



When Students Lead

The Leadership Development
Training Program Toolkit

from the
UC Davis Student Farm

Authors and Acknowledgments

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Introduction

The UC Davis Student Farm

Our farm began in 1977, when a small group of dedicated students planted their first crops on a 20-acre parcel on the west side of the UC Davis campus. Their goal was to explore and learn about alternative farming and gardening through shared physical work, experimentation, and problem-solving.

Students initiated a number of projects which allowed them to gain practical skills, knowledge, and experience in several areas related to organic farming, ecological horticulture, and environmental education. These projects have developed over time: the Student Farm now hosts hundreds of students each year who participate as volunteers and interns, or through formal courses which use the farm for field-based learning. We offer programs that operate within either the Market Garden, an eight-acre space that offers opportunities for the farm-scale production of fruit and vegetable crops which are sold and donated to the Davis community; or the Ecological Garden, a one-acre learning space devoted to a highly diversified, garden-scale production of fruits and vegetables, flowers and fruit trees, chickens and compost production. Additional programs focus on food security and community access, or offer specialized opportunities in organic plant breeding, vineyard and tree crop care, or farm equipment maintenance and mechanical skills.

The Student Farm is centered on experiential learning, and strives to provide context and a learning community in which students can apply the knowledge they are gaining in academic coursework. Today, the farm is guided by a team of five permanent staff, three short-term staff, two graduate students, and approximately 20 student employees. The non-student staff support student initiatives and provide long-term stability and institutional memory for the farm's ongoing operations and teaching programs. Student employees lead field crews and provide mentorship to student interns and volunteers while participating in all aspects of field and enterprise management at the Student Farm. These student employees are the focus of the Leadership Development Training Program at the Student Farm. They work together to ensure that all UC Davis students continue to have diverse opportunities for learning about and experimenting with sustainable agriculture and food systems.



Why Leadership Development?

At a certain point in its life cycle, a campus farm and garden program like ours reaches sustainability in terms of student engagement and institutional support, which means there's finally time and energy to look more deeply at the quality of student experience. For most of our history, we've done a great job of providing authentic, field-based learning opportunities for novice learners, and although there were always many student leaders at the farm—after all, it was students who started the farm—we hadn't really thought about how to support the learning and development of those most advanced students, and how to empower and acknowledge them as true leaders in our community.

In recognition of this need, and in response to student demand, we developed the Leadership Development Training Program. This program develops student leaders at the farm, growing them up from novice interns and volunteers into paid, lead student farmers and gardeners who share responsibility for mentoring their peers and running our programs and operations. Creating these leadership opportunities has been a game-changer for the UC Davis Student Farm and for our students themselves. Let us tell you more about it!

The Leadership Development Toolkit

This toolkit is a step-by-step implementation guide for other campus farm and garden programs. We'll share our process, the insights we developed along the way, and some resources to get you started with growing student leadership in your own programs. Context is key, and we hope that you'll glean the important lessons from ours and adapt them to your own. Because we want you to digest and use what's contained in these pages, we've tried to keep the toolkit short and to the point while providing additional depth and examples in the Resources section. We imagine there will be lingering questions. We welcome your engagement, truly! Please feel free to reach out with thoughts and feedback.



How to Use This Toolkit

We've developed a guiding document that works on multiple levels. First, we want to get folks thinking about what's going on in the field right now—what their students might currently be experiencing. Second, we want to give you some tools to gather that information, and to figure out how to use that knowledge to improve your programs. We'll try to provide a view into the implementation process at several different scales, from the interpersonal to the institutional, in the hopes that the growing pains we experienced can help you identify and avoid some challenges; this may also allow you to take advantage of opportunities you might not be considering. And, like any good toolkit, we'll occupy the bulk of your attention with the nuts and bolts of our programs, practical strategies, factual descriptions of programmatic components, and accompanying resources and documents to show you what we mean.

