



Search for the Assistant Head of School for Faculty and Academics

The Taft School

Watertown, CT

THE SEARCH

[The Taft School](#) (Taft), one of the nation's premier college-preparatory boarding and day schools, seeks a collaborative, empathetic, and strategic leader to serve as the first permanent Assistant Head of School for Faculty and Academics (AHFA). This is an exciting moment for Taft, as they introduce a new senior leadership role that will advance a variety of cross-functional strategic initiatives to ensure an integrated educational experience for students and a rewarding professional path for members of the faculty and staff. At the same time, this moment represents a new chapter for a closely knit and dedicated school community, and this leader must thus inspire trust and confidence in the face of cultural change, and believe deeply in a schoolwide culture of learning, growth, pedagogical experimentation, and reflection.

The Taft School was founded in 1890 by Horace D. Taft who believed that character, above all else, determined success in life. Nearly 135 years later, Taft students, or Tafties as they are colloquially known, continue to live out the School's motto of "Not to be served, but to serve" both in and out of the classroom. Collectively, Taft students and alumni seek to better the world around them on a local, national, and international scale through engagement in the [Watertown community](#) and contributions to [global inquiry](#). Taft's 583 students enjoy a beautiful Collegiate Gothic campus, exceptional faculty, a rigorous academic curriculum, and art and athletic programs that compete on a national scale. After Taft, they are admitted to the nation's most prestigious institutions.

Taft's appeal is strong, as evidenced by its 1,650 annual applications and 16 percent acceptance rate. The campus attracts a mix of boarding and day students and prioritizes enrolling diverse classes: 42 percent of students identify as students of color; 19 percent are international students, hailing from 54 different countries; and 35 percent of the student body receives financial aid. As of June 2024, Taft boasts an endowment of \$344 million, one of the top 15 boarding school endowments in the nation. Taft maintains an annual operating budget of approximately \$51 million. The School's strong tradition of alumni giving, with 34 percent of alumni donating annually, ensures its ability to sustain excellence for the coming generations. Additionally, more than 90 percent of Taft's current parents contribute annually to the Parents' Fund.

In July 2023, the Taft School welcomed Peter Becker '95 as its sixth Head of School. Mr. Becker, a Taft alumnus, is a strong believer in the transformative role a Taft education can play in the intellectual and moral formation of its bright and cordial student body. He is committed to strengthening Taft's welcoming

and inclusive educational community of diverse leaders and critical thinkers. The Assistant Head of School for Faculty and Academics will report directly to and work alongside Mr. Becker to write Taft's next chapter and strategic plan. Serving as a crucial thought partner and advisor to the Head of School and senior leadership team, the AHFA will play a key role in advancing and integrating the educational mission throughout the full life cycle of the Taft experience.

HISTORY & OVERVIEW

The Taft School opened its doors in 1890 with a broad – yet singular – mission that was ahead of its time: to educate the whole student. Originally known as Mr. Taft's School, Taft was founded by Mrs. Robert Black near the turn of the century. She fortuitously asked her friend, Horace D. Taft, a Yale-educated teacher, and brother of the future 27th U.S. President, to lead the School. He accepted the job with enthusiasm, and for 46 years, he led Taft as Head of School through several name changes, campus moves, and new waves of students.

Throughout his tenure as the School's leader, Mr. Horace Taft remained committed to the holistic education The Taft School provided its students – both through rigorous academics in the classroom and extracurricular learning in clubs, sports, hallways, and dorms. To this day, Taft students graduate with a sense of self, a sense of place, and a readiness to take on the world.

Taft's 226-acre campus features historic buildings with state-of-the-art and sustainable technologies. Notable buildings include: the Lady Ivy Kwok Wu Science and Mathematics Center, measuring at 48,000 square feet and featuring a PCR machine for DNA replication and an aquatic biomes center; the STEM Laboratory, which houses three hi-tech makerspaces, a laser cutter, CNC machine, 3D printer, and interactive smart tools; and the Hulbert Taft Jr. Library with 58,000 volumes and full text databases with access to more than 12,000 periodical articles. Additionally, the campus features multiple dance and art studios, two theaters, 16 tennis courts, two field houses, two ice rinks, and an 18-hole golf course. Serving as a community connector, Main Hall, through which every student and teacher walks multiple times each day, is a key feature of Taft's architecture and culture.

The Taft community is comprised of around 583 students in grades 9-12 and a small group of post-graduate students. With 130 faculty, Taft students benefit from a 5 to 1 faculty ratio. While most students board (five-sixths of the student body), the remaining one-sixth commute daily from neighboring towns. Taft receives around 1,650 new student applications per year, 61 percent of which are from private schools and 34 percent from public schools.

The Taft School is located in Watertown, a historic and rural town in western Connecticut with just over 20,000 residents. Its location allows easy access to the conveniences and cultural attractions of Connecticut's larger cities and towns and the beautiful hills and open spaces of northwest Connecticut and the Southern Berkshires. Taft is less than an hour away from Hartford's Bradley International Airport

and less than thirty minutes away from both Amtrak and Metro-North train stops. Conveniently, Taft is also located two hours from New York City and 2.5 hours from Boston.

ACADEMICS, CO-CURRICULAR PROGRAMS, & STUDENT LIFE

At the core of Taft's mission to educate the whole person lies an emphasis on high scholarship and intellectual endeavor. Taft translates that mission into a roadmap for learning that is bolstered by a broad, evolving, and innovative curriculum. This is further advanced by a robust Honor Code, and built on a strong intellectual and academic foundation, all of which is brought to life by a dedicated and caring faculty, made up of highly educated experts in their respective fields.

Courses at Taft are spread out across seven academic departments: Arts, English, Global Studies and Service, History, Mathematics, Science, and World Language. Each semester, students choose from more than 200 one-unit courses to fulfill the School's 26-unit graduation requirement. To graduate, Taft students are required to take one unit of English every semester, along with four units of History, four units of Laboratory Science, Level III of a World Language, Algebra II and Trigonometry, and four units of Arts. Taft offers one of the nation's first [independent study programs](#), which, for more than fifty years, has allowed students to pursue their passions through high-level, inquiry-based, self-directed courses of study. Taft students may also choose to study away from Taft for a semester or two and/or enroll in Global Online Academy classes. Students may apply to participate in the two-year [Global Leadership Institute](#) (GLI), a competitive co-curricular program linking Taft and Waterbury public schools through shared learning and leadership experiences. Students may pursue a [Global Studies and Service Diploma](#), which pushes its students to engage locally and globally as agents of social change.

Additionally, Taft's experiential and applied learning opportunities prepare students from Grade 9 and onward not only to thrive in the 21st century, but also to lead the way as globally literate, intellectually robust, and ethically principled graduates and citizens of an increasingly interconnected world. A hallmark of Taft's academic approach is the continuous evaluation and modification of its academic program to reflect the most advanced teaching and learning methodologies, while providing students with unique opportunities to pursue their passions. As previously mentioned, students are also guided by a campus Honor Code informed by Taft's core tenet of "character, above all else, determines success in life." Every assessment, whether daily homework or a final exam, ends with the student's written pledge: "I have neither given nor received aid on this assignment," a testament and commitment to the importance of honesty and integrity.

Academically and co-curricularly, Taft students are surrounded by the arts. They may pursue artistic inquiry in a wide range of disciplines, from ceramics and sculpture to design and drawing, from dance and music to theater and video arts. Academic courses in the arts support the School's mission of educating the whole person and are required to graduate. Opportunities outside of the classroom—from concerts and theater to gallery exhibits and travel—not only broaden and enhance learning, but also bring energy, culture, creativity, and balance.

