

Stand-Alone Staffing Guide

For commuting programs you may only need academic teaching assistants or tutors who can work with your students on reading and writing skills and act as a peer consultant for understanding college life and helping them navigate the application process. Residential programs will need staff to work in evenings and may behave more like camp counselors than academic tutors. Some of our programs employ graduate students to organize logistics such as classrooms and field trips, or to train and supervise undergraduate teaching assistants and tutors. We recommend a 1:10 staff to student ratio for general activities and smaller groups for group tutorials. Yale has one set of staff that acts as residential and academic teaching assistants and schedules staggered breaks for other staff in the afternoons and evenings. Columbia divides the staff in two: academic TAs work in the mornings (and throughout the academic year) while residential TAs begin their days at lunch. Ursinus has one commuting week and one residential week. It has four tutors that it recruits from the writing center and two residential TAs. All six work full days during the commuting week, and then divide into morning and afternoon/evening shifts for the residential week.

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I. Recruitment

At Columbia, the staff recruitment of 16 undergraduate teaching assistants begins immediately after winter break, with interviews scheduled in late February and final decisions made before spring break in March. At both Ursinus and Columbia professors connected to the program teach related seminars, and Columbia has had success recruiting students from those classes. Staff applications and job descriptions at Columbia can be found here: <https://freedomandcitizenship.columbia.edu/jobs>. In recruiting undergraduate or graduate staff to apply for your program you will want to consider the following:

- **Information to share about the job**
 - Exact dates of the program, including training and post-program wrap-up
 - Hours on-site and off-site prep work they might need to do
 - Desired skills and experiences
 - Skills they will they gain and what will they learn from this work
 - Requirements for eligibility
 - Pay rate or stipend
 - Housing and meal plan benefits (if applicable)
- **Advertising the job**
 - Reach out to your former students. Ask for their recommendations or request their help spreading the work about the job opening
 - Talk to your colleagues and ask for their recommendations or help advertising the program
 - Find related courses in your campus directory and ask professors to advertise the job description in class

- Use your campus online job marketplace, if one exists, or contact career services to find out about how you can advertise broadly on campus
- **How staff can apply**
 - You may want to keep the basic application simple to encourage applications, and spend more time vetting your candidates through in-person interviews. Information you may want for an application includes:
 - a) Cover letter
 - b) Resume
 - c) Transcript
 - d) Writing sample
 - e) 2+ references with contact information, related to work or volunteer history

II. Hiring

The American Camps Association recommends a personal interview for summer staff, and we highly recommend one as well. Try asking questions that get them to provide specific examples of their behavior or decisions in certain instances in their own experience, rather than in hypothetical scenarios. Remember your undergraduate staff are not only teachers but may also be camp counselors and project managers depending on the scope of your program. Questions you may want to ask:

- **General**
 - Tell us about your transition to college--what helped or hindered your adjustment and how might that experience inform your work with our students?
 - Why are you interested in this job? What are you hoping to get out of it?
 - Which of your professional or volunteer experiences do you think is most relevant to our work, and why?
 - (At the end): Is there anything you'd like us to know about yourself or your experiences that we haven't asked about?
 - (At the end): Do you have any questions for us?

- **Teaching**
 - Have you had a seminar professor or TA who you thought did an outstanding job orchestrating a full group discussion? What did they do that you might emulate in your own class?
 - Have you ever had to lead a group activity in a club, job, or volunteer experience? What are strategies you have for getting the full group to participate?
 - Think about our syllabus (or the syllabus of a related class you took): is there one text you're most excited to teach? How would you explain the texts to your students before they read it to get them excited? What is one concept you think your students must walk away from that text understanding?
 - Have you ever edited or taught writing to peers or students? What did you learn from that experience? How did you balance making your own edits with maintaining the author's own voice?
 - Imagine we are high school students. Can you tell us what a thesis statement is and how we can tell if we've written a good or bad thesis statement?
 - Think back to a time (or consider a time in a relevant work experience) in which you've had to tell a peer "no". How hard was it to set up a boundary and how did you do so without hurting your relationship with that person?
- **Residential**
 - What about the residential position interests you besides free housing? What kind of experiences are you hoping to have with the students?
 - Have you ever been in an authority position with people close to you in age? How have you managed that relationship?
 - Consider your own freshman orientation leaders or residential advisors in campus housing: what did they do that you would want to emulate with our high school students in the dorms, or what would you avoid?
 - How do you want your students to think of you (how would you want them to describe you)? What actions could you take and what behaviors

