

Common Questions from Graduate Assistant Candidates
Answered by
Current Graduate Assistants at the University of Central Missouri:

- **What has it been like living so far away from home? How have you adjusted?**

I grew up in Los Angeles, California so moving to Warrensburg was definitely a huge transition. There are days when I really miss my family and friends but the great thing about this experience is that I'm not the only one. My cohort has been very supportive and we've all vocalized in some shape or form that we miss home but we're also each others support system. I use to have Harry Potter marathons with my friends back home and that's something that I've luckily been able to do here with some of my cohort members. Adjusting to a completely new area is not easy but when you have the support of your cohort and the second years, it really makes it a bit easier to call Warrensburg your new home. **Angie Juarez, California State University San Bernardino, San Bernardino, CA.**

I grew up in a town about the size of Warrensburg in Texas, so coming here was almost like going home. My undergrad was at TCU in Fort Worth, so the adjustment was more getting back into the small town groove, which is something I've enjoyed. I like have all the necessities close by and it's kind of fun planning trips to Kansas City with my cohort for the things I can't get in Warrensburg. Being able to build local connections is something that I value and definitely helps with the transition. **Michael Lostritto, Texas Christian University (TCU), Greenville, TX.**

Being away from home has not been hard, for me it was adjusting to a small town. Growing up in Milwaukee, WI and then doing my undergraduate in Green Bay, WI, Warrensburg is pretty small. However, I still do everything I enjoyed doing at home. I love being downtown and hanging out in the local coffee shops and with Lee Summit so close, I am able to travel on weekends! **Naomi Semb-Lovejoy, The University of Wisconsin Green Bay, Milwaukee, WI.**

Transitioning from home in Washington state to Missouri was difficult knowing that I was starting all over again. However, I look back at this experience and I am thankful to have had the experience. I was forced to really investigate what I need/want to gain from my geographic and cultural location. Two years may seem like a long time, but it is all about finding your networks of support and care. I am from Seattle, WA. and I loved going to Kansas City on the weekends. Nonetheless, Warrensburg has a nice cozy feel that I came to love and appreciate. Although I am a city person, I really came to enjoy the charm of the 'Burg. **Joe Lloyd, Washington State University, Seattle, WA.**

I'm originally from a town near Des Moines, Iowa, so home is only about three and a half hours away. I'm not able to go home too frequently but I'm normally busy on the weekends, working on programs with Student Activities or trying to get some homework wrapped up. It was a bit of an adjustment at first but I feel like there are things to keep you busy. My advice is to get to know the people you work with, members within your cohort, and folks around UCM and the Warrensburg community. Those connections will make all the difference! **Jesse Heath, University of Northern Iowa, DeSoto, Iowa**

Living far away from home was definitely an adjustment for me personally. I went to undergrad about two hours away from my parents, so they were always there as a kind of safety net there if I ever needed it. Moving to Missouri really helped me to spread my wings and learn how to do things for myself, while also cherishing my time back in South Carolina a little more when I get to visit. Plus, it was great to have such amazing people in my cohort to help me make myself feel at home and create my own family here in Warrensburg. **MJ Miller, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC**

Warrensburg and UCM are actually larger than Vermillion and USD. That made my initial transition very easy because a lot of the population and culture was essentially the same. My family moved once I graduated high school, so my childhood home is gone. That made it a lot easier for me to move here because I'm still looking for a sense of home. **Tristan Beck, University of South Dakota, Vermillion, South Dakota**

Living far away has had its ups and downs. I am appreciative of getting the chance to engage in a different environment. To help with the transition I would still take time to facetime friends and family. I also looked to find ways to get involved with the community to make it feel more like home. **Leksi Simic, California State University San Bernardino, Wilmette, IL**

Having gone to undergrad far from home, I really was really to continue to plunge into Warrensburg. For me it is all about becoming engrossed with the campus and community and finding ways to be able to make connections in those spheres. **Rick Cazzato Jr., Truman State University, Bartlett, IL**

- **What has been some of the challenges of making the transition to UCM you have had to face and how have you adjusted to them?**

Some of the challenges I have faced really revolve around homesickness. I think that I started to miss home more than I realized. Along with that, I also found it challenging to discover the type of leader I am at UCM. I am not the same person I was at my undergrad and that's okay, because now I'm trying to discover who I want to be as a professional. Since I'm more on the introverted side, I was nervous to make new connections with people but slowly I've been letting my guard down and have found that I have so much in common with my cohort and the second years! The transition is not easy, but it is so worth it. The support you get here truly makes it worth it. **Angie Juarez, California State University San Bernardino, San Bernardino, CA.**

