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Twenty Years of Growing and Sustaining a University Student Reading Council

Bethanie C. Pletcher, Robin D. Johnson, and Kelli Bippert

Abstract

Few universities have a large, successful student organization devoted to growing future teachers by way of leadership, teaching, and volunteer opportunities. One such organization exists at a mid-sized regional university in South Texas, the Student Reading Council (SRC). The SRC is a student-governed organization that develops its members professionally through the use of frequent meetings with guest speakers. Members and officers, usually preservice teachers, learn leadership skills and have opportunities to network with local schools and community organizations. This paper describes the mission and history of the organization, as well as future steps in growing membership, improving meetings, and fulfilling service to the community. The current faculty advisors hope to share information to encourage and aid others seeking to start such an organization.

Keywords: *student reading councils, preservice teacher leadership, reading, community service*

“It’s a really good feeling to know that you accomplished a year of providing the members with different speakers, different opportunities to work events, to be a part of the community...” Current Student Reading Council officer

The quotation above embodies the mission of the Student Reading Council (SRC), a student-led organization on the campus of Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. This organization, having ties to the state literacy organization, the Texas Association of Literacy Educators, was created by former students and reading faculty members to “promote literacy in the community and serve as a network group between current and future educators” (SRC mission statement). SRC members accomplish this goal each year through several avenues: member meetings, tutorial programs in the local schools, community events, and fundraisers. These activities allow its members to begin their career paths as teachers early in their undergraduate years and practice teacher behaviors, such as communicating effectively with others, working with a team, and building a repertoire of literacy teaching strategies (Pucella, 2014). Members also have opportunities to lead within the organization, which Bond (2011) recommends as crucial to developing future teacher leaders.

What is the Student Reading Council?

Our search of active councils, similar to ours, revealed evidence of two others. Both exist at large institutions of 29,000 and 39,000 students. We found student education organizations in our state; however, these are organizations that focused on bilingual and early childhood education. We

are delighted that our institution, where student enrollment is around 12,000, has been able to sustain and grow membership in our unique student council.

Mission

The mission of the Student Reading Council at our university as stated is to “promote literacy in our community and serve as a network group between current and future educators.” We asked those involved with SRC to talk about the mission as they see it. Their responses fell into two categories that align with the written mission: community involvement and teacher development. The current and past officers discussed the mission as being primarily to “spread” and “promote” literacy in the surrounding community. They believe it is important that the community sees the organization and the college of education as resources from which they can draw. They want to build families’ appreciation of literacy and reach out to those who cannot afford books for their children by holding book drives and events that have literacy at their core. Faculty advisors, on the other hand, focused on the professional development and networking opportunities that involvement with the council provides. Getting preservice teachers familiar with the profession of teaching and daily school life was mentioned, as was the learning of strategies for literacy instruction through monthly meetings and tutoring opportunities. One former faculty advisor said her goal was for them to “feel more a part of the profession” and act as a “member of the teaching culture.” Another mentioned that the student reading council is what its members make of it, and that some students see it as a “hoop to jump through” or a “box to check.” However, those who become very involved in it will reap the benefits.

Membership

The council rewards active membership in order to grow and sustain its numbers. Each year, members who are graduating and have been active in the organization by attending meetings and engaging in volunteer opportunities are given a TAMUCC Student Reading Council graduation cord to wear at the commencement ceremony. There are also active member awards given to those who complete a predetermined number of volunteer hours. Active members are honored at an annual organization luncheon and bestowed with gifts, such as SRC t-shirts, books, and paid registration to the state literacy conference. One of the original faculty advisors donates money to the organization for a textbook scholarship to be awarded annually to a member who writes an essay that lists their actions to promote the mission of the organization.

