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## Retention of Returning Orientation Team Leaders

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Running head: RETENTION OF RETURNING ORIENTATION TEAM LEADERS

Retention of Returning Orientation Team Leaders at California State University San Marcos

Matt Menor

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### Abstract

The purpose of my research was to explore why Orientation Leaders (OL) do not return for another year at California State University San Marcos (CSUSM). Specifically, my research question was: How can I better understand and support the retention of returning Orientation Leaders at CSU San Marcos? Using O’Leary’s Cycles of Action Research as a guiding framework, I conducted one pre-cycle, a needs assessment, and two cycles of data collection: interviews with returnees and interviews with prostaff members. As a result, I developed a set of recommendations to help future prostaff members understand the different needs of the student leaders as well as implement better support infrastructure within the team.

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### Retention of Returning Orientation Team Leaders at California State University San Marcos

As an undergraduate student, I found that the most positive and supportive environments were the ones happening outside of the classroom. As an incoming student to California State University (CSU) Monterey Bay in 2012, I was a shy person who was not sure what college would be like and I had reservations about leaving home. My Orientation Leader was outgoing and loud; something I was not. They forced us to talk with other students and exchange numbers so we would always have a study buddy. As a result of my positive experience, I applied to be a part of O-Team with the desire to do the same for students that my Orientation Leader did for me. I knew the experience would push me out of my comfort zone. Unfortunately, I did not get selected for the team my first year but I did reapplied the following year and was selected to be a part of the team.

Orientation was the start of my journey, a place where I got to explore who I was as well as grow as a leader on campus. I met amazing students who also wanted to get involved and help others. As the years went on, I found that some of my team members would lose interest and not return; many were looking at other campus opportunities to get involved in. I returned for one more year and ended up being an intern during my last two years as an undergraduate student. I found it puzzling that less and less of the team would return to pass down information we learned and knew about Orientation to the new students.

In my current role at CSU San Marcos (CSUSM) in New Student and Family Programs, I have noticed the same thing. I have been through one complete Orientation Season with the 2019 team and currently work with the 2020 team. There were a small number of returner applications that were turned in and fewer returners that are passing the information and insight they gained

from Orientation to the new student leaders. This led me to question why Orientation Leaders do not return.

Through my position as a Graduate Assistant at New Student and Family Programs at CSUSM, I explored reasons why Orientation Team Leaders chose not to return for another year on the team. Specifically, in this paper, I begin with a review of the literature to provide the background for my action research project. Next, I introduce the theoretical framework used during this research. Then, I summarize the purpose of the study, as well as methodology and context that informed the cycles I conducted. Finally, I conclude with limitations I faced while conducting the research, my recommendations for the future, and my final reflection on the process.

### **Literature Review**

New Student Orientation happens at colleges nationwide before the summer before incoming students start classes. Orientation is essential for the transition of new students to a new academic setting (Nadler, Miller, & Casebere, 1998). Orientation looks different from college to college, but it is a pivotal moment where students receive information on different campus resources, campus culture, academic advising, and an array of other resources useful for success in college. Orientation is a time for newly admitted students to get a good sense of what they can expect from a university. It sets students up to learn skills in college that will help them navigate the complex environment in which they are going to be developing. In sum, orientation plays a key role in predicting how many students continue their study at a university (Ben-Avie, Kennedy, Unson, Li, Riccardi, & Mugno, 2012).

Orientation Leaders are necessary to create a successful Orientation in which incoming students feel a sense of the college environment they will be entering. Orientation Leaders assist in discussing concerns, fears, campus resources, and their personal experience to the incoming class (Rosenstein, 2000). They are fundamental to Orientation programs not only for the energy they bring to the program but also for the personal stories that they share with new students. Orientation Leaders help set the tone for interactions students have with one another and the university (Bell, Haberek, & Zepko, 2010). The interaction between the Orientation Leader and the incoming students is essential because Orientation Leaders help with the transition of not only the new students but their support systems as well.

Research shows that was one of the items orientation team leaders find most helpful is peer-to-peer interactions (Gaskin & Williams, 2017). In one study, Gaskin & Williams (2017) found the Orientation Team had positive experiences when returning Orientation Team Leaders presented to them regarding topics they would need to know to conduct orientation. Student leaders also expressed that when returners facilitated training and dialogues, it helped them to bond as a team. In another study, Gruszka, Witt, & Tower (2019) utilized 10 years of preexisting data to examine changes in learning within 10 different cohorts of Orientation teams. Orientation Leaders were placed in a course that was worth 3 academic units to gain an understanding of themselves and the campus to prepare them for the role. They were given a pre-test, mid-test, and post-test to see their growth over time in the course. They found that Orientation Leaders were learning and growing from the course they were in which helped them with their roles as Orientation Leaders. However, they also found there was no difference from year to year. It did not matter the cohort year when it came to understanding and learning the material. This research

shows change can be made by looking at the strengths and positives of a group. However, it is also important for students to understand what the goal is for training and what skills they will walk away with at the end, particularly for returners who may have already learned the content necessary to be on the team.

To conclude my review of the literature, I read an article from the Association of Orientation, Transition and Retention in Higher Education (NODA) about a graduate student's transition from a graduate program to working in Orientation. Rosenstein (2019) discussed their journey through a graduate program and landing their first job in Orientation. As an Assistant Director of Orientation Programs, they had to navigate the complex world of a new campus. In the article they challenged the Orientation Team to critically think for themselves about solutions to problems. It was a strategy to help students develop their own skills, as well as to help them see problems from a different angle.

The literature that I reviewed followed a specific structure moving from a macro view to a micro view. I discussed Orientations in general and their role in a university. Then I summarized literature on Orientation Team Leaders and then finally I highlighted the work of someone in the role of Orientation. All of these articles shared a common thread: a focus on student development. No matter what programs or trainings are available, student development plays a key role in it all. Understanding what students may be going through, or the transitions and takeaways they experience, creates a positive college experience and contributes to the work within Orientation

### **Theoretical Framework**

Considering New Student and Family programs have many different theories when considering the needs of the incoming students, I took a look at the development and needs of the student leaders as they arise. With this, I chose to look at the development of the Orientation Leaders through two different theoretical frameworks. One of the frameworks I chose was Maslow's Theory of Hierarchy of needs. The second theory I chose to look at the student leaders through was Schlossberg's Transition Theory. These theories helped me to gain a little more insight into what the Orientation Leaders are experiencing and may help me identify reasons as to why they may not want to return for another year on the team.

#### **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

Maslow's Hierarchy of Need is one that I applied to the reasons why Orientation Leaders are not returning for another year. The theory works in the way that students work toward their potential in different categories (Trigg, 2004). The theory works in a ladder format in which each category reflects a basic need of a student in order to help them gain insight into themselves and the potential they hold. The reason this theory was established by Abraham Maslow was to help understand the motives people may have in order of precedence (Peterson & Park, 2010) As a hierarchy each category must be satisfied before moving to the next category of the pyramid (Hagerty, 1999). The theory is based on individual development but in this work, it will be applied to student leaders in Orientation. The theory works to help students work their way up the pyramid to the top category of self-actualization. This is the point where students see themselves as having gained skills and experience but also a place of understanding their self-worth.

**Physiological Needs.** The first category in Maslow's Hierarchy of need is physiological needs. This category can be viewed in terms of basic needs for students. When students are working up the pyramid to self-actualization, they must have the basic needs. Things such as a living arrangement, clothing, water, food, and other basic needs. These things are the foundation and baseline when looking at students' needs. When we look at Orientation basic needs is the basis of everything that we do. We ask our Student Leaders to be on campus early and have a mode of transportation to do so. We offer students breakfast and lunch on all Orientation days that they are working. Again, student leaders sign up for the Orientation sessions they would like to work. However, with that we do not have housing for the whole team. This means that many of our student leaders are traveling from home to be at Orientation in the morning.

