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Exploring how resident advisors create meaning of their paraprofessional fall training and its transfer: a constructivist case study

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EXPLORING HOW RESIDENT ADVISORS CREATE MEANING OF THEIR
PARAPROFESSIONAL FALL TRAINING AND ITS TRANSFER:
A CONSTRUCTIVIST CASE STUDY

Dissertation Submitted Toward Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Dean F. Kennedy

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
School of Educational Research, Leadership, and Technology
Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership

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has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in School of Educational Research, Leadership, and Technology, Program of Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership

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ABSTRACT

Kennedy, Dean F. Exploring How Resident Advisors Create Meaning of Their
    Paraprofessional Fall Training and Its Transfer: A Constructivist Case Study.
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Utilizing constructivist research methods, this case study explores how 12

Resident Advisors (RAs) make meaning of the Fall RA training experience, as well as the

process of applying what they have learned in training to their living communities.

While each RA experienced training and its transfer uniquely, five themes emerged

connecting participants' stories: the importance of developing peer relationships,

awareness and influence of Resident Directors (RDs), RA experience over time, RA

training structure, and RA training content remembered by RAs. Overall, the most critical

components of Fall training identified by participants were opportunities to build

relationships with their peers, learn from more experienced RAs, and directly apply what

was learned during training.

Based on participants' responses and the themes as they emerged, future research

should be broadened beyond one university's context to include other institutions varying

by size, geographic location, and on-campus housing population in order to further learn

how RAs make meaning of their training and post-training experiences. Research

utilizing a longitudinal component, mixed methods, as well as focusing on individual and

collective populations of RAs would add to existing literature in this area. Implications

for practice are many. Training designers and supervisors need to connect Fall training to staff development opportunities during the year while continually seeking and including feedback from RAs. In addition, training sessions would likely be more meaningful to participants if team building activities were woven throughout the schedule to foster and strengthen relationships among all RAs. It is important to incorporate returning RAs' perspectives into the design and implementation of training curricula as not only do they provide a significant knowledge base of the RA position, but new RAs look up to their more experienced peers and value their perspectives. Lastly, assessing participants' learning preferences, abilities, and motivations will provide supervisors and training designers a wealth of information to assist in the enhancement of training curricula.

DEDICATION

To all past, present, and future Resident Advisors who value the power of building

relationships with peers and residents; as well as residence life professionals seeking to

enhance the lives of all students who live in their building communities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As my committee, family, friends, and peers will attest, I struggle with finding words to express my appreciation and feelings for everyone who has supported me throughout my life and especially this doctoral program. My initial pursuit of higher education started with, "well, what else would I do?" after high school and it was Mom, Dad, and sister, Hope who made sure I had a home to visit when a reprieve from college was essential, in addition to the occasional laundry runs. Without Suzanne Seplow, Leanne Fenner, Dave Zamansky, and Martha Tatro, who introduced me to residence life and challenged me to be a better Resident Advisor and stretch beyond my comfort zone, I would never have sought a Masters degree 2000 miles from home to start advancing in the field.

I attribute most of my quest for knowledge and persistence in education to Gardiner "Tuck" Tucker, Katrina Rodriguez, and especially Flo Guido, who all continually supported me personally, professionally, and academically during both my master's and doctoral programs. Not only did they provide consistent support throughout my educational and professional journey, but they challenged me to reach higher within myself to be the best researcher and writer I could be. My ever-slowly advancing ability to write and think critically about multiple perspectives is the compilation of these caring academicians and professionals who are selfless in how they care about student growth and development. Flo's patience and support for me during this process is nothing short of extraordinary as I bounced around the country attempting to advance in the profession

and slowly whittle away at the writing process, which is painfully difficult for me. Her ability to provide sincere, honest, and candid feedback is a testament to our friendship and her desire to challenge her advisees to higher than they think possible. I would not be where I am today without her mentorship, guidance, feedback, support, and compassion. In addition, I would like to acknowledge my fourth committee member, Dr. Kathy Fahey, who has been a patient and understanding life saver, stepping in at the eleventh hour to support me through this process.

This brings me to the participants in this study, who are some of the most dedicated, caring, compassionate, and motivated RAs I have ever worked with throughout my career in residential life. Our conversations were never short of amazing, inspirational, and grounded, as we explored their experiences during and after training together. Each individual made a significant impact on how I view my position, profession, and how we as professionals work with RAs within and beyond training. In addition to the participants are my amazing friends Tresa Barlage, Lisa Labarbara, Heather McKenzie, Tim Blair, Gay Perez, Hassel Morrison, who all served as sounding boards and/or inn keepers during the course of my study, in addition to the occasional technical support when I needed a printer at the last minute. It is also important to acknowledge the leadership and many employees of the housing department at Hunter University, who supported me in this research while I was employed there, as well as after a position across the country pulled me away from students, staff, and my job at that institution. The continual support from administrators within and beyond the housing department is reflective of their care and compassion for students who live at, and attend, Hunter University.

Similarly, I would not have finished this manuscript without the incredible assistance of Jody Donovan who served as my peer mentor and shoulder to cry on. Jody took time away from her family, friends, and work to read all 800 single spaced pages of my data, offering thoughts and suggestions for patterns, then would spend hours with me on the phone discussing participants' experiences and emergent themes. In addition, Jody's skill at editing is remarkable as her feedback challenged me to think beyond my own writing capacity and truly reflect participants' stories. Jody also served as my confidant when I had none, pushing me forward to continue transcribing and writing when I did not think I could ever finish.

All in all, this has been one of the most challenging and rewarding projects in my life and I look forward to applying what I have learned to my current and future positions, whether they are in residential life or beyond. While this dissertation represents the fruits of my labor over the past several years, the application of what is contained herein rests on the shoulders of every professional, graduate student, training designer, and student leader who have the opportunity to implement changes to training curricula. For that reason, I want to acknowledge and thank every individual who reads this manuscript and strives to make a positive difference in the world.

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CHAPTER

PREFACE

The narrative that follows reveals the stories of 12 Resident Assistants as they make meaning of Fall RA training and the application of what they learned to their living communities. Although given several opportunities throughout this study to choose pseudonyms, every participant proudly shared their experiences in hopes that readers of this document will value the candor with which they provide their perspectives. However, while University Housing and Residential Life leaders endorsed this study, the expanse of Hunter University's programs and services, including the housing department, will remain under the protection of pseudonyms.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Higher education across the U.S. is facing a paradigm shift in what college

students, their families, and businesses expect from colleges and universities (Ekman &

Pelletier, 2008). Residential housing programs are not void of this concern, as they strive

to increase the intentionality with which they implement initiatives and services

dedicated to address students' needs from a holistic perspective. An important element of

residential housing programs are staff members on the 'front lines' with residents,

commonly called Resident Advisors (RAs), paraprofessional staff members who live and

work in residential communities.

Currently, most institutions with on-campus housing employ paraprofessionals

who are generally responsible for creating positive educational environments for

residential undergraduate and graduate students (Upcraft & Pilato, 1982) where students

learn about themselves while living with others. The role of residential student staff has

developed since the founding of higher education in the United States, but their role as

paraprofessionals who are subject to formal job training came about during the 1960s. As

this student staff position developed, an exponential increase in skills required for them to

be successful leaders and role models in their residential communities is noted (Gentry,

2006; Webb, 2003). In addition to paraprofessionals needing a more extensive skill set,

colleges and universities from the 1960s until the present are witnessing an increasingly

diverse array of constituents placing higher expectations on colleges and universities to

produce educated young adults with excellent interpersonal skills who will immediately

acquire a job upon graduation. This has created a dynamic where now, more than ever,

there is a need for highly trained, proficient student staff members who can support the

continued growth and development of the holistic college student. In most residential

institutions, these paraprofessionals become an integral component in student life,

growth, and development beyond the classroom (Gentry).

Residential programs are at the fulcrum of a delicate balancing act as

paraprofessionals are responsible for a plethora of information. Yet, existing literature

does not indicate whether these staff members receive appropriate levels of training in

order to successfully complete their position responsibilities in challenging and

supporting student's holistic development (Sanford, 1966; Schuh, 1981; Webb, 2003).

Contrary to previous research focused on identifying the most effective training methods

(Greenleaf, 1967; Greenwood & Lembcke, 1972; Lynch, 1968, Marchand, 1972;

Meschanic, 1971; Schuh; Stoner, 1972; Twale & Muse, 1996), this inquiry explores the

experiences, perspectives, and meaning making of paraprofessional residential life staff

members during pre-service training and how information and skills learned during

training are transferred to their communities.

Statement of the Problem

Since the inception of residence life paraprofessionals in higher education, early

training efforts began as primarily informal and unsystematic across the U.S. (Ender,

1984). As the position became more formalized, so too did the development of pre-

service and in-service training programs, designed predominantly by entry level

residence life professionals (Blimling, 1993; Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984). Currently,

RAs at most colleges and universities are increasingly responsible for more complicated and voluminous information and require more refined skills, making it paramount they not only be adequately trained, but that their training be directly applied to residential communities. Although most training programs are designed to be comprehensive, providing paraprofessionals the skills to enhance the social and educational development of residence hall students, the literature reflects little change or advancement in training methods since the 1960s. Recent literature in the field of residence life training suggests that most training is merely a dissemination of knowledge and skills with limited attention to the applicability of what is learned (Elleven, Allen, & Wircenski, 2001).

A significant amount of effort is required to design, implement, oversee, and evaluate RA training programs, especially those that occur over a one to three week time period prior to the Fall academic term. Literature on RA training suggests the benefits of such training outweighs the resources involved to implement it (Carroll, 1981; Elleven et al., 2001; Schuh, 1981), therefore this research focused on knowledge and skills RAs learn as a result of training, in addition to how and whether those skills were directly applied to living communities following training, a process often called training transfer. As the profiles of students, as well as their needs and expectations continually change (Coles, 1995), causing challenges for higher education, are RAs equipped to address these challenges with information learned in training? In addition to an increasingly complex set of issues facing students, residential life programs are also increasing their expectations of RA job performance related to departmental mission statements, philosophies, and programming models. In the end, are housing programs and their staff meeting the needs of students through student staff training?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to explore how RAs make meaning of their experiences in Fall RA training and how they transfer the acquired knowledge and skills to their living communities at a large public four-year university in the south, hereafter referred to as Hunter University. Unlike other studies that have examined various training methods (Greenleaf, 1967; Greenwood & Lembcke, 1972; Schuh, 1981; Twale & Muse, 1996; Upcraft, 1982; Upcraft & Pilato, 1982) and the effectiveness of such training (Gimmestad, 1970; Lynch, 1968, Marchand, 1972; Meschanic, 1971; Roberts, 1972; Schuh; Stoner, 1972), this inquiry explores the deeper meaning of how RAs process and apply their training experiences to better their residential communities.

Primary Research Focus

The primary research focus for this study is to explore the ways RAs make meaning of training and how they transfer learning and skills to their living communities. Individual paraprofessional and peer group changes were explored while trying to understand how each paraprofessional made meaning of their own experiences. This study guided RAs to reflect on themselves, training, and the living communities for which they were responsible.

Ethical Considerations of the Study

In my role as a residential life professional in higher education, several delimitations arose throughout this study involving participants and me as the researcher. Resident Advisors chosen as participants lived and worked with professional colleagues and graduate students with whom I worked while employed at Hunter University. For the first three months of the study, I served as an administrator for the on-campus residential

life program which employed all of us, yet had no direct supervisory responsibilities over the participants. Three months into the study, I accepted a position at a different university on the opposite side of the U.S. I was aware that my initial dual role as administrator and researcher created situations where experiences and perspectives were shared contingent upon how participants perceived my role in the department. For example, it was possible for RAs to choose either to embellish or limit experiences over the course of this study to be seen in a favorable light or to avoid being held accountable for their actions. Similar reasons likely occurred from a peer group perspective which potentially impacted how participants described their experiences.

Last, my educational background and professional experiences could also have produced barriers to relationships with participants if I chose not to learn about and value each paraprofessional's history and reasons for becoming a Resident Advisor. Having been an RA for three years and residential life professional for 10, it was challenging for me not to project my experiences onto RAs participating in this study who may not choose student affairs as a professional career path.

Significance of the Study

In the field of higher education, it is widely known that residential paraprofessional student staff members are critical to the positive creation and continued success of encouraging educational environments (Blimling, 1993; Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984; Riker, 1965; Roberts, 1972; Upcraft & Pilato, 1982; Wemple, 1979; Wetzel, 1990). RAs interact with students in their living environments on a daily basis and are responsible for being in tune with residents' needs, interests, problems, and goals (Upcraft & Pilato). Kuhn and Powell document how the position of paraprofessional

student staff has evolved from paid or volunteer students enforcing strict policies and inspecting rooms, to peers serving as counselors and advisors to those in their living communities (as cited in Harshman & Harshman, 1974). Today's residential student staff serve in a multitude of roles: role model, counselor, teacher, student (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984), facilitator, disciplinarian (Peterman, Pilato, & Upcraft, 1979), information and referral agent, leader, programmer, organizer, and conflict mediator (Winston, Ullom, & Werring, 1984), to name a few. A shift from policy enforcer to promoter of student development follows the trend in higher education whereby students are expected to take a more active role in their education, including taking responsibility for their actions (Wetzel, 1990).

With the incorporation of developmental philosophies into residential life programs and student staff supervision, residential life professionals are responsible for ensuring that paraprofessionals are successfully trained to carry out their numerous responsibilities. In addition to training focused on applying developmental theories to a living community, student staff must receive training to address more complicated and serious issues other students face, such as depression, alcohol and drug abuse, eating disorders, sexual orientation, self-identity, and so on. Staff and administrators within higher education need to address these complex issues with student staff in order to demonstrate to constituencies within and beyond the college or university (students, parents, governing boards, legislators, etc.) that everything is being done to provide a safe, healthy, supportive environment for residential students.

The importance of housing programs creating and maintaining a safe educational environment is paramount, as colleges and universities have been described as lacking a

sense of community (Boyer, 1987). As institutions become increasingly specialized and complex (Schroeder, 1993), residential life departments have the responsibility to design a co-curricular environment where students' needs are addressed by highly trained housing paraprofessionals. Not only are housing professionals in a position to challenge students to develop in a supportive environment while their needs are being met, but they have an opportunity to enhance the development of institutions of higher education (Schroeder). By starting with an understanding of student staff training and how that training can be strengthened to meet current and future students' needs, higher education can demonstrate its commitment to student learning beyond the classroom.

As a considerable gap in RA training design and implementation currently exists, this study is significant because it assists residence life training designers to develop more intentional and meaningful training experiences for paraprofessionals. It is also important because it provides a deep analysis of the meaning making process and outcomes of RA training and how concepts learned in training are transferred to residential communities. As demands on residential life programs are increasing by both internal and external agencies, descriptions that unfolded in this study can help identify how RA training can be intentionally designed to maximize the potential by which RAs assess and address students' needs in college and university residential communities. Further, this study is unique as limited research on issues in residential life have been conducted from a constructivist paradigm, or utilizing qualitative research methodology or methods.

