

NEAT Institution:

Southern Connecticut State University

Project Title:

Alumni And Donor Relations Fellowship

Project Dates:

July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025

Contact information:

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Executive Summary

Purpose

The Alumni and Donor Relations Student Fellowship Program at Southern Connecticut State University was developed to provide meaningful, hands-on professional experience for students while supporting the operations of the Office of Alumni and Donor Relations. Launched in the current academic year, the fellowship has welcomed two dynamic student fellows, Alyssa Longo and Kate Ekberg, who brought enthusiasm, creativity, and dedication to their roles.

The fellowship is designed to promote student development and exposure to the advancement field, building valuable career skills while contributing to alumni engagement initiatives.

Roles and Responsibilities

Kate focused on financial operations, supporting budget tracking and administrative processes. Her responsibilities included:

- Budget management and documentation
- Purchase reconciliation and tracking
- Processing and submitting financial forms via DocuSign

Kate's involvement in these functions provided her with valuable insight into university finance systems and operational procedures.

Alyssa concentrated her efforts on digital marketing and communications. Working closely with professional staff, she:

- Curated and created content for alumni social media channels
- Collaborated on the development and distribution of the monthly alumni newsletter
- Participated in strategy sessions to increase alumni digital engagement

Through this work, Alyssa was able to build an array of technical and creative skills vital to communications and alumni engagement.

Both students played an active role in event planning and support. Their contributions included:

- Preparing event inventory and supplies
- Generating and printing event materials (sign-in sheets, nametags)
- Selecting and ordering event giveaways
- Staffing event registration tables and networking with alumni attendees

Collaborative Initiatives and Program Impact

In collaboration with the Annual Giving and Donor Relations teams, Alyssa and Kate also supported student-focused philanthropic initiatives leading up to the university's Day of Caring. They assisted with:

- Tabling during community hour to promote philanthropy and student scholarships
- Educating peers about campus resources and financial aid opportunities
- Organizing interactive activities like trivia games with giveaways (e.g., SCSU swag, Dunkin' gift cards)

These pop-up events not only boosted awareness but also empowered students to take ownership of their education and giving culture. Another key element to the success of these programs was the peer-to-peer interaction, as opposed to solely professional staff tabling and engaging with current students.

Overview

Following an initial training and onboarding period, both students successfully transitioned to working more independently, managing tasks and projects integral to the department's daily functions and long-term goals. In addition to working primarily with Alumni and Donor Relations, fellows will visit with key IA staff each week to learn about their area, what their roles/responsibilities are, and how it overlaps with Alumni and Donor Engagement.

Year one: Work with Associate Director of Alumni Relations and Associate Director of Annual Giving on weekly projects.

Year two: Work with Director of Alumni Relations and Director of Annual Giving on higher level and larger-scale programs, such as homecoming, alumni professional's day, Day of Caring, and board governance.

Requirements:

- 2-year commitment from a rising junior or a rising senior.
- Application and essay required.
- Fellows will be selected by a committee comprised of Institutional Advancement Leadership.
- After year one, the fellowship will always have two (2) fellows in the program.

Itemized budget:

- 1st year: \$10,000 (one fellow)
 - \$5,000 per semester
 - 19 hours/week per semester (16 weeks) = \$16.44/hour
- 2nd year and beyond: \$20,000 annually (two fellows)
 - \$10,000 per semester (\$5,000 for each fellow)
 - 38 hours/week per semester (16 weeks) = \$16.44/hour

Findings and Conclusions

Overall, the Alumni and Donor Relations Student Fellowship was moderately successful, with room for growth. We achieved our objective of enhancing student learning, expanding program capacity, and cultivating the next generation of advancement professionals.

Budget: We anticipated having more resources to fund this initiative; however, budget cuts prevented us from having more weekly hours for our fellows. As a result, we elected to have two student fellows to provide more support for our team, while still meeting program objectives. Each student worked with us for about 5 hours a week. There were other student workers who were hired by other areas within our division, and unexpectedly our budget was asked to incur some of these costs. Ultimately, we had about \$4,000 for the year to work with. We elected to launch the program later in the semester in order to align more closely with our budget lasting the entire year, so our fellows could work both semesters and have an opportunity to participate in both fall and spring initiatives to optimize their experience and exposure to the field.

Rotating visits with other departments: Given the time constraints we had weekly with our fellows, we expedited the time frame for their onboarding and truncated their meeting times and opportunities with key IA staff a bit. Although they did not meet as frequently with other departments as we anticipated, both Kate and Alyssa had opportunities to work on projects with various departments, such as integrated marketing and communications (Homecoming/Family Weekend, Day of Caring), development (conducting campus tours for key prospects), and research (updating constituent information in our database).