**Safety Needs.** The next category in the pyramid is safety. This can be personal safety, resources, and health. These things are important to students and a priority for the staff as well. We recognize that we are bringing in new students to our community but need to ensure the safety of our student leaders. If safety cannot be assured or a student leader does not feel safe in the environment in which they are working, it can lead to negative experiences and a reason why they would decide not to return to the team the following summer.

**Love and Belonging Needs.** A sense of belonging is the next category on the pyramid. This category is where students feel connected on an individual level but also at a team level. To Orientation, this is probably the most critical of the categories. This is because this is what we train our team to be, unified, build bonds, and networks with one another. We are seeking to transition our incoming students successfully, and to do that, current students, staff, and faculty need to help incoming students feel a sense of belonging on our campus. However, to do that,

our current students need to feel we, as staff in our Orientation Team training, are trying to foster that community. To help give a sense of community, every returner has mentees, as well as they belong to a family which is overseen by the 6 Leadership Team Leaders.

With the idea of love and belongingness, this is where I can see Orientation losing most of their student leaders. Some students enter Orientation thinking one thing, but the team does not meet the expectation of that student and so choose not to return. I can also see students who do not make connections with others on the team and thus wish not to return. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs showcases what Orientation strives for and the potential consequences we face when we do not help students with what they need to be successful in their job as well as academically and in life.

**Esteem Needs.** The esteem category is one where students feel recognized, valued, respected, and utilized for their strength. The esteem needs can only be achieved once the individual feels socially accepted by others (Trigg, 2004). The esteem category is one where student leaders feel supported by staff and recognized for the work that they do. It can be hard sometimes with about 50 Orientation Team Leaders to recognize all, but effort and measures are in place to do so within the team. Students who are in this category who consider not returning may feel they were not recognized or, as Trigg mentioned, were not being socially accepted. Understanding students' need for the esteemed category can be critical in the way that Orientation Leaders are viewed and if they do foster a sense of family and community within the team.

**Self-Actualization.** This is the height of the pyramid. This category, sometimes referred to as moral needs, is looking into students who desire to be the best that they can be. Even with

the other categories fulfilled, students can still feel a disconnect between what they are hoping to achieve and life itself (Lea, Tarpay, & Webley, 1987). At this point in their life, they are redefining what it is that they do. By reevaluating themselves, this allows them to hone in on their skills to do the best they can do. This is where we, as staff, are hoping to get students in terms of student development. To feel more confident in the choices they are making and helping them be the best they can be. After this, there are always new and more things to learn, but that drive and desire to learn and keep growing is the reason they are in the self-actualization category.

### **Schlossberg Theory of Transition**

The theory of Transition is one that is not new to folks in New Student and Family Programs across the nation. The theory is an insight into understanding the needs of students who may be coming from different high schools or community colleges to your institution (Smith & Zhang, 2008). This is the root of why New Student Programs and Orientations are held every year for students. Orientation is the pivotal moment for students to gain information on campus resources and see if the institution is a good fit for them for the next few years. With that, the theory also can be connected to the Orientation Team Leaders. Transitioning is a hard thing to cope with sometimes and can be sudden for many people. Orientation Leaders are no strangers to transition and what that can mean for their development. A transition is described as a situation in which a change in relationships, routines, and roles (Rall, 2016). These changes can lead to other situations and transition away from Orientation.

In the case of understanding our student leaders and why they may not be returning, the Schlossberg theory of transition can be applied. Schlossberg's theory of Transition offers a glimpse at aspects to the individual in transition, the transition, and the environment in which a

transition is happening (Rall, 2016). The theory is helpful when designing learning outcomes for the Orientation Team Leaders as to what they may be experiencing as well as what support we can provide them to make decisions and help them through the transition.

**External Factors.** When I look at my Orientation Team, it is evident that they all represent different aspects of campus life as well as bring their own unique experiences with them. This makes Orientation and meeting with students more authentic and builds bonds between student leaders and the incoming class. However, with that, it is hard when the transition from home life to work life. As noted, CSUSM is a majority of commuter students, and our Orientation Team is no different. They are commuting from Temecula, San Diego, and everywhere in between. With this, a transition from the demands of home and the demands of Orientation can be hard to cope with. External factors, as well as the previous theory, work with the transition that students can be facing.

**Academic vs Co-Curricular.** This is another area of the theory to consider. Summer, for many students, is the time to figure out the next steps in their academics and career. This can be challenging when Orientation is demanding time as well as everything else. The transition between the two can be difficult as well as the transition to summer. Many students have studied abroad or held internships. With the transitions, it can be hard for students to feel a connection to campus or even to the team.

### **Summary**

In sum, these theoretical frameworks helped me understand where Orientation Team Leaders may be coming from and where in their student development they may be. I recognize students go through many different experiences and these theoretical frameworks helped guide

my reflections. Finally, the theories I utilized also helped with the content of the research. When coming up with questions and even my daily work with student leaders, specifically returners, having these theories helped me understand the various factors at play.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand the reasons why Orientation Team Leaders choose not to return for another year for Orientation. Specifically, I used an action research methodology to help me see the dynamic of the team as well as the environment they are subject to over the summer for Orientation at CSUSM. The research question guiding my study was: How can I better understand and support the retention of returning Orientation Leaders at CSU San Marcos?

### **Methodology**

To ensure that I was aware of all aspects of the issue and working to address it, I utilized O'Leary's model to help me understand more. O'Leary's model is a spiral brought to life as more information emerges (Koshy, 2006). O'Leary's model made it possible for me to reflect on what I noticed within the team. Koshy also explains, "the model is based on an evaluative practice that alters between action and critical reflection." This methodology offered useful insights to the problem I was addressing as well as understanding more about Action Research. O'Leary's model is useful in my case because it addresses both change implementation and uses the knowledge gained from that process to enact change (O'Leary, 2004).

The reason I chose O'Leary's model of Action research was because I was a new staff member entering into a new environment. O'Leary's model begins with an observation then continues to reflect, to plan, and to act. The rotation was the best for me because it allowed me to

observe the team as a whole and the department regarding the returning Orientation Team Leaders and the responsibilities they have. O'Leary's methodology, "attempted to minimize the distinction between researcher and researched, with high value placed on local knowledge." (O'Leary, 2004). This has allowed me to be in the same boat as the new members and the experience they have within the team. Although my role was different from theirs, I was still a new member of the team.

The model is relevant to the work I was conducting because of the problem I had seen when I was in Orientation in undergrad and the change within the organization and the way I think about returners. As someone who wants to work in Orientation as a full time professional, this model gave me the ability to step back into the role of a new Orientation Team Leader and a returner. I was able to understand what was being asked of them and then take a step back as a staff member to help provide support or resources to them. I think my previous experience was very important to the work because it allowed me to see different kinks in the armor of Orientation and how we can help the team in general. All of this came about within the observation and reflection process of the model. Allowing me just to observe the way they all interacted and even staff interacted with the team was interesting to see. Jotting down these observations in a journal was helpful for the reflection and the questions I wanted to ask during my Cycles. With only using qualitative data, this model was essential to understanding the problem, the system (myself included), and possible changes that can be made. With each cycle, a new interview was conducted with different groups that I found to be useful to the research and groups I thought would be essential to talk to through my observation and analysis of the previous cycles.

### **Context**

CSU San Marcos (CSUSM) established in 1989 as the 21st California State University of the 23 campuses. In fall 2018, CSUSM reported an enrollment of 14,511 students (Facts About the CSUSM). Within CSUSM, New Student and Family Programs (NSFP) organizes Orientations for these students, as well as the weeks of welcome and homecoming events with the Associated Students Inc. of CSUSM. In this organization, I am the Graduate Assistant hired for summer 2019 through spring 2020. My role is to support onboarding the new student leaders and support the daily logistics of Orientation dates offered to admitted students. NSFP's mission is, "to support new students and their families in a successful transition to university life at CSUSM, from admission through the first year. We aim to create a welcoming environment for new students and families, instill a sense of pride in campus spirit and traditions, and connect students and families to services and resources available on campus." (New Student & Family Programs).

