

Tips From the Top

Advice from Student of the Year Jose Diaz

Compiled by Chelsea Ellis

If you can do it, Jose Diaz probably has. From founding a new chapter of the Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity at the University of Miami to being Student Government president and the first student to get a voting seat on the Board of Trustees at this private school, his leadership skills have been honed by hard work and time. Here's how he became the 2002 Florida College Student of the Year and where he sees himself in the future.

Born to Lead

I first got involved in Student Government my sophomore year in high school, and have been every year since. I got involved in SG because I saw that the people who were involved in Student Council (as it was called then) were the ones that were truly making a difference in our high school experience. I enjoyed my time in SG so much that I ran for student body president in high school and won.

When I entered college, I knew immediately that I wanted to continue my involvement in SG. I became Commuter North Senator within one month of my freshman year, and served as Interfraternity Council Senator, Speaker of the Senate, and ultimately President my senior year.

I get my motivation to lead intrinsically. It's as much a part of my personality as anything I can think of. I love to be involved and to make a difference, and the best way I know to do this is by being a leader in the organizations I'm part of. I have realized that I can achieve the greatest number of goals in the least amount of time if I'm one of the leaders of the group. I might not always be right, but I'm always willing to listen to the advice of my peers. This gives the groups I'm involved with an edge, because many leaders just manage and don't listen.

Leadership Strategy

I believe that you don't plan to be a leader—it just happens—but I did know that I wanted to become SG president again when I entered college. I knew that it would be a great opportunity for me to nurture my talents and foster a positive environment for the **University of Miami**.

My only plan was to take it one day at a time. I thought, "If I survive today, I can surely survive tomorrow," meaning, no matter how overwhelmed I was in student

activities, I knew that tomorrow would be just as full of just as many tasks and obstacles.

Honestly, I could never have mapped my student involvement four years ago because it was so unpredictable, and I'm proud of that. I like being spontaneous. Life throws you many curveballs, and I believe



that I was in the right place at the right time many times throughout my career.

However, there were times that my plans were jeopardized. For example, I had the opportunity to graduate a year early from UM because I had come to school with over 44 credits from high school. I knew that if I graduated early, though, I would miss many opportunities such as being student body president. So I decided to double-major instead. If I hadn't, my college experience would have been radically different. It was one of the best decisions that I've ever made.

Also, as a sophomore, I was approached by seven different SG parties and asked to

run for vice-president. This would have given me a lot of worthwhile experience, but I knew that I wasn't ready. It would have jeopardized my plans to become president because I would have alienated all the people that I was running against. I decided to run for Speaker of the Senate instead.

Leadership for Life

I am who I am today because of the leadership positions I assumed as an undergraduate. Being chapter president of Sigma Phi Epsilon for five semesters truly taught me how to work with all sorts of people. It was the most important position I have ever held, and it allowed me to achieve higher positions and learn to thrive under pressure. As a result of my leadership positions, I am a more patient person. I also see the big picture a lot better, and that has helped me to gain a great deal of success. I really couldn't picture my development as a person without student leadership.

My most unexpected accomplishment as a student leader was gaining a student vote on UM's Board of Trustees. When I ran for student body president, I never thought that the project would be feasible because it was such a controversial topic. However, I quickly learned that it was the perfect time for such a proposal to pass. Our new president, Dr. Donna Shalala, is a true advocate of student rights. After much work and lobbying, the idea passed, and I was really amazed that we accomplished such an overwhelming task.

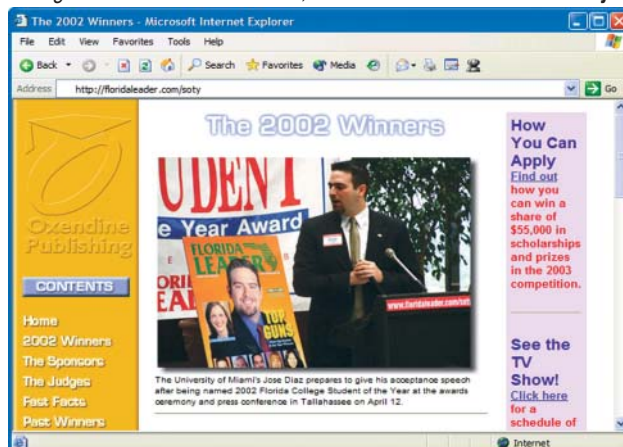
My most challenging obstacle has been maintaining great relationships. Many people alienate their friends, family, and peers because of their involvement in leadership activities, and I really didn't want to fall into that trap. I've always made sure that my relationships with others have stayed healthy. Many times people sacrifice other people for power, money, and greed. Throughout my four years in college, I not only maintained my past friendships, but I made countless new ones. I'll never forget those very special people.


I have learned to balance my time and commitments with to-do lists. I love them.

They are so important to me. My friends think I'm a bit on the extreme side of to-do lists, but I feel like I can't go to bed unless I have completed as many tasks as I could. Some people say, "Why do today what I can do tomorrow?" but I say, "Why do tomorrow what I can do today?" That has helped me so much because I am always on task. That way, if something unexpected should pop up, I have the time tomorrow to make it up because I am not behind. I always stay two steps ahead of the game.

Jose Diaz is attending Columbia Law School in New York after graduating from the University of Miami last spring with a 3.44 GPA. Contact Diaz at jfdiaz36@aol.com.

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