



San José State
UNIVERSITY

Creating a Caring Community: The SJSU Mental Health Ambassadors Program

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The Background



1. SJSU Students

- Highly diverse:
 - e.g.: > 100 languages used everyday at campus.
- Most = Commuters.
- Average age = 26.
- 1st Generation.
- Most need to work → volunteering = luxury.
- Therapy = ?!@#\$\$^@\$\$&*??

2. SJSU CS's Challenge

- Providing ethical and socially and culturally responsive services while resources are limited:
 - Social Justice.
 - Non-traditional services.

The Mental Health Ambassador (MHA) Program



MHA Program

- Created in Fall 2006.
- Goals:
 - Improve the psychological wellbeing of the SJSU students and the university community.
 - A Win-Win-Win solution for students, the university, and the Counseling Services.

MHA Program: The Ambassadors

- All students are welcomed – complete the application form and go through an interview.
- Main goal = Spreading the words, bridging, “**Ambassadoring.**” MHAs are different from “peer counselors” or “peer educators.”
- Requirements for MHAs:
 - Complete training:
 - One-day Ambassador training + Weekly group meeting + monthly individual meeting.
 - Individual Educational Counseling.
 - Complete semi-structured responsibilities:
 - 4 Activities + 1 Final project.
 - Positive Impact Log.

MHA Program: Rationales

- Empirically supported ingredients for retention and academic success:
 - Sense of community and involvement.
 - Strong social support.
 - Mentors and/or role models.
 - Good academic skills and knowledge. (*Lotkowski et al., 2004; "What Works in Student Retention" by ACT, 2004*)
 - Cognitive map for success. (*Torres, 2006*)
 - Psychological and educational counseling. (*Sharkin, 2004*)
 - High academic self-efficacy. (*Robbins et al., 2004; Close et al., 2008*)
 - Informal support network. (*Chiang et al., 2004*)

MHA Program: The Handbook

- A 76-page training manual & a reference for the Ambassadors.
- A collection of analogies, accurate mental health knowledge, and tools:
 - For general public.
 - Many pages are designed to stand-alone handouts.

Handbook p.15

Table 2. Differences between various mental health professionals in California.

<i>Title</i>	<i>Psychiatrist</i>	<i>Clinical Psychologist</i>	<i>MFT</i>	<i>LCSW</i>	<i>“psycho- therapist”</i>
Regulated by California government?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Need to pass licensing exams?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Minimal degree required?	M.D.	Ph. D. or Psy.D.	Master’s	Master’s	No
Provide psychotherapy?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	?
Prescribe medications?	Yes	No	No	No	No
Order medical Tests	Yes	No	No	No	No
Ethics Standards to follow?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

The Outcomes



Outcome: Ambassadors Activities

- Presentations (class, conference, faculty meetings).
- Interactions w/ students, professors, department heads.
- “Chalking.” Tabling.
- Small research projects.
- Flyers, bookmarks, gifts, etc.
- Multi-language and culturally responsive services.
- Relayed students’ and faculty’s needs and voices; being counseling Services’ “ears, eyes, and mouths.”
- Significant increase in students “taking” students to CS.

Outcome: Ambassadors' Growth

- Based on anonymous summative evaluations, the program reportedly increased Ambassadors':
 - Confident.
 - Communication skills
 - Sense of belonging/connection to the university.
 - Career clarity.
 - Skills in stress, time, and emotion management.
 - Academic and interpersonal success skills.

Outcome: Campus Reactions

- “I am convinced that the type of program...is the only way change can happen in our culture to improve mental health awareness and care.”
- Psychology department printed and distributed the Handbook to all faculty members.
- Other agencies/departments started “attaching” themselves to the MHA program or starting their own Ambassadors.