

Emily Repetowski

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Bike Ambassador & Bike Buddy Research Report

In the 2024 Campus Bicycle Plan, the university aims to "Develop a Bike buddy program on campus by FY30" and to "Develop a Bicycle Ambassador program on campus by FY30" (2024 Campus Bicycle Plan, p.39). These goals serve to promote biking on campus as a sustainable and active mode of transportation. By examining various university, community, and cyclist organizations' approaches to bike buddy and bike ambassador programs, the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign can better understand the benefits and challenges of implementing such programs. This information can then be utilized to outline a cohesive implementation framework for both programs. On June 28th, a 40-question survey about bike buddy and bike ambassador programs was emailed to 26 organizations and on June 30th the survey was emailed to the Campus Bike Programmer network. Various organizations contacted for this research include Big 10 Universities, Ivy League universities, universities in the Midwest and universities with platinum Bicycle Friendly University Status.

Out of the 12 organizations that responded to the survey, 2 had bike buddy programs and 3 had bike ambassador programs.

1. University of Iowa Bike Library
2. Greater Madison Metropolitan Planning Organization
3. The League of American Bicyclists
4. Virginia Tech Sustainable Transportation and Hokie Bike Hub
5. Tufts Bikes
6. Boston University
7. Virginia Tech Sustainable Transportation
8. University of Minnesota
9. University of Oregon
10. Colorado School of Mines Outdoor Recreation Center
11. State College Borough
12. New Jersey Bicycle & Pedestrian Resource Center at Rutgers University

Bike Buddy Program Research

Of the twelve respondents, the Greater Madison Metropolitan Planning Organization and University of Minnesota were the only programs to have a bike buddy program. The Greater Madison Metropolitan Planning Organization in Madison, Wisconsin, has managed a bike buddy program for approximately ten years although, the program has only been fully fleshed out since February 2025. The program features 30 registered bike buddies who are matched using the

online platform RoundTrip via the “bikepool” feature. The Greater Madison Metropolitan Planning Organization’s program is funded by a STBG (Surface Transportation Block Grant) along with a local match provided by area.

The University of Minnesota has an informal bike buddy program where, through the Gopher Rideshare Program application, cyclists can tag themselves as mentors for people to request them.

An employee from Boston University also responded to the survey with their experience in a workplace bike buddy program from a previous role at the Portland Bureau of Transportation and the Street Trust. The main takeaways from this response were that successful bike buddy mentors are flexible, laid-back, and welcoming. The survey response also shared an anecdote from the bike buddy program where a mentor would offer to bike to work with people and bring bike tools and donuts. The mentor would meet people at their homes and would choose a leisurely route on a day where being slightly late would be okay. This mentor’s approach as a bike buddy helped people to feel more comfortable biking to work. While not directly related to the bike buddy program, the employee also explained how creating a map for bike commuters to mark their homes helped to create a biking culture at work. A major challenge for this bike buddy program was limited interest from mentees and mentors who were disproportionately male with strong cycling preferences.

Bike Buddy Program Recommendations

Adopting an app (such as RideAmigos) or creating an algorithm to match bike buddies using factors like location, cyclist experience, destination, and starting point can make it easier to pair bike buddies. Including multiple factors to choose from when searching for a bike buddy also opens up the program to more than students looking for mentor-mentee rides. For easier access, it could be helpful to add this feature to the Illinois app. To advertise this program across campus, F&S can reach out to various RSOs and departments. Reaching out to a vast group of students such as freshman, graduate students, international students, students in dorms, and off-campus students, can make for a more diverse group of bike buddies. Events such as Quad Day, Welcome Week, and Sustainapooloza can be great opportunities to promote the bike buddy program. Holding additional in-person events and group rides where cyclists can meet up for the bike buddy program can also make it easier to form bike buddy groups.

Bike Buddy Program: Steps Towards Implementation

1. Coordinate a system to pair up bike buddies based on various individual and ride characteristics (algorithm, app, sign-up sheet, in-person meet up, etc.)
2. Widely advertise the bike buddy program at in-person events, Welcome Week events, and online to attract a diverse group of bike buddies.

3. Reinforce the program by improving bike infrastructure and bike safety measures on campus.
4. Implement end of year/semester surveys to better understand cyclists.