Self Reflection

My personal interest in this topic stems from my own experience working in residential life at six higher education institutions. I began my career as an undergraduate RA where I participated in three years of Fall training that did not seem to change from year to year. As RAs, we returned to the residence halls approximately 10 days prior to the beginning of classes and participated in training curricula with identical presenters, topics, formats, and locations. Very little, if any, information seemed transferable to the development of our communities until we were in the middle of a situation and did not know what course of action to take, such as purchasing food for a program, confronting a policy violation, or contacting a presenter. During those instances, I could not remember if I learned a specific protocol in training or not, so I would attempt to address the situation in a way that made the most sense to me.

As a residential life professional for a decade, I have coordinated, presented, or participated in similar trainings where content seems to increase from year to year, yet methods slightly change. Even when assessing and evaluating training efforts, often little, if any, feedback becomes incorporated into further in-service training or the following year's Fall training.

As I explored the background of RA training and reflected on the literature from the past 50 years, I saw the potential benefits of RAs who attended training and then applied knowledge and skills to their living communities. However, reading manuscript to manuscript did not seem to enlighten my comprehension of why and how some RAs transfer knowledge and skills learned in training to their communities, when others were not as successful. My passion for understanding how training could be conducted in such

a way that all RAs benefited was formed at this time. I believe if RAs perceive Fall training as positive and meaningful, they will not only enhance their own growth and development, but learn important information that can be applied within their residential communities. When both of these aspects are addressed through powerful training experiences, residential life programs can improve how they meet students' needs.

To a large extent, Fall RA training has not changed from my first time through as a paraprofessional 16 years ago. As training seems to remain static, I have noticed drastic changes in resident demographics at the institutions where I worked, including decreased communication skills with the rise of technology and increasing occurrences of mental and psychological emergencies. Although recent trainings I have coordinated included these topics, my experiences suggest that most RAs still seem ill-equipped to address these issues, in addition to their already long list of responsibilities. Regularly after training, RAs ask graduate and professional staff questions that were clearly covered during RA training, as reflected on the training schedule and lists of training outcomes. This made me wonder how a training model can be designed to increase what RAs retain when they are on the job in their living communities.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE DISCOURSES

In order to better understand the context of this study, explorations of the

foundations of undergraduate students living on college campuses and the student

paraprofessionals responsible for those residential communities are essential.

Specifically, the following sections outline discourses related to the historical

development of students living in college and university housing, the role of

undergraduate paraprofessional student staff, and how student staff members are trained.

The final sections of this review highlight college student learning and major tenants of

training transfer, a concept used to understand the level in which information learned

during training is applied afterwards.

Development of Student Affairs and Residence Life

Revealing the historical background of Resident Advisors (RAs) on campus

begins with a description of the context in which this undergraduate student staff position

developed. This section showcases the history of housing students on campus from the

beginning of higher education in Medieval Europe until the present, as well as the

development of residential programmatic philosophies and the evolution of 'student

affairs.' Finally, the emerging role of professional, graduate, and paraprofessional staff in

residence life programs is discussed.

History of Housing Students on Campus

The origins of higher education institutions can be traced back to 12th Century Europe where elites and their children were trained to serve both church and state in urban centers through emerging professions of law, medicine, and clergy (Perkin, 1997). As these universities escalated in notoriety throughout Europe, students traveled significant distances to be taught by masters not only in these professions, but to gain "esoteric knowledge and wisdom . . . to learn the meaning of life and eternity" (Perkin, p. 5). These preliminary residential learning environments generally existed in homes or properties owned by local nobles, where older masters tutored younger students based on the model in which friars of the time educated younger clergy in residences they maintained (Perkin).

As the desire to learn under these instructors grew, the city of Paris witnessed the birth of a guild of masters by 1170, professors who organized to offer a structured curriculum to interested and wealthy students in one location. With 14 to 15 year old boys coming from all over Europe to these educational centers, a college system evolved whereby students lived in hostels or other accommodations paid for by students or a "resident master," because the guilds felt no obligation to provide housing (Cremin, 1997; Perkin, 1997). Even towards the end of the 12th Century with the creation of endowed college units designed to provide housing to poor scholars, instruction remained separate from students' housing accommodations (Cremin).

This college system served as the model for other developing higher education institutions throughout northern Europe. However, at roughly the same time, small universities developed in Bologna, Italy where students maintained a significant amount

of control over all aspects of the living and learning environments, including among other things, faculty salaries, and room and board rates. This student control remained effective for over a century, until student fees were supplemented by the community where the university was located, resulting in an educational system comparable to the Parisian model where professors shared power with clergy who oversaw student behavior (Perkin, 1997).

English students returning home from study in France and Italy were joined by other European students migrating to England around the turn of the 13th Century and through their influence, small educational institutions arose in populated townships. The majority of these institutions consisted of separate living and learning environments, yet over 400 years, revenues generated from residential 'colleges' became a dependable source of income for universities (Cremin, 1997). Among several of these small colleges in England, Oxford and Cambridge developed into the most prominent institutions, in large part due to the support they received from the King and Pope (Perkin, 1997).

Higher education in the United States developed in the likeness of the collegiate models of Oxford and Cambridge (Nuss, 2003; Thelin, 2003; Winston & Fitch, 1993). Graduates of these prestigious universities founded most of the colleges and universities in North America from 1636 to 1770 (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984). The first residential colleges to open in colonial America following the Oxford and Cambridge model were Harvard in 1636, The College of William and Mary in 1693, and Yale in 1701. These institutions maintained a quadrangle-type architecture designed to foster an organizational culture and educational philosophy that supported students' development of strong character and scholarly achievement (Thelin) both in and outside the classroom.

From colonial times to present day U.S. higher education, a majority of college campuses maintain a residential component due to the belief that residence halls are seen as critical aspects of the educational experience (Winston & Fitch, 1993) for an entering freshman population who averaged between 15 and 17 years of age (Cremin, 1997). Dormitories provided young students room, board, and a common experience where they to share in "experiences which made men of boys," as well as to develop a sense of common decency and self-respect that hopefully taught responsibility (Rudolph, 1965, p. 96). In general, students traveled great distances to obtain a higher education and due to their young ages, were not yet ready to take care of themselves (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984).

Emergence of Residential Philosophies

Campuses of early institutions of higher education in Europe from the 13th to 18th Centuries tended to foster an adversarial residential environment between students and faculty. Professor masters in Paris, as well as the students, organized into guilds against the clergy and eventually, each other. Students in Bologna developed into guilds for mutual protection against faculty and local townspeople (Perkin, 1997). However, with the rise of Oxford and Cambridge in England at the turn of the 13th Century, the "Oxbridge" educational model reflected a living learning environment of several residential colleges within a university setting where faculty and students lived and learned together (Thelin, 2003).

Similar to the residential communities of Oxford and Cambridge where students resided in a living learning environment, colonial colleges maintained dormitories and dining halls essential to early college life (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984; Nuss 2003;

Winston & Fitch, 1993). Within these dormitories, not only did faculty teach and provide remedial tutoring (Nuss), they also joined the president and priest-seminarians in embracing the role of *in loco parentis,* where college personnel acted on the parent's behalf to closely supervise student's conduct, character, and moral development (Upcraft & Pilato, 1982; Thelin, 2003). As most institutions in colonial U.S. were established by religious groups, students were responsible for learning academics, church doctrines, and being held to strict moral guidelines and behaviors (Blimling & Miltenberger). Although all faculty were responsible for holding students accountable for their behavior, it was generally the college president's responsibility to be chief disciplinarian (Nuss; Perkin, 1997; Thelin).

Early colleges in North America, such as Harvard, William and Mary, and Yale, were modeled after Cambridge and Oxford in order to perfect the English educational experience and create civilized and responsible leaders of church and state (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984; Thelin, 2003). Institutions in the U.S. were unable to follow suit of their English counterparts in developing students as scholars and gentlemen in residential environments because the early American system of colleges and universities provided dormitories solely for the shelter of students and the ability of faculty, clergy, and presidents to regulate behavior (Blimling & Miltenberger).

As opposed to their European counterparts, curricula and living arrangements were administered by faculty in England and students in Italy. The newly formed institutions in Colonial America developed college governing boards responsible for curricular and discipline decisions that faculty and presidents enforced. Not only did this organizational structure allow for more control over institutional decisions by college

board members, but those members were often tightly connected to local governments, providing access to taxes, tolls, and lottery funding (Thelin). American colonists hoped that having decisions made by a governing board external to an institution would avoid tensions between faculty and students because then neither controlled curricula and/or institutional governance (Thelin, 2003). This was not the case however, as several rebellions occurred throughout the 1700s and early 1800s by students who were dissatisfied with teaching methods, strict discipline, harsh sanctions for behavior and, occasionally, dining hall food (Frederiksen, 1993; Nuss, 2003).

The ability for institutions to address these issues was compounded by the passage of the 1862 and 1890 Morrill Acts, which created land grant institutions and increased access for women, students of color, and individuals who traditionally could not afford higher education. As more students enrolled in higher education, the search for housing on and off campus intensified and the ability of faculty and college presidents to maintain order in living communities became more difficult. For example, in 1852, President Henry Tappen of the University of Michigan converted a dormitory into classroom space because he felt students' living spaces should be separate from their learning environments (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984). This decision initiated a trend across U.S. higher education to the extent that institutions opening in the late 1800's did so with no residential facilities.

U.S. higher education during the latter half of the 19th Century was also influenced by German and Scottish educational philosophies (Perkin, 1997). Instead of teaching several subjects, these styles of education perpetuated a system where faculty increased their expertise and experience in one body of knowledge. Institutions learned

money could be saved by replacing an instructor master who taught the whole syllabus with a "specialized, single-subject professor" (Perkin, p. 16). Not only did professors become proficient in single 'fields of study,' but higher education as a whole focused on developing students' intellect in the classroom, leaving personal growth and development unaddressed. College dormitories and residence halls were only deemed necessary in rural areas in order to provide student accommodations (Winston & Fitch, 1993), while similarly used buildings in urban areas were converted to other uses (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1990).

At the turn of the 20th Century, enrollment continued to increase at U.S. institutions of higher education, and the supply of rooming or boarding houses adjacent to colleges and university campuses was not sufficient to meet the needs of the growing student populations (Frederiksen, 1993). In conjunction with the limited supply of off-campus housing, parents and students were not satisfied with the quality of such living environments. After the passage of the second Morrell Act in 1890, there was a growth in popularity of colleges for women, which were primarily residentially focused. College and university administrators observed a shift in students' interests in living environments, resulting in the development and increase of housing and dining facilities on campuses across the U.S. (Winston & Fitch, 1993). With the construction of residential facilities and not enough faculty or higher level administrators interested in overseeing those buildings, it became necessary to have additional college personnel to oversee those environments, creating the field of 'student affairs.'

Student Affairs as a Profession

With enrollment growth in higher education in the latter 19th Century, faculty responsibilities gradually transitioned away from supervising and advising students in the co-curricular environment (Fredrickson, 1993; Nuss, 2003; Perkin, 1997) to college presidents who became more overwhelmed by increasing administrative tasks and student discipline. Not only were existing institutions susceptible to this surge in enrollment, but new institutions for women and minority students also experienced increasing student numbers.

In particular, the growth of women's colleges in the U.S. coincided with a need for higher education to provide personnel dedicated to addressing students' needs and concerns beyond the classroom, especially in order to protect the sanctity of womanhood in the U.S. (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984). The first student personnel positions created at women's institutions were "principals, wardens, and matrons" who supervised women's behaviors and the interaction between men and women (Winston & Fitch, 1993, p. 316). Other colleges and universities followed suit by creating both deans of men and women positions, with job responsibilities focused on overseeing student conduct outside the classroom. For example, Harvard University appointed its first collegiate, non-academic dean in 1870, Professor Ephraim Gurney, removing the president from the role of disciplinarian (Nuss, 2003). The development of these positions marked the origination of universities being concerned with the "management, administration, and general affairs of students," rather than remaining focused on solely providing services and supervising dormitories (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984, p. 22).

As enrollment continued to climb through the early 20th Century, colleges and universities created student affairs' positions in addition to those addressing discipline and behavior issue problems; health services personnel, social directors, deans of students, educational and vocational counselors, part-time employment coordinators, graduate placement staff, financial assistance officers, coordinators of extracurricular activities (Frederiksen, 1993; Nuss 2003; Thelin, 2003; The Student Personnel Point of View, 1937; The Student Personnel Point of View, 1949), and housing staff.

It was also during this time that colleges and universities began to see a reemergence of the English model of higher education, blending with Scottish and German philosophies, where institutions were educating students both in and outside the classroom. Although services rendered throughout higher education in the U.S. were similar, it was the specific personalities and idiosyncrasies of administrators, as well as unique histories and missions of institutions, that created a diverse array of student affairs organizations and positions (Williamson, 1961). Of the many student affairs positions, this discourse will focus on staff members who work with students directly in their residential environments.

Emergence of "Residential Life" from Student Affairs

To address the specific demand for housing at the University of Chicago, President William Harper allocated resources in 1893 to construct the first on-campus residence hall (Wetzel, 1990). It was President Harper's goal to create a living community where students could develop and reconnect with faculty outside the classroom (Jencks & Riesman, 1962). This concept of residence halls initiated a trend for institutions across the U.S. to construct similar living communities (Wetzel). The initial

construction of residence halls by the University of Chicago, followed closely by Cornell University and Columbia University (Upcraft & Pilato, 1982; Wetzel), served as a basis for the development of other student housing facilities and programs throughout the rest of the 20th Century.

Colleges and universities continued to expand their residential capacities, not only to provide a place for students to live, but also to ensure a safe environment for the increasing numbers of women attending higher education (Wetzel, 1990). In addition to separate housing facilities for women, institutions implemented different policies specifically for women, such as dress codes, curfews, and visitation hours. Throughout the first half of the 1900s, rules were strictly enforced by individuals who lived in those halls, were loyal to the institution, and maintained the status quo: athletic coaches, house mothers, and student proctors (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984; Upcraft & Pilato, 1982).

Additional pressures were placed on college and university residential programs with the dramatic increase in housing needs following World War II (Winston & Fitch, 1993). The GI Bill of Rights generated access for thousands of service men and women to attend higher education, thus the increase in enrollment. However, the growth in students was further complicated by the need to house spouses and families, an issue for which residential programs were not prepared. In order to address the problem of limited housing, institutions of higher education were given former military facilities and low interest loans to build college dormitories (Winston & Fitch). This was done to maximize the number of bed spaces and solely provide housing and food to students attending higher education, moving away from the small intimate extended family atmosphere from Colonial times (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984).

Following the significant involvement by the federal government post WWII in providing funds and buildings to support the housing of college students, the 1960s and 1970s also experienced an increase in federal interest in higher education. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the 1965 Higher Education Act are two examples of how the federal government influenced higher education residential life programs because more students were granted access to higher education through equal access and increased eligibility for financial assistance (Nuss, 2003).

Residential departments re-examined their role in developing the total student, as no longer could character be developed strictly through the enforcement of rules and maintaining strict behavior. Upcraft & Pilato (1982) described that "character was redefined as 'student development' and rules and regulations were replaced by programs, services, and activities that promoted student development" (p. 4). In order to integrate large numbers of college students living in multistory residence halls into the collegiate experience, the following services and programs were developed: educational programs in the halls, resource centers, faculty-in-residence programs, living and learning communities (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984).

