



AEP
ACADEMIC EVENT PROFESSIONAL

It Takes a Village: Volunteer Recruitment, Management and Merriment

Amy Quiring and Zach Fairchild – University of Oregon

Introductions



Amy Quiring
Director of Major Student Events
Division of Student Life -
Office of Major Student Events



Zach Fairchild
Special Events Coordinator
Division of Student Life -
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Major Student Events Strategic Vision: We strive to enrich the student experience by producing exceptional, inclusive, and iconic student-centered events and to create opportunities for meaningful engagement, tradition building, and exploration of the university experience. We are committed to providing a consistent, positive, safe and inclusive experience for every student and guest.

What to Expect Today

1. **Who We Are and What We Do:** Overview of commencement at the University of Oregon
2. **An Evolving Volunteer Experience:** A summary comparison of the UO commencement volunteer experience over the past 7 years
3. **Recruitment & Registration:** Methods, tools & best practices for recruiting and retaining volunteers
4. **Training & Preparation:** Methods, tools & best practices for training and preparing volunteers for their experience
5. **The On-Site Experience:** What our volunteers see, hear, experience on commencement day
6. **Recognition & Retention:** Methods, tools & best practices for recognizing the investment of time and energy and leveraging the experience to increase volunteer retention year after year
7. **Lessons Learned:** Takeaways we have learned over the past 7 years that make us better
8. **Goals for the Future:** Our ideas and plans to further our success and continuously improve the volunteer experience



Who We Are & What We Do

2019 Commencement by the Numbers

Bachelor's Degrees: 4,197

Master's Degrees: 896

Doctoral Degrees: 138

Law Degrees: 97

Double Majors: 418

Triple Majors: 8

Oldest Graduate: 76

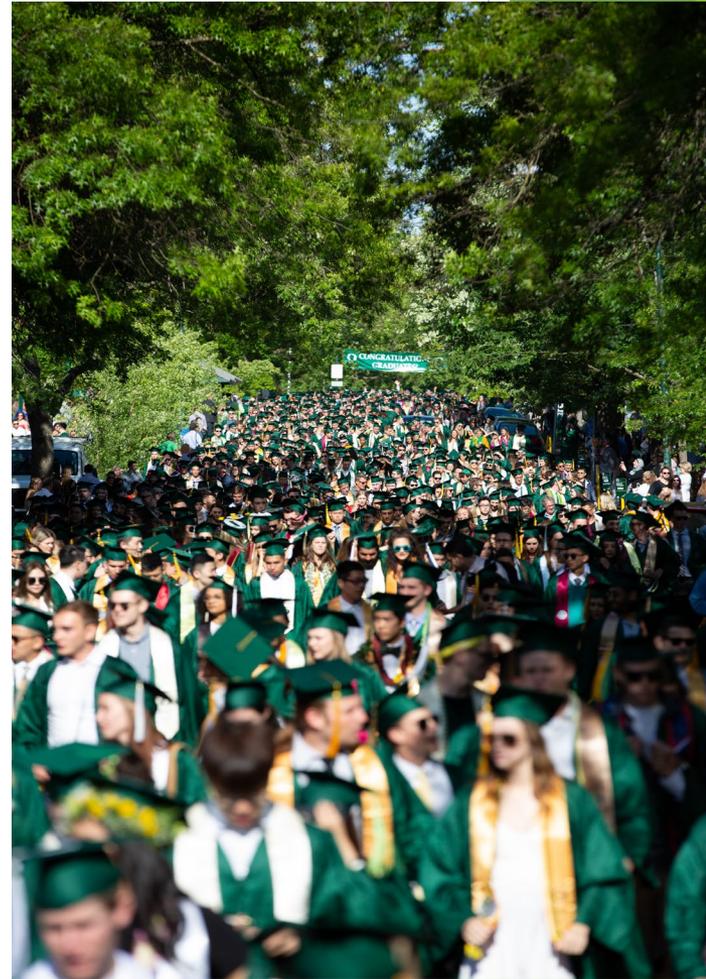
Youngest Graduate: 19



Who We Are & What We Do

It really does take a village to do all of this...

