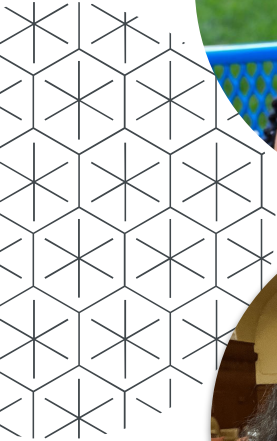# Voices of Power: Shifting Paradigms in Higher Education

A summary of the quantitative and qualitative data and total overview
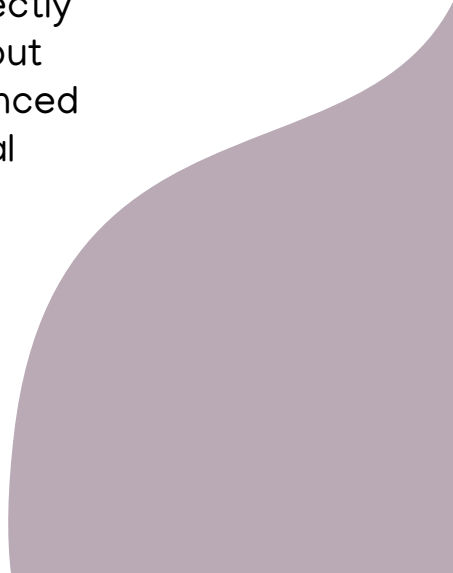
Meet the Fellows!

Our Why

Post-secondary administrators, faculty, and staff members are often faced with a decision making process that directly impacts the student experience and campus culture, but there are few cases when those who will be most influenced by those choices are able to give voice to their actual needs, expectations, and lived-experiences.
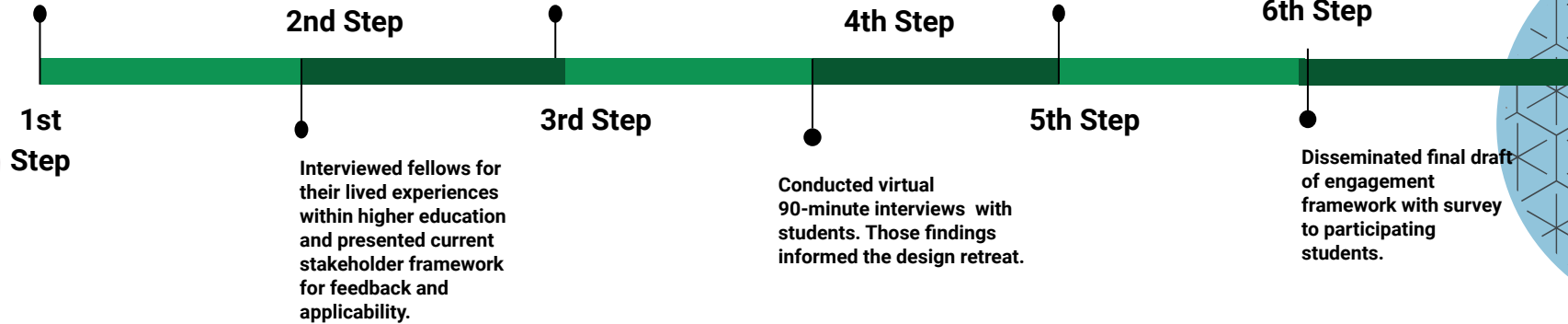
Goals

1. Ensuring students from historically excluded communities are seen, heard, and honored at the intersection of their identities on-campus and through policy served as the foundation for this work.

2. The charge of this project was to create a student-facing shift power, share power engagement framework that supports a student's ability to increase their agency and autonomy in decision-making processes that affect both their educational journey as well as the journeys of future college students.

Study Structure

Recruited a cohort of 6 student fellows who co-led the design process with Kinetic Seeds and Changing Perspectives.

Together with student fellows, we developed a recruitment strategy and fielded a student in-take survey. Those findings guided the development of an interview protocol.
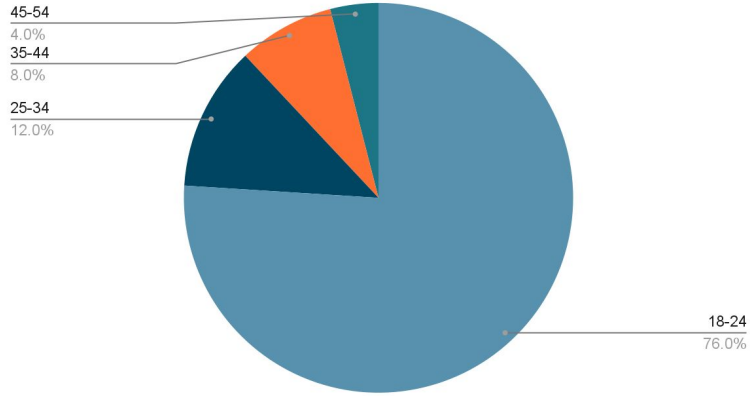
Conducted 2 ½ hour participatory design retreat to conceptualize student engagement framework.

2nd Step

4th Step

6th Step

1st Step

3rd Step

5th Step

Interviewed fellows for their lived experiences within higher education and presented current stakeholder framework for feedback and applicability.

Conducted virtual 90-minute interviews with students. Those findings informed the design retreat.

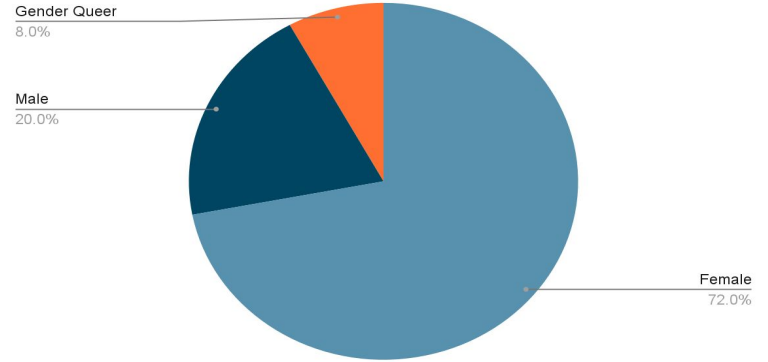Disseminated final draft of engagement framework with survey to participating students.

! In addition to gaining new skill sets, students were offered financial compensation and were duly recognized and credited for their contributions, ensuring their efforts are acknowledged academically and professionally.
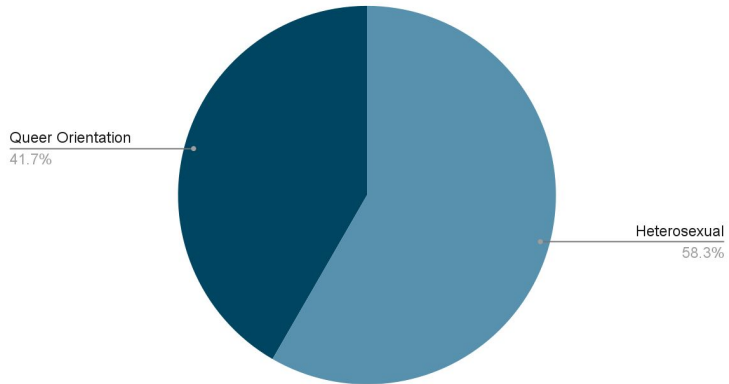
Survey Participant Demographics
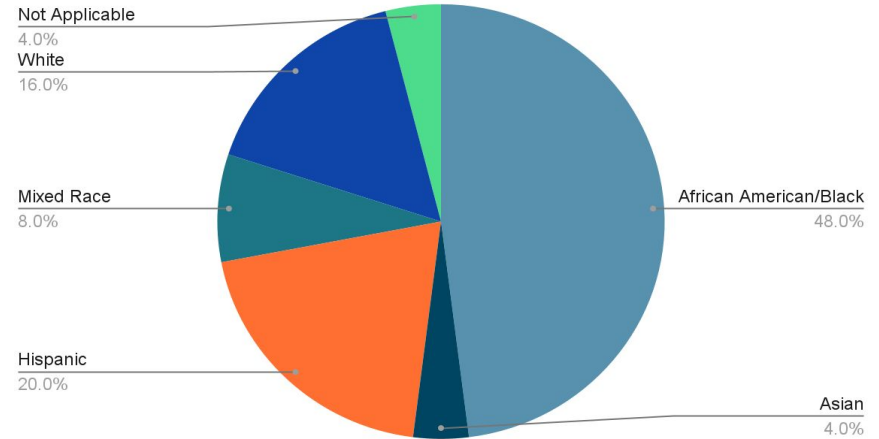
Age Distribution