Also during this time, societal issues such as civil rights, the assassination of revered political and religious leaders, U.S. military involvement around the world, and unrest on several college campuses caused a change in the relationship between students and institutions (Nuss, 2003). The Supreme Court rendered several decisions recognizing that when students turn 18 years old, they do not forfeit their constitutional rights by enrolling in higher education (Nuss). In addition to court decisions, students questioned how the strict enforcement of policies developed 'character' (Upcraft & Pilato, 1982).

This dynamic within and beyond higher education resulted in many student affairs

practitioners no longer acting on the basis of *in loco parentis*. In particular, students

challenged institutions and administrators through protests and legal action to increase

their educational and personal rights, forcing higher education to consider students over

18 years of age adults and be treated as such (Astin, Parrott, Korn, & Sax, 1997; Bickel &

Lake, 1994). During roughly ten year period from the late 1960s to 1970s, the higher

education environment of strictly enforced curfews, sign in and out logs, and dress codes

at almost every institution developed into co-educational residence halls with open

visitation policies, elimination of dress codes, and decreased enforcement of alcohol

issues at most public and some private institutions across the U.S. (Blimling &

Miltenberger, 1984; Fredrickson, 1993; Nuss; Perkin, 1997).

Research in the 1970s began to examine how this changing living environment

impacted residence hall students' experiences and the institutions. Studies during this

decade revealed that the on-campus living experience of first-year students is important

because it generally increases student retention and success. Specifically, Astin (1973)

found that students living on campus were less likely to withdraw from an institution than

commuting students, and they were more likely to finish a baccalaureate degree in four

years. Chickering (1974) conducted two studies involving over 175,000 students and

observed that students living in residence halls (1) exceeded learning and personal

development predicted when specific variables were taken into account, (2) were more

involved in academic and co-curricular activities than other students, and (3) earned

higher grade point averages.

Astin (1977) conducted a follow-up to his 1973 study that included over 250,000 students from 1961 to 1974, in which he found that living in a residence hall for the first year was the most important characteristic for students finishing college. He concluded that students who live in a residence hall their first year in college (1) express more satisfaction with their undergraduate experience than commuter students, (2) were more likely to achieve in leadership and athletics, (3) obtained higher grade point averages (men only), and (4) showed an increase in artistic interests, liberalism, and interpersonal self esteem. Based on these results, residence halls were advantageous to institutions because they benefited financially while students were enrolled, as well as afterwards, as students continued financially supporting their alma mater as alumni. Further, if students have a positive experience living on campus, they graduate quicker (Blimling, 1995; Li, Sheely, & Whalen, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993) and are likely to become employed immediately following graduation.

Several scholars have identified the potential for residence halls and residential life staff members to educate students beyond the classroom (Astin, 1973, 1977; Blimling, 1995; Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984; Upcraft & Pilato, 1982). Brown (1974) suggested that student's living environment can have a substantial impact on personal and educational development if that environment is created intentionally by the university and residence life staff. Considering these assumptions, the following five objectives for residential life programs are considered: (1) provide satisfactory living environments through renovation and new construction, (2) maintain facilities to ensure safety and security, (3) establish guidelines and standards for cooperative community living, (4) create an environment fostering interpersonal communication and responsibility, and (5)

offer opportunities for growth and development (Riker and DeCoster, 1971).

Furthermore, living in residence halls can help students understand and follow through on

personal and educational development, better understand themselves and others, improve

interpersonal communication, and maintain an environment fostering growth, safety, and

security (Li et al., 2005; Riker, 1980).

      The recognition of the importance of residence halls brought about an increased

awareness in the need to sufficiently train staff members who were responsible for

promoting the development of residence hall students. Thus, the traditional role of

coaches and house mothers in student housing developed into residence hall directors

(Wetzel, 1990), staff with undergraduate degrees, trained to live and work in a college

residential community. Similar to clergy, faculty, and presidents in colonial higher

education valuing the development of civilized, responsible citizens, university residence

life staff in the 1970s reasserted institutional commitment to educating and developing

the whole student (Winston, Ullom, & Werring, 1984) through the application of student

development theories (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Also during this decade,

residential life departments focused less on how living environments influenced student

development and more on the role of professional and undergraduate paraprofessional

staff living in residential communities (Zirkle & Hudson, 1975).

      It was during this period that paraprofessional student staff were compensated by

colleges and universities for their work in residential communities and the position

became more consistently defined across the U.S. Although the position and its

responsibilities remained relatively constant during its evolution, there was limited

consistency regarding the title for such an individual. Titles such as resident assistants,

hall counselors, house fellows, community assistants, neighborhood assistants, and resident advisors (Winston & Fitch, 1993), among others, dominate the higher education landscape depending on the institution and philosophy of the residence life program. For the purpose of this manuscript, the students holding this staff position are referred to as Resident Advisors or RAs.

<center>Paraprofessional Staff in Residence Life</center>

The roles of paraprofessional student staff in residence life can be traced back to colonial higher education and continued to evolve into what it looks like today. Throughout the development of employing paraprofessionals on college campuses, not only have the characteristics of student staff changed but also the relative consistency in which the role is defined across higher education in this country. Three responsibilities underlie every RAs role regarding the community for which they oversee: provide an atmosphere conducive to studying, understand students' living and environmental needs, and maintain a safe and secure environment (Upcraft & Pilato, 1982). The following outlines paraprofessional development from colonial times to the present, reviews general characteristics of required responsibilities and attributes of these paraprofessionals, and traces the growth of student staff training in residence life.

Origins of Student Staff in Student Housing

The presence of student staff in higher education housing dates back to colonial colleges (Winston & Fitch, 1993). Since then, access to higher education has increased through the Morrell Acts, soldiers returning from World War I, the Depression of the 1930s, and soldiers returning from World War II, thus resulting in a continual surge in enrollment. As more students chose to live on campus and financial resources did not

match this growth, demands placed on housing managers to maintain order in residence halls continued to escalate.

In the mid-20th Century, as housing departments hired personnel with undergraduate degrees and experience working with residential populations (i.e. housing professionals), the ratio of students to professional staff remained too high. In many housing programs, professional staff members were overwhelmed as they tried to meet the needs of all students in their living communities. In order to address this predicament, student staff positions were developed and became institutionalized to assist professional staff in managing residential environments (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984; Winston & Fitch, 1993).

At many colleges and universities where students were employed to work in housing facilities, those students either volunteered, were informally elected by other members of the community, or were hired by the institution. In exchange for their services, students were provided a room in campus housing and/or a meal plan (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984; Winston & Fitch, 1993). There was little consistency from institution to institution as to what duties and responsibilities these students assumed. Whether institutions had a version of live-in professional staff position and/or student staff with differing levels of responsibilities varied depending on who was in charge of the living communities, as well as a housing department's overall philosophies. As the 1900s progressed and institutions formalized various professional residential staff positions, roles of student staff were similarly impacted.

These student staff members were considered 'paraprofessional' because they did not receive formal professional training, yet were responsible for the completion of some

designated tasks usually performed by professional staff (Delworth, Sherwood, & Casaburri, 1974). During the 1950s, student housing programs were among the first campus departments to utilize paraprofessionals as a significant aspect of their departmental philosophy and practice (Winston et al., 1984).

Originally, housing paraprofessional staff members were selected, trained, and supervised to: 1) promote the personal development of their peers; 2) create and maintain an environment that stimulates and supports development; and 3) ensure a safe, clean living environment (Winston & Fitch, 1993). More specifically, common duties performed by these staff members included inventorying furnishings, reporting maintenance concerns, enforcing policies, promoting community development, organizing academic, recreational, and social programs, communicating with professional staff, and counseling their peers (Blimling, 1995; Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984; Paladino, Murray, Newgent, & Gohn, 2005; Upcraft, 1982; Winston & Fitch; Winston, Ullom, & Werring, 1984).

By 1966, over 65% of colleges and universities in the U.S. were employing the services of student paraprofessionals (Brown & Zunker, 1966). The use of paraprofessionals has had a positive impact through an increased effectiveness in working with students as a peer, the ability to offer additional services and programs at a reduced cost, freeing professionals' time to address larger issues, and increasing the interaction between academic and student affairs through educational programming (Ender, 1984).

The RA role developed significantly from the mid 1950s until the present. With the practice of *in loco parentis* subsiding through the 1960s and 1970s, residential

programs focused the RA position less on reporting violators of university policy and

emphasizing disciplinary activities to acting more frequently as counselors and advisors

(Greenwood & Lembcke, 1972; Harshman & Harshman, 1974; Powell, Plyler, Dickson,

& McClellan, 1969; Upcraft, 1982; Winston et al., 1984). As residential life programs

evolved to focus more on student development, rights, and responsibilities (Brown,

1972), so too did the role of RAs. In addition to serving as disciplinarians, counselors,

and advisors, other roles that RAs assume include: socializer, leader, organizer, conflict

mediator (Winston et al.), role model, student, teacher, administrator (Blimling &

Miltenberger, 1984), facilitator, limit setter, tutor (Knouse & Rodgers, 1981), community

developer, and programmer (Wetzel, 1990). The shift in responsibilities demonstrates a

continual evolution of the RA position, as now it is designed to directly meet the needs of

students (Wetzel) through the assessment of students' concerns and timely referral to the

appropriate institutional resource(s) (Ender, 1984). Ultimately, the RAs role across the

U.S. differs based on institutional type, mission and goals of the residential life program,

type of students in the RAs community, and how the supervisor defines the position

(Upcraft & Pilato, 1982).

The Resident Advisor

With the many roles that RAs play in residence halls and apartment communities,

limited research has been conducted to determine if the 'perfect' RA exists and what that

person looks and acts like (Powell, Plyler, Dickson, & McClellan, 1969). Although the

list of job roles and responsibilities seems extensive, three aspects of the RA position

required of all staff include: high energy level, high level of interpersonal communication

skills, and above average academic ability (Cannon & Peterman, 1973). RAs live in

communities where they work and as they have intense and intentional interactions with residents daily, the ability to maintain a high energy level is crucial. Most RAs spend a significant amount of time with their residents and through those interactions are placed in positions where thoughtful and intentional communication skills are necessary. Lastly, RAs must not only thrive academically while working a 24 hour a day job, they must role model positive study behavior and help residents through their academic concerns. As a leader among peers in a college community, actions and verbal expressions by resident advisors have a significant impact on the development of students in their living environments (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984; Paladino, et al., 2005; Zirkle & Hudson, 1975).

RAs are considered key personnel in the implementation of effective housing programs through their positive impact on residential communities (Kipp, 1979) and by increasing the satisfaction of first-year students (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). The personal skills considered imperative in the implementation of a residential life department's developmental philosophy include: accepting people with various backgrounds and experiences; working through ambiguity and stress (Winston et al., 1984); acting responsibly; having loyalty to their institution; making ethical decisions; understanding ambiguities of the position; being sensitive, empathetic, genuine, flexible, and able to gain trust; balancing friendships within and beyond the community; investing in the job (Powell et al., 1969); positively working with others; exhibiting strong leadership and communication skills; managing their own lives while contributing to the academic, social, emotional, and personal development of others; and demonstrating the capacity to profit from training (German, 1979).

With limited recent works on what researchers and practitioners consider important skills, personality characteristics, selection methods, training formats, and evaluation procedures, it is important to note that as every higher education institution across the U.S. is different, so too is the nature of RA Recruitment and Selection, as well as RA Training. The following provides a brief review of the literature in these areas.

RA Recruitment and Selection

It is not the intent of this manuscript to provide an in-depth description or analysis of the range of paraprofessional selection processes across the U.S., yet it is important to identify general trends found in the literature in order to anchor the scope of this position. To begin, this review explores why students apply for the position, what skills and characteristics they bring to the position, and why residential life departments select them to serve as RAs. It has been noted that every selection process includes carefully defined job expectations, desired competencies, and criteria for evaluation (Ostroth, 1981). In order for residential life programs to provide comprehensive services to on-campus residents, students affairs professionals should aim to select RAs who would best meet the needs of both the department and student population (German, 1979). It is this selection process that ultimately impacts the kinds of staff selected and the services offered.

RA selection. Staying true to this philosophy, housing departments in the 60's, 70's, and 80's have emphasized hiring professional and paraprofessional staff in order to enhance residential students' co-curricular experience (Zirkle & Hudson, 1975). When compared to their supervisors, resident advisors generally do not have the benefit of a completed undergraduate degree and a number of years' experience living in residence

halls and working with on-campus undergraduates. Therefore, residence life departments must determine the qualities necessary when hiring RAs to promote residential student growth and development. One study found that RAs with above average academic ability who displayed high energy and had a high level of interpersonal skills were more successful when fulfilling the expectations placed on them by university administrators (Cannon & Peterman, 1973). These students tended to be older, brighter, interpersonally cautious, and empathetic to students' concerns (Aiken, Barr, & Lopez, 1976; Upcraft, 1982; Winston & Fitch, 1993).

Opinions differ regarding an optimum candidate's age. Some believe sophomores and juniors tend to be more successful in residence programs that require extensive training for paraprofessional staff because the drop-out rate among first-year students is too high and graduating seniors tend to limit their service because of their pending departure (Allen, 1974). On the other hand, because of their experience at the institution and ability to facilitate learning among younger paraprofessionals and residents, employing juniors and seniors as RAs may be optimal, although their term of service is more limited than younger staff (Delworth, Sherwood, & Casaburri, 1974).

How and why RAs are selected. As residential program philosophies differ across the U.S., so do how those programs recruit and select paraprofessional student staff (Zunker, 1975). In general, many selection processes include candidates filling out a paper application, participating in some form of individual and/or group interview (Greenwood & Lembcke, 1972), role playing scenarios, standardized instruments, and attending required training seminars (Ender & Winston, 1984; Greenleaf, 1974; German, 1979; Upcraft & Pilato, 1982, Winston et al., 1984). The criteria used by most residence

life programs in this process include: demonstrated academic achievement; warm, friendly personality; good basic interpersonal skills; emotional stability; ability to cope with stress and ambiguity; and accepting of people from diverse backgrounds (Cannon & Peterman, 1973; Chernow, 2000; Delworth et al, 1974; Ender & Winston, 1984; Greenleaf, 1974; Upcraft & Pilato, 1982; Winston et al.). In general, these criteria are linked directly to the paraprofessional position job requirements (Winston et al.).

Why students apply to be RAs. Many students apply to be RAs for reasons unrelated to the responsibilities and nature of the position, such as compensation (room, board, stipend, etc.), increased responsibility, the opportunity to work with people in a helping relationship, and development of leadership skills (Chernow, 2000; Greenwood & Lembcke, 1972; Powell et al., 1969). The type of motivations may depend on the residential programmatic philosophy, students' perceptions of the position, required job expectations, the size and location of the institution, among other factors (Powell et al.). The next logical question in investigating the RA selection process leads to what defines one RA as more successful than another.

Comparing selection and training. When considering effective skills for successful RAs, some housing professionals question whether RA selection or training is more important and where departmental resources should be allocated. It has been suggested that common topics in training such as self-awareness, communication skills, and sensitivity to others are critical skills that can be identified through selecting staff, not necessarily through training them (Wemple, 1979). However, other authors challenge that notion by viewing staff training as more important than selection because training may compensate for an individual's lack of experience, knowledge, skills, and abilities

not addressed in the selection process (Bowman & Bowman, 1995). Regardless of which is considered more important, staff training must be seen as an essential element in any residential life program (Schuh, 1981), because "RAs are only as good as their training" (Upcraft & Pilato, 1982, p. 239).