Leadership Development gives your **STUDENTS**:

- ❖ Achievable **GOALS** to work toward
- ❖ **TOOLS** to achieve those goals
- ❖ **CONFIDENCE** and **EXPERIENCE** as leaders in their fields
- ❖ **TRANSFERABLE SKILLS** and **KNOWLEDGE** to jumpstart their careers

Leadership Development gives your **PROGRAM**:

- ❖ **CAPACITY** to work with greater numbers of novice and advanced students
- ❖ Continued **RELEVANCE** within a rapidly evolving campus
- ❖ Mission **ALIGNMENT** that re-allocates staff time toward long-term program development
- ❖ Program **SUSTAINABILITY** through increased student retention

Getting Started

The first step in creating a leadership development program is to provide space for students to voice their interests and desires while allowing that space to be student-managed and student-organized such that they are effectively amplifying each other's voices. This student-driven approach is the guiding principle of this first section of the toolkit and to all our program development efforts.

Listening to Students

Because staff gain and hold institutional wisdom and are responsible for developing and sustaining programs over time, it's easy to initiate program development behind the scenes, without deep engagement from students. Resist that urge. In our experience, it's not only important to engage students in new program development, but to rely on them as a driving force.

In 2013, our students formed a Student Organizing Team (SOT) that worked for a year to capture the voices of their peers. In practical terms, this means they facilitated a series of conversations to find out what the Student Farm community thought about the opportunities and experiences that were currently available. The SOT also conducted a campus-wide survey to understand general student perceptions of the Student Farm among students with all levels of involvement. By relying on students to lead the process, and to listen to one another, we ensured that any emergent ideas were grounded in the real needs and desires of the people the farm was created to serve. We could create an entire toolkit focused on the SOT process. If you're interested in carrying out a similar set of activities in your program, contact us for more resources.

Key Findings:

- ❖ Novice students were very happy with their experience at the farm, but more advanced students wanted deeper participation, understanding, and responsibility.
- ❖ The pathways to advancement at the Student Farm were unclear, and communication across programs was uneven, impeding students' abilities to access deeper learning opportunities.
- ❖ Students were learning as much from each other as they were from staff; peer-to-peer teaching and learning was an essential part of quality student experience at that farm.

When taken together, these insights clearly communicate the need for leadership development opportunities.

After the concerted effort of the SOT process, we found it important to build on the momentum around open communication and generate ongoing opportunities to center student voice and experience. Frequent **Farm Dialogues** between staff and students, which have an open agenda to which anyone can contribute, combined with annual **Farm Forums**, which have an agenda with set and open portions, are two great strategies for ongoing engagement with students as you develop a new program. We've included resources for holding both types of conversations at your farm or garden. Most important in crafting and offering these venues is that they provide the time and space for student voice to emerge. Sometimes we don't even know there's something to be said until we create that space and see what surfaces.

Defining Roles and Values

Defining Roles

In seeking to create new leadership opportunities in your program, we found that students aren't clear on how to move from one role to another. Students often get introduced to one aspect of the program and stay there, even if they'd like to experience other things. Moreover, unless it's spelled out in writing, students don't always know how to ask for more responsibility or demonstrate that they are ready for it. Reflecting back on the core messages from our students, it became clear that simply improving the quality of teaching and learning for our advanced students would not address the fact that many students had no awareness of how to access those opportunities. Before building the new program, we needed to define and explicitly communicate pathways through Student Farm experiences that resulted in competency, leadership, and employment; the results are shown in Figure 1, below. Once students had more information about how to navigate our programs, they were able to guide their peers in achieving greater access as well. Not surprisingly, this greater transparency also led to greater equity in students' access to meaningful education and advancement from internship into staff positions.

