

NEW STUDENT ORIENTATION GRAD GUIDE



New Student Orientation
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

CONTENTS

Overview of the Office	2
What We Do	5
Student Leadership	8
Living in Columbia	9
Ask a Grad	10
Contact Us	11



OVERVIEW OF THE OFFICE OF NEW STUDENT ORIENTATION

The Office of New Student Orientation provides orientation, transition and student leadership programs at the University of South Carolina. The department functions within the subdivision of Enrollment Management in the Office of the Provost.

Mission

The Office of New Student Orientation engages incoming students and their supporters in meaningful experiences that facilitate the successful transition to and through the University of South Carolina.

Vision

The Office of New Student Orientation strives to create a supportive environment that encourages student exploration, an inclusive community and personal success.

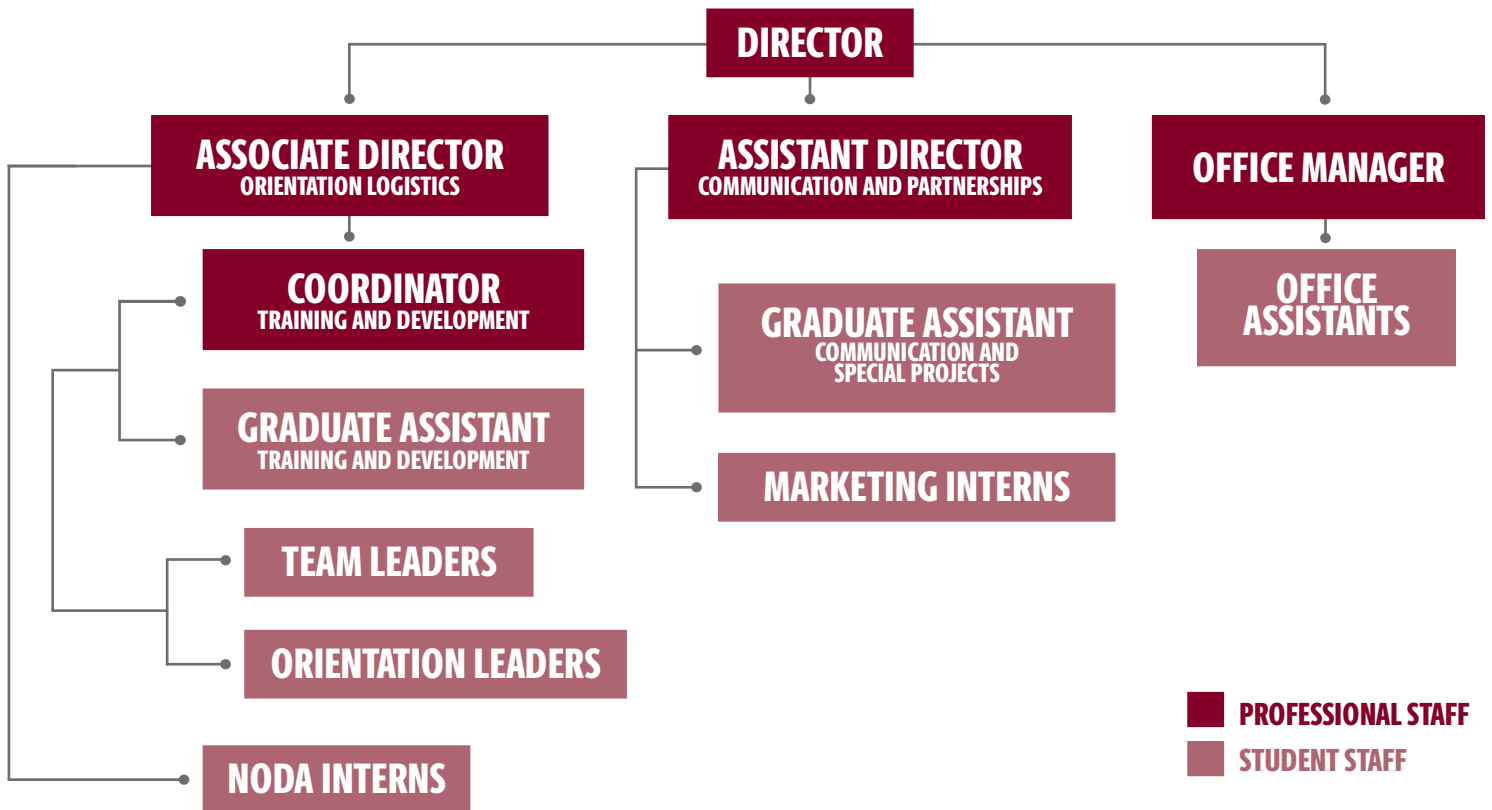
Motto

Right where you belong

Values

Discovery • Community • Innovation • Tradition • Support

Organizational Chart



OVERVIEW OF THE OFFICE OF NEW STUDENT ORIENTATION

Meet our staff! We are here to support and guide students, families and supporters during this exciting transition stage in their academic and personal development.



Alison Leach Hughes | Director

Hi! My name is Alison (she/her), but most call me ALH. I am originally from Wetumpka, AL, but I have called Cola home for four years. I attended Auburn University for my Bachelor's in English and the University of Alabama for my Master's in Higher Education Administration. I am a proud first-gen college graduate, which ignited my passion for helping students, families and supporters as they transition to and through college. I have worked with orientation, transition and retention for 15 years at a variety of large public institutions, which is perfect for me because I am a huge college football fan. I

am mom to two of the best dogs, Lou and Bertie, and it is my mission to try and rank Mexican restaurants in the Midlands with my husband, Jordan. You will often see me with a Dr. Pepper in hand and my most common phrase is "if you need anything, just holler," which I mean whole-heartedly. I serve as President for NODA and am a proud member of Alpha Chi Omega. In my work, I like to dream big, so you'll often find me using my strategic talent theme to imagine the "what ifs" and make them realities in our work.