RA concerns prior to training. RAs are hired because they successfully complete the selection process, yet for some staff members, there is a disconnect between applying for the RA position and anxieties of actually performing in the role. In a study of new and returning RAs who were questioned to identify their anxieties about starting the position, the following concerns were revealed: (1) adjusting at first to the job and floor, (2) addressing crisis situations, (3) being a policy enforcer, (4) being respected by their residents and doing a good job, (5) balancing the position with academics and social life, and (6) relating to their supervisor (Upcraft & Pilato, 1982). A review of the literature indicates these concerns are not addressed during the selection or training of RAs.

Resident Advisor Training

Literature on the history of training resident advisors is limited, however several authors indicate that a widely-implemented contemporary format of RA training was developed during the 1970s as residential life programs became more focused on student development (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984; Upcraft, 1982; Wemple 1979). As residential life programs adopt developmental philosophies for their living communities, paraprofessional staff members are expected to be responsible for more information and have more skills, yet these individuals are still relatively young and inexperienced. Some RAs possess the characteristics and skills mentioned above upon selection, where others have the capacity to enhance their interpersonal skills through training. In general, an

RAs ability to be successful in training is largely dependent on their problem solving skills leading into the training experience (Heppner & Reeder, 1984; Morley, 2002).

Due to the high expectations that residential life programs place upon paraprofessional staff, RAs are encouraged to develop all the competencies necessary to work with student development issues through training (Bourdeaux, 1997; Carroll, 1981; Murray, Snider, & Midkiff, 1999; Wemple, 1979). The application of these skills is further complicated with the "psychological exposure" of the RA position, which some describe as the exposure (or giving of oneself) of one's personality to another in the context of a helping relationship or when significant interactions exist within a community (Powell et al., 1969). The peer education environment of training eases this exposure because RAs have an opportunity to develop and enhance their skills, while creating their identities as staff members and getting to know others on their staff (Greenleaf, 1967, 1974). Training conducted in a comprehensive manner not only reinforces housing department philosophies, but helps meet the needs of college students, their parents, and employers post graduation.

As residential life departments continually assume a more developmental philosophy in their housing operations over the past half century, RAs need to be appropriately trained to implement such goals. However, individuals responsible for planning staff training often choose from various training modules and tailor them to meet the needs of individual campuses, departments, and student bodies (Schuh, 1981). Some suggest it is important to assess the skills staff members possess and areas for development prior to designing training curricula (Schuh). Next, it is recommended to sequence the training curriculum to determine what learning needs to occur during pre-

service (prior to the academic year) and in-service (during the academic year) training. There exists a dearth in the literature in these two areas, as it is common for most RA training designers to organize a set of training sessions based on skills and knowledge they think all RAs should know, as opposed to addressing the developmental nature of all their staff and priorities of their residence life departments and institutions (Bourdeaux, 1997). The negative result of this common design flaw is that RA training has not evolved as significantly as the roles and responsibilities of the RA position.

Assessing paraprofessionals' skills is difficult, as RAs carry a large number of responsibilities as relatively inexperienced, traditional-age undergraduate student staff members – no training program can possibly address all complexities of the position (Elleven, et al., 2001; Upcraft & Pilato, 1982). As previously stated, some authors suggest residential life programs require RAs to be mature, intelligent, able to understand others, and have the skills to work effectively with a wide range of people in various situations prior to their participation in training (Bourdeaux, 1997; Wemple, 1979; Winston & Buckner, 1984). When candidates are selected as RAs, "it is imperative to provide support and training in order to assist them [RAs] in the performance of their duties" (Wemple, p. 6). As students enter the RA position with untapped talent and have the potential to practice their skills (Winston et al., 1984), there is considerable agreement regarding the benefits of RA training; however, little agreement exists about timing, duration, intensity, goals, content, format, and evaluation for such training (Delworth et al., 1974; Greenleaf, 1974; Schuh, 1981; Upcraft, 1982; Winston & Buckner, 1984).

One study conducted at the University of South Florida identified needs that are important to include in residential life paraprofessional staff training programs: (1)

understanding the developmental pattern of traditionally-aged college students, (2) being familiar with institutional services and community needs, (3) having a working knowledge of student development theories, (4) being familiar with institutional decision making processes, (5) understanding the importance of being a role model, (6) understanding the existing professional staff support network, (7) developing a team relationship with peer paraprofessionals and professional staff, and (8) seeing the relevance and potential career possibilities in student affairs (Stoner, 1972).

Since RAs need training in so many areas, training programs may neglect some aspects of the position, may not cover everything or may not address issues equally (Roberts, 1972). Without appropriate training and support in their positions, RAs may be overwhelmed as they attempt to help their peers with a wide range of issues (Schuh, 1981; Wemple, 1979). Properly training RAs helps them become effective counselors, advisors, programmers, disciplinarians, and leaders in their communities because more than any other college or university staff, they are more in tune to students' needs (Upcraft, 1982). Students who live on campus develop faster than those who live off campus, so it is imperative for RAs to learn programmatic and advising skills to provide effective leadership and activities in their residential communities (Astin, 1977; Chickering, 1974; Schuh, 1981).

Throughout the training process, it is important for training designers to (1) address the job RAs are expected to perform, (2) facilitate the development of skills RAs naturally possess, (3) reflect the most critical issues facing students at that institution, and (4) balance time committed for training with time required to perform job responsibilities (Greenwood & Lembcke, 1972). Although this process may differ from institution to

institution across the U.S., there are six general categories upon which every training is based: training timing, participants, learning outcomes, content, format, and evaluation.

When training occurs. RAs generally arrive on campus one to three weeks prior to the beginning of classes for the Fall term – a period widely known as pre-service training. Training occurring during this time contains more content than other training in which RAs participate, yet only a limited amount of materials and information can be presented and absorbed (Greenwood & Lembcke, 1972) during such a relatively short time period. Pre-service training provides RAs opportunities to learn about their positions, the department, and institution while assisting them build confidence in their own skills (Winston et al., 1984). RAs trained prior to residents arriving on campus report less job stress, more self-confidence, and a clearer understanding of their responsibilities than RAs who receive no training (Winston & Buckner, 1984).

Beyond this pre-service training, there may be optional shorter trainings between academic terms, in-service training sessions throughout the academic year supplementing staff meetings, and in some cases a required academic course (Bowman & Bowman, 1995; Winston & Fitch, 1993). The initial pre-service training is designed to provide skills and background necessary for the position, whereas in-service training throughout the academic year primarily focuses on how to get the job done as issues and concerns arise (Ender, 1984).

It is widely believed that training RAs while they are on the job may not be effective because tension is created between addressing immediate needs like adjusting to the position and identifying residents' needs, while at the same time developing long range skills such as listening, communication, and programming (Winston & Buckner,

1984). The level of involvement of paraprofessional staff in the design and delivery of training and evaluations has a paucity of coverage in the literature. However, "it is necessary for the supervisor and the paraprofessionals to be a part of the training and evaluation process" (Allen, 1974, p. 278).

Training participants. Residence life paraprofessionals staffing patterns are different across the U.S., with institutions employing RAs who have varying years of experience in the position and with training. Some institutions limit RA employment to one year, creating an environment where the entire RA staff is new each year. Other colleges and universities limit the ability for RAs to return to two or three years, and some institutions allow RAs to remain on staff until graduation. In general, training programs are designed to educate all paraprofessionals staff employed by residence life programs, including first, second, third, and fourth year RAs. Although literature related to different training methods for RAs with varying seniority is non-existent, widely accepted practice is to focus training materials on first-year staff members.

Most residence life programs utilize the services of second- and third-year RAs, which poses a concern when designing training (Schuh, 1981). These individuals generally have the skills necessary to complete their job responsibilities, but if they are uninvolved in training sessions, staff cohesion is lacking. Training can be designed to engage these student staff members in multiple ways, in order to keep them involved and enhance their personal and positional growth and development by including them on a staff training committee, as training presenters, and/or to coordinate evaluation strategies.

Rarely recognized as a participant in training, RAs' supervisors are crucial in assisting paraprofessional staff understand the nature and complexities of the position,

prior to, during, and after training. In general, most RAs' supervisors across the U.S. have limited experience supervising, as they are professionals or graduate students relatively new to student affairs who may be unsure of themselves and not have an established supervisory style. They may even be unfamiliar with the nature of the RA position (Winston et al., 1984). RAs' supervisors are responsible for understanding how students develop, including RAs, as well as issues faced by students, staff, and themselves when working and living in on-campus residential communities (Winston et al.).

Learning outcomes. Training programs vary across the U.S. based on underlying philosophical assumptions, objectives sought, available resources, and methodologies used by residential housing departments (Powell, 1974). Training consistency is further complicated due to the numerous, complex, and occasionally contradicting nature of RAs' job responsibilities (Roberts, 1972). Developing learning outcomes for training curricula also differ for similar reasons. For example, RAs benefit from being able to understand the philosophical foundations of higher education, the relationship of environmental factors to student growth, and how young adults develop in college (Greenleaf, 1974). Student staff members also find usefulness in knowing developmental theories and strategies when encouraging student involvement, growth, and self development (Schroeder, 1976, 1993). Other helpful knowledge for RAs is found in the literature on orientation and information, mutually cooperative relationships, interpersonal dynamics, and the integration of student development into higher education (Powell). Finally, training in residence hall operations, institutional resources and support services, human relationships, and program advising makes RAs more effective in their jobs (Schuh, 1981).

With the importance of this training documented in the literature (Blimling, 1995; Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984; Winston & Fitch, 1993), it is difficult to identify specific training areas, as there are many differences between RAs, the communities they oversee, and the needs of residents on campuses across the U.S. (Upcraft, 1982). Paraprofessionals, in general, have the capacity to learn proper procedures, such as filling out forms and evacuating a building, but teaching them to think on their own in complex and ambiguous situations requires more in-depth education throughout the training process (Stoner, 1972). For this reason, the next section focuses on what information, skills, and abilities are generally included in training.

Training content. Topics covered during pre-services training range from specific administrative and procedural functions to highly structured interpersonal skills workshops (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984; Upcraft, 1982). Topics covered, time allocated, and resources dedicated to RA training vary from institution to institution depending on who coordinates each training program. A review of the literature on pre-service RA training highlights various topics consistently addressed by residence life departments: self-awareness, crisis intervention, conflict resolution, problem solving skills, confrontation skills, health, safety, security issues and procedures, team building, emergency response, rules and regulations, administrative tasks, interpersonal skills, programming, knowledge of campus resources, time management, and stress management (Blimling, 1995; Brown, 1972; Elleven et al., 2001; Ender, 1984; Schuh, 1981; Twale & Muse, 1996; Upcraft, 1982; Upcraft & Pilato, 1982; Webb, 2003). Teambuilding is especially critical during training for long term success, as paraprofessionals are more receptive to training content and handling difficult situations

after they have learned to accept and trust their peers (Schuh). Although this is a long list

of skills and abilities, the value of training RAs on these topics is immeasurable, as errors

in crisis response or reporting facilities concerns could result in loss of life or severe

property damage (Schuh).

Educating these neophyte staff members primarily takes place through utilizing

on-campus resources (Greenwood & Lembcke, 1972) as presenters. Ease of scheduling a

known internal resource person or department over an unknown entity external to the

institution usually occurs. In addition, because RAs serve as resource and referral agents,

introducing them to campus resources builds a positive relationship so RAs feel

comfortable and confident to make referrals to, and seek advice from, these partners on a

regular basis.

Training format. How RA training is delivered has received little attention in the

literature, with colleges and universities in the U.S. utilizing many methods to train their

residence life student staff and limited time to publish methods used or results found. As

with other aspects of the RA position, little consensus exists on the most effective ways

to educate student staff on their job responsibilities. Formats vary across the U.S. with

how much time to dedicate to training prior to Fall classes, how many and what types of

in-service opportunities are essential throughout the academic year, and in the past 20

years, the role academic courses play in the training and development of RAs (Webb,

2003). Some techniques utilized in RA training include a published training manual,

printed college resource materials, case studies with realistic examples, opportunities to

role-play confronting difficult situations, and the use of various and innovative audio-

visual methods (Greenleaf, 1967). The level to which these methods are included in RA

training sessions depends on the priorities and allocated funding of each residence life program (Greenwood & Lembcke, 1972).

RA training methods range from lecture style where a campus administrator disseminates information, to role playing exercises where paraprofessionals practice elements learned in previous training sessions in seemingly 'real-life' situations (Greenwood & Lembcke, 1972; Twale & Muse, 1996; Upcraft, 1982; Upcraft & Pilato, 1982). Studies examining and comparing types of training models and training content indicate little to no difference in how RAs accomplish their duties (Gimmestad, 1970; Lynch, 1968; Marchand, 1972; Meschanic, 1971). Common trends found in high quality training programs are educating student staff on self-awareness, interpersonal communication, and sensitivity to others (Blimling, 1995; Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984).

Training can be conducted from a basic "nuts and bolts approach" where RAs learn how to address very specific situations to highly structured training models providing behavioral templates by which multiple situations are addressed (Upcraft, 1982). Other training models may combine several approaches in order to cover as much material as possible, yet a concern exists that merging various models results in excluding potentially important information (Upcraft & Pilato, 1982).

Residential student staff members are generally considered bright and have high expectations for those who train them. For this reason, residential life professionals and graduate students are responsible for making training "practical, yet deep, relevant yet philosophical, immediate yet long range, current yet universally applicable" (Upcraft, 1982, p. 14). Training programs will have a better chance of success if designers assess

training needs, identify useful resources and energetic presenters, sequence sessions in a logical format, and are flexible throughout training to adjust as needed (Schuh, 1981).

Training evaluation. Several residence life departments conduct yearly assessments, but results are rarely applied to the next year's training program. When residence life professional staff reflect on a training experience, they may see "ultimate evaluation of a training program is how it relates to successful job performance" (Upcraft, 1982, p. 27). With RAs who are responsible for their job and community throughout the academic year 24 hours a day, it is challenging for supervisors to directly oversee the applied results from training. This is primarily due to supervisors being busy with administrative tasks during the first few weeks of each Fall term to adequately observe the performance of their staffs (Schuh, 1981).

Information gained from assessment processes can help justify the existence of a training program by demonstrating how it relates to departmental goals and objectives, identifying whether training programs should be continued or discontinued, and gaining information on how to improve future training (Kirkpatrick, 1998). Additional rationale to support the need for a comprehensive assessment program can include: identifying strengths and weaknesses; comparing costs and benefits; deciding who and how many RAs participate in future training; identifying which participants are more and less successful; reinforcing major points; gathering data for future marketing; determining if the training address specific needs; and establishing a database to assist administrators in making future decisions (Webb, 2003).

Current practices in assessing and evaluating RA training may or may not address each of these areas and generally depends on how residence life professionals dedicate

time, resources, and personnel. Creating successful annual RA training means evaluations are incorporated into the fabric of residential programs, including the incorporation of feedback loops before, during, and after training to assess RA on-the-job effectiveness (Cannon & Peterman, 1973). Organizationally, administrators have developed a built-in system of identifying and possibly explaining successes, failures, and the overall effectiveness of training sessions.