The department is comprised of one Director, one Coordinator, one Graduate Assistant, and six student workers who are called the Leadership Team. Appendix A showcases the Organizational Structure of NSFP. NSFP employs roughly 50 Orientation Leaders to support Orientation and New Student Programs. Orientation Leaders are volunteers meaning they do not receive a stipend but do receive some appreciation at the end of September. This appreciation is in the form of a banquet. At the end of the Orientation Team Leader's contract NSFP puts together a banquet to recognize the hard work the team has done over the summer. The Banquet includes the staff appreciating the team with certificates of appreciation, stoles for Orientation Team Leaders who will graduate, and awards voted on by the team. Orientations run from June

through August. June is when the transfer students hold their Orientations. Transfer Orientations are a half-day program happening four times a week, all of June. The cost of their program is \$75 per person, which includes their parking permit, swag bag material, snacks, and refreshments throughout the day. First Year Orientation happens in July and August. These Orientations are a full-day program that happens two times a week and on 1 Saturday of the month. Orientations are by the major of the student, and so this dictates the availability of dates they can see. NSFP offers Orientations in both English and Spanish for days in which guests can attend and only in English for students-only dates. First Year Orientation costs \$95 for the student and \$45 for an additional guest.

When entering the department, NSFP also hired a new coordinator of Orientation. We were hired and trained weeks before the team went on a retreat before the start of Orientations in June. The new coordinator and I were able to get acquainted with the way NSFP work as well as get to meet the Leadership team before meeting the full team. After a few introductions and reminders of who we were, we were able to connect with the student leaders and find ways in which we could support them through the summer.

It is also important to note as I was transitioning into my role, CSUSM was transitioning to a new president of the university. While preparing for Orientation, President Neufeldt met different departments and attended a few Orientations. The previous President, President Haynes, of CSUSM, came from a Social Work background while the new president of the university came from a Student Affairs background. Many of Dr. Neufeldt's goals focused on student success and the impact CSUSM has on the community. This is important to note because of the

direction the president takes a university. Focusing more on student well-being and co-curricular activities and opportunities, President Neufeldt shifted the culture of CSUSM in this area.

### **Cycles**

For my research, I wanted to see what returning Orientation Team Leaders thought of their experience and talk with prostaff who supervised the Orientation Team in the past. This focus was developed after I conducted a needs assessment. For students, this allowed me to understand what they gained by returning for another year on the team. It also gave me insight into what others who do not return could be missing out on developmental wise. For prostaff, this allowed me to learn more about how they helped students and what they may have implemented or changed about the team in order to help students bond as a group and bond with the incoming class of students.

I began with a pre-cycle to learn more about the retention of returning Orientation Team Leaders. Because I was new to the space, I knew it would take time for me to gain the trust of not only the team but also the department. Thus, I focused on listening and learning, paying special attention as to whether the problem that I encountered as an Orientation Leader myself regarding returners was something that CSUSM was experiencing as well.

Cycle one was conducted between October-November of 2019. Participants who met the requirement of being a returner were emailed and asked to participate. Once a participant was confirmed, I emailed them a copy of the questions I would ask (see Appendix B). On the day of each interview, a copy of the questions was printed as well as a consent form (see Appendix C). Once in the interview, I went over the interview script (see Appendix D) and proceeded with the interview.

For the prostaff, the same process as above was conducted. The interviews were conducted in February 2020. Prostaff had a different set of questions, which focused more on what they observed and what changes they made to the program in order to address it (see Appendix E). I also realize that prostaff are resources and support systems for many of the team and so they may have information that students told them as to why they would not be returning. After going over the prostaff script (see Appendix F), I completed Cycle 2.

### **Pre-Cycle: Needs Assessment**

When I was in Orientation, we had issues retaining returning Orientation Leaders. Some of the Orientation Leaders did not like the group dynamic of the O-Team; others utilized Orientation to find other career choices on or off campus. Knowing about this issue, I wanted to investigate a little more about the problem and if the CSUSM Orientation Team experienced the same thing. I reached out and talked with a few people who were involved in Orientation at CSUSM. Many of them mentioned other discrepancies in Orientation programs and the need for support, but most of the people I talked to referenced returning Orientation leaders and retaining them. I also talked with my supervisor at CSUSM and she also agreed this was an issue and a topic to look further into.

As a result of these conversations, I did some research on literature for the retention of second year Orientation leaders. Although it was scarce, I was able to find an article on improving responsibilities and skills gained by being a student leader. The process for returners builds on what they have gained from the past and also addresses challenges they may face with increased authority and responsibility (Barnes, 2015). Barnes (2015) cautions readers to watch for the dangers of letting last year's team strengths or success cloud students from embracing the

new team. This is a common issue that occurs as returning Orientation leaders want the same experience or to showcase their knowledge to the new team. With returning Orientation Leaders, there needs to be a way for them to see changes in the program that they can make. One way that Barnes (2015) does this is by allowing the returning Orientation Leaders to help out with the selection of the new team. To me, this was a great way to engage with the returning Orientation Leaders. Because they saw what worked and what did not work with the last team, they can help create a team that is high performing.

**Summary of Needs Assessment Findings.** Being new to Orientation at CSUSM, I had preexisting data as to if Orientation leaders were interested in returning the following year. As a result of my needs assessment, I learned many Orientation Leaders did not get paid for their time during Orientation but did receive other forms of compensation. To appreciate the work they did and committed to over summer, Orientation Leaders receive priority registration for their classes in the fall, as well as their choice of a fall parking permit or a gift card to the University Bookstore. However, the hardship of working without getting paid can be a major deterrent for returnees. CSUSM is a commuter campus and housing is limited. Students often find themselves living off campus in different surrounding cities so commuting to campus for Orientation in the summer can be hard. Ultimately, there was a need to find better ways to compensate Orientation leaders for their time and specifically returners who may have more responsibilities in the future.

### **Cycle One: Student Interviews**

After being on retreat and attending a few Orientation Sessions with the team, I analyzed and created questions I would ask willing returners on the team (Summer 2019). There were a total of 12 returners on the 2019 Orientation Team. Returners were emailed to invite them to

participate in my interviews. All responses in the following section are from individuals that were willing to complete an interview with me. Prior to the meeting, all participants were emailed a copy of the questions. This allowed them the opportunity to think about the questions and how they would like to formulate their answers. I asked them to be authentic with their response and to not share what they thought I wanted to hear. I clarified that I was interviewing them as an outside source, not as one of their supervisors.

All students were asked why they think many O-Teamers do not return for another year. With a group like Orientation, it is heavily based on the team aspect and leaning on each other to get the job done. This encouraged them to be vulnerable with themselves to grow as a team. Asking the other questions helped me gain insight into the mind of the returners and what they wanted to accomplish.

The questions that I asked were drawn from what I observed over the summer, as well as their previous experience on the Orientation Team. The returners that I was able to interview all had one thing in common other than being a returner. They were all a part of the leadership Team at one point in their Orientation career.

**Student A.** The first person I interviewed was a 3<sup>rd</sup> year returner who originally got involved in Orientation because they were involved in a similar program in high school that allowed for incoming students to get oriented to campus life. Student A enjoyed their time in Orientation and getting to know more students, both the incoming class as well as the Orientation team. However, Student A talked a lot about the amazing resources they were not aware of on campus. By returning, they were able to learn more and more about different campus resources as well as have the opportunity to connect with staff that ran that resource. They explained how

useful it was for themselves to use these resources or to tell their student groups at Orientation or their friends about these resources. Student A expressed the importance of why they decided to return to the team for 2 more years. Student A had a great sense of pride in the school and helping other students see that but also a sense of belonging. Student A, like many other students at CSUSM, was a commuter student. Student A discussed the importance O-Team played on them and made them feel part of the campus environment even though they did not physically live on campus. Student A expressed this was a big reason they were able to continue their studies at CSUSM and seek out the help they needed academically based on the skills that they learned from O-Team. Student A expressed two main reasons O-Teamers do not return for another year came. Orientation either was not a good fit for what they are looking for or they did not have the time to commit to all the requirements that New Student and Family Programs ask of the student leaders.

