



## CHAPTER 14\*

# TWO-WAY STREET: Ambassadors Sharing the Road

Adriana Gonzalez, Sara K. Kearns, Darchelle Martin,  
and Jason B. Reed

## Creating a Student Ambassador Program

Ambassadors are more than student volunteers that choose to dedicate their time toward the libraries; we are active and engaged members of the student body that believe that the libraries are worthy of time and investment. The ambassadors not only acknowledge the library as a crucial part of our campus, but we devote our time and talents toward increasing its value for all students and faculty. (Ambassador Interview)

The Kansas State University Libraries Student Ambassador group formed in fall 2013. This chapter documents the first three years of our program, focusing on the program's development: our impetus, establishing the foundation in our first year, shifting leadership from advisors to student officers in our second year, and student ambassadors defining their goals and objectives in our third year. We offer practical

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guidance and the philosophy informing our decisions throughout the narrative.

Kansas State University (K-State) is a public, land-grant institution with an enrollment of more than 24,000 students (approximately 20,000 undergraduate and 4,000 graduate students). K-State Libraries are staffed by approximately 100 tenure-track librarians, professional staff, and support staff. In the summer of 2013, Adriana Gonzalez, head of faculty and graduate services, Sara K. Kearns, head of undergraduate and community services, and Darchelle Martin, public relations officer, began to plan an ambassador program. While our objectives varied, partially due to the missions of the departments we represented, we identified three common goals for a program: outreach, feedback, and advocacy.

We researched library student groups at other institutions, scouring the professional literature and the Internet in order to better understand existing practices. Our review of more than twenty student groups from other libraries, all of which were described as advisory councils or boards at that time, revealed that our vision to have students serve in advisor and ambassador roles was relatively unique. Several sources confirmed the value of library student advisory boards for improving library services and relationships with students<sup>1</sup>. Deuink and Seiler's article<sup>2</sup> and book<sup>3</sup> describing Penn State Schuylkill Campus's library student advisory board as a student "friends of the library" model offered insights into students serving as ambassadors to the campus community. Acting as more than sounding boards, we envisioned our ambassadors also serving as advocates for the libraries to external audiences, including other students, faculty and staff, donors, and potential donors. We wanted our student group to be fully engaged with the libraries, and as future alumni, our most invested constituents.

While we found minimal evidence of this model in other libraries, we discovered that many K-State academic colleges had a student ambassador group. Reaching out to these groups was extremely helpful. We wondered if our expectations of student involvement would only be possible as a paid position; speaking with other advisors reassured us that students value volunteer service, too. We encouraged student employees of K-State Libraries to apply, but decided not to develop a model with ambassadors as employees because we wanted students to feel empowered to speak critically without feeling they were risking their jobs. We also noted that none of the ambassador programs on our campus operated as internship models. While some of our ambassadors have expressed an interest in librarianship

as a profession (and one recent graduate is currently enrolled in library school), our ambassador program would not provide the pre-professional educational experience expected of an internship. We also learned that registering with K-State's Office of Student Activities and Services as an official student group offered many benefits, such as funding, training, the ability to create listservs and websites, and to participate in activities fairs.

We submitted a proposal to the libraries' leadership team, comprised of our administration and department heads. Because the student group would represent and advise the libraries, we needed to ensure support from within the libraries prior to starting a group. Our proposal outlined the essentials of our program, from recruitment through funding. Ambassadors would:

- Be selected through a two-step process of a written application and, if selected, an in-person interview
- Serve for two years or until graduation, whichever came first; those in good standing could serve beyond two years
- Meet once a month

We requested funds from the dean to cover refreshments for monthly meetings and polo shirts. The ambassadors would operate under the dean's purview, so would not have a separate budget. With approval from our library's leadership, the group was officially named Kansas State University Libraries Student Ambassadors and was charged to advocate for K-State Libraries and serve as representatives to guests, alumni, prospective students, and current students. Ambassadors would also advocate for the perspectives and needs of the student body. Our dean was so invested in the ambassadors that she committed to attending monthly meetings as her schedule permitted.