Several studies have been conducted to examine the effectiveness of paraprofessional staff training and results vary. One study found that short term training interventions may generate favorable outcomes in RA performance (Murray et al., 1999). After evaluating resident advisors' reactions to RA training, another study used feedback suggesting training was too rushed and redundant to improve future training (Webb, 2003). A third study revealed that many RAs perceiving training sessions as being useful over time (Heppner & Reeder, 1984). Those researchers also found that staff members who were more confident about their problem solving abilities regarding specific topic areas rated the training as more useful than RAs with lower confidence levels about their problem solving abilities (Heppner & Reeder,). The benefits of assessing the content and importance of training has also been documented. A large study of 704 universities concluded that residence life programs "desperately need well-designed, empirically based evaluations based on the methods and techniques used to achieve educational goals with students" (Bowman & Bowman, 1995, p. 45). Finally, another study found that RAs who received training are more successful at their jobs than RAs who received no training (Peterman, et al., 1979).

Individual training formats vary across residential life programs, making examination important. At over 70% of schools surveyed in a national study, student staff found the disciplinarian role of their jobs the most difficult, especially when it was expected they initiate and maintain effective counseling relationships with the same student body with which they are enforcing policy (Greenwood & Lembcke, 1972). Since a disciplinarian role is a major component of the RA position, training curricula focusing on conduct and accountability tend to result in RAs feeling more confident in these areas when fulfilling their job responsibilities.

Literature related to the process and evaluation of RA training is minimal. Many times, the evaluation of training comes as an afterthought (Webb, 2003), as student affairs graduate students and professionals tend to focus training planning efforts on logistics and content. This causes meaningful data collection from assessment instruments to be minimal, and the process of evaluating training to result in limited insights as to what RAs learn as a result of their participation. In order to better understand what paraprofessional staff members may or may not learn during training, it is important to explore college student learning, which is addressed next.

<div align="center">College Student Learning</div>

Students' experiences in higher education advance them along a learning developmental continuum (Paulsen & Feldman, 1999). When students enroll in college, they tend to believe knowledge is simple, absolute, and certain, that learning takes place quickly, and that individuals' ability to learn is fixed. Upon graduation, students believe knowledge is complex, tentative, evolving, learning occurs gradually over time, and students' abilities to learn can improve over time. As students gain content knowledge

and skills, they learn they have the ability to learn. However, when students do not gain knowledge and skills in a structured learning environment, they may think they are incapable of learning (Cull, Martin, Mauri, Miras, Onrubia, Sole, & Zabala, 1993).

Even more specifically, students' motives, expectations, and preparedness for higher education affects how they approach learning and how they adjust to the wider higher education environment (Astin, 1993; Byrne & Flood, 2005; Keeling, 2004). A manuscript published by the two foremost student affairs professional organizations, *Learning Reconsidered*, defines learning as, "a comprehensive, holistic, transformative activity that integrates academic learning and student development" (Keeling, p. 4). No longer can a students learning be categorized within different departments in higher education. By attending a college or university, students further develop cognitive and practical competence skills while integrating learning into their sense of identity through multiple interactions with their environment (American College Personnel Association, 1996). Thus, it is necessary to explore college student learning and what influences students' abilities to learn and retain knowledge within a higher education context. Therefore, the following sections frame college student learning as it relates to this study and highlights characteristics that influence it.

What is Learning?

Learning is an inexact science, as learners experience it in different ways, learning situations vary, and instructors' goals and philosophical foundations of what they teach take different forms (Wilson & Scalise, 2006). For the purposes of this study, learning is defined as knowing and interpreting what is known, discovering new information, and changing an individual's cognitive and affective skills (Bowen, 1977; Watson & Stage,

1999), all while developing written communication, oral communication, and independent work skills (Donald, 1999). Furthermore, college student learning in the context of this study is seen as encompassing the integrated whole learner, rather than their component parts of mind, body, and spirit (Keeling, 2004).

Two major paradigms of thought related to learning are positivism and constructivism. From the time of the Industrial Revolution in the mid-1800s, positivism has been the primary epistemology within the college and university environment, a perspective that suggests knowledge is based on actual sense experience and that truth can be learned and proven through strict scientific method (Schram, 2003). Separate from positivism is constructivism, which is based on the premise that knowledge is actively learned and subjectively known (Stage & Muller, 1999). Constructivists emphasize learning in the context of reality, utilizing physical experiences, encouraging learners to understand and interpret phenomena for themselves (Stage & Muller), thereby constructing their own truths and realities (Drake, 1998). Constructivist learning is operationalized by connecting knowledge and skills across different topical areas to physical real-life experiences, individual reflection, and facilitated by knowledgeable and caring facilitators to gain a deeper understanding of what was learned (Drake; Stage & Muller).

Watson's Model for Student Learning is a conceptual framework that reflects a constructivist view of college student learning. Divided into three components, Input, Process, and Output, this model for learning (Watson & Stage, 1999) breaks down the learning process into basic elements that highlight how individual learners interpret and make meaning of their own learning. When students arrive at college, their Input is

shaped by the cultural and educational histories that influence how they experience the educational process. The Input component includes all the personal characteristics and experiences students bring with them to the collegiate environment, such as how they view their collegiate experience, learning, socializing with others, curricular and co-curricular involvement, and choosing a major, among many others. The Process of a student attending an institution of higher education includes their behaviors on campus, the quality of effort and time spent learning, and the many influences that exist on a college campus. Influences may include, but are not limited to, a connection to the local community, the level of substance use and potential abuse by the individual and peers, and the role of peers, faculty, and staff, to name a few. The third component, Output, describes the personal, social, intellectual, cultural, and vocational information or understanding of processes students have gained from their collegiate experience. Humans are in a continual state of learning throughout their lives and this model reflects the simplicity, yet comprehensive nature, of how learning is impacted during the students' college years.

A similar constructivist perspective outlines five dimensions that influence learning: development, knowledge base, motivation/affect, strategic processing and executive functioning, and context (Murphy & Alexander, 2006). The first dimension, development, is described as the orderly and systematic changes in an individual's ability to learn resulting from time and experience in multiple learning environments. One's knowledge base is the level of knowledge an individual has about a certain topic area prior to entering the learning environment. The third dimension, motivation/affect, relates to individuals' mental state and energy level in how interested and engaged they are in

participating within a learning environment, as well as what they hope to gain from learning new material. Strategic processing and executive functioning describes learners' ability to reflect on their own thoughts and behaviors related to the content and context of a learning environment in order to increase their level of knowledge in a particular topic area. The fifth dimension is the context, or situation, of the learning environment, including all physical characteristics of an environment that may influence learning. Together, these dimensions offer a context through which learners and educators can view the learning process. If one or more dimensions are lacking or not fully taken into account, the ability for individuals to learn may be diminished.

Regardless of what is being learned, knowledge is subjective and continually developed and modified by individual learners (Heuwinkel, 1996). Learning typically results in a change in behavior that follows three steps: students think, perceive, and react to their environment in a new way; and they experience repetition when studying, identifying, and following procedures. Finally, the change in students' learning is relatively permanent (Domjan, 1993). In addition, learning is specifically defined, interpreted, and conceptualized by individuals, making both learners and instructors/presenters responsible for influencing the learning environment.

Specifically related to the learner, three characteristics have been found to influence students' ability to learn course material: student readiness, course characteristics, and learning approaches (Bures, Abrami, & Amundsen, 2000). The authors found that students need to be prepared to study course content to actually learn the material. Within this readiness characteristic lies students' pre-requisite skills, knowledge, and interest in the session content, as well as environmental issues such as

room set-up and the level of support students perceive from instructors. Course characteristics such as the breadth and depth of information, expectations for performance, and educational assistance access also impacted students' ability to learn. Students had varying learning approaches which either helped or hindered learning, such as study habits, writing skills, and comfort level with technology. Other literature suggests that student learning approaches are not static intrinsic characteristics of students, rather, learning approaches are constantly dynamic and influenced by environmental factors, personal factors, and prior learning experiences (Byrne & Flood, 2005).

Characteristics that Influence Learning

Characteristics that influence college student learning include are multiple and individual specific. The following section highlights five characteristics that have been found to encompass what elements significantly influence a students' learning: student history, personal characteristics, environment, instructor, and instructional methods (Bures et al., 2000). A personal characteristic that is woven throughout every learner's educational experience and the above characteristics is the level of motivation they have to learn content and skills. For the purpose of this document, literature on motivation in college student learning will be explored following this section.

Student History. It is important to be aware of students' individual differences and backgrounds, as well as know the stimuli that have potential to elicit positive motivational responses to increase student success (Theall & Franklin, 1999). Students' backgrounds and beliefs are shaped by multiple pre-collegiate experiences, including parents' education, home environment, upbringing, pre-collegiate school, and so on

(Paulsen & Feldman, 1999; Schommer, 1993; Schommer, Calvert, Gariglietti, & Bajaj, 1997). It cannot be assumed students are prepared for the particular demands of higher education or that they are going to learn or perform in traditional academic ways (Maclellan, 2005). For example, students' abilities to adapt to the type of learning required in college and ability to adjust to the wider collegiate environment is affected by their preparation when entering higher education (Gallon, 1990). This knowledge can help educators identify where college students are in their learning, growth, and development to help them succeed academically and personally.

College student learners bring with them an accumulation of assumptions, motives, intentions, and previous experiences that serve as the foundation for every learning opportunity, thereby impacting the path and quality of their learning while they are in college (Biggs, 1996; Vermunt & Vermetten, 2004). Prior knowledge and experience is a driving force that directs students' attention, influencing their judgments about what is important and relevant, impacting meaning and comprehension, and shaping the way they perceive the world (Reynolds & Shirey, 1988; Vermunt & Vermetten). College students are conditioned over their educational careers to 'proper' patterns for teaching, learning, and assessment strategies (Cook & Leckey, 1999; Milton, 1973). These patterns generally include acquiring a textbook and course outline, completing papers and projects throughout the course, and cramming for final exams. Through these patterns, students become accustomed to the continual drone of reading what they imagine the instructor thinks important and writing what they think the instructor deems valuable, not necessarily learning to increase their knowledge and skills.

Personal Characteristics. While the experiences and knowledge students gain prior to entering higher education comprise their history, students' personal characteristics have the most influence on how and what they learn. Throughout students' formal and informal education, particular characteristics interact with each other in every learning context (Garcia & Pintrich, 1992). These human characteristics include curiosity, activity, initiating thoughts and behaviors, making meaning from experiences, and desiring to be effective at what is valued (Lambert & McCoombs, 1998). Learners' prior experiences, beliefs, and knowledge serve as the scaffolding that frames and supports the construction of future knowledge (Murphy & Alexander, 2006). Ultimately, students' perceptions of their cognitive ability, motivation, and affective characteristics create initial criteria for learning as they examine tasks and determine the extent to which they can adapt new knowledge and skills within their personal experience (McCoombs, 1998).

Environment. Beyond the influence of an individual's history and personal characteristics is the environment in which learning occurs. Although both learners and instructors are engaged in the learning process, because instructors generally have more knowledge and experience with material taught in an educational setting, one of their major roles is to assess the learning environment, as multiple elements influence students' abilities and capacities to learn (Greenleaf, 2003; Weiss, Huczynski, & Lewis, 1980). For example, more positive learning occurs when the educational environment provides adequate materials and supplies, is comfortable, there is an instructor who is open to participant input and collaborative learning, and there is freedom for students to apply what they have learned (Noe, 1986; Weiss et al.).

Student involvement outside the classroom is inextricably linked to learning (Astin, 1984; Pace, 1984; Pascarella & Terrinzini, 1991, 2005). Campus living communities provide environments where purposeful interactions between students, faculty, and staff enhance the academic experience and personal lives of all students (Anchors, Douglas, & Kasper, 1993). Interacting with other students beyond the classroom provides an environment for students who are involved in discussions that lead them to think for themselves and express their thoughts with feedback from others (Bok, 2006). In these encounters, the sharing of each student's background, values, and perspectives can challenge other participants to examine and re-examine why each individual believes what they believe, as well as test ideas against new information and unexpected ideas (Bok).

Also influential on students' learning are individuals who share the learning environment. Seldom does learning occur in a vacuum, as college students are constantly surrounded by other student learners, who have significant influence over each other (Astin, 1993; Greenleaf, 2003). Learning in a group context offers excellent opportunities for students to learn beyond the confines of their own identities and experiences. In a group setting, students learn how to collaborate with others on similar goals, while learning about people with different backgrounds and identities (Bok, 2006). The group learning environment helps students integrate facets of academic and social life to help them further identify with each other and/or the institution (Bok). This type of learning environment increases the sense of community (Gardiner, 1996) within and beyond a classroom or training environment.

It is important each participant in a learning group knows all are dependent upon each other's success. For this to happen, collaboration is face to face, group members are accountable to each other, the group periodically discusses how each individual has contributed to the learning process, and how the group could achieve even more success (Bernardson, Bernardson, & Smith, 1991). When groups of participants are engaged in a training session with a shared experience, discussion can be stimulated beyond the training session, which may result in stronger bonds among peers (Astin, 1993). Students must remain focused on optimal learning, as it is relatively easy to get 'side-tracked' when working with others.

Instructor. Beyond the learning environment and students' personal characteristics, students' perceptions of the instructor's role in their educational experience can influence their learning. The concept of challenge and support, introduced by Nevitt Sanford (1966), is critical for educators to consider when working with learners. Effective student affairs' practitioners and faculty members apply this continuum to learners. Every student must have their own perceived balance of challenge and support in order to learn and develop. A lack of challenge in the learning environment results in students feeling 'too' safe and not moving towards growth (Sanford). On the other hand, too much challenge without adequate support causes maladaptive responses or retreat. Students' abilities to accept challenges are contingent upon the level of support they perceive is available from peers, instructors, and supervisors, among others. In addition, students who perceive tasks to be unattainable may perceive they have low control over their ability to learn, which eventually

contributes to decreased learning, minimal interest in complying with instructors' directions, and/or not trying to accomplish the required task (McCoombs, 1998).

Students who have different interests, motivations, and attitudes about learning have one commonality – their instructor. The instructor's role is to create a disequilibrium or provide stimuli for students to examine, expand, and modify their existing knowledge (Heuwinkel, 1996). What instructors know, care about, and do is powerfully related to students' abilities to learn and retain new knowledge (Leamnson, 1999; Maclellan, 2005; Murphy & Alexander, 2006). In addition, the student-instructor relationship is critical and how students feel about their instructors has a powerful influence on how they listen, whether they work to comprehend course content, and how much they learn (Leamnson). For example, good instructors inspire students by communicating enthusiasm for the subject matter (Jaspers, 1959) and providing students a sense of what can be accomplished if learners care about and are invested in their own learning.

Informed educators are familiar with student developmental levels (cognitive, affective, moral) of the population with which they are working (Murphy & Alexander, 2006). As students develop in relation to the specific learned task or topic, they are more likely to increase functioning independently as instructional guidance decreases (Murphy & Alexander). As students continue to learn independently, they are more likely to transfer acquired knowledge or skills beyond the learning environment which is one main goal of learning. However, this independent functioning has limits. For some learners, there is a "point of no return" at which point the autonomy expected of students by instructors is too great. Ultimately, educators who ignore student norms of behavior,

communication, and learning preferences/styles tend to provoke resistance to learning, while teaching that is responsive to student norms prompts engagement and learning (Olneck, 1995).

