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## Almost Everything You Always Wanted To Know About Taking a New Position

The following information is designed to help you transition into a new Student Affairs position. It is a list of things we wish we knew before (or as) we accepted professional positions.

Each institution is unique. It is very difficult to find out about all of these items; during a campus visit ask about the items that are most important to your professional well being. The level of your position may dictate the benefits offered to you. Don't take **anything** for granted; systems and areas of the same campus can be drastically different!

- CAMPUS CONCERNS - Enrollment? Relationship with community? Crime? Harassment? Alcohol? Drugs?
- DISCIPLINE SYSTEM - Student code of conduct. Rights vs. Responsibility. Sanctioning decisions made at which level? Confidentiality – parents notified, access to files.
- EVALUATION/FEEDBACK – Formal/Informal? Frequency? By whom?
- HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS – Annual reports or other past records? Is predecessor around to assist/impede?
- HOURS – 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. and/or 5 p.m. – 9 a.m.? Comp. Time for evening and weekend hours? Vacations-length/restricted dates? Office hours? Flex time? Status during holidays, academic breaks and summers? 10 mo. vs. 12 mo. contract?
- HOUSING ACCOMMODATIONS – Size? Cost? Distance from office? Laundry? Storage? AC/Heat Control? Pets?
  - ON-CAMPUS/LIVE-IN – Distance from students? Private access to building/apt.? Overnight guest policy? Benefits/considerations for significant other/spouse/children. Furnished?
  - OFF-CAMPUS – Distance from/access to campus. Visit area at different times of the day and night if possible
- MISSION STATEMENT – Does one exist? If so, does it match departmental behavior? Does it match your personal/ professional values?
- OFFICE DRESS – What is the dress code, official and unofficial? Is casual okay?
- OFFICE WORKSPACE – Size? Location? Shared? Reception Area? Meeting Areas?
- ORGANIZATION OF SYSTEM – Recent changes? Increasing/Decreasing #'s? Flexibility? Decision making at which levels? What is the theoretical base (if any) for programs, actions and decisions?
- ORIENTATIONS/TRAINING – Procedures? History? “Traditions”? Department-wide and/or College-wide?
- PARKING/TRANSPORTATION – Cost? Who pays? Location in relation to office/housing? Lighting, access, protection from weather? Public Transportation – quality, accessibility? Proximity of airport, train station, bus station.
- PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT – Professional memberships paid? Subscriptions? Conference support – time, travel, meals, fees?
- RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER OFFICES – Especially those with which you will be working—both formal and informal.
- SECRETARIAL SUPPORT – Full-time? Part-time? Student? Professional? Shared? None?
- SOCIAL OUTLETS – Night life for professional staff/spouse/family? Does staff currently socialize outside of office.
- STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS – Bulimia? Eating disorders? Substance abuse? Suicide? Extent of problem? Means to address problems, educate staff and students?
- SUPERVISOR – style, expectations, personality, commitment to your professional growth. Degree of involvement with day-to-day operations. What are the best things/ worst things?
- BUDGET -- Amount. What types of items are included: supplies, printing, programs, food, staff gifts?
- COMPUTERS – PC? Mac? E-mail? Internet? Training available?

## **WHILE NEGOTIATING**

- **ARRIVAL DATE** – If you can, arrange to arrive one or two weeks before the rush of staff training. It can take more time than you think to change driver's license, license plates, bank, long distance phone service, etc.
- **BENEFITS** – Life Insurance, Homeowners, Vision, Dental, Medical, Visual, Psychological. Choice? Cost? TIAA/CREF transferable? Payroll deduction for purchased items and or services? Dates that benefits begin.
- **MOVING EXPENSES** – Covered by you or institution? Percentage? Flat Amount?
- **SALARY** – Range? Starting Date vs. 1<sup>st</sup> paycheck? Frequency-weekly, bi-weekly, monthly? Union dues? Retirement?

## **RELOCATION CONSIDERATIONS**

- **AUTOMOBILE** – costs for transfer of license plates, driver license, insurance....
- **HAIR/CLOTHES** – Where do the locals shop/go for services?
- **SHOPPING** – Find someone who is familiar with your former state to translate store names... “ \_\_\_\_ there, is the same as \_\_\_\_ here”
- **TAX FORMS** – Arrange to get state forms before leaving the area. City tax? State tax?

## **AS YOU BEGIN**

- **PERSONAL BUDGET** - Take this opportunity to establish/improve your budget, research bank savings/checking accounts, area taxes. etc. Cost to transfer auto/license. Live-in – Put aside an amount that is close to what you would be paying in rent; when you do move off campus, you will have money for rent/utilities.
- **FORMAL/INFORMAL PROCEDURES** – Watch and listen. Read files, policies, publications, mission statements, department goals, etc. Trust carefully. Maintain a social/professional balance. Learn the politics. Think carefully before choosing a “side” or one is chosen for you.
- **INFORMATION SCREENING** – Avoid listening to rumors and prejudging co-workers. Do not burn bridges before you know where they lead!
- **MAIL** – New mailing address (home or office). New phone number(s); can you arrange service prior to you arrival. Live-in – If all mail goes to office, consider an off-campus P.O. Box for privacy and assured forwarding of mail after you leave.
- **NEGOTIATING A NEW SYSTEM** – Learn from the institution's past and adapt your past experiences. Keep the best and discard the rest. Observe and listen carefully!
- **PERSONAL WELLNESS** – Schedule personal time from day 1; don't wait for a break in the routine, it may never come! Plan at least one weekend per month to relax, get away if possible (especially if you live-in).

## **GENERAL SURVIVAL**

- **Ask Questions!**
- **Listen, Listen, Listen!**
- **Do What You Think Is Best** – give 110% vs. the minimum required.
- **Offer Suggestions** – After you are aware of how the system works. Avoid the comment “We always did it this way when I was at \_\_\_\_\_.”
- **Take Risks** – As a new person, mistakes are allowed.

## **TAKE FULL ADVANTAGE**

- **BEFORE/DURING A CAMPUS VISIT** - Contact the Chamber of Commerce to get information about nearby cities; other sources of information include automobile clubs and local papers. During an interview on campus, stop by one of the local hotels to see what tourist/entertainment type attractions are available in the area.
- **ACADEMIC OPPORTUNITIES** – free course – even if you do not plan to use them to obtain a future degree, consider courses that will expose you to other areas (art, literature, athletic related courses)
- **AREA RESOURCES** – Check area services – free tapes, tax forms from local libraries. Free maps from State Police.
- **BENEFITS** – Health plans – read the materials! Many offer classes, examinations, etc. That should be taken advantage of. Also note change/removal dates. Retirement – What is the best plan? How long do you plan to stay? Tax forms.
- **CAMPUS SERVICES** – discount purchasing of computers, bookstore items, travel services, etc.
- **CONFERENCE TRAVEL** – Take advantage of conference travel, by incorporating “mini-vacation” side trips. A good break from campus to rejuvenate.

- **CREDIT UNION/LOCAL BANKS** – direct deposit, free services for employees, loans, credit cards, financial services, etc. Consider a bankcard that can be accessed in other states.
- **ENTERTAINMENT** – Campus performances, speakers, etc. Area discounts with an ID or campus affiliation – museums, galleries. Reduced price movie passes, etc.

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