kind of dried up’ after the wind-up barbecue at the end of the year of her involvement. Carmen felt that there could have been more of a ‘follow up’ as she felt ‘kind of left out’ when the program she was working in ended for the year. She felt that she ‘wasn’t kept in the loop’ so it ‘just kind of faded.’ Ed described ‘a sort of distance’ that emerged between himself and the OWP staff after the program had ended.

Alumni had different points of view on how Student Ambassadors were recruited. Ed felt that it was promoted mainly to teaching students, whereas in his view ‘members of Western Sydney are generally sort of community-minded…lots of people would appreciate those sorts of opportunities.’ Many students do not know about these programs therefore there could be a stronger push for recruitment across programs at Western Sydney University. He also suggested that closer alignment with young people’s career goals might be possible in some programs:

If you have dreams to be an engineer or a psychologist or something and you’re able to get mentored by someone that’s studying to do one of those things, it could make that seem like a much more realistic sort of career goal than just another teacher talking to you. (Ed)

In contrast, Ana saw the participation of teaching students as a great strength of the program. She would have liked to see more pre-service teacher involvement. As a volunteer experience within the mandatory unit Classrooms without Borders, it could be seen as a kind of ‘indentured servitude’ in that ‘you do your time and then you’re off.’ Whereas for her it was ‘so rewarding and rich’ in developing her understandings of how to be ‘an effective, engaging teacher.’ She hoped to be an advocate for the program when she becomes a teacher, planning to ‘advocate for it and use it as a way to funnel more schools in or funnel more students in.’

Experienced and enthusiastic Student Ambassadors are an ongoing asset for widening participation programs. As noted, they can assist with the training of new recruits. Their interest can be harnessed productively in ‘a two-way’ or ‘win-win’ scenario in Ana’s words, particularly those who are planning to become teachers. Experienced Ambassadors form a ‘stable’ or ‘rich network’ of keen volunteers, who are very interested and very motivated. She describes this as a ‘stickiness’ that can help people to
continue to work together. There does not need to be ‘a constant search for interested students.’

The sequencing of programs was also mentioned. Gabriela suggested that there may be gaps or interruptions in provision in the high school programs which are currently ‘a bit blocky.’ Although she recognised that there would be logistical problems, she envisaged more continuity. She said ‘it would be nice if they could start from, say, Year 7 and then work their way through say with the same batch of kids all the way through to Year 12, so they always have this mentoring from the university.’ Ana talked also about understanding ‘the life cycle of students through the program.’

Finally, in terms of program organisation and impact, Inga felt that the on-campus visits were more powerful than the school visits. There was too much talking at the students in the high school visits she felt, compared to the on campus visits where ‘we had games and we had fun and we were showing the students around [and] taking them to classes so they could see what they can expect from uni.’ She also suggested that sessions be more interactive so ‘the kids themselves are directing’, where ‘they have opportunities to lead the discussion.’ Otherwise the risk is a deluge of ‘tons and tons of information.’

(ii) Student Ambassador Role

Some of the information the Student Ambassadors felt they needed in their training pertained to their own conduct and modes of engagement with young people. This would help them to understand and be prepared for the role. Ana said that she would have benefitted from broader discussion of the parameters and contexts for her work as a Student Ambassador:

*Can you share your personal and professional stories with them?... What couldn’t we do? What are some strategies that we can do? Is it talking to students, is just being a babysitter, if you will, of students? Was it sharing, was it not sharing? Was it mainly synthesising what they say? What was the best approach for us to be the most effective on the day to suit the goals of the program?* (Ana)

For alumni without extensive experience, the purpose of the Student Ambassador could be rather hazy. Brenda speculated that:

*Some ambassadors would go through the program not even understanding what is expected of them. They know they’ve got to come and attend a certain event at a certain time, and wear a certain t-shirt, and be around and present, but in terms of direction and guidance around the overall goal, I don’t think that was clear.* (Brenda)

As discussed in the previous section, clearer briefing and ongoing sustained engagement could assist in overcoming these problems.

Ambiguity about roles could also contribute to difficulties engaging with students, and cause problems that the Student Ambassadors did not know how to deal with. Ebony, who planned to be a teacher, felt unprepared and ineffective working with disinterested young people. Although ‘it got better’ over time, the students she worked with ‘weren’t quite so happy to see us every week’. They had been selected because their schools had
identified them as ‘disengaged’ and gathering them into a large group away from their normal classes was seen by them as an invitation to ‘just muck around for an hour.’ The teacher assigned to the class told her that ‘you would never have all of these kids in the same room at once.’ When there were thirty together, the Student Ambassadors ‘had no idea...how to get these kids to be quiet and actually listen to us.’ This account suggests some ambiguity between roles of Student Ambassadors and teachers, who usually have more experience and familiarity with the students and are better able to ensure orderly environments for program delivery. Brenda noted more directly that it was ‘disheartening’ for her to see how teachers disengaged during programs: ‘They would be on their phones during the events. They wouldn’t know what was going on, because they just weren’t concentrating.’
CHAPTER 6 – INTERVIEW RESULTS: STAKEHOLDERS

Participants
This chapter addresses the perspectives of key stakeholders, Widening Participation managers and program leaders, on the qualities and experiences of student ambassadors and what they bring to, and take from, the widening participation programs they work with. In previous research in this area, reports from program leaders and administrators of programmes have been important to provide fully rounded accounts of the student ambassador experience (Burke, 2012; Waller, Harrison & Last, 2015; Ylonen, 2010, 2012). This research has thus far foregrounded the student participants’ perspectives. Surveys reported with current students (cohort 1) and alumni (cohort 2) provided measurable outcomes on a range of self-report scales. Qualitative interviews with alumni (cohort 3) provided rich accounts of individual experience, remembered several years later. While these can provide insights into the enduring legacy of the experience for the student ambassador participants, they are also limited because of the variability of the alumni experiences. Some alumni participated in only one program or for only one semester. Some were infrequently called upon while others were employed regularly. Some of the challenges they raise may have already been addressed within program delivery in the time since they exited. Accordingly, the program leaders who have the most extensive experience across programs and have worked with the diversity of Student Ambassadors form the important cohort 4 of the evaluation. Their interviews enable triangulation of findings across multiple perspectives.

Extended interviews were held with fourteen managers, program leaders, project officers and others involved in widening participation work at Western Sydney University. Two of the interviews were with managers of programs administered separately from the Office of Widening Participation, including Indigenous Outreach programs. These programs were also reliant on the participation of current university students and insights into their experiences are also pertinent to the discussion in this chapter. Five men and nine women were interviewed. Interviews ranged in length from 45-78 mins. Participants’ extensive experience included working with the following programs: First Food Forward, Fast Forward, STEPS, Future for All, Lodestar, PATHIE and Refugee New and Emerging Communities. Many of the participants had worked across a number of programs over several years. Two of the participants had been Student Ambassadors themselves prior to moving into administration of programs.

Findings
Although participants had much to say about the structure and delivery of the programs they worked with, and the young school students who were the focus of the programs, in this report we focus on their comments about the Student Ambassadors. This is in line with our research purpose to evaluate impact of participation as Student Ambassadors on university students’ self-efficacy beliefs, academic and personal resilience, professional skills development, civic and social awareness, connectedness to community and academic outcomes. The discussion is organised according to the overarching themes of the discussion of alumni interviews in Chapter 5: Personal aspects, Rewards, Belonging, Aspirations, Challenges and Academic Engagement.
1. Personal aspects

Alumni discussed personal aspects in terms of Personal Attributes (or Personality), Work-related skills, and the particular subcategory of Interpersonal & Communication skills, which were useful for work and more broadly in their lives.

(i) Personal attributes

Personal attributes, often referred to as aspects of personality, included those qualities that people bring with them into the role and those that they develop during their work as Student Ambassadors. All of the OWP project personnel gave detailed descriptions of the personal attributes they looked for as they were recruiting Student Ambassadors. Interviews and training sessions were also opportunities for widening participation staff to select and sort those applicants that were seen to be already demonstrating desirable qualities.

Personal attributes that were important were wide-ranging. Kath thought they needed to be ‘reliable,’ ‘gregarious,’ ‘enthusiastic,’ have the ability to develop ‘quick rapport’ and able to deal with ‘the chaos of the youngsters.’ Zoe thought that they needed to be ‘extroverts,’ to be ‘doers,’ to be able to show initiative so that they could work well when they were ‘left to their own devices’. Vicki describes how this is evident when they are ‘constantly surveying the room, seeing what needs to be done.’ Olive thought they needed to be ‘genuine, caring people.’ They need to be able to create ‘rapport’ with young people. They needed to be ‘energetic’ and ‘fun’ because they needed to get the kids excited and ‘demystify the whole scariness’ of the university. Taylor identified ‘mindfulness’ or ‘staying in the environment with the young people they’re engaging with’ as a crucial attribute particularly for those working with young people in out of home care. Having ‘a sense of humour’ was also helpful thought Ursula. They needed to have empathy and to be ‘sensitive,’ including being able to communicate effectively with all sorts of people. They needed to be flexible so they could be ‘quick thinkers on their feet’ and ‘happy to pick things up and run with them.’ Larry required them also to be ‘punctual,’ and ‘willing to muck in and do anything that’s asked.’ Vicki describes them as ‘enthusiastic,’ ‘hard working,’ ‘approachable’ and ‘firm but caring.’ Wendy thought they needed ‘flexibility, persistence, reliability’ and to be able to feel ‘positive being in different situations.’ Although extroversion may be positively perceived and enthusiasm is important, Wendy thought that it was not necessary to be ‘super outgoing’ or to be ‘flamboyant’. What mattered more was being able to ‘be genuine, be yourself...place yourself in the students’ shoes.’ Rita too notes that some of the most effective Student Ambassadors can be ‘dipsy, quiet, reserved’ but in their interaction with the young people they are ‘just as good as the noisy, vibrant, extrovert.’ Moses recognised that in the new and emerging communities portfolio, they need to be enthusiastic above all when they come into the program, then he works with them to develop their leadership and engagement skills and their confidence.

