

# NORTH CASCADES INSTITUTE MOUNTAIN SCHOOL TEACHER GUIDE

Mountain School is a cooperative program between North Cascades Institute,  
North Cascades National Park, and your school



North Cascades Institute welcomes students and participants of any race, color, national and ethnic origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, military or marital status, age, sensory, physical, or mental disability to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students and participants at the Institute. The Institute does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national and ethnic origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, military or marital status, age, sensory, physical, or mental disability in administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and other administered programs.

## WELCOME!

At North Cascades Institute, our mission is to inspire environmental stewardship through transformative educational experiences in nature. Since 1986, we have been proud to offer quality programs that connect people of all ages to the natural world.

We are excited you have chosen to bring your class to our Mountain School program at the North Cascades Environmental Learning Center. This Teacher Guide includes everything you will need to plan your trip and prepare your students, parents, and chaperones for the experience.

This Teacher Guide includes the following sections to help you organize your trip:

- General Program Information
- Teacher Planning Information
- Parent and Chaperone Information

We are looking forward to an incredible Mountain School session with you and your class! Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or need more information.

For scheduling, pricing, and contract information:

Eric Buher | Mountain School Manager  
Email: [eric\\_buher@ncascades.org](mailto:eric_buher@ncascades.org)  
Phone: 206-526-2564

For program planning and logistics after your group has been scheduled:

Please contact the Mountain School team at [mountainschool@ncascades.org](mailto:mountainschool@ncascades.org)

MK Kirkpatrick-Waite | Mountain School Coordinator  
Phone: 206-526-2562

Hannah Black | Mountain School Coordinator  
Phone: 206-526-2475

Eric Buher | Mountain School Manager  
Phone: 206-526-2564

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## WHAT DO STUDENTS LEARN AT MOUNTAIN SCHOOL?

We know that the biggest takeaways for students are often inspired by a self-driven, emotional connection to the material. Self-discovery, teamwork, and application of knowledge facilitate this connection. This principle guides our curriculum to incorporate student identity and personal perspective into each aspect of the Mountain School experience - helping students become more aware of their own learning process. By design, the curriculum is greatly student-centered and focuses on Next Generation Science Standards, Climate Literacy, and Social-Emotional Learning.

Students at Mountain School will encounter an essential question, in two parts. By the end of their stay, they will be able to draw on the culmination of their unique Mountain School experience, as well as their own lived experience, to formulate a personal answer to the following:

1. How am I connected to the North Cascades?
2. Why does connection to a place matter?

The learning plan for each trail group will be developed by their instructor, using the following resources:

1. Teacher submission of their prioritization of the Curriculum Goals, in the Pre-Trip Questionnaire
2. A session theme drawn from instructor personal interests, seasonal resources, or the essential theme of “interconnectedness”
3. Mountain School Core Lessons (see below)
4. Student responses during an initial “mind-mapping” activity

In this way, student learning experiences will be directed by teacher priorities, instructor knowledge, and student interests.

## THE GOALS OF THE MOUNTAIN SCHOOL CURRICULUM

1. Develop a model demonstrating interactions between multiple factors in an environment using two or more of the Earth’s systems.
2. Ask questions and identify climate-related challenges for local and global communities and problem solve ways to mitigate and/or adapt to those challenges.
3. Collaborate daily using discussion, team-building, and active listening to develop empathy through sharing perspectives and experiences.
4. Identify a personal connection to a community and explain how that perspective impacts our relationship to people, resources, flora, fauna.
5. Identify two learnings or areas of growth and describe how those experiences will influence students to engage in stewardship of their natural and human communities.

