



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

LEARNING BY LEADING[™] HANDBOOK

A guide to the process of beginning and maintaining a Learning by Leading[™] (LxL)
Student Leadership Team.

This guide contains information regarding the history of the LxL Program, enrollment process for interns registering for course credit, position descriptions, and overall expectations for maintaining a team.



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Program History

On the east side of the University of Central Florida (UCF) main campus lies the university's hub of environmental stewardship, innovation, and community: the UCF Arboretum, epicenter of the university's Learning by Leading™ (LxL) Program. The journey of this program began after a presentation on LxL at an American Public Gardens Association (APGA) conference. In the spring of 2019, Arboretum Leadership embarked on an immersion visit to the University of California, Davis (UC Davis) to learn about this program and UC Davis's implementation of it. Inspired by the successful model they observed, they returned to UCF with a vision to create a similar initiative.

Launched in the fall of 2019, the program started modestly with four teams, eight Leadership Students, and 16 Interns. These pioneering students were eager to make a difference, diving into projects that ranged from habitat restoration to sustainable agriculture. The program's hands-on approach allowed students to apply their classroom knowledge to real-world challenges, fostering both personal and professional growth.

As the semesters passed, the program evolved and expanded. By the spring of 2025, it had grown to encompass 12 teams, 14 Leadership Students, and 41 Interns. This growth was a testament to the program's success and continuing interest in sustainable practices, both in the natural and built environments, among UCF students. The program's structure allowed for flexibility, adapting to changes in funding and student availability, ensuring that it could continue to thrive and make an impact through the most difficult circumstances, including a global pandemic.

One of the most significant changes came in the fall of 2023, when the program partnered with UCF's Experiential Learning department. This collaboration streamlined the registration process for student Interns, making it easier for more students to get involved. The partnership also brought additional resources and support, enhancing the overall experience for participants.

The LxL Program's success has not gone unnoticed. Its model of engaging students in career readiness through hands-on, innovation-focused projects has caught the attention of other departments at UCF. The program's adaptability means it can be implemented in various disciplines, providing students across the university with valuable opportunities to develop their skills and make a positive impact on their community.

In essence, the UCF Arboretum LxL Program is more than just an educational initiative; it is a dynamic and evolving platform that empowers students to lead, innovate, and drive change. As it continues to grow and adapt, it promises to remain a cornerstone of UCF's commitment to fueling discovery, innovation, and elevating student success.



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Position Definitions



Staff Mentor

Staff Mentor is a paid University employee who provides direction, support and encouragement to students, both formally and informally. They directly oversee Leadership Students (and Junior Mentors and Apprentices, as applicable), and assist with guiding their teams' directives, offer support in developing and implementing projects, and foster a sense of community among teams.

Junior Mentor

Junior Mentors are recent graduates that participated in the program as an Intern and/or Leadership Student. A Junior Mentor supports Staff Mentors and guides upcoming students. They share their knowledge, offer advice, and help team members navigate academic requirements while also assisting the Staff Mentor with various tasks. Junior Mentors hold a paid position.



Apprentice

Although like a Leadership Student, Apprentices do not oversee a team of Interns. A student Apprentice holds a paid position and works on a special project that a Staff Mentor oversees. They receive hands-on training, perform tasks under staff guidance, and gradually take on more responsibilities as they gain proficiency. Apprentices will provide specific deliverables to their Staff Mentor at the conclusion of their apprenticeship. These positions are filled "as needed" by the department based on project needs and funding availability.



Leadership Student

A Leadership Student holds a paid position in which they organize and manage events, activities, scheduling, and programs for their individual team. They handle logistics, communicate with their team and volunteer participants (if applicable), and ensure everything runs smoothly. Leadership Students attend one meeting per week with their Staff Mentor, lead one meeting per week with their team of Interns, and attend monthly Leadership Student meeting(s) where programmatic goals and operational logistics are communicated across teams.



Intern

A student Intern gains practical experience by working on real-world projects under the supervision of their Leadership Student and Staff Mentor. They assist with various tasks, learn industry-specific skills, and apply their academic knowledge in a professional setting. Intern positions are unpaid. Interns enroll in zero to three credit hours to facilitate completion of their degree program requirements.

Student Leadership Program Standards

General Standards

Community

Promote an environment that welcomes and values all participants.

Ensure opportunities for all students regardless of background.

Professional Development

Provide training and development opportunities to enhance leadership and career skills.

Offer mentorship programs to support personal and professional growth.

Collaboration and Teamwork

Foster a culture of collaboration across teams and roles.

Encourage effective communication, shared responsibility, and mutual support to achieve program goals.



Scan the QR code to download the Expectations of Learning by Leading™ Agreement

Unpaid Intern Roles

Learning Objectives

Clearly define learning objectives and outcomes for each internship role.

Ensure that internships provide meaningful, educational experiences.

Supervision and Support

Interns are supervised jointly by the team's leadership student and staff mentor.

Weekly leadership/intern meetings provide space to monitor progress and provide feedback.

Workload and Hours

Weekly hours scheduled correspond with the number of academic credit hours the student is enrolled in and can be changed from semester to semester.

Provide flexibility to accommodate students' academic and work schedules, personal responsibilities and extracurricular activities.

Recognition and Evaluation

Offer formal recognition for contributions such as program awards, letters of recommendation and annual scholarships as funding allows.

Use required evaluations to assess performance and provide constructive feedback.

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Paid Leadership Roles

Compensation and Benefits

- Provide fair and competitive compensation for paid roles.
- Offer additional benefits, such as professional development funds and opportunities to present team projects at conferences as funding allows.