The Student Ambassadors strengthened or developed particular personal attributes during their experiences. While some of these related to more diffuse qualities such as confidence, they also include specific work-related skills. Vicki described the entire experience as an opportunity for Student Ambassadors to learn and to change their views of themselves:
I think they're learning a lot about themselves and just how tough they actually are and just how far they've actually come too. They've also learnt that they do have something more to offer the world, I think as well. That they've got so much they can offer and these kids remind them I think as well. They give them that sort of...oh my god, I did something great today, I feel awesome. (Vicki)

Zoe described watching how shy students increased in confidence as they ‘come out of their shell.’ Vicki observes how rewarding it is for her to see that those who have ‘no clue’ at the beginning, can ‘blossom’ as they gain experience: ‘a whole new side of them actually blossoms.’

In PATHE, there are many ‘positive passive outcomes’ according to Tane. Their ‘self-esteem’, ‘self-efficacy’, ‘autonomy’ and ‘agency’ are all impacted. As noted in the other programs, self-confidence is an area of significant increase over the time that they work as Student Ambassadors. People who ‘wouldn’t say boo’ have an entirely ‘new outlook’ after 6 months of work, not because they become extroverts but because their confidence and competence increase. Their ‘self-worth’ increases and this positive outlook ‘really feeds into their understanding of who they are and what they can contribute.’ Increasing the value of ‘cultural differences’ is also important as students recognise that ‘irrespective of whether I might not come from dominant discourses, my views can still count and still matter.’

(ii) Work-related skills

Taylor observes that Student Ambassadors develop increased confidence in themselves and their ability to apply the skills they develop in the workplace:

It’s one thing to develop skills in an academic context, or develop knowledge as such, and then a completely separate thing to apply it. I do believe that the benefit student ambassadors gain from these sorts of programs ... will stand them in very good stead when they leave university and go into the external workforce. (Taylor)

Ursula relates the changes in their self-confidence, perseverance and understanding of ‘where kids are coming from and how they think’ to the amount of time that Student Ambassadors are involved with programs. She suggests that, for example, ‘if they do 12 shifts with us, 12 different days, by the end of those 12 days, often they’re different people in terms of their self-confidence.’ Of particular importance to those who hope to become teachers, Larry notes that over time Student Ambassadors develop a ‘strong ability to relate to children.’

As well as qualities such as flexibility, initiative and openness, Tane describes further qualities that Student Ambassadors develop as they work in PATHE. Through their experiences as Student Ambassadors, they learn to be more realistic about their time commitments. They develop the ‘ability to persevere’ and ‘maintain focus.’ Good ambassadors are ‘personable,’ and ‘relatively laid back’ rather than ‘regimented.’ They need ‘emotional intelligence’ and the ability to maintain ‘good, healthy, professional, boundaries.’ Most importantly, they must be ‘genuinely committed’ to the program and its ‘vision,’ and to understand ‘the bigger picture’.

A number of fundamental workplace skills are also enhanced. As Rita points out, for some Student Ambassadors the ‘experience of working in an adult environment in an office’ is itself quite valuable. Managing tasks, using equipment, taking messages,
working in a team, time management are all skills that they may not realise they are developing.

Student Ambassadors in the PATHE program undertake extensive online and face to face training, including weekly meetings with numerous guest speakers form within and beyond the university. This enables them to improve their ‘knowledge base, knowledge perspectives, knowledge outcomes’ that can help in their work and beyond that work. Student Ambassadors in PATHE learn to be ‘job ready’ because the skills they are developing are ‘key attributes in today’s workforce.’

(iii) Interpersonal and communication skills

Interpersonal skills are particularly important. Rita notes how they acquire ‘really good people skills’ that are applicable in many professions. Larry suggests that the skills in ‘engaging with the community’ that they are acquire can also set them apart in the job market. Taylor identifies ‘the ability to communicate with people at different levels’ as a valuable skill developed that is ‘of massive benefit to the student ambassadors’ within and beyond their university life.’

Work-related skills that can develop through the program, according to Vicki, include ‘lots of confidence in public speaking’, and skills in ‘teamwork’ and ‘networking.’

Empathy is also developed through their experience. Wendy notes greater empathy and understanding of people whose lives are different to your own contributes to working lives, but also to ‘your own personal life, your relationships.’ Larry describes how some of them acquire a better understanding of ‘the challenges that these kids have got in front of them, not necessarily being stigmatised, but being identified as being from low SES backgrounds.’ This entails understanding ‘socioeconomic status and where that fits into society’ and ‘how we as a university and we as a society can ensure that these people are not marginalised and that they’re included.’ Increased cultural awareness is also important learning for Student Ambassadors for example when school students they are working with on campus need to ‘get up and pray, or they’re in a period of fasting’. Recognising that cultural diversity is part of life, and that there’s ‘cultural differences that we need to embrace’ is an important component of personal growth for some Student Ambassadors.

2. Rewards

Program leaders also identified altruistic and pragmatic rewards for Student Ambassadors. These may be factors that motivated them to begin the work, or they may emerge through their work. As Ursula stresses, there’s no one thing that motivates our students...there’s a whole range of different things’ and their motivations change through the time they are engaged with the program.

(i) Altruistic

Many of the program leaders stress the sense of positive contributions that characterise the Student Ambassador experience. Olive described the altruistic outlook of Student Ambassadors who were ‘involved in the whole equity group and being part of the community and giving back.’ Vicki describes some of the Student Ambassadors as
‘absolutely passionate’ because ‘they’ve come from disadvantaged backgrounds, they’re at university, and for them it’s about giving back.’

Student Ambassadors are better positioned to achieve altruistic rewards when they understand the aims and goals of the programs they are working with. Program leaders recognise the practicalities of students’ lives that drive the pragmatic motivations for working as Student Ambassadors. Although it is a job, and program leaders are respectful of the diverse reasons that people opt to become Student Ambassadors, there is also a sense that, as Ursula puts it, that it is ‘not just a job.’ This is meaningful work that has an impact. As Wendy says ‘people need money and need to live’ but the feedback she has received suggests that their priorities shift through their engagement. People come to her after working with school students and say ‘Oh my gosh, I don’t want to go to my real job because this is so much better.’ Rita says ‘if you’re going to have a part-time job, who’d want a job at a checkout when you can do a job like that.’ It is also important that program leaders ‘tell them how much we appreciate them, that they’ve done a good job.’ Ursula describes how what may have begun as a pragmatic goal to earn some income often changes through the experience. Their motivation changes when they see and experience the work. It is fuelled by the passion that drives widening participation work from the program leaders at the university. As Ursula says, this is ‘really important because that passion’s infectious as well and I think the ambassadors catch that.’

In the PATHE program, as Tane stresses, many of the Student Ambassadors do the work because ‘they feel like it’s their responsibility to pro-actively expand that vision of Pasifika achievement.’ They hope to ‘altruistically lead by example.’ Moses also says that some of the Student Ambassadors he works with ‘have a genuine need to support their community...[and be] an inspiration to their community.’

Moses describes that although the work aims to bring more people into the university it is definitely ‘not marketing’. Rather, he says, ‘we touch at their hearts.’

(ii) Pragmatic

Pragmatic and very worthwhile reasons include building CVs, especially towards the end of their degrees. For the aspiring teachers who are the largest cohort involved in the programs, it is directly related to their intended profession. Kath stresses the experience they acquire in classroom, managing group dynamics and self-confidence in classroom settings. It ‘adds strings to their bow’ as Larry puts it. Benefits include ‘exposure to different students, to different age groups of students, different backgrounds’. However, as Larry and several other program leaders stressed, it is important to have students from a wide range of university courses.

Broadly, being a Student Ambassador provides evidence in a CV of ‘really practical’ and ‘hands on’ experiences that can serve as a ‘point of differentiation’ when they are applying for jobs as Ursula suggests. Their experience includes the ‘soft skills’ that are required for the future. These are the sorts of skills that ‘employers are looking for that employers can’t teach’ as Ursula points out. In her view, other university graduates are unlikely to have this level of community engagement. Working for the university is also an asset on a resume as several program leaders point out. Pina describes it as ‘wonderful’ for the Student Ambassadors from Aboriginal backgrounds who work in the Aboriginal Outreach programs.
Paid work at the university is also of pragmatic benefit in juggling their studies with the need to earn an income. It might mean, for example, as Larry suggests that they ‘have to do less shifts in their part time job and they can devote more time to study’. Work within school hours that fits around their university timetable may enable them to do less paid work in evenings and weekends.

Moses suggests that very broad benefits ensue from the experience for Student Ambassadors. They are better prepared ‘for life’s eventualities,’ for ‘their adult life and work life as well probably even parental life.’

3. Belonging

Alumni had identified belonging in terms of institutional belonging, regional belonging and cultural belonging. These themes also emerged in the program leaders’ interviews.

(i) Institutional

Institutional belonging was seen as important by the program leaders. Wendy describes how the students that the Student Ambassadors work with see them as ‘inspirations’ because they are ‘the real face to what’s happening at the university.’ For the Student Ambassadors, their sense of institutional belonging increases as ‘they identify with the university, they identify with the students, they identify with us.’ Larry sees the experience as an opportunity for people ‘to give back to the university, to provide something back and to help out the next generation.’

Ursula argues that ‘If communities can see how much kids like these [the Student Ambassadors] give back to the community maybe that will change perceptions about Western Sydney University.’

Belonging to particular courses and Schools within the university was also mentioned by several of the program leaders who stressed that it was ideal to have a breadth of Student Ambassadors across courses. Moses, for example, describes how important it was that when they had robotics activities, it was important to have engineering students who can talk in detail about robotics projects. When they are also from the new and emerging communities that his programs work with: ‘they can bring the message home to the community.’

Institutional belonging can also include their association with their old schools. Larry describes how these established relationships are taken into account when students are selected for events.

*If we know that we’ve got a student ambassador who went to a particular school, we will try to do a match on the day that says we’re working with Kingswood High School today. Do we have any of these student ambassadors who attended Kingswood High School? Let’s get them in on the day. The team will indicate if they know that a student has come from a particular school. We will introduce them and talk about it.*

(Larry)

Involving Student Ambassadors who have themselves graduated from schools that are involved in programs is highly motivating and increases the sense of affiliation. Larry
describes how having Student Ambassadors present at school Awards evenings ‘closes the loop’ for young people from that school and for the Student Ambassadors:

*It’s a really good closing the loop sort of thing, showing student life cycle coming from being a student in Year 9, sitting there like these kids are tonight - come through the system, finished high school and succeeded and coming to university studying. That’s a good story to tell.* (Larry)

(ii) Regional

Belonging to the broad western Sydney region is also an important outcome. As Ursula states, when they go out into the workforce as graduates, they are most likely to be working in the ‘huge geographical area across Western Sydney’ that is encompassed by the widening participation programs. They may be ‘working in the very community that they’ve been helping in as well.’ This enables them to build a ‘sense of belongingness to the community where they studied and where they’ve actually lived and where they’ve worked.’ They have a better understanding of ‘the sorts of people that are in that community and the skills that are needed to work with any group of people.’ Pina describes that: ‘when they’re getting out into the work force and they’re working at the local school down the road, well they’re going to be a very passionate, very hard working teacher because they can see the need more so than if they don’t come from here.’