Position	Minimum Requirements	Student Level				Compensation	Market Garden		Ecological Garden		Community Table		Level of Supervision
		Non-Student	Undergraduate Student	Graduate Student	Recent Graduate		Hours per week	Positions per quarter	Hours per week	Positions per quarter	Hours per week	Positions per quarter	
Volunteer	None	✓	✓	✓	✓	None	1-9	0-6	2-9	0-6	0	0	Variable
Novice Intern	None		✓	✓		Academic Units	3-6	50	3-6	17-22	3-6	10-12	High
Intermediate Intern	1 quarter prior experience in program		✓	✓		Academic Units	3-6	5-10	3-9	5-7	3-6	5-6	Moderate
Advanced Intern	3 quarters prior experience at SF; approval required		✓	✓		Academic Units	3-6	0-3	3-6	0-3	3-6	0-3	Moderate
Lead Student Farmer/Gardener	1 quarter prior experience in program; demonstrated ability to work well with a team		✓	✓	✓	Pay/Academic Units	10-15	8-10	8-12	3-4	10-15	0-3	Low
Permanent Staff	extensive prior experience; strength in systems thinking and interpersonal communication	✓				Pay	20-35	1-2	20-30	1-2	30	1	Low

Figure 1 outlines student and staff roles at the Student Farm. This is a communication tool we use to share with students looking for greater transparency and understanding of Student Farm roles and how to move through them.



Defining Values

In order to improve communication and connection across the Student Farm, and to create a basis for our leadership development program, we asked students to generate a coherent vision of the values of leadership shared by all members of the Student Farm community. Students and staff worked together in every space on the farm to hold conversations about the qualities and attributes we wanted to see embodied in leadership roles and responsibilities. We developed a [Leadership Values Document](#) that outlined those values which we then integrated throughout existing programs, within the leadership development trainings, and even in our job application procedures. Here's what the process actually looked like:



Step 1: Developing our Student Farm Values of Leadership

- open discussions among experienced student farmers about leadership values
- synthesis and articulation of our leadership values
- general agreement from Student Farm community that we “have it right,” or right enough to move forward with a “living document” that we can work from and refer back to

Step 2: Facilitating better awareness of and skills at actualizing these values through:

- providing context or description for how these values are put into practice in our jobs
- making time and space for improvement among staff and student employees
 - skills-building workshops and reflection
 - troubleshooting and sharing through group check-ins
- developing a simple feedback and/or self-assessment process for student staff
- making our expectations about these clearer with our staff and student employees
- Including these values to the extent appropriate within job descriptions and the job application process

Creating the LDTP Curriculum

With a clear mandate from students, a better framework for access and equity, and the newly articulated leadership values to guide us, in 2014 the Student Farm staff designated a committee to develop the new Leadership Development Training Program (LDTP) curriculum. This process took about a year of special meetings and reporting back to the whole staff community. First, the committee undertook a strategic review of Student Farm programs, their history, specific goals for student learning, and needs for training. A staff retreat in 2015 generated a lot of ideas and content in each of these areas. The committee then processed that information and looked to similar programs in their network that could provide models of successful leadership training. The specific components of the program emerged piece by piece, with workshops becoming the central forum for knowledge sharing and capacity building.

Throughout the process, one of the major questions raised by staff was around their own capacity or bandwidth. With so much to do in a day, how would they find more time to build and implement a whole new program that required even more intensive engagement with student leaders?

Time and experience answered that question: **as students were given more opportunities to lead, they in turn took more ownership over the actual management responsibilities of the farm's programs and facilities, effectively redistributing the workload so that staff had more time to invest in educating and training students to perform the necessary functions of the farm, be those technical or cultural.** Furthermore, the staff discovered that one of the most valuable components of the LDTP was already at least partially in place. Our student leaders already participated in weekly management team meetings with the staff who supervised them. When we explicitly reframed these meetings as leadership development opportunities, students were able to recognize them as key sites for mentorship, learning, and leadership. We'll describe these meetings and other elements of the program in the next section.