## CORE MOUNTAIN SCHOOL LESSONS

**Alluvial/Fluvial Valley:** Students explore how water shapes the land and connects all parts of the ecosystem.

**Big Map Lesson:** Students make observations about geology, geography, and human history of the Northwest.

**Camouflage:** Students investigate predator-prey relationships and animal adaptations through play.

**Community Contract:** Students set expectations, as a trail group, for their shared experiences.

**Decomposition Mission:** Students are introduced to various decomposers and the process of “energy cycling.”

**Each One Teach One:** Students become experts on a single plant, then share their knowledge with their peers.

**Geology Lesson:** Students imagine how a rock was formed, seek evidence, and test their hypothesis.

**Microscope Lab:** Students are oriented to microscopes, and practice scientific methods of investigation.

**Mind Mapping:** Students explore a theme, and generate a plan for how to explore it.

**Web of Life:** Students build a kinesthetic model of a food chain, and observe how various actions impact it.

## TYPICAL PROGRAM SCHEDULE

### Day 1 (Mon/Wed)

- 10:30 – 11:00 Arrive North Cascades Environmental Learning Center on Diablo Lake  
\*(Students should have their daypacks ready with: packed lunch, water bottle, raingear, clothing layers, and pencil)\*
- 10:30 – 11:30 Unload bus, go to Amphitheater, introduce staff/adults, divide into Trail Groups for Lunch
- 11:00 – 11:30 Student lunch in trail groups; Teacher/Chaperone orientation
- 11:30 – 12:30 Student orientation
- 12:30 – 5:00 Learning time in trail groups
- 4:30 – 5:00 Teacher and chaperone free time
- 5:00 – 6:00 Participants move into lodges, free time for students *facilitated by teachers and chaperones*
- 6:00 – 7:00 Dinner
- 7:00 – 8:30 Evening programs
- 9:00 Recommended quiet hours begin

### Day 2 (Tue/Thur)

- 7:00 Recommended wake up time
- 8:00 – 9:00 Breakfast, pack lunches, gather gear
- 9:00 – 4:00 Learning time in trail groups  
Lunch on the trail!
- 4:00 – 5:00 Ranger Program
- 4:30 – 5:00 Teacher and chaperone free time
- 5:00 – 6:00 Student free time *facilitated by teachers and chaperones*
- 6:00 – 7:00 Dinner
- 7:00 – 8:30 Evening programs
- 9:00 Recommended quiet hours begin

### Day 3 (Wed/Fri)

- 7:00 Recommended wake up time
- 7:00 – 7:30 Check-out tasks led by chaperones
- 7:30 – 8:00 Lodging check-out inspection
- 8:00 – 9:00 Breakfast, pack lunches
- 9:00 – 10:00 Trail group time for students and chaperones  
Teacher debrief with Mountain School Staff
- 10:00 – 10:30 Closing Ceremony
- 10:30 – 11:00 Lunch, load bus, depart

## FACILITY AND CONTACT INFORMATION

**Lodging:** Our three lodges provide accommodation for up to 92 people. Participants sleep three or four to a room. Each lodge has two shared bathrooms with two sinks, two toilets and two showers. Toilets and showers are partitioned in private stalls. **A fitted sheet and pillow with pillowcase will be provided for each bed. All participants must bring their own sleeping bag or blanket.** Prior to checkout, participants are expected to remove bed linens and sweep out their rooms.

**Facilities:** The Learning Center has three indoor classrooms, including two fully equipped laboratories for aquatic and terrestrial study, a library, an amphitheater, immediate trail access and several outdoor shelters for field activities.

**Meals:** Delicious, nutritious, vegetarian meals are prepared by our talented kitchen staff and served buffet-style in the Salmonberry Dining Hall. The Foodshed Program at North Cascades Institute integrates local and organic ingredients into each meal. The Dining Hall is a nut-free facility and any additional special dietary needs can usually be accommodated with advanced notice. Please contact the Mountain School team with any dietary questions.

**Risk During Learning Center Programs:** All of our Learning Center programs involve hiking on trails and being outside for extended periods of time. While instructors make every effort to exercise caution to prevent mishaps, participants must assume full responsibility for their individual safety and must provide their own health and accident insurance. Keep in mind that we are sharing the outdoors with mosquitoes, black flies, ticks, snakes, black bears, cougars, inclement weather, and other unpredictable natural elements. Protective clothing, sunscreen, raingear, and insect repellent are advised.

**\*\*IMPORTANT:** All participants (including chaperones and teachers) must complete and sign a Participant Information and Release (PIR) form.

Teachers are responsible for checking that all forms are filled out completely and have all the necessary signatures. If a student arrives with incomplete paperwork, you as the teacher will be asked to complete and sign all necessary forms after receiving verbal permission from the parent/guardian. If that is not possible, the student will be sent home.