Student Ambassadors most often ‘live in the western suburbs. They’ve come from a normal high school. When they tell their story, they will tell you that’ says Rita. It is the ‘similarities between the students in our program and our ambassadors that makes it work’ according to Rita. She thinks that ‘If we had kids from the north shore where everything was given to them, these kids would not relate to them at all.’

Familiarity with the local area can also enhance the capacity that the young people have to relate to Student Ambassadors. As Kath says, though it isn’t detrimental if it isn’t there, there is a benefit if they are familiar with the ‘local football area, …know the shopping centre …It’s just all part of the ease of the conversation and the beginning of connection’ between them. Nic agrees that the experience ‘is more powerful if you do have that connection to Western Sydney.’ Young people pick up on this authenticity which translates into a sense that ‘this person cares and really they’re not too different from me’.

Tane describes this as a ‘relational point’ in that most of the ambassadors in PATHE continue to reside in Western Sydney, where the work of the program takes place. Class is also tied in with geography, and with religion.

(iii) Cultural belonging

Several examples were provided of cultural affinity and how that could enhance relationships between Student Ambassadors and young people. Rita gives the example of a Student Ambassador from a Pacific Islander background who related particularly well to students from similar backgrounds. She shared that ‘all [she] was ever good at school was music and singing. ‘She changed courses several times until she found the music degree, which she loves and is heading for a career as a music therapist. She would then sing to the students.’
There can be a ‘sort of camaraderie’ between people from similar backgrounds, as Rita explains:

*The kids from a different ethnic background they’ll share with you. Yeah, my parents are really tough on me and they made me study hard.*

However it is the variety of backgrounds of Student Ambassadors that is most important in the eyes of the program managers. Different students relate to different Ambassadors so it is important that they are ‘not little cut outs,’ in Rita’s words.

In the PATHE program, Tane says that as well as all the work they do in the programs Student Ambassadors ‘provide a real life example around the idea of a Pacific person being able to achieve.’ Although it is not a condition of employment, they do ‘definitely profile to Pacific students’ in their recruitment. There is a ‘cultural underpinning’ in this particular scheme, which is ‘intertwined with a cultural commitment and cultural fervour.’ They show by example that ‘it is possible to go on to further education and training, irrespective of coming from a Pacifica background.’ Tane explains that Pacifica people are over represented in sport, performing arts and (negatively) in the legal system, so PATHE aimed ‘to create an over-representation of Pacifica people in education, in a positive way.’ Representation of alternative stories is key in order to overcome the ‘challenges that coming from a diverse ethnic background might be when it comes to participating in higher education.’ Student Ambassadors in PATHE are often ‘first in family… from public housing communities or in families that are still trying to make ends meet. But they’ve still persevered and I think that’s where a lot of the richness in their narratives.’ There is a sense of ‘collegiality’ because ‘we’re both from Pacific backgrounds. Or I understand your Pacific background.’

Moses, who works with a very new program targeting refugees and emerging communities, describes how they have organised some on campus days to bring groups of students of similar cultural and language backgrounds in together, sometimes with interpreters. Other activities involve outreach to communities at venues away from the university. The Student Ambassadors are deliberately chosen to be from the same communities. He says that:

*What happens is that when you go to a community or work with a community and you bring along a student who is a symbol of success. Maybe they’re doing engineering or something. To them that lights up - they think, okay my son can do that. These ambassadors have been very good because they’ve actually told their story.*

*Like one particular lady she told the story about how she escaped war from Iraq. Went to Iran and globetrotting and eventually she ended up here in Australia. But now she’s doing a very prestigious degree in the university. So speaking to her community that’s actually inspirational to them.* (Moses)

Seeing university students who are like them is crucial for families. Parents will see their son or their daughter also on campuses when they meet a Student Ambassador from their community: It ‘lights up their life’ and ‘reignites their passion’ especially he says for older people. For young people:

*They see maybe their big brothers, the other people from the community that are actually studying. It’s a motivator. They say I want to be like them.* (Moses)
Pina, who works with the Aboriginal Outreach programs and Pathways to Dreaming, also sees it as important that students can relate to the Ambassadors.

*It’s what they see within themselves... Hanging with the young Aboriginal university students and talking to them and seeing they’re just like them. They’re no different. They’re no genius or anything like that. They relate to them better. Then that’s more of the encouragement for them to go to uni. (Pina)*

4. Aspiration

Aspiration is at the heart of widening participation initiatives and was the focus of many of the comments from program leaders. As researchers have previously suggested, aspiration is a complex disposition, simultaneously entailing ‘thinking-feeling’ (Sellar, 2013) and requiring a range of sociocultural resources including imagination and emotion (Harwood et al., 2017; Zipin et al, 2015). It requires ‘re-organizing images’ of university life (Harwood et al., 2017, 189), and facilitating opportunities where young people might ‘swerve’ in new directions that deviate from trajectories that might have been assumed by them, or that might have been assumed for them by others (Harwood et al., 2017, 190). The accounts of program leaders provide many instances of how Student Ambassadors are central to these new ‘ecologies of learning’ (Harwood et al., 2017).

(i) General comments on aspirations

Larry describes Student Ambassadors as part of the whole ‘student life-cycle’ that structures such work. Access, retention and success are all essential aspects of the life-cycle, and the suites of programs on offer target students from Year 5 through to Year 12. The Student Ambassadors are part of a ‘bigger picture’ and they ‘buy in’ to the aims and goals of the widening participation agenda.

Vicki reflected that ‘the biggest thing’ that they learn through working as Student Ambassadors is that ‘doesn’t matter where you’re from, you can do it.’ As one of her Student Ambassadors put it ‘you’re not your postcode.’ This is the message that is crucial for them to convey to young people. Tane stresses that ‘class, gender, religion, ethnicity, all of those other categories and differences. It’s still possible to go onto education, irrespective of those particular perspectives.’

Student Ambassadors are ‘down to earth’ and they can bring the university experience into sight for young people who would otherwise see it as not for them. When school students meet Student Ambassadors who are ‘normal, cool, jandal wearing, or thong wearing, board shorts kind of people’ who are doing well in their studies, it breaks down the idea that ‘university is only for super smart and super nerdy people.’ Ursula also stresses that university becomes more ‘realistic’ and young people learn that ‘university is not just a stuffy academic place and you don’t have to be the smartest kid in the world.’ It is crucial that young people can relate to the Student Ambassadors which is contingent, Ursula suggests, on them being ‘willing to share and willing to open up to the kids and just be themselves.’

(ii) Telling their stories
Program leaders often noted the importance of the personal stories shared by the Student Ambassadors. Rita points out that one of the essential qualities for a Student Ambassador is ‘being able to share a story coherently and succinctly.’ Stories are more than just the effective recounting of experiences because part of their impact is affective or emotional. This has effects on the young people but also on the Student Ambassadors whose stories are validated at the same time as they are shared. Larry notes that young people learn that ‘they’re not alone’ through ‘passing on that story.’ For Vicki, stories are the ‘critical’ factor because as Student Ambassadors talk about themselves and their own experiences these ‘resonate’ with young people. For example a Student Ambassador might say: ‘Yeah I had that issue too, I wasn’t sure about what I wanted to do when I - and I was told by my parents that I shouldn’t go to university and I believed them. I wish I didn’t because now I’m a mature student and I have to - and really I’m glad that I did go to university.’ Larry suggests that their stories ‘mirror some of the stories of the kids who have come along.’ The authenticity of their stories lies in the ‘real life’ experiences that they share:

Some of the stories are quite powerful in terms of them coming from a particularly disadvantaged point in their life for a whole range of reasons. Just talking about how they handled things and how they managed things and what they had to do to get over hurdles. I think that’s again part of that real life experience that they bring.

In the PATHE program, Tane describes how ‘our ambassadors are the real-life every day example of being another student.’ The narratives they share are ‘current and real life.’

Wendy suggests that their stories of multiple pathways, often shared in group panels, to university are important: ‘it might not be that they came to university straight away; they might have gone via TAFE. They might have tried three degrees before they landed in their own degree.’ The pathways college for alternative entry also features. Rita provides an example of this sort of story:

I wasn’t the brightest kid at school. My HSC mark was terrible. I went to the college. I did a year at the college. Then I was able to get into uni.

Ursula says that ‘good stories’ to share include those that tell stories of difficulties that have been overcome, and of a fluid rather than linear pathway through university courses:

Kids that maybe have not had an easy time at university necessarily that have got here and changed their mind and have finally found their feet because ... They’re good stories for kids to understand that you don’t have to come to university, start a degree and you’re locked into it for three years whether you like it or not and kids don’t understand that. It sounds simple but high school students don’t understand that you can change degrees or that you can come into university without an ATAR and all those kinds of things. (Ursula)

Rita also finds great value in the opportunities provided in panel sessions where Student Ambassadors share their stories:

Some of them will say this is my third degree that I’ve started. I started this one and I lasted six months and then realised it wasn’t right for me. Now I’m doing what I really like doing and I’m really pleased. I needed to go through that to get here. I wouldn’t have chosen this if I hadn’t done the other two. So, it’s okay to change your mind.
Students benefit enormously from understanding that entering university and progressing through university look different for different people. As Rita puts it, the Student Ambassadors’ stories demonstrate that:

You can take different turns, but it’s not a wrong turn. It’s just another turn in the road... They wouldn’t have realised that they loved doing this if they hadn’t done X, Y and Z first.

Their stories might be similar or different to those of the young people they speak to, but all stories are valuable. Ursula points out that:

Some of them have got quite different stories and so it gives the kids a completely new perspective that they hadn’t even thought about before. Some of them have stories that are very similar to their own. So there’s a real empathy there and they tend to gravitate towards that. But both have got a really valuable role I think.