Instructional methods. Complementary to the student-instructor relationship is the process of aligning learning tasks with learning goals, thus enhancing retention and application of new knowledge and skills (Wilson & Scalise, 2006). Once learning goals and student tasks are aligned, the next step is to vary instructional methods, as teaching students different strategies for solving problems can improve critical thinking skills (Wilson & Scalise; Huba & Freed, 2000) since every student learns differently. Different teaching and learning methods in most traditional educational environments consist either of lecture or discussion formats, with occasional crossover between the two.

Learning via discussions is favored over lectures because "active learning approaches provide learning advantages over passive approaches" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 102). When learning goals stretch beyond retaining newly learned information at course conclusion to transferring learning to other situations, students develop skills in thinking and problem solving, increase motivation for additional learning, and change their learning attitudes (Gardiner, 1996). For example, one study that measured retention of information after a course, the transfer of knowledge to new situations, and measured problem-solving, thinking, attitude change, or motivation for further learning, found that students favored discussion methods over a lecture style format (McKreachie, Patrick, Lin, & Smith, 1986). In addition, a review of five studies found that after about 15 to 20 minutes of lecture, students' minds begin to wander and information retention decreases (Davis & Alexander, 1977).

Instructors within and beyond higher education utilize discussion methods to replace lectures in hopes of increasing student learning. However, if instructors are not skilled in facilitating discussions, there may not be benefits to student learning. Similarly, poorly facilitated discussions may create a situation where there is not adequate time to cover the breadth and depth of information. An additional potential danger utilizing discussion methods occurs when students may not engage their peers in dialogue if they believe they have low abilities or poor preparation in that topic area (Bok, 2006). Similar to the expectation that learners apply what they learn, instructors are responsible for gauging their students to determine the best educational methods and then applying that knowledge in their teaching. The debate over whether lecture or discussion methods are more effective may depend on the content of information presented, skill of instructor, and educational setting/environment. In a review of 17 studies comparing lectures to discussions, McKreachie (1986) found that both methods are just as effective when students are learning low-level factual information.

When designing meaningful instructional methods for student learning, instructors can incorporate reflective components into the curriculum to increase learning. One such strategy includes encouraging students to engage in personal reflection via writing or dialogue with classmates. A second method to increase student reflection is the inclusion of immediate instructor feedback when students complete learning tasks. Encouraging students to reflect on learning and try different approaches in problem solving when initial efforts fail can significantly enhance performance and learning retention (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999). Research has long established that providing students with prompt constructive feedback improves their learning

(Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006; Kuh, 2003; Page, 1958) and that when instructors give frequent opportunities for students to test their knowledge and skills, learning is improved (Black & Williams, 1998; Carina et al.; Page). Critical thinking and learning can be enhanced by giving students problems or case studies and having them teach each other by working in groups (Bok, 2006; Bernardson, Bernardson, & Smith, 1991; Slavin, 1990). For example in Slavin's study, 49 of 60 students who participated in a team learning environment showed an advantage over individual learners when completing their coursework.

Research has found that each academic discipline has a distinctive learning climate (Cashin & Downey, 1995; Haskell, 2001). While there has not been extensive literature generated in this area, few studies have explored this relationship. Postman (1988) found that the subject matter and learning audience vary across disciplines, in terms of a unique manner of speaking, writing, conducting research, and engaging in discourse. Educators aware of this information can use it to their advantage by reflecting on how conveying a topic in the classroom can best be presented to their students, taking into account not only content, but also students' interests and learning styles. For example, when students possess a deep-seated interest in a specific topic, they are likely to learn more and achieve greater results (Murphy & Alexander, 2006) when applying that information.

As students apply what they learn, both within and beyond the confines of a classroom or training venue, they must receive consistent, timely, and meaningful feedback on their performance (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999b; Haskell, 2001; Wilson & Scalise, 2006). Individuals generally acquire and apply new skills and

knowledge faster if they receive timely feedback throughout the learning process (Pellegrino, Chudowsky, & Glaser, 2001). Students need to know quickly if they complete a task incorrectly. When students are correct, they need to know to replicate a particular learned skill or behavior. Succinctly put, practice without feedback produces little learning (Carini et al, 2006; Pellegrino et al.), which is why students must understand the measures by which they will be judged, how they are progressing within these measures, and how they can improve throughout the learning process (Black & Williams, 1988).

Motivation

Woven throughout each of the above characteristics is the role motivation plays in a student's learning. Concepts of motivation are intricately intertwined with all aspects of college student learning. Generally, students learn only what is personally relevant based on their self-perceived capacity to learn and use of learning strategies (Paulsen & Feldman, 1999). As people cannot be educated against their will, learning is often accompanied by various elements associated with a student's motivation and satisfaction, which are specific to each individual (Leamnson, 1999).

Motivation defined. Motivation is defined as the elements and processes that initiate and influence the magnitude, persistence, and quality of goal-oriented behaviors (Dweck & Elliott, 1983). In addition, motivation is seen as dynamic, contextually sensitive, regulated by learners, and influenced by peers and instructors (Leamnson, 1999; Maclellan, 2005). Culture and climate significantly impact an individuals' motivation because of the deep interconnectedness of how language, beliefs, values, and behaviors influence experiences and decisions (Wlodkowski, 1999).

Each learners' epistemological perceptions affect their motivational beliefs, cognitive strategies, affective factors, and desired learning outcomes within every learning environment (Bruning, Schraw, & Ronning, 1995; Hofer & Pintrich, 1997; Murphy & Alexander, 2006; Schommer, 1990). By understanding concepts of learning, learning styles, and the educational environment, educators are able to connect with and motivate students to become more involved and interested in their educational experiences (Watson & Terrell, 1999).

Learning can only be self-initiated and not externally caused – it can be externally encouraged, but only internally controlled (Leamnson, 1999). In order for students to be motivated to learn a particular content, they must experience a need to learn that information, or a deeper reason for the role that subject matter plays or will play in their lives (Leamnson). Ultimately, motives influence how and why people learn (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996) and the greater a students' motivation, the more likely the individual will use cognitive processes to gain optimal learning (Covington, 2000; Laird, Shoup, Kuh, Schwarz, 2008; Wolters, 1998). Although motivation cannot be directly observed or measured precisely, students' motivations can be based on their actions, such as signs of persistence and completion of tasks and projects (Wlodkowski, 1999).

Range of motivation. Students' desire to acquire mastery and display competence in particular topic areas is a strong motivation for action and to learn as much as possible to ensure proficiency (Fazey & Fazey, 2001). The direction learners proceed to attain their goals can be divided into two categories that rest along a broad continuum: performance orientation and learning orientation (Bures et al., 2000). In the study of motivation, these two orientations are also referred to as extrinsic and intrinsic

motivation, respectively (Pintrich, Marx, & Boyle, 1993; Stage & Williams, 1990).

Performance orientation and extrinsic motivation rest on one end of a continuum opposite

from learning orientation and intrinsic motivation. The nature of a continuum reflects the

range that some learners are better able than others to balance these 'opposing' levels of

motivation (Pintrich & Garcia, 1991), depending on the topic, environment, instructor,

and learner.

Students with a performance orientation or who are extrinsically motivated to

engage in learning because of reasons not related to the acquired learning (Deci,

Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991), but do so to achieve an external goal, such as

receiving an award, getting a grade, acquiring a job, or avoiding punishment (Dev, 1997;

Donald, 1999; Fazey & Fazey, 2001). Students perceived as not interested in taking on

additional tasks or having noticeable anxiety about undertaking challenging projects tend

to base the quantity and quality of their learning on extrinsic reward systems (Ryan,

Connell, & Deci, 1985).

Three levels of internal regulation reflect the complex nature of extrinsic

motivation: external, introjected, and identified (Deci et al., 1991). Individuals who are

externally regulated to learn a specific topic may do so only when they are stimulated by

influences completely external to the task being learned, such as a student who is

studying to pass a test that will lead to a better paying job. Adjacent to external regulation

on this continuum is introjected regulation, which is demonstrated by students

recognizing the value of what they learn, yet are motivated to learn by anticipation of

reward or fear of failure. Individuals within the identified regulation level perceive that

by learning new information, they not only receive personally relevant rewards, but they

inherently value what they are learning. The main difference between identified

regulation and intrinsic motivation is that with the latter, the impetus to learn is initiated

by the individual.

On the opposite end of the continuum from performance orientation and extrinsic

motivation are students who maintain a learning orientation as they generally learn for

the sake of learning, as they challenge themselves to learn tasks regardless of their ability

or the task difficulty. A learning orientation or intrinsic motivation means a student's

desire to learn is for the sake of deeper learning, originating from within that individual's

core and being closely connected with their sense of self and purpose (Donald, 1999;

Fazey & Fazey, 2001; Laird et al., 2008). Intrinsically motivated students who actively

engage in learning out of curiosity, interest, enjoyment, or to achieve intellectual

development and personal goals are more apt to achieve in the learning environment than

extrinsically motivated students (Donald; Fazey & Fazey; Lepper, 1988; Lumsden, 1994;

Murphy & Alexander, 2006; Paulsen & Gentry, 1995).

Studies in college student learning suggest that students who have goals arising

from extrinsic motivation tend to constrain their own performance, while students who

develop goals through intrinsic motivation will enhance their performance (Paulsen &

Feldman, 1999). Similarly, in a study of intrinsically motivated college students,

participants chose learning tasks that were more challenging, as opposed to extrinsically

motivated students who tended to choose learning challenges with lower degrees of

difficulty (Lumsden, 1994). When intrinsic motivation is present in a learning

environment, students and instructors tend to create experiences, opportunities, and

whole environments where everyone involved is more likely to continually enhance each

other's motivation. Positive expectations for learning and a positive learning environment foster intrinsic motivation in the learning process (Marcano, 1998). Based on this perspective, the responsibility for learner motivation within an educational context rests on students, educators, and organizations (Wlodkowski, 1999).

Personal characteristics. Each learner's self appraisal of competence and confidence levels, as well as self efficacy, interacts with motivation to initiate or inhibit future learning (Bures et al., 2000; Fazey & Fazey, 2001; Lumsden, 1994). This self appraisal includes opportunities for students to reflect on their expectations of what they will learn, their own sphere of control in the learning environment, and prior attitudes of the presenter, content, schedule, etc. (Bures et al.). Building a sense of self-efficacy to promote learning involves constructing learning environments where ability is viewed as an acquirable skill, competitive social comparisons are deemphasized, self-comparisons of progress and personal accomplishment are highlighted, and instructors reinforce students' abilities to exercise a degree of control in their learning environment (Stage & Muller, 1999).

There are several personal characteristics that determine a person's level of motivation to learn: causal attributes, academic self concept, perceived ability, increasable conception of intelligence, and past achievement (Valle, Cabanach, Nunez, Gonzalez-Pienda, Rodriguez, & Pineiro, 2003). Causal attributes determine the level of effort a student puts into learning a specific set of skills and/or knowledge. For example, motivated students are committed to learning (Donald, 1999) exert more effort to learn a skill or topic and are more likely to learn what they had intended. Academic self-concept is described as a student's perception of their ability to learn a specific subject matter. It

is potentially useless for a person to be motivated to solve a task or attempt to learn if they are convinced, fully or partially, that they have an inability to learn the content. Once learners perceive they have the ability to learn and have witnessed an increase in their knowledge and/or skill level, whether in one topic area or several, they will likely have more confidence in their ability to keep learning or learn more complex information. Lastly, as students reflect on what they have achieved through learning, their motivation to learn in the future is either promoted or inhibited. It is important for instructors and presenters to identify these characteristics in an audience of learners, as educators have an increased responsibility to determine students' levels of motivation and develop appropriate strategies to ensure learning success.

 Conditions to foster motivation. Students' motivation to learn is paramount to many other topics included in this literature review (e.g., student history, environment, instructor, and so on), therefore it is important to examine what conditions foster and increase students' motivation to learn and meet learning goals. As every person is different, so too are how they are motivated in the learning environment, based on their previous experiences, perceptions, and attitudes (Wlodkowski, 1999). Keeping students' differences in mind, two sets of researchers designed frameworks aimed at enhancing students' motivations to learn. The first set of researchers identified five elements educators should consider when creating curricula: designing instruction with students' needs and interests in mind, eliciting students' curiosity, clearly organizing course material, being interested in the importance of student learning, and giving students consistent feedback (Theall, Birdsall, & Franklin, 1997).

In addition to research conducted by Theall et al. (1997) that led to the above elements, two additional researchers in education articulated eight conditions that increase learning motivation (Quay and Quaglia, 2004). First, a learning environment designed to foster a sense of belonging for all learners increases the likelihood of students feeling part of a community. Once in a community environment, students more readily connect with the learning content, subject, other learners, and the department or institution. Second, individuals in a position of authority are responsible for being aware of their own role model status within the learning environment. Often, students look up to instructors and presenters, as they have more life experience. As role models in an educational environment, instructors face a significant level of pressure, as the educator in front of learners can lose the respect and confidence of their students just as quickly as they gain it.

Third, acknowledging and celebrating learners' accomplishments with public recognition and not solely relying on grades bolsters students' motivation to learn more. It is well known that students have grown up in a society where grades have enormous significance (Donald, 1999; Ender, Newton, & Caple, 1996; Leamnson, 1999; Milton, 1973; Page, 1958; Wilson & Scalise, 2006), but significant learning occurs from the process of dedicating effort to learning, not just from the results of learning. A fourth condition that increases students' motivations to learn is to incorporate moments of fun and excitement into curricula. As students apply what they learn to other applications or settings, demonstrating that learning can be fun and connected to the world around them helps learners see the benefits and greater picture of what they learn when the training session or class has concluded.

A fifth condition described by Quay and Quaglia (2004) suggests the importance of encouraging students to be creative and curious about the content of their learning, as well as the learning process itself. Challenging students to ask 'why' and 'why not' questions in a positive supportive environment helps them continuously engage in their own learning, but also in others' learning. Next, there must be a safe environment where learners are encouraged to participate in healthy risk-taking and feel comfortable succeeding and failing among their peers and instructors/presenters. A seventh condition describes the necessity of providing opportunities for students to be leaders within learning opportunities, taking responsibility for themselves and their peers. Successful students need to feel as if they are an important part of the classroom or training session, including making decisions about content, format, location, the schedule, and so on. The last condition outlined by Quay and Quaglia emphasizes the importance of celebration in learning environments. It means a great deal to students when they are recognized for acting on their beliefs and encourage others to do the same. This helps cultivate self confidence and results in positive behavior both in the learning environment and beyond.

Regardless of what students learn, one major goal of education is to help students develop the confidence, skills, and knowledge needed to be successful when they graduate and enter graduate programs and/or the full-time professional work force. This can be significantly challenging as every student learns differently, every educational setting has varying characteristics, instructors are inherently unique, and the importance and applicability of material being learned is subjective for each learner. Even with all these challenges within the college environment, it is crucial to assist students on their

paths of success as they directly apply what they learn during their university years to their lives beyond college.

The RA training environment is one setting where paraprofessionals learn a wide array of content and skills that are immediately applied to the residential community when training concludes. Research is limited on the relationship between what is learned in training and what RAs apply in their jobs, as well as the relationship in how RAs perceive training and how useful training is in their jobs. In a study of 21 liberal arts colleges in the South, results show that 48% of the 388 RAs who responded rated the training as unhelpful (Twale & Muse, 1996). Although many factors likely contributed to these results, student affairs practitioners should be able to identify knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes learned in training applied in the RA position. Furthermore, training evaluators and student affairs practitioners are responsible for understanding the organizational climate surrounding RA training, how information taught in training is learned, RAs motivation to learn, and how to facilitate the application of skills learned in training to a job setting.