45-54
4.0%

35-44
8.0%

25-34
12.0%

18-24
76.0%

Gender Identity

Gender Queer
8.0%

Male
20.0%

Female
72.0%

Sexual Orientation

Queer Orientation
41.7%

Heterosexual
58.3%

Race/Ethnicity

Not Applicable
4.0%

White
16.0%

Mixed Race
8.0%

Hispanic
20.0%

African American/Black
48.0%

Asian
4.0%
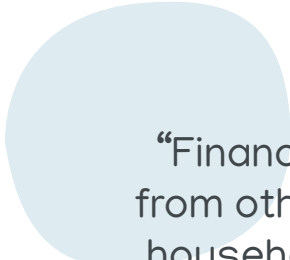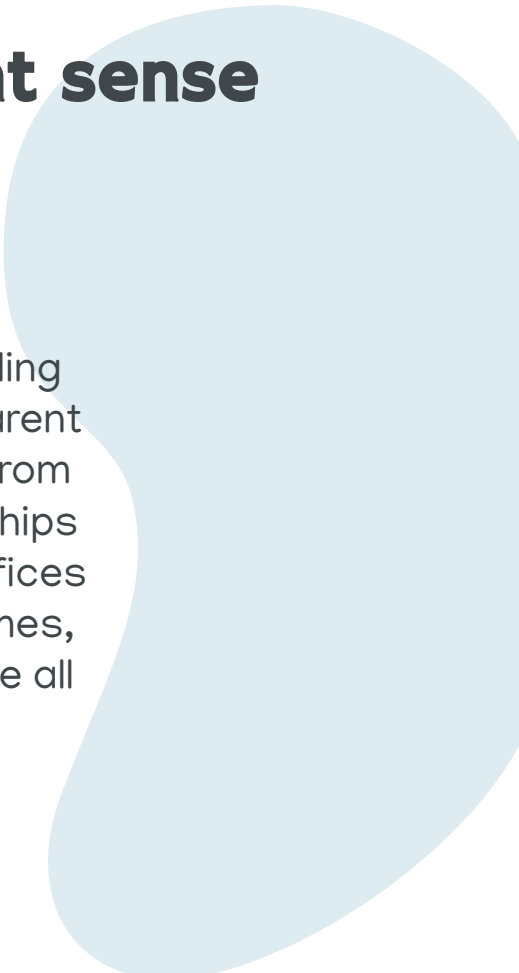
Survey Highlight:
What is contributing to your current sense of thriving or surviving?

"Financial hardships and the lack of understanding from others. I come from an immigrant single-parent household that suffers from financial hardship from time to time, so interpreting your financial hardships and being met with unresponsive financial aid offices and professors who do not understand sometimes, makes it hard to thrive in the classroom because all you're doing is trying to survive in real life."