- 2 days of ceremonies
- 12 different ceremony sites
- 40 ceremonies across campus
- Over 4,500 graduates
- Over 35,000 guests
- 150 volunteers and staff support



Who We Are & What We Do

2019 UO Commencement Highlight Video:

<https://around.uoregon.edu/commencement-2019>

An Evolving Volunteer Experience

2012-2015	2015-Present
Only recruited around 40 volunteers	Recruiting 100+ volunteers
Recruitment = “Volun-told” (many from the same single department)	Some departments still require staff to volunteer, but many more are coming on their own terms
Long shifts (4 hours+) & back-to-back shifts	Shorter shifts (1.5-3 hours) & intentional breaks
Vague job descriptions	Very specific and detailed position descriptions & personalized itineraries
Unclear sign up process (who knows what you’re going to get)	Clear sign-up survey (know what you’re signing up to do in advance)
Information/details shared day-of and information packet was very text heavy	Information/details shared ahead of time with in-person trainings and walk through of space

An Evolving Volunteer Experience

2012-2015	2015-Present
One staff person in HQ to manage commencement fires, communications AND volunteers	Multiple staff/student staff with specific HQ responsibilities
Bad food	Better food, more food, hot food
Ugly 1989 heavy volunteer polos that volunteers turned back in at the end of the day (and then SOMEONE had to wash!)	Light t-shirts provided to every volunteer that they keep (and reuse year after year if they want – or they can get a new one!)
No feedback solicited post-event	Solicit volunteer feedback via online survey (and actually listen/implement ideas)
	Added a mobile app and lanyards with critical information for volunteers to have on hand in the field

Recruitment & Registration

Recruitment: Expanding the Pool

- Cast our net wide!
- Leverage our existing networks/relationships (grassroots)
- Volunteer for our colleagues events/activities
- Build volunteer network list after each event and communicate with them (we ask if volunteers want to be considered for future event opportunities at all of our events)
- Ask entire departments to participate as a group/team for a specific role or need that might match their department's mission
- Piloting “lead volunteer” role this year with our most experienced volunteers

This may take time, but it is well worth it!

Recruitment & Registration

Recruitment: Determine what you ACTUALLY need

- Communicate the event goals – create buy-in from your volunteers to believe in them too
- Review the event from the guest's/student's point of view (literally walk/roll step from start to finish) to identify where service or staffing is needed and how many positions might be required for any given role
- Define how the guest will interact with the volunteer in each specific role – helps match volunteer with position
- Create a detailed job description that describes responsibilities, shift start and end times, number of volunteers needed to fulfill role

Common mistake: Recruiting volunteers without intention – nobody likes to feel useless/stand around/do nothing

Recruitment & Registration

Volunteer Position Examples

Autzen/Shuttle Volunteer

Graduate Seating Guide
Volunteer

Duck Grad Parade Volunteer

Guest Exit Guide Volunteer

Central Reception Volunteer

Information Booth Volunteer

Confetti Streamer Volunteer

University Commencement
Celebration Volunteer

Department Liaison Volunteer

Water Station Volunteer

Golf Cart Driver Volunteer

Zero Waste Station Volunteer

Recruitment & Registration

Registration: Communication

- “Save the Date” beginning of winter term
- Qualtrics form & logic for easy sign-up
 - Include detailed job descriptions so they know what they are signing up for
- Communicate the confirmation!
- Individual/personalized itineraries
- What happens when people cancel?
- Communicating assignments a week out, again the day before.

Training & Preparation

Training: In-Person

- In-person volunteer trainings; 2-3 different times/days
- We go over everything about the day so all of our volunteers have context and could step into other roles in a pinch
- Offer individual trainings for those who cannot attend on a case-by-case basis, though the expectation is to come to one of the group trainings
- Offer group trainings to an entire department if appropriate
- There is a required golf cart training for volunteers wanting to drive golf carts
- Opportunity to ask questions, learn from returning volunteers

Training & Preparation

Preparation: Pre-Event Resources

- Confirmation email of volunteer registration once they've signed up, with a copy of their registration as record
- Microsoft Teams with important information and resources
- Direct access to our team, with prompt responsive replies
- Website with dates, times and locations of ceremonies
- Consistent communication leading up to the day-of
- Ability to be flexible with changes to schedules (as much as we are able)
- In-person tour of arena (optional)
- Volunteer packet with comprehensive information about the entire commencement day and ALL volunteer roles
- Individual itineraries that are specific, personalized and accurate

The On-Site Experience

Welcome to Headquarters (HQ)!



