

## Cultivating Future Professionals: My Experience as a NODA Intern Supervisor

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One of the main reasons I entered the Student Affairs field was because of the powerful experiences Student Affairs professionals had provided for me as an undergraduate student. I wanted to be able to create these life-changing experiences for others. Between my first and second years of my graduate program at Western Illinois University, I participated in the NODA internship program.

As an intern, I journeyed far from the Midwest to Montclair State University in New Jersey. This experience was meaningful to me in many ways. The internship provided more than additional experience working with comprehensive orientation programs. It gave me the opportunity to apply what I was learning in the classroom in practice. Most importantly, I felt this experience solidified my decision to work in the orientation profession after I finished graduate school. I also knew that someday, I wanted to offer a meaningful experience for a graduate student similar to mine.

A few months after starting as assistant director of Orientation at Northern Illinois University, I suggested to the office the possibility of hosting an intern for the coming summer. The director agreed that hosting a NODA intern could be a valuable experience for both the intern and the office. Because we had not hosted an intern before, we expected some challenges, but looked forward to beginning the process.

The first step was creating a job description, with input from experienced orientation leaders and professional staff. After the internship job description was created, the process was simple. Each host institution created a profile on the NODA website where host institutions could access their job descriptions, view candidate resumes, update internship coordinator on the status of selecting an intern, and use the NODA internship resource center. The resource benefited to host institutions by providing deadlines and samples of job descriptions, contracts, appointment letters, and interview questions.

In late January, the NODA intern interview and selection process began. Students who were interested in our position submitted their resume and application online. The number of qualified applicants was manageable. After applications were reviewed, phone interviews followed. Selected candidates participated in two sets of interviews, the first with two professional staff members and a second interview with second-year orientation leaders (team leaders).

The team leaders and I, with input from other professional staff, ranked the candidates interviewed. We based the final decision on how finalists would fit into the team dynamic, if they would work well with new orientation leaders, and if they could “hit the ground running.” In this case, there was consensus on the top choice.

We were excited when our NODA intern accepted the position. One goal I had in

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supervising the intern was to help him feel like an important member of the staff. He received information about the university, our department, and the orientation program by mail to help him learn about the campus quickly, as orientation would begin shortly after his arrival. During a spring American College Student Personnel (ACPA) conference, the intern and I were also able to meet briefly to get to know each other.

When the intern arrived in mid-May, he immediately became part of orientation leader training and final preparations for orientation programs. His assigned tasks during the programs ranged from helping supervise the orientation leaders, presenting an academic session to nearly 3,000 new freshmen, and analyzing evaluation results. The intern also presented information about online communities such as Facebook and MySpace in a seminar for family members. The intern initially expressed apprehension about giving the sessions, but he rose to the challenge and strengthened his presentation skills. It was evident that he took time to rehearse the presentations, and he demonstrated a sense of professionalism in his delivery.

Another responsibility for the intern was co-supervising the orientation leaders. Before he could be an effective supervisor, the intern needed to develop relationships with the student staff. This may have been his greatest challenge of the summer, due to the difficulty of entering a pre-formed close-knit group. However, the staff responded quickly and positively to his sincerity and enthusiasm.

Throughout the summer, the intern played a crucial role for the office. He continually took initiative in tasks that made the programs run smoothly. The intern was easy to supervise because he always alerted his supervisor of any potential problem with the program or staff. By frequently asking questions about the orientation program, our intern gave the office an opportunity to reevaluate why we do what we do. His evaluation of our program will prove useful as we plan for future programs.

As the summer concluded, and our NODA intern prepared to leave us, I hoped we provided a meaningful experience with a multi-dimensional program that will enhance his professional development. I also hope our intern left his experience happy that he chose the Orientation Office at Northern Illinois University as his internship because we are happy that we chose him.