I came from a private institution, so transitioning into a public one has been interesting. While a lot is the same, because the student affairs field stays relatively the same, the challenge was to always be aware of the differences so that I could function fully in this new setting. It's a challenge I've enjoyed, because it helps me look outside of my previous experiences and grow from it. Some things I've had to abandon and others I've integrated into my new position. It's been a really good learning opportunity. **Michael Lostritto, Texas Christian University (TCU), Greenville, TX.**

Not living with my best friends was an adjustment, but there are so many people here at UCM that have made Warrensburg feel like my new home. Taking advantage of every opportunity to hang out with the cohort out of class and work helped! **Naomi Semb-Lovejoy, The University of Wisconsin Green Bay, Milwaukee, WI.**

I maintained my relationship with my romantic partner from undergraduate. She and I have been together for 3 years prior to me coming to UCM. It was a hard adjustment at first, but I really learned on my cohort to help me adjust to life at UCM. In addition, I went to a large, public, research1 institution - UCM was a student population and demographic that I had never encountered which made it difficult to know how to engage at first. Overtime, I really invested in learning more about the culture of the Midwest and the population that UCM serves. You would be amazed by how much the UCM demographics will enhance your professional understanding of student affairs practice. **Joe Lloyd, Washington State University, Seattle, WA.**

A challenge that I have faced is working with a supervisor who have different leadership styles than I have experienced. This is never an easy situation as there may be a lot of things that you don't see eye-to-eye on. However, this doesn't mean that you can be effective in your assistantship position and make important changes on this campus. I've learned how to effectively accomplish my position independently and try to compromise when issues arise. This is not an ideal situation but it helps you learn how to collaborate with different people. **Jesse Heath, University of Northern Iowa, DeSoto, Iowa**

One of my biggest challenges coming to UCM was transitioning into a new department. I had never worked in Housing prior to accepting my position here and so I felt very anxious about acclimating to the Housing environment, while also continuing to do good work within Fraternity/Sorority Life. Everyone here was exceptionally good about explaining things and helping me to understand the differences that come with a live-on position, so I would say the transition and adjustment turned out just great! **MJ Miller, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC**

The biggest challenge for me was leaving my family that is just starting. I have an almost 9 month old child and a loving partner that are not able to be here with me while I get my degree. I adjusted to this by going home 1-2 weekends a month and by having them come down to visit me. **Tristan Beck, University of South Dakota, Vermillion, South Dakota**

Coming to a small town had been quite the adjustment. I am used to big city and going out when ever. Something that has helped me adjust to the transition was being able to spend some time with others who have the same feeling. It has given me a chance to actually explore new place that I am in. There are a bunch of parks you can experience. Imposter syndrome- coming from a place that I knew most people and offices to a completely different place has been eye opening to how it takes times to build relationships again and relearn a university. This has been a positive challenge in making me rebelieve I am capable of accomplishing my goals in my position even though it is a new place. **Leksi Simic, California State University San Bernardino, Wilmette, IL**

One of the biggest transitions for me was transitioning into a new environment. Having two years of professional staff experience before going to UCM, I had seen a lot of the in's and out's of Residence Life and so figuring out how UCM did things was an adjustment. Because each

institution is vastly different it just took some time to figure out how UCM worked and how I could utilize my leadership style to. really make an impact here. **Rick Cazzato Jr., Truman State University, Bartlett, IL**

- **What has been your best experience in your assistantship and CSPA so far?**

Getting the opportunity to work as a Residence Hall Director (RHD), has truly been an amazing and challenging experience. Sometimes, you won't have the answers to everything and that is okay! I knew coming here that there was going to be a lot of new things I probably wouldn't fully know about. I ask questions on the daily and my peers along with the professional staff, are always willing to answer my questions. I also have the great honor to be part of a cohort that is supportive and accepts my introvertedness. When I'm feeling like I need my "me" time, they respect it and will continue to invite me to places regardless. Being part of CSPA, has been really mind opening, because I get to know more about my cohort and how they see the world, but we get to educate each other on concepts that we may not be too familiar with. We might not always agree but we are all definitely here for the same reason and that's to empower ourselves to use our voices so that we can leave a positive impact on our students, but to also encourage each other to become the best future student affairs professionals, that we know we can be. **Angie Juarez, California State University San Bernardino, San Bernardino, CA.**