In rare instances State Route 20 can close between the Learning Center and Newhalem due to rock, snow, or mudslides. A road closure may delay your group's return down valley. Learning Center staff are well equipped for this possibility with plenty of extra food and staff prepared to care for the needs of the students.

**Contact Information:** Staff at the North Cascades Institute administrative office in Sedro-Woolley may be contacted for general program information.

North Cascades Institute 810 State Route 20  
Sedro-Woolley, WA 98284  
Phone: 360-856-5700 Fax: 360-856-1934

**Emergency Contacts:** In the event of an emergency, schools and families can reach teachers and program staff at the following numbers:

North Cascades Environmental Learning Center | 206-526-2599  
Eric Buher, Mountain School Manager | 206-526-2564  
Maria Santiago, Learning Center Director | 206-526-2590 (after office hours) | 802-989-3353 (cell)  
Jeff Giesen, Associate Director | 425-213-8394 (after office hours)

## DIRECTIONS TO MOUNTAIN SCHOOL

Mountain School is located at the North Cascades Environmental Learning Center on the shores of Diablo Lake in North Cascades National Park.

**Directions from the West:** From I-5, take exit 230 in Burlington and travel east on State Route 20 (North Cascades Highway) to mile 127.5. Turn left onto Diablo Dam Road, proceed over the dam, turn right and travel approximately 1 mile to the Learning Center. Please drive carefully as the road is narrow and it can be extremely windy. The Learning Center parking lot will be clearly marked on your right at the end of the road. Mountain School staff will meet you in the parking lot. After parking, follow signs to the office where luggage will be unloaded (approximately 0.3 mile from parking lot).

Estimated driving time to the Learning Center from Seattle: 3 hrs; Bellingham: 2 hrs; Sedro-Woolley: 1.5 hrs.

**\*\*IMPORTANT:** One chaperone from your school group must drive separately so that a vehicle will be at the Learning Center in the event that a student must leave early, or an emergency should occur.

## ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

**Arrival Time:** We would like to have schools arrive at the Environmental Learning Center between 10:30am and 11:00am. If you cannot arrive by 11:00am, please contact the Learning Center at 206-526-2599. Keep in mind that most cell phones do not work east of Marblemount. Verizon phones work in Newhalem.

**Late Arrival:** Contact the Learning Center if any member of your group plans to arrive later than 4:00pm. To access the Learning Center, you must drive across Diablo Dam—due to national security, the dam is gated at approximately 4:15pm each day. We can arrange for entry into the gate after hours if we know ahead of time.

**Phones:** Most cell phones do not work east of Marblemount. There is Wi-Fi on campus for adult access only. Wi-Fi can be used for Skype, Google Hangout, Facetime, etc. Your cell phone may also have Wi-Fi calling or texting capabilities.

**Gas Stations:** Don't forget to gas up! The closest gas station is located in Marblemount near milepost 106, approximately 21 miles west of the Learning Center. We encourage you to arrive on site with a full tank of gas.

**Departure Time:** We suggest that schools depart between 11:00am-12:00pm on their last day to give students enough trail time, as well as time to eat lunch, before loading onto the bus. If you would like to adjust your departure time from the suggested time above, please let us know so that we can plan our programs accordingly.

**Rest Stops:** Howard Miller Steelhead Park, located 40 miles east of I-5 on State Route 20. Turn right on State Route 530 in Rockport, travel one block and turn right into Howard Miller Steelhead Park. Public restrooms are available.

## PROGRAM GUIDELINES FOR ADULTS

### Teacher and Chaperone Guidelines:

1. There must be a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 2 adult chaperones for each trail group. Trail groups can have up to 16 students per instructor, but we aim for 12-13.
2. We require a minimum of 2 adults per lodge.
3. One chaperone must drive separately so a vehicle will be at the Learning Center in the event that a student must leave early, or an emergency should occur.
4. Teachers and chaperones are responsible for student supervision. We expect that all teachers and chaperones will refrain from drinking alcoholic beverages or using marijuana during the entire Mountain School session. As such, no alcohol or marijuana is allowed in the lodges or on campus during the program.
5. We are a smoke-free campus. Smoking is only allowed off campus grounds (i.e. in our parking lot).