**Student B.** The next person I interviewed was Student B. Student B was a 2<sup>nd</sup>-year returner who got involved with Orientation to build new friendships, networking, and getting involved on campus. Student B was also a commuter student and transfer student. Student B recalled that many colleges have a hard time getting transfer students involved and connected to campus in the short amount of time they are at a college as compared to the freshman. Student B wanted to get involved and make a mark on the campus. Student B joined different clubs and held leadership roles in each organization. Student B reminisced on what was memorable to them about the Orientation Team. They discussed how amazing it was to see different years in school be so close to one another, as well as the community that O-Team built that first year for Student B. Student B talked about the idea of wanting a community at CSUSM. Student B

returned for another year because of the atmosphere the previous year had created for them.

Student B felt included and a part of something bigger in their first year on the team.

Understanding about the self, as well as the team dynamic, was all created thanks to the

Leadership Team and the Director of New Student and Family Programs. Student B loved that feeling and wanted that feeling to continue as well as to re-create that feeling for the new team.

Student B went on to say that was the main reason for applying for a position on the Leadership Team. Being on the team for one year and returning for the second year as for the last time

before they graduate, Student B wanted more. Student B mentioned they felt they were given a taste of different things from around campus. They felt they were given puzzle pieces that gave

them an idea of the image they were creating but they felt pieces were still missing and wanted to return in order to get more insight not only of campus resources but how the Orientation sessions

were created and ran from a behind the scenes perspective. When I asked Student B about

changes, they mentioned the program was helpful and that there were no changes needed in

regard to Orientation Sessions. However, Student B also explained the training and the

responsibilities of the Leadership Team and returners could be improved upon. Student B

discussed a better way to train the Leadership Team. They felt they were not given enough

training and support in order for them to do the job that they needed to do. Student B said some

tasks that were given to them and the other Co-Directors were hard to figure out because there

was a lack of guidance and support. Student B also mentioned they wished they emphasized the

importance of returners' roles as well as delegated more responsibilities onto them. Having

returners meant having experienced O-Team members who could help with different aspects of

Orientation and Student B wished they delegated more responsibility to them. Finally Student B

said some of the reasons in which O-Teamers do not return for another year were the lack of compensation/living arrangements, exploring other functional areas, cliques, and lack of mentorship.

**Student C.** Student C was the next one that I interviewed. Student C was a 3<sup>rd</sup> year O-Team member and was on the Leadership Team for two years. They recalled their Orientation Team Leader was outgoing, fun, and helped to build a connection within their small group at Orientation. Student C mentioned they met their best friend at Orientation, and how they both applied and were accepted into the Orientation Team the following year. Because of this friendship that was established at Orientation with the Orientation Leader, Student C wanted to be able to do the same for the incoming student to CSUSM. Student C also shared memorable moments on the team, such as the retreat:

Retreat was the perfect way to get all of O-Team in one room to have a good time, to learn, and to bond with one another. Every retreat is different, and I value the time I get to have with the team and how we all learn and grow with one another.

Student C shared how the retreat was a great experience for everyone to bond since everyone was together for three days. After the retreat, another memorable moment was the connections made with others over the summers in trainings that the whole team goes through. Training can be fun and informative since O-Teamers have the opportunity to attend a pre and post bonding sessions, which helps the team connect to one another. Student C discussed how the pre and post bonding sessions were the experiences where they got to know other members of the team since they were away from campus. Lastly, Student C discussed mentorship. O-Team members are paired with a returner for a mentor/mentee pairing. This gives the mentee the opportunity to ask

the mentors questions and have a helpful reference point for all things Orientation. Student C mentioned they had a great mentor who was there for them when they had questions or were having a hard time at Orientation. They also said it was nice that there was someone there who would check in with them and celebrate the victories of the day as well as help process the challenges. When asked, Student C said the main reason they returned was because they wanted to build connections with campus partners. Student C said that campus partners were always useful tools in either getting students connected or having opportunities for O-Team since they go through extensive training. When asked about changes, Student C had similar ideas as Student B. They mentioned having returners step up more and understand what it means to be a mentor. Student C wanted to see more returners challenged so they could step out of their comfort zone to be role models, not only their mentee but to the team as a whole. Finally, when asked why they believed O-Teamers do not return for another year, Student C mentioned compensation, low interest/not the right fit, not a good experience, and graduation.

**Student D.** Student D was a 3<sup>rd</sup> year returner O-Team Member set to graduate in May 2020. When I asked Student D about why they wanted to get involved in O-Team they said, “priority registration, making new friends, just doing something, but my main reason was to gain experience that I can put on my resume and bring into an interview.” Student D had many incentives over the year but having something on their resume to make them more marketable in the field they will enter once they graduate was the main reason. Their most memorable moments were actually the moments after Orientation. Student D reflected on commuting home and the thoughts that went through their head about all the students they just impacted and helped. Student D reflected on feeling accomplished and that was the reason why they kept

coming back to the Orientation Team. Their memorable moments and the feeling they had when it was all over made them feel important and made a lasting impression on the incoming students' lives. When asked about why they think O-Teamers do not return Student D said:

I feel like this is a case by case situation for each student. A couple of reasons that I could think of are that the O-Teamer does it for a year, gained the experience, and used that experience to move onto greater things. Another reason could be because of lack of compensation for our team. It is expensive to compensate the entire team and implementing a parking permit has helped, but O-Teamers may have bills to pay and other living situations where they cannot afford to volunteer their time and need to get a job with a lot of hours. Lastly, could be because that O-Teamer did not have a positive experience with their year due to drama between others, not seeing it as worth it, did not like what was required of them, or they may not know how to apply doing another year of Orientation into their professional life.”

Student D referenced many of the same things that the other students touched upon as well.

**Student E.** Student E was a part of the Leadership Team in 2019. Student E has been on the Orientation Team for 3 years and offered great insights about their time on the team. When asking Student E why they were interested in joining the Orientation Team initially it was about the connection to other students and their experience and feeling like they could actually call CSUSM home. Student E was a commuter student and found it hard to find reasons to stay on campus. They expressed the difficulty in having a sense of pride in the school when they were only there for class. Much like the other students who commuted from different areas, it was a sense of belonging on campus that they were missing. When talking to Student E they noted the

most memorable part of their experience came after the long days of Orientation when they had the opportunity for post bonding sessions at the end of Orientation. With post bonding sessions, the Orientation Team had the opportunity to grab dinner together after Orientation. Many Orientation Leaders took this opportunity to catch up with their other team members as well as to relax from the busy day. Student E enjoyed this time with the team as well as having a reason to stay a little bit longer in San Marcos. I asked why they returned to the team and they said:

I returned because I knew there would be people who were in the same boat as me last year. Having and knowing I would be a mentor to someone else really inspired me to want to return in hopes I would be able to essentially help the next me.

This quote was a powerful message of how Student E went on to understand themselves and develop as a leader. This allowed Student E to recognize what was gained from their experience on the team as well as develop their own skills and wanted to be able to return to the team. Student E continued on to discuss what they were hoping to gain as a returner. Student E mentioned their experience was pretty seamless, the only thing they wish they were able to get was a little more responsibility or say in the way the training has gone. As a returner, the trainings were very similar to the year before. Staying engaged with the presenter was hard to do and Student E wished they had the opportunity to have their input on training regarding different ways for them to stay engaged and involved. When asked about changes, Student E didn't have any. They felt the way Orientation was being run was effective and efficient. They felt they got exactly what they had hoped they would. Lastly, when asked about why others do not return, they had similar answers as the other students I interviewed: other jobs, home commitments, internships, summer courses, and studying abroad. Much of what Student E shared was inspiring

and I could see how their mindset changed from before joining the Orientation, as well as while being part of the team.

