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Design Art Architecture and Planning

Industrial Design

Student Orientation Leader

Thematic Area: Leadership

Project Start Date: April 25th

Project End Date: July 19th

For my self-designed honors experiential learning project, I am working as a student orientation leader for the University of Cincinnati over the summer of 2014. After a four month long application process, and a month of training and getting to know my team, I’ll help run orientation for new students coming to UC in the 2014-2015 school year. For those parents and students, I will be one of their first encounters with the University. I’ve wanted to have this job since I attended orientation last summer. Leadership and community involvement are very important to me, which is why I am involved in so many student groups and organizations. This is also why I’ve applied to be an RA and a SOL. As an orientation leader, I’ll lead small groups of new students throughout the day, and do other office work to get everything ready to run smoothly every day over the summer. The time commitment is intense, and most mornings we’ll wake up at 4:30 to get ready for our day. Being a SOL means that you come to work and run orientation, making sure every student is well cared for. It also means holding a good sense of character when the day is over. I say the time commitment is intense because its 24/7. This job will not only give me more leadership experience, but also it will test my character and my ability to balance social and authoritative roles.

For my two learning outcomes, I chose to use the following: “Identifies the various characteristics of a leader in a given situation/role” and “has the ability to relate, communicate and work effectively with others”. As a student orientation leader, I’ll be working with a team of 29 other SOLs as well as a team of Student Orientation Coordinators (SOCs). My ability to work as a leader on a team of other people my age and older will be very important over the next three months. In order to successfully complete the SOL job, I will need to understand exactly what it takes to lead groups of new students. In most situations, I’ll be older than all the students I’m working with. I know that this experience will help me grow and learn more than I ever would otherwise during my summer break.

In a professional setting, this experience will give me leadership skills that will help me to head a project or lead a group through a design problem. Academically, I know that being a SOL will show my dedication to the University of Cincinnati, which may in turn cause my professors to look to me to be a leader in the classroom. I believe that I’ll gain the most on a personal level. My goals for the summer are to be challenged as a leader and to push myself to be a more extroverted person. I have had trouble in the past getting to know new people and putting myself out there, and I believe this experience as a SOL will put me out of my comfort zone.

The resources I’ve chosen to prepare myself for this leadership role are two books: Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead by Sheryl Sandberg, and The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership by John Maxwell. These books were both recommended by my parents and sister as great resources for developing leadership skills. I’ll be reading these books during our month long training to prepare myself for my role as a student leader on campus for new students. John C. Maxwell is an internationally recognized leadership expert, speaker, and author who has sold over 13 million books. His organizations have trained more than 2 million leaders worldwide. Dr. Maxwell is the founder of EQUIP and INJOY Stewardship Services. Every year he speaks to Fortune 500 companies, international government leaders, and organizations as diverse as the United States Military Academy at West Point and the National Football League. Sandberg is the chief operating officer of Facebook and is ranked on Fortune’s list of the 50 Most Powerful Women in Business and as one of Time’s 100 Most Influential People in the World. In Lean In, Sandberg digs deeper into these issues, combining personal anecdotes, hard data, and compelling research to cut through the layers of ambiguity and bias surrounding the lives and choices of working women.

My unique contribution to the SOL experience is that I am an outlier. I am not from Ohio, I’m gay, and I’m an introvert from a very small private school. I know what it’s like to come to a large university without knowing anything about the city or people. I hope that I can be an ally to the other outliers like me. If I can improve their experience at orientation, then I feel my job as a SOL has been successful. I bring a new perspective to the table that most Ohio students can’t bring. I remember being at orientation feeling nervous and uncomfortable as an out of state student. I knew nothing about Cincinnati and I didn’t understand why everyone was asking me what high school I went to. There will always be new students like me, with concerns like I had. I want to be there for those students.

As a reflection on the entire summer as a SOL, I want to really look into how my leadership skills were enhanced. I plan on keeping a blog to log my hours as a SOL. As much as I’d like to think that I’ll write every day, I’ll most likely write a weekly entry describing the impact that the week had on me, and in the end, I’ll reflect on the experience as a whole. Was I a successful SOL? Do I feel as though my leadership skills have improved? How likely am I to lead again? Did I leave the SOL experience knowing that I made orientation better for new students?

I’m hoping that my blog will serve as a guide to new students as well as future SOLs. I plan on sharing my work with the director of the SOL program, and it will ultimately be up to her to decide how far my logged experience can go. I’ll also keep a blog as a meditation. This is a high stress job, and taking an hour away from the week to write an entry or two will help me distress and recollect my thoughts on the experience.

My project advisor will be Sarah Leggesse, the director of orientation at the University of Cincinnati. She oversees all things regarding orientation and will be our mentor and guide through the SOL process this summer.