Survey Insights

84%

21 out of 25

Received financial aid or scholarships, but 16 students said the support was <u>inadequate</u>

76%

19 out of 25

Were employed to supplement school cost-impacting their ability be engaged on campus

52%

13 out of 25

Had not offered feedback to their universities

40%

10 out of 25

Were not engaged in initiatives and programs for student input

*The majority of surveyed students had not offered institutional feedback and were not included in decision-making.

Student Voice & Engagement

Notable Conclusions

Student voice refers to their influential expression of ideas on issues related to their education and campus life

We find there is a direct relationship between student voice and and student's views on power dynamics

And campus involvement determines a students ability to thrive versus survive
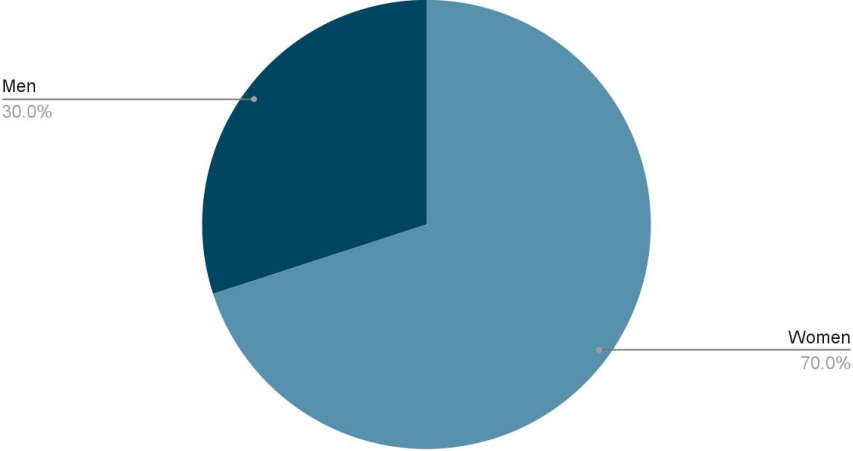
Interview Analysis

The purpose of the qualitative inquiry through a comprehensive interview was to allow students an opportunity to expand on topics that may have been more nuanced, but could not provide full context due to the natural limitations of quantitative data gathering via the initial survey.
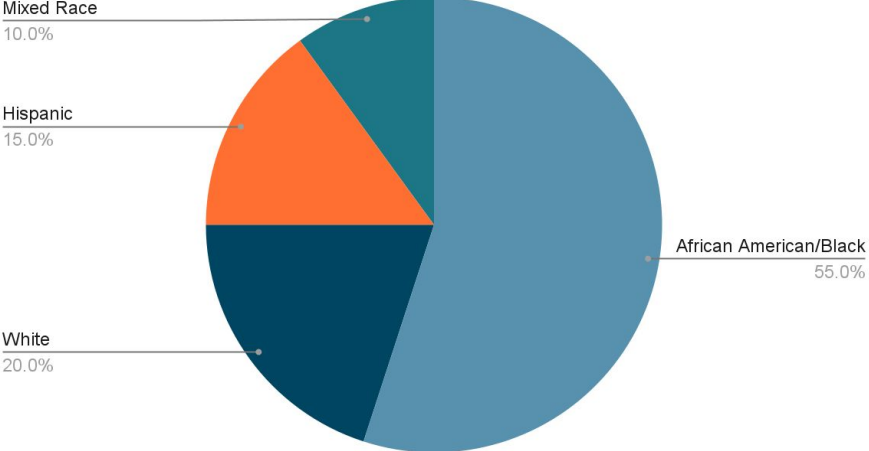
Student Interview Demographics

Gender

Men
30.0%

Women
70.0%

Race/Ethnicity

Mixed Race
10.0%

Hispanic
15.0%

White
20.0%

African American/Black
55.0%

Feeling Unheard

Students felt their voice did not matter in terms of institutional power, with over half the participants committing to their voices not being heard within the interview.

