Loughborough University Teaching Innovation Awards 2010
FINAL REPORT

Name	Department
Elizabeth Gadd	Library

Email	Phone number
e.a.gadd@lboro.ac.uk	01509 222342

Project title

Peer-to-peer library support for students

Abstract

Four student Library Ambassadors were recruited to provide a conduit between the Library and students in the University in order to raise student awareness of, and improve engagement with, library services. The Ambassadors were given free reign to focus on Library-related issues of interest to them, to get feedback from fellow-students in creative ways and to develop campaigns to reach students on those issues. The first semester saw them working together as a group to develop three student videos promoting library support during exam time. Later evaluation showed that 68% of students had seen the videos, and a good number had acted on their advice. The second semester saw them working with their respective Faculties on individual projects. These projects had mixed success depending on the motivation of the Ambassador concerned. Positive outcomes included the inclusion of student-to-student library information in pre-fresher packs, and a useful student perspective on the development of the Library web pages. Focus groups with the Ambassadors showed that they found the experience a positive and developmental one. Focus groups with Library Project staff highlighted concerns about the time- and resource-intensive nature of the Ambassador model. Further funding from the HE STEM programme has been secured to investigate alternative low- or no-cost models for continuing this important work.

1 Issue(s) addressed by project

The Library offers a range of services and facilities to help enhance a students' learning experiences. A recent Library survey demonstrated that not all students engaged with the services and facilities on offer and therefore did not benefit from the opportunities available to them. The PQ Team report on enhancing student engagement highlighted[1] the value of peer support "to make the transition to increasingly independent learners, while also making fuller use of physical and online resources". In addition, research has shown that students are far more likely to use their peers as an information source than 'experts'[2].

In 2007 the Library and Careers Service collaborated on peer-to-peer support by adapting the role of the very successful SU Career representatives into Career and Library

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[1] Fitzgerald, M. *Report on Student Engagement Project (PQ09-P69)* presented to Programme Quality Team on 16th November 2009.
http://www.lboro.ac.uk/admin/committees/pq/meetings/2009/pq09-m10.htm

[2] Urquhart, C. et. al. *Uptake and use of electronic information services: trends in UK higher education from the JUSTEIS project.* Aberystwyth : University of Wales. 2003.
http://cadair.aber.ac.uk/dspace/bitstream/2160/191/1/JUSTEIS-Program-rev14Apr.doc

representatives. The combined role was too large for the student representatives, so in 2009 it was agreed to revert the posts back to Career representatives. It was therefore very timely for the Library was therefore delighted to receive funding from the Teaching Innovation Awards to pilot the use of student peer to peer workers.

2 Aims

The aim of the project was for the Library to pilot the use of student peer to peer support workers to provide a conduit between the Library and students in the University in order to raise student awareness and improve engagement with library services.

3 Specific objectives

1. To raise awareness amongst undergraduates (both library and non-library users) of the services and facilities available through the creation of student focused promotional material.

2. To generate a rich seam of informal qualitative, student centred feedback which complemented the existing Library generated data.

3. To identify whether the SIGMA model of student ambassadors could be easily transferred to other support services within the University.

4. To provide the student peer to peer workers with work experience that could be used as evidence for the University's Employability Award and their CVs.

4 Activities/methodology

In May 2010, four Ambassadors were appointed to work for 3 hours per week during term time for one academic year. The Ambassadors were:

- Sarwar Khan, 4th year Wolfson School – liaising with Engineering
- Fiona Watson, 2nd year Chem Eng – liaising with Science (no suitable applicant from Science Faculty)
- David Evans, 3rd year Politics – liaising with SSH
- Malle Koido, 4th year Communications & Media – liaising with SSH

From left to right: David Evans, Malle Koido, Fiona Watson and Sarwar Khan

In October 2010, the Library Ambassadors received training in overview of the Library, team building, motivation, communication, and evaluation. It was made clear that the Ambassadors had free reign as to gather and respond to feedback.

4.1 Semester 1 activities

Ambassadors were asked to work together on a project of their choice: Library support for students during exam time. Context was gathered through face-to-face survey of students in the EHB. As a result, they produced three short videos on

 i) finding alternative exam study spaces
 ii) using Metalib to find information
 iii) booking a group study room.

They were widely available across campus and also on the Library's You Tube account http://www.youtube.com/user/pilkingtonlibrary/)

To accompany the video campaign, the Library put together a display stand that covered various aspects of exam support.

4.2 Semester 2 activities

Ambassadors undertook individual projects with Faculty and the relevant Library Faculty Team.

- **Sarwar Khan (Engineering):** arranged for all Departments to include some student-written information about the Library in their 'student-to-student' information packs for upcoming freshers. He has also lobbied for some engineering software to be installed

on Library PCs. He organised and advertised four engineering-specific skills sessions for students, delivered by members of the Library Engineering Team.
- **Fiona Watson (Science):** explored via survey what 2nd year Information Science and Mathematics students require from the Library..
- **Malle Koido (SSH):** worked with Library's Web Strategy Group to establish students' views of the current Library web site and how its style should be developed. Her findings influenced the overall design of the Library site.
- **David Evans (SSH):** investigated the design of a student-led Library induction for new students in the Business and Economics School. This did not develop as far as we would have liked.

