

SEDA Spring Conference 2024



Session Title: The contribution of Educational Developers to academic citizenship in higher education

Session Type: Research paper (20 mins plus questions)

Main presenter(s): Dr David Walker, University of Brighton

Co presenter(s): Professor Susan Smith, University College London

Session Summary: Academic citizenship is regarded as a foundational value of academia. In the face of new public management techniques, and the increasing disaggregation of the academic role, the literature has lamented a retreat from academic citizenship. This has significant consequences for the academic ecosystem both within institutions and beyond. Interviews with 17 educational developers offered insights into how they support the service dimension of academic citizenship in their roles and engage in academic citizenship activities.

Session Outline: The study reported in this research paper, funded by a SEDA small grant, sought to answer the following research questions:

- How do educational developers support the service dimension of academic citizenship in their institutions?
- How do educational developers engage in institutional and sector related service activities?

Academic citizenship is regarded as central to the very notion of what it is to be a university (Kenny & Fluck, 2019; Macfarlane, 2007) and best understood as service to the community and academic disciplines based on shared obligations. The service dimension of academic citizenship may encompass a range of internal and external activities, including contribution to committees, public engagement activities, mentoring, and taking responsibility for administrative or managerial roles (Macfarlane, 2007).

Whilst there is a growing body of work considering academic citizenship (Beatson et al., 2022; Carli & Tagliaventi, 2022), and the activities associated with it are increasingly being formalised in promotion criteria for academic roles, the specific contributions made by educational developers to citizenship and the challenges they face in this area, including issues of equity of opportunity, have not yet been investigated.

Educational Developers, as academics or professional service members, play a pivotal role in supporting academic staff to fulfil their citizenship responsibilities and through their own direct contribution to the community through service roles in their respective institutions and the sector.

Enhancing our understanding of the role of developers in supporting and engaging in academic citizenship facilitates the identification of effective strategies and resources to support them. This presentation shares findings from the study, and offers insights into how developers engage with citizenship in two key dimensions, the formal and the informal. Whilst formal citizenship activity is critical for the functioning of the institution, informal citizenship is often critical to personal advancement, a key measure for promotion to the most senior levels.

References: Beatson, N. J., Tharapos, M., O’Connell, B. T., de Lange, P., Carr, S., & Copeland, S. (2022). The gradual retreat from academic citizenship. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 76(4), 715–725. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12341>

Carli, G., & Tagliaventi, M. R. (2022). Can you do all in one professional label? Complementarity, substitution, and independence effects in academic life. *Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00868-y>

Kenny, J., & Fluck, A. (2019). Academic Administration and Service Workloads in Australian Universities. *Australian Universities’ Review*, 61(2), 21–30.

Macfarlane, B. (2007). Defining and Rewarding Academic Citizenship: The implications for university promotions policy. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 29(3), 261–273. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600800701457863>