Wendy says that there will always be something that the Student Ambassadors can share about their own lives with the young people ‘whether it be as remote as a geographical area or an interest of study or a cousin’s friend went here.’ Finding points of connection between their lives and the lives of the young people in schools is important to their work. Ambassadors may have had ‘a bit of a life journey [themselves] where things haven’t panned out,’ they’ve had ‘roadblocks’ but did not give up on their goals. Their honesty in sharing their stories with young people can overcome their inclination to think that ‘once there’s one roadblock that’s it.’ One example of this comes from an ambassador who was working with a student with ADHD:

He was really bright but he kept saying no, I’ve been told I’ll never be able to do anything. He was really good with computers. So in the panel she made a point to say that she’d been diagnosed with ADHD. Then suddenly he just was so inspired.

(Wendy)

Tane describes that in PATHE, the ‘richness of the narratives’ comes through in the Student Ambassadors’ abilities to ‘share the realness of what it means to come from this particular ethnic background and how it’s still possible irrespective of that.’

Moses describes how hearing stories from people who are different is another route to learning about the self. There are ‘many differences’ including gender, cultures and ambitions. He says that ‘even when people come from the same communities, they have different aspirations.’ He says of one of his Student Ambassadors:

He’s actually got to meet people from his own community but people from different communities. Now he appreciates hearing these stories from those communities. It tells him that as much as he thought that he went through brimstone and fire.... He said, look I thought maybe I was the only person that went through challenges like that and I’m still standing here. (Moses)

The stores that the Student Ambassadors tell are embedded in their ‘inspirational talks’ about their lives. They learn from each other’s many differences.

(iii) Influencing others

Influencing others is dependent on recognising their points of similarity and difference. For Larry, it’s crucial that young people learn that:
Others have gone through what they’re going through – facing the same hurdles, the same obstacles, being marginalised, being told that you will not achieve.

Their interactions with ‘real life students’ can make it all more accessible, achievable and realistic. This positions the Student Ambassadors as ‘real role models’ in what Larry calls ‘powerful’ and ‘life changing’ work. Student Ambassadors are perceived by Kath as being ‘great touch points’ for young people or as ‘big brothers or sisters who are modelling what they’re going to do in five years.’ A day on campus, which would have been a completely ‘foreign atmosphere,’ can give young people the sense that they have ‘actually walked in the shoes of a university student’ as Kath describes it.

Affinities between Student Ambassadors and young people also arise because of their similarity in age. As Ursula notes: ‘they make the students feel comfortable because they’re a similar age… They’ve had similar experiences to our kids and so their crucial role, whether they realise it or not, is in really helping the students to feel comfortable at university.’ The authenticity of their experiences is important in showing young people, as Ursula put it, that ‘real people, just like me, come to university.’ Larry also notes that it is important that the Student Ambassadors are, relatively speaking, ‘young, modern, cool, hip.’ In contrast to the program leaders who may have thorough knowledge of university procedures and possibilities, the Student Ambassadors being ‘cooler than us’ are ‘up with modern trends and they can share that stuff …in terms that they’ll understand better.’ The diversity of Student Ambassadors is critical. As Rita describes them, this manifests as ‘different walks of life, different nationalities, different [previous] universities, different programs and different personalities.’

In PATHE, the Student Ambassadors are both ‘aspirational and inspirational.’ They are ‘bolstering the individual participant’s understanding of what it means to go onto further education’ and ‘providing the scope for people to feel like this is something that they may also believe in.’

(iv) Imagining the future

Enabling young people to imagine alternative futures is crucial for widening participation. These programs are carefully designed to inform and enthuse young people for further education. Yet, as Wendy stresses, what makes a difference to a young person’s educational trajectory will not always be visible:

It could be anything minuscule that they say throughout the day that just triggers something in a young person to think, hey I can do that… It’s that real face of someone that could be them down the track.

She describes this in visual terms: they need to ‘visualise yourself at university,’ and to see ‘the real face’ of their potential future selves. Larry also sees these as ‘light bulb’ moments, when it suddenly becomes apparent that a young person is ‘starting to think about things that they had not before.’

5. Academic engagement

Program leaders recognised that the Student Ambassadors were learning at the same time as the students, and as Vicki put it, this was ‘another level’ in the widening participation agenda. Tane describes how the confidence developed in PATHE ‘obviously flows into retention, course progression, completion’. Working as a Student Ambassador in his view has an impact on their ‘learning outcomes, including
assessments’ because of their enhanced ‘ability to critically reflect and review.’ They become involved in the ‘critical consumption and production of knowledge’ and learn to ‘think through things a bit more abstractly.’ This feeds into the ‘ability to be critical in their understanding of X, Y and Z.’

Several of the program leaders describe how Student Ambassadors have changed their courses. Working with school students has had particularly powerful effects on Student Ambassadors’ career choices:

We always hear of students changing their careers based on the work they do in our program. We had one student studying psychology change to teaching. They’re both related, but they’ve realised skills that they’ve had that they didn’t think they’d have because they’re working with children. (Wendy)

Kath describes a nursing student who is now ‘desperate to try and get out of her third year of nursing...because [she says] I just want to be a teacher.’ Ursula has also noticed this pattern and calls it a ‘massive’ and ‘amazing’ shift when it does happen:

Often they’re working in a similar sort of area, so they might be doing psychology or social work or something but they change from that to teaching as a result of - admittedly they were probably thinking about changing anyway, but when they’ve worked with our kids they’ve gone, you know what, I really like this, this is an area that I think I would be good at. I’m really making a connection with the kids. This is something I could make a career out of. (Ursula)

However in her experience, the numbers who actually make the change are fewer than those who express the desire to change. As teaching courses are predominantly postgraduate, it is quite possible that Student Ambassador alumni may make that decision later in their academic careers.

Although many of the Student Ambassadors come from teaching courses, they may also change their courses as a result of the work:

We’ve heard of CWB students switching from primary to high school teaching. We do often joke about it on our days because they’re so worried about oh my goodness, I can’t - I’m used to working with littlies, how am I going to work with - they seem - high school students are getting taller and taller so they seem like giants. (Wendy)

Yet they find the experience of working with older students so rewarding that some of them decide to change their career pathways as a result.

Moses describes a Student Ambassador who expressed the desire to change courses after attending a forum with refugee communities:

They say look I really want to understand more about it. They say to me, look I’m a good Aussie born and bred. I’ve never had contact with a refugee before and this is the first time I’m hearing these stories. So for me, look, we just hear things on the TV and in the newspaper. So I really want to study something to do with the refugees...
Something completely different. (Moses)

Pina recognises broad and long term academic benefits for the Student Ambassadors from Aboriginal backgrounds:

The more opportunities the university can give them, the more inclined they are to basically come back and do further study in post grads. Come back and do research
here, recommend the university to their peers or to their family and friends, things like that and we do get a lot of that where they will speak to people that they know. We’ve had students transfer from other universities just to take on some of the opportunities that we do offer students here. (Pina)
Conclusion

Finally, it is important to note that the program leaders were very supportive of the Student Ambassadors and saw them as the central and most important component of widening participation programs. Larry says they are ‘critical’ and a ‘highly valued part of what we do... key part of the delivery.’ Moses describes the Student Ambassador program as ‘one of the greatest initiatives that I think the university has ever come across’ because ‘not only does it give experience to the students...but they also become inspirational to their communities.’
CHAPTER 7 – FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the evaluation found that students and stakeholders were in agreement that the Student Ambassador program was highly beneficial for both ambassadors’ personal and professional growth. Further, it has immediate and ongoing impact for Western Sydney University and its wider communities. In addition, the evaluation found that working as a student ambassador helped participants to achieve the university’s Graduate Attribute: ‘demonstrates comprehensive, coherent and connected knowledge’ (Appendix 10) and directly contributed to their future professional careers.

Students universally cited their high regard for the aims of the program and were proud of their own contributions to those aims. Working with young people was personally rewarding and they could see visible changes in those young people which, in turn, impacted on their own efficacy beliefs and broader sense of self. In general, students left the program because of graduation and many would have liked to continue with the program if their personal and professional circumstances would have allowed.

The findings presented below are organised according to the aims and associated questions of the research. The key focus was to investigate the impact of participation in the Student Ambassador program on students’ self-efficacy beliefs, academic and professional resilience, professional skill development, civic and social awareness, connectedness to community and students’ academic outcomes. These were evaluated via qualitative and quantitative data collection from the following cohorts:

- Current student ambassadors [survey data];
- Student ambassador alumni [survey and interview data];
- Program stakeholders [interview data].

Prior to addressing these key aims, we believe that it is important to highlight student participants’ perceived benefits of project participation that sit outside these measures.

**Altruistic and personal benefits**

While students identified the pragmatic benefits of gaining professional experience and earning money, the majority of students prioritised altruistic benefits such as helping young people and making a difference in their lives, engaging with and giving back to the Western Sydney community, and the satisfaction and enjoyment the experience gave them. This seems to have been stronger for Western Sydney University students than in previously reported research on such programs overseas. For current Student Ambassadors these altruistic motivations significantly increased by the end of their first year as Student Ambassadors. Student Ambassador alumni also described how altruistic reasons for participation strengthened through their period of involvement, and stayed with them during the years following their experience.

Student Ambassadors identified numerous aspects of the experience as personally rewarding and enjoyable. They felt that they were making a difference in young peoples’ lives by inspiring them towards higher aspirational goals, often sharing their own parallel stories in their work with young people. They took the responsibility of being role models for young people seriously and were touched when young people looked up to them in this way. They enjoyed interacting and working with peers in other disciplines from across the university. They increased their knowledge of and
appreciation for the rich cultural diversity of the region and of the university. They were proud to represent the university in schools and the wider community. This links with the WSU Graduate Attribute: ‘understands and engages effectively with the culturally and socially diverse world in which they live and will work.’

*Professional skill development*

Professional skill development was seen by all cohorts as both a motivation for and an outcome of participating in the Student Ambassador program. These included valuable soft skills like leadership, communication, interpersonal skills, flexibility, responsibility, teamwork, time management and initiative taking. The development of profession specific skills such as engaging and working with young people, seeing their potential as individuals, and applying knowledge acquired in an academic context were also seen as valuable skills acquired through the program, particularly in relation to teaching, social work and nursing careers which were the most frequently reported courses in which Student Ambassadors were enrolled. This facet of the evaluation links to the following Graduate Attributes: ‘commands multiple skills and literacies to enable adaptable lifelong learning’ and ‘applies knowledge through intellectual inquiry in professional or applied contexts.’