An Organization Governed by Students

The Student Reading Council truly is a student-run organization at our university. Each year, in February, there is a call for those members who are interested in serving a one-year term as an officer. Members may nominate themselves or others. The offices are President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary, Hospitality, and Historian (a new role added for the 2017-2018 academic year). The election is held during the March meeting and nominees deliver a brief speech informing why they would make an effective officer and what they have previously done to serve the organization. While most offices have traditionally been filled by undergraduate students, the office of Treasurer is held by a doctoral teaching assistant. This has been a decision of the faculty advisors and officers who feel that this position is best held by someone who is on campus regularly and has experience handling money. One officer said that she appreciated the consistent “transparency of the treasurer and that the SRC monies were always handled professionally.” The officers hold a monthly officer meeting, even during months when member meetings are not held. During these meetings, the officers plan member meetings, fundraisers, and community events; and discuss issues such as ways to involve members, ways to grow membership, and how they might be more involved in the surrounding schools and community. The faculty advisors are present during these meetings to support the officers, as the officers determine the meeting agenda and run the meetings. During interviews, both current and past faculty advisors spoke to the good fortune of recruiting exemplary students for officer positions and how important this is to the smooth and efficient operation of the organization. When asked about working with other students as officers in a student organization, one current officer said, “You’re not on your own when you’re an officer. Everyone just helps each other. It’s very collaborative. You can talk to them about your classes and whatever is bothering you.” The officers work together, and even though there is the typical hierarchy from President to Secretary, it is inspiring to watch them synergize, to the point where an outsider would not be able to pick out who serves in which role. The current SRC president told us her fellow officers make it “easy for [her] to be in charge of the organization.” This is the kind of teamwork that we as faculty advisors want to see, for this teamwork is evident to the members and carries over into the organization’s work.

Role of Faculty Advisors

Serving in the role of faculty advisor for any student organization is a balancing act. Advisors need to be available to provide guidance and suggestions while also allowing the student officers and members to lead the organization. A current faculty advisor feels that “it’s so important to not just be a ‘figurehead’ as I have seen with other organizations, but to be truly involved with these students and provide leadership to the extent that it is needed.” As mentioned above, at least one faculty advisor attends each officer meeting. It is also crucial that all faculty advisors attend the six Student Reading Council meetings each year, as “the students need to see us there and want to build relationships with us outside of class”

(current faculty advisor interview). A former advisor said, “I always sat in the back row because I wanted members to take responsibility...for the organization.” Advisors also attend the meetings so that students will perceive them as more of “a real person” and “more approachable” (current faculty advisor interview). Several students told us stories about showing up for their first meeting, not knowing anyone, and how seeing one of their professors was “comforting.” The student officers and members shared that they want to see the faculty advisors and other reading course instructors at meetings, and one student said, “It’s nice to see that the professors take the time to attend these meetings. It shows that they’re interested in learning.” The faculty advisors enjoy this aspect of service to the university because “it is worth it – personally and professionally, and we learn from others and work with others on literacy activities and events” (current faculty advisor interview).

Social Media

The officers of the Student Reading Council stay in touch with members through a variety of social media outlets. The organization has a link on the university website that houses a flyer with meeting dates. All university organizations are also required to register their members through a program called OrgSync. Here, the officers can keep track of members, access member information, and send emails about upcoming events. The secretary and hospitality officer are responsible for updating the council’s Facebook and Twitter accounts by posting event dates as well as photos from past meetings, fundraisers, and volunteer events. These digital avenues of communication keep the momentum and excitement going between monthly member meetings.

Gathering Information about the Student Reading Council

In order to gather information about our university’s student reading council, the three current faculty advisors conducted individual and group interviews with thirteen people who are or have been involved in the organization (see Table 1). Two former advisors, one who has been on the reading faculty for 20 years and the other who has been on the reading faculty for 15 years and was a former student member, were interviewed regarding the history of the student reading council. Five current officers were interviewed in two groups, and one former officer interview was conducted individually. Also, one group of three current undergraduate student members was interviewed. The three current faculty advisors, two reading faculty and one teacher education faculty, responded to the questions in writing. All interviews lasted about 20 minutes, were audio-recorded, and all were completed face-to-face, with the exception of one interview with a former officer that was conducted by phone. Participants were chosen based on availability and desire to contribute to this project. All are confidential except for the three current faculty advisors who are also the authors of this article. All of the participants completed informed consent forms as well. The current faculty advisors transcribed all interviews, printed out the transcriptions, and

grouped information based on the questions asked during the interviews (see Appendix A).

