

## Leadership Experience in the African Student Association and International Student Association

I have always been drawn to leadership because it offers a chance to bring people together and make a positive difference. When I became Vice President of the African Student Association (ASA) during the 2023-2024 academic year and the International Student Association (ISA) during the same period, I was excited to take on these responsibilities simultaneously. Leading in two organizations at the same time was both challenging and rewarding. I wanted to connect with others, celebrate our differences, and help our groups grow stronger. These roles taught me a lot about leadership and myself. I learned how to communicate effectively, solve problems, and plan big events. I also grew by working with people from many different backgrounds, which opened my eyes to new ideas and cultures. In this essay, I'll share the leadership skills I gained, how these experiences shaped me, and how they've inspired my future goals.

As Vice President, I often collaborated with board members who brought diverse opinions and skills to the table. One pivotal experience occurred while planning African Night, one of ASA's signature events. Our team faced disagreements regarding the balance between traditional and modern performances. Recognizing the importance of inclusivity, I ensured every member had the chance to voice their thoughts. By facilitating open discussions and fostering compromise, we created an event that honored our traditions while appealing to a wide audience. This experience underscored the value of listening and promoting unity within a team.

Leadership does not happen alone, and my experience as Vice President of the African Student Association (ASA) and the International Student Association (ISA) was deeply shaped by the team I worked with. Collaborating with the president and other board members was central to everything we accomplished, from organizing major events to addressing challenges and planning the organizations' futures.

The **president** of each organization set the overall vision, and my role was to support that vision while managing specific tasks. This partnership required constant communication and mutual respect. For example, during the planning of African Night, the president focused on external outreach and securing performers, while I coordinated the logistics, such as arranging venues, setting timelines, and managing the budget. By dividing

responsibilities in this way, we ensured nothing was overlooked. Regular meetings helped us stay aligned and address any obstacles together.

The **secretary and treasurer** played equally important roles in the team. The secretary ensured that meetings ran smoothly by taking detailed minutes and keeping the group organized. Their records were invaluable when we needed to revisit decisions or track our progress. The treasurer, on the other hand, kept us grounded financially. They provided regular updates on our budget and helped us allocate resources effectively. For example, during the International Festival, the treasurer's careful management allowed us to stretch our limited funds to include additional decorations and cultural items, enhancing the event's atmosphere.

Collaboration extended to **committee members and volunteers**, who brought their unique skills and ideas to the table. For instance, during the cultural fashion show at the International Festival, we relied on a dedicated group of volunteers to help participants prepare their outfits and manage the backstage flow. Their enthusiasm and hard work made the event seamless and vibrant.

Of course, teamwork wasn't without its challenges. Differences in priorities or ideas occasionally led to tension. During one event, there was disagreement among board members about whether to focus on traditional or modern elements. As Vice President, I saw my role as a mediator. I encouraged open discussion, making sure everyone felt heard, and helped the group find a compromise that balanced both perspectives. These moments taught me the importance of active listening and building trust among team members.

Working with such a diverse and talented group expanded my perspective and helped me grow as a leader. I learned to rely on others' strengths, delegate tasks effectively, and celebrate the contributions of every team member. Together, we created events and initiatives that reflected our shared vision and made a lasting impact on the campus community.

Leadership also means navigating unexpected challenges. During the International Festival, a performer canceled just hours before the event. In response, I worked with the team to adjust the schedule, while others extended their acts to fill the gap. This taught me to remain calm under pressure and reinforced the importance of trust and teamwork. Together, we delivered a successful event that exemplified resilience and collaboration.

Planning major events like African Night and the International Festival tested and refined my organizational skills. As Vice President, I helped coordinate venue bookings, promotional strategies, and performance schedules. I also learned to delegate responsibilities effectively, ensuring tasks were distributed evenly among team members. For African Night, seeing the event come to life after months of preparation was a deeply rewarding experience, highlighting the importance of meticulous planning and teamwork in achieving shared goals.

One of the most fulfilling aspects of my leadership roles was working with students from different cultural backgrounds. Events like the International Festival and African Night provided opportunities to celebrate and learn from our differences. For instance, during a cultural fashion show, students proudly showcased traditional attire, sharing stories behind their clothing choices. These moments not only strengthened our community but also deepened my curiosity and respect for other cultures.

Creating an inclusive environment was central to my leadership approach. I prioritized ensuring that every member, regardless of their background, felt welcomed and valued. During meetings, I encouraged quieter members to share their thoughts, fostering a culture where everyone's voice mattered. This focus on inclusion built a strong sense of belonging, motivating members to engage actively and contribute meaningfully.

My Strengthsfinder top five strengths—Competition, Restorative, Analytical, Futuristic, and Ideation—shaped my leadership style as Vice President of the African Student Association (ASA) and the International Student Association (ISA). Reflecting on these, I see how they influenced my approach to inclusion, learning, and problem-solving throughout my term.

**Competition** drove my commitment to excellence, both personally and within my team. I always sought ways to make our events stand out, whether by increasing attendance, improving coordination, or creating unique experiences for participants. This strength inspired me to set high standards and motivate the team to achieve our goals, ensuring that every member felt invested in our shared success.