The Training Program: Key Elements

The Student Farm currently employs approximately 20 students each quarter. These student employees play significant and important leadership roles within the Student Farm, particularly in teaching, training, supporting, and supervising more novice students in the field. Student employees hold the formal title of **Lead Student Farmers (LSFs)** in order to acknowledge, reinforce, and signal their roles as leaders to all Student Farm participants. Because our LSFs are continuing learners themselves, we developed the Leadership Development Training Program (LDTP) to support them in gaining skills, knowledge, and confidence, which are of immediate use in their positions, and also, presumably, of long-term value to their careers.

LDTP Key Elements:

- ❖ Weekly management team meetings with staff and Lead Student Farmers
- ❖ Develop technical and communication skills workshops for Lead Student Farmers and staff
- ❖ Offer workshops with 12-15 different topics per year (each LSF must complete a minimum of nine)
- ❖ Semi-annual individual meetings between each Lead Student Farmer and their main staff supervisor
- ❖ End-of-year program evaluation

Weekly management team meetings for staff and LSFs

Students involved at the Student Farm, including most LSFs, participate in one of its primary learning spaces and programs: these include the Market Garden, which offers farm-scale vegetable production and marketing; the Ecological Garden, which provides garden-scale production of vegetables, herbs, fruit trees, and compost building; and the Community Table Project, which addresses food security and community access through initiatives to increase productivity and sustainability at the Student Farm. Within each space, permanent staff and LSFs hold weekly management team meetings where weekly to-dos, management decisions, and community activities are discussed and determined. Data gathered from end-of-year evaluations indicated that these meetings are the most highly valued component of the LDTP and are very effective gatherings for discussing topics such as field management tasks, upcoming events, and long-term planning. Short, relevant, continuing education lessons or field walks are often included as part of weekly meetings. Weekly meetings provide our students with a collective space to problem-solve with staff about management tasks and issues, thereby increasing the knowledge, skills, and confidence of our LSFs. Weekly team meetings are paid time for all LSFs. Meeting time is scheduled at the beginning of each quarter to maximize student employee attendance. Weekly management team meetings provide the Student Farm community with a regular, institutionalized context for practicing leadership and professionalism as expressed in our Student Farm Leadership Values.



Engaging Students

Technical and Communication Skills Workshops

We provide between twelve and fifteen different skills workshops for LSFs annually, with the expectation that each LSF will attend at least nine. These are split more or less evenly between Technical Skills and Communication Skills Workshops (see titles listed below), and tend to be led by a combination of staff and students. Some of these workshops are given to all employees together, while some are geared toward either Ecological Garden or Market Garden employees particularly with regard to some of the technical skills covered; all LSFs are invited to attend any LDTP trainings regardless of the topic.

One of the significant challenges we have faced in the LDTP is scheduling workshops so that a large percentage of our LSFs can attend, given students' varied and busy work and class schedules, and the number of people involved. By making some workshops specific to either Ecological Garden or Market Garden employees, we have been able to reduce the number of schedules that need to be in agreement for full attendance at these workshops. Some program-specific workshops are scheduled during weekly management team meetings as appropriate. Another strategy that has worked well is to conduct four workshops as part of an annual Fall Orientation in the two or three days leading up to the start of fall classes, when we find most students have returned for the school year but have a more flexible schedule. This allows a larger percentage of our LSFs to attend, and helps build cohesion among the LSFs at the start of the year.

Our 2017-2018 Workshop Schedule:

I. Annual Fall Orientation (workshops offered before the school year begins):

Communication Skills Workshops:

- ❖ **Welcoming people and Leading Tours** at the Student Farm
- ❖ Examining what we all **value** in Student Farm Leaders: Reflecting on **personal leadership goals**

Technical Skills Workshops:

- ❖ **Greenhouse Management** and Sowing Seeds
- ❖ Using **Small-Scale Machinery**: Lawn Mower, Weed-Eater, Rototiller
- ❖ **Food Safety** for Vegetable Production and Harvest
- ❖ **Tractor Transplanting**

II. Fall Quarter Workshops

- ❖ **Culturally Competent Communication Skills**
- ❖ **Harvesting Produce** for CSA and Dining Services

III. Winter Quarter Workshops

- ❖ Providing/Receiving Valuable **Feedback PLUS** Strategies for **Managing Student Farm Crews**
- ❖ **Crop Planning** for Planting and Harvest
- ❖ Floral Design — Train the Trainers (local farmer/florist-led workshop)
- ❖ **Equity in Outdoor Education**

IV. Spring Quarter Workshops

- ❖ Sharing Leadership Successes and **Troubleshooting Leadership Challenges**
- ❖ **Post Harvest Handling** of Vegetables
- ❖ **General Safety Considerations** in the Farm and Garden Environment
- ❖ Weed Management Strategies for Small-Scale Production

Individual Check-ins between LSFs and Supervising Staff

Staff members try to conduct semi-annual individual check-ins with each LSF. This allows individual LSFs and supervising staff to discuss progress, performance, and goals, and provides an opportunity for open communication. This is especially important in a work environment where the express goal is to grow leadership. The check-in provides the staff member with insights into how to support students' leadership and overall development. LSFs generally report that they find these check-ins very helpful, in large part because we work to establish each check-in less as an evaluation of student performance and more as a discussion of the student's own goals, the ways in which staff can support those goals. However, finding time to conduct the check-ins has been challenging, and we are exploring ways to modify and improve this part of the LDTP.



End-of-Year LDTP Evaluation

Throughout implementation, we conducted an evaluation of the LDTP at the end of each academic year, using the following methods:

- Student employee responses through written surveys
- Facilitated group discussions with student and permanent staff (*questions for these are formulated ahead of time and extensive notes of conversation are taken*)
- Staff responses through written surveys
- Staff discussion of observations and thoughts

These evaluations have helped us improve our program since its inception in 2014, and have given us insight into specific aspects that our LSFs appreciate, value, and benefit from, and those aspects which can be improved for greater effectiveness. Furthermore, the evaluation process has provided an important forum for permanent staff to witness and reflect upon the impact of the LDTP, both on the overall operation and effectiveness of the Student Farm and for the personal development of individual students.

Staff feedback from these evaluations includes reflections on how much or how little LDTP workshops seem to translate into student performance in the field, and a sense of greater confidence in student ability. Workshops and meetings have also provided more opportunities for students to voice questions and concerns; this was noted by students and staff alike. One of the strongest themes has been the value students find in our weekly management team meetings; this has served as a validation of practices we have relied upon and appreciated for some time but are only now able to fully value and understand.

Reallocating Staff and Student Responsibilities

The new focus on developing student leaders has required staff to change how they approach their work, allowing them to spend more time teaching and mentoring advanced students and a little less time on the field operations that keep our teaching facilities in good order. As Lead Student Farmers become more confident as leaders, permanent staff are also able to step back from the intensive mentorship of novice students. The upside of this transition is that the investment in building the capacity of student leaders contributes directly to their development of the skills and confidence to share in operations and management tasks and the ownership and deep knowledge of programs and facilities that helps them spot opportunities to pitch in. This dynamic plays right into our leadership values because we want students to develop the initiative, professionalism and care for community that makes them true partners in leadership with the staff. While it required an initial leap of faith and investment, we are all reaping tremendous rewards.

Creating a Mentoring Environment

Because we expect our student leaders to mentor their peers in the field, and because we want them to continue learning and growing at this higher stage of development, we focus a great deal of energy on building supportive relationships with them. This happens in many contexts throughout the farm. We invest time and resources in community-building activities, which we'll describe in more detail below, where staff are always present and approachable. This allows students to feel comfortable with the staff during non-social occasions, too, bringing questions and concerns as they arise.

Our weekly management team meetings are the heart of our mentorship activity with LSFs. Student farm staff models effective mentoring by valuing student knowledge and contributions, allowing the students to ask questions, provide feedback and help shape management plans for the week. This all sounds obvious, but slowing down enough to listen to student input, to create a true exchange between learners at every level (and seeing staff as learners, too) takes intention and practice. It's easy to privilege the list of tasks needing immediate attention and not remember that we are educational farms, and that the main task is always supporting the growth and development of our students.