## Recruitment and Membership

The success of our ambassador program relies on the caliber of the students who serve. Recruitment is one of our most time-intensive processes. The first year was most difficult because we recruited all new members with an untested process. We guessed at the size of our inaugural membership and borrowed from other campus groups to establish our recruitment process. Fortunately, our initial process proved to be successful and we have used it as our foundation, with some adjustments, in subsequent years.

We established from the beginning that the Ambassadors would be a diverse program. We define a diverse group as students of different back-

grounds, race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, year in school, and majors. Every year, the ambassadors have represented almost every college and included students in every year in school, from freshman through graduate students. The group always includes in-state, out-of-state, and international students, and students of diverse races and ethnicities. This diversity ensures that our ambassadors represent our student body.

We recruit, interview, and select our new class at the beginning of the fall semester so we can recruit freshman. We employ traditional marketing methods to advertise the program, including printed materials and social media. We promote the ambassadors at activities fairs, student orientations, and library events. Each of these methods was mentioned when we surveyed applicants about how they heard about the program. Asking professors and other advisors to send email (which we draft) directly to students has the largest impact. We promote the program as a chance for an organization or college to be represented and as a leadership opportunity for students. We also increase our pool by reaching out to colleges from which we receive few or no applicants, letting them know we want their college to be represented.

The advisors handled recruitment the first year; in subsequent years we work with the ambassador's recruitment/membership committee. This meant that recruitment served as our first foray into collaborative leadership. Three ambassadors serve on the recruitment committee each year, along with the advisors and the incoming chair of the ambassadors. One advisor begins planning the recruitment process with the committee in late summer. Diversity among the ambassadors remains a key objective, so we focus on contacting a variety of student groups and degree programs. Ambassadors reach out to students, while advisors reach out to faculty and staff. Interested students have two weeks from the start of the semester to submit a written application online. All members of the recruitment team review applications using the same rubric. Based on the written material, some applicants are invited for in-person interviews.

We schedule interviews for a weekend with an away football game. We include the interview date on promotional materials so applicants can save the date. Applicants sign up for slots online using Google Calendar. We allocate twenty minutes per candidate—ten minutes each with the recruitment committee and the advisors. We separate the interviews so that candidates start by talking to fellow students, hopefully alleviating the stress

early ambassadors reported when meeting with advisors. In addition to the advisors and recruitment team, three ambassadors volunteer to serve as hosts (greeting candidates and escorting them to interviews) or to tabulate scores from the interview rubrics.

The interview day for the recruitment committee looks like:

- 1:00 p.m. Recruitment committee, advisors, and hosts arrive and make final arrangements
- 1:30–3:00 p.m. Interviews—rubrics are collected and tabulated after every interview
- 3:00–3:30 p.m. Break
- 3:30–5:30 p.m. Interviews
- 5:30–6:30 p.m. Review applicants, select new ambassadors

The interview day for a candidate looks like:

- 2:25 p.m. Arrive at library, greeted by host
- 2:30–2:40 p.m. Interview with recruitment committee
- 2:40–2:50 p.m. Interview with advisors

We select new ambassadors within an hour, using a method proposed by ambassadors: identify a pool that clearly meet all requirements and a pool that do not, and only discuss borderline applicants. The recruitment team and advisors look for applicants who can articulate why libraries are important to them. When reviewing applicants, the ambassadors and advisors contribute equally to the discussion. The hosts offer insight into the general social skills of applicants. Applicants are contacted within twenty-four hours with a letter either inviting them to join the ambassadors or thanking them for their interest and time.

One ambassador explained why she served on the recruitment committee (now known as the membership committee):

I believe that library ambassadors are an instrumental part of the libraries here at K-State. Being a part of the membership committee allows me to serve the ambassador program by selecting new members and creating an experience all of the members can enjoy. And through serving the members, we serve the program and in turn the libraries. (Ambassador Interview)

While applying to be an ambassador is time-intensive, we continue to be impressed by the number of applicants:

- Year One: 43 applicants, 27 interviews, 23 ambassadors selected
- Year Two: 31 applicants, 20 interviews, 11 ambassadors selected
- Year Three: 33 applicants, 22 interviews, 11 ambassadors selected

A significant number of ambassadors stay with the program beyond the two-year commitment. At the end of our second year, ten of the fourteen ambassadors who completed their commitment chose to remain with the group, with others graduating or pursuing other opportunities. By year three, the number of ambassadors rose to thirty students. While this is a large group, requiring a significant time commitment from the advisors, as the program has matured, the ambassadors have assumed more of the organizational responsibilities.

