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Stronger Together: Peer Coaching as a Tool for Enhancing Engagement













About the Peer Coaching Group (PCG)



A space for academic and non-academic staff at higher education institutions (HEIs) to learn and exchange experiences, insights, and strategies for fostering safer, more inclusive environment for students

- When: April June 2024
- **Format:** six online meetings on Tuesday mornings, 8:30 10:00

Participants:

- 12 staff members from European HEIs
- 1 facilitator
- 3 UNICOMM representatives

Goals:

- Empowering HEI staff
- Sharing experiences, insights, and strategies aimed at creating safer, more inclusive spaces for all students
- Developing infographics
- Establishing a community

Peer Coaching Group



- **Meeting 1** Intro, introducing ourselves, small groups: goals, expectations
- **Meeting 2** Reflection in groups: your 2-3 best experiences from your work with students from the past year
- Meeting 3 Empowerment, story sharing and identifying topics
- Meeting 4 Well-being and stress management: theory and practice
- **Meeting 5** Developing infographics in groups
- Meeting 6 Presentations, final reflections and summary of PCG

Infographic 1: Let's engage! Building community around extracurricular activities

The first infographic:

- Presents practical strategies for creating and sustaining a vibrant extracurricular community
- Is designed as a pathway, illustrating the step-by-step journey of building an engaging community
- Includes additional practical tips

Infographic 1 full size - <u>link</u>

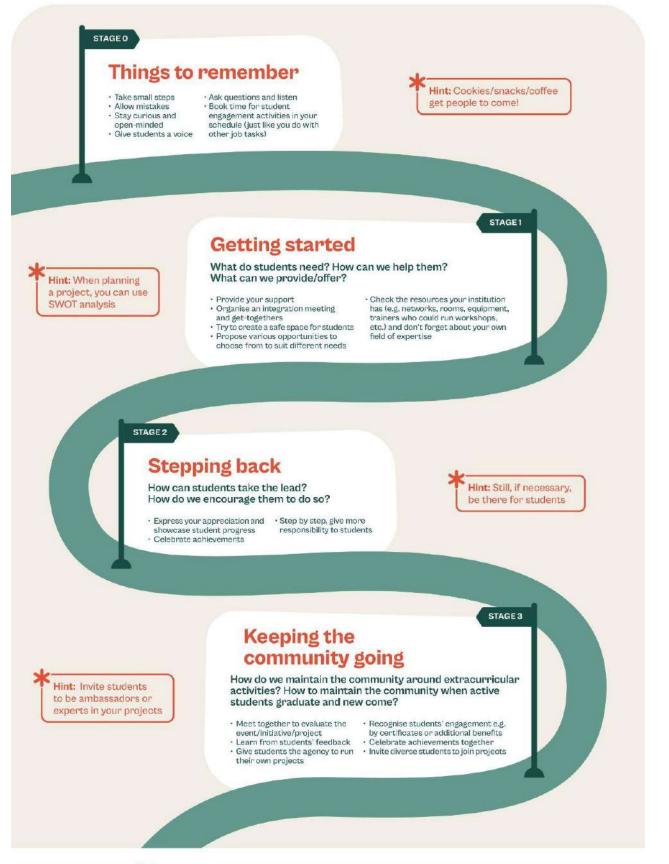


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Building community around extracurricular activities Tips from and for the university staff



















Infographic 2: Boost your self-confidence and self-care to support student engagement better

The second infographic:

- Shares powerful tips on enhancing self-confidence and self-care to better support student engagement
- Is designed in the shape of a head, symbolising the internal and external aspects of self-confidence and self-care, and highlighting how both mental and social strategies contribute to improved student interaction
- Includes two exercises to quickly calm the mind and body and reduce frustration