5 Project outcomes/findings

5.1 Evaluation of video campaign
101 students were approached for their views on the video campaign:
- 68 of whom had seen the videos, leaving 33 that had not
- Of the 68 who had seen the videos, 60 (88%) had understood what they were about.

The two key messages that had been received by students were that alternative study spaces were available (47 responses) and that bookable group study rooms were available (12 responses). A good number of students had done something with this information (see table 1).

Action	Number of students
Used G block to study	23
Used Haselgrave to study	11
Told others about other spaces	15
Booked a study room	18

Table 1: What students had done in response to the Ambassador video campaign

This survey showed there was a low level of Ambassadors with only 18 (out of the 101 surveyed) being aware that the Library Ambassadors existed.

5.2 Evaluation of Library web pages (Malle Koido)
To summarise Malle's survey results, users were generally happy when it came to the website content. Their concerns over the current Library website mainly addressed its appearance as being slightly out of date.

- *"Logical structure, regular changes of images, keep it fresh as design hasn't changed in years... keep refreshing on regular internals, make it a site people want to visit, not just have to get to different places/resources... a place to stop an explore..."*

- *"The website is good except for the already very dated designs and pictures. The blog should be integrated into the homepage, as this would encourage it to be read, with a better widget than you have now such as on the lboro.ac.uk main page."*

- *"If direct paper search were possible through library's website (without the need to state the journal etc), that would be good. Like a built-in google scholar that allows you to get direct access to papers."*

5.3 Outcomes from Focus Groups
At the end of the Project Focus Groups were held with both the Ambassadors and the Library Staff involved with the project. Some of the key outcomes are listed below.

5.3 i)Ambassador Focus Group
A main difficulty for the Ambassadors was time management as each week would create a different work load, and this was difficult to judge. The Ambassadors did explain however that the role did help improve their time management overall. Another difficulty was meeting together, as they all have different timetables. It was agreed that the blog helped with communication. It was agreed that the staff were very friendly and welcoming.

When asked if there was any other kind of support you would recommend for future ambassadors, the responded that in the first semester a few ideas were not feasible without a budget. However, the Ambassadors felt that if they had an idea that required expenditure, library staff would listen and provide funding if appropriate.

All felt the existence of Ambassadors made a difference to students. The roles provided a opportunity for students to find out more about the Library. They felt that final year students used the help the Ambassadors offered most, as this is the year the Library is used most; alongside postgraduates.

In terms of future developments, the Ambassadors felt that further work could be done by Ambassadors to promote awareness of journals and the Know-How courses. They also felt that attending various lectures to promote the Ambassador role further would also be useful.

Malle, David and Sarwar would all recommend the Ambassador role to other students. The role has helped with various reports and self confidence.

5.3 ii)Library Project Staff Focus Group
The Project staff team felt that the time required to recruit and manage the Ambassadors was very high – a finding that resonates with the SIGMA experience of working with student Ambassadors. The part-time Project Leader found that it was necessary to appoint a deputy to fill in during her absence. There was also some disappointment with the level of creativity and initiative shown by some. It was felt that the Ambassadors thought that the role would be more straightforward than it actually was, that some struggled to fit it around their exams, and that some found it difficult working across the Faculty.

Despite this, it was felt that the Ambassadors' input had made a significant impact on the Library over the year. The outputs (listed in Section 7) were all very valuable, and the Library is keen to continue to build long-term working relationships with a small group of students in this way.

Possible future models for Ambassadors include:
- Having more Ambassadors (one per School).
- Recruit first years about to embark on their second year.
- Give them an idea to work with rather than expecting creativity
- Running the Ambassador programme as a competition (e.g. 'Win £200 to promote or improve a Library Service of your choice').
- Integrate Ambassador work with coursework so they get marks for achieving.

6 Project outputs/deliverables
- Three re-usable student-led videos relating to Library support during exam time.
- Student 'top tips' for exams for use in Library teaching and exam support displays

- Student input into the design of Library web pages
- Greater engagement by engineering students with Library 'Know-How' courses
- Proposed new engineering software in the Library
- A further £10,000 awarded from the HE STEM Programme to further investigate how Science and Engineering Library Ambassadors could be utilised on a low- or no-cost basis.

7 Implications (including links to University strategy)
The Library remains convinced that the building of long-term relationships with students to influence the development of library services is essential. The SIGMA model tested on this project proved to be partly successful, but as the SIGMA team found, it was both time- and resource-intensive and did not result in the creative and innovative developments we had anticipated. We are delighted to be able to continue to work on alternative models by virtue of the HE STEM funding. We hope that by working closer with the Schools themselves, and by considering more deeply the field of student motivation, we can develop an Ambassador model that is both effective and sustainable.

8 Dissemination plans
Elizabeth Gadd gave a presentation on the project to an EMALINK (East Midlands Libraries group) Seminar entitled, "Engaging the disengaged: the use of Library Ambassadors at Loughborough University." This was held in February 2011 at Warwick University. Ginny Franklin and Ruth Stubbings have had a paper accepted at the RAISE (Researching, Advancing & Inspiring Student Engagement) Conference in September 2011 at Nottingham University. This is entitled "Library Ambassadors give students a voice" and will include video clips of one of the Ambassadors themselves talking about their experiences. The Final Report will be made available on the Library web pages and disseminated via JISCMail discussion lists. Further dissemination opportunities are being sought and are likely to be shared with the future HE STEM Ambassador work.