As the specific context of this study focuses on the training environment for Resident Advisors prior to the commencement of the Fall term and the application of what they learned to their residential communities, it is helpful to explore training transfer, the act of applying what is learned. Training transfer provides a framework for understanding organizational climates, methods for skill and knowledge dissemination in a training setting, participant motivation, and processes to assist direct application of skills and knowledge when training is concluded.

Training Transfer

Multiple conceptual frameworks exist that examine how and to what extent learning within a structured educational environment is applied to outside that context, such as a job, relationship, personal life, and so on. Some of these research areas include: applied learning, training transfer, learning transfer, and behavior modification, among others. Based on an examination of the literature, training transfer provides the strongest foundation upon which concepts of RA training and college student learning rest, as it is grounded in a training and post-training environment (as opposed to being limited to a classroom). In addition, the models of training transfer highlighted below provide a comprehensive framework that dovetails with the multiple roles and responsibilities required of RAs during and after training. It is for these reasons that training transfer is the most relevant concept through which this research examines how RAs make meaning of Fall training and the application of what they learn to their residential communities.

Throughout the business literature, how knowledge and skills are learned during training and continually applied as part of an individual's job performance, is known as training transfer (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Broad & Newstrom, 1992; Burke & Baldwin, 1999; Garavaglia, 1993; Hoekstra, 2003; Olsen, 1998; Poteet, 1996). Identifying training transfer is not only a way to justify time and cost spent on training when funding in higher education is under such scrutiny, but also to verify the usefulness and applicability of training curricula (Garavaglia, 1993). The body of knowledge in training transfer is extensive, therefore the next sections examine the origins of this concept, provide several models that have served as foundations of this area of study, and highlight major tenants found in the current literature that directly apply to this study.

Development of Training Transfer

Early research on training transfer was initiated by Thorndike and Woodworth in 1901 where the concept of identical elements was first studied (as cited in Borowski, 2000; Poteet, 1996). These researchers found that the transfer of knowledge from one application to another was enhanced when identical stimulus and response elements exist in training and work environments. Ellis (1965) built on this concept finding that when trainees are given multiple examples of a skill and allowed to practice in various situations, they are more likely to transfer that skill beyond training.

Another landmark study in the late 1950s found that whether an individual attends training, or not, does not necessarily mean they transfer learned skills back to the job (Mosel, 1957). Successful knowledge and skill transfer is more likely to occur when training content directly applies to a job, trainees can practice skills on the job immediately, and trainees are motivated to change some aspect of their position (Mosel). These seminal studies have set the stage for multiple perspectives and research trends on training transfer.

Models of Training Transfer

Several researchers developed models to explain the process of training transfer, as well as the complex relationships existing between influencing elements. The most common model describing the role motivation plays in training transfer was developed by Noe (1986). Complimenting his work, Baldwin and Ford's (1988) Model of the Transfer Process describes the training transfer process in further detail. Holton's (1996) Model of Evaluation, Research, and Measurement add to Noe's and Baldwin and Ford's research by including how an employee's work environment and individual ability impact transfer.

The last model is proposed by Facteau, Dobbins, Russell, Ladd, and Kudisch (1995), who explored the impact of trainees' attitudes and beliefs on training transfer. All of the models discussed have emerged within the business literature and focus on explaining training effectiveness.

Noe's Model of Motivational Influences on Training Effectiveness. Noe (1986) developed one of the earliest models of training transfer to explain the integration of environmental and motivational factors in the relationship between learning and behavior changes on the job. Elements such as a trainees locus of control, individual expectations, career and job attitudes, reaction to skill assessment, motivation to learn, and motivation to transfer were all suggested to influence the effectiveness of training (Ayers, 2005; Noe). Noe's research also examines how trainees perceive their access to 'task' and 'social' components on the job. For example, task components are tangible features of the work environment, such as materials, supplies, and monetary support, where social components may include opportunities to practice learned material, receive support and recognition from supervisors, and gain positive feedback. A major finding in Noe's research suggested the extent to which trainees perceive they have adequate and available access to these components during training influenced their levels of motivation to learn and transfer knowledge to the job.

Baldwin and Ford's Model of the Transfer Process. Drawing on a comprehensive literature review of motivation and training, Baldwin and Ford (1988) developed a model to illustrate relationships between various elements in the training process: training inputs, training outcomes, and conditions for optimal transfer. Inputs include trainee characteristics (ability, motivation, and personality), training design (learning principles,

topic sequence, content) and characteristics of the work environment (perceived support and the opportunity to use learned skills on the job), and training outputs are seen as what is learned and how much is retained over time. In this model, conditions for transfer include the generalization or maintenance of training, or both, where there is a perceived level of support for training from the organization, as well as motivation to training.

Ultimately, the purpose of this model is to examine how training inputs and outputs impact conditions for transfer. Through their research, Baldwin and Ford's research has increased the understanding of how characteristics of training influence transfer. First, trainee characteristics and the work environment directly influence transfer, regardless of training material. Next, training outcomes are directly influenced by training design, trainee characteristics, and the work environment. Finally, an individual's motivation and a supportive work environment are necessary to apply knowledge and skills to a job – solely learning skills does not necessarily result in transfer.

Holton's Model of Evaluation, Research, and Measurement. Building off Noe's, and Baldwin and Ford's models, Holton (1996) proposed that individuals' motivation to transfer, the work environment, and the ability to increase their learning influenced trainees' capacities to learn information and positively change their job performance. Increasing a trainee's motivation to transfer depends on the organizational climate, the expected return on their investment in training (time and money), attitude about their job, and perceived fulfillment from attending the training. Holton also identified readiness for training, job attitudes, personality characteristics, and motivation to transfer as direct antecedents to an individual's ability to learn. Holton's research suggested that learning

from training is of little use to organizations if it is not transferred in some degree to individual performance. Ultimately, Holton found that although individual performance, learning, and organizational changes are the primary outcomes of training, influential factors are multi-directional (Ayers, 2005). When illustrating the relationships between elements in his model, Holton used arrows pointing in opposite directions, demonstrating how the dynamic linkages between individual, environmental, and organizational factors can influence each other

Facteau, Dobbins, Russell, Ladd, and Kudisch's Model of Factors Influencing Motivation to Learn and Perceived Training Transfer. A model proposed by Facteau, Dobbins, Russell, Ladd, and Kudisch (1995) sought to explore the extent to which trainees' attitudes and beliefs about training influence their motivation to learn and their perceptions of how much information they transfer back to their work. Findings from their research indicated that attitudes about training (training reputation and individual intrinsic incentives), an individual's commitment to the organization, and level of supervisory support directly related to a trainee's motivation to learn during training. They found individuals who were more motivated to learn demonstrated increased training transfer.

The above models describing motivation to learn, motivation to transfer, and the process of training transfer for trainees serve as a foundation to this study as research will be conducted on the meaning making process of RAs surrounding their training and post-training experiences. In addition to these models, extensive research has been conducted utilizing these models and others to examine the training transfer process, resulting in

several broad categories that inform this study: organizational climate, knowledge

acquisition, participants' motivation to learn, and post-training transfer.

Organizational Climate

In general, organizations are relatively slow to change and leadership may "resist

attempts at the implementation of new techniques and work procedures" (Huczynski &

Lewis, 2001, p. 228). To counteract this notion of resistance, a work environment where

organizational members are favorable to change can directly impact employees'

motivation to learn and their motivation to transfer knowledge to their position (Burke &

Baldwin, 1999; Noe, 1986; Weiss et al., 1980). The importance of an entire

organization's social context can not be underestimated (Noe, 1986). Senior leaders,

peers, and supervisors who provide positive, honest, critical feedback and reinforcement

to all employees throughout training exercises/sessions and later when learning is applied

on the job, witness improvement. This positive environment likely results in trainees

transferring knowledge, skills, and behaviors from training to their work environment as

employees (Anderson, 2005; Noe).

Prior to the start of training, assessing and identifying organizational conditions to

support or inhibit transfer also enhances employees' abilities to apply learned skills

(Weiss et al., 1980). Conditions facilitating transfer include: a supervisor open to

suggestions and employees' ideas, employees responsible for their own work, autonomy

for employees to use their own methods, and a free exchange of information among all

staff. Conditions inhibiting transfer include work overload, unplanned crises, difficulty in

convincing others of new ideas, and excessive rates of change and/or staff turnover. Each

of these elements contribute to the success of every organization, as well as its

employees. Every supervisor is responsible for an organization's climate. One study found that supervisors' attitudes and management styles through the training process affects the level to which employees transferred what they learned during training (Weiss et al.).

Strategies of Knowledge Acquisition

Once the organizational climate is been established to support training transfer for all employees who are motivated to learn, supervisors and training designers have the ultimate responsibility in determining how employees are trained and in what topic areas. In addition to employees' desire to learn new information, it is important to first consider employees' abilities to comprehend new subject matter and how skilled they are in experimenting with new knowledge (Huczynski & Lewis, 2001). If trainees are expected to master specific tasks, it is necessary to address the general concepts underlying each task, as well as specific skills necessary to successfully complete them. Trainees are more likely to learn a second task if similar principles apply (Kelley, Orgel, & Baer, 1985) such as teaching an individual how to plan an activity, followed by skills on running a meeting.

When learning new information, "real basics will transfer to new problems and situations because the skills are the same – only the problem, the situation, or the mode of application is different" (Kelley, et al., 1985, p. 78). The degree to which employees have the ability to transfer skills, behaviors, and knowledge is dependent on: 1) similarity between training and ultimate job responsibilities, 2) amount of skills practice, 3) training simulations matching actual work settings, 4) feedback on how skills are executed, and 5) the degree and nature of skills facilitation on the job (Olsen, 1998).

Based on the skills employees are expected to master, supervisors and trainers are responsible for deciding what basic skills are taught. The most important aspect in selecting training topics is to determine what basic skills are needed to excel on the job. Training transfer is more likely to occur if trainees are taught to utilize basic skills when addressing new and different situations (Kelley, et al., 1985). Training attendees who learn material when topics are taught one at a time are more comfortable moving on to new content than trainees who are subjected to multiple topics within the same training session (Kelley, et al.). When training on a second topic occurs before mastery of the first, it is likely that learning transfer will not occur on either topic (Goldstein & Sorcher, 1974).

By practicing new information, skills, and behaviors, individuals develop the ability to discriminate between positive and negative consequences of their behaviors, as well as when what they have learned does and does not apply to situations in the workplace (Parry & Reich, 1984). When possible, both correct and incorrect training examples are used to demonstrate positive and negative consequences of individuals' behaviors (Parry & Reich). Trainees cannot be expected to remedy their own incorrect behaviors if they do not know how to recognize negative behavior or the negative results that behavior may produce (Kelley, et al., 1985). In a similar vein, trainees should also recognize the consequences of their actions when their positive behavior produces positive results.

Trainees respond well to continuous reward for their positive behavior by supervisors and the organization for which they work (Weiss et al., 1980). Two unpublished dissertations indicate trainees who perform skills accurately during training

may not transfer those skills back to their job unless there are positive consequences for

doing so (All, 1977; Calkin, 1979). Regardless of trainees' capacities to build on current

knowledge and their abilities to try new things based on training, trainees must also be

motivated to transfer that learning back to the job. In conjunction with rewards offered by

organizations to apply new knowledge at the conclusion of training, trainees' motivation

is also strongly influenced by the degree with which they value course content and the

potential for that knowledge to assist them personally and/or professionally (Huczynski

& Lewis, 2001).

Motivation to Learn and Transfer

In a supportive organizational climate, an employee's trainability is a function of

their skills, abilities, and motivation (Baldwin et al., 1991). Furthermore, an individual's

motivation to learn is a direct antecedent to learning (Ayers, 2005; Holton, 1996; Laird et

al., 2008; Noe, 1986) as there is a difference between motivation to learn and motivation

to transfer (Baldwin & Ford, 1988). Motivation to learn is a trainee's specific desire to

learn content (Noe & Schmitt, 1986), while motivation to transfer is the desire to use

knowledge and skills mastered during training on the job (Ayers; Noe & Schmitt)

Supervisors and trainers can examine employees' abilities by understanding

individuals' capacities to comprehend subject matter and possessing the appropriate level

of skills to experiment with new learning (Huczynski & Lewis, 2001). This information

can be gained through a comprehensive interview process by critically evaluating an

employees' work performance. Motivation refers to the "choices people make as to what

experiences or goals they will approach or avoid, and the degree of effort they will exert

in that respect" (Keller, 1983, p. 385). Employees' motivation to learn may be influenced

by their beliefs that information presented during training is directly applicable to their jobs (Clark, Dobbins, & Ladd, 1993), in addition to the potential extrinsic rewards of promotion, salary increases, and prestige (Noe, 1986).

One researcher found that employees who are highly motivated in their jobs are more likely to learn new skills, knowledge, and behaviors (Noe, 1986). Participating in training opportunities is one avenue by which employee's increase the breadth and depth of their knowledge, improve job performance, and raise self-worth. In order to create an environment where employees can develop a high motivation to learn, Noe identifies six conditions that should exist:

1. Trainees think the skills assessment of their strengths and weaknesses administrated by their supervisor is accurate;

2. Trainees feel as though they have the capability to master the training content;

3. When trainees master skills learned in training, their performance is related to desired personal and/or professional outcomes (prestige, salary increases, organizational movement, self-confidence, etc.);

4. Trainees value good job performance;

5. Trainees identify psychologically with their job and seek some type of advancement/change of position within their field; and

6. Trainees perceive the work setting as possessing necessary resources to apply newly learned skills, including positive supportive peer and supervisory relationships.

Within these conditions, employees' levels of motivation to learn from training sessions, engage in subsequent learning, and alter their behaviors are consistent with what was covered during training.

Motivating factors to attend training include a trainee's involvement in the training design, the credibility of those who require or suggest training, and both organizational and supervisory support (Clark et al., 1993). Relating directly to a supervisor's role, an employee's motivation may depend on their reaction to the assessment of their skills, specifically regarding the credibility of the assessor, level of detail included, and perceived usefulness of the evaluations (Noe, 1986).

In addition to individuals' performance assessments, employees' perceptions of their environment are important. When observing organizational climate, conditions may pave the way for high levels of employee motivation to learn and identify potential obstacles. Possible constraints that may hinder employees' motivation to learn are a lack of needed services from co-workers, an individuals lack of skills to perform necessary tasks, insufficient job related information, improper tools and equipment, inadequate budgetary support, unfamiliarity with the assigned task, insufficient time to meet deadlines, poor work conditions, and lack of organizational support from peers, supervisors, and upper level administrators (Peters & O'Connor, 1980). Individuals may lack the motivation to fully engage in training, which may result in decreased transfer of knowledge and skills, if these constraints are not addressed prior to and during training. When staff feel their performance is improved as a result of training and those behaviors are recognized by supervisors post training, employees tend to be more motivated to learn, thus being more likely to participate in further training (Noe, 1986).

