

## **A Highlight on Executive Director Sarah Smith Orr**

By Wendalyn Tran '14

*"I truly admire Sarah Smith Orr for her hard work at CMC and her commitment to developing all CMC students into great leaders." - Samantha Abril '13*

When Sarah Smith Orr was asked to serve as one of the founding board members of the Kravis Leadership Institute in 1994, not only did she become a part of the Claremont McKenna College community but she also became a mentor and resource to students and an asset to the college. She currently serves as the executive director of KLI, a co-coordinator of the Women and Leadership Alliance, and teaches courses as a visiting professor. Her expertise lies in leadership—with an emphasis on leadership theory, women leaders, social entrepreneurship, and leadership in the social sector.

Orr's career in the social sector, leading through a business model, began as a volunteer for the United Way, and she states, "It was my involvement in the community that provided opportunities for developing my expertise and professionally in a broad range of areas, including understanding that leadership is a part of who I am." Starting as a volunteer fundraiser in minor roles for the United Way of Broome County in New York State, in a few years she became the county campaign chair, the first woman and the youngest person to fulfill this role, raising over \$2.1 million during her one-year term as chair. Moving from lead volunteer, she continued to advance in the organization but in professional roles—first as a campaign director at the United Way where she had started as a volunteer, then becoming the executive director for both the United Way of Midland in Texas and the United Way of Berks County in Pennsylvania, a consultant for United Way International working with United Ways in Baroda India and Jamaica, and a vice president of the United Way of Greater Los Angeles. Her immense work with United Way included the funding and management of budgets over \$10 million, creating marketing strategies, launching and managing community-based program initiatives, and raising over \$50 million during her UW tenure.

After 17 years of leadership in the United Way, Smith Orr continued her career as the founding executive director of Leadership California, a nonprofit, educational program for women leaders in California; a senior coach and trainer for the Hudson Institute of Santa Barbara, a coaching and training organization; the founding chair of Leadership Pasadena; and as the founder and owner of Smith Orr and Associates, a management and consulting firm. She has served on many boards of directors including the National Women's Hall of Fame. She currently serves on the Advisory Board for the Applied Women's Studies at Claremont Graduate University and just stepped aside as the Chair of the Board of Scholars at Vail Leadership Institute. As adjunct faculty at the Drucker School (CGU), she received the designation of Faculty Member of the Year in 2011.

When asked about the current position of KLI and its future direction, Smith Orr stated that KLI is now engaging more of the campus community and offering more leadership education opportunities to students. However, she hopes for KLI to become further connected in the different areas on campus and to provide more leadership development opportunities to all students, regardless of their academic disciplines. She is committed to help CMC achieve its

mission of “developing responsible leaders.” She also plans to develop a stronger financial platform to ensure the resilience of and future programming for the Institute. Nevertheless, she is happy with KLI and where it is heading, in addition to greatly enjoying her time at CMC. “I love working with students and all at CMC. My roles as executive director and faculty are demanding but fulfilling ones. I treasure many aspects of my work at KLI and CMC, especially working with and learning from our awesomely talented students, KLI’s esteemed board of directors, a dedicated and talented team of professionals and faculty at KLI, as well as being part of the greater CMC community.”

Students also enjoy working with Smith Orr, appreciating her energy and immediately recognizing and admiring her extensive expertise and achievements. Rachit Khaitan ’13 stated, “Not only does Sarah embody passion for what she does but also matches it with an unparalleled ability to execute tasks at hand.” Her drive comes partly from growing up on a working farm and having parents as educators. Her greatest inspiration and role model was also her mother; not surprisingly, Smith Orr is now a mentor and inspiration to many students on campus. “Sarah has always inspired me. It is incredible to see the amount of work she puts in and that she does everything with her heart,” Rhea Jain ’15 said. Erikan Obotetukudo ’13 even recalls the first time she met Smith Orr. “I will never forget it! Within the first thirty minutes of meeting her, Sarah shared everything she knew about people and organizations involved with health, women, and leadership...That interaction and the ideas that came from it still inspire me today. Thank you, Sarah!”

And thank you so much, Sarah Smith Orr, for all of the work that you do for the CMC community. We are truly fortunate to have you.