

Matt Tackett, Kentucky '27

How do you work with or lead a team?

When leading a team, it is important to view yourself as just another member on the team working together to reach a common goal. This allows more effective communication and collaboration throughout the team. No one is above the rest and this ensures no one feels that there is a power imbalance. Someone telling everyone what to do is a boss, not a leader. A leader is with their team working alongside everyone to achieve their goals. A leader should ensure that all members of the team have their ideas heard and opinions respected. Good communication starts with the leader setting positive tones and encouraging participation from the whole team. The leader's role is to help the team navigate toward the common goal that is set by everyone. A good leader knows everyone's strengths and weakness and can properly delegate tasks and encourage collaborations within the team to achieve goals. The leader should also harness the power of recognition, always shining the spotlight on the members of the team, encouraging hard work and highlighting great efforts. This keeps the team energized toward goals and limits burnout when the work gets hard. A good leader also accepts responsibility for the success of the team, doing what they can to achieve the common goal when other efforts are not enough. These principles are what I believe make a good leader and what I strive to practice with every team I am a part of.

What leadership experiences have equipped you for the District Trustee role?

I currently serve as the District 6 Director of Events. This experience has allowed me to become more involved in ASDA on the district level and work closely with the current trustee. With my position, I have learned more about planning a district meeting by collaborating with other districts, talking to sponsors, writing contracts, and taking part in negotiations. During my time in undergrad, I served as the president of my fraternity. In this role, I developed skills including: facilitating meetings to conduct business; oversee chapter operations of officers and committees; serve as a liaison between the undergraduate chapter and the alumni chapter, national headquarters, university, interfraternity council, office of student affairs, and other student organizations; and plan and host chapter events for community service, philanthropy, and brotherhood. I also served as one of two elected class representatives for three years in the student government association's student congress. While serving as a representative, I advocated for student accommodations across campus, decided how allocated university funds would be distributed to and utilized by students, and served as a liaison between the students on campus and the university administration. These leadership experiences have prepared me to represent District 6 on the national level and serve as its Trustee.

Why are you interested in the District Trustee role and what do you hope to accomplish in this position?

I am from a small town in the Appalachian Mountains of eastern Kentucky. Growing up I saw how my community was portrayed nationally, most notably our poverty, lack of education, and poor oral health. I have always wanted to do what I can to change that. I am interested in District Trustee because it is an opportunity for someone like me to be in the room where conversations are happening and decisions are being made. District 6 is composed of Arkansas, Tennessee, and Kentucky, all of which are typically portrayed as a monolith with the same image as my small town, and I know we are so much more than that. I want to be an outspoken advocate for improving dental health in this country, increasing educational opportunities for my fellow and future dental students, and work with others that have the same goals. In this position, I hope to gain insight on the life and challenges of dental students across the country as well learn from others' perspectives on how we can improve our field.

What are 2-3 issues important to dental students?

One issue important to dental students is the current situation surrounding federal student loans. Affording dental school, even with loans, is a major challenge for many who wish to pursue a career in this field. Affordability should not be a deterrent for qualified candidates currently attending dental school or those that will attend in the future. For current students, the course load and responsibilities are difficult enough to manage, so adding financial strains would only worsen the experience and quality of life they have while trying to learn. For future students, it will limit opportunities to even pursue dentistry as a possible career. Declining enrollments and fundings will decrease the quality of education provided by dental schools across the nation. Limiting student loan amounts will not only negatively affect dental students, but the communities they would go on to practice in. Many impoverished areas are facing shortages of dental providers, and those that wish to practice in these areas may not have access to an education because they cannot afford it out of their pocket or qualify for private loans.

Another issue important to dental students is resource gaps in our education, such as staff/faculty shortages, dated technology, and funding for patient care. Many schools lack adequate funding to keep up supply of patients that their students need to practice on. This is leading to many students feeling behind or lacking confidence in their skills and dental education.