Role Clarity and Expectations

- Position descriptions clearly outline the responsibilities and expectations for each paid role.
- Ensure that roles align with the program's goals and objectives.

Leadership Enhancement

- Utilize the Work+ framework to intentionally connect student employment with career readiness and skill development.
- Incorporate NACE career competencies to guide goal setting, reflection, and evaluation of student leadership experiences.

Work-Life Balance

- Encourage a healthy work-life balance, recognizing the importance of academic and personal commitments.
- Offer flexible working arrangements where possible.

By adhering to these standards, a student leadership program can create a supportive and enriching environment, fostering growth and development for all participants.



Program Evaluation and Improvement



Feedback Mechanisms

1. Establish regular feedback mechanisms like student or employer evaluations to gather input from participants.
2. Student feedback is used to continuously improve the program.
3. Exit Interviews are conducted when students leave program to assess their overall experience.



Impact Assessment

1. Conduct periodic assessments to measure the impact of the program on participants and the community.
2. Use results to inform decision-making and strategic planning to continue advancement of the program.



Scan the QR Code to access
Learning by Leading Program
Resources.

Current Structure of Learning by Leading at UCF



ARBORETUM

Arboretum Operations

- Plant Production
- Urban Agriculture
- Public Garden Management

Communications

- Social Media and Video Production
- Website and App Development
- Outreach and Engagement



UTILITIES AND ENGINEERING SERVICES

Stormwater

- Stormwater Compliance
- Stormwater Maintenance

Natural Resources

- Urban Forestry
- Land Management



BRAND AND MARKETING

Marketing

- Graphic Design
- Activations and Outreach



FACILITIES AND BUSINESS OPERATIONS

Communications

- Social Media
- Communications Support



Learning by Leading Curriculum

Through collaboration with UCF Experiential Learning, the Arboretum identified Career Services' Work+ program, an initiative that connects academic learning with intentional, career-focused work experience. Because Learning by Leading prioritizes career readiness and skill development, incorporating Work+ was a natural fit. As a result, all leadership student position descriptions now align with Work+ by intentionally integrating three of the eight National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Career Readiness Competencies, ensuring students gain meaningful, transferable skills through their roles.

Career Readiness Core Competencies



**Career and
Self Development**



**Critical
Thinking**



Teamwork



Professionalism



Communication



**Perspective
Awareness**



Technology



Leadership



Scan the QR
code to learn
Practical
Strategies for
Supervisors
from Work+

Work+
SKILLS FOR TODAY, SUCCESS FOR TOMORROW

Registered Student Intern Curriculum

In addition to their specific team tasks and projects, all interns complete course work online to advance their NACE competencies and prepare them for their future careers. The online portion of the curriculum is listed below:

Year 1 Summer, Fall, and Spring Semesters

1. NACE Competency Reflections
2. NACE Competency Inventory
3. Articulating Your Career Competencies

Year 2 Summer, Fall, and Spring Semesters

1. Build Your Resume Using VMock
2. Research Job Descriptions to Identify Interview Questions Reflection
3. Career Exploration & Professional Experience

Quick-Start Guide

1.

Identify a Staff Mentor

Select a UCF employee from your department who will serve as the Staff Mentor to oversee the LxL student team.

2.

Secure Budget for Paid Leadership Students

Confirm your department has financial resources to support paid student leadership positions.

3.

Create Job Description

Draft a clear and engaging job description for the Leadership Student(s), including responsibilities and qualifications.

4.

Post on Handshake

Submit the job posting to Handshake, UCF's student employment platform.

5.

Interview & Hire

Use your department's standard hiring process to review applications, conduct interviews, and hire selected students.

6.

Evaluate Readiness for Interns

After 1–2 semesters, assess your team's capacity and determine if you're ready to add registered student interns.

Have additional questions? Reach out to the Arboretum Coordinator (kelsie.johnson@ucf.edu) for more information and detailed steps to get started.



Expand the UCF Arboretum's Impact

Donating to The Arboretum Foundation Fund

The University of Central Florida and the Arboretum are grateful for the generosity our donors share with us each year. Your contributions directly impact the lives of our students and staff. UCF is fast becoming one of the premier metropolitan universities in the nation, and our success could not be achieved without your loyal support.

The UCF Arboretum welcomes donations to our Foundation Fund. All donations enhance our ability to grow our organic community garden, develop education programs, support research projects, and provide opportunities for community engagement. No gift is too small, and every gift is important to the success of the Department. Your gift will help create a lasting legacy of increased ecological awareness and will lead to better conservation and stewardship of natural resources.



Scan the QR to
Donate to the Arboretum

Sponsorship Opportunities

\$10,000 - Fund the Learning by Leading™ Program

Support the Learning by Leading™ (LxL) program, which empowers students to become co-creators in environmental projects.

Enable students to engage in hands-on learning, managing real-world projects, and developing crucial skills for future careers.

\$50,000 - Endow first-generation urban ecology student scholarships

Provide scholarships to first-generation college students pursuing studies in urban ecology.

Expand learning opportunities for students in environmental sciences.

\$250,000 - Develop the Arboretum public garden utility area

Improve infrastructure for sustainable practices, including water conservation and organic farming, through enhancements of the utility area.

Support educational programs and community engagement.

\$5,000,000 - Establish the Arboretum offices and outreach building

Create a dedicated space serving as a hub for research, education, and community outreach.

Expand interdisciplinary collaboration and advance UCF's research initiatives. This facility will be a cornerstone in fostering a sustainable future for the university and broader community.

Interested in becoming a sponsor? Connect with the Arboretum Director (jennifer.elliott@ucf.edu) for next steps.



LEARNING BY LEADING
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