### Teacher and Chaperone Responsibilities:

1. Overall preparedness—Help students be prepared for all activities; several reminders will be needed (i.e. BRNJWPLS [backpack, raingear, nametag, journal, water bottle, pencil, layers, sit pad], meeting times and places).
2. Field Study—Be an active participant in the trail group by role modeling appropriate behavior and assisting in reinforcing the instructor’s behavioral expectations for students. Follow the lead of the trail instructor. Encourage student inquiry and active participation from all students in the trail group. Teachers and chaperones should be physically able to hike 3-5 miles each day and should be prepared to spend the entire day outside.
3. Medications—Depending on your school’s policy, teachers and/or chaperones may be required to distribute student medications. Mountain School staff are unable to distribute student medications.
4. Meal times—Help our staff facilitate an orderly mealtime; assist staff with crowd control and dining hall expectations. Assist students and staff with dining hall clean up after meals.
5. Free time—Teachers and chaperones are responsible for supervising students during free time between 5:00-6:00pm. Free time areas include the library, playfield, and lodges. During this period, there must be an adult with students at all times, and we ask that teachers act as transporters for students between these locations.
6. Lodges—Supervise students in lodges and enforce lights out.
7. Check out—Assist students with lodge clean up on the last day. Students may only head to breakfast after they have stripped beds, swept rooms and common areas, and moved gear to the office area.
8. Be a positive role model—Come to Mountain School ready to participate with enthusiasm and a good attitude. Remember that your main role at Mountain School is to provide supervision to, and interact with, ALL students.
9. Illness—It is expected that all students will participate in hikes and daily activities unless physically ill. If student is ill, they will need to be supervised by teachers or chaperones, or else be sent home.
10. **Optional:** It’s a good idea to bring an alarm clock, a watch, a thermos for tea/coffee, and a flashlight.



## PROGRAM GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS

### Mountain School Expectations

1. Respect Yourself
2. Respect Others
3. Respect the Environment

### Mountain School Rules

1. Only walking while exploring with your trail group. Instructors will let you know when you can run!
2. RULE OF 3'S: Students must be with at least one other student and an adult when leaving the group or moving between free time areas. Never put yourself in the situation where you are alone with a student.
3. RULE OF KNEES: Do not climb anything higher than your knee.
4. Only water in lodges (no food or drinks)
5. BE PREPARED – **BRNJWPLS**: *Backpack, rain gear, name tag, journal, water bottle, pencil, layers, sit pad*

### Lodge Guidelines:

- No electronics (cell phones, radios, iPods, computer games, etc.), knives, hair dryers, candy, gum, or money are allowed at Mountain School. The only exception to this rule is cameras or cellphones used for taking photographs only.
- Quiet time is 9:00pm to 7:00am All lights must be out by 10:00pm at the latest, typically earlier for younger students.
- The teacher will make room assignments prior to arrival at Mountain School; only those students assigned to a room are allowed inside that room.
- Absolutely NO food or drinks (except water) are allowed in or around lodges.

## TEACHER CHECKLIST

Teachers, please use this checklist to ensure your school group's information is received by Mountain School staff well in advance of your arrival.

### 4 to 6 Weeks Prior to Mountain School

- Copy and send out **Parent Letter, Participant Information and Release Form, COVID Waiver, and Packing List**
- Begin to recruit chaperones
- Schedule a virtual student pre-trip visit (Information and scheduling options will be emailed to you.)

### 3 to 4 Weeks Prior to Mountain School

- Select chaperones and send them the Chaperone Letter (page 15) and Chaperone Role Information (page 7)
- Collect forms and fees from students and chaperones. Teachers also need to fill out Participant Information and Release forms for themselves.
- Check that Participant Information and Release forms are completed, ***signed on the back***, and have accurate medical and dietary information. **(Students with incomplete forms cannot stay at Mountain School)**
- Arrange with your school finance office to send a check or Purchase Order to North Cascades Institute *(Please do not bring payment with you)*

### 3 Weeks Prior to your arrival at Mountain School

- Email all pre-trip forms to [mountainschool@ncascades.org](mailto:mountainschool@ncascades.org)

*Please complete these forms electronically. Be sure to include the first and last names of participants.*