**Student F.** The last student I interviewed was Student F. Student F had a little bit of a different perspective on Orientation as they graduated May 2019 but were going to continue their education at CSUSM and so they were still part of the team for summer. Student F said the reason they first joined the team was because they did not have a good experience the day of their Orientation. At first did not want to apply, however one of their friends was applying and encouraged them to do the same thing. Once accepted, Student E recalled making the best of it and going into the team open minded to learn something new. It worked well so they returned for another year on the team. Student F said the most memorable part of their experience was working with the support systems. Many Orientation Leaders shudder at the thought of having to work with support systems during orientation but Student F said since they are a little bit older, they were more comfortable with talking and speaking to the support systems of the students. They also said they were able to gain more friends and have a better appreciation for what Orientation does. Student F enjoyed their time on the team. They were able to connect with a lot of different resources on campus and create bonds with the team. In fact, they still talk to the leaders from their first year. When asked what they were hoping to gain, they simply replied with a better perspective. Student F did not have a good Orientation experience when they were an incoming student. When they applied and accepted the position to be on the team, they wanted a new perspective on Orientation. They said that is exactly what they got when they were able to see the work and behind the scene efforts that go into planning and executing Orientation. Lastly when asked why they feel student leaders choose not to return, Student F said it's something they

did not love, sharing “you really need to love what you do in Orientation to have the drive and passion to come back.” Student F said a reason they heard many people did not want to return or chose not too was because they found something they did not like. For students, finding out what they do not like is just as important as finding something they do like. Orientation is not an environment where everyone can thrive in. To conclude, Student F mentioned that not all Orientation Leaders enjoy their time, some of them also find it challenging to fit in with the team.

**Summary of Student Interview Findings.** Overall, the students I interviewed mentioned they returned because of campus involvement, sense of belonging, mentorship, and communication/networking. New skills were gained and old skills enhanced as a result of them returning to Orientation. They were able to gain more insight into campus life as well as who they are themselves. Many of them felt accomplished and proud of the work and progress they have made over the years. I was able to hear it in their voices and see it in their eyes as they were talking and reflecting back on their time on O-Team. Nevertheless, there was a list of different reasons why they felt or knew people did not return for Orientation, including compensation, time commitment, and fit. A student mentioned,

I love the experience I had in Orientation, but I cannot say that for everyone. I know everyone makes the experience their own but sometimes there is just too much going on in the Orientation Team Leaders life that makes them choose. Knowing we do not get paid checks or stipends can put things into perspective for them.

Regarding compensation, orientation Leaders, with the exception of the Co-Directors, are not paid positions. Student leaders gain other compensation for their time including their polos and

jackets, as well as parking permits. Like the many of the CSUSM population, many of the O-Teamers did commute to campus for Orientation Sessions and so having a form of compensation for their time, and even gas, was something almost everyone mentioned in their interview.

The next theme was time commitment. All Orientation Leaders receive a mandatory time commitment sheet during their interview as well as once they are selected to be a part of the Orientation Team with Orientation Session dates, training, retreat, and week of welcome dates. Appendix G shows an example of a mandatory time commitment sheet that is provided to the student leaders. New Student and Family Programs ask student leaders to attend 10 Orientation Sessions and to be on call for two other sessions. Students have the opportunity to pick the sessions they want to work and plan the rest of the summer based on what they have selected. Many student leaders felt that the time commitment was a lot for O-Teamers. A student mentioned,

It really is a challenge in time commitment. I enjoy having summers to travel and to be away from school for a little bit. It can be hard when you choose your Orientation dates you are contracted to work but then your best friend calls you to cover their shift. You can always say no but knowing the work that goes into Orientation its hard too. I love coming to CSUSM but sometimes I do like a break from it. Recognizing Orientations are not every day but mostly every other days does not give you much wiggle room to plan other things.

For some they have other jobs that they worked or had to balance summer classes/ studying abroad. Since training also took place during the spring semester on almost every Friday, it was

hard for students to be in touch with the O-Team when they had class that ended during training as they would arrive late and miss out on pre-bonding sessions.

A final theme I was able to see was the idea of the O-Team not being a good fit. It is important for students to understand what they are getting into and what the job is asking of them. Many students join Orientation because they had a great experience at their Orientation and want to do the same. However, they do not understand what goes into planning and executing Orientation. Not finding a fit in Orientation is a valid reason. Some students talked about O-Teamers who used O-Team as a steppingstone to other functional areas on campus. This was the most common reason that many of the students gave me. O-Team gives you transferable skills as well as networking with other campus partners and departments. Many other departments find it easier to hire O-Team leaders because they know they have the skills needed for the job as well as knowledge of the department and campus to help students. Another thing that was mentioned which fits in this category is cliques. With returners coming back, they already know each other, and it is easy for people to stick with those they know in environments where new people are introduced. So, for first year O-Team leaders entering this environment, it can be intimidating or something they were not expecting and were not able to get the mentorship/guidance they needed or wanted.

### **Cycle Two: Prostaff Interviews**

With Cycle 2, I had a better idea of why students were returning and why they were not. A lot of the information from Cycle 1 informed the questions and direction I wanted Cycle 2 to take. For this Cycle, I wanted the perspective of the prostaff members who were hiring the returners. I also wanted to see ways in which they were helping students feel involved and

invested in O-Team. One thing I got out of Cycle 1 was that many of the interviewees mentioned a sense of belonging and how students who decided not to return may not feel that comfort. Thus, I wanted to explore prostaffs' opinion about this issue and what they had done to cultivate a sense of belonging amongst students.

**Prostaff A.** The first prostaff member I interviewed was a coordinator for Orientation in 2012. They were also a part of the Orientation team when they were a student so they had a unique perspective. When asked about the different strategies that were implemented to gain more returners, they mentioned the Tukwut Leadership Circle (TLC). With the assistance of Orientation, many O-Teamers could be in Orientation and complete the Tukwut Leadership Circle. They mentioned this was a great way to recruit students who were interested, as well as have students that have gone through it both in O-Team and in TLC. With the rigor of Orientation Team training, many requirements for TLC were met with training. The prostaff member also mentioned that although there was nothing major that was used to recruit students to come back for another year many of them chose to because it became a home away from home that fostered a sense of pride for CSUSM.

When asked why they thought students did not return for another year, the prostaff member mentioned issues that were previously mentioned, including compensation, vacation time, family commitments, and having a job. The prostaff member also mentioned the rigor and standards for Orientation Team Leaders. Having high standards can be too much for students. Student standards include knowing information for tours, showing up on time, and being where they are supposed to be at a given time. NSFP holds its Orientation Team to a high standards, especially on Orientation Days, and the months leading up to these days. Students are not only

representing the department but the university. It is their responsibility to help incoming students see what CSUSM is like, as well as help them understand resources they have access to.

When asked about the benefit students gain from another year and what they may gain from it, the prostaff mentioned more ownership. As students who are in college, they themselves are developing so having ownership and a better understanding of leadership is helpful. The prostaff mentioned students wanting more responsibilities or more ways to get involved within Orientation. They also mention it being more ownership within themselves and the pride that comes with that. When looking at the benefits of another year, the main benefit mentioned was showing others the support given to them not only from campus partners, but from the team and staff working in NSFP. Many students do go through a lot in their undergraduate career and are transitioning from different parts of their lives to newer things. They mentioned how students would come to them just for a life update; something the prostaff member took to mean that students felt comfortable and supported by them.

Asking what they felt students miss out on when they decide not to return, the prostaff member mentioned lack of depth. Throughout this interview the prostaff member mentioned periodically that the first year is the sponge year. Students are excited to be on the team and try to soak up as much information as possible. There is a lot of information they need to retain in order to be able to share it with students and their support systems. If they decide not to return for another year, students are potentially lacking the depth of the information they were given. Having a basic understanding of departments and resources is always helpful and returning for another year helps students sit with the information to be able to help the incoming class. Finally, if students decide to return, they get the opportunity to view things such as trainings or retreats

through a different lens, which helps the team be more dynamic but also helps everyone look at things from different perspectives.

**Prostaff B.** The second prostaff member I interviewed supervised the Orientation team for 9 years prior to getting a new role. This prostaff member mentioned during the interview the size of the team and how that influenced their answers. When this prostaff member was supervising the team, they had on average 35-40 Orientation team members as compared to the current team of 50+.