Jared Logan | Associate Director, Orientation Logistics

Hello Hello! My name is Jared (He/him/his). I grew up on a farm in Lake Lure, NC which speaks to my passion for cultivating growth and development in others along with my 30+ indoor plants and pet turtle Noah. I am a proud queer, first-generation college graduate attending East Carolina University for my B.S. in Applied Sociology with Concentration in Marriage & Family and obtaining my M.Ed. from Clemson University in Counselor Education-Student Affairs. My education and knowledge, along with my relator talent theme, drives my work in understanding group dynamics, identity

development, storytelling, and navigating relationships internally and externally. I am a member of Pi Kappa Phi Fraternity and stay involved as an alum through chapter advising and serving on the greater organization's conduct committee. I enjoy music in all formats but specifically Sam Fischer and the Queen Beyonce! My work has ranged from student leader development, family programming, and special populations so sense of belonging and mattering mean a great deal to me. I am a strong advocate and catalyst for meaning making of everyday experiences and making sure that others know they are seen, heard and valued.



Kayley Safley / Coordinator, Training and Development

Howdy! I am Kayley (She/her). I am from Clarksdale, MS. I earned my B.A. in Communications from the University of Southern Mississippi and my M.S. In Educational Administration from Texas A&M University. I am about to enter my ninth summer of Orientations — going from my time as an Orientation Leader at Southern Miss to my Graduate Assistantship in Orientation at TAMU to now. That is full circle as my role oversees the Orientation Team! I am an active alumna of Delta Gamma,

involved in the Junior League Columbia, and am on the GOLD Alumni Council for my undergrad. When I'm not at work, you can find me traveling, reading, picking up a random hobby, and hanging out with my best friend, my dog, Maggie!



