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OPA Experience Reflection

 During this summer of 2016, I acted as an Orientation Peer Assistant (OPA) for the office of New Student and Family Programs. This position greatly improved my leadership skills by pushing me out of my comfort zone and discovering how my leadership style can fit with different group dynamics. Being an OPA allowed me to develop professional relationships with faculty, interact with incoming students, and improve my communication skills.

 Most of my experiences with this position and leadership built on my leadership competency within a team. In training, many team building activities were incorporated into the program. As a staff of seventeen people who all had to work with each other, it was imperative that each of us understood different strengths and weaknesses of our coworkers. There were tasks that each of us prepared and many of us recognized each other’s preferences. We were expected to leader large and small group activities with the incoming students. Many OPAs were more comfortable leading the small group activities of twenty people compared to the groups of sixty students.

 My role on the OPA varied depending on who I worked with and what their strengths were. I preferred working with large groups of 50+ students or having one-on-one conversations with students and family. I was comfortable with the small groups of 20 students, but they were not my forte. Because of my comfortability in large groups, I would facilitate those activities and make announcements. When working with individual students, I loved having conversations and making them feel comfortable as I led them for place to place. My coworkers were more adept at facilitating the group activities with groups of twenty students so in that situation I would handle organizing the materials while they facilitated discussions.

 My experience of being an OPA has been one of the most rewarding jobs I have had. I was able to see students become more comfortable with their choice in coming to MNSU and see them make connections with others. This experience has developed my leadership skills while working with a group of leaders aligned with the same goal: to welcome incoming students to MNSU. This job has allowed me to practice trusting others to take the reins occasionally when they are better suited for a task. I have grown immensely as a leader in this position and I cannot wait to return next summer!