

# VASSAR

## EXPLORING TRANSFER PROGRAM

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### Role of the Student Counselor

Student counselors are an essential component of the Exploring Transfer Program. Their role as academic tutors, counselors and allies to the faculty and staff is vital to the program's success. The counselors contribute to this success in two ways: by enriching the quality of the students' lives outside the classroom through a variety of facilitating and advisory tasks, and by acting as a reliable liaison linking students with the faculty and staff.

Both tasks are important and interdependent. The first involves the exercise of responsibilities devoted primarily to facilitating the students' successful passage through the program, while the second requires active and regular communication and feedback between faculty and staff, as well as the students in the program. As persons in closest contact with the students, the counselors are, as it were, the eyes and ears of the program. From their vantage points (in the classroom, dormitory and dining hall), the counselors have a unique perspective on the program, and therefore occupy the best position from which to monitor and assess the quality of the students' experience.

Counseling in the Exploring Transfer Program is a demanding, but rewarding experience. As they respond to the various needs specific to community college students, the counselors will be required to demonstrate strong leadership and organizational skills. In their advisory capacity, counselors will often face student-generated problems for which a prompt and creative solution is required. Typically these problems are performance related and stem from difficulties the students face as they navigate the various intellectual, cultural and emotional challenges of the program. The counselors must therefore possess intellectual as well as emotional maturity.

#### Qualifications

Counselors must be enrolled at a four-year liberal arts institution, or must have graduated from such an institution. Preferably, counselors are students or alumnae/i of Vassar College, and/or have prior experience working with or participating in the Exploring Transfer Program. Counselors must possess the following:

- Evidence of academic excellence.
- Marked proficiency in writing analytic essays, with expertise in a field of study relevant to the course that he or she is assigned
- Ability to work well with other students, and with faculty and staff
- Strong organizational skills and leadership ability
- Understanding of, and a commitment to, the philosophy and mission of the Exploring Transfer Program

#### Responsibilities and Duties

The demands placed on counselors are considerable, and as such, the position requires a significant commitment of both time and energy. Counselors are expected to:

- Be in residence for the entirety of the program
- Attend a training and orientation session prior to the start of the program
- Participate in all general activities of the program

- Take the majority of their meals in the dining halls with the students
- Adhere to codes of conduct as outlined in Vassar College Regulations and the Vassar Student Handbook.
- Meet regularly with the Program staff

#### In matters of Residential Life

- Develop and execute residential life programs
- Provide support to students on issues of residential life and campus culture
- Report to the Program administration the general health of the residential life environment and welfare of the student group
- Help maintain a healthy environment, conducive to learning within the dorm.
- Report immediately to the Program administration any person whose behavior and/or actions interferes with the health of the program experience of Exploring Transfer students, violates College Regulation, or threatens the fabric of residential life
- Report to the Program administration any student who may need outside assistance with academic and or emotional challenges

#### In matters of Academic Life

- Support students in developing their academic skills, particularly in the areas of reading efficiency and analytical writing
- Identify the unique academic needs of the students and tailor counseling to match
- Hold office hours of sufficient duration throughout the week to facilitate the academic needs of the students, but for no less than 2 hours each day, and for no less than 4 hours on the day prior to an assignment due date
- Encourage group work among the students while stressing the need for academic individuality and independence
- Report to the Program administration those students with special academic needs
- Attend all classes of the assigned course and read all course materials in accordance with the respective syllabus
- Organize and lead discussion groups related to the course readings and assignments
- Assist with special events such as field trips, lectures, etc.
- Meet regularly and in agreement with the course instructors

#### **General Guidelines**

Counselors must be available at all times during the course of the program, so that students and program staff can easily locate them. Due to the counselors' many responsibilities, their work in the dormitory may be distributed among the counselors on a rotating basis. For example, two or three of the counselors may be required to be on call every night for one week, to field late night or early morning questions and to resolve problems. Given the demands of the position, counselors may not have outside and/or competing commitments.

Counselors must keep, and be prepared for, all appointments with both students and staff. If an appointment cannot be met, the counselor is expected to notify the affected parties in advance and to ensure that any corresponding responsibilities are properly handled

Counselors must be alert to warning signs indicating problems of adjustment among the students. This is particularly important in the first week of the program. Typical problems include homesickness, isolationism and anti-social behavior, lethargy, anxiety, or conspicuous nervousness. Any one of these may prevent students from succeeding in the program, and the program staff must be immediately informed of any student exhibiting one or more of these problems. Counselors must not attempt to act as psychologists.

Counselors should be considerate of one another by providing support when needed, and should hold weekly planning meetings to discuss issues, share ideas, and plan strategically for the following week.

Counselors should be careful not to allow any individual to monopolize their time, therefore leaving other students without assistance.

**Confidentiality**

It is typical for students to share intimate and personal details of their lives with the counselors, throughout the course of the program. It is imperative that all counselors exercise sound judgment in relation to these disclosures, and that the counselors treat every such disclosure as confidential in nature. The information must not be shared with other students, and only in circumstances where such disclosures affect, or threaten to affect, the students' performance or well being, or the general health of the Exploring Transfer Program should the information be shared with the Program Director or other relevant personnel.