When asked about different strategies they used to retain returners there was no shortage of opportunities that were given to the team. To start, this prostaff member started the mentor/mentee program. This allowed new Orientation Team Leaders to be paired with a returner in order to get a better sense of what Orientation commitments would be like as well as a resource for these students. Another opportunity that was given to the team was committee opportunities. The prostaff member mentioned they used to have different committees for various things such as fundraising, training, event planning, etc. These committees were chaired by a returner and so it gave an incentive for Orientation Team Leaders to return. This gave them the opportunity to have an elevated role but also to help with their leadership development and any other skills needed to be successful.

When asked their thoughts on why first year O-Teamers choose not to return, they discussed issues such as they can't return due to grades or a conduct case, summer school, work, friends are not returning, it's not what they expected, and cliques. The prostaff member also shared feedback they received when they conducted exit interviews with the team. One student had expressed how they did not feel like a part of the team at training or at the Orientations. The

student went on to say that they did not feel comfortable hanging out with the Orientation Team at other events, such as post bonding trips after an Orientation Session. The prostaff member shared how they used to not do an application or a formal interview for their returner Orientation team leaders. Thus, anyone who wanted to return to the team was able to do so. The prostaff also mentioned the age range of the group. Since CSUSM is high in transfer students there have been Orientation Team Leaders who are older in age than the first year O-teamers or even the second years. This can lead them to feel disconnected as well as not having the same goals as the other younger members of the team. Lastly, the prostaff mentioned many of the students they supervised chose not to return because they went to seek other opportunities in different functional areas. The prostaff member said, "Orientation Team is one of the most solid, equitable leadership opportunities on our campus that launches people into other great opportunities." With the training that Orientation Team Leaders receive they learn the skills to do any leadership role on campus. Thus, many other departments will hire an O-teamers for a position because they know they have the skillset to deal with an array of problems and still be ok with the work.

As for new initiatives, the prostaff member listed several things that they implemented to encourage first year O-Team members to return. Again, they mentioned the mentor/mentee program but also mentioned professional development. One thing the prostaff member started was having returners apply to attend an Association for Orientation, Transition, Retention in Higher Education (NODA) Regional Conference. With the group that was selected, the prostaff member encouraged them to write a and submit a proposal for the conference. Other initiatives included having a different returner in charge of a training session and giving the students the opportunity to provide feedback in different areas that are facing Orientation. The example that

was shared was when Orientation was considering removing academic advising from the day, the academic advisor, Orientation Director, and some returners were in the room to make that final decision. Lastly, the prostaff member mentioned a rule they implemented limiting the number of returners that were brought back for another year. They mentioned this was the best way to find out who was joining the Orientation team for the right reasons and with good intentions, not just to hang out with friends. The rule that still stands today is the team is composed of  $\frac{2}{3}$  returners while the rest are first time Orientation Team Leaders. This rule helps with the development of the overall team. Limiting the number of returners allows for the prostaff member who does the hiring for the team to consider the work the student did the summer before. It also allows for the first time Orientation Leaders to have their own experience with the team.

**Prostaff C.** The first question that I asked involved the role of Returning Orientation Team Leaders. Prostaff C stressed the importance of having returning orientation team leaders. They talked about the experience allows the returners to learn more and develop as leaders in this role. Orientation Team Leaders who return are essential in the development of the team. They mentioned the insight and the social aspect of Orientation. The prostaff member also talked about the support that the returners bring to the group. Many of the first years get overloaded with information that when it comes time to perform, they can get flustered or frustrated. Having a returner who has been through it and can help them navigate these challenging conversations and/ or tasks is beneficial to the individual and the team.

Next, I asked what they were hoping returners gain from another year on the team. In response to this, the prostaff member talked about increasing responsibility. Added responsibility gives a sense of ownership to the returners and gives them an appreciation for the work being

done for them in the past. The prostaff member also talked about personal gratification. They hoped that being there for another year would help with them being proud of the school they were a part of and the team as well. Lastly, they mentioned = confidence. Within Orientation, there is much opportunity for growth in the group with personal skills that can be used when applying for other jobs or even in the classroom. The prostaff member mentioned instilling confidence in the returners. The prostaff member said that if they take anything away from a second year, it is the confidence they need to be the best they can be.

Lastly, I asked why they think Orientation Team Leaders choose not to return for another year. While the prostaff member mentioned many of the same issues raised by others, they focused primarily on compensation. The prostaff member said that compensation was received but at the end of the contract and in a different form such as a parking permit or a gift card to the bookstore. Thus, for them student leaders were being compensated, not the way they would like, but still students were being recognized for the work they were doing.

**Prostaff D.** Next, I interviewed a prostaff member that had been with the team for a year. I asked the same questions regarding the importance of having Returning Orientation Team Leaders. They responded with the following:

Returners carry important responsibilities in helping to train our new O-Team Leaders. They lead by example and model expectations, as well as directly support the development of new members through mentor-mentee relationships, practicing campus tours, and answering questions. Returners also have a significant amount of influence on the overall experience of new team members, as they help to set the tone and create the culture of inclusiveness, energy, and positivity we hope to create within the team.

This was something that was mentioned before with all of the other interviews. The statement from the prostaff member also shows how much prostaff relies on the returners to help develop the team.

When asking what they were hoping for returners to gain, the prostaff member mentioned developing their leadership, mentorship, communication, and interpersonal skills. They also said they hoped students would have fun, specifically referencing the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships, an affinity for CSUSM and the O-Team, all while creating lifelong memories. The Orientation Team is a fun and loud group of students. The prostaff member wanted them to be able to enjoy the time, even if they didn't take anything else from experience.

Lastly, I asked why they thought Orientation Team Leaders choose not to return and the prostaff member said,

From what I've observed in my first year in this role, some O-Teamers choose to pursue other opportunities more directly related to their careers rather than return to O-Team.

One student who applied and was accepted as a Returner chose to leave the team after sharing with me that they felt they needed to devote more time to a paid position, so lack of financial compensation is also a potential barrier.

The prostaff member's remarks were similar to what students also mentioned. Students utilize the time over summer to figure out career goals after graduation or to get a foot in the door through an internship. Even returners who were committed to the Team found that they need to reprioritize and focus on long term career goals. Thus, this question provided insight not only regarding why Orientation Team Leaders don't return but the relationship that the O-Teamers have with the prostaff members.

**Summary of Prostaff Interview Findings.** With Cycle 2 concluded I found it very interesting the prostaff members were spot on with what the undergraduates were saying about why they have returned and why others choose not to. Staff members and students had great rapport with one another. Students felt confident and comfortable with their supervisor. It was also interesting to learn what the prostaff members implemented to cultivate a sense of belonging for the team. Both prostaff members mentioned a team's attitude and how the culture is shaped by the behavior of the returners. They set the example for the team and the season. By limiting the number of returners on the team, they make sure that the Orientation Team Leaders are coming back for the right reason and reflecting on their experiences from that past summer. Prostaff members were also open with what they felt students missed out on when they chose not to return. Whether students realize what the director and coordinator were teaching them, the prostaff members discussed how there were so many more things that students miss by not returning. Other than building friendships or community on campus, they showcased the importance of the information they receive and how helpful that is when applying for other jobs and opportunities. Prostaff have more insight into the development of students and student leaders, thus, they understand the importance of being on the Orientation team and what can be gained if students are willing to learn things and challenge themselves. A handful of students that do Orientation are interested in a career in Higher Education or potentially looking into a career in this field. The prostaff are there to support them along the way and show what it takes to put on Orientations by having returners be a part of the logistics.

### **Limitations**

When working with New Student and Family Programs there were a few limitations regarding changes to our physical space. When I first started off in the New Student and Family Program, we were housed under Student Life & Leadership. This physical space was more open; thus, many students came to hang out. The space also provided Orientation the resources to host our staff meetings and morning/debrief meetings for our Orientation Team. After Winter Break, New Student and Family Programs were physically moved to the Dean of Students office. The space was shared between New Student and Family Programs, Cougar Care Network, Student Conduct, and Student Outreach and Referral. Adjusting to this new space was a limitation because many students did not know the location of the Dean of Students' office and, for those that did, it conjured negative feelings since it's where students get referred when they get in trouble. This made it hard for students to participate in interviews in the Dean of Students Suite.