## **Year One: Creating a Shared Foundation**

In the first year of the ambassador program, ambassadors and advisors alike were learning what it meant to be library student ambassadors. The advisors communicated this to the ambassadors, even during the interview process, to explain why we did not always have an immediate answer to questions and to encourage the ambassadors to share ideas to improve the program. During the first year, the advisors took a more active leadership role than in subsequent years. We focused on training, establishing an organizational structure, and engaging the ambassadors in advocacy and outreach.

Once the ambassadors were selected, they attended a mandatory, two-night orientation to equip them to advocate and advise. The first night introduced ambassadors to the libraries' mission and work; the second night covered donor relations. During the introduction to the libraries, our dean welcomed the ambassadors and shared our vision of how they would support and advocate for the libraries. We conducted a "behind the scenes" tour of the main library, allowing ambassadors to learn about the variety of work necessary to run a library while exploring spaces not typically seen by the public. The tours definitely pique the ambassadors' interest, and the insights stay with them:

I don't think that I would know how intricate our library was if it weren't for the ambassador program. I have

found out that there are a wide variety of types of librarians serving in various behind-the-scenes positions, I have seen parts of the library that many students don't know exist, and I have seen just how much effort the library puts into meeting the needs of students. (Ambassador Interview)

A development officer from the university's Foundation provided soft-skills training on approaching and interacting with donors. This component has been included in training every year since. While our ambassadors do not actively fundraise, we know from experience that donors like to hear from students, so our ambassadors need to be knowledgeable and comfortable interacting with donors.

Many ambassadors joined because they wanted to contribute to the progress of the libraries. The advisors were already in position to inform students of the libraries' questions and ideas. However, if the program was solely directed by the advisors, we would lose the ambassadors' energy and initiatives. We believed that switching to a model of shared governance that included student officers would embed student engagement into the program. Therefore, we sought student officers to lead meetings, develop programming, and raise student concerns. We held elections for officers at our first meeting. Ambassadors stood for chair, chair-elect, secretary, and Open House co-chairs. The first chair of the Ambassadors was a graduate student with leadership experience who was comfortable leading the meetings and drafting bylaws and a constitution. The newness of the program meant we did not have precedent in terms of content or activities for the officers to follow, so the advisors more heavily influenced meeting agendas and outreach opportunities than we would in subsequent years.

The advisors engaged the ambassadors in a decision-making process at the first meeting in order to reinforce the value we would place on their contributions. We sought feedback on the use of study space during finals week and a finals event called Caffeine Fix, when the libraries provide refreshments for three nights. Our libraries strive to maintain a balance between quiet study space and group study space. Silent/quiet study space is very limited, particularly during finals. The advisors shared this struggle and the ambassadors brainstormed suggestions, two of which were imple-

mented. The energy level during the brainstorming was very high and the ambassadors demonstrated both creativity and thoughtfulness.

We agreed at the meeting to implement several of their suggestions, demonstrating the importance of ambassador input. Suggestions that could not be implemented became a learning opportunity for the ambassadors, helping them understand the constraints of the budget, facilities, and staffing resources. The advisors learned about significant barriers to studying in our main library, notably a lack of power outlets and unreliable Wi-Fi. We gained perspective on what students find disruptive, what they are willing to overlook, and the fluidity of student expectations for the library's physical spaces, particularly in terms of the time of day and time of the semester. Testing our assumptions and gathering feedback allowed us to more confidently experiment with services.

The ambassadors continue to provide invaluable feedback. Our dean brings high-impact issues to the ambassadors, including a student library fee proposal and a proposal to redesign our main floor. The transformation in the ambassadors, when they shift from seemingly passive listening to a flurry of questions and discussion points, is phenomenal. Due to the diversity of our ambassadors, they call upon backgrounds that include student government, experience with school bonds at their high schools, and knowledge of fees from different colleges on campus. This generates rich discussion and provides perspectives that we would not have known to ask about in a survey.

Finally, we identified venues for the ambassadors to act as our advocates. Ambassadors volunteered for events such as the Friends of the Libraries Annual Gala, Homecoming, Family Day, International Games Day, and Orientation and Enrollment. The ambassadors contributed ideas and insight to make every event more rewarding for all involved. For instance, the open house co-chairs worked with Darchelle Martin to organize entertaining activities for more than 1,000 attendees that promoted the libraries. Ambassadors relished engaging with faculty, donors, and alumni at the Gala, providing a much needed student presence at a key fundraiser for the libraries.

Year one was a year of learning for both the ambassadors and the advisors. The meetings created opportunities for the ambassadors to ask questions and learn about the libraries. We established precedents regarding soliciting and responding to ambassador feedback and understanding how



the ambassadors engaged with students, the public, and donors. We introduced an environment of shared leadership, allowing the ambassadors to identify areas in which they could assume more leadership in the future. Most important, the ambassadors believed they made an impact. As an ambassador shared:

I do feel like I have made a difference to the libraries and to K-State students. First of all, our continued feedback on the Wi-Fi in the building directly led to improvement of that service. Also helping at events like the Gala, where we are showing donors and alumni how much students care about the libraries, are very beneficial. I also just feel like my increased knowledge has helped me tell students in my classes and my friends about services the library has to offer. (Ambassador Interview)

## **Year Two: The Ambassadors Define Themselves**

The ambassadors assumed more leadership of the program's development in our second year and became fixtures in our outreach efforts. The foundation we established the prior year allowed the advisors to continue bringing questions, ideas, and volunteer opportunities to the ambassadors. However, to be truly responsive to our students, the advisors needed to step aside so the ambassadors could establish goals reflecting their awareness of what students needed from the libraries. As long as the advisors and dean could solicit feedback from the ambassadors and count on participation in outreach events, we were content to accept their decisions.

We were fortunate that the chair and chair-elect also served as officers in our first year. The secretary, while a new officer, was part of the inaugural ambassadors cohort. We experienced change within the advisors as Jason Reed replaced Adriana Gonzalez. With experienced officers in position, the advisors moved into a more advisory role (e.g. answering questions about the budget, building and infrastructure, and IT limits). The officers took more direct leadership, particularly in guiding the group through the process of identifying their objectives as ambassadors.

Prior to a meeting in the early fall, each ambassador posted two goals for the year on our online message board. The executive committee and ad-

visors identified three significant themes from the submitted ideas: learning about/educating others about the libraries, ambassadors as a team, and advocacy ideas. The officers distributed the thematically grouped ideas to the ambassadors, including new ambassadors, prior to the next meeting so they were prepared to discuss them. At the start of the meeting, we posted the ideas and themes on the walls. Each ambassador used color-coded sticky dots to vote for or against ideas that they wanted to pursue. This process developed consensus as the ambassadors chatted while voting, and everyone could see trends develop. Our chair then led the ambassadors through a discussion finalizing the goals.

While the ambassadors identified clear goals, the organizational structure of the group proved to be a roadblock. Announcements from the advisors were taking up the majority of the monthly meetings, not leaving enough time for the ambassadors to work on their goals. Ultimately, the ambassadors decided to form committees that would meet once a month to handle the business of the group. There were several ideas how the committees would function, so the ambassadors asked the chair to review the options and propose a committee structure that they would vote on for inclusion in the bylaws and constitution. The chair and the co-chair, with feedback from advisors and the secretary, drafted a proposal and a presentation.

Simultaneously, a smaller group of ambassadors developed a second proposal to address ideas they felt the officers' proposal did not encompass. Competing proposals were an opportunity for the group to discuss how they envisioned their roles as ambassadors. The ambassadors also learned how professional organizations use guidelines like Robert's Rules of Order to regulate their meetings and manage changes to bylaws and organizational constitutions.

The officers' proposal outlined:

- Eight standing committees
- Ambassadors would serve on one committee, with the option to serve on more
- Committees would meet monthly, have a chair, and submit a monthly activity report
- The ambassador's proposal outlined:
  - Two standing committees
  - Ambassadors could propose new committees with the approval of the chair

- The chair would establish goals and subcommittees at the start of every year after gathering ideas from the ambassadors
- The chair-elect would assign ambassadors to subcommittees; the subcommittees would report to the chair-elect
- Every ambassador would serve on a subcommittee

The ambassadors' proposal also called for a treasurer, provided more detail about replacing officers, and added language for a vote of no confidence. For the May meeting, our chair presented the proposals alongside each other and the original text of the bylaws or the constitution (see Figure 14.1).