In relation to communication and interpersonal skills, students specifically identified developing the ability to listen, talk, connect and engage with diverse audiences, as well as public speaking and presentation skills, and the confidence to speak to strangers, to articulate their own ideas, and to work collaboratively to solve problems.

These student self-assessments of professional skill development were echoed in the observations of program leaders who saw student ambassadors developing a broad range of skills over time as their confidence grew with exposure to a wide range of people and experiences.

*Increased self-efficacy beliefs*

Self-efficacy refers to the strength of a person’s belief in their abilities to achieve goals and complete tasks. Increased self-efficacy was evident across all cohorts and is a significant impact from participation as Student Ambassadors.

Increased confidence, self-worth and openness were identified as key personal attributes developed through their participation in the program. Student Ambassadors also felt increased confidence in themselves as leaders which they attributed to improved interpersonal and communication skills and leading successful collaboration with diverse groups of people, and their ability to find solutions in difficult situations. Program leaders also observed these qualities develop in the Student Ambassadors over time. This links with the Graduate Descriptor: ‘is a self-reliant learner who works effectively in groups and teams.’

Feeling you can make a difference in the community was seen as a significant outcome of being a Student Ambassador. Moments where the Student Ambassadors saw how they were making a difference in an individual young person’s life were powerful experiences that affirmed their sense of self-efficacy.

The experience of telling their own stories and seeing the effect these stories had on the young people and the way the young people perceived them, gave the Student
Ambassadors a sense of agency and affirmed their identity as successful and effective people in the world, sometimes reawakening and expanding their own sense of future possibility.

Through their work as Student Ambassadors, alumni felt included in and part of the university, the western Sydney region, and for some, with particular cultural communities. Feeling the value of their work and pride in their contribution strengthened this identification and bolstered their sense of self-worth and potential.

Alumni reported increased confidence in themselves and their ability to engage, succeed and effect change personally, socially, academically and professionally as a result of their experience as Student Ambassadors. They experienced pride and satisfaction in helping others, in particular young people. While our quantitative measure of self-efficacy was concerned strictly with the domain of Personal Effectiveness and Locus of Control (Figure 10), an unanticipated outcome was that students’ sense of self in relation to personal values and impact also increased.

**Civic and social awareness and connectedness to community**

By and large, students’ sense of civic and social awareness was enhanced as a result of their experiences as student ambassadors. This was strongly the case with alumni and stakeholder interviews and implicit in the survey responses of current students and alumni in terms of motivations and reasons for recommending the program to others. Exposure to and engagement with a wide range of people, cultures, and levels of disadvantage through the program led to greater understanding of the barriers to education as well as its potential to transform the lives of individuals and communities, and a greater appreciation of their own situation as university students. Further, the firsthand experience of the impact they have as student ambassadors in encouraging and inspiring young people towards higher aspirational goals fostered an ongoing interest, and commitment for some, in continuing this kind of work.

Increased connectedness to community was also evident. Shared narratives and direct personal engagement with school students led to increased identification with the broader Western Sydney community and increased pride in representing and promoting the university and what they perceived as its genuine and inclusive approach to widening participation in Western Sydney. A sense of belonging and pride in the university was often fostered through the experience of working as a Student Ambassador.

Current Student Ambassadors demonstrated a strong civic and social awareness and desire to give back to their communities (connectedness) with their top motivations for becoming an SA being the desire to help young people improve their futures, and the belief that young people are the key to the future. The biggest shift in motivations for current Student Ambassadors was the addition of ‘Promoting WSU’ and increased significance of ‘Serving as representative of WSU’ as motivating factors through the year of their engagement as Student Ambassadors. This suggests that current students developed an increased sense of institutional belonging, as measured by identification with and connection to WSU, by the end of their year as Student Ambassadors. While the survey does not establish a causal link, interview results from alumni support this probability.
Academic and Professional Resilience and Academic Outcomes

Academic resilience measures students' ability to deal with set-backs, failure and adversity within a learning environment. Although the study was unable to measure direct links with academic outcomes, alumni reported that their retention and resilience were impacted. They greater confidence in their ability to engage and achieve academically. Academic behaviours as measured by attendance did not show significant variations. Students sometimes became more passionate and committed to their chosen careers, and the academic pathways that would lead them there. Program leaders also recognised that increased confidence in the Student Ambassadors led to increased retention and academic resilience.

Challenges and suggested improvements to the Ambassador program

While the students and alumni surveyed and interviewed were highly positive about their experiences as Student Ambassadors, some common themes emerged as they identified challenges and made suggestions for improvement.

Organisational aspects included the distribution of work, which was identified as an issue by both current students and alumni. Many of them would have liked increased opportunities for work, requesting both more frequent and more consistent work. They were aware of the uneven distribution of opportunity, and a number were disappointed that they were not rostered on as much as they would have liked to be. While communication was identified as an issue by several current students, it was also identified by program leaders who rely on responses from Student Ambassadors regarding their availability.

Increased or enhanced training was also identified as an area that could potentially be improved. Greater clarity about the aims of the program and the roles of Student Ambassadors within each program and more targeted debrief and feedback sessions would have been appreciated by some Student Ambassadors.

Further there were suggestions from both alumni and program leader interviewees to broaden the scope of recruitment to include a wider range of faculties (i.e. beyond teaching), and also to increase opportunities for teaching students to participate. These apparently opposing suggestions were motivated by the strong perceived value of the program for students from all faculties in broadening their personal and professional development while at university. Widening recruitment was seen to be a way of improving the program by increasing the range of role models, study and career options made available to participating school students.

Limitations of the current study

The findings reported here seek to illuminate key issues and outcomes of the Ambassador program. The findings, however, should be interpreted cognizant of the following project limitations.

Firstly, no direct causality can be inferred from the results. The pre-/post- design of this phase of the evaluation allowed for participants to serve as their own comparison group, providing trend growth data over the course of the year. Between the pre and post testing times, there may have been other experiences that influenced changes witnessed in the post-test.
Secondly, the small sample size limited the sophistication of the analysis, however, trends were identified and future data collection may bolster the sample size and thus the statistical analysis that can be conducted.

Thirdly, the initial project aimed to assess student academic performance as an outcome measure to be tracked in the pre and post testing periods. Approval was granted to access this information; however, this information was not made available throughout the project. Future research may seek to access student academic performance data to determine if serving as a student ambassador has an impact on their performance in their university course.

Fourthly, it is recognised that the participants represent a biased sample as it is likely that those who responded to the request to be involved in the project had definite views about the program they wished to express. In this case, the alumni presented overwhelmingly positive views about the impact of being an ambassador.

Fifthly, there was wide variation amongst ambassadors in their involvement in the program. Future research, with ample sample size, may investigate whether the amount and type of involvement produces differential impacts.

Sixth, qualitative interviews with alumni provided rich accounts of individual experience, remembered several years later. While these can provide insights into the enduring legacy of the experience for the student ambassador participants, they are also limited because of the variability of the alumni experiences. Some alumni participated in only one program or for only one semester. Some were infrequently called upon while others were employed regularly. Some of the challenges they raise may have already been addressed within program delivery in the time since they exited. Accordingly, the program leaders who have the most extensive experience across programs and have worked with the diversity of Student Ambassadors form the important cohort 4 of the evaluation. Their interviews enable triangulation of findings across multiple perspectives.

Finally, the experiences of Indigenous students are outside the scope of this study. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are by and large not represented in this research as they primarily work/volunteer with programs outside the OWP remit. However interviews with Aboriginal engagement program leaders reported positive outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students involved in these programs citing increased confidence, strengthened cultural belonging, enhanced academic resilience and improved academic outcomes.
Recommendations

Recommendations for Western Sydney University and Australian Government, funding Higher Education Participation Program:

The Student Ambassador program should be continued, expanded and celebrated as it not only encourages school students to move into Higher Education but also fosters professional and personal growth for the Student Ambassadors themselves.

Recommendations for the Office of Widening Participation:

1. Recognise and promote the benefits of working as a Student Ambassador in developing a wide range of skills and dispositions amongst Western Sydney University students. The experience is potentially transformative and the aspirational focus of WP activities has reciprocal effects on WSU students as well as school students. Encourage the university to recognise learning that takes place outside courses, for example by working with other sections of the university to (i) map the reported impacts of Student Ambassador work against an expanded version of WSU Graduate Attributes (Learning Transformations), (ii) develop promotional materials that identify the impacts and effects that Student Ambassadors have in their work as ‘aspiration agents’ with young people across the region (Media Unit).

2. Investigate submitting an application to have Student Ambassador activities recorded on the Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement given the contribution the role makes to the extension of the experience of the student’s program of study.

3. Recognise that Student Ambassador work is taken up within a network or ecology of outreach activities conducted by the university. While many of these are associated with OWP, students and alumni identified related activities offered by other sections of the university that they took up that had similar intent to connect with young people in ways that encouraged them to envisage and work towards their futures.

4. Ongoing data collection for program evaluation:

   a. While the quantitative elements of project evaluation demonstrated some shift in key student outcomes over the year of their participation, interpretation was compromised due to low numbers of participation and the restrictions of two time points. We recommend that OWP continue to administer the pre-/post-surveys at two time points annually. Further, we recommend that the program staff incorporate survey completion into program training and completion, to increase participation. We recommend that this quantitative data be captured as a mandatory component of participation in the Student Ambassador program at several time points. Time point #1 (pre-/baseline survey) should be prior to their orientation session as a new Student Ambassador at the start of the academic year. The second time point (post- survey) should be at conclusion of the calendar year of ambassador activities. For ongoing ambassadors, we recommend that follow-up surveys (post-surveys) should be readministered at the start and end of each subsequent year of student participation. In this way, the program can capture both short and longitudinal impact, particularly useful for some of the psychosocial measures included in the instrumentation which may take longer to exhibit effect. Surveys should be accessed via student email addresses to ensure matching of pre- and post-surveys.
b. We further recommend the addition of self-reporting measures of academic outcomes within the pre-/post-survey given the challenges associated with accessing students’ official university transcripts for the purposes of tracking academic change. This might include an item measuring global self-report as well as a proxy measure of academic self-concept.

5. Expand recruitment of Student Ambassadors to include students across the breadth of university schools and courses. Mixing with other Student Ambassadors was highly motivating for current university students and increased their sense of institutional belonging both while they were WSU students and subsequent to graduation.

