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Leaders Are Made, Not Born



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Today marks one year since I applied to become an Orientation Advisor (OA). The hesitation in hitting that submit button at the end of the application almost got the best of me, but I decided to go for it, and not look back. After going through a rigorous application process, I received word late last November that I had been accepted to enroll in the program. I told myself that I should turn down the offer, because I was not cut out for the job.

Orientation Advisors are in charge of creating an exceptional welcoming experience for incoming students during their summer orientation. Part of the different responsibilities entails helping those students prepare for their first semester; for example, OAs help with planning class schedules, leading campus tours, and even sharing their undergraduate experience. Once accepted into the program, student advisors are required to enroll in an upper-division education course, attend 2-3 retreats, and study various campus resources inside and out. They also attend a two-week intensive training camp before the first summer orientation begins. Ultimately, all of these requirements help grounded me in what it means to take initiative and be a leader.

As OAs undergo heavy training, they do not realize how much the program is shaping their character. I could not have predicted just how much confidence I would gain. Not only did I deliver a personalized monologue to over 10,000+ prospective students in a crowded auditorium, but I also met some of my best friends. The unique group of individuals selected to train alongside me are so unique, astonishing, and caring. We spent a lot of time with each other, and before we know it, we were more than just future employees, because the structure of the program is designed to shape student leaders while simultaneously building lifelong friendships. To better strengthen these friendships, the administrators of New Student Services take

initiative in creating the most memorable bonding experiences, which also helped to ease the process. We took trips to Fiesta Texas, went camping, and even skydiving.

I believe there are two skills vital to success, confidence and perseverance, two I lacked before partaking in the program. I went from being a hesitant, shy student to becoming extremely involved in campus politics and literary research. It is a space to grow and push oneself out of their comfort zone without being criticized for it. It is part of the reason I secured an internship with our University Writing Center, a spot on the Counseling and Mental Health Center Student Advisory Board, and an Associate Editor position with The Liberator Magazine, the official publication of UT Austin's College of Liberal Arts. The various perks that come with the job serve as a reminder not to fret over any mistakes but to simply learn from them.

Students often ask me what the program does for a resume in the long haul. My answer? It does everything. I have applied for various internships and organizations, and during interviews, I am often asked to speak about the experience.

Organizations and jobs around campus know being an OA says a lot about a student because the position requires detailed knowledge about specific campus resources, emergency protocols, and student life. Future OAs looking to acquire leadership experience should consider applying. The opportunities it affords students are priceless—as are the free meals given every so often.



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