Measuring and Facilitating Transfer Post-Training

The time after an individual has completed a training session is the most important period to facilitate positive transfer (Burke & Baldwin, 1999). Organizations and supervisors who do not take steps to assist employees in applying what they have learned in training to their jobs may find employees who see training as a waste of time and resources (Garavaglia, 1993; Kelly, 1982). Supervisors have the responsibility to document training transfer successes on the job and demonstrate the benefits and cost effectiveness of training (Garavaglia; Kelley et al., 1985). Demonstrating transferred knowledge and skills that fulfill the ultimate objectives of the original training session is an asset for supervisors, trainees, trainers, and the organization (Kelly).

Research indicates that the "greatest single cause for weak transfer of training is the absence of a strong maintenance system to recognize and reinforce new behaviors on the job" (Parry & Reich, 1984, p. 60). An established action plan where supervisors and trainees document successes and failures can be part of this system (Parry & Reich) as long as all participants are willing to work together to report what occurs post training. Using action plans post-training, new knowledge and skills are modified to become critical elements in job performance. After knowledge is successfully transferred and documented, an essential aspect of the educational experience (of training) becomes an inherent part of the employee's, and ultimately the organization's, value system (Kelly, 1982). The process of documenting and assessing successes and failures can become a critical aspect in evaluating job and organizational performance.

Administrators and trainers should take all the above into account when designing training sessions for staff, especially individuals who have supervisory responsibilities.

When incorporated into training philosophies and materials, it is more likely that the knowledge, skills, and behaviors learned during training are utilized by employees when they return to, or start, their positions (Burke & Baldwin, 1999; Garavaglia, 1993; Huczynski & Lewis, 2001; Kelly, 1982; Noe, 1986; Olsen, 1998).

Summary

Literature related to studying the meaning making experience of RAs during and after Fall pre-service training was examined in this chapter. The historical context through which the Resident Advisor position and training have developed from the beginning of higher education through to the present are revealed. As early as the 12th Century, higher education students were living close to, or on, university campuses because they traveled great distances to attend a college or university to increase their academic knowledge in professional career fields. The process of students living on campus became more formalized with the founding of Cambridge and Oxford Universities, which then translated to the first institutions in the U.S.

Residential philosophies continued to develop in colleges and universities through the use of dormitories where students solely ate and slept and eventually to residence halls where students participate in a comprehensive co-curricular experience. In addition to the transition from dormitories to residence halls, life in on-campus housing changed from the late 1600's to the present. Student enrollment in the U.S. grew with the passage of the Morrill Acts, soldiers returning from serving their country, and other avenues increasing access to students who did not solely identify as white middle and upper-middle class men. With enrollment growth came additional housing on campus and the

need to oversee residence halls more closely because upper-level administrators could not maintain 'order' or provide what students demanded well into the 20th Century.

In order to address students' (and parents') needs beyond academia, colleges and universities began to employ professional staff in the early 20th Century and then student paraprofessional staff in the mid 1950s – both positions dedicated to the holistic growth and development of students outside the classroom. Initially, paraprofessionals assisted professional staff in coordinating administrative and discipline related tasks, but that level of position grew in responsibilities to more educational, programmatic, resource-oriented activities. By the end of the 1960s, most residential colleges and universities had this paraprofessional position in place within residential communities. Although the position name varies by institution, this manuscript views refers to the position as a Resident Advisor (RA).

RAs are generally selected based on their academic ability, high energy, and interpersonal skills, yet every selection process across the U.S. varies. Once employed, RAs are generally responsible for working with people from diverse backgrounds, developing community, conducting programs, confronting policy violations, and serving as resource and referral agents for their residents in communities of varying sizes. In order to prepare RAs for their positions, these paraprofessionals participate in multiple levels of training: pre-service training prior to the Fall term, in-service training throughout the year, weekly staff meetings, and depending on the institution, a for-credit course. Throughout this training process, RAs develop and enhance their skills in order to provide the most positive experience possible for residents in their communities. With the variety of training programs and different levels of evaluation across the U.S., there is

little consensus as to 'best' practices and seldom have published evaluation results lead to changes in the following year's training curriculum at most institutions.

Research to examine such practices has been strictly positivistic in nature, generally focusing on training effectiveness or RA satisfaction. As higher education faces pressure from its administrators, governing boards, and the public regarding accountability for finances and outcomes, there has been growing interest in measuring what students gain from living on campus. Residence life programs are now in a position to demonstrate student engagement in learning and the value-added experience of students who live in residence halls, as well as a justification of the benefits paraprofessional staff receive from training initiatives.

When exploring how and why college students learn or do not learn when placed in an educational setting, it is necessary for higher education faculty, staff, and administrators to understand how college student learning occurs. The process of learning encompasses both the sharing and gaining of new information, blending it into learners' experiences and ultimately altering how they perceive their world (Bowen, 1977; Donald, 1999; Watson & Stage, 1999; Wilson & Scalise, 2006). Inherent in this study is that learning is constructivist in nature, meaning that students construct their own truths and realities based on the knowledge and skills presented to them (Drake, 1998). Every student's background and experiences lay a unique foundation for how they perceive the educational setting, all participants in that environment, and the material presented.

As the learning process is different for each person (Wilson & Scalise, 2006), not only must educators identify what college student learning is for their particular audience, but also the plethora of individual characteristics that impact students' abilities to learn.

Every student enters a college or university with a diverse background shaped by pre-collegiate perceptions and experiences, family and peer influences, and personal learning abilities. Every learning opportunity is influenced by this history and each individual's personal characteristics, making it challenging for instructors to educate all students in ways that have the most meaning for them.

Beyond the differences in learners are other influences in an educational setting, such as the environment, instructor, and topic covered. Research has consistently demonstrated that learning occurs everywhere (Astin, 1984; Keeling, 2004; Pace, 1984; Pascarella & Terrinzini, 1991, 2005) and students who feel physically, emotionally, and mentally safe tend to maximize what they learn. Instructors who can provide this type of safe environment have been more successful in helping students learn and apply information, especially if a positive relationship exists between student and educator. Beyond the importance of this relationship is the material being learned, and the significance students place on the importance of that information. As long as activities and projects are coordinated with learning goals, students are more likely to increase their expertise, learning, transfer, and development (Bransford et al., 2000).

As students continuously construct meaning of the world around them, an individual's perception about themselves, the environment, their relationship with the instructor, and the topic being presented influences their motivation to learn, therefore either heightening or decreasing students' engagement in learning (Wlodkowski, 1999). A reality in learning is that teachers, facilitators, trainers, and other learners will enhance the motivation for some students, while diminish that of others. Assuming faculty and student affairs practitioners know what they want students to learn and understand

students are motivated differently, the challenge becomes convincing all students that the material taught is important and satisfying learn (Leamnson, 1999). Although students may know different learning strategies have different levels of motivation, content and skills gained may mean nothing unless they are motivated to apply newly learned information, skills, and abilities to the world outside an instructional setting (Perkins, 1991; Schneider & Pressley, 1989).

A traditional paradigm of learning places responsibility on faculty and instructors to assist students in applying knowledge learned within the confines of an academic setting. As demonstrated here, learning occurs both within and beyond classroom walls, so it is important for all faculty, staff, and administrators to realize their responsibilities in engaging college students in their learning, regardless of the learning environment. Specific to the context of this study, student affairs practitioners, and in particular, the graduate and professional staff who work with paraprofessional staff members in residential communities must move beyond merely understanding the complexities of learning, to increasing the application of learning within residential settings in order to benefit all on-campus residents. Even more specifically, training designers in residence life are responsible for identifying the organizational climate surrounding RA training, how information, skills, and abilities taught in training are learned, how RAs are motivated to learn, and how to facilitate the application of skills learned in training to a job setting. Taken originally from the business literature, the concept of training transfer offers a way to measure the extent to which knowledge and skills learned during training are applied to an individual's job.

Research at the turn of the 20th Century on training transfer initially examined

how knowledge from one application was applied to another in work environments. The

literature has grown from that time until the present, where the topic of training transfer

has blossomed into multiple research interests including organizational climate, strategies

of knowledge acquisition, motivation to learn, and the measurement and facilitation of

transfer post-training. Literature from each area within training transfer, including

specific conceptual models, serve as a solid foundation upon which to build a study to

look at how RAs make meaning of their training experiences, as well as the meaning

making of applying what they have learned to their jobs.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

The previous chapter exposed the origins and models of RA training to better understand how RAs make meaning of their training, as well as how they apply learned knowledge and skills to their living communities post training. This chapter provides an overview of the theoretical frameworks governing this research that uses qualitative methodology to investigate the experiences of 12 participants in an eight day Fall RA training program at a large public research university in the South. For the purposes of this study, the pseudonym of "Hunter University" is used. Utilizing qualitative approaches allowed this study to examine processes and experiences of RAs in Fall training beyond previous studies that generally focused on overall training effectiveness through a positivist perspective (Cannon & Peterman, 1973; Gimmestad, 1970; Heppner & Reeder, 1984; Lynch, 1968; Marchand, 1972; Meschanic, 1971; Murray et al., 1999; Peterman et al., 1979; Schuh, 1981; Upcraft, 1982; Upcraft & Pilato, 1982), the value of individual training methods (Greenleaf, 1967; Greenwood & Lembcke, 1972; Twale & Muse, 1996; Upcraft; Upcraft & Pilato; Webb, 2003), or student staff satisfaction (Schroeder, 1973, 1993; Twale & Muse; Webb). The following discussion highlights the research paradigm in which this study is grounded, as well as the methodology and set of methods designed to illicit the richest descriptions of how student staff members perceive their training and post-training experience. Additionally, a description of the rigor criteria used in this study is examined.

Research Paradigm

The ontological, epistemological, and methodological premises from which this study is approached are grounded in a research paradigm, or "set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 33). The paradigm chosen for this study to explore RA training experiences is constructivist in nature, as it is important to "understand the complex world of lived experiences from the point of view of those who live it" (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118). Separate from an interpretive paradigm where knowledge and truth can be discovered by the mind, constructivism sees knowledge and truth as a matter of individual experience and perspective – created, not discovered (Schram, 2003).

In a constructivist tradition, this research examines the complex and constructed realities of how RAs make meaning of Fall training, what is learned, and what is applied post training in residential communities from a paraprofessional point of view. In order to gain comprehensive knowledge of RAs' experiences in training, participants were fully engaged throughout this research as multiple perspectives emerged and were synthesized to construct various realities. Only through direct interactions can participants' perspectives and voices be heard and honored (Schram, 2003).

Ontology

The perspective brought to this study in terms of "how things really are" (Schram, 2003, p. 30), or the ontological perspective, is that multiple realities exist. Individuals construct truth and knowledge within various social contexts. It is anticipated readers will view this research as an unveiling of how some RAs at Hunter University experience Fall training and how they transfer the knowledge and skills acquired during training to their

residential community as the academic year progresses. Although every RA attended the entirety of Fall training, their realities of what was presented, how it was presented, and how they may apply what they learned varies by individual.

Epistemology

The epistemological perspective that informs this research identifies how as the researcher, I have come to know the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Schram, 2003), as well as explaining the relationship between participants and myself (the researcher) throughout this study (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln; Schram). Identifying this study through a constructivist epistemology enabled me to work closely with participants in order to better understand the impact RA training has on the lives of RAs, in addition to how RAs perceive their influence on their residents derived from what they learned in training. Identifying the nature of RAs' realities and how they construct meaning of their experiences as paraprofessionals will help future researchers better understand the implications of RA training and how its learning is applied to residential communities.

Entering this research, my role as a residence life administrator for several years brought with it a set of value-laden assumptions and values (Creswell, 1998) about RAs experiences, elements of RA training, and the application of knowledge, skills, and abilities to living communities after training. This experience provided me an enhanced ability to access, as an insider, the socially constructed world of RAs and their living communities (Creswell, 1998) because as a residence life professional for a time at this research site, I was more familiar with terms, policies, procedures, and expectations of the RA position, as well as the general organizational climate in which they work.

Methodology

Aligned with a constructivist research paradigm, utilizing case study methodology enhanced my potential to uncover significant elements characteristic of a single phenomenon – the RA training experience (Merriam, 1998). Merriam further explains how case study research uncovers the meaning of processes through monitoring and causal explanation. Monitoring describes the context and population of a study, discovers the extent to which a 'program' has been implemented, and provides formative feedback. Causal explanation seeks to describe the intrinsic meaning making process through which events or circumstances influence those involved (Maxwell, 2004; Merriam).

In order to examine how RAs make meaning of their training experiences as well as the application of those experiences to their residential communities, this research was conducted through intrinsic case study design, using information gained from participants to develop themes, as opposed to identifying categories prior to commencing the research (Creswell, 1998). Three purposes have been identified for studying cases: collective, instrumental, and intrinsic (Stake, 1994, 2003). Collective case study research provides insight into broad phenomena, population, or general condition through multiple cases where instrumental case study research views the examination of a case as necessary to provide insight into an issue or theory. The purpose of this research was not to understand an abstract construct, general phenomenon, or develop a theory, but to recognize and describe the intrinsic nature of how RAs make meaning of Fall RA training (Rodwell, 1994; Stake, 1994, 2003). The nature of intrinsic case study design allows RA training and residential community development for a small group of resident advisors at one university to be observed (Rodwell; Stake, 1994, 2003). Over the course of an academic

year, in-depth data was collected from "multiple sources of information rich in context" (Creswell, 1998, p. 61), in addition to learning how RA training influences residents and residence life programs through the eyes and experiences of RAs.

RA training and the application of learned skills are processes that exist within a bounded system (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998), such as a finite time period prior to classes starting each Fall, a living community developing throughout the academic year, or individuals selected as RAs. A bounded system has been graphically represented as a circle with a heart at the center (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Where the heart is the focus of the study, the circle "defines the edge of the case: what will not be studied" (p. 25). Data collection for this case study was delimited by this 'circle,' as there was a limited number of people who could be included as well as a finite amount of time in order to conduct observations (Merriam, 1998).

Context

Hunter University is a large public, four-year, land-grant university with approximately 30,000 students, located near a capitol city in the southern U.S. Hunter University has a 120 year history and is a nationally recognized leader in physical science and technology with additional strengths in agriculture and engineering. Recent enrollment data from the Fall of 2003 characterizes the student body: the majority of students are in-state residents; over 100 countries and all U.S. states are represented; over three-quarters of undergraduates identify as white/Caucasian with the next largest representation African American; approximately 60% of the student body is male; and over three-quarters of students are enrolled full-time.

Of the total student body, just under 10,000 students are housed in traditional and apartment style communities, spread over four sections of on-campus and off-campus environments, called neighborhoods. Each neighborhood is lead by an Associate Director, who supervises one to three Assistant Directors. The Assistant Directors each supervise two to three graduate resident directors, a majority are enrolled in a master's degree program focused on higher education, who in turn supervise six to 15 RAs. In total, the on-campus housing and residential life program employs over 200 RAs who are each responsible for 15-50 first-year through graduate student residents.

About 10 days prior to the halls opening each Fall semester, RAs return to campus and participate in pre-service training. Although the time frame on each of the four neighborhoods is similar, the overall training schedule, session formats, presenters, and even topics differ. This case study focuses on RA training for Smith Neighborhood at Hunter University and over 50 RAs who live and work in three buildings. Fall training and all in-service sessions are designed and implemented by a committee, consisting of nine RAs, chaired by graduate staff, and advised by an Assistant Director.

Participant Sampling

Intentionally selecting participants was necessary in order to provide rich information directly related to the purpