

# TOP 50 VOICES IN STUDENT ENGAGEMENT



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**Manager, Student Leadership Programs**

Alysia is a student experience specialist who develops and manages programs to enhance student access, participation, and success, focusing on reducing disadvantage for equity groups. With a background in media and extensive tertiary education management experience, she excels in communication and team building.



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## Can you share a bit about your background and the journey that led you to your current role in student engagement?

As a student in Melbourne, I loved community radio, and student radio is where I met my people—those extra special, lifelong friends that you carry with you through all of life's ups and downs. After spending way too long at uni and studying sociology, philosophy, and media communications (UG and PG), I spent six years working in commercial radio across Victoria and the ACT before deciding that it was not for me. I yearned to be back at university, with people who read, where thought was both challenging and exciting, and where people were actively shaping and changing their futures.

So, I returned to Melbourne, resumed my studies, and somehow started working casually at a university, vetting people for entry into degrees. I always had an interest in social justice and ended up working in student services, supporting students with disabilities, and eventually managing the student disability service at another university. My interests then led me to expand into other equity groups, and eventually into specialist roles related to student transition and retention, international students, and now managing Student Leadership programs and Student Partnerships more generally.

**“I AM PARTICULARLY PROUD OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LA TROBE LEADERS PROGRAM, WHICH HAS GROWN FROM AROUND 50 MEMBERS TO OVER 650 IN ALMOST TWO YEARS.”**



*Alysia with La Trobe student leaders attending Future Female Conference 2022 in Melbourne.*

## What are the key responsibilities and goals in your role for boosting student engagement and retention at your university?

My role at La Trobe University is Manager, Student Leadership Programs. I head up a team of three amazing people in Student Partnerships to devise, develop, and deliver student leadership and engagement opportunities with and for students across our five Victorian campuses and online. Our primary program is the La Trobe Leaders program, a volunteer-based initiative for students. The program is based on a service-as-leadership philosophy, and our leaders volunteer across the university through three key areas: welcome, mentorship, and engagement. In return, we actively provide a range of professional development opportunities, support, and university and transcript acknowledgment of service. **The program not only helps students develop employability skills, but it also fosters a vibrant and active student community.**

We also facilitate student consultation, focus groups, and student voices in university activities, as well as various reward and recognition initiatives for students who make outstanding contributions, either academically or more generally in the university community.

**Could you tell us about a specific project or initiative you led that significantly boosted student engagement?**

Learning to be a university student while mastering academic content can be quite daunting, especially in the first semester and even more so for first-generation students. I am particularly proud of a teaching and learning support program I developed for a university area that leverages the key relationship between students and their subject tutors to support new students within their discipline during this transition.

The program guided identified support tutors through a series of interventions at critical points in the semester to assist students at risk of disengagement. **It had a substantial impact on pass rates, with increases of up to 15% in some subjects, and improved student success, with a higher percentage of students achieving high grades and better retention from semester to semester.** Ultimately, the program was adopted university-wide, and although I have since moved into new areas, the program continues to this day.



*Alysia with City Campus members of La Trobe Leaders Program in August 2024.*

**“I LOVE BEARING WITNESS AS STUDENTS COME INTO THEIR OWN, DISCOVERING WHO AND WHAT THEY CAN BECOME.”**

**What motivates you to continue working in student engagement?**

A student's time at university shapes them for the rest of their life. Regardless of their course or academic success, the experience of being a student is profoundly impactful. **I love bearing witness as students come into their own, discovering who and what they can become,** and I feel privileged to play a small role in helping shape and guide that development. On a day-to-day level, I also really enjoy working with students. **Their enthusiasm is infectious and energizing, and that feeling is deeply rewarding.**

**What achievement in your role related to student engagement and retention are you most proud of, and why does it stand out to you?**

Ultimately, what I am most proud of is the student community created through our programs—the camaraderie and connection many of our students feel, to the point that they continue to engage with the program even after graduation and into their professional lives.

Right now, **I am particularly proud of the development of the La Trobe Leaders Program, which has grown from around 50 members to over 650 in almost two years.** I take pride in the progress of the program, including the work I have done to clearly define it and the subsequent growth that has incorporated leadership development opportunities, peer mentorship, and internship opportunities. While the program still has room for further development, I am proud of how far it has come.