Garland Jackson / Office Manager

Hi, I'm Garland Jackson, and I serve as the Office Manager for ONSO. I help keep things running smoothly behind the scenes by coordinating administrative needs like student registration, ordering supplies, and providing customer support to incoming students and their supporters. I manage the Office Assistants in our office as well. I'm pretty down to earth, and I'm always up for a good conversation, so don't hesitate to stop by and say hello. I'm originally from Pompano Beach, Florida, and I try to bring that

warm, welcoming energy into everything I do. When I'm not at work, you can usually find me spending time with friends and family. I'm also a big gamer, almost always online playing Call of Duty, Destiny II or Battlefield with the people I love. I'm all about good vibes, good community and good company. And if you ever need a show recommendation, I'm your guy. I love binge-watching great series with great people. I'm excited to support you and help make your experience here as smooth and welcoming as possible.



Katie Hodapp / 2nd Year Graduate Assistant

Hi! My name is Katie (She/her) and I am from Louisville, KY. I'm pursuing my M.Ed. in Higher Education and Student Affairs. I earned my B.S.W. in Social Work at the University of Louisville. I am a proud transfer student, which allowed me to get involved and find my people in college. I was as an Orientation Leader and a Cards Camp Counselor (our version of Extended Orientation). I created countless memories and lasting relationships during this time and found my love for higher education! I was also involved with my sorority, Pi Beta Phi, and served on the leadership team. I love

spending time outdoors and trying new restaurants. I recently rescued a cat named Alistor, from Harry Potter of course! Most times you can find me at a local coffee shop or walking in local parks when the weather is nice.



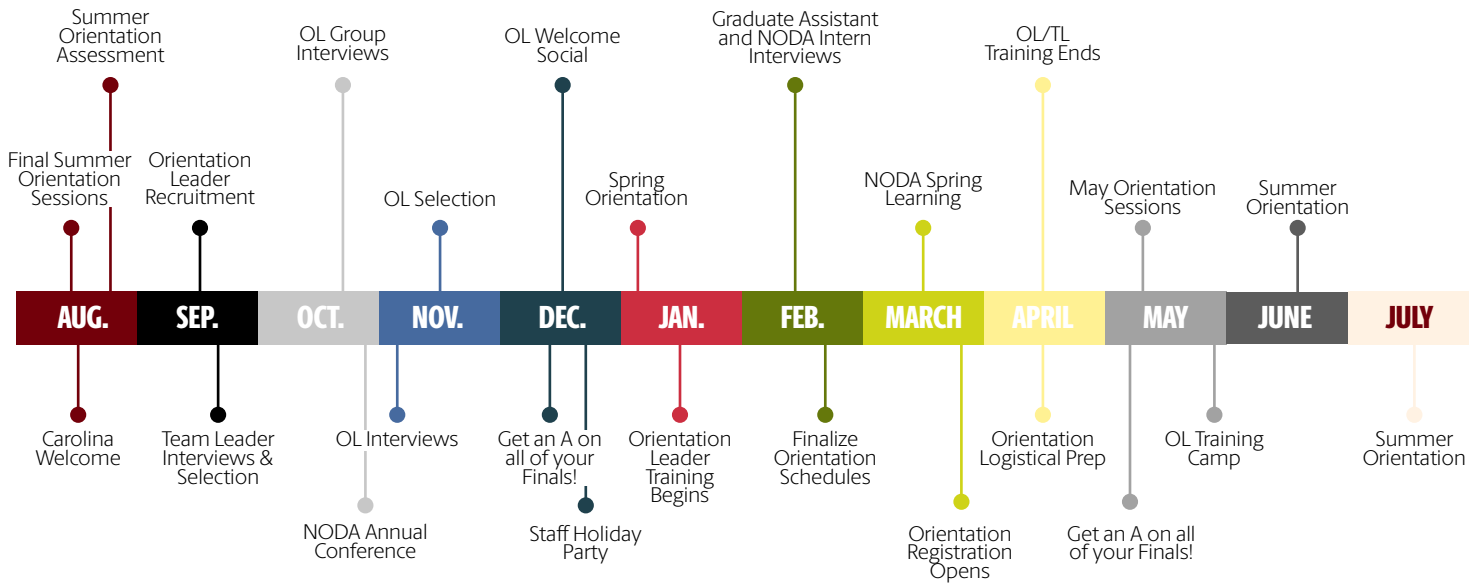
Abby Matijevic / 1st Year Graduate Assistant