Taft's athletic program is also an integral component of school life. Students at Taft participate in athletics at all levels—from intramural programs to 27 competitive varsity teams. Through physical health and wellness classes in addition to the athletic program, all students are taught the value of health and wellness, the importance of a lifelong commitment to fitness, and the enjoyment that participating in all forms of athletics can bring. Taft coaches have built one of the most successful athletic programs in New England and encourage fair play, respect for opponents, a love of the game, competitive spirit, and team loyalty. As a result, students leave Taft with an understanding of hard work and good sportsmanship, a sense of responsibility to one's team and teammates, the ability to set goals, and an overall commitment to healthy living through physical activity.

LEADERSHIP & GOVERNANCE

On July 1, 2023, Peter Becker '95 began his tenure as Taft's sixth Head of School. He received a B.A. with Distinction in Religious Studies from the University of Virginia and an M.A. in History from Yale University. He was awarded a Fulbright Grant to study classical history, architecture, and archeology at the American Academy in Rome, Italy. After working briefly as an investment banking analyst, Becker first worked with independent school students while on the staff of FOCUS (the Fellowship of Christians in Universities and Schools). He began his boarding school career in 2003 at The Lawrenceville School. In 2012, Becker was appointed Head of School at The Frederick Gunn School, where he left a legacy of school innovation, improvement, and change. Becker is also a leader in the independent school educational landscape, attending and presenting at professional conferences, and serving or having served on the board of The Association of Boarding Schools (TABS), the Connecticut Association of Independent Schools (CAIS), The Washington Montessori School, and as a member of the Heads and Principals Association.

Taft is governed by a dedicated Board of Trustees. Nearly all 35 trustees are Taft alumni or parents of Taft graduates. They bring important expertise, insight, and a personal commitment to guiding Taft's future. The Board operates through a committee structure, and the Assistant Head of School for Faculty and Academics will work with the School Performance Committee to oversee academic life at Taft.

THE ROLE OF ASSISTANT HEAD OF SCHOOL FOR FACULTY AND ACADEMICS

The Assistant Head of School for Faculty and Academics will collaborate with the Head of School, the Assistant Head of School for Student Life, and the Senior Administrative Team in creating Taft's learning ecosystem through two prongs: leading all aspects of faculty life, including hiring, onboarding, professional growth and feedback, compensation, and housing; as well as leading the School's academic program. An essential competency for the AHFA will be the ability to build and lead collaboratively, fostering teamwork and aligning efforts toward shared goals – critical for sustained success in this role. The AHFA will work closely with community members to increase the School's capacity to execute both immediate and long-range strategic projects and priorities; be a champion of inclusive and reflective practices that enhance community belonging; and promote the ongoing evaluation and improvement of teaching and learning across the faculty, as guided by Taft's mission, [Portrait of a Graduate](#), statement of

diversity and inclusion, and the employee code of conduct. This AHFA will have a keen understanding of the faculty's role and the academic program's significance in creating Taft's 24/7 ecosystem for whole-student learning and growth.

Reporting directly to the Head of School, this individual will oversee approximately six direct reports, including the Dean of Academic Affairs, an Administrative Assistant, the Dean of Faculty Office, the Director of Teaching and Learning, the Director of the Moorhead Academic Center, and the Director of the Library. Under the purview of this team, the Assistant Head of School for Faculty and Academics will be responsible for informing the overarching academic program strategy and structure.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

Serve as a trusted partner and advisor for the Head of School, senior leadership, and trustees.

A key leader on campus, the AHFA will provide counsel to the Head of School and other senior leaders on the academic program and faculty life. They will keep a finger on the pulse and serve as an accessible and authentic entryway for feedback on both faculty and academics. They will escalate themes and key challenges to the Head and senior leadership as needed and communicate clearly back to the faculty. They will be an expert in their work and will bring credibility to the role, honoring and recognizing the facets of Taft that make it distinct, while also exhibiting a creative mindset to leverage Taft's existing strengths and growth edges. Working closely with the Head of School and other senior leaders, the AHFA will establish and clearly communicate the priorities of Taft to the broader school community, often leading key strategic initiatives that will help shape the future of student learning and growth via faculty development and the academic program.

