

# Take It from the Top

## Advice from Florida's best student leaders

Compiled by Lindsay Downey

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**T**here's no set formula for success, but if anyone knows how to work at solving the equation, it's the 2004 Florida College Student of the Year honorees. From motivating, mentoring, and overcoming adversity, to budgeting time and getting an organization off the ground, the state's top leaders give you their insider tips. For more information on the winners or to participate in the 2005 Florida College Student of the Year Award, please visit [www.floridaleader.com/soty](http://www.floridaleader.com/soty).

### How has your group improved the quality of life on campus for students? How can it be further improved, even after you graduate?

"P.E.A.C.E has helped students realize how necessary it is to go out and volunteer. It gives students the opportunity to make a difference in a variety of ways. It can be further improved by keeping a better database of volunteer events and planning more alternative spring break trips."

—**Brianna Holmes**

03-04 Student Coordinator  
People Exploring Active Community Experience  
University of Tampa  
[blholmes@ut.edu](mailto:blholmes@ut.edu)

"The 51st Way began as a vision I had to create a campus empowerment program that could be implemented at any university, anywhere. I've made a difference at UNF by teaching my peers through workshops how to have confidence in themselves and how to be self-starters. The 51st Way met and exceeded my vision when the federal government granted it 501c3 nonprofit status.

Now, the 51st Way is not only changing lives on my campus but also in my community."

—**John Allen, Jr.**

03-04 President and Founder  
The 51st Way  
University of North Florida  
[jallen51way@hotmail.com](mailto:jallen51way@hotmail.com)

### How do you overcome adversity?

"Before you begin a task, make sure to plan for mishaps. If you find yourself in a place where you feel like you can't get out, envision yourself succeeding. Let the

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success you desire motivate you to overcome adversity."

—**Ayanna Beckles**

03-04 President  
Student Government Association  
Seminole Community College  
[ayanna.beckles@hotmail.com](mailto:ayanna.beckles@hotmail.com)

"Because I'm deaf and a cancer survivor, I face adversity every day. I find hurdles at each endeavor and another setback after every bend. It hurts to climb so high and be knocked down, but I stare adversity in the face and growl right back at it, so when I fall

### What advice would you give up-and-coming leaders?

"Remain confident at all times. Work closely with people you respect and admire. Upon awakening every day, I speak of the day at hand and I live by the motto 'I can do anything I set my mind on doing.' However, I can do it only with the help and guidance of others."

—**Wendy Reed**

03-04 President  
Student Government Association  
Manatee Community College  
[z.wow@verizon.net](mailto:z.wow@verizon.net)

"Use a daily planner, Palm Pilot, or some other means of organizing your time. You don't get paid in college, but your time is the most valuable asset and resource that you have. Use it wisely and keep good



MCC's Wendy Reed



FLORIDA LEADER MAGAZINE

**Winner's Circle:** Contenders for the 2004 award bond and debate during the annual leadership retreat preceding the ceremony.

back three steps, I step ahead another five. Fear is also what drove me because I knew that fear is what courage is derived from. I saw a cool bumper sticker one time that said 'Courage is fears that have said their prayers'."

—**Leslie Brown**

03-04 Member  
Leadership Challenge Team  
Seminole Community College  
[deafparamedic@aol.com](mailto:deafparamedic@aol.com)

"I don't care if there is any adversity from other people. By just doing my own thing without letting other people influence me negatively, I gain a lot of respect and following."

—**Bijal Chhadva**

03-04 Entertainment Chairman  
and Founding Member, Dance Marathon  
University of South Florida  
[bijalbgk@hotmail.com](mailto:bijalbgk@hotmail.com)

records and plans so you can review them and share that information with others."

—**Joshua Pila**

03-04 Founder  
Multicultural Information Council  
University of Florida  
[jpila@ufl.edu](mailto:jpila@ufl.edu)

### What qualities make you an effective leader?

"I've never been an authoritarian leader. I believe in leading by example and working in the trenches with everyone else. If you're personable, others are certainly more willing to come up to you and ask you questions, and you're more likely to make the desired impact."

—**Kimberly Rogers**

03-04 Founder  
McLane Center Fall Festival  
Chipola College  
[berly122@hotmail.com](mailto:berly122@hotmail.com)



Chipola's Kim Rogers

**What is the most important issue facing Florida college students today?**

“The most important issue for students today is finding a unique activity to set them apart after graduation. More than just a degree is needed to find a job today. Finding that one ‘right’ activity is hard but necessary.”