Table 1 Participants

Role in the Student Reading Council	No. of years involved
Reading faculty member	20
Reading faculty member/former advisor/ former student member	20
Reading faculty member/current advisor	3
Reading faculty member/current advisor	2
Teacher education faculty member/current advisor	1
Current president	3
Current vice president	2
Current treasurer	3
Current secretary	2
Current hospitality representative	2
Former president	3
Current undergraduate student member	2
Current undergraduate student member	2
Current undergraduate student member	2

History of the Student Reading Council

The Student Reading Council (SRC) has its roots in the 1980s. According to one former faculty sponsor, the SRC was on the books as early as 1993, although it had been lying dormant during the 1980s, and existed in name only. During the early 1990s, the council did not actively hold member meetings. By 1996, under the direction of two reading faculty members, the membership began to increase, and at its peak had as many as 160 student members. These students participated in reading conferences that took place at the university. According to one local public school superintendent, these SRC member-participants were considered preferred teacher candidates due to their experience with public speaking and had “presentation experience and were the ones that she preferred.”

In the following years, as the direction of the SRC shifted in response to the Texas Education Administration (TEA), the SRC centered efforts on mentoring, and the SRC enrollment decreased to around 20 active student members. For the following eight years, the organization barely survived.

Through the early 1990s, new faculty sponsors breathed life into the organization, bringing the membership back up to almost 70 student members. Once again the focus of the SRC changed to that of teacher preparation and development, and provided students opportunities to participate in activities such as mock interviews. The sponsors at this time made the following clear to undergraduate participants, “If you’re going to be successful, here are the things that [the SRC is] doing” (sponsor interview). The focus on teacher preparation encouraged elementary education students to participate in the SRC and aided them in finding success in the teaching profession.

During the mid- to late-90s, the SRC was one of the

few student organizations on the university campus, with meetings at standing-room-only capacity. At this time, the SRC was allowed more freedom in how it operated due to the absence of university organizational oversight. During this period, SRC meetings went from a make-and-take model to a focus on providing professional development, networking opportunities, and practical classroom teaching advice.

Beginning in 2006, the increase in university student organizations led to more competition for student time and commitment. This led to a decrease in student participation, which became a concern for faculty advisors. However, a renewed focus on providing students with practical teaching advice and professional development opportunities, as well as a commitment to keeping meetings to one hour in respect of the students’ time, helped to improve student membership.

For the past thirty years, the SRC has continued to offer teacher education students opportunities to learn practical teaching skills, and provide important services to the local community through its volunteer activities.

Meetings

There are three Student Reading Council meetings per long semester, and all meetings occur at noon on Saturdays due to students’ busy weekday schedules. The regular meetings are held in September, October, November, February, and March, with a luncheon meeting held each April. Attendance at meetings has hovered at around 30-40 for the past three years. Each regular meeting follows a structured format and lasts no longer than one hour. Attendees often comment that this is helpful, as many of our students work and some have children. Members who were interviewed shared that they appreciate the structure and timeliness of the meetings, as they are busy students. They “know what to expect” and “exactly how the organization is run.” The president leads each meeting by opening with minutes from the past meeting, as well as the treasurer’s report, and asks for member approval on these items. New business is then discussed, such as upcoming fundraisers, community events, tutorial opportunities, and other important agenda items that need to be shared with members. A guest speaker shares information with the group for 15 to 20 minutes. The president then closes the meeting.

The officers, with the help of the faculty advisors and other reading faculty, select a guest speaker for each meeting. During the past three years, there has been a wide range of speakers who have provided their perspectives on reading education (see Table 1). The advisors, students, and members agree that it is important to invite people from our local community who are knowledgeable in their area and who are enthusiastic and engaging speakers. When interviewed, several members indicated that the speakers are the main reason they attend meetings and they appreciate the variety of speakers and topics presented. The speakers volunteer their time to do this; however, the officers give the speakers a small gift card and a handwritten thank-you note for their contribution to the organization.

Those members and officers with whom we spoke described the meetings as “fun,” “organized,” and “professional.” To

increase membership and meeting attendance, most reading course professors offer extra credit for involvement with the Student Reading Council, and there are drawings for children's books during meetings as well. One student told us that, after their initial attendance, people "keep coming because [they] want to."

Table 2 Guest Speakers

Speaker	Topic
Middle school English teacher	Reading notebooks
Elementary school principal and literacy leader	Reading instruction
Community college reading instructor	Vocabulary strategies
Secondary ELAR district coordinator	Disciplinary literacy
High school principal and literacy leader	Reading instruction
Preschool coordinator and teacher	Shared Reading instruction
University reading center support personnel	Dyslexia
School librarian	Establishing libraries overseas
Elementary teacher	Teaching abroad
Associate professor of science education	Best practices in teaching

Benefits of Student Reading Council Membership

Learning about Teaching

A foremost goal of the Student Reading Council is to professionally develop preservice and in-service teachers, because, to quote one faculty advisor, "We can't very well teach them everything there is to know about classroom instruction in our courses, and the SRC is one more way to develop their toolkits." This is accomplished through three venues: guest speakers at the monthly meetings, service learning, and conference attendance.

Guest speakers. A literacy professional is invited to speak at each council meeting. Our guest speakers play a significant role in the learning of the student members. When asked about the speakers (see Table 2), the advisors, officers, and members indicated they appreciate the information presented and have learned about instructional strategies and resources for teaching. Members who are completing their field-based courses and student teaching leave each meeting with ideas they can use immediately in their classrooms. These brief professional development sessions also excite preservice teachers about their future careers. Hearing from practicing teachers and administrators is invaluable as members are exposed to "teacher talk" (officer interview). One officer commented, "I felt more at-ease and confident going into the classroom [after hearing from guest speakers]."

Service learning. Undergraduate SRC members learn about opportunities to work in the community by attending meetings, since faculty members share information about tutorial programs in local schools. These programs provide early exposure to local schools and to the realities of teaching. The students gain confidence in pedagogical methods and have the chance to talk about literacy teaching and learning

outside of the four walls of the classroom. These experiences help them "connect the dots" (member interview) of their university learning and their work with children and "make the university coursework come alive in its practical application with real students" (Griffin & Zhang, 2013, p. 266). Students who have volunteered their time in these after-school tutoring programs or worked in the America Reads program in the elementary school located on the university campus shared with us the advantages of such work. First, it has confirmed their career choice, which is consistent with research conducted in this area (Griffin & Zhang, 2013). Many students express anxiety about being in schools as teachers for the first time; however, with the experiences afforded them through the Student Reading Council's connections, they are more optimistic about going into their field-based courses. One member indicated that the tutoring experience "helped [her] transition being around kids." Several studies (Barnes, 2016; Jones, Stallings, and Malone, 2004; Lane, Hudson, McCray, Tragash, and Zeig, 2011) found that, during these tutoring experiences, preservice teachers began to develop an identity for themselves as teachers. Second, they learn about planning and implementing lessons. One member said she learned how to teach guided reading lessons, which helped her later when she had to teach similar lessons during her field-based course. A former Student Reading Council, now an in-service teacher, said she took many of her experiences as a tutor into her own classroom. Thus, these experiences help to extend preservice teachers' understanding of instructional strategies (Swick & Rowls, 2000).

Conference attendance. Each year for the past three years, all student officers, as well as three members voted as "most active" in the organization, receive funding from the Student Reading Council to attend the state organization's reading conference. They enjoy the learning experiences there, as well as opportunities to engage teaching professionals in conversations about reading instruction. These early conference experiences help them understand the importance of future conference attendance to stay current in their field. The attendees also give back to the Student Reading Council by serving as guest speakers and sharing what they learned at the meeting that is held the month after the conference.