- Completed **Pre-trip Questionnaire Form**
- Completed **Trail Group Form**
- Completed **Lodge/Room Assignment Form**
- Completed **Medical Alerts/Dietary Restrictions Form** *(Include information for students, chaperones, and teachers)*

## 2 to 3 Weeks Prior to Mountain School

\_\_\_ Confirm bus transportation arrangements, give schedule and directions to bus driver

\_\_\_ Make copies of the following to bring to Mountain School:

- Participant Information and Release forms (all originals must stay at Mountain School, so you may want to make copies to keep for your trip home)
- Trail Group and Room Assignment forms

\_\_\_ Meet with the chaperones:

- Share trail group and room assignments with chaperones
- Discuss responsibilities and expectations with chaperones

\_\_\_ With students:

- Discuss expected academic goals and behavior expectations; discuss consequences for students who do not follow behavioral expectations
- Have the scheduled Mountain School pre-trip meeting with your students
- Go over packing list. Please contact the Mountain School team if you are aware of any students who need to borrow gear.

## Arrival day at Mountain School

\_\_\_ Make sure each student and chaperone have:

- Sack lunch for the first day
- Daypack: with water bottle, raingear, hat and gloves, clothing layers, and zip lock bag with pencil for journal
- Separate bag with everything else on the packing list
- Remind students NOT to bring extra food, electronics, money, knives, etc.

\_\_\_ Bring completed and signed Participant Information and Release forms for all participants. A member of the Mountain School team will collect these forms from you as soon as you arrive at the Learning Center.



Dear Parents/Guardians,

Mountain School is a nationally recognized environmental education and field science program offered by North Cascades Institute in partnership with North Cascades National Park. Your child's class will be participating in Mountain School as part of their school science curriculum. This opportunity provides students with a safe and positive outdoor educational experience that allows them to develop social, academic, and physical skills. Educators who specialize in teaching young people in the outdoors will lead your child on hikes, activities, and exploration.

Mountain School is held at the North Cascades Environmental Learning Center, 68 miles east of I-5 on State Route 20 in North Cascades National Park. Students, chaperones, and teachers sleep in lodge rooms, spend their days exploring and participating in educational activities, and learn collaborative living skills during the 3-day, 2-night program.

Your child's class will be attending Mountain School from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.

Enclosed with this letter you will find:

- Participant Information and Release Form
- COVID Waiver
- Packing List
- Mountain School Informational Handout

Please return the completed Participant Information and Release Form to your child's teacher by \_\_\_\_\_.

**Be sure to read and sign the back of the form.**

Spring and Fall weather in the North Cascades can be unpredictable. While we hope for sunny and warm days, it is crucial to be prepared for cold, wet, and windy weather. Please carefully look over the Mountain School packing list well in advance to make sure your child will be adequately prepared for Mountain School. If your child is missing something on the list, Mountain School has a large gear room with additional supplies. We are happy to loan students anything they need while in the program.

In rare instances State Route 20 can close between the Environmental Learning Center and the town of Newhalem due to rock, snow, or mudslides. In this rare event, a road closure may delay your child's return home. Learning Center staff are well equipped for this possibility with plenty of extra food and staff prepared to care for the needs of your child. This has happened only twice during the Mountain School season in over 30 years of programming.

Support from parents is essential in making this a successful and positive educational experience for everyone involved with Mountain School. Parents/guardians are welcome to volunteer as chaperones on this trip! We request that all teachers and chaperones participate in trail activities and assist with supervision of students throughout the duration of the Mountain School program. Please contact your child's teacher if you are interested in accompanying your child's class as a chaperone or if you have any questions or concerns.