<b>BY-LAWS: ARTICLE III ( COMMITTEES)</b>		
<p><b>Original</b> Each group member will be expected to serve on a committee, either standing or special.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standing Committees: committees that oversee tasks or events that occur every year. The standing committees for this group are:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open House</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Special Committees: determined by the group's immediate needs. Special committees are appointed by the Chairperson. The Chair of the committee is appointed and will only serve as long as needed.</p>	<p><b>Proposal 1</b> Each group member will be expected to serve on a committee, either standing or special.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standing Committees: committees that oversee tasks or events that occur every year. The standing committees for this group are:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Events</li> <li>– Incoming Students</li> <li>– Promotional</li> <li>– Membership</li> <li>– Building/Facilities</li> <li>– Education</li> <li>– Graduate Students</li> <li>– Executive</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Special Committees: Same as original</p>	<p><b>Proposal 2</b> Every member is expected to serve on a subcommittee, members are welcome to propose new committees for further exploration of an issue. The Chair must approve all new committees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standing Committees: committees that oversee tasks or events that occur every year. The standing committees for this group are:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open House</li> <li>• Recruitment</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Subcommittees: determined by the Chair at the start of each year, organized by the Chair-Elect. The Chairperson appoints subcommittees.</p> <p>Special Committees: Same as original</p>

**Figure 14.1.** Example of how proposed bylaw changes were presented along with original text.

The chair reviewed the proposals according to bylaw or constitution section. The ambassadors discussed each proposal following Robert's Rules of Order. Ultimately, the ambassadors voted to move forward with the standing committees, requiring each ambassador to serve on a committee, and the language about replacing officers (see Figure 14.2).

FINAL TEXT OF BY-LAWS	
<p><b>By-Laws: Article I (Election of Positions)</b></p> <p>Section 6-Position Replacement</p> <p>In the event that an officer needs to be replaced for any reason, the other officer and group advisors will determine who will make a suitable replacement and that person will be voted on by the other officers and advisors. In committee chamber, the new officer candidate will be presented to the group for assessment. Upon the absence of said person, a majority vote will dictate the support and election of a new candidate. Any observed nay votes will result in a nomination and discussion period. If a nomination is not selected within the allotted time increment, the discussion will be moved to an online ballot to be open a known amount of time.</p> <p>In the event of a vote of no confidence an online ballot will be given to determine leadership. A majority vote is necessary for election.</p>	<p><b>By-Laws: Article III (Committees)</b></p> <p>Each group member will be expected to serve on a committee, either standing or special.</p> <p>Standing Committees: committees that oversee tasks or events that occur every year. The standing committees for this group are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Events</li> <li>Incoming Students</li> <li>Promotional</li> <li>Membership</li> <li>Building/Facilities</li> <li>Education</li> <li>Graduate Students</li> <li>Executive</li> </ul>

**Figure 14.2.** Text of the approved bylaws.

During the year, our officers sought guidance from a variety of groups in addition to the advisors. They relied heavily on each other, listened to the ideas and experiences of fellow ambassadors, and learned from other campus ambassador groups. By the end of the year, our officers demonstrated confidence in leading meetings and handling questions. The ambassadors were increasingly comfortable raising and addressing issues among themselves and looked to the officers first for clarification, then the advisors.

This was the first time many of the ambassadors had been part of a group creating itself, so there were growing pains and discussions about professionally expressing opinions and timely communication. As advisors, it was difficult at times to remain neutral and focus on mediating the discussion, but we were proud to see the group mature and the officers demonstrate leadership. Ultimately, the ambassadors became a stronger organization because the ambassadors decided how they would operate going forward. According to our then chair-elect, “The changing of our constitution and bylaws to create a more effective group has been a really interesting transition. I believe as we continue to grow and come up with new ideas, it will probably change even more to allow us to best represent the libraries.”

