

Sean Schrader

## OAK Candidate Statement

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To this day, I still vividly recall the email I received notifying me that I'd been recommended to join the ODK circle at the University of South Florida (USF) in the spring of 2022. Admittedly, not knowing much about the organization, I was skeptical about joining, and wondered why I should get involved with my circle. However, a conversation with my peers who'd also been nominated, and personal research on the history of the organization and its unique focus on exploring leadership proved this was an opportunity I could not pass up. Now, as I approach two years as a member of ODK, I'm confident that becoming a member was one of the best decisions I've made in my time as a college student.

Although there are many leadership organizations in existence, I believe ODK is different in empowering students with the tools to be successful in making a positive difference, and exploring how individual passions can be aligned with opportunities for impact. Personally, I've been fortunate to witness this leadership focus through my involvements both in my individual circle at USF, and at the national level. In the Tampa Bay community, our circle has placed an emphasis on charitable giving, and the ability to help those that are less fortunate and in need of support. Specifically, we've worked to host service events and donation drives during the holiday season, aimed at bringing students together, and bringing a sense of holiday cheer to those who need it most of all. At the national level, as a member of the Student Advisory Board, I've been fortunate to play a role in exploring how student members can make the most of their time in their circle, while preparing for the next important chapter in their lives. Working with other talented ODK student leaders and staff, we have organized multiple townhalls focused on important subjects like enhancing the opportunities that individual circles provide to their students and preparing students for life after their undergraduate degree, and the many forms that journey can take.

I reflect on my individual experiences because I think it speaks to the essence of not just what makes ODK unique, but what also makes it successful. Having a mindset geared towards leadership is important, but it's only as effective as the people you're surrounded by. In my case, I've found great success in advancing initiatives which align with the mission of ODK because of a strong sense of community, and willingness to support one another. Getting to meet with other ODK student leaders around the country, it's clear that my experience is not uncommon, and as such, it gives us an opportunity to build on the strong foundation of these ODK principles, while further advancing our organizational goals to best align with needs of our student membership.

This window of opportunity is why I'm running to be the next Student Trustee for ODK, where I will strive to continue the important work already being done, while exploring new initiatives which further our organizational goals. Specifically, creating a greater sense of cohesion among our membership is my top focus, and leveraging tools like MyODK, the creation of programs like peer-to-peer support and professional mentorship, and establishing regular townhalls to hear from members are critical areas that when invested in, will strengthen our organization even further. Additionally, creating opportunities for circles to work with one another in areas of relevance to their particular region is an exciting prospect, and one that will help foster new relationships, while addressing the needs of particular communities in the process.

Right now, as a collective society, we face incredible challenges, yet I remain more optimistic than ever before in our ability to make a positive difference. Although the challenges we face may seem insurmountable, it's the small steps, when taken together, that have the ability to create significant change with time. ODK has created this unique platform for us to connect together with a shared goal of investing in leadership and making the world a better place and with your partnership, I'm confident we can further expand the reach of our organization, while bettering the communities we're fortunate to call home.