75%
15 out of 20

Not feeling supported

Many students felt they wanted a stronger and closer relationship with the faculty on campus.
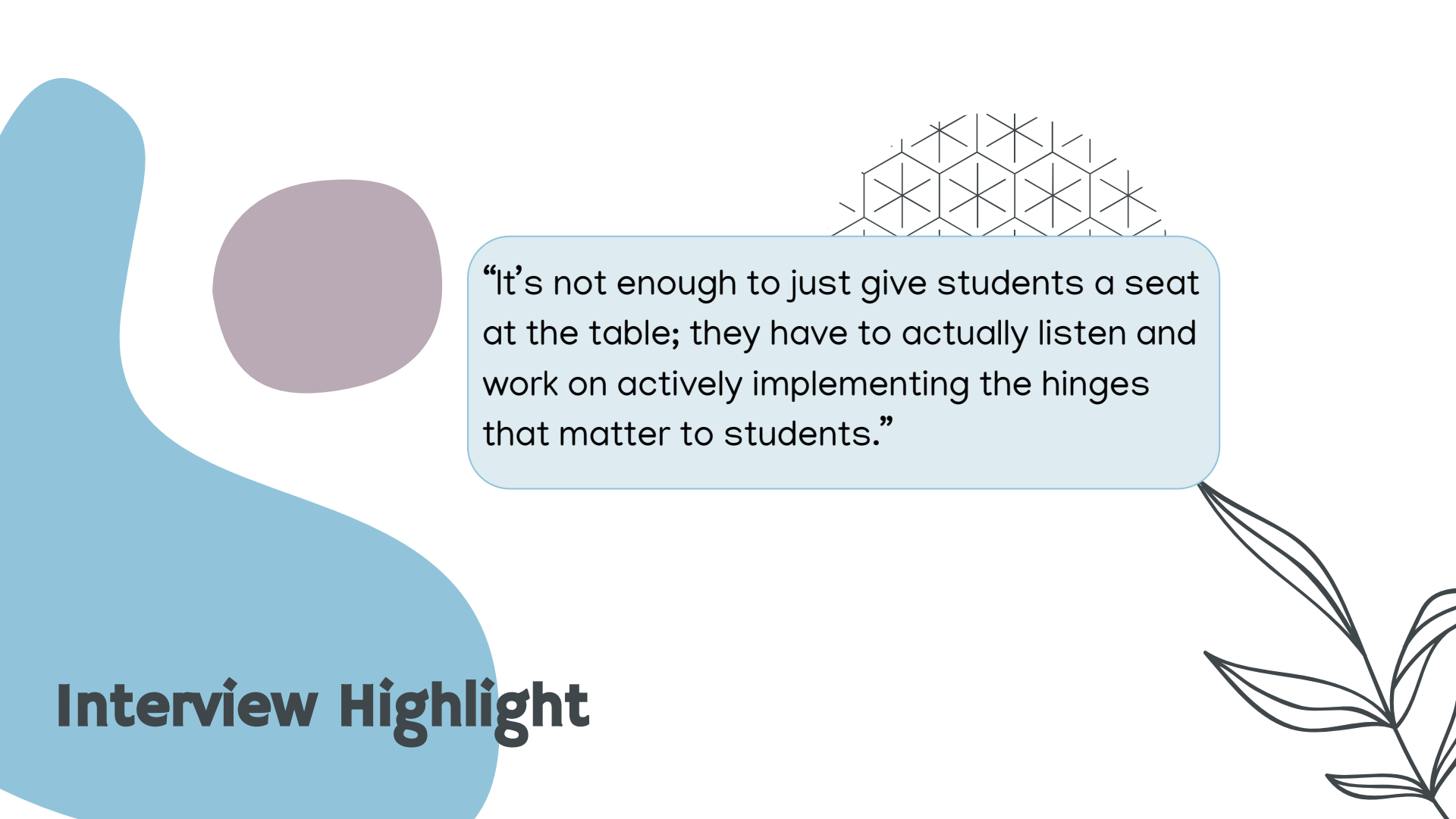
55%
11 out of 20

In addition, students also voiced concerns about not feeling supported by faculty in particular and also the lack of resources available to them on campus.