The On-Site Experience

Volunteer Check-In

- Arrive to HQ at time listed on itinerary
- Positive and dedicated commencement staff on-site
- Volunteer receives:
 - Commencement volunteer t-shirt
 - Lanyard with maps, ceremonies list with times/location, resources, shuttle information and important phone numbers
 - Radio with access to HQ and to communicate with other volunteers
 - Personalized itinerary with any updates
 - Goodies (graduation ducks, water bottle, sticker, button)
- HQ is open and secure all day to leave personal items, stop in for breaks, eat provided meals, etc.



The On-Site Experience



Don't forget the food!

Recognition & Retention

Video Testimonials:

A happy volunteer feels important, effective and appreciated; volunteering helps to give a sense of purpose, belonging and accomplishment within a community.



Tina Haynes

On-Campus Recruiting
Coordinator for
University Career Center



Tayler Marshall

Assistant Director for
Fraternity and Sorority Life

Recognition & Retention

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Recognition & Retention

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Recognition & Retention

Recognition: Big and Small

- “Super Volunteers” signs
- Gifts, something cute and something useful (doesn’t have to be big or expensive!)
- Nametag milestone ribbons or buttons
- Tell them the value of their contributions throughout the day, with public kudos and encouragement over the radio
- Food is a universal thank you
- Say thank you, out loud, numerous ways!
- Thank you emails post event
- Post-event celebration (ice cream social or other informal gathering)

Recognition & Retention

Retention: It's the Little Things

- Fun, energetic atmosphere leading up to the event and day-of in our HQ and all across campus
- Calm, cool, collected staff leaders throughout the entire process
- Providing ample tools/resources so folks know what they're doing and if they can't find it, they know where to go or who to go to
- Responsiveness to concerns and comments, adapting practices to reflect volunteer needs and desires
- Post-event feedback survey, with actual action
- Save the date email in January that includes another thank you and invite to participate again

Recognition & Retention

What Our Volunteers Say:

- “Overall the organization was WONDERFUL. So many families complimented us on our organization.”
- “There were a lot of volunteers; plenty to do, but plenty of people to do it. The information I received in advance was really helpful. I felt useful.”
- “I am always honored to be a part of this special day for our students and their guests and I am excited to be here to help in any way I can.”
- “We as a campus strive to ensure that each students and their guests have an exceptional experience while visiting our campus for commencement. Being able to be an impactful part of their experience, is truly rewarding.”

Lessons Learned

Key Takeaways:

- Assume everyone knows nothing (sometimes we are too close to the event and take our knowledge for granted) – give them all the information
- Look at the event through the volunteer's perspective – how they will experience the day, provide flexibility to make the role their own, empower them to own it
- Specific sign-up/registration that describes the assignments and shift times upfront
- Trainings ahead of time with time to process and ask questions
- Make volunteers feel knowledgeable and empowered – that they are supported by our office if they need anything

Lessons Learned

Key Takeaways:

- Personalize (even though it takes more time)
- Cast a wide recruitment net all the way across campus
- Stay organized, detail-oriented – volunteers feel confident and taken care of
- Emergency procedures – give volunteers tools and resources so they do not feel alone in case of emergency
- Provide calm, fun, happy environment
- Shirts!
- Good food, hot food, lots of food

Goals for the Future

Looking Ahead:

- More departmental commitments
- System with auto self-select and adjustable scheduling/waitlist feature for volunteers
- Volunteer individual login to control/communicate with other volunteers (perhaps in the same position(s))
- Volunteer training video
- Provide relaxation resources (relaxation techniques, chair massage) through our Health Center and Wellness Center
- Find more ways to celebrate our volunteers and instill more of a community feeling/connection throughout the entire year

Final Thoughts

- Our volunteers feel like they are part of a team and it shows. They support one another throughout their shifts and truly care about what they are doing!
- Productive, energized, happy volunteers translate to a consistent and positive experience for every student and guest, which is the ultimate goal!





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**Questions?
Thank you!**

Amy Quiring and Zach Fairchild, University of Oregon