Bike Ambassador Program Research

The University of Oregon's UO Bike Share Student Ambassadors program has been active since 2022 and typically has between 10-20 active student ambassadors during the year. The Bike Share is operated by a local nonprofit, PeaceHealth Rides. This program is managed by PeaceHealth Rides and partially funded by the University of Oregon. After students fill out a form to become an ambassador, they are required to attend quarterly meetings to learn about service-learning opportunities like bike valet events, planting trees by bike, helping with bike education events, and volunteering at bike encouragement events on campus. One of the most popular events is the Filmed by Bike Festival, where ambassadors aid with event organizing, marketing, and emceeing. "Bike Share is operated by a local nonprofit, and they manage the Bike Share Ambassadors Program. UO Transportation Services provides some funding for this program." The University of Oregon describes how events take careful planning and providing a clear framework and timeline for events makes the program easier to administer. The University of Oregon also suggests that providing a somewhat flexible commitment is important for student ambassadors.

State College Borough, where Penn State is located, administers the State College Borough Bicycle Ambassador Program, which has been active since 2012. As of July 2025, the program has 5 ambassadors, the majority of whom are retired folks from the community. State College Borough collaborates with Centre Bike, a non-profit, and the Centre Region Council of governments for several events. The program is funded through the Department of Public Works' Sustainability Community Engagement Fund. Ambassadors can take on a variety of roles such as tabling for events, helping with community bike rides and delivering educational presentations. Some events include Bike-in Movie, Fall-Foliage Community Bike Ride, and Mayor's Bike Ride. Ambassador roles can also depend on training. To reach Silver, ambassadors must complete the League of American Bicyclists Smart Cycling Course, while for Gold, ambassadors must complete a League Cycling Instructor training, which allows them to lead community rides. Similarly to the University of Oregon, some of the biggest challenges are coordinating volunteers and events. Another challenge is event attendance.

While the University of Minnesota does not officially have a bike ambassador program, biking program interns are informally used as bike ambassadors. There is a desire to develop a formal bike ambassador program.

In an interview with the New Jersey Bicycle and Pedestrian Resource Center, a researcher discussed the New Jersey Ambassadors in Motion program, a state-wide bike ambassador program, based at Rutgers University, that ran from approximately 2012-2021. While the

program has been discontinued for several years, understanding the successes, challenges, and reason for disbanding this program is invaluable. Due to a spike in cyclist and pedestrian deaths, the New Jersey's bike ambassador program was developed to promote safety and active transportation. The New Jersey Department of Transportation funded the program through a BRPC grant. Typically, 5-6 graduate students were hired for the program in which they would spend about 20% of their time doing ambassador duties and 80% doing research for the New Jersey Bicycle and Pedestrian Resource Center. Ambassador duties could include outreach at busy locations with flyers and pamphlets with safety tips, helping with bike rodeos, public bike safety presentations, and engaging with other organizations like the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority's Street Smart Campaign. Bicycle ambassadors were recognizable in the community because of their presence at many events in the community while wearing bike ambassador shirts. The ambassadors frequent travel across the state also presented a unique opportunity for ambassadors to make notes of good and poor bike infrastructure around the community. Some of the most successful events were bike education and safety events hosted during international student orientation. The program officially ended in 2021, with no current plans to reinstate it as it was difficult to quantify its effectiveness in promoting safety combined with a shift in priorities from the New Jersey Department of Transportation from focusing on mode share to focusing more on safety. While some information was simple to quantify, such as information about pamphlets passed out and events held, it was difficult to prove a strong correlation between the ambassador program and reducing cyclist and pedestrian accidents and fatalities.

From 2013-2017, Virginia Tech Sustainable Transportation and Hokie Bike Hub also had a bike ambassador program. The ambassador program was run by students with limited support and interest in programming from campus.

Bike Ambassador Program Recommendations

University of Illinois Urbana Champaign bike ambassadors should be required to undergo a cyclist safety training program and/or pass a bicycle safety training quiz. It could be useful to administer an already established League of American cyclist course or adopt certain aspects and develop a new course/quiz more tailored to cycling locally. It could also be a bonus to have ambassadors that are knowledgeable about bike maintenance, bike storage, local bike trails, and other common questions. Bike ambassadors should be recognizable in the community. This requires ambassadors to visually signal that they are bike ambassadors, such as with a shirt or spoke card or sticker, etc. and consistently attend relevant events. While bike ambassadors should expect to dedicate some time to the program, ambassador work should also be flexible to retain ambassadors and accommodate students' busy schedules.

Bike Ambassador Program: Steps Towards Implementation

1. Create a simple bike ambassador application that asks about a person's interest in the program, comfort with biking on and off campus and availability.
2. Select applicants that are passionate and willing to represent safe biking habits.
3. Administer safety training to all ambassadors.
4. Order and distribute ambassador gear.
5. Have ambassadors consistently appear at events and practice safe habits.
6. Check in regularly with ambassadors to gauge feedback.