I've gotten so many opportunities to build new and lasting relationships within a short time and it's amazing. The bonds I already have with my cohort far exceeded my expectations when I came, because I'm a naturally introverted person and I like doing things on my own. This position requires a good support network, though, and I've found that in my cohort, something that I was definitely apprehensive about when I was making my decision. We're all different and we all have our quirks, but at the end of the day we care for and support each other and that's really what has made this an amazing experience for me. **Michael Lostritto, Texas Christian University (TCU), Greenville, TX.**

Working as a Residence Hall Director and going through training with my staff has been the best part of my time here at UCM. Being able to get to know the dynamics of my staff, team building with them and then seeing them work with their students is my favorite part. **Naomi Semb-Lovejoy, The University of Wisconsin Green Bay, Milwaukee, WI.**

Within University Housing I have the honor of going to class with the same people I work with on a day to day basis. It is amazing to see how the classroom conversations transform into our practice. It is really fun to geek out about theory over lunch or the bewilderment of law...it really helps you feel invested in how immediate the knowledge can be transferred into the real world! **Joe Lloyd, Washington State University, Seattle, WA.**

I've enjoyed the relationships that I've made with my co-workers this past year. The GAs in the Office of Student Activities help make the job and the office environment much better. We support each other when life gets a bit more stressful and challenge each other in our positions when we can grow professionally. If you are willing to be vulnerable and put yourself out there, you can have these relationships too! **Jesse Heath, University of Northern Iowa, DeSoto, Iowa**

The best experience I have had in my assistantship has definitely been the conversations that I get to have with CAs and students. While I do not have a building of my own, I have a multitude of CAs that I have created great relationships with and get to learn more about and support throughout their time working with our department. The best days are when I get invites to come see actions that our CAs have created and want to share, because you can tell that they have worked hard and are extremely proud of the final product! **MJ Miller, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC**

The best experience I have had so far would be the friendships that I've made with the other GAs. We created fun groups like a book club and a Dungeons and Dragons group. Those friendships and bonds have been integral to my ability to thrive here at UCM. **Tristan Beck, University of South Dakota, Vermillion, South Dakota**

One of the best experiences I have had in my assistantship was when I was able to watch my students take the time to put on Big Pink Volleyball. The group of students I worked with were very engaged in creating a successful event and are always looking to help in exceling towards the next step. **Leksi Simic, California State University San Bernardino, Wilmette, IL**

UCM is amazing! I truly am so grateful to have ended up at a place with such supportive friends, and co-workers. It is a unique experience of working and taking classes with the same people, and it really allows you to see how everyone's specific strengths all come together for the betterment of the department. I know that the friends I am making here are going to be friends with for the rest of my life. **Rick Cazzato Jr., Truman State University, Bartlett, IL**

- **What are the benefits of being a part of the CSPA program at UCM?**

The autonomy. You'll probably hear this a lot, because it's true. Being placed over your own building is an incredible learning experience. Pairing that responsibility with classwork that directly influences the job is something that has already benefited me and something I know will continue to help me build myself as a professional. **Michael Lostritto, Texas Christian University (TCU), Greenville, TX.**

One of the biggest benefits of being a part of the CSPA program at UCM is that I have been able to directly apply what I have learned in my classes to situations I have handled in my graduate assistantship. There have been numerous times I have walked out of class and used what I learned no longer than an hour later. **Naomi Semb-Lovejoy, The University of Wisconsin Green Bay, Milwaukee, WI.**

The cohort model is an amazing support system Coming out of the pacific-northwest into the midwest was a challenge but I had a cohort that was so incredibly vested in my transition. In addition, our program is one of the very few that offer a Law class to students. You would be amazed how often you will reference your coursework in real life application. **Joe Lloyd, Washington State University, Seattle, WA.**

The CSPA program does an amazing job at producing well-rounded professionals through its curriculum. Our classes have been very particularly created to touch on core competencies of our

field and it shows! There is not a day that goes by that I do not get to utilize what I've learned in class in my assistantship. **MJ Miller, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC**

One of the main benefits of being a part of CSPA here at UCM is getting connected with other professionals that are going into the field. The graduates from UCM go all over the country and that allows you to have a large network that you can rely on when you start your job search.

Tristan Beck, University of South Dakota, Vermillion, South Dakota

I have been really grateful that this program is theory to practice. There have been times where there is a theory I have learned in class and am able to put it to a situation that a student was going through. I feel that this program has also prepared me for a professional position because of all the autonomy I have had within my position. **Leksi Simic, California State University San Bernardino, Wilmette, IL**

The assistantship opportunities that you have at UCM really prepare you for the next steps. Instead of being an Assistant Hall Director, I am the Residence Hall Director and have autonomy of my building to help and foster community. Compared to many of my peers at other institutions, I am being challenged and exposed to opportunities that many of them will not have until their first full-time role. It just truly shows how well prepared UCM makes you to enter the full-time professional world. **Rick Cazzato Jr., Truman State University, Bartlett, IL**

- **Why did you choose UCM?**

I remember getting off the airplane and thinking to myself, there's no way. However, when I did my on campus interviews my perception of UCM completely changed. I was nervous to go from California to UCM because I thought I wouldn't have the support system here. Luckily, I had an interaction with a faculty/professional staff member that I knew I would have their support in some shape or form. Warrensburg is small but when I made my decision to come to UCM it was because I knew that I could help the students here just as much as they were going to help me. One of my mentors, once told me, "If you're not feeling nervous, then you're not learning". I had the opportunity to stay in California and stay in my comfort zone, but I realized that I would be doing a disservice to myself if I stayed because I would not be challenging myself to reach my own full potential. I do not regret choosing UCM, because I believe I have meet some of the most influential people here thus far. **Angie Juarez, California State University San Bernardino, San Bernardino, CA.**

My gut told me I should pick UCM. I did a lot of interviews, many of which were on campus, and I didn't get the same feeling of welcome and belonging as I did at UCM. The people here are truly invested in their students and making sure that each individual feels validated and important within the system. I knew this was a place that I could build relationships and truly help students, and ultimately that's why I'm in this field. **Michael Lostritto, Texas Christian University (TCU), Greenville, TX.**

I chose UCM because of how I felt in my interview. I was able to feel a sense of comfort and support from everyone I met during my off and on campus interview. Feeling that support

before I even was a part of the CSPA program, really helped me feel like I made the right decision! **Naomi Semb-Lovejoy, The University of Wisconsin Green Bay, Milwaukee, WI.**

I chose UCM because of the overwhelming call to a challenge. I knew that the RHD position had autonomy and that it would require discipline and rigor. I needed to expand beyond my comfort zone and tread into a geographical and socio-educational space that I had never been introduced to. This experience has broaden my perceptions and skills immensely and I am grateful to my assistantship because of this. **Joe Lloyd, Washington State University, Seattle, WA.**

I chose UCM because I felt that the faculty and staff genuinely cared about my success and future in the field of student affairs. They have been very supportive with offering a variety of experiences to help build my overall skillset and expand on my background. **Jesse Heath, University of Northern Iowa, DeSoto, Iowa**

Making the choice to come to UCM was the easiest and hardest decision I've ever made. I originally applied with the understanding that I did not want to leave South Carolina, but knowing that I would not be challenged if I stayed. From the moment I met the first person from UCM, I always felt a sense of familiarity and community. Every moment I spent on campus felt genuine and I never felt like I had to be in "interview mode", which was very important to me in choosing a new home for two years. At the end of the day, UCM was everything I needed in a graduate institution, even the things that I never considered before being here. I'd make the decision to choose UCM all over again in a heartbeat. **MJ Miller, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC**

I chose UCM because of the experience I had during my on campus interview. The other schools I saw had very little student involvement and it felt professional the whole time. UCM was a lot more fun and hands on with the interviews. I felt like I got to know the people at UCM better. **Tristan Beck, University of South Dakota, Vermillion, South Dakota**

I chose UCM because of the size and how others have spoken so highly of the program. I've appreciated that people have been straight forward as well. **Leksi Simic, California State University San Bernardino, Wilmette, IL**

I chose UCM because of the hands-on experience and strong academic program that Central has. Central has a strong reputation within the field and I knew that I wanted to learn and be challenged. Seeing the strong assistantship opportunities, I knew I was going to be able to really grow as a professional and take the skills to become a strong professional. **Rick Cazzato Jr., Truman State University, Bartlett, IL**

- **What do you do for fun while at UCM?**

I hang out with my cohort a lot. We'll have game/movie nights, do homework together, or just have those really awesome late night conversations. I've been to several on campus events that are a lot of fun, particularly the movies that they bring to campus each weekend before they are

officially released post-theater. **Michael Lostritto, Texas Christian University (TCU), Greenville, TX.**

I enjoy hanging out with friends at Starbucks on campus, going to local coffee shops and attending programs put on by Spotlight. **Naomi Semb-Lovejoy, The University of Wisconsin Green Bay, Milwaukee, WI.**

Something that I enjoy doing is getting the cohort together and go to social outings together. I am a coffee fanatic like many of my peers which made Starbucks a popular place to meet and work on assignment/read. I enjoy running around Warrensburg - plenty of beautiful water features such as Lion's Lake and Pertle Springs. **Joe Lloyd, Washington State University, Seattle, WA.**

There are a lot of great programs and activities brought to campus, such as a variety of comedians and performers. I also enjoy frequenting the local movie theater! **Jesse Heath, University of Northern Iowa, DeSoto, Iowa**

When I think of the fun I have had at UCM, it 100% includes members of my cohort every single time. Whether its late-night conversations, movie nights, or even Dungeons and Dragons adventures, I'm always having a good time when I'm surrounded by my fellow grads! **MJ Miller, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC**

One thing I love to do for fun is drive out to Pertle Springs and Lyon's Lake and walk around. It's a great way to get rid of stress and reflect on my life. **Tristan Beck, University of South Dakota, Vermillion, South Dakota**

When I get the chance, I do enjoy walking around the various parks that are here in Warrensburg. I also enjoy hanging out with those who I have met here at UCM. **Leksi Simic, California State University San Bernardino, Wilmette, IL**

Often times my free time is spent hanging out with other members of my cohort around town. For a small town, Warrensburg has a lot of fun activities both on and off campus that I spend a lot of time doing. The best experiences I have had with my cohort have involved spending lots of time in the community and taking advantage of the opportunities Warrensburg provides. **Rick Cazzato Jr., Truman State University, Bartlett, IL**

- **Comments & Advice offered to potential CSPA students at UCM:**

It's okay to not know the answers to everything because we're all here to learn and develop as future student affairs professionals. It can be difficult to get out of your comfort zone but it's worth it! I've learned a lot from my cohort, supervisors, and instructors. I also ask about 100 questions a day and it's okay! Everyone here is willing to answer those questions because they want to see you succeed, there's no such thing as a dumb question! **Angie Juarez, California State University San Bernardino, San Bernardino, CA.**

Step outside of your comfort zone. When I first arrived to UCM and met the people I would be working with, I did not expect to build the relationships that I have so far. I thought these people

were all too different from me. But I took that step outside of what was normal for me and it was the best decision that resulted in so much friendship and support that I would have completely missed out on. That doesn't apply to only relationships either. Yes, get to know everyone because you never know who you will connect with, but also do all the things. Reach out to departments you are interested in and offer your help. Volunteer to help with events, or advise organizations. There are so many opportunities that you will miss if you don't push yourself to grow, so reach out and take advantage of them all. **Michael Lostritto, Texas Christian University (TCU), Greenville, TX.**

ASK QUESTIONS! Everyone has been so willing to help, so utilize your resources and get your questions answered. As much as UCM is interviewing you, you also need to feel like it is the right fit for you, ask them questions! **Naomi Semb-Lovejoy, The University of Wisconsin Green Bay, Milwaukee, WI.**

Don't judge a book by its cover. UCM is a masked opportunity that many overlook because of geographic location. As someone who grew up in metropolitan Seattle, I can safely say that just about anyone could be happy for two years in Warrensburg. It is truly up to YOU how you want to make the experience. UCM has afforded me countless opportunities for professional growth which will (hopefully) propel me into my next professional role. **Joe Lloyd, Washington State University, Seattle, WA.**

Be yourself and be authentic. Don't water yourself down or change who you are to be what you think you're supposed to be. Every single graduate student is different and that is what makes us all so great. Graduate school is a time to grow and become the very best version of yourself, so be open to learning new things. Overall, never lose sight of who you really are, it's your greatest strength! **MJ Miller, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC**

My advice would be to focus on yourself. The place you pick shouldn't be because it's the closest or the easiest thing to do. Wherever you choose to go should be because you believe you will grow the most. **Tristan Beck, University of South Dakota, Vermillion, South Dakota**

Take the time to fully understand what type of support you need in a program. If you are looking to gain various opportunities UCM gives you a chance to work with those you choose. **Leksi Simic, California State University San Bernardino, Wilmette, IL**

Be authentic to yourself during your search and in the field. I knew that I needed to be at a place where I could express who I am and be myself and I found that here in central. I think also knowing what you want out of a program is essential. For me, I knew I wanted to be in a cohort model and seeing the closeness that the graduate students at UCM had was what I knew I wanted out of my experience. Trust the process and put yourself out there - everyone truly just wants to get to know you and see how you can impact their campus. **Rick Cazzato Jr., Truman State University, Bartlett, IL**