Lead a transformative, mission-aligned approach to faculty recruitment and retention.

In a dynamic educational environment, the role of the Taft faculty must evolve to meet emerging challenges to the "triple threat" model in residential environments, while upholding the School's commitment to academic and co-curricular excellence. What boarding school educators do is a way of life—an all-consuming experience that offers distinctive opportunities and challenges, and leading these dedicated individuals requires generosity of spirit, empathy, tact, creativity, good humor, and grace. The AHFA will lead efforts to refine and clearly distinguish between faculty and staff roles, ensuring alignment with Taft's mission and values in responsibilities, benefits, and hiring practices. This role involves collaborating closely with the Director of Human Resources, the Dean of Faculty Office, the Dean of Academic Affairs, the Director of Teaching and Learning, and the Director of the Moorhead Academic Center to shape and sustain a vibrant, diverse faculty community that thrives in Taft's high-achieving, residential environment. The AHFA will also be instrumental in establishing an onboarding process and year-round recruitment strategy that effectively introduces new members to the community and supports Taft's standards for exemplary teaching, learning, and faculty engagement.

Advance Taft's commitment to teaching excellence and professional development.

The high caliber of the Taft faculty is a distinct strength of Taft's academic program, and faculty development will be a critical charge for the incoming AHFA. The faculty culture is dynamic and complex, with 50 percent of faculty having joined Taft in the last four years; the average tenure of all faculty members is just over ten years, and faculty bring varying levels of exposure to Taft (new, mid-career, and career-long Tafties). The AHFA should be attuned to the important work of sustaining a strong faculty cohort and providing all faculty with the opportunity to continue to grow, learn, and advance their teaching, undergirded by clear measures for success. The AHFA will implement a comprehensive, integrated professional growth framework for all faculty that supports Taft's mission-and-values-aligned standards for exemplary teaching, learning, and faculty engagement. This Assistant Head of School for Faculty and Academics must value a collegial atmosphere and should create an environment that ensures faculty are seen, acknowledged, and appreciated. The AHFA will help to reimagine adult learning in ways that expand their access to resources, perspectives, and contexts that can inform their craft. The AHFA must thoughtfully and collaboratively enhance the process for faculty to receive essential feedback on their work, learn from colleagues, and pursue opportunities for professional growth.

Ensure the holistic excellence of Taft's academic program by advancing a 24/7 ecosystem for whole-student learning and growth.

Boarding school educators teach constantly, inside and outside of the classroom, and the successful candidate will intimately understand this unique aspect of residential life. Students learn from the institution itself, including from the structures that govern all aspects of their days, whether in the dining hall, in the classroom, at rehearsal, in athletics, or in their dorms. This distinctive education prepares Taft students for college and life thereafter. This incoming AHFA will integrate a clear and coherent curriculum that clearly connects the "what" and the "why": what Taft's goals for student learning are, why those are the goals, and how the academic program is integrated with residential life to create conditions for those goals. The Assistant Head of School for Faculty and Academics will work closely with the Assistant Head of School for Student Life and the Dean of Academic Affairs to empower the Academic Deans and department chairs in pursuit of this collaborative framework.

Crystallize a comprehensive framework for Taft's unique, post-Advanced-Placement curriculum.

It is essential that Taft's curriculum reflects the School's unique educational philosophy that prepares students for a dynamic, interconnected world. In the spring of 2001, former Head of School William MacMullen formed a ten-member committee to examine the answer to the question: "What do we want Taft graduates to know and be able to do?" The result of their multi-year effort was the Taft Portrait of a Graduate (POG). Since the Taft curriculum has moved away from the Advanced Placement model, the POG will help shape the curriculum and define creative opportunities for deep, rigorous, contemporary, relevant, and reflective learning inside and outside of the classroom. Drawing on the experience and expertise of the exceptional Taft faculty, the POG was created to inform a unique, broad, and adaptable curriculum built on innovation, inquiry, and depth in concept and content. The Portrait of a Graduate is a living document that will evolve and continue to distinguish Taft's academic curriculum from other boarding schools. The AHFA will work with colleagues to create an academic program that aligns with the

POG and serves Taft's faculty and students. This leader will collaborate with the community to determine overarching, defining expectations for faculty that align with the Portrait of a Graduate and continue to differentiate a Taft education.

Continue to establish a sense of belonging and serve as a key champion for diversity, equity, inclusion.

Taft is an intentionally diverse institution whose members work to acknowledge, respect, and empathize with people of all different identifiers, such as race, socioeconomic status, gender identity and expression, education, age, ability, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, language, nationality, and religion. As Taft continues to evolve as an institution, the Assistant Head of School for Faculty and Academics will find ways to build equitable processes and clear guidelines that advance a sense of belonging for everyone in the Taft community. This work includes both recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty, and also ensuring that all faculty feel welcomed and included once on campus. Additionally, the AHFA will collaborate with Taft's Head of School, CFO, Director of Human Resources, and Dean of Faculty Office to establish clear and transparent processes for generous, equitable compensation and housing policies.

Support, develop, and empower a high-performing team of senior academic leaders.

This Assistant Head of School for Faculty and Academics must invest in people and create a workplace characterized by collaboration and transparency. They will inspire other leaders to make positive changes and will support a leadership culture characterized by mission-aligned and institutionally integrated goal setting, evaluation, and leadership skill-building. Together with the Head of School, the AHFA will empower a world-class, comprehensive academics team by clarifying and streamlining academically-related roles and responsibilities across the senior leadership team. Being a "triple threat" faculty member, much less a senior administrator, at a boarding school is among the most demanding professions—intellectually, emotionally, and physically. The AHFA will work to account for sustainable workloads across senior leadership and faculty due to the intersectional nature of work and life within the residential community of Taft.

QUALIFICATIONS & CHARACTERISTICS

The ideal candidate must embrace Taft's mission and fully engage in the life and rhythms of a boarding school community. Strong candidates will bring many of the following skills and attributes:

Professional Experience

- Passionately support academic excellence and continue to inspire a culture of innovation by engaging with academic leaders and faculty on critical discussions of academic policy, pedagogy, curriculum, and interdisciplinary and global education.
- Demonstrated ability to recruit faculty from diverse backgrounds and a record of working productively with diverse faculty, staff, and students.
- Proven experience as a classroom teacher and a deep understanding of the challenges that educators face.

- Established experience in being highly collegial and collaborative, with the ability to unite and inspire the faculty, while also holding colleagues accountable and motivated to continually develop excellent teaching and school service.
- MA degree or higher required in a substantive academic discipline taught at Taft or M.Ed.

Personal Qualities

- Excellent leadership skills, including the ability to delegate appropriately, ensure excellent interdepartmental communication and collaboration, and guide colleagues' individual professional growth.
- Excellent interpersonal, oral, and written communication skills while using discretion to maintain confidentiality; strong emotional intelligence.
- Serve as a strong, experienced educational leader to create and implement clear administrative systems, policies, and guidelines.
- Demonstrated effectiveness as a team builder and decision maker who has experience empowering individuals to act in an institution's best interest.
- An orientation toward listening to and inviting varied points of view to establish a culture of trust, transparency, and candor.
- Student-centered leadership with a proven passion for mentoring and supporting the professional growth of faculty and staff.

Research shows that people belonging to structurally marginalized groups often only apply to jobs if they meet 100% of the qualifications. As no one ever meets 100% of the qualifications, we encourage you to apply if you feel that most of the above qualifications reflect your experience and expertise.

TO APPLY

All inquiries, nominations, referrals, and applications (resumes and letters of interest) should be sent electronically and in confidence to Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm. The target salary range for this role is \$200,000 to \$230,000 and will be commensurate with experience.

Carrie Alexander, Berkley Braden, Arianna Williams, and Marlyn Desire of Isaacson, Miller
<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/taft-school/assistant-head-school-faculty-and-academics>

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