Recommendations for University Student Support Staff:

1. Given students’ reports of learning about university support structures and programs via their participation as a Student Ambassador, rather than through standard, mainstream methods of university orientation and communication, we recommend that the university continue to monitor and improve these strategies.
REFERENCES


http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR19/nickson69.pdf


Somerville, M., Gannon, S., Reid, C., Naidoo, L., & Gray, T. (2012). Student Aspiration Trajectory Research. Available at:


APPENDIX 1 - COHORT 1 CURRENT STUDENT AMBASSADOR PRE-SURVEY

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

Evaluation of the Widening Participation Student Ambassadors Initiative

We wish to invite you to be involved in a research project conducted by Associate Professor Susanne Gannon, Dr Danielle Tracey and Dr Jacqueline Ullman, Centre for Educational Research, Western Sydney University (WSU). The aim of this one-year project is to evaluate the impact of WSU students’ participation in the WP Student Ambassadors program in terms of students’ emotional and psychological growth, academic and professional skills development, civic and social outcomes, and the sense of community connection both with the WSU academic community as well as the broader Western Sydney community. You have been invited to join the research project because you are a Student Ambassador in 2016.

This study has been granted ethics approval from the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval No. H11534).

For Student Ambassadors who agree to volunteer to participate, their participation would involve:

- Completing an online survey twice, one of which is in April 2016 and the other at the end of the year. The survey includes questions regarding some background information, experience and benefits of participating as a Student Ambassador in the Widening Participation programs. The survey will take about 15-20 minutes to complete.

- By completing the online survey, students are providing consent for the researchers to access their academic record (GPA for each semester’s enrolment) and their record of hours working with the Office of Widening Participation.

The survey is anonymous. This means that your name will not be linked to this survey and you will not be identified in any of the publications that arise from this research project.

Your assistance in this study is voluntary. There will be no adverse consequences should you choose not to assist. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent at any time without prejudice to my relationship with the researchers now or in the future.
If you have any questions, we expect you to ask us. If you have any additional questions later, please contact either:

Associate Professor Susanne Gannon          Dr Danielle Tracey
Phone: +61 2 4736 0292                       Phone: +61 2 9772 6105
Email: s.gannon@westernsydney.edu.au        Email: d.tracey@westernsydney.edu.au

Dr Jacqueline Ullman
Phone: +61 4736 0270
Email: j.ullman@westernsydney.edu.au

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the WSU Research Ethics Officer at email: humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au or phone: (02) 4736 0493. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

This information sheet is for you to keep.

Please select ‘Yes’ if you have read the information above and are happy to continue and answer the survey questions. If you select ‘No’, you will no longer be eligible to participate in this research.

- Yes, I am happy to continue.
- No thanks, I do not want to be involved.

Student Ambassadors Program, Online Pre-Survey for 2016 Cohort

SECTION 1: Demographic Information

Please provide the following information:

1. Your age (in years)
2. Course Name
3. Commencing Month and Year of Course
   (MM/YY; e.g. 02/2016)
4. Are you?
   - Full-time
   - Part-time
5. Country of birth

7a. If born outside Australia, what age (in years) were you when you first arrived in Australia?

6. Was one or both of your parents/carers born outside of Australia?

   o 8a. [If yes]
     Where was your parent/carer 1 born?
     
     o Where was your parent/carer 2 born?

7. Do you identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander?

   o Yes
   o No

8. Do you identify as having a Pacific Islander Heritage?

   o Yes
   o No

9. Have you ever been in out-of-home care?

   o Yes
   o No

10. Are you a young carer?

    o Yes
    o No

11. How often do you speak English in your family? If you only speak English, tick 5: ‘always’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In my family we speak ENGLISH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. What is your gender?

   ○ Male  ○ Female  ○ Transgender/Non-binary

13. Are you a local or international student?

   ○ Local (Australian citizen or permanent resident)  ○ International
14. What is the highest level of education your parents or carers have completed?

Parent/Carer 1

Parent/Carer 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Parent 1</th>
<th>Parent 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma (or equivalent)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE certificate/diploma</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University degree (Bachelors or Masters)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral degree (PhD)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional degree (e.g. MD, DDS, EdD, JS)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m not sure</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. Has anyone in your immediate family been to university?
   - ○ Yes
   - ○ No

16. When you were in high school, did you ever participate in one of the school-based Widening Participation programs offered by WSU (e.g. ‘Fast Forward’, ‘Pathways to Dreaming’, ‘STEPS’, ‘PATHE’, ‘Heartbeat’)
   - ○ Yes
   - ○ No

[If yes] 18. How did you benefit from participating as a high school student?

[Textbox provided]

SECTION TWO: About your university experience

This section will ask you a series of questions related to your experience of being a university student and a Student Ambassador here at Western Sydney University.

17. When did you become a WSU Student Ambassador? (MM/YYYY; e.g. 02/2016)

18. Please rank order from 1 to 5 your TOP 5 motivations for becoming a WSU Student Ambassador.
To make new friends
☐ I want to help young people improve their future
☐ To give something back to the community
☐ To gain professional work experience
☐ Because I enjoy working with young people
☐ To improve/enhance my CV
☐ To earn money
☐ To promote Western Sydney University
☐ To serve as a representative of Western Sydney University
☐ Because I believe that helping young people is key to the future
☐ Other, please specify _______________________________________________

19. Roughly how many hours per week do you anticipate working as a WSU Student Ambassador? ____

20. At the end of this year as a WSU Student Ambassador, what do you hope to achieve? You may hope to achieve many of these things, but please select your TOP 3 CHOICES.
☐ Communication Skills
☐ Leadership Skills
☐ Teaching Skills
☐ Enhanced ability to work with young people
☐ Specific skills for your field of study
☐ Organisational skills
☐ Networking; Potential job opportunities
☐ Other, please specify ________________________________

21. How many times in the last 4 weeks did you miss mandatory class activities for one or more of your university subjects (e.g. lecture, tutorial, lab, online activities, practicum, etc.)?
   ○ None
   ○ Once
   ○ Twice
   ○ 3 Times
22. [If yes] Why did you miss university class activities over the last four weeks? You may tick multiple boxes.

- sick
- working in my job
- looking after family member
- busy on family farm or family business
- holiday with friends/family
- didn’t feel like going
- didn’t see any value in attending

[Items below are from the single-factor ‘Academic Resilience Scale’ (Martin & Marsh, 2006). Alpha = .89; Items measure students’ ability to deal with set-backs, failure and adversity within a learning environment.]

For the following set of items, please reflect on the work expected of you at Western Sydney University.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Not True of Me At All (1)</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Extremely True of Me (6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23. I believe I am mentally tough when it comes to exams/assessments</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. I don’t let study stress get on top of me</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. I’m good at bouncing back from a poor mark in my university work</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. I think I’m good at dealing with university work pressures</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. I don’t let a bad mark affect my confidence</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. I’m good at dealing with academic setbacks at my university (e.g. bad mark, negative feedback on my work).</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
[Items below are from the ‘Education and Career Aspiration Scale’ (Yeung & McInerney, 2005). Alpha = .85 for Educational Aspiration and .82 for Career Aspiration. Items from the Educational Aspiration subscale have been modified for context specificity.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Not True of Me At All (1)</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Extremely True of Me (6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29. I hope I can continue with advanced education (e.g. Honours/Masters/PhD) [EA]</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. I want to go on to further university study [EA]</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. I try my best at university, hoping to get into an advanced degree (e.g. Honours/Masters/PhD) [EA]</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. I am eager to do some advanced courses [EA]</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. I wish to get a good job [CA]</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. I very much hope to get a good salary when I am employed [CA]</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. I hope I will find desirable employment in the future [CA]</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SECTION THREE: About you in general

This section will ask a series of items about you more generally: your relationship to the Western Sydney community and your general way of being.

[Items below are from the ‘Civic Responsibility Survey’ (Furco, Muller & Ammon, 1998) Overall Alpha = .84; Items measure connection to the community, civic awareness and civic efficacy. Modifications have been made to specify Western Sydney as the community of interest for this study.]
The items below ask about your sense of connection to Western Sydney. For these items, we are asking about Western Sydney more generally rather than Western Sydney University specifically.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>36. I feel like I am a part of the Western Sydney community.</td>
<td>Strengths Disagree (1) 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. I pay attention to news events that affect the Western Sydney community.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. Doing something that helps others is important to me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. I like to help other people, even if it is hard work.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. I know what I can do to help make the Western Sydney community a better place.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. Helping other people is something everyone should do, including me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42. I know a lot of people in the Western Sydney community, and they know me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. I feel like I can make a difference in the Western Sydney community.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44. I try to think of ways to help other people.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45. Everyone should pay attention to the news, including myself.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Items below are from the ‘Review of Personal Effectiveness, with Locus of Control’ Measure (Richards & Neill, 2000), Alpha range from .79 - .93; The full measure includes a wide variety of subscales that would be relevant to this project, including the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROPELOC Factor</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active Involvement</td>
<td>Use action and energy to make things happen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative Teamwork</td>
<td>Cooperation in team situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Ability</td>
<td>Leadership capability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimension</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Thinking</td>
<td>Openness and adaptability in thinking and ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Seeking</td>
<td>Put effort into achieving the best possible results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Confidence</td>
<td>Confidence and belief in personal ability to be successful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Efficacy</td>
<td>Ability to handle things and find solutions in difficult situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Effectiveness</td>
<td>Competence and effectiveness in communicating and operating in social situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress Management</td>
<td>Self-control and calmness in stressful situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Efficiency</td>
<td>Efficient planning and utilization of time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping with change</td>
<td>The ability to cope with change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Effectiveness</td>
<td>The overall effectiveness of a person in all aspects of life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Locus of Control</td>
<td>Taking internal responsibility for actions and success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Locus of Control</td>
<td>Accepting that external issues control or determine success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Items</td>
<td>Control scale consisting of stable personal preferences. Allows baseline for change in stable areas for comparison with changes in other ROPELOC dimensions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: Due to the large number of items and multiple factors in this scale, items are presented without their accompanying response format for ease of discussion.