### **Recommendations**

With what I have learned from both student leaders and the prostaff members I developed a set of recommendations to help with the retention of returning Orientation Leaders. I think a major part of this action research was developing better ways to foster a sense of belonging on the team as well as figure out ways to keep returners more engaged and returning with something new to bring to the team. With that, these are a few recommendations that I would make in order to mitigate the issue of less returners on the team.

### **Trainings**

The first recommendation I have is training. Currently training is conducted by the Leadership Team. I think to increase the responsibility and the interest of returners at training by

having them be in charge with 1 member of the leadership team would be beneficial. I think it would help with some of their public speaking skills as well as organizational skills. The opportunity to co-facilitate training would also give returners the opportunity to collaborate and communicate with campus partners about their presentations. Returners go through the same training that they did their first year with small adjustments to departments. As we saw in Cycle 2, it is hard to keep them focused and really take ownership of the work they are doing. With this recommendation, I believe it would make the returners have more pride in the work but also keep other returners accountable to setting the example at training and paying attention.

### **Professional Development**

As I have personally seen, and from a prostaff members' answer to one of my questions, professional development is important for the team and even more so for students interested in pursuing a career in higher education in the future. NODA is a great opportunity for returners to network with other Orientation Team Leaders from different kinds of schools and states. NODA 2020 at University of Las Vegas had 4 different regions in attendance and representation from about 6 states. The leadership team, myself, and the coordinator took a lot away from this experience and brought some new ideas for the team and Orientation. Opening that back up to returners would allow them to have the opportunity to attend. However, I also want to recognize the limitation of funding with this situation. Funding plays a large factor because of the registration fee and travel costs. Nevertheless, I believe it is a beneficial conference and great networking opportunity for student leaders. There are many other ways to develop the students as well, such as submitting a proposal for the conference. Attending a conference is something I never had the opportunity to do in undergrad and knowing if, as a returner Orientation leader, I

would be going to a conference would have helped build my resume and bring new ideas back to the team.

### **Mid-Summer Survey**

Currently there is an end of summer evaluation for the Orientation Team. Although I think an end of summer evaluation is important to see how the team felt over the course of their time commitment, I think having a midsummer check in would be beneficial as well. Having a midsummer evaluation would allow for the Coordinator, GA, and Leadership Team to really understand the problems that O-Teamers may be having and finding a way to help resolve it or mediate them. This recommendation comes from the students and prostaff telling me a reason many O-Teamers do not return is because they did not enjoy their experience. Although the needs of all may not be satisfied, I think a mid-summer survey would help us shift in direction as well as help people enjoy the long days of an Orientation season.

### **Final Reflection**

Through this Action Research I got to get to know a lot about my teams and the leaders who are there to help them. I learned Orientation Team Leaders at CSUSM are asked to wear many hats and tasked with a lot of different things. The most satisfying aspect of my research was learning more about their enthusiasm for Orientation. I could see the passion behind their intentions to give incoming students the opportunity to fall in love with the campus. I think it is important for the development of the team that CSU San Marcos recognize the hard work that not only the San Marcos's team does but teams across the nation. Knowing Orientation Team Leaders volunteer their time to help transition incoming students speaks volumes to the campus culture of CSU San Marcos.

In regard to the returners and the process of why they do not return, it is all up to the individual. Many things can affect a student's life and the plan to continue in Orientation is based on their mental and physical capacity. We can see the students that did return learned a great deal of skills and developed not only as leaders but as individuals. I saw the importance of returning Orientation Leaders as one myself. The knowledge and passion they have for students and their team is abundant. As a returner I knew my knowledge was valued but seeing it from a staff perspective really helps me understand the dynamic of the team as well as how to help returners gain an elevated role as they are put to a higher standard than first time Orientation Team Leaders.

With the prostaff members their dedication not only to New Student and Family Programs but the team has not gone unnoticed. Earlier in the fall semester of 2019, we held an Orientation Team Leader Reunion. It was great to see the interactions that were happening between the student leaders and staff. During my Cycle 2 interviews I got a sense of the connection and impact these staff members made on these students. Staff members mentioned how they were invited to weddings, baby showers, engagement celebrations, and more. This showed me that the relationship goes beyond summer and has an impact on the students from the very beginning.

With this research, I found myself more and more excited to start my career and journey in Student Affairs and working with Orientation Team Leaders. This research has shown me gaps to be mindful of as well as ways to support returning Orientation Team leaders and the first-time leaders as well. As a Student Affairs professional it is important to help students grow and develop. Whether students remember me or not is not as important as them knowing there

was someone there to support them. I am extremely grateful for my team at CSUSM welcoming me into the cougar family. They have made a huge impact on me and have set a standard for what I hope future teams I supervise will achieve.

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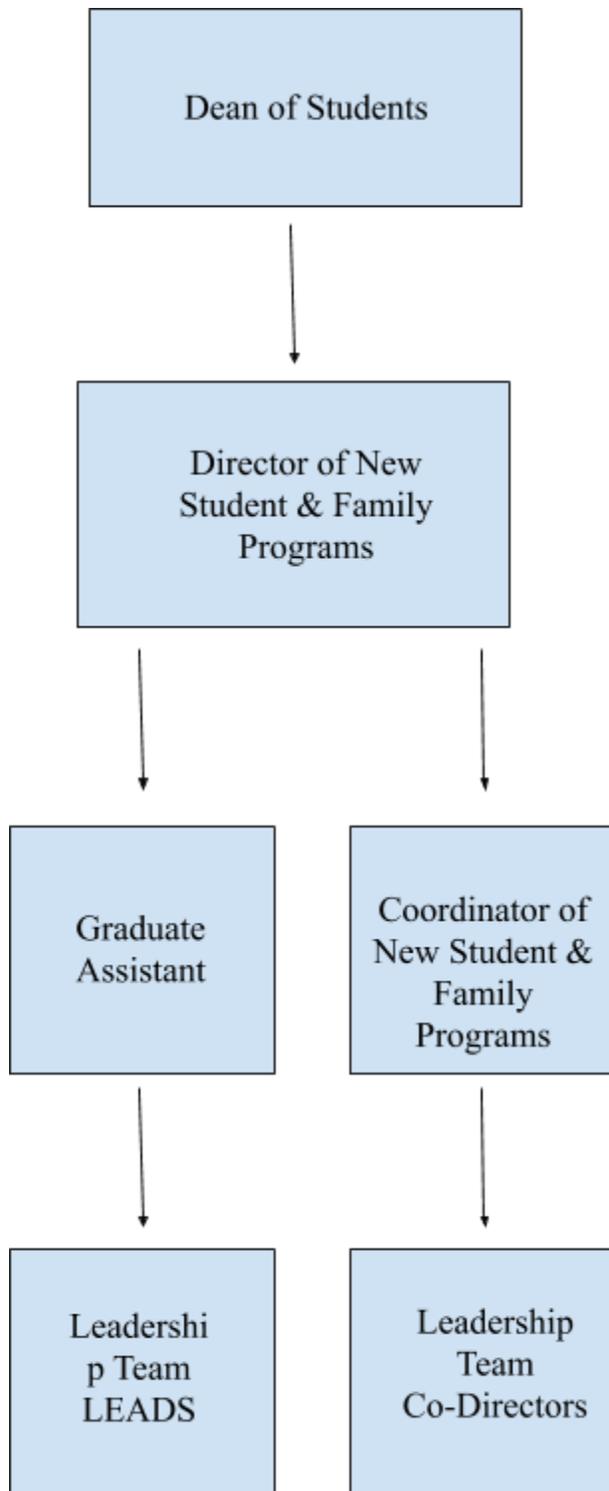
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Appendix A: New Student and Family Programs Organizational Structure



## Appendix B: Student Interview Questions

1. What led you first to apply to the O-Team?
2. What made the experience memorable on your first team?
3. Why did you decide to return for another year?
4. What were you hoping to gain as a returner that you did not get your first year on the team?
5. What changes (either organizational or responsibilities) would you like to see for future returners
6. What marketing tactics would you utilize to increase the number of returners?

