

# A Legacy of Leadership: Involving Returning Orientation Leaders in Recruitment and Selection

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*In a selective and prestigious paid student leadership position, orientation leaders help new students and their parents or guests make the transition to University of California, Merced through relationship-building activities, student life presentations, goal-setting exercises, and academic advising in 1-day orientation sessions throughout the summer. Readers of this article will gain insights into recruiting, hiring, and forming strong teams by effectively utilizing returning staff. Named “legacy orientation leaders” by the author of this article, the returning staff members’ new title is reflective of the elevated responsibility and opportunities they have within our program. The legacy orientation leader application and interview processes, recruitment efforts, and participation in individual and group interview processes are discussed. Through these involvements, legacy leaders become torchbearers of program traditions and values in recruiting and selecting new orientation leader staff.*

What does it mean to leave a legacy? Making a lasting contribution to a program or the development of others is a way to leave legacy in leadership. It is in this spirit of legacy that I named returning student staff members “legacy orientation leaders” at the University of California, Merced. Legacy orientation leader staff members are called to embrace new leadership roles within our program, have unique opportunities to engage in professional-level learning experiences, and share in ownership of program development and outcomes. Their involvement in recruitment and selection processes for new orientation leader student staff is the first step in embracing their legacy leader role. A selective and prestigious paid leadership position, orientation leaders help new students and their parents or guests make the transition to our university through relationship building activities, student life presentations, goal setting exercises and academic advising in one-day orientation sessions throughout the summer. As torchbearers of the orientation leader position, legacy orientation leaders promote this job to fellow students as an opportunity to grow and learn, inspire classmates to apply through their example, and use their leadership experience to help identify candidates of great quality, skill, and potential. As the inaugural director of New Student Orientation at University of California, Merced, I believe the development

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of legacy orientation leaders is an essential element to creating student staff teams of consistent excellence. My hope is that these insights might help others recruit, hire, and formulate strong teams by utilizing legacy orientation leaders as torchbearers of inspired leadership and program values.

Becoming a legacy orientation leader begins with an application and interview process designed for this group of experienced leaders. Application essays and interview questions spur reflection on their readiness for new responsibilities, goals for leadership growth, expectations surrounding change, and their responses to situational case studies based on past team challenges. During an interview with each staff member, we candidly discuss his or her application reflections. We talk about how it is natural to make sense of new situations and experiences by comparing them to previous ones. We also discuss the danger of letting last year's team strengths or success paralyze us from embracing this year with openness. I ask about how they would like to contribute to our legacy staff by becoming torchbearers of knowledge, tradition, and example to less experienced staff. We brainstorm ways that they can use their unique gifts in a more significant way or make past team strengths part of our success again this year. I put no limit on the number of years a staff member can serve as an orientation leader while a student at our university. Instead, these application and interview processes help me determine whether continued learning and growth in the position would benefit both our program and the candidate.

A final question on the legacy orientation leader application asks for a description of a project that they would like to help implement as a contribution to their legacy. The individual or collective Legacy Project involves experienced staff in creating a lasting contribution to our program. Past projects have included a training workshop with an area high school orientation leader team, service events, brochures on transfer students, and faith-based resources and memory books. Their season-long project helps them remember, focus, and forward legacy staff ideals in a tangible way.

Our legacy staff members are heavily involved with recruitment and selection of new leaders, which begins with a recruitment campaign planning day. This year, our team watched the TEDx (2009) video "Start With Your Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Action" as a springboard for discussing why we chose to help new students have a successful start at University of California, Merced. We continued with a discussion about our program values and identified student populations that could help fulfill these values. After brainstorming recruitment methods, I grouped similar types of recruitment and communications efforts and asked staff to pair together to co-lead these teams in a recruitment area of their choice. Legacy staff members drafted plans for recruitment areas with timelines, resources needed, and ways they will solicit help from their fellow staff members to carry out their activities. The afternoon part of the recruitment day was spent implementing plans: creating posters and signs, reserving space, and developing agendas for events. Our materials are often the first to be displayed on campus windows, bulletin boards, and social media, and they attract attention when students return to campus at the start of the spring semester. Campaign leaders meet once per week

during the month-long campaign to update each other on their efforts, solicit additional help, and discuss challenges. Legacy staff members also reach out to student organizations by requesting to attend 10 minutes of an upcoming meeting to share information about the position. They plan and lead several application workshops, so potential applicants can better understand the requirements of the position, gain perspectives on crafting professional applications from career services representatives, and begin to develop their applications through brief writing and public speaking activities.

This recruitment process also serves a second purpose. I describe the recruitment campaign period of our season as "Orientation Independent Study," in which legacy orientation leaders take initiative to plan, organize and coordinate involvement of other staff toward a common goal, much like an independent study course. These roles are key expectations of the student assistant coordinator position, the highest level of student leadership in our program. Staff members enjoy the challenge of trying out these roles. As their supervisor, I am able to use these experiential learning tasks to evaluate and foster talent in our group.

As we transition to the hiring phase of staff selection, legacy orientation leaders are heavily involved in reviewing applications. They are also full participants in individual and group interviews. During the application review process, we analyze the strengths of our individual and collective leadership on our current team. We also talk about possible weaknesses in our team and develop application review rubrics to highlight qualities, talents, and experiences that may meet these needs. The team's need in any given year trumps individual accolades. In helping to conduct interviews, staff members improve their own interview skills. As they discuss interview answers given by candidates, they reflect on how they would respond to important issues, share accomplishments, or give examples of their development in academic and leadership settings. Beyond the university setting, staff involved with these processes can influence their future workplaces by contributing to ethical selection and hiring practices.

Our group process interviews involve 8 to 10 candidates in philosophical discussions on the purposes of education, simulated parent question and answer sessions, and creation of a mini skit to help understand each candidate's ability to demonstrate patience, listening skills, compromise, and problem-solving abilities with others. We look for signs that a candidate can be a leader among leaders.

On the eve of our first orientation, legacy staff members plan a special ceremony to celebrate the culmination of our training efforts and their confidence in new staff members' readiness for their roles as orientation leaders. Legacy leaders share confidence-building remembrances then light candles held by each new staff member while draping an official staff jacket over their shoulders. One the most anticipated moments of our season, our annual Torch Ceremony, signifies the passing of the light of inspiration, commitment, and knowledge between legacy and new staff.

As program directors and leaders, we need to find opportunities to help returning staff members build leadership legacies. I am proud of how our legacy

leader torchbearers have helped our program develop a reputation in student staff excellence. I hope these ideas and insights will help you yield similar results.

## Reference

TEDx Talks. (2009, September 28). *Start with why: How great leaders inspire action*. [Video File]. Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4ZoJKF\\_VuA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4ZoJKF_VuA)