46. When I have spare time I always use it to paint.  
   CI101

47. I like cooperating in a team.  
   CT102

48. No matter what the situation is I can handle it  
   SF103

49. I can be a good leader.  
   LA104

50. My own efforts and actions are what will determine my future.  
   IL105

51. I prefer to be actively involved in things.  
   AI106

52. I am open to different thinking if there is a better idea.  
   OT107
53. In everything I do I try my best to get the details right.
   QS108
54. Luck, other people and events control most of my life.
   EL109
55. I am confident that I have the ability to succeed in anything I want to do.
   SC110
56. I am effective in social situations.
   SE111
57. I am calm in stressful situations.
   SM112
58. My overall effectiveness in life is very high.
   OE113
59. I plan and use my time efficiently.
   TE114
60. I cope well with changing situations.
   CH115
61. I cooperate well when working in a team.
   CT216
62. I prefer things that taste sweet instead of bitter.
   CI217
63. No matter what happens I can handle it.
   SF218
64. I am capable of being a good leader.
   LA219
65. I like being active and energetic.
   AI220
66. What I do and how I do it will determine my successes in life.
   IL221
67. I am open to new thoughts and ideas.
   OT222
68. I try to get the best possible results when I do things.
   QS223
69. When I apply myself to something I am confident I will succeed.
   SC224
70. My future is mostly in the hands of other people.
   EL225
71. I am competent and effective in social situations.
   SE226
72. I can stay calm and overcome anxiety in almost all situations.
   SM227
73. I am efficient and do not waste time.  
   TE228

74. Overall, in all things in life, I am effective.  
   OE229

75. When things around me change I cope well.  
   CH230

76. I am good at cooperating with team members.  
   CT331

77. I can handle things no matter what happens.  
   SF332

78. I solve all mathematics problems easily.  
   CI333

79. I am seen as a capable leader.  
   LA334

80. I like to get into things and make action.  
   AI335

81. I can adapt my thinking and ideas.  
   OT336

82. If I succeed in life it will be because of my efforts.  
   IL337

83. I try to get the very best results in everything I do.  
   QS338

84. I am confident in my ability to be successful.  
   SC339

85. I communicate effectively in social situations.  
   SE340

86. My life is mostly controlled by external things.  
   EL341

87. I am calm when things go wrong.  
   SM342

88. I am efficient in the way I use my time.  
   TE343

89. I cope well when things change.  
   CH344

Overall, in my life I am a very effective person.  
OE345
APPENDIX 2 - COHORT 1 CURRENT STUDENT AMBASSADOR POST-SURVEY

The post-survey for current ambassadors is identical to the pre-survey with the following adjustments.

1. Section 2: Question 19
   Change wording from ‘how many hours per week do you anticipate working as a student Ambassador’ to ‘how many hours did you work as a Student Ambassador’.

2. Section 2: Question 20
   Change wording to ‘Now that you have finished working as a WSU Student Ambassador, what was your greatest gain for the year,...?’ followed by list of attributes.

3. Add: ‘What was the most enjoyable part of being a WSU Student Ambassador?’ followed by open text-box.

4. Add: ‘Is there an aspect of being a Student Ambassador that could be improved?’ followed by Yes/No choice.

5. Add: ‘Could you please explain what aspect could be improved?’

6. Add: ‘Would you recommend becoming a Student Ambassador to other university students?’ followed by Yes/No choice.

7. Add: ‘Would you explain why/why not you would recommend becoming a Student Ambassador?’ followed by an open text-box.
## APPENDIX 3 - COHORT 2 ALUMNI SURVEY

### SECTION 1: Demographic Information

*Please provide the following information:*

| 1. Your full name  
(this information is gathered so we can access your student records and record of work as an ambassador). You will not be identified in the presentation of the results. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Your date of birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The name of the course you completed at Western Sydney University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Commencing Month and Year of Course <em>(MM/YYYY; e.g. 02/2016)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Final Month and Year of Course <em>(MM/YYYY; e.g. 02/2016)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Country of birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6a. If born outside Australia, what age (in years) were you when you first arrived in Australia?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 7. Was one or both of your parents/carers born outside of Australia?  
| o Yes  
| o No |
| 6a. [If yes]  
Where was your parent/carer 1 born?  
___________________  
Where was your parent/carer 2 born?  
___________________ |
| 8. Do you identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander?  
| o Yes  
| o No |
9. Do you identify as having a Pacific Islander Heritage?  
   - Yes
   - No

10. Have you ever been in out-of-home care?  
   - Yes
   - No

11. Were you a young carer?  
   - Yes
   - No

12. How often do you speak English in your family? If you only speak English, tick 5: ‘always’.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In my family we speak ENGLISH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. What is your gender?  
   - Male
   - Female
   - Transgender/Non-binary

14. Were you a local or international student?  
   - Local (Australian citizen or permanent resident)
   - International

15. What is the highest level of education your parents or carers have completed?  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent/Carer 1</th>
<th>Parent/Carer 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma (or equivalent)</td>
<td>High school diploma (or equivalent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE certificate/diploma</td>
<td>TAFE certificate/diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University degree (Bachelors or Masters)</td>
<td>University degree (Bachelors or Masters)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral degree (PhD)</td>
<td>Doctoral degree (PhD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional degree (e.g. MD, DDS, EdD, JS)</td>
<td>Professional degree (e.g. MD, DDS, EdD, JS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m not sure</td>
<td>I’m not sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>None of these</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16. When you first attended University, had anyone in your immediate family been to university before you?  
   - Yes
   - No
17. When you were in high school, did you ever participate in one of the school-based Widening Participation programs offered by WSU (e.g. ‘Fast Forward’; ‘Pathways to Dreaming’; ‘STEPS’; ‘PATHE’; ‘Heartbeat’)
   - Yes
   - No

[If yes] 16.a. How did you benefit from participating as a high school student?
   [Textbox provided]

SECTION TWO: About your university experience

This section will ask you a series of questions related to your experience of being a university student and a Student Ambassador at Western Sydney University.

18. When did you become a WSU Student Ambassador? (MM/YYYY; e.g. 02/2016)

19. When did you finish being a WSU Student Ambassador? (MM/YYYY; e.g. 02/2016)

20. Think back to when you first became a WSU Ambassador. Please rank order from 1 to 5 your TOP 5 motivations for becoming a WSU Student Ambassador.

- To make new friends
- I want to help young people improve their future
- To give something back to the community
- To gain professional work experience
- Because I enjoy working with young people
- To improve/enhance my CV
- To earn money
- To promote Western Sydney University
- To serve as a representative of Western Sydney University
- Because I believe that helping young people is key to the future
- Other, please specify

21. Roughly how many hours per month on average did you work as a WSU Student Ambassador? _____

22. Which programs did you work on (please tick all that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AIME – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentoring program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fast Forward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES mentoring program - Youth Encouragement Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEPS - Strive towards educational participation and success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Foot Forward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LODESTAR and Polestar programs for Out-of-Home-Care children, young carers and Care Leavers - including KiC Club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future for All program - Partnership with Western Sydney Wanderers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return to Study Programs - non-current school leavers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee Programs / Conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PATHE - Pasifika achievement to higher education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Smith Family - Learning for Life Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WP Ambassadors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacitate – raising aspirations for students with disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Tutor for Fast Forward, STEPS and other WP programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSC Tutorials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debating Club competitions and training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Success @UWS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS scale up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATES@UWS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSS Initiatives - multimedia developments and peer guides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSC Study Days - Rural and Remote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATSI PASS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WISE program – Women in Science &amp; Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Course Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazine Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Visit Program – ATSI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Engagement Expansion including: (i) Pathways to Dreaming; (ii) Heartbeat;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTiPS - horticultural therapy project working with Primary schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Ambassadors (PANGO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books in School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, please specify ________________________________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
23. Why did you stop working as a WSU Student Ambassador?

- [ ] I graduated
- [ ] I wasn’t contacted about work
- [ ] I didn’t find it rewarding
- [ ] I moved to a new job because the Ambassador role didn’t provide enough income
- [ ] I moved to a new job that my experience as an Ambassador helped me to obtain
- [ ] My study commitments meant I didn’t have time to work as an Ambassador
- [ ] Other, please specify __________________________

24. When you first commenced as a WSU Student Ambassador, what did you hope to gain? You may have hoped to achieve many of these things, but please select your TOP 3 CHOICES.

- [ ] Communication Skills
- [ ] Leadership Skills
- [ ] Teaching Skills
- [ ] Enhanced ability to work with young people
- [ ] Specific skills for your field of study
- [ ] Organisational skills
- [ ] Networking; Potential job opportunities
- [ ] Other, please specify __________________________

25. When you finished working as a WSU Student Ambassador, what was your greatest gain? You may have gained many of these things, but please select your TOP 3 CHOICES.

- [ ] Communication Skills
- [ ] Leadership Skills
- [ ] Teaching Skills
- [ ] Enhanced ability to work with young people
- [ ] Specific skills for your field of study
- [ ] Organisational skills
- [ ] Networking; Potential job opportunities
- [ ] Other, please specify __________________________

26. What was the most enjoyable part of being a WSU Student Ambassador?

open field (paragraph response)
27. Is there an aspect of being a WSU Student Ambassador that could have been improved? Yes / No

If yes, please explain? open field (paragraph response)

Whilst working as a Student Ambassador, how much of an impact did the experience of being a WSU Student Ambassador have on you in the following areas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28. Your ability to deal with set-backs or failure within University</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Your aspirations to further your qualifications or perform higher in your University degree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Your aspirations to obtain a good job or influencing the type of work you wanted to undertake in your career</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Feeling like I was a part of the University community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

32. Think back to the work you performed as a Student Ambassador. What contribution are you most proud of? (open Text field) (Paragraph response)

SECTION THREE: About your achievements since leaving WSU

This section will ask a series of questions about how you have developed since leaving WSU and if your work as a Student Ambassador has had any long-term impact on your career or broader life.

Thinking about who you are now and your career progress, how much of an impact did the experience of being a WSU Student Ambassador have on you in the following areas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33. Feeling connected to the broader Western Sydney area where I worked as a Student Ambassador</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
34. Feeling you can make a difference in the community
35. Understanding of social issues that affect our communities
36. Your ability to work hard to make things happen
37. Your skills to cooperate in a team situation
38. Your leadership capability
39. Your open mindedness and ability to think about things in a different way
40. Applying effort to achieve the best possible result
41. Your confidence and belief in your personal ability to be successful
42. Your ability to find solutions in difficult situations
43. Your effectiveness in communicating and operating in social situations
44. Self-control and calmness in stressful situations
45. Efficient utilisation of time
46. Your ability to cope with change
47. Your overall effectiveness in all aspects of life
48. Taking responsibility for your actions and success
49. Feeling like external forces determine or control my own success

50. How has being a Student Ambassador benefited your career? (open text field) paragraph response
51. How has being a Student Ambassador benefited your life in general? (open text field) paragraph response
52. Would you recommend becoming a Student Ambassador to other University students? Yes/No. Why / why not? (open text field) paragraph response
53. Please indicate if you are willing to participate in an interview. This interview will be face to face or on the phone and will last about 30 minutes. The interview will be related to your answers in this survey.
   ○ Yes
   ○ No
   If yes, please give your contact details (Name, phone, email, and suburb where you are located)
Name: ____________________________________________________
Phone:____________________________________________________
Email: _____________________________________________________
Suburb: ____________________________________________________
APPENDIX 4 - COHORT 3 STUDENT AMBASSADOR ALUMNI - INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Evaluation of the Widening Participation Student Ambassadors Initiative

*Indicative question prompts*

Name:

Course:

Year:

OWP programs you have supported:

We’re interested in your experiences as a university student supporting the Widening Participation programs – we’d like to know more about you as a Student Ambassador and what that has meant for you, and your experiences within the programs you have worked in.

What did it mean to you to be a student ambassador?

Can you tell me about the process of becoming a student ambassador. [Recruitment, how they found about it, did anyone else suggest the program to them, did you know about the program before university…]

What motivated you to become a student ambassador?

What qualities did you bring to your role as a student ambassador? [personal, individual, community networks, cultural and identity factors…]

What qualities have you developed as a result of your role as a student ambassador?
What qualities have you taken into your working life?

Have you noticed any other impacts on your life [from your experience as a student ambassador]?

Tell us about the training you did to become a student ambassador. What did it involve? Was there any other training you would have liked to have had [that might have helped you in your role as student ambassador]?

Can you tell us about your experiences as a student ambassador? [programs supported, length of involvement, frequency, number of schools]
*Note programs from alumni list prior to interview and personalise.

What benefits have you experienced from your participation in the student ambassador program?

Has this experience changed the ways you think about yourself? Your community? Western Sydney University, Education, the Western Sydney region?

Is there anything else you want to add?

Is there any advice you’d like to give to the program organisers?
Evaluation of the Widening Participation Student Ambassadors Initiative

*Indicative question prompts – for program leaders*

Name:

Year:

OWP programs you are responsible for:

We’re interested in your experiences as a coordinator of Widening Participation programs who is working closely with Student ambassadors

What does it mean to work with student ambassadors within the particular program you have been supporting? What is the role and function of student ambassadors?

*Think about the process of recruiting and training student ambassadors.* What do you think motivates students to become student ambassadors? What makes a good student ambassador?

What did the training involve to be a student ambassador? Can you describe the training? Did you plan and deliver it? What is the most important aspect of the training?

Were there particular skills and understandings that students need to take from the training into their roles as student ambassadors?

Was there anything missing, or anything you would have liked to have done differently?

How important was it to have done the training before they start as student ambassadors? Do they have opportunities for ongoing training, or other networking/connecting?
Think about the qualities of student ambassadors. What personal qualities do they bring with them into their roles as student ambassadors? What qualities do they develop during their roles as student ambassadors? What new qualities should they take into their lives after they have been student ambassadors? Do you know of other ways that being student ambassadors impacts on their lives? What are they?

Think about the student ambassadors as university students. How does being student ambassadors impact on their university studies? On their choices of courses and careers?

Think about the student ambassadors working with young people in the program you coordinate. What young people do they work with? How does the program impact on these young people, through the work of the ambassadors? How is this evident? What sorts of relationships do the student ambassadors develop with the young people? Do they share any of the resonances or differences between their lives? What differences are there? What are the young people learning from the student ambassadors and what are the student ambassadors learning from the young people?

Think about the program you are responsible for and the students as ambassadors for WSU and higher education more broadly. What does it mean to them to be ambassadors? For higher education more broadly? This university? This region? Particular courses?

Is there anything else you would like to add about the student ambassadors?
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

12 April 2016

Associate Professor Susanne Gannon
School of Education

Dear Susanne,

I wish to formally advise you that the Human Research Ethics Committee has approved your research proposal H11534 “Evaluation of the Widening Participation Student Ambassadors Initiative”, until 31 March 2017 with the provision of a progress report annually if over 12 months and a final report on completion.

Conditions of Approval

1. A progress report will be due annually on the anniversary of the approval date.

2. A final report will be due at the expiration of the approval period.

3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee prior to being implemented. Amendments must be requested using the HREC Amendment Request Form: [link]

4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events on participants must be reported to the Human Ethics Committee via the Human Ethics Officer as a matter of priority.

5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the Committee as a matter of priority.

6. Consent forms are to be retained within the archives of the School or Research Institute and made available to the Committee upon request.

Please quote the registration number and title as indicated above in the subject line on all future correspondence related to this project. All correspondence should be sent to the email address humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au.

This protocol covers the following researchers:

Susanne Gannon, Jacqueline Ullman, Danielle Tracey

Yours sincerely

Professor Elizabeth Deane
Presiding Member,
Human Researcher Ethics Committee
Western Sydney University
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

15 August 2016

Associate Professor Susanne Gannon
School of Education

Dear Susanne,

RE: Amendment Request to H11534

Research Engagement, Development and Innovation (REDI) has received a request to amend your approved research protocol H11534 “Evaluation of the Widening Participation Student Ambassadors Initiative”.

The amendment has been reviewed and I am pleased to advise that it has been approved, as follows:

To provide: 1. financial incentive for participation (for survey participants) and 2. reimbursement for travel costs/time (for interview participants).

Please do not hesitate to contact the Human Ethics Officer at humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au, if you require any further information.

Regards

Professor Elizabeth Deane

Presiding Member,
Human Researcher Ethics Committee
Western Sydney University
Email invitation

Dear OWP Student Ambassador/ Student Ambassador alumni/ OWP Program leader,

We are researchers from Western Sydney University who are conducting research around the impact of working within the Office of Widening Participation Programs on Student Ambassadors who work within these programs at Western Sydney University. We would value receiving your input given your involvement with the program. [Current Student Ambassadors: We invite you to complete an online survey on one/two occasion/s: firstly, between now and the next 2 weeks, and later in the year when we will email you again.][Alumni: We invite you to complete an online survey about your experiences as a Student Ambassador.] You are being invited to participate in this project because you are: (a current Student Ambassador/ an alumni Student Ambassador/ an OWP program leader). A smaller group of participants will be invited to a follow-up interview or focus group discussion.

(The survey will ask some basic demographic information as well as some questions about your experience with the Student Ambassador Program./ The interviews/ focus groups will enable you to give additional information about your experience with the program).

Your participation is voluntary and your individual responses are confidential. This project has been approved by the WSU Human Research Ethics Committee (H11534) and you will find an information sheet attached to this email that provides further information about the study.

If you would like to take part in this study, please complete the survey online by clicking this link:

http://XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX. We ask that you do this sometime between now and the next 2 weeks. All instructions are detailed on the survey, and completing it should only take between 20-30 minutes of your time.

Thank you in advance for your participation in this important project. If you have questions regarding the study, please do not hesitate to contact us on the details provided on the information sheet.

Sincerely,

Associate Professor Susanne Gannon, Dr Danielle Tracey and Dr Jacqueline Ullman
APPENDIX 9 - COHORT 3 & 4 – INTERVIEW CODES

**Aspiration / Imagined futures

Imagination

Connection

Journeys / Stories / Pathways

• imagination and personal stories
• connecting the past present of the student ambassadors to the future of the young people
• like personal narratives - Student Ambassadors as role models - matching backgrounds (schools, ethnic diversity etc.)
• bridging now and the future
• opening kids lives to fuller possibilities
• first in family
• diversity
• ‘becoming’ as much as information
• capacity for all kids

Belonging

Institutional belonging
• trust, pride, knowing more about the university

Regional belonging
• insiders - expanding perspective of WS, becoming comfortable with broader
• outsiders - engaging with WS / understanding WS / countering stereotypes

Cultural belonging

Personal aspects (personal growth / personal qualities)

Personality
• self efficacy - enhanced belief in one’s own abilities
• know self better / self belief / self identity / strengths and weaknesses
• reflectiveness
• self esteem
• leadership (F&G)
• maturity (F&G)
• patience
• trust

Work related skills
• time management
• reliability
• leadership (F&G)
• teaching skills
• behaviour management / engagement management

Interpersonal skills
• speaking to diverse audiences
• confidence / overcoming shyness / recognising and working with different
• listening
• empathy
• behaviour management / engagement management

Rewards

Altruistic
• helping people
• making a difference
• giving back

Pragmatic
• income
• part time meaningful work
• compatible with study
• gain work related skills
• gain experience
• increase employability - CV

Academic Engagement
• resources for retention
• reflectiveness
• change or confirm course

Challenges
• reflectiveness
• communication
• variability of coordinators
• selection
• continued involvement
A University graduate:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduate Attribute: Knowledge Domain</th>
<th>Generic Skills</th>
<th>Descriptor: A University Graduate:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>commands multiple skills and literacies to enable adaptable lifelong learning</td>
<td>• communication skills</td>
<td>communicates effectively through reading, listening, speaking and writing in diverse contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• numeracy</td>
<td>applies appropriate numerical skills to understand, interpret and solve problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• social interaction skills</td>
<td>is a self-reliant learner who works effectively in groups and teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• information literacy</td>
<td>accesses, evaluates and uses relevant information to solve problems and to continue learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• technology literacy</td>
<td>applies communication and other technologies effectively in personal and professional learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Indigenous Australian Knowledge” – demonstrates knowledge of Indigenous Australia through cultural competency and professional capacity

| • knowledge base | appreciates the culture, experiences and achievements of Indigenous Australians, thereby encouraging an Australian identity inclusive of Indigenous Australians. |
| • communication | communicates ethically and effectively within Indigenous Australian contexts. |
| • social and cultural | understands and engages effectively with the culturally and socially diverse world in which they live and will work. |
| • leadership and partnership | understands the circumstances and needs of Indigenous Australians, thereby encouraging responsibility in raising the standard of professional service delivery to Indigenous Australians; possesses a capacity to engage and partner with Indigenous Australians. |

demonstrates comprehensive, coherent and connected knowledge

| • has in-depth knowledge in one or more chosen fields of study | |
| • understands how this knowledge is connected with other fields and disciplines | |
| • understands the local and international relevance of their chosen field(s) of study | |
| • understands the values and principles of scholarly inquiry | |

Available at: http://policies.uws.edu.au/download.php?id=189&i=00158&v=2