While the ambassadors internally focused on negotiating their goals during the year, they also became integral to our outreach efforts. One significant contribution of the ambassadors is representing the libraries with prospective and current students at recruitment and orientation events. Librarians connect with (or reassure) parents, while ambassadors connect with (or reassure) students. Ambassadors relate with other students through shared majors or hometowns and easily segue into discussing library resources.

The connection is also felt by our donors and alumni, who express how much they enjoy meeting ambassadors at events. During our second year, we increased the presence of the ambassadors at the Friends of K-State Libraries Annual Gala, both in number attending and greater integration with the evening's events. The ambassadors' presence was welcomed by our university provost, who thanked them for attending during her remarks. Ambassador participation at events like these helps remind donors that their gifts have a very real impact.

## **Year Three: Enacting Change**

The third year for the libraries' student ambassadors ushered in increased activity and leadership opportunities with the addition of committees. As voted on by the ambassadors, the eight standing committees were:

1. Graduate Students: represent graduate student concerns
2. Promotional: promote the awesomeness of the libraries, including services, resources, and library and ambassador events
3. Building: understand the physical building, from HVAC to furniture, and its effect on student use
4. Education: educate ambassadors about the libraries to be informed advocates
5. Events: plan events, including organizing and coordinating volunteers
6. Incoming Students: outreach to new students, working with campus offices like New Students Services
7. Membership: recruit new members; create social bonds within the ambassadors
8. Executive: the existing committee comprised of officers and advisors

Each committee would be ambassador-led with an assigned advisor for guidance. The advisors believed the ambassadors' increased impact on the libraries was worth their additional time commitment. The advisors selected committees in the summer based on the scope of each committee, our positions in the libraries, and personal interest. All advisors serve on the executive committee; the remaining committees were divided, with two advisors selecting two committees each and one advisor selecting three committees. It soon became apparent that serving as the advisor for three committees was not feasible, so we recruited a fourth advisor to our team. The libraries' new undergraduate experience librarian, Charissa Powell, joined the advisors and was matched with the Incoming Students committee.

Once the newly recruited ambassadors joined us, all ambassadors signed up for committees through open enrollment at a meeting. Our chair reminded everyone that each ambassador was required to participate in at least one committee. The advisors and officers hoped that self-selection would increase participation and sense of community through a shared purpose.

Each committee identified a chair, primarily by common consent, for whoever volunteered. Most ambassadors welcomed the opportunity to gain leadership experience by chairing a committee. However, some committees were primarily comprised of new members who were reluctant to assume a leadership role with limited experience. After assurances of support from advisors and committee members, new ambassadors agreed to lead, proving to be strong chairs. This demonstrates the flexibility needed when creating a new program: when the unexpected happens, make the best decision you can.

Highlights from the committees include: a 3-D printing workshop, a Shakespeare masquerade, and building community by recognizing members during monthly meetings and social events like bowling. One ambassador, following a basement to rooftop tour of our main library as a member of the Building and Facilities committee, presented about maintenance issues and related costs of running the library to her speech class. Afterward, classmates shared how important the libraries were to them and that they were more receptive to student fees based on her speech. We eagerly anticipate future ambassador-driven endeavors as the committees gain traction.

As advisors, we observed that inviting the ambassadors to take on larger roles each year, defining who they are and their impact, has increased the ambassadors' engagement with the libraries. Our ambassadors agree, with one stating:

At first, it was difficult to see how the ambassadors were influencing the libraries because we were still trying to figure out what we wanted that influence to be. It wasn't until we formed the committees in our third year that I truly felt like we were making an impact on the libraries. No longer were the advisers coming to the meetings to tell us what was going on; we had each committee presenting different things that were happening around the libraries. Additionally, I truly felt like we were valuable when the advisers or the dean asked for our opinions and feedback. In this way, I felt valued as both a student and an ambassador. (Ambassador Interview)

## Lessons Learned

With several years of experience establishing and helping the ambassadors evolve, we can share four lessons we have learned:

### *Lesson One: Establish a Clear Mission*

As advisors, we rely heavily on the program's charge to find our balance between supporting and empowering our ambassadors. The ambassadors also recognize the extent to which a defined mission impacts their contributions:

