

Two experienced CTY academic deans have sent us their notes about what a typical day is like for them during opening week and during the session.

Comments from Dean #1

A Typical Day of Opening Week at CTY

Early during opening week, as academic dean you must make sure that each course has a home in an appropriate classroom. After meeting briefly with the facilities people as soon as possible, you should spend a couple of hours on this task by walking around campus with the list of available classrooms. Part of reviewing classrooms involves checking that the air-conditioning and lights in each room work. You also need to check the number of chairs and tables against the course enrollment numbers you have and note any AV equipment in each classroom. It's helpful to have all of this information on a site chart. If there isn't one at your site already, this walk-through will offer you a good opportunity to collect the information and notes on classroom facilities you will need for constructing a site chart. If your site already has such a chart, you should re-check the facilities; classroom interiors may have been altered during the previous academic year. This walk-through also familiarizes you with the campus; your knowledge of the site is essential for you to successfully supervise the instructional staff.

Once you have finished checking the classrooms, the rest of your day should be devoted to a number of specific tasks. You can continue to organize your office space—milk crates with hanging folders make for an easy-access filing system. Lunch may serve as a break, but you might consider a working lunch with the administrative team. For instance, administrators could talk about who is responsible for each segment during the upcoming orientation for all staff. After lunch, you might head over to the campus bookstore to meet the manager and to count books and check on supplies. If you do, be sure to bring the book/supply list with you to note absences and late arrivals. After making contact with the bookstore personnel, you might initiate contact with the library staff to find out library hours and levels of access for students and staff. Dinner off campus is a great way to clear your mind a bit. Then in the evening you should spend some time preparing welcome packets for the instructional staff (writing, photocopying, etc.). As the day draws to a close, you should also circulate around the other administrative offices to make people feel welcome, to begin building good working relationships, and to offer assistance at the last minute before you go to bed.

A Typical Day During the Session

You should have breakfast with some of the instructional staff in the cafeteria. (Make sure this includes a contingent of TAs as well as instructors.) You might then visit a biology class or a chemistry class in the morning so you can observe the instructor lecturing or leading review sessions; you could then drop in on the afternoon lab later in the day to see the outcome of a particular lesson and observe more student interactions. You should take notes discreetly.

Be sure to attend the administrative meeting later in the morning to discuss your ongoing projects and to listen to others' notes on general site issues and specific students. Here, you might ask the counselor to visit the biology class you have just observed to provide you with some more feedback about how individual students are doing. Following the meeting, at lunch

you might follow up with an instructor about the special colored chalk he or she ordered that hasn't come in yet. You might also find the facilities people at lunch to check up on the air-conditioning problem in one of the classroom buildings.

When you return to the office after lunch, you should attend to any parent phone calls. Later, you might visit a writing class, and then come back to the office to write a memo to your staff about helping out with meal time supervision of the students—you were informed of this problem during the morning meeting by the dean of residential life—and to create the agenda for the faculty meeting in the late afternoon.

When classes are over, you should be available to the instructional staff; here, you might have a quick conference with a couple of instructors about your observation of their classes, or meet with a TA having difficulty communicating with her instructor. Once the faculty meeting concludes, you might drop by the student swim-meet in the pool.

After dinner, you should write up your class evaluation letters and be available for your staff when study hall is over. You might also meet with a student who needs help understanding what constitutes appropriate classroom behavior. You should then call this student's parents to describe how your meeting with him went. Finally, you might look over your calendar for the next day so you can go straight from breakfast to your first class visit in the morning.

Comments from Dean #2

Opening Week: The First 24 Hours

Opening week is a special time for the administrative staff. You will work steadily from the time you arrive on site, but you will also find time to bond with the rest of the administrative team. During your first twenty-four hours on site, you can expect to move into your residence, unpack boxes, and arrange your office space. You can also expect to begin to confront some of the least glamorous aspects of the job. For example, my first official task as an academic dean was to check TA and instructor housing to make sure that the phone numbers were correct, garbage cans were in place, air conditioning units were working, etc. You cannot shirk these kinds of responsibilities, or your battle for staff allegiance will be lost before the session even begins.

After making sure that the physical infrastructure is adequate, you will begin to work on the organizational infrastructure. This planning involves housing assignments, classroom assignments, instructional team pairings, and orientation calendars. I always approached these organizational moments as I would a card game. Each staff member has a different value. When some staff members are placed together, you will have a full house or a straight flush. When others are placed together, you might as well fold your hand and run. You can try to bluff, but in the long run it will probably not serve you well. It's your job to understand your staff. If you don't know your people, ask someone who does or consult their resumes.

After setting up pairings and calendars, the administrative team should regroup to develop a crisis plan (in case of an unforeseen disaster) and put the finishing touches on orientation packets. Obviously, the first 24 hours is not a time for relaxation. You should knock out as much

work as possible because the days leading up to the arrival of the staff and students will disappear in a hurry.

Week Two: A Typical Day

On a typical day during Week 2, I woke up early (around 6 or 6:30) so I could have some time to read or write. In all my years at CTY I always insisted on maintaining my intellectual life. As a dean, I found that “having a life” that existed outside of CTY helped me to maintain my objectivity and cool-headedness in times of crisis.

After a relaxing morning, I would generally try to eat breakfast, and then I would wander out into the main quad just before classes started. This helped to keep my instructors honest. By the second week, certain instructors will begin to chip away at their class time by starting late whenever possible. I tried to make myself visible to them in the mornings to prevent that from happening. While wandering around the quad, I would also deal with the small problems that tend to arise before class: locked doors, last minute AV requests, sick children, etc. Once classes began, I always breathed a sigh of relief, knowing the rest of the morning belonged to me. I would usually pour my first cup of coffee around this time, and settle in at my desk to return phone calls, check my email, check in with the Baltimore office, and arrange my priorities for the day. During the second week, my priorities were usually very simple: I had a morning meeting with the rest of the administrative team, and I generally had three or four classes on the docket for observation.

The class observations are, to me, the heart of the academic dean’s job and the responsibility that more than compensated for any aggravation associated with the job. During the second week, I spent an average of three or four hours in classrooms. For each observation, I wrote down as many facts as I could: What is the instructor’s teaching style? Does everybody in class participate? Are there any disruptions? Are the students engaged? Is the TA a part of the class? Does the classroom setup facilitate discussion? Is everyone dressed appropriately? Is the class paced appropriately? These observations are frequently inspiring—a reminder of the heights to which education can soar. After my observations, I would return to my desk and quickly write my reports to teachers, pouring out every detail I could glean from my notes, then offering some remarks about things that might change, or in some cases, absolutely had to change.

I usually worked on these reports well into the afternoon, but regardless of what I was doing, I always made myself available for teachers immediately after their classes. This post-class time can be an extremely productive time for you. Teachers will come to you with concerns, student behavior problems, complaints, etc. I usually had a notebook open and ready for my teachers so I could write down their problems in order to deal with them in a timely fashion.

After people cleared out of the office I would try to exercise before dinner. After dinner, I would polish my observation reports and write my to-do list for the next day. I also would try to spend some time in the evenings socializing with the instructional staff. It’s important to develop friendships with your teachers, and it’s best to spread yourself around so that you gain a well-rounded view of the community.