Infographic 2 full size - <u>link</u>

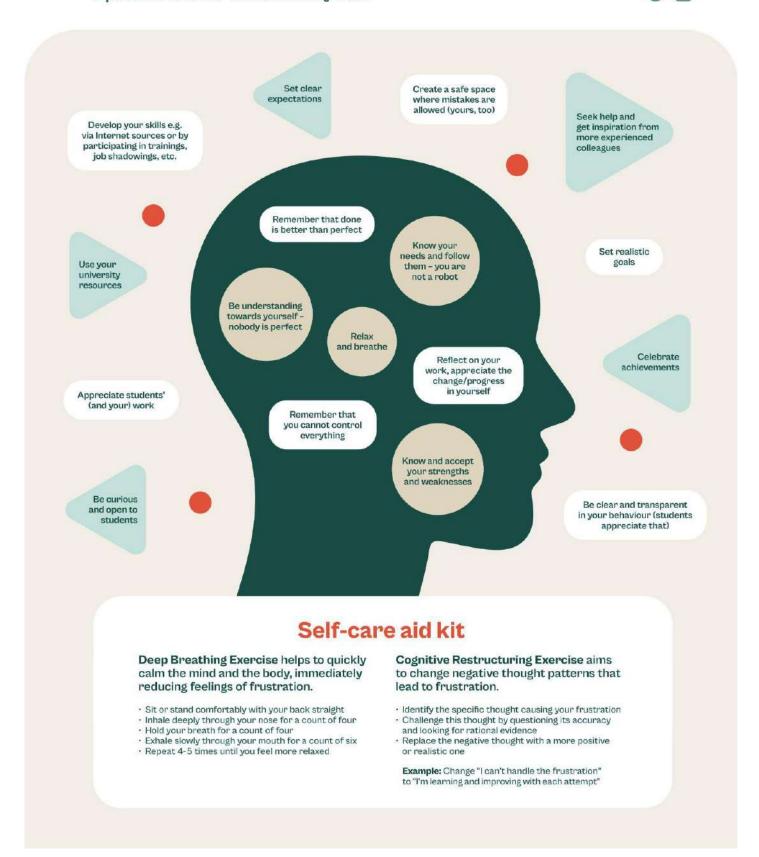




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Tips from and for the university staff















Infographic 3: Useful skills and competencies of university staff supporting student engagement

The third infographic:

- Highlights essential skills for university staff aiming to support student engagement effectively
- Depicts these skills as extensions of an octopus's arms, symbolizing their diverse and adaptable nature
- Each arm presents a different skill, along with a brief definition and practical ways to develop it

Infographic 3 full size - <u>link</u>

Useful skills and competencies of university staff supporting student engagement

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JOIN US!





Staying Calm

Maintaining composure under pressure and in stressful situations

Hints: Develop your own routines to manage challenging situations effectively. Practise mindfulness, meditation, or breathing exercises to manage stress

Patience

The ability to wait calmly and manage frustration

Hints: Engage in activities that require sustained effort over time and practise strategies for managing frustration constructively. Work on long-term projects and practise delayed cratification

Intrinsic Motivation

Being self-driven and motivated by internal goals and values

Hints: Identify and pursue activities that align with your personal values and set meaningful goals that inspire you. If you are not sure in which direction to go, don't be afraid to try out different possibilities.

Flexibility

Adaptability to changing situations and environments

Hints: Engage in diverse activities and step out of your comfort zone regularly. Embrace changes in university policies and student needs by continuously updating your skills and knowledge. Attend workshops and training sessions related to new educational technologies and teaching methodologies.

R

Empathy

Understanding and sharing the feelings of others

Hints: Volunteer, listen actively in conversations, and try to understand different perspectives. Enhance your support by recognising and validating students' feelings and experiences.

Resilience

Bouncing back from setbacks and maintaining a positive outlook

Hints: Focus on developing a growth mindset by viewing challenges as opportunities for learning. Don't hesitate to seek support when facing difficulties. Treat failures as valuable experience and learn from them.

Inclusiveness and Intercultural Skills

The ability to communicate and interact with people of different backgrounds, cultures and identities

Hints: Be open, listen actively, learn and be aware of general concerns regarding student life and transitions between various life stages (e.g. high school – university, university – work/career). Try to get to know the student community and different groups within it: working students, parenting students, international students, etc.

Organisational Skills

The ability to plan, prioritise and structure work, divide tasks, set deadlines

Hint: Implement project management tools and strategies to efficiently plan, prioritise, and organise tasks, ensuring that all deadlines are met.













Quotes

- (...) I really felt like we were enriching each others' work
- (...) it was a great focal point of the week

It was a great experience(...) to have a safe space to share ideas and concerns

I also really enjoyed the session (...) about our mental health at work

(...) I didn't think it would be possible to create such a **good atmosphere**, a sense of safety and still get the job done in such a short time.

The workshops were good, a bit too early to start my day with a workshop. I personally found that it was difficult to speak out because some colleagues took most of the time speaking and not listening.

amazing leadership, felt safe, got support, will miss those meetings

(...) I reflected on my own practice in a new way

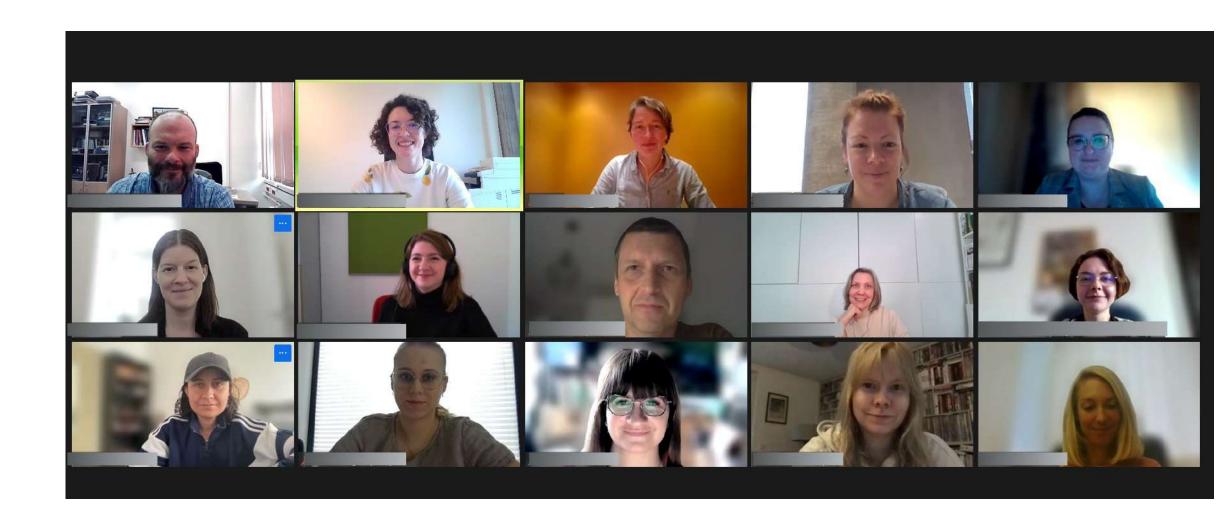
That's not the end

PCG is still ongoing!