60%
12 out of 20

Value Student/School Organizations

Students felt that when community and resources lacked support student organizations helped them maintain a sense of belonging

55%
11 out of 20

Common Interview Themes

"It's not enough to just give students a seat at the table; they have to actually listen and work on actively implementing the hinges that matter to students."

Interview Highlight

Student Interview: Key Insights

Feedback

The lack of availability to provide feedback on how universities are run can lead students to feel disempowered

Standardization

Navigating financial aid can leave students reliant on individual employees due to a lack of standardization

This space was intended to serve as an opportunity for students to reflect on the ongoing research findings, as well as engage in collaborative brainstorming to help reimagine how institutional power dynamics can be transformed.

Design Studio

Design Studio Main Activity:
Power-Play Scenarios

Participants developed a strategy for how to address each of these scenarios to ensure equitable outcomes in service of student empowerment and institutional transformation. Our gathering concluded with reflections on the experience and visions for creating a student-centered framework to center student voice and engagement.

Scenario Example

Student participates were given a made up scenario, like the one below, and asked to provide tangible solutions for solving the specific problem.

Scenario 2
You have a Latinx male student having a difficult time receiving financial resources. The student informs you that every time they go to the financial aid office, they only can talk to front desk workers and feel like the other staff members are afraid of them. The student admits that sometimes he has difficulty understanding people because he has a hearing issue and English is not his first language. To compensate, he often gets close to people and tries to read their lips.
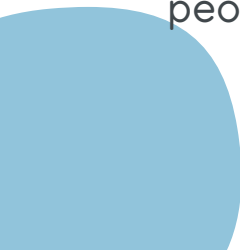
Scenario 2 Solutions

- Hire workers that can speak the language of the local community/regular clientele
- Add an online chat box option for the financial aid department to create an ease if accessibility for less tech savvy students
- Have handheld language translation devices readily available in the office

The possible effectiveness of the above solutions were reflected in the some of sentiments shared by students about their previous experiences when dealing with formal offices and organizations.

- " Growing up you're like 6 years old being handed government documents and being told to translate it… like you can barely understand the language being used yourself but have to then explain it to your parents."
- "Not being able to really understand the locals had me feeling alone."

General Power Play Solutions

There were some generalized solutions for enriching the imaginary students college experience.

1. Strengthening Support on Campus
2. Clear and Concise Presentation of Available Resources
3. Finding Support Amongst Peers or Classmates
4. Multiple Channels for Communication and Feedback
5. Addressing Cultural/Ethic Concerns and Acknowledging Their Effect on the Student's Collegiate Experience
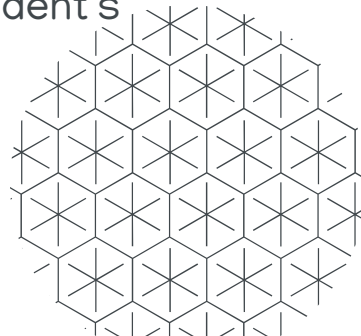
1. Student Agency and Informed Decision-Making
2. Awareness and Transparency of Student Resources
3. Bridge the Communication-Action Gap
4. Create Avenues for Peer Support and Advocacy