Hello! My name is Abby Matijevic! As a first year graduate assistant my role and responsibilities revolve around all things Orientation Leaders! I co-supervise the team and assist with team training and development as well as an overall boost of morale! A little bit about me, I am originally from Chicago, Illinois and I went to Mississippi State University for my undergraduate degree. I am currently pursuing my M.Ed in Higher Education and Student Affairs. So, if that says anything about me, I love to talk,

especially about things like reality TV, good music and what Alani flavor I am deciding to drink that day.

WHAT WE DO

While New Student Orientation primarily takes place in the summer months, it is a year-long process. From assessment and planning to recruiting a team and training them for what the Orientation season holds, the Office of New Student Orientation works throughout the year to ensuring we're supporting students for their ultimate success.



New Student Orientation Sessions

New Student Orientation Sessions are held May-August and January. We offer approximately 28 sessions that are attended by over 18,000 students, families and supporters.

Carolina Welcome

Carolina Welcome is series of university-wide events that provide opportunities for new and returning students to get connected to campus. We assist Gamecock Entertainment in the coordination of First Night Carolina, the official kick-off for the fall semester. Additionally, we host First Day Photos each semester to help celebrate a student's transition to and through the university.

NODA Annual Conference and Spring Learning

Our office holds an institutional membership with NODA - The Association for Orientation, Transition and Retention. NODA provides professional development and networking opportunities for professionals and graduate students in our field. Traditionally, our office attends the NODA Annual Conference in the fall semester and Spring Learning in the spring semester.

Orientation Leader Training and Training Camp

We host weekly training for our Orientation Team throughout the spring semester on Wednesdays from 4-6 pm. During this time, we focus on developing OLs as individuals and leaders. As we move into the summer, Orientation Leaders attend training camp, which focuses more directly on their role as peer leaders and helps them understand the day-to-day logistics of hosting an orientation session.

Cocky Transitions

Launched in 2025, Cocky Transitions is our online, pre-orientation modules for all incoming students. We provide information about academics, student life, finances and safety all before a student steps foot on campus for Orientation.

WHAT WE DO

We provide a total of 28 orientation sessions for freshman students, transfer students, families and supporters. Additionally, we modify our program to meet the needs of those belonging to special populations on campus. Our philosophy is that New Student Orientation is an ongoing process, making ourselves available to attendees throughout their first-year at South Carolina and beyond.



Freshman Orientation

Freshman Orientation follows a two-day, overnight program model. Students are given the option to attend sessions during the months of May-July. They engage with a variety of campus partners, attend multiple small group sessions led by Orientation Leaders, speak with their academic college, learn about the commonalities of the first-year experience and get advised and registered for classes. This is our office's largest program, hosting up to 20 sessions each summer with roughly 400-450 students in attendance on each date. The cost of this program is \$260/student.

Transfer Orientation

Transfer Orientation follows a one-day program model. Students are given the option to attend sessions during the months of May-July. Modified from our freshman program, transfer students engage with a variety of campus partners, attend one small group session, speak with their academic college and get advised and registered for classes. We use this program model for sessions held in January for students admitted in the spring, May for students admitted in the summer and August for late arrival fall students. This is our office's second largest program, hosting five sessions each summer with roughly 250-300 students in attendance each date. The cost of this program is \$130/student.

Special Populations

We offer specialized Orientation programming for the following student groups:

- South Carolina Honors College
- Capstone Scholars
- TRIO Opportunity Scholars
- Palmetto Pathway
- Gamecock Gateway
- CarolinaLIFE
- Student athletes
- Veterans, dependents and active-duty military

We collaborate with stakeholders to integrate opportunities to connect into both freshman and transfer programs.