Networking

Networking is defined in the Merriam Webster dictionary as "the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions; specifically: the cultivation of productive relationships for employment or business" (Networking, 2017). Being a member of SRC and attending meetings is a way to connect with university administrators and professors both in the field of literacy and in other content areas. It is also a place to build relationships with public and private school principals and teachers in the community. This opportunity to network as a way to enhance future job attainment opportunities is one of the benefits of membership in the Student Reading Council.

Advisors. Advisors interviewed spoke of networking benefits both from the perspective of how it benefits them as an advisor and member of the university faculty, and how it

benefits the students who are members. The idea of getting to know others involved in SRC was discussed. One advisor shared a benefit for her saying, "...it has helped me develop a stronger bond with our department and with the students. As they get to know me, and I them, we can build a better relationship in and out of the classroom."

Advisors also saw SRC as a way for students to get to know peers in other capacities and build relationships beyond the college classroom. These relationships might lead to future partnerships, job opportunities, and knowledge of surrounding districts. As students participate in projects and opportunities provided by SRC, they bond and create friendships built on common interests that may last beyond the college years. Another networking benefit advisors mentioned was the fact that students "really get to know the professors on a personal basis, as well as professional basis." A current advisor summed up networking benefits by saying, "I think students start to realize the value of networking. I push the social aspects of the organization, since this is the best opportunity that they'll have to talk and ask questions and learn about their future career in a more casual, informal way."

Officers and members. Officers interviewed echoed many of the same themes advisors mentioned. They felt that networking with professors and other students was a top reason to be a part of SRC. They discussed building relationships and making future connections within the community and schools. One officer said, in relation to getting to know other students, "Since you most likely have a class or two together at some point in time, it's only gonna help you get to know other education majors if you can come here and talk to each other." In relation to connections made with professors, one current officer noted, "It's made me feel more comfortable talking with my professors and asking them questions." An overall benefit shared by a former officer was the fact that being a member of SRC allowed her to network with other teachers and professionals in the reading/literacy field. She said, "You get to meet a lot of people, a lot of speakers, a lot of professional teachers and administrators out there, and learn what they've done for the community, instead of just sitting in a classroom."

Connecting with others was the benefit most members spoke about during their interviews. One member said, "SRC is a chance to make new friends. You see people/faces from classes that you have; maybe you don't really talk to them...but when you see them and they're the only person you know in the room you go and sit next to them, and then you start volunteering together. You make connections that you [normally] wouldn't." Another member discussed the value of being noticed by their professors, therefore creating a connection that can last throughout their years at the university.

Leadership

Leadership in the Student Reading Council was found to benefit undergraduate students in their endeavors as future teachers in a number of ways. Forster (1997) defines teacher leadership as the effort to support and enhance practices within the school and among colleagues. Teacher leaders work toward improving their profession to benefit students

and teachers within their schools. The different roles that teachers adopt as leaders can be through an ownership role, such as by organizing events; participant role, which can be demonstrated through volunteer efforts; and witness role, through sharing new information with fellow teachers (Rogers & Scales, 2014). Teacher leaders take on a number of additional duties within their schools in an effort to improve the learning environment (Bond, 2011). Providing avenues for supporting and shaping teacher leadership, such as through organizations like the SRC, is one of the many responsibilities that teacher preparation programs should undertake (Forster, 1997).

Advisors. The Student Reading Council advisors described benefits related to student participation in the SRC. According to Pucella (2014), it is important that teacher preparation programs support preservice teachers' leadership skills while students are still forming their own personal philosophies of education and teaching. One benefit that the SRC advisors found was the chance to become involved in other professional organizations. One example of this was the encouragement for students to attend and participate in local and regional literacy conferences, where students often present their own research. These opportunities were seen as a way to help teacher education students build their leadership skills to prepare them as classroom teachers and future campus leaders. The SRC officers also described benefits of participating in meetings and volunteer opportunities. Student leadership skills, which can translate to teacher engagement within the school and community, can be supported by increasing the scope of what teacher preparation programs see as preservice teacher development (Bond, 2011). Students' identities as future teacher-leaders can be developed "through an expansion of knowledge of themselves as leaders, others in the school community, and teaching through sharing strategies" (Bond, p. 7).