Our group has been successful because we were given the freedom to define our purposes. On a very broad scale, a successful group has clearly defined goals with a set structure on how to achieve those goals. In our specific program, we defined ourselves as a group that provides a voice for the students to the libraries and a voice for the libraries to the public. (Ambassador Interview)

### *Lesson Two: Trust your Ambassadors*

Allow the ambassadors to assume responsibility and listen to their ideas, even if they conflict with yours. When librarians ask students for input, they have to be open to genuinely considering student ideas and implementing them, as feasible. This trust can increase an ambassador's engagement:

I'm fairly involved on campus, but my experience with being an ambassador has been unique because I feel like our efforts are so integrated with the library. What we do actually has an impact, and that has been encouraging to me. (Ambassador Interview)

### *Lesson Three: Commit Yourself*

A successful ambassador program requires time and energy from advisors and ambassadors to attend meetings, plan programs, and volunteer for events. Committed advisors, often working outside the typical workday, need support from library and university administration to run the program and to demonstrate that ambassadors' contributions are valued. When our dean attends meetings and welcomes ambassadors to donor events, she reinforces the importance of their contributions.

### *Lesson Four: Be Flexible*

Learning what is best for your program requires experimentation and time. Ambassador commitment fluctuates under the weight of coursework, jobs, internships, study abroad, and life. Understand what is most important for the mission of the program, and allow for the ebb and flow of semesters, challenges, and opportunities.

## **Reflection**

We have spent this chapter explaining the time, resources, and commitment needed to make a program like this work. After three years of running this program, the question becomes: Is it worth it? When many libraries and universities face budget challenges and staffing shortages, we must



think strategically about how we spend our time. For us, the answer from both administration and advisors is a resounding, “Yes.”

The largest benefit to the libraries is the improved connection with our student body. This is true for large, important decisions, like bringing a student fee proposal to our student government association, but also in more routine, daily library activities, like our communication and marketing efforts for our student audience. Individually, our ambassadors share their insider knowledge with friends and classmates. More broadly, the ambassadors are a conduit to future students, current students, and alumni alike. They embody the thousands of students the libraries impact every year, giving voice to the learning and communities that can develop.

Many academic librarians enjoy working with students, but our connections with students is often fleeting, lasting the duration of a reference interview or, in rare cases, a semester. One of the benefits the ambassadors identified about committees was getting to know the advisors better. Beyond our official roles, we advisors cherish the informal relationships we build with our ambassadors and were heartened to learn the ambassadors want librarians to know who they are.

At this point, it is too early to study the engagement of our ambassadors post-graduation; we hope they will be our advocates as alumni. While student employees are an important constituent for libraries—and we appreciate their feedback and insight—they are often constrained within an office or department. Therefore, the ambassador program allows us to engage students more widely. Our ambassadors enter the program with an affinity for the libraries, and their passion grows as they learn more about the libraries and librarians.

Being able to see the impact I’ve made on the libraries gives me a sense of ownership in this library that I lacked before this program. I spend more time at the libraries now because I am more comfortable with the resources available to me and the atmosphere that we have helped shape. (Ambassador Interview)

The best part of being an advisor for the K-State Libraries Student Ambassadors is being a part of the extraordinary growth shown by the ambassadors. Witnessing their growth in confidence and knowing that we

helped someone develop has been an incredible opportunity. We are proud of all of the ambassadors, current and past, who dedicated their time, and especially grateful to those who assumed formal or informal leadership, which was vital to the success of this program. The ambassadors are an integral part of the libraries' strategic plan, and their input is invaluable. We learn from each other and strive to improve the library experience for our community. If the previous years are any indication, the ambassadors and the advisors will grow as individuals and as a group, and contribute to improved services for the libraries' users.

## Notes

1. Candace R. Benefiel, Wendi Arant and Elaine Gass, "A New Dialogue: A Student Advisory Committee in an Academic Library," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 25, no. 2 (1999): 111–113, doi:10.1016/S0099-1333(99)80008-1; Erin Dorney, "Students as Stakeholders: Library Advisory Boards and Privileging our Users," Library with the Lead Pipe, last modified February 6, 2013, <http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2013/students-as-stakeholders-library-advisory-boards-and-privileging-our-users/>.
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