Family and Supporter Orientation

We recognize the important role of families and supporters during each program. We invite them to attend New Student Orientation with their student and participate in various breakout presentations. We connect them with the Office of Parent and Family Programs, family-focused resources and engage them in conversations surrounding how to navigate South Carolina so they can best support their student. The cost of this program is \$130/freshman supporter and \$65/transfer supporter.

Partnership Program

Throughout the year, we partner with a variety of on-campus, local and corporate businesses to help connect them with incoming students and supporters. We do this through a formalized partnership that includes benefits like tabling at the Resource Fairs held during sessions, recognition on our websites and materials and ads in the Garnet Guide, our annual orientation publication.

Service Project

New Student Orientation is all about community and being part of a community means taking an active role and giving back. Students, families and supporters are invited to start investing in their new community by bringing donations to the Gamecock CommUnity Shop during their session.



STUDENT LEADERSHIP

The Office of New Student Orientation provides student leadership and professional development opportunities to current students serving in Orientation Leader and Team Leader positions. Outside of these roles, students may also work with our office as Office Assistants or Marketing Interns.



Orientation Leaders

We recruit 40 students to work as Orientation Leaders, who are integral members of our team. They guide and support incoming students and families as they transition to campus. They are official ambassadors for the university who work to share the values, expectations, resources and spirit of the Gamecock community. Along the way they make friendships, discover their leadership potential, network across campus and kick-off the nation's #1 first-year experience at any public institution.

Before they can welcome students, they spend the spring semester attending weekly leadership trainings, participating in team retreats and attending student-focused conferences. Our goal is to provide our Orientation Leaders with professional development opportunities that not only prepare them for a summer on our team, but for any future career or educational endeavors. Our catchphrase for this team is ***one summer changes everything***, reiterating the long lasting professional impact of being an Orientation Leader.

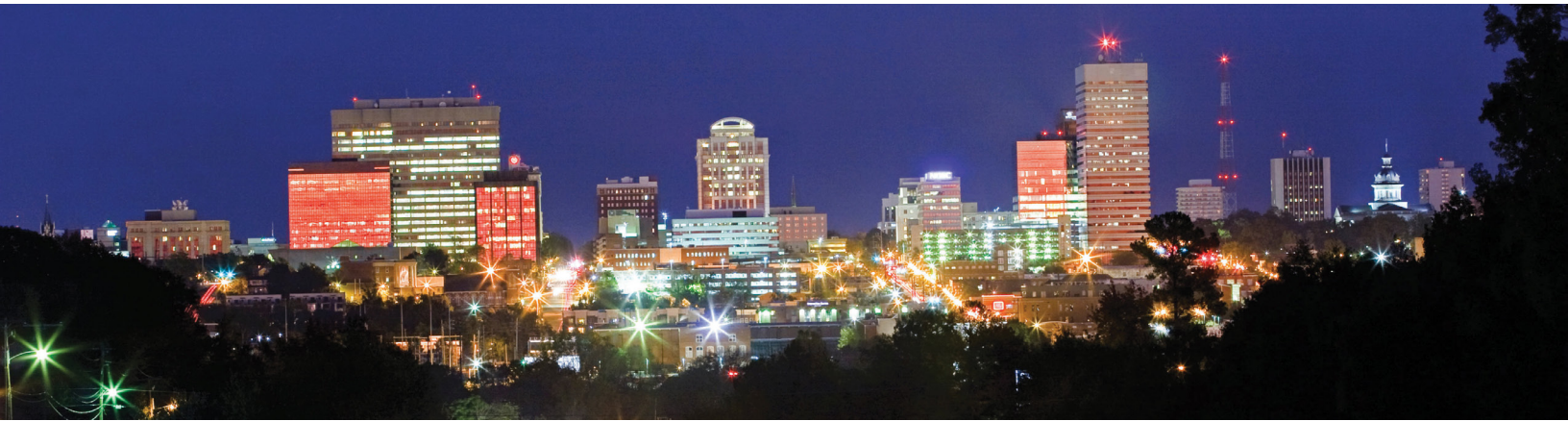
Team Leaders

Once a student has completed their year as an Orientation Leader, they have the opportunity to become a Team Leader. These students serve as peer leaders and mentors to our Orientation Leaders. As opposed to working directly with incoming students, our Team Leaders work with families and supporters and run day-of logistics during Orientation. This portion of our team is traditionally comprised of six individuals.