Officers. One benefit described by the officers was the improvement of their professional and leadership skills. Pucella (2014) contends that preservice teachers need to be provided opportunities to take on leadership roles as undergraduate students: they are "not too young to lead" (p. 20). Once in the schools, these new teachers need experiences that will promote their engagement within school leadership roles. The SRC officers shared that they had learned to become more assertive leaders through experiences such as contacting SRC meeting presenters, creating meeting agendas, delegating tasks, and taking charge during monthly meetings.

The SRC officers also stated that they had developed into more responsible students and leaders. The need to balance due dates for events related to the SRC and the experience in seek approval through proper bureaucratic channels were possible through the leadership roles taken on by the officers. Officers became more responsible through the planning of special events, such as the annual luncheon. Additionally, they acknowledged that as officers, they were setting an example as the representatives of the SRC, and they felt that ultimately, the image that they portrayed reflected on the entire SRC.

Other benefits of serving as an officer included an improved position for their future teaching career through

opportunities to network with students, professors, and professionals. They were also able to use their officer role as evidence of leadership on their professional résumés. The benefits described by the SRC officers not only allowed them to improve leadership and professionalism, but had a potentially direct impact on their hiring outlook.

Few experienced classroom teachers reported to have received guidance in leadership while enrolled as teacher education students (Pucella, 2014), and these opportunities continue to be lacking in some teacher education programs. The SRC is one such way these programs can provide guidance and leadership support for preservice teachers (Forster, 1997).

Volunteer Opportunities and Community Events

The Student Reading Council is invited to many community events throughout the year to support literacy. McDonald, Tyson, Bryko, Bowman, Delpont, & Shimomura (2011) state that exposure to new geographic or cultural settings offer opportunities to engage with others who are different from themselves. By volunteering for literacy nights at schools throughout the city and family events held in community centers, SRC members and advisors meet children and families who introduce them to their world of experiences beyond the university. Advisors, officers, and members shared events that they had attended such as family literacy nights, parent reading nights, and book fairs. One goal of SRC volunteers is to hand out books and plan literacy activities for school events like Family Math Night or Spooky Science Night that are focused on content areas other than reading. Schools also provide volunteer opportunities for SRC members at Book Fairs and during after school programs. One advisor mentioned the fact that “we have built partnerships with schools by sending students out to tutor.” A longtime SRC member said that her favorite things to do at the book fair were “to help children pick out books, play games with them, and read them stories.” One member even dressed up as Clifford the Big Red Dog during a school book fair.

Members also see the importance of these literacy events for networking and becoming a stronger teacher. One officer noted that she liked “to work in different events in the community and build a résumé for becoming a teacher.” This sentiment was echoed by an advisor who said, “Networking with community members and helping build partnerships with SRC is also important. I love wearing my SRC t-shirts and sharing what the students do with anyone who asks!”

Collecting books to share with community organizations and school partners has been a large part of SRC through annual book drives. Every spring, the SRC sets out boxes around campus for book donations and lets students know what organization will benefit from the books collected. One of the most successful book drives benefitted Child Protective Service (CPS) offices across South Texas. Through this donation, over 300 children receiving services from CPS received a brand new book as a gift for the holidays. The other gently used books collected were given to CPS offices to create libraries in their visitation rooms. The goal for this initiative was to encourage parents to spend visitation time

reading with their children and to provide caseworkers with a readily available educational tool to enrich the children’s time while in the office. Another book drive held on campus during the Texas Association for Literacy Education (TALE) conference collected over 150 books and \$90 in donations to be delivered to a women’s shelter and children’s shelter in South Texas. SRC members sat at volunteer tables throughout the conference to sign people in, direct people to their rooms, and talk to them about the book drive. In order to have more books available to share during literacy events in the community, the President of SRC submits an annual request for book donations from a local grocery store chain that results in boxes of books being delivered and put to use. Once received, SRC members are able to hand out these books at community events. One officer said, “I like to see the look on the kids’ faces when they get a new book.”