Building Community

A parallel and equally important part of our work has been strengthening and expanding a sense of the Student Farm as a community of learning and practice. Nurturing a vibrant community of students and staff is essential to our success in helping students learn and develop. This sense of community and shared purpose and responsibility creates an open learning environment that helps students feel more comfortable not yet knowing things, asking questions, and making mistakes. It is also essential to students' active involvement in assessing the effectiveness of our programs and guiding our program development. As our community has grown and evolved so has the diversity of its activities.



These include numerous social events, including our Annual Okra Chile Cook-off and Farmsgiving, and student-led workshops on farm-related topics, including making and using compost tea, beekeeping, and fermenting foods; these events are increasingly managed by students. We also engage in community building during events such as Farm Forums, Farm Dialogues, and some specific parts of the LDTP, which are designed to stimulate programmatic discussion and feedback in all aspects of the Student Farm, from fieldwork to teaching to long-term planning. Developing a community of practice where students feel empowered to lead comes down to relationships and growing common trust, which require both formal and informal contexts to develop.

Connecting Leadership to Student Learning Outcomes

Why Focus on Leadership?

Our students greatly value the opportunity to spend time engaged in productive, hands-on learning experiences in one of the most beautiful locations on campus, surrounded by a caring and engaged community. And we love creating that experience for and with them. Though we hope to contribute to the education of a new generation of diversified organic farmers, we respect that many students will not necessarily move on to careers in agriculture. With that in mind, we have articulated the goals of our farm both to serve our particular community of students as they work on the farm and to prepare them for their future endeavors.

We have three major learning objectives for student learning:

ONE

Students gain understanding of and practice in systems thinking and use the farm as a model for examining ecological relationships, managing complexity, and engaging larger food systems questions.

TWO

Students have a deep understanding of and are able to apply Student Farm Leadership Values, including good communication, a strong work ethic, initiative, vision, kindness, and care for community.

THREE

Students develop a range of professional competencies that will serve them well in any field, be that agriculture, academia, government, business or the social sector.



These learning outcomes reflect the traits of any good leader: the ability to solve complex problems, to communicate effectively, and to lead teams and mentor others; the curiosity and confidence to ask good questions; and a commitment to inclusivity and to developing the cultural competency needed to work well with people from diverse backgrounds.

When we progressively build the capacity of our students and create opportunities for leadership, we are giving them a chance to explore their own abilities in each of these areas. Because we are asking them to model and mentor these traits for other students, we are also committing to offer a high level of support in their work.

Leadership development programs at student farms are good for lead students, for their peers, for the successful management of the farm, and for broader educational goals and relevance to the institutions we serve and who support us. Whether you're a newly established campus farm or garden, or are looking to deepen the quality of student learning in your program, we feel confident the lessons we've learned can apply to your context. If you design your programs with student leadership as a central tenant, they will inevitably more resilient, successful and valued spaces by your students and your institution.

Additional Tools and Resources

UCD Student Farm Leadership Development Program

These are available for review and download from <http://asi.ucdavis.edu/programs/sf/resources>.
Look for Leadership Development Training Program on the Educational Materials page.

Resources for Building Dialogue within our Student Community

- Process for the Student Organizing Team
- How-to for Farm Dialogs and Farm Forums
- Student Farm Roles and Pathways Chart

Resources for Developing Student Leadership

Annual Plan for our Leadership Development and Training Program

Communication Skills Workshop Agendas

- Values workshop agenda and reflection rubric
- Feedback Workshop
- Leading Work Crews
- Equity in Outdoor Education

Technical Skills Workshop Agendas

- Weed Management Strategies for Organic Gardening Workshop
- Greenhouse Management and Flat Seeding
- Tools for Planning for Crop Rotation, Seeding, and Transplanting Dates