

Showcasing the Authentic Student Experience

The Library and Student Mentoring Partner to Create a First-Year Library Ambassador Program

Gina Schlesselman-Tarango, John M. Pfau Library • Barbara Herrera and Sara DeMoss, Office of Undergraduate Studies • California State University, San Bernardino

About the Partnership

Library Ambassadors (LAs) are CSUSB students employed in the Office of Undergraduate Studies' Student Mentoring Program (SMP), which fosters the success of undergraduate students through peer-to-peer support that encourages academic excellence, campus connectedness and engagement, and the personal growth and development of participating students. As LAs, student mentors are trained in the basics of the Pfau Library, including services available to new students, finding resources for common assignments, and getting research help. The librarian-led training typically includes an overview of an in-class presentation, practice addressing FAQs, and discussion of presentation best practices.

LAs then connect with first-year students by pairing up to visit targeted first-year courses where they give the in-class presentation, answer student questions, and administer a brief survey. In encouraging LAs to share their authentic research experiences, concerns, and needs, the program's peer-to-peer approach strives to counter library anxiety (Blecher-Cohen, 2019; Carlile, 2007; Parks, 2019).

LAs are paid for both training and classroom visits.

2019-2020 CSUSB Student Mentors



Connecting with Students

The librarian reaches out to faculty teaching first-year courses in the GE program that have a info. lit. learning outcome. If interested in hosting a 45-minute LA visit, faculty complete and submit a form, and the librarian then confirms the visit details. The LAs communicate amongst themselves to determine who is available for the visit. Ideally, novice LAs partner up with seasoned LAs for their first few visits. From fall 2018 to date:

- LAs have reached ~**1200** first-year students
- 93%** of surveyed students indicated they learned how to do basic college-level research
- 95%** indicated they learned how to get research help

Challenges

The majority of challenges encountered so far center on the expectations of faculty, some of whom press LAs to cover content beyond the scope of the presentation. While they are trained to refer those with advanced questions to a librarian, at times faculty continue to put the LAs on the spot or express disappointment with the visit. In the future, the librarian plans to reiterate the basic nature of the presentation in her visit confirmation email to faculty, underscoring that the LA program is meant to supplement, not replace, faculty-led info. lit. instruction.

Future Directions

- How might we involve experienced LAs in the training and development of new LAs?
- How can we best assess the program's impact on both first-year students and LAs (beyond a survey)?
- What strategies can we use to communicate the value of this program to campus administrators to ensure its continued funding?

“This Library Ambassador program is ... extremely beneficial for students who are learning the tricks of the trade for research. Many of my former students have told me about how instrumental this program was to them.” –Faculty

References

- Blecher-Cohen, Z. (2019). The student connection: Thinking critically on library anxiety and information literacy. *Public Services Quarterly*, 15 (4), 359-367. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15228959.2019.1664361>
- Carlile, H. (2007). The implications of library anxiety for academic reference services: A review of literature. *Australian Academic & Research Libraries*, 38 (2), 129-147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048623.2007.10721282>
- Parks, C. (2019). Testing a warmth-based instruction intervention for reducing library anxiety in first-year undergraduate students. *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, 14 (2), 70-84. <https://doi.org/10.18438/ebliip29548>