They spend the fall and spring semester attending and leading trainings and retreats, Orientation Leader trainings and student-focused conferences. Our goal is to build on what they learned the previous year and introduce new perspectives on peer leadership.

LIVING IN COLUMBIA

Ranked #1 in 2025 as the best place to live in South Carolina and the #5 best cities on the rise by Southern Living in 2024, Columbia, SC is where small town charm meets the Metropolitan area. No matter the season, the city comes alive and there is always something to do. From arts and culture, sports, entertainment, local eats and rave-worthy attractions, read below to learn what makes Columbia *famously hot*.



The University of South Carolina, the state's flagship university, is located in the heart of the Capital City of Columbia. This redefined modern community has all the southern charm you could ask for. Columbia is a fresh, contemporary area where stately buildings buzz with new business and centuries-old sites give rise to fresh perspectives, local attractions and exciting events. Our city is an exciting, creative hub fed by the university and Capital City communities - all this in the midst of the surrounding natural beauty. From artists to musicians, chefs and brewers, Columbia has it all!

Nothing compliments Columbia better than our campus. As a public university, the University of South Carolina prides itself on its rich 200-year history. Similar to its host city, the university is a perfect mix of tradition and innovation. In addition to being the state's largest institution of higher education, the University of South Carolina boasts the #1 public University Honors College, #1 Undergraduate International Business Major, and U.S. News and World Report's #1 First-Year Experience among public institutions.

The Office of New Student Orientation's Top Ten Famously Hot Spots

- 1 Soda City Farmer's Market
- 2 Tubing on the Congaree
- 3 State parks and walking trails
- 4 Columbia Museum of Art
- 5 Riverbanks Zoo and Garden
- 6 Columbia Fireflies Baseball
- 7 Local restaurants in the Vista
- 8 First Thursdays on Main Street
- 9 Concerts at Colonial Life Arena
- 10 Broadway shows at the Koger Center

ASK A GRAD

Want more information being a Graduate Assistant or NODA Intern at the University of South Carolina? Our past grads have shared insights and experiences from their time in the Office of New Student Orientation. Check out what they have to say below.



Maisy Wade / Former NODA Intern

My biggest piece of advice is to embrace the pace and be fully present in the experience. Things move quickly in this role, but don't let that speed keep you from soaking in the moments that make this work so special. Take the time to pause, look around, and appreciate the energy, the people, and the impact you're making every single day. Ask questions—lots of them! The professional staff here is not only incredibly knowledgeable, but they genuinely want to help you learn and grow. Whether it's about program logistics, leadership strategies, or navigating the university, leaning into curiosity will deepen your understanding and make you more confident in your role. Most importantly, remember that this experience is a unique opportunity to grow both personally and professionally while contributing to a program that has a real impact on students and their supporters. You'll learn skills here that you can carry into any future role, build relationships, and gain a deeper understanding of how collaboration, flexibility, and intentionality make a program successful. Be present, be engaged, and take in as much as you can. You'll be glad you did.



Sean Smyth / Former ONSO Grad, HESA Alum '25

Choosing to come to USC and join the Office of New Student Orientation was truly the best decision I could have made. In my graduate school experience, I've grown more than I ever imagined. Learning from everyone in the office and contributing to the positive impact on incoming students has been such a rewarding experience. The office's fun and supportive atmosphere has made me feel completely at home while completing my master's degree. I couldn't recommend this experience enough!

Thank you for your interest in the Office of New Student Orientation at the University of South Carolina! Feel free to stay connected with us on social media, and good luck during the rest of your search process.

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CONTACT US





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