**Restorative** played a key role in my ability to tackle challenges. For instance, when we faced disagreements during African Night planning or last-minute changes at the International Festival, I worked with the team to identify problems and find practical solutions. This strength helped me address conflicts constructively and foster

collaboration, ensuring that everyone's contributions were valued and that we achieved our goals as a team.

My **Analytical** nature allowed me to make well-informed decisions and focus on continuous learning. I often relied on feedback, attendance data, and previous event outcomes to improve future planning. For example, analyzing attendee feedback helped us tailor the International Festival to include more interactive elements, such as cultural demonstrations, which promoted inclusion and engaged a wider audience.

**Futuristic** thinking fueled my vision for the organizations. I was always looking for ways to not only meet our current goals but also pave the way for long-term success. This strength showed up in my efforts to establish practices, such as creating a comprehensive event planning guide, that would benefit future leadership teams. It also aligned with my focus on inclusion, as I worked to create spaces where everyone felt empowered to share their ideas and perspectives.

Finally, **Ideation** brought creativity to my leadership. I enjoyed brainstorming new ideas for events, like the "Africa Unplugged" panel discussion, which challenged misconceptions and promoted meaningful conversations about diversity. This strength encouraged innovative thinking and ensured that our events reflected a balance of cultural education and entertainment, furthering our mission to celebrate diversity.

Together, these strengths shaped my leadership style, helping me foster inclusion, embrace learning, and solve problems effectively. They allowed me to bring out the best in my team and ensure that our efforts left a lasting impact on the organizations and the campus community.

One of the most impactful initiatives during my tenure was organizing the Africa Unplugged panel discussion. This event aimed to challenge stereotypes about African cultures and highlight the continent's diversity. The feedback we received was profound—attendees expressed how the event reshaped their perspectives. This experience reinforced the power of creating educational spaces where dialogue and understanding can flourish.

One of the toughest challenges I faced during my time as Vice President of the African Student Association (ASA) and International Student Association (ISA) was managing my responsibilities alongside a demanding academic load. During this period, I was taking 18

credits in a semester, which included some of the most challenging courses in my program. Balancing these intense academic commitments with the pressures of leadership often felt overwhelming. There were moments when the weight of it all became so heavy that I seriously considered stepping down and walking away.

There were nights I would stay up late trying to complete assignments, only to realize I had to be up early for an important meeting or event preparation. My schedule was packed to the point where I barely had time for myself, let alone to reflect and recharge. It felt like no matter how hard I worked, I was always falling behind in one area or another. The stress was exhausting, and the idea of giving up crossed my mind more times than I'd like to admit.

What made it even more challenging was the constant pull between the two roles. On one hand, my academic performance was crucial for my future goals. On the other, I had made a commitment to the members of ASA and ISA to lead with dedication. There were days when I felt like I wasn't giving my best to either, which made me question whether I was the right person for the role.

One of the most difficult times came during African Night, which coincided with midterm exams. The sheer amount of work required to plan the event—coordinating performers, finalizing logistics, and handling last-minute challenges—clashed directly with my need to prepare for exams. I vividly remember sitting in the library, surrounded by my notes, while my phone buzzed with notifications about event-related issues. In that moment, I felt completely defeated and even started drafting an email to resign from my leadership positions.

However, what kept me going was the support of my team and the realization of why I had taken on these roles in the first place. I reminded myself of the impact we were making—how ASA and ISA were creating spaces for connection, celebration, and learning. I also leaned on my team during these moments. The president and other board members stepped up to take on additional responsibilities when I was overwhelmed, and their encouragement helped me find the strength to keep pushing forward.

I also learned to adjust my approach to time management and self-care. Instead of trying to do everything myself, I became better at delegating tasks and trusting my team. I started using a planner to break down my days into smaller, manageable chunks and prioritized tasks based on deadlines and importance. I also made time for small moments of rest, even if it was just a quick walk or a conversation with a friend.

Looking back, those moments of doubt were some of the most transformative for me. They taught me resilience and the importance of leaning on others when needed. They also showed me that even in moments of struggle, perseverance can lead to incredible growth. While the semester was one of the hardest of my college career, it was also one of the most rewarding.

By the end of that semester, not only had I managed to stay on top of my academic responsibilities, but we had also successfully executed African Night and other events. Crossing the finish line felt like a victory, not just for our organizations but also for me personally. It reminded me that even when things feel impossible, persistence and support can carry you through.

My leadership experiences with ASA and ISA helped me grow in ways I never anticipated. I developed patience, adaptability, and a stronger sense of self-awareness. While I initially doubted my ability to lead such diverse groups, overcoming challenges and successfully organizing events boosted my confidence. These roles also broadened my worldview, teaching me to approach problems with empathy and an appreciation for different perspectives.

Looking ahead, I'm inspired to continue building on these lessons. Whether in my career or community, I plan to prioritize diversity, inclusion, and collaboration in all my endeavors. I aspire to create spaces where individuals feel empowered to contribute and grow. Leadership, to me, is not just about guiding others but also about learning from them and making a positive impact together.

Serving as Vice President of ASA and ISA has been one of the most rewarding chapters of my life. These roles taught me the importance of communication, problem-solving, and celebrating diversity. They also helped me grow as a person, equipping me with the confidence and skills to tackle future challenges. I am deeply grateful for these experiences and excited about the opportunities ahead. Leadership is a journey of bringing people together, learning from one another, and driving positive change—a journey I look forward to continuing.