We look forward to sharing this unique field experience with your child! For more information, please visit the Mountain School section of our website at <https://ncascades.org/signup/schools/mountain-school>

Sincerely,

Mountain School Staff

## MOUNTAIN SCHOOL PACKING LIST

Please carefully look over the following checklist and check each item as it is packed. If you have trouble coming up with any of these items, please let your teacher know well before your Mountain School visit, and we will be happy to provide them for you. Also, please label your belongings! **When you arrive at Mountain School, come dressed ready to spend the day outside. You should arrive with your backpack ready to go and your overnight bag packed separately.**

### Backpack—packed with the seven items listed below:

- Rain jacket (and rain pants if you have them)
- Warm fleece or jacket
- Warm hat, preferably wool
- Warm gloves
- Water bottle (watertight, so you can carry it in your bag without leaking)
- Sack lunch for the first day
- Quart-size zip lock bag for journal, with pencil

### In another bag, backpack, or suitcase, please pack the following:

- Shoes for playing and learning outside (1 pair of sturdy water-resistant hiking boots OR 2 pairs of sneakers - extras for when 1 pair gets wet. No sandals or open-toed shoes)
- 3 pairs of wool or synthetic socks
- Long underwear, leggings, or thick tights
- Underwear (3 changes)
- 2 pairs of long pants
- Warm sweater or sweatshirt
- Long sleeve shirt and 2 other shirts
- Towel and washcloth
- Warm sleeping bag, or bedroll with sheet plus blanket

**\*\*\* Each lodge room includes a fitted sheet, pillow, and pillowcase for every bed.**

### In a zip lock or toiletry bag labeled with your NAME, please pack the following:

- Toothbrush and toothpaste
- Soap
- Sunscreen
- Personal toiletries

### Give to your teacher:

- Approved medications and written directions (with your name on it—teacher will oversee all medications)

### Optional:

- Camera and extra battery or film NOTE: If your phone is your primary camera, students can bring this if pre-approved by the teacher. They are NOT permitted to use phones for any other reason. There is no cell service on campus.
- Binoculars
- Book to read at free time or bedtime

\*Do NOT bring any candy, gum, extra food, blow dryers, hair spray, hair gels, makeup, games, iPods, cell phones, computer games, knives, or money!

\*Please bring only what you will need and pack tightly. **You are responsible for carrying your own belongings approximately 0.3 miles uphill from the bus to your lodge room.**



Dear Chaperone,

Thank you for volunteering your time as a Mountain School chaperone! Your participation in this program serves a vital role in making this experience a very special learning opportunity for your child and their class. In order for Mountain School to be successful, it is important that all chaperones know how the program works and what is expected of them.

Upon arrival at Mountain School, an adult orientation will reiterate chaperone responsibilities and expectations, as well as define Mountain School program goals, Learning Center boundaries, and safety rules. Chaperones are expected to supervise students throughout the duration of the program, including overnight. Chaperones will be assigned to one trail group for the duration of the program to help facilitate the group learning process during the day and assigned to one lodge to ensure adequate overnight supervision.

The most important chaperone engagement duties are to:

- Actively participate in all lessons/activities with the learning groups (***Chaperones should be able to hike up to 5 miles each day and should be comfortable spending all day in the elements***)
- Encourage student participation and cooperation in all activities
- Assist instructors in enforcing behavioral expectations
- Supervise student recreation and free time
- Make sure students are in their rooms at bedtime
- Enforce "lights out"
- Be a positive and supportive role model!

Chaperones (and teachers) will also be responsible for attending to student needs at night. For risk management purposes, we require that students sleep 3-4 per room and that they only enter rooms they are assigned to.

It is very helpful to the program if you attend a chaperone meeting with your child's teacher. This will help you become oriented with the schedule and your responsibilities. While on trail, we expect chaperones to take an active role in supporting North Cascades Institute instructors during trail activities, games, discussions, and exploratory hikes. The way you fulfill your role will strongly affect the experience of the students. Although safety is primarily the responsibility of the NCI instructor, you may be called upon for support.

At least one chaperone must have their personal vehicle at the Learning Center in the event that a student needs to go home before the completion of the program. In addition to the items listed on the Mountain School Packing List sent home with your student, we recommend that each chaperone bring an alarm clock, a watch, and a flashlight (if it is getting dark early during the dates you attend Mountain School). You may also wish to bring a travel mug for hot drinks while on the trail. If you anticipate needing to make a phone call while here, please be aware that there is no cell reception on campus. We do have Wi-Fi for adult use, but we request that you use it with discretion or after hours, as this is an electronic-free campus for students.

Please contact your child's teacher regarding any responsibility you may have to cover tuition fees. These fees may or may not be covered by the school district.

We look forward to sharing this special experience with you!

Sincerely,

Mountain School Staff