Reinventing the Student Ambassador Program: Theory, Training & Storytelling

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ACT Enrollment Planners Conference
Session Overview

• NIU’s Ambassador model: Past and Present
• Building the staff through recruitment, hiring and training
• Expanding the ambassador role
• Applying student development theory to practice
• Storytelling on the Campus Tour
• Challenges & future plans
Institutional Profile

- DeKalb, Illinois – 65 miles west of Chicago
- Public teaching and research institution with 20,130 students
- Average ACT = 22
- Average Class Rank = 62\textsuperscript{nd} percentile
- Ethnic/Racial Categories
  - White: 57.0%
  - Black: 15.9%
  - Hispanic/Latino: 15.4%
  - Asian: 5.0%
Northern Ambassadors are student employees paid at university wage ($8.25/hour).

Work-study is encouraged, but not required for Ambassadors.

Once hired, Northern Ambassadors will stay on staff until graduation or resignation.

Ambassadors have the opportunity to move into a student coordinator leadership role.

Diverse student staff representative of the student body.
2011 Northern Ambassador Program

- 20 Northern Ambassadors, 1 student coordinator, 1 graduate assistant.
- Each ambassador worked between 2-6 hours a week.
- Shifts were exclusively tour shifts, daily visits or special group visits.
- 1 group visit per day, most visits were bus tours.
2016 Northern Ambassador Program

- 48 Northern Ambassadors, 8 student callers, 3 student coordinators, 3 graduate assistants
- Each ambassador works between 6-15 hours
- Shifts include tour shifts, front desk, call center, and outbound calling shifts
- Multiple group visits per day, 5-8 per week. With small group tours for most groups.
Expanding the Ambassador Role

- Admissions Call Center
  - Hybrid student and full time staff call center
- Outbound Calling
  - Inviting students to visit, visit follow up, and application follow up
- Administrative Support
  - Front desk coverage, outreach support, duties as assigned
2016 Totals

• 11,105 students toured campus
  – 2,859 students on daily campus tours
  – 575 students on transfer specific tours
  – 2,998 students on Open House tours
  – 4,673 students on large group visits (145 groups)

• Tour types
  – Walking tours: 0-45 guests
  – Bus tours: 45-135 guests
  – Scavenger Hunt tours: 45+
How did we accomplish this?

- Recruitment
- Hiring
- Training
## Recruitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2016</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Application on website</td>
<td>Application on website</td>
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<td>Flyers</td>
<td>Flyers</td>
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<td>Advising Offices</td>
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<td>Student Organizations</td>
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<td>COMS 100</td>
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<td>Information Nights</td>
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<td>Social Media</td>
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<td>Accepting applications year round</td>
<td>Accepting applications twice a year</td>
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Hiring Process

• 2011
  – Individual Interviews
  – Interviews conducted by coordinator, GA, professional staff member
  – 5-6 interviewed a year
  – 5-6 hires a year

• 2016
  – Selections Workshop
  – Interviews conducted by Northern Ambassadors
  – Second interviews conducted by coordinators, GA’s, and professional staff member
  – 60-70 interviewed a year
  – 15-20 hired a year
Selections Workshop

• One day group interview
  • Large Group
    – Icebreakers
    – Mingle
  • Small Group
    – Introductions
    – 5 items
    – NIU commercial
• Individual
  – 30 second speeches
  – NA interviews
• Second interviews take place the following week
Training

• 2011
  – Training Manual
  – Shadow and Tag-teaming tours

• 2016
  – Training Manual
  – Progressive tour training
  – 5 weeks worth of training and staff bonding
  – Continuous training, 3 times per semester
Ambassador Training

• Week 1
  – Hiring Paperwork, Staff Introductions, Position Overview, Expectations
• Week 2
  – NIU Categories, Reliving the transition, Difficult Question 1
• Week 3
  – NIU Catchphrase, Expert Tour Shadow, Dialogue on Diversity
• Week 4
  – Google Maps Tour, Difficult Question 2
• Week 5
  – Rotate-a-Tour, Wrap up
Incorporating Theory into Training

- Kolb’s Cycle of Learning

![Kolb's Cycle of Learning Diagram]

- Concrete Experience
  (doing / having an experience)
- Reflective Observation
  (reviewing / reflecting on the experience)
- Abstract Conceptualisation
  (concluding / learning from the experience)
- Active Experimentation
  (planning / trying out what you have learned)
Incorporating Theory into Training

- Schlossberg’s Transition Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SITUATION</th>
<th>SELF</th>
<th>SUPPORT</th>
<th>STRATEGIES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trigger</td>
<td>Personal / demographic:</td>
<td>Social Networks:</td>
<td>To cope:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Timing</td>
<td>age, SES, gender, health,</td>
<td>• Intimate</td>
<td>• Modify</td>
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<td>Role change</td>
<td>culture</td>
<td>• Family</td>
<td>• Control meaning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>Psychological:</td>
<td>• Friends</td>
<td>• Manage stress</td>
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<td>Concurrent stress</td>
<td>• optimism, resiliency,</td>
<td>• Institutions /</td>
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<td>spiritual outlook</td>
<td>Communities</td>
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<td>Who is responsible</td>
<td></td>
<td>Flexibility and multiplicity is most effective</td>
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Reliving the transition…

…Mr. Potato Head!
Applying Theory

Kolb’s Cycle of Learning
1. Creating the concrete experience
2. Reflecting on the experience
3. Learning from the experience
4. Discussing what we have learned

Schlossberg’s Transition Model – Identifying the 4 S’s
1. Situation
2. Self
3. Support
4. Strategies
Storytelling on the Campus Tour

• Reprogramming the “Tourbots”
• Replacing the script with bullet points
• Allowing students to see themselves at the University
• Facts/Legends > Stories
• Knowledge = 4.86/5.00
• Friendly = 4.89/5.00
Challenges

• Ambassador retention
  – Academic Pursuits
  – Additional Employment
• Involved students are involved
• Hours and employment limits
• Preferred roles in the office
• Budgets
  – Incentives
  – Recognition
Future Considerations

- Offering internship and class credit
- Expanding ambassador roles
- Scholarships and tuition waivers
- Expanded training
- Enhancing group visit experiences
Questions?