## Appendix C: Student Consent Forms

**University of San Diego Institutional  
Review Board Research Participant  
Consent Form**

For the research study entitled:  
Retention of Returning Orientation Leaders

**I. Purpose of this Research Study**

My name is Matt Menor, and I am a graduate student at USD in the Higher Education Leadership program. The purpose of my research is to explore the reasons and gaps why Orientation Team Members do not return for a second or third year in Orientation at California State University San Marcos (CSUSM).

**II. What will you be asked to do?**

If you decide to be in this study, you may be asked to:

a) Participate in an individual Interview

Your participation in this study will take a total of no more than 1.5 hours.

**III. Foreseeable risks or discomforts**

Sometimes when people are asked to think about their feelings, they feel sad or anxious. If you would like to talk to someone about your feelings at any time, you can call toll-free, 24 hours a day:

San Diego Access and Crisis Line at (888) 724-7240  
CSU San Marcos: Student Health and Counseling Center (760) 750-4915

**IV. Benefits**

While there may be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study, the indirect benefit of participating will be knowing that you helped researchers better understand why there are low retention rates of returning Orientation Team Leaders and potential ways to increase the number of Orientation Team Members that return for another summer.

**V. Confidentiality**

Any information provided and/or identifying records will remain confidential and kept in a locked file and/or password-protected computer file in the researcher's office for a minimum of five years. All data collected from you will be coded with a number or pseudonym (fake name). Your real name will not be used. The results of this research project may be made public and information quoted in professional journals and meetings, but information from this study will only be reported as a group, and not individually.

\*\* Voice Recordings: For research purposes, I will be voice recording the activity and discussions we have including interviews. These recordings will not be shared with others and are for my purpose only. Recordings will be stored with other documents you give me. If you are

not comfortable with me voice recording you or the things you say, you may decline to participate or talk to me about other options.

#### **VI. Compensation**

You will not receive compensation for your participation in this study.

#### **VII. Voluntary Nature of this Research**

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You do not have to do this, and you can refuse to answer any question or quit at any time. Deciding not to participate or not answering any of the questions will have no effect on any benefits you're entitled to, like your health care, or your employment or grades. You can withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You may contact CSU San Marcos's counseling center anytime at:

Student Health & Counseling Services  
333 S. Twin Oaks Valley Rd  
San Marcos, CA 92096-0001  
Phone: (760) 750-4915  
Fax: (760) 750-3181  
Email: [shcs@csusm.edu](mailto:shcs@csusm.edu)

#### **VIII. Contact Information**

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact:

**Matt Menor**

E-mail: [mmenor@sandiego.edu](mailto:mmenor@sandiego.edu)

Phone: (209) 531-5904

**Dr. Nydia C. Sánchez**

(Faculty Advisor)

E-mail: [nydiasanchez@sandiego.edu](mailto:nydiasanchez@sandiego.edu) Phone: (619)260-8839

I have read and understand this form, and consent to the research it describes to me. I have received a copy of this consent form for my own records.

---

Signature of the Participant

Date

Name of Participant (PRINTED)

#### Appendix D: Student Interview Script

##### **As the Researcher:**

My role in student leaders interviews will be to record the responses student leaders give me to the questions I ask. I will be asking the questions below to help with my research on returning Orientation Leaders. Since I will be interviewing the student leaders one at a time, there will be no need for pseudonyms during the interview.

##### **Introductions/ Script:**

Thank you for taking the time to help me with my research and agreeing to do an interview with me today., I would like to start with introductions so you know who I am and what will be happening with our time. Starting off my name is Matt Menor and I am a Graduate Assistant for New Student and Family Programs.

As you know I am a graduate student at the University of San Diego. I am conducting research into the role, responsibility, and experience returning Orientation had this summer. The research conducted here and the stories you tell will allow me to advocate for future returners and their development as leaders.

As I conduct this interview, I would like to go over the consent form (hand consent form to interviewer with pen). As I read through this please stop me with any questions. If at the end of me reading this and or you looking over it and would not like to participate you are more than welcome to let me know and the interview will be over. If you are ok with the form and have no further questions please sign and date the form.

I want to emphasize that what is said in here will remain in confidentiality and your information will not be shared with student leaders. I may reference what was said in here but no names will be tied to it. With that, I ask for your full participation and honesty when answering these questions.

At this time I would like to ask if any of you have any questions. If no further questions I would like to get started.

## Appendix E: Prostaff Interview Questions

1. What strategies have you used in the past to increase the interest in Returning Orientation Leaders.
2. Seeing that there are only a handful of returners on the current team, why do you think many of the Orientation Team members chose not to return?
3. What are you hoping/seeing returners gain from another year on the team they didn't receive in previous years?
4. What do you see is the benefit of having returning Orientation Team Leaders?
5. What do you think, if any, do student leaders miss out on if they chose not to return?
6. What new initiatives, if any, did you introduce to give returners more responsibility?

## Appendix F: Prostaff Interview Script

### **As the Researcher:**

My role in prostaff interviews will be to record the responses pro staff give me to the questions I ask. I will be asking the questions below to help with my research on returning Orientation Leaders. Since I will be interviewing the prostaff one at a time, there will be no need for pseudonyms during the interview.

### **Introductions/ Script:**

Thank you for taking the time to help me with my research and agreeing to do an interview with me today., I would like to start with introductions so you know who I am and what will be happening with our time. Starting off my name is Matt Menor and I am a Graduate Assistant for New Student and Family Programs.

As you know I am a graduate student at the University of San Diego. I am conducting research into the role, responsibility, and experience returning Orientation had this summer. The research conducted here and the stories you tell will allow me to advocate for future returners and their development as leaders.

As I conduct this interview, I would like to go over the consent form (hand consent form to interviewer with pens). As I read through this please stop me with any questions. If at the end of me reading this and or you looking over it and would not like to participate you are more than welcome to let me know and the interview will be over. If you are ok with the form and have no further questions please sign and date the form.

I want to emphasize that what is said in here will remain in confidentiality and your information will not be shared with student leaders. I may reference what was said in here but no names will be tied to it. With that, I ask for your full participation and honesty when answering these questions.

At this time I would like to ask if any of you have any questions. If no further questions I would like to get started.

## Appendix G: Orientation Team Contracts

**2020 Orientation Team Mandatory Time Commitments\***

- I. **O-Team Kickoff**
  - Saturday, February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020
  
- II. **O-Team Trainings (2:00pm-5:00pm with optional team bonding 1:00pm-2:00pm)**
  1. February 21<sup>st</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020
  2. March 6<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, & 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020
  3. April 10<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020 (Off April 3<sup>rd</sup>)
  4. May 1<sup>st</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020
  5. O-Team Spring Appreciation: April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020
  
- III. **Discover CSUSM**
  - Saturday, April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020
  
- IV. **O-Team Retreat (*Overnight, location TBD*)**
  - May 19<sup>th</sup> – May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020
  
- V. **Summer Orientations and Related Events (Minimum of 10 Orientations required)**
  - June 16<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup>
  - July 7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> (online), 23<sup>rd</sup>
  - August 1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> (online), 6<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>
  - Bag-Stuffing Party: June 4<sup>th</sup> 2020
  - O-Team Summer Appreciation: TBD
  
- VI. **Fall 2020 Commitments**
  - **Move in Weekend:** August 28<sup>th</sup> & 29<sup>th</sup>
  - **Weeks of Welcome:** August 28<sup>th</sup> – September 11<sup>th</sup>
    - **Miiyu:** August 29<sup>th</sup>
    - **Dive In Movie:** August 30<sup>th</sup>
    - **Transfer Welcome Reception:** August 31<sup>st</sup>
    - **Cougar Question Mart:** August 31<sup>st</sup> – September 3<sup>rd</sup>
  - **O-Team Banquet:** September 11<sup>th</sup>

\* All Dates and Times Subject to Change