Differences Between Trip Positions

A Trip Trainee is someone who has demonstrated the interest and motivation to want to join the trip staff of the Adventure Trip Program. They are willing to learn, support and assist while learning the basics of the activity. Trainees are to shadow trips and observe.

A Trip Apprentice is a beginner or novice who has acquired the introductory skills to actively help Trip Leaders on their programs. Responsibilities on a trip will be limited to minor support functions, learning, giving feedback one-on-one to a participant, and being actively involved in the entire trip process. The Trip Apprentice does not actively teach technical skills, but can provide instruction on basic outdoor skills.

An Assistant Leader is someone who has acquired intermediate personal technical skills and a thorough understanding of trip and experiential processes, but is not yet ready to teach all of the advanced skills of an activity. They will be able to teach all skills necessary for participants to remain safe during their programmed activity.

A Trip Leader has demonstrated unwavering maturity, the ability to handle administrative and supervisory duties without supervision, and most importantly has demonstrated the ability to make sound judgments in the field. The identified hard skills held by this person are significant in their area of expertise, and can instruct on all aspects of the activity. The level of responsibility expected, however, is proportionate with the abilities (judgment) demonstrated. Often the approval to progress to Trip Leader may appear subjective, but in all cases the decision to allow a “Check Off” to the next level should be granted only when the Graduate Assistant, senior trip staff and the individual agree that the time is right.

Expectations during a Checkout

Expectations during a checkout are high. The staff checking out must demonstrate all skills listed for the level of their checkout in that activity’s Skills Assessment. Note that on some trips it may be impossible to obtain all the items listed on the Competency Checklist. In this situation the staff, in coordination with the Graduate Assistant, will use their judgment on the checkout. To checkout, the staff member must clearly communicate to the Graduate Assistant that they would like to check out on a given task and the Graduate Assistant will watch the task and evaluate its effectiveness. The effectiveness of the task will be dependent on the task.

Example: If a climbing Assistant Trip Leader wants to checkout as Trip Leader, they will demonstrate their ability to build an anchor system. They will be evaluated on their efficiency setting the anchor, as well as the effectiveness of the anchor. As listed in the Skills Assessment for Climbing, an Assistant Trip Leader must be able to set-up, tear down, and rappel from a “bombproof” anchor. Setting this anchor must be efficient as well as safe.

This is the same with interpersonal skills associated with a trip. Though harder to evaluate, all Trip Staff must be effective instructors. Evaluating interpersonal skills are done through debriefs, evaluating how staff interact with participants, how staff handles situations, and reviewing participant evaluations. The final decision in all checkouts is up to the Graduate Assistant. However, Trip Staff play an important part in the checkout process. Thorough debriefs and communication between all staff members are important when dealing with checkouts; if the staff on the trip are not comfortable with you leading, or instructing them you will not checkout. Know that at the level of Trip Leader, you will have a lot of responsibility. If the trip goes wrong, it will be on the shoulders of Trip Leader. Because of this level of leadership has the highest expectations. A staff member checking out for this level must not only be proficient in the hard skills required, but must demonstrate maturity and levelheaded thinking. When checking out remember to be safe and thorough, and you will not have a problem. Be sure to communicate beforehand to the Graduate Assistant and Trip Staff and find out their personal expectations for what a successful checkout should be.
How to Fail a Checkout
There are several ways to fail a checkout. Not following safety guidelines is an automatic failure to checkout, as well as forgetting important paperwork. Failure to demonstrate each competency safely and effectively are also grounds to fail a checkout. Failure to arrive on time for trip activities, inability to act differently from participants or from the previous level may result in failing a checkout.

If you fail a checkout, do not get discouraged. This simply means you have room to improve your skills further. A checkout should be textbook perfect; staff need to know you are capable of having a perfect trip, even if future trips have a few minor errors.