Giving back to the community was a reason that advisors, officers, and members offered for taking the time to volunteer for SRC. One advisor stated that these events provided “opportunities to go into the community and to do something and give back.” An officer shared, “It was an intrinsically rewarding experience [to hand out books] and promote literacy and represent ourselves as an organization. It was nice to volunteer and give back to the community.” The SRC also held a volunteer day for creating manipulatives and resources for an afterschool literacy library that will be used for tutoring at a local community center. The director of the center has said that those activities have been a valuable resource for tutors to use when reading with students, helping them with their homework, and getting them excited about literacy.

McDonald et al. (2011) maintain that

“partnerships with community organizations may move teacher education efforts closer to the overall goal of preparing teachers with contextualized knowledge of children than allows them to incorporate the complexity of children’s lives into the classroom in ways that ultimately improve children’s opportunities to learn” (p. 1696).

Taking part in these volunteer opportunities and community events help the future teachers in SRC learn more about their strengths as a teacher and learn more about the children and families with whom they may one day work. They also help them integrate into the communities where they will serve and become aware of the many cultures that create the fabric of the city.

Future of the Student Reading Council

There are three areas that were mentioned most when discussing the next steps for the Student Reading Council: membership growth and retention, organization of meetings, and volunteer opportunities. The health of the organization is dependent on listening to former and present advisors, officers, and members and being willing to look at both the positive aspects of SRC and what might be improved.

Membership Growth and Retention

Many of the advisors interviewed spoke of the need to continue to grow membership and get the members more involved with one specifically saying,

"I definitely think we need to keep growing our membership and advertising our events.

We need to cross departments and talk to/encourage the professors in Teacher Education and even content area departments/colleges to share dates/events with their students. This connects with the philosophy we have that every teacher is a reading teacher!"

Another advisor suggested that advertising more across departments and colleges might "encourage more students to consider running for office." Two advisors shared the idea of growing membership by seeing more of a graduate presence. This might be achieved by visiting graduate classes in multiple departments and colleges to share the purpose and role of the SRC on campus and in the community, and encourage professors to discuss the benefits of membership with their graduate students.

Officers and members of SRC communicated the idea of inviting people outside of the university to join. One option mentioned was to encourage community members to attend a meeting and speak with them about the importance of literacy education in the community and the need to support future teachers. One member's idea of outside membership consisted of reaching out to high schools in the area. She said, "I think it would be a good idea if we had younger people in the club too, so that they can get an idea as to what it's like." She even discussed the idea of university students who are members partnering with the high school students to mentor them and talk to them about university life and a career in teaching.

For recruitment within the university population of students, members suggested a mixer and more of a presence at new student orientations, including a focus on freshmen or first year students who are in their first semesters and may be unsure of their career direction. One member noted, "If we did a little more outreach into the university to let people know who we are and what we're doing, more students might check us out."

Organization of Meetings

A theme that emerged from the participant interviews concerned the possible restructuring of meetings. The most important aspect of meetings mentioned by officers was to keep them interactive. One way to involve meeting attendees, according to all participants, is to focus on the speakers. One advisor suggested changing the process for securing speakers in order to vet them more carefully. She said to "make it more of a competitive process," and then to "be clear about the expectations and nature of our organization and what our members need to hear." A former advisor wanted to remind SRC officers to always "amp up the speakers and choose ones who have a lot of energy and will be listening to the students' needs." Another advisor spoke about putting speakers first on the agenda, then old business, and ending the meeting with new business, in order to maintain the

momentum of the meeting.