Design Studio: Important Takeaways
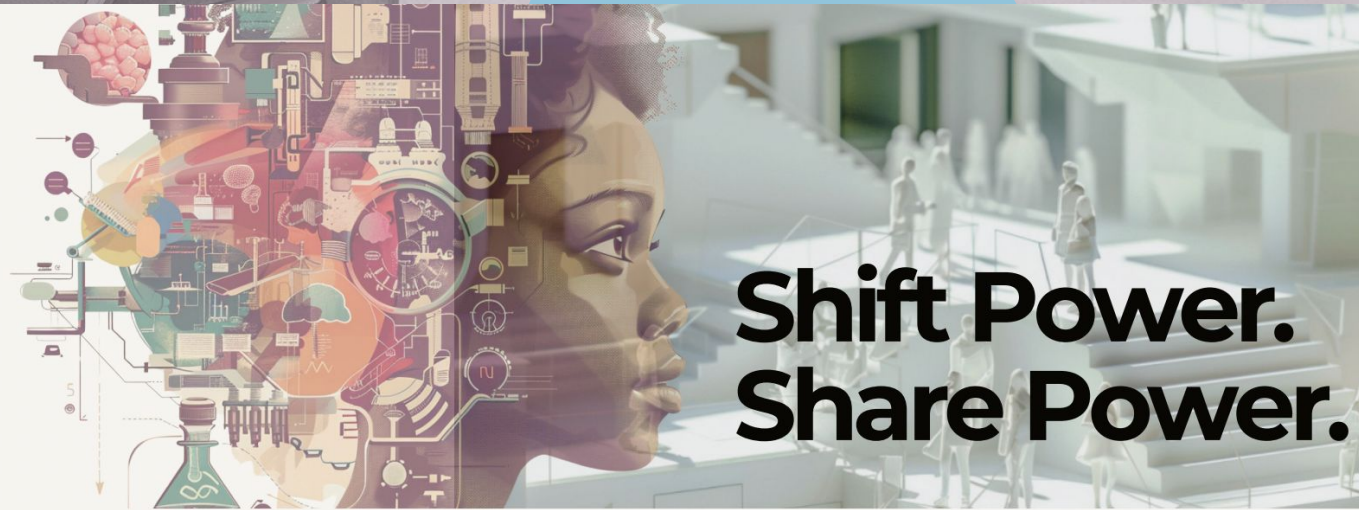
Shift Power.
Share Power.

A Student-Designed Framework to
Drive Empowerment and Ensure Success

Our next steps are for institutions to move beyond "performative" engagement thus they must <u>invest in empowering students</u> in interactions that allow them to take the lead.

Strategies to Bridge the Gap

Ways to Boost Students' Agency and Autonomy

- Channel faculty and staff influence and resources towards issues and problems that are important to students.

- Equip students with self-advocacy skills through workshops on communication, negotiation, and navigating institutional systems.

- Create advisory boards or committees with student representatives to contribute to institutional decisions.

Strategies to Bridge the Gap
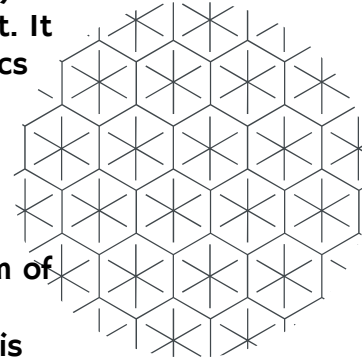
What Students Need to Feel Empowered

- When students see themselves as influential participants in their education, their sense of initiative and self-direction is significantly strengthened.

- Involving students in governance gives them a real stake in their education and nurtures their autonomy.

- A supportive community is essential for students to feel connected and empowered to share their ideas and challenges.

Call To Action!

Central to this process is the need to recognize and actively address the power dynamics within the college environment. It is particularly important to acknowledge how these dynamics disproportionately affect marginalized student populations, often inhibiting their opportunities to fully participate and succeed in their educational journey.

Administrators, faculty, and staff must shift from a paradigm of command and control to one of shared power, actively involving students in decision-making processes. This shift is crucial in breaking down barriers faced by marginalized students, ensuring that their unique perspectives and challenges are not only heard but also acted upon.

This research is not a fixed model but a living structure that must evolve with ongoing student input and institutional reflection. It is a call to action: to embrace a culture of shared governance and continuous dialogue, ensuring students are not just passengers but co-pilots.

Q&A?

Thank you!