could you practice that would ensure your students see you as _____?

- What would you anticipate being the biggest issues you might face supervising high school students in the dorms?
- Have you ever felt highly stressed or overwhelmed on campus? What coping strategies did you employ that you might teach to your students?
- How might you build community with students during down time?
- **Year-long Civic/College Mentorship**
 - Have you ever worked on a long-term group project? What was that experience like and what did you learn about getting a group to complete an assignment on time?
 - How do you balance your time during the academic year so that you have time for your extra-curricular activities?
 - Our students will have a lot going on during their senior year and you may struggle to get them to attend meetings over time. What tactics might you employ during the summer or at your first meeting in the fall to encourage their year-long commitment?
 - What civic issues would you like to work on? Pick one: how would you explain to one of our high school students why they should care about it?

III. Training

Columbia's staff training lasts 30 hours and takes place the week before the program. Yale's staff training takes place over the course of two to three days. Much of Columbia's training time is spent role playing and writing lesson plans for the summer. Staff also spend time writing and preparing for student orientation. Outlined below are the major points you should cover. Know that you'll probably need to repeat some of the important points and that there will always be issues that arise that you haven't covered in training.

- **Building community and comfort in the classroom**
 - Role playing scenarios as teachers and students
 - Ice-breakers, mixers, and name games
 - Seminar-style discussions

- **Understanding the program**
 - Purpose, mission, goals of the program, and how we implement them
 - Outline of full program
 - Listing of staff responsibilities and roles at each level
- **Policies & Safety**
 - Clear expectations of staff conduct
 - Outline of all student policies and how staff can implement them
 - Review of Protection of Minors (POM) protocol and mandatory reporting procedures
 - Emergency procedures
 - a) CPR/AED/First Aid Training if necessary for residential staff
- **Pedagogy**
 - Teaching objectives
 - Working with diverse student population
 - Building student relationships
 - Putting students first
 - Behavior and classroom management
 - Lesson planning

IV. Evaluations

Approach evaluations of your staff with two goals: first, help your undergraduate teaching assistants improve their teaching skills, and they will appreciate the opportunity to learn from your experience and guidance. Second, document specific their wonderful actions that your TAs did well for future letters of recommendation. Recording your observations and evaluations during the summer allows your staff to improve and provides documentation that you can use to easily write strong letters of recommendation. At Columbia, many of the undergraduate teaching assistants had little or no teaching experience prior to the summer but were nonetheless able to successfully pursue teaching jobs because of the experience and recommendations they received from the program.

Having formal observations of undergraduate-led classes allows the tutor or teaching assistant a chance to demonstrate their ability to accept feedback and improve. We recommend observing

each undergraduate instructor twice over the course of the summer. At Columbia, evaluators fill out a simple form in which the observer writes down everything that happens throughout the class. These notes are incredibly useful for letters of recommendation that TAs may request months or even years later. The form also has space for the observer to suggest behaviors or practices that the teaching assistant can stop, start, and continue doing in class. The observer tries to come up with feedback in each category (the last one usually has the most). After class the six teaching assistants converge for a 20 minute meeting while students are at lunch to reflect on their sessions as a group and hear any important announcements. Following the meeting the student who was observed has a short one-on-one meeting to review the evaluation with their observer.