Volunteer Opportunities

Although many volunteer opportunities are offered each semester, advisors wanted to see even more shared throughout the year. One advisor suggested partnering with a local literacy council on a regular basis to tackle illiteracy problems across all age groups in the city. Another suggestion was to adopt a retirement home and have members read to residents on a rotating schedule.

The need for more members to participate was shared. One officer said, "The members really should be more involved and more willing to volunteer. It's helpful to have the members come early to meetings and events and want to help out." These statements were echoed as other officers said they thought it was "nice to see the SRC members out in the community." To address these comments, in the future, officers and advisors will need to make sure that volunteer opportunities are available at times when members would be able to help; officers and advisors will also need to make sure that they share the events far enough in advance so that plans can be made and schedules can be adjusted. Incentives beyond the graduation cords may need to be offered for volunteer hours. A survey could be shared at the first meeting to allow input from members regarding what type of volunteer activities they would like to see offered.

The types of volunteer activities that officers and members would like to see continue are participation in a state literacy association annual conference and the tutoring opportunities offered in school districts served by the university. One member said, "I want to do more read-alouds and connect with more elementary campuses." Another said, "I would like to see SRC go to hospitals and read to children who are in hospitals for long periods of time." The Student Reading Council has a long history of being involved in the community and these suggestions for more partnerships are strong possibilities for the future.

Conclusion

The Student Reading Council has, for many years, provided preservice teachers with a place to "find their voices" as teachers (Pucella, 2014, p. 16). They lead the organization each year by providing members opportunities to teach, learn, network, and fundraise. The members give back to the surrounding community and, in doing so, gain experiences that they will use during their teaching careers and begin to solidify their choices to become teachers (Lane et al., 2011; Jones, Stallings, & Malone, 2004). As faculty advisors for the Student Reading Council, we continue to promote seamless facilitation between our courses, the organization, and authentic experiences in classrooms and our community.

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Appendix A

Implementing and Sustaining University Student Reading Councils Interview Protocol

- What was/is your role with the TAMUCC Student Reading Council?
- Describe your role with the SRC (undergraduate student member, graduate student member, former undergraduate student member, former graduate student member, current officer, former officer, faculty member).
- How many full semesters have you been an active member of the TAMUCC Student Reading Council?
- **For student members who are not or have not been SRC officers:**
 - Have you considered pursuing an officer role?
 - How many meetings per semester have you attended?
 - What would you like to share about the SRC meetings (format, speakers, other)?
 - What activities have you been involved in through the SRC (parent nights, tutoring, fundraisers, award recipient, speaker, etc.).
 - What are the benefits of taking part in the Student Reading Council?
 - What is the mission of the SRC as you see it?
 - What might you tell others who might be interested in joining the SRC?
 - What are the future directions you would like to see the SRC take?
- **For officers:**
 - In what officer role(s) have you served?
 - How many meetings per semester have you attended?
 - What have been your experiences as an SRC officer?
 - What would you like to share about the SRC meetings (format, speakers, other)?
 - What activities have you been involved in through the SRC (parent nights, tutoring, fundraisers, award recipient, speaker, etc.).
 - What are the benefits of taking part in the Student Reading Council?
 - What is the mission of the SRC as you see it?
 - What might you tell others who might be interested in joining the SRC?
 - What are the future directions you would like to see the SRC take?
- **For faculty advisors:**
 - How many meetings per semester have you attended?
 - What have been your experiences as an SRC faculty advisor?
 - What would you like to share about the SRC meetings (format, speakers, other)?
 - What activities have you been involved in through the SRC (parent nights, tutoring, fundraisers, award recipient, speaker, etc.).

- What are the benefits of faculty involvement in the SRC?
- What is the mission of the SRC as you see it?
- What are the benefits of student involvement in the SRC?
- What might you tell others who might be interested in joining the SRC?
- What are the future directions you would like to see the SRC take?
- **For founding faculty member:**
 - What is the mission of the SRC as you first envisioned it?
 - In what ways has it changed since its inception?
 - What are the future directions you would like to see the SRC take?

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