Access: our student fellows had restricted access to some administrative systems due to HR and privacy compliance standards; however, we allowed them to sit with key staff members to familiarize themselves with said programs. We discussed the intent, purpose, etc. of each, and creating training documents for some, such as our e-mail platform, MyEmma. While this limited some anticipated tasks and projects, it allowed us to provide alternative training tools and exposure for our fellows.

Impact: the impact of the student fellowship was substantive. It was great to have the support we have been lacking for several years, coupled with the opportunity to train and cultivate students, expose them to the advancement field, help them build valuable career skills, all while contributing to alumni engagement initiatives. Witnessing the growth in confidence and skills of both Alyssa and Kate over the course of the year was extremely rewarding, and they were a breath of fresh air for our staff with their energy, enthusiasm, and support.

Recommendations: due to budget cuts across the university, we do not anticipate being able to retain both of our student fellows. Alternatively, we plan to offer them opportunities to work with us on specific projects throughout the year. I designed this program to be a two-year framework, but it was still extremely effective and beneficial to both our area and the student fellows despite having to pivot throughout the year. If provided adequate funding, this program would be a great opportunity to build an intentional pipeline of young professionals into our field, as the work we do is everchanging and needs new and interesting perspectives, coupled with new skills and approaches as practitioners.

Appendix

Budget/Expenditures for Alyssa and Kate for FY25: **\$3,231.91**

FY25:											
04Z01413	628857	Alyssa Longo	601400	11/28/2024	74.56	12/13/2024	2025	0	REG	9098VR	
04Z01413	576353	Kathren Ekberg	601400	11/28/2024	176.00	12/13/2024	2025	5	REG	9098VR	
04Z01413	628857	Alyssa Longo	601400	12/12/2024	93.28	12/27/2024	2025	0	REG	9098VR	
04Z01413	576353	Kathren Ekberg	601400	12/12/2024	288.00	12/27/2024	2025	5	REG	9098VR	
04Z01413	576353	Kathren Ekberg	601400	12/26/2024	80.00	1/10/2025	2025	5	REG	9098VR	
04Z01413	576353	Kathren Ekberg	601400	1/23/2025	81.75	2/7/2025	2025	5	REG	9098VR	
04Z01413	576353	Kathren Ekberg	601400	2/6/2025	212.55	2/21/2025	2025	5	REG	9098VR	
04Z01413	628857	Alyssa Longo	601400	2/6/2025	157.94	2/21/2025	2025	0	REG	9098VR	
04Z01413	576353	Kathren Ekberg	601400	2/20/2025	138.98	3/7/2025	2025	5	REG	9098VR	
04Z01413	628857	Alyssa Longo	601400	2/20/2025	157.94	3/7/2025	2025	0	REG	9098VR	
04Z01413	576353	Kathren Ekberg	601400	3/6/2025	138.98	3/21/2025	2025	5	REG	9098VR	
04Z01413	628857	Alyssa Longo	601400	3/6/2025	133.42	3/21/2025	2025	0	REG	9098VR	
04Z01413	576353	Kathren Ekberg	601400	3/20/2025	155.33	4/4/2025	2025	5	REG	9098VR	
04Z01413	628857	Alyssa Longo	601400	3/20/2025	78.97	4/4/2025	2025	0	REG	9098VR	
04Z01413	576353	Kathren Ekberg	601400	4/3/2025	302.48	4/17/2025	2025	5	REG	9098VR	
04Z01413	628857	Alyssa Longo	601400	4/3/2025	152.55	4/17/2025	2025	0	REG	9098VR	
04Z01413	576353	Kathren Ekberg	601400	4/17/2025	114.45	5/2/2025	2025	5	REG	9098VR	
04Z01413	628857	Alyssa Longo	601400	4/17/2025	174.29	5/2/2025	2025	0	REG	9098VR	
04Z01413	628857	Alyssa Longo	601400	5/1/2025	119.85	5/16/2025	2025	0	REG	9098VR	
04Z01413	576353	Kathren Ekberg	601400	5/1/2025	245.26	5/16/2025	2025	5	REG	9098VR	
04Z01413	628857	Alyssa Longo	601400	5/15/2025	24.53	5/30/2025	2025	0	REG	9098VR	
04Z01413	576353	Kathren Ekberg	601400	5/15/2025	130.80	5/30/2025	2025	5	REG	9098VR	
04Z01413	576353	Kathren Ekberg	601400	6/26/2025	130.80	7/11/2025	2026	5	REG	9098VR	
					3362.71						

This report was run by Jay Chhabra in SCSU's finance office. The last \$130.80 payment to Kathren took place in FY26, so I subtracted it from the total expense of \$3,362.71 displayed at the bottom of the screenshot.