—**April Gillespie**  
03-04 President  
Student Government  
University of Tampa  
agillespie@ut.edu

“I believe the most important issue facing Florida college students today is the availability of an affordable education. The cost of tuition is going to be a continual factor in the choices that upcoming students make before going to school. I’m afraid that if the cost of living continues to rise, then education may once again be for the elite.”

—**Clevin Weekes**  
03-04 President  
Honors Council  
Florida Memorial College  
clevinweekes@hotmail.com

be amazed at what you can achieve simply by sending a follow-up message.”

—**Steven Cohen**  
03-04 Founder and National Chairman  
Friends for Life of America  
University of Florida  
sdcohen@ufl.edu



**FMC's Clevin Weekes**

**What surprised you most about your transition from high school to college?**

“I was surprised by the myriad of organizations in which I could easily become involved, as well as the autonomy afforded college leaders by

the campus administration. I was also surprised by how quickly and easily campus leadership positions transitioned into state and national responsibilities.”

—**Jason Guercio**

“The speed with which it occurred. I couldn’t believe how quickly the transfor-

get behind our teachers with more training, more compensation, and most of all, more recognition.”

—**Matt Collier**  
03-04 President  
Student Government  
Association  
Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University  
colli3ef@erau.edu



**ERAU's Matt Collier**

**What will most improve life in Florida in the future? What role do you see yourself taking in achieving that?**

“I would change the apathy level in the state of Florida. I’d encourage students and citizens to become active in their local government, use their talents to help those around them in service, and become more involved in their local community. It seems as though a small percentage does a lot for the world, while the majority are only concerned with their own world. If everyone put others before themselves, our world would be a much better place.”

—**Cathalain Tobin**  
03-04 President

Student Government Association  
Florida Southern College  
ctobin@flsouthern.edu

**“It’s so hard to watch a great university that I love having to cancel classes and struggle to offer services students need because of under-funding.”**

—**Marianne Howe**  
03-04 Founder Recycle UCF  
University of Central Florida

**In what specific areas will you use your leadership skills after you graduate? What are your plans after graduation?**

“I definitely will stay involved with Saint Leo as an alumna and help out Student Government. I’ll stay involved with my sorority, and once I leave the university, I’ll be able to advise future sisters.”

—**Janet Levic**  
03-04 Executive Vice President, Operations  
Student Government Union  
Saint Leo University  
janet.levic@saintleo.edu



**UCF's Annie Howe**

“Managing stress. College students have stress from classes, organizations, family, and friends, and they must learn time management skills to enjoy their college careers.”

—**Kimberly Ruhge**  
03-04 Founder and President  
Graduate Business Student Association  
University of Central Florida  
kwatts03@hotmail.com

**How do you take your ideas from a vision to a reality? How do you get others excited about them?**

“Master the courage to turn original ideas into action. College is the last time you will enjoy both limited responsibility and a paid support system—university administrators. Make the most of it!”

—**Jason Guercio**  
03-04 Director and Founder  
Medical Mentoring Program  
University of Miami

“Do what 99 percent of students don’t: follow up! If you get someone’s card, be sure to send them a thank-you note and remind them of your conversation. You’ll

mation happened. I was a senior in high school, and then —boom! —I was a freshman in college, chairing a 12-person committee, sitting on the executive council of our Student Government as a voting member, and starting my own club. Never be afraid to try out something new.”

—**Craig Altemose**  
03-04 Co-president  
and Founder  
Alliance of Concerned  
Individuals  
Eckerd College  
altemocs@eckerd.edu



**Eckerd's Craig Altemose**

**What one thing would you change about your school or the Florida educational system? Why?**

“If I had the power to change one thing, I would focus on our teachers and educators. All schools, regardless of the level, are meant to transfer knowledge from teacher to student. Without adequate support, teachers can’t do this effectively. If we expect to continue to be a world leader, the United States has to make a sincere commitment to

“I would like to advocate for improved healthcare rights here and in developing nations. I want to help people more than just by being a physician: by changing healthcare policy.”

—**Minal Ahson**  
03-04 President  
Islamic Society of UM  
University of Miami  
mahson@miami.edu

“In the United States Army as a second lieutenant, I will have the opportunity to be in charge of 40 soldiers. Someday I would like to work in Congress as an advocate for education.”

—**Brianna Holmes**



**UM's Minal Ahson**