

# From idea to publication: How RISE Ambassadors are impacting science education

By Megan Neely, ASU News  
March 25, 2026

When [Sara Brownell began the RISE Ambassadors program](#) three years ago as part of her [Charter Professorship](#), she hoped to make a positive impact on STEM learning environments by empowering undergraduate students to have greater agency in both the research conducted and its translation into meaningful change.

The program, hosted within the [RISE Center](#), promotes innovative education research in STEM-related fields. Brownell's overall goal for the [RISE Ambassadors program](#) is to encourage students to be creative while providing tangible outcomes that improve inclusion.

"We have phenomenal undergrads who care deeply about inclusion in STEM, and we're wasting that potential if we're not equipping them with networks or a platform to be able to take their ideas and actually have an impact," said Brownell, a President's Professor in the [School of Life Sciences](#).

Over the past three years, students in the RISE Ambassadors program have taken on projects that have resulted in the creation of resource pages for students, the expansion of the RISE Center's social media presence to amplify research findings and the publication of peer-reviewed research papers. Students are also tasked with disseminating research findings through accessible channels, such as in-person community events and workshops and even TikTok reels.

## Advocating RISE research

Former RISE Ambassador Vincent Truong graduated in 2025 as a [Dean's Medalist](#) with degrees in psychology and biochemistry (medical chemistry). He was interested in advocacy, so he focused his efforts on leading workshops, creating resource pages and advocating for the RISE Center's

work through an elevated social media presence.

Now attending Mayo Clinic Alix School of Medicine, Truong said this experience taught him how to collaborate and be accommodating of others.

“I think (having been) a collaborator and having that teamwork (experience) really helps me now for sure,” he said.

Aliya Hashim is currently in her second year with RISE, studying both neurology and pharmacology and toxicology. She is involved in a project focusing on how accessible ADHD resources are for students on college campuses across the country, as well as misconceptions surrounding the disorder.

Hashim has been involved with the RISE Summit — an event exploring how to make STEM spaces more accessible — as well as poster sessions.

“There are so many more people who share, if not exactly the same, very similar experiences, and hopefully that gives them the support or just the hope that they need to get through college,” Hashim said.

Brownell sees the program as a balance between giving students opportunities to explore their own questions and ensuring that the projects lead to outcomes that can have an impact.

To assist with the balance, PhD candidate Baylee Edwards is a collaborator and day-to-day research mentor for many of these students. As a core member of the RISE Center and a fourth-year PhD student, she has helped RISE Ambassadors take an idea all the way to peer-reviewed publications not once, but three times.

Now, the students are reflecting on their experience in RISE and how it led to their becoming co-authors on peer-reviewed publications.

## **Gaining real-world research experience**

Hailey Bunch learned about RISE Ambassadors in one of Brownell’s courses and was particularly drawn to the program’s previous work on students disclosing their mental health struggles on medical school applications.

“As a person who has bipolar disorder, I felt that work was incredibly important. I was struggling with how to approach my own medical school application and debating whether or not to mention my own diagnosis to explain a poor semester I had,” Bunch said.

Brownell recruited Edwards to mentor Bunch, who tackled this topic by reaching out to medical school admission committee members to gather insight on how disclosing bipolar disorder affects admission decisions and if their responses showed a bias toward a preferred response.

The paper Bunch co-authored, [“Progress or prejudice? Medical school admissions committee members exhibit nuanced responses to applicants revealing bipolar disorder on applications,”](#) was recently published in the journal *Advances in Physiology Education*.

## A class experience, questioned

Jude Kolodisner was an undergraduate in Brownell's class when he participated in a class demographics survey administered during the first week of the course. Later, when he became a RISE Ambassador, he designed a project with Edwards to explore the impact of being asked to take such a survey on students. They found that students responded positively to it, reporting increased feelings of approachability with the professor.

Now in medical school, Kolodisner co-authored the published paper "[Students respond positively to an instructor collecting and sharing aggregated class demographic data from a survey in a high-enrollment physiology course](#)" in 2024 for [Advances in Physiology Education](#).

"I didn't have much research experience, and they (Brownell and Edwards) showed me how to write a paper, collect data and basic stats. They were very patient with me and it was a super inviting, low-pressure research experience," Kolodisner said. "To see that there's a professor that really cares about making sure you're getting the most out of your experience in a classroom and then get to work on a project that evaluates a survey that any instructor could use was really rewarding."

## From first-gen to research on faith

Analy Granados began pursuing her interest in first-generation student experiences as a RISE Ambassador. She created a set of resources for first-generation students and gathered insights from others on how they could be further supported in school. Brownell reached out to Granados to help Edwards work on a grant-funded research project related to the experiences of religious students in biology.

"It was just really fun getting to interview students and seeing behind the scenes of a research project," Granados said. "It was a cool experience getting to work so closely with Sara and Baylee. (Before that) I didn't ever really think too much about higher education research."

Granados, who is now headed for dental school, co-authored the paper "[The experiences of students with concealable Muslim identities during peer interactions in undergraduate biology courses](#)" in [Life Sciences Education](#) this past September.

---

*This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).*

## Main image



One of Sara Brownell's cohorts of RISE Ambassadors. From left: Vincent Truong, Jude Kolodisner, Analay Granados, Hailey Bunch and Sara Brownell. Courtesy photo

**Text image(s)**





The RISE Ambassadors program encourages collaboration among students in different disciplines.  
Photo courtesy of The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences