Young Scholars Application for the 2019 Upstate Institute Summer Field School

The following project proposal was created by a community partner of the Upstate Institute to describe the way they would like to engage with a Colgate student this summer. The research project proposed will be a full-time research project conducted by a Field School Fellow this summer. Below, the partner describes their organization and the research project, as well as a statement of benefit derived by the community for this project. The proposal also mentions logistical considerations and required skills for a student interested in doing this work.

Young Scholars Liberty Partnership Program, Utica College, Utica, NY 13501

The 2019 Young Scholars LPP Parent and Family Engagement Initiative is a redesign of the traditional methods of connecting parents to their child’s education. The Young Scholars Liberty Partnerships Program (LPP) is a multi-year program designed to motivate at-risk students to stay in school, earn a New York State Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation, and graduate college and career ready.

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The overriding question we are asking is, using our unique strengths and connections to Young Scholars families, how can we better engage our parents with their child’s education and help them navigate the education system? We would like the researcher to examine current best practices; what other institutions are finding successful or unsuccessful; and how technology can be used to further parent engagement.

Young Scholars is in a unique position to create a program tailored to the needs of our families. Our staff has the time to develop meaningful connections with the Young Scholars students and families. The students enter the program at the end of sixth grade and continue through high school graduation, and beyond. They travel through the years as a cohort, building a bond with the program and each other.

Parent engagement has waxed and waned throughout the 26 years of Young Scholars. We have had a parent advisory committee and parent workshops but the participation steadily declined. We would like the researcher to help us develop a structure that will enable parents to be involved with the Young Scholars LPP, the student’s school, and the college preparation process while addressing barriers such as language, transportation, poverty, a family history of low education levels, and
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parent work responsibility. Most of the Young Scholars will be first generation college students which necessitates a strong support network for the students and their families. Ultimately we will share the Fellow’s results with the other 46 Liberty Partnerships Programs to lead the process of developing state guidelines.

The Upstate Institute Fellow will work directly with Young Scholars students, parents, and staff, as well as perform research and develop ideas. Ideally, they will design and co-produce one or two events to be held in the summer.

This research will support the Young Scholars mission of keeping students in school and graduating college and career ready. By working together, parents, Young Scholars staff, and Utica City School District staff can increase the positive outcomes for students, particularly in regards to attendance and grades. High school graduation is the necessary first step in expanding the work force needed in the ever-changing employment landscape of the Upstate region. The impact will go further than the upstate region as well. The New York State Department of Education has mandated that all LPP programs establish a structure for parent engagement. This will be a focus at the 2019 LPP summit that Young Scholars will host in Utica. The Fellow’s research will be integral to our input in developing state guidelines.

Logistically, we would like the researcher to be on site with Young Scholars at Utica College several days per week. This will enable them to meet the staff, visit the schools, see what resources are available to the program, and to work directly with students and parents during our summer program in July. The Fellow will be supervised by the Executive Director and the Director of Program Operations.

In addition to the expected research skills, the Fellow should have strong interpersonal communication skills and be comfortable speaking on the telephone and meeting with parents. The Fellow should also be willing to immerse themselves in the daily life of Young Scholars in order to get a broad view of this multifaceted program.

During the month of July 225 of our 347 students in grades 7 – 12 will be on Utica College’s campus for two concurrent summer programs. We would like the Fellow to be part of the team providing support to the teachers, students, and administrators.
The Fellow will be involved in the day-to-day running of a not-for-profit education program; learning the skills needed to be productive in a busy office. In their interactions with our students and families they will have the opportunity to work with one of the most diverse populations in the country, in addition to working with a diverse staff. The Fellow will be invited to all staff meetings, summer program organizational meetings (with junior and senior high school teachers and college professors) and be included in decision making discussions in the office. Based on past experience, we find that the Fellow does the best work and receives the best experience if they are incorporated into the daily workflow of the Young Scholars Program.