- Online meetings every second Tuesday of the month
- Rotating facilitators, external experts
- Structured and unstructured sessions

We meet to:

- Discuss current achievements and challenges related to enhancing student engagement
- Reflect on our work
- Learn from each other
- Boost our motivation
- Create a sense of belonging
- Start the day on a positive note
- Practise public speaking



Enhancing engagement – multi-vector learning



Other examples from the UNICOMM Project

Masterclass Workshops on Community Building

- workshops: team building, NVC, selfcare and digital hygiene
- student experts experienced in student union representation, activism, volunteering, and running their own NGO, who were invited to talk about their experience balancing active engagement with student life
- working together on solutions for creating open and friendly "spaces" for engagement and participation in HEI

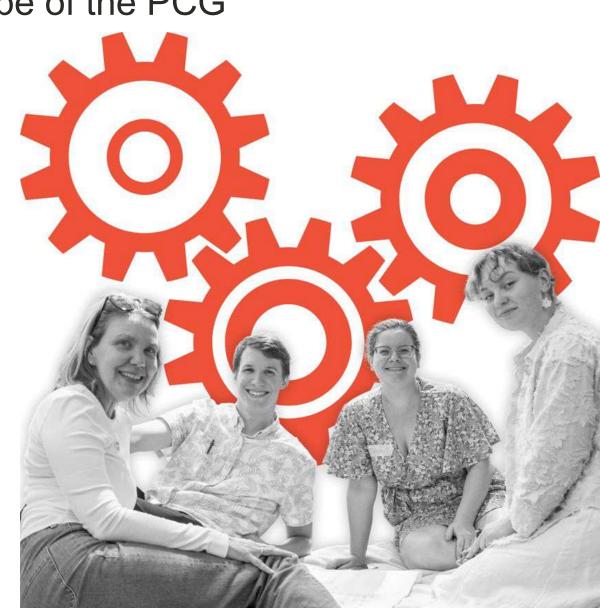
Summer Academy on Student Participation

- for 5 days staff and students from the consortium member institutions worked side by side
- module led by ESU student representatives was one of the highest-rated ones
- a welcoming atmosphere that made each participant feel they had an impact on the outcomes of the workshops
- it is important to treat students as partners in our initiatives, not just passive 'recipients'

Technical know-how



- Topic
- The 'why' question → goals
- Mode: online vs offline
- Date, time, duration and frequency
- Status: open to new members, occasional open calls, or permanent members only
- Format: ready-to-go structure vs organisational meeting to discuss the shape of the PCG
- Meetings: structured vs unstructured vs mixed
- Facilitator: one, rotating, or guest facilitators
- Ground rules for cooperation
- Tools: shared drive/documents, forms
- Other considerations:
 - sending reminders
 - generating links / booking a room
 - taking notes from meetings
 - sharing news & inspirations



PCG contract



- Confidentiality: All discussions within the group should remain confidential unless explicit permission is given to share information outside the group.
- **Respect:** Each member should respect the opinions and ideas of others, even if they disagree. Everyone's perspective is valuable.
- Active Participation: Each member should actively participate in discussions and activities. This
 includes being prepared for each meeting and completing any agreed-upon actions.
- Constructive Feedback: Feedback should be constructive, specific, and kind. It should be aimed at helping the individual improve, not criticize them.
- Commitment: Members should commit to attending all sessions and participating fully. If a
 member cannot attend a session, they should notify the group in advance.
- Open-mindedness: Members should be open to new ideas and willing to take on board feedback and suggestions from others.
- **Equality**: All members are equal, regardless of their background or experience. Everyone's voice should be heard.
- Goal-Oriented: The group should have clear, shared goals that everyone is working towards.

Reflections & thoughts



- Safe and welcoming community
- Shared common ground
- Horizontally organised network
- Non-directive approach
- Voluntary participation
- Diversity and inclusion
- Co-creation and shared responsibility
- Safety and trust built over time
- Questioning the status quo nothing is taken for granted
- Give it a go!

<u>UNICOMM HintBook: Building Stronger Communities in Higher Education. Tools and Ideas for Navigating Student Engagement in a Changing World</u> (Hint 6 and Hint 8)



THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

- → WOLONTARIAT.UW.EDU.PL/UNICOMM
- → INSTAGRAM: @UNICOMMPROJECT
- → WOLONTARIAT@UW.EDU.PL