V. Sample Staff Training Schedule

Day 1	
10:00 - 11:30	<p>Welcome to F&C! Staff participate in class discussion about the ethos of teaching based on pre-assigned readings.</p>
11:45 - 12:30	<p>Day in the life of F&C Group activity: staff are given cards with either the title of an activity (i.e. “lunch” or “seminar”) or a description of what staff should be doing during that time (i.e. “walk around the dining hall, being available for questions from students”). Staff should work together to put the full schedule in order with the appropriate descriptions.</p>
12:30 - 1:30	<p>Lunch</p>
1:30 - 2:30	<p>Fire Safety + Public Safety Led by campus public safety and fire departments.</p>
2:45 - 4:00	<p>Team Building - Role Playing (Part I) Before training, staff are told to prepare a 5-minute game (and bring any required materials). Staff take turns leading their games with the group. We hand out role-playing cards at the start of each game (i.e. “on your phone,” “tired,” “chatting with friend,” “thinks this game is stupid,” “is a visual learner”). Staff are told to act as the character on the card, progressively stepping up the intensity of their acting at each turn. We use the games to practice leadership skills and talk through different scenarios.</p>

Day 2	
10:00 - 11:30	<p>Introduction to our Students</p> <p>Presentation on demographics of program participants and brief overview of the New York City school system and college application process, followed by staff reading student select student applications/enrollment forms, drafting memos on each student to be shared across the staff.</p>
11:45 - 12:30	<p>Mentorship and Motivational Interviewing</p> <p>Social work fellow gives a presentation on mentorship and motivational interviewing. Staff practice motivational interviewing in pairs.</p>
12:30 - 1:30	Lunch
1:30 - 2:45	<p>Protection of Minors Overview</p> <p>Led by Columbia's Title IX and Protection of Minors coordinator. Presentation, scenarios, and discussion.</p>
3:00 - 4:00	Team Building - Role Playing (Part II)
Day 3	
10:00 - 11:00	<p>Writing Philosophy</p> <p>Overview of writing manual and writing goals of the program. Review of three major writing skills: integrating quotations, observations vs. claims, thesis statements.</p>
11:00 - 12:30	<p>Writing in Practice</p> <p>Split up: Morning TAs review lesson plans for three major writing skills while evening TAs brainstorm strategies for helping students begin writing assignments. Staff are given former student papers to review in preparation for the afternoon session.</p>
12:30 - 1:30	Lunch
1:30 - 2:45	<p>Writing Role Playing</p> <p>In pairs, staff practice providing written or oral feedback (depending on TA role).</p>
3:00 - 4:00	<p>Teen Mental Health</p> <p>Presentation by social work fellow on common issues and strategies, discussion of scenarios. End with mindfulness practice.</p>

Day 4	
10:00 - 11:00	<p>Lesson Plans Introduction to lesson plan template, elements of effective lesson plans. Introduction to SMART goals (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound). Group decides on “extracurricular activities” and “social programming” for afternoons/evenings, to write lesson plans today and tomorrow.</p>
11:00 - 12:30	<p>Lessons in Practice Staff write lesson plans for extracurricular activities/tutorials, peer review for feedback.</p>
12:30 - 1:30	Lunch
1:30 - 2:30	<p>Student Orientation Overview of 4-day orientation plan, assigning roles for staff.</p>
2:30 - 4:00	<p>Orientation/Lesson Prep Staff work independently or in partners reviewing orientation plans, writing lessons</p>
Day 5	
10:00 - 11:00	<p>Hidden Curriculum of College Students Brainstorm the secrets of college success, and ways to incorporate into the summer (i.e. navigating libraries, attending office hours, writing emails, etc.)</p>
11:00 - 12:30	<p>Split Session Morning/Academic TAs have training on leading group discussions while Evening/Residential TAs have training on reading skills</p>
12:30 - 1:30	Lunch
1:30 - 4:00 PM	<p>Summer Prep Staff work on any outstanding activities from the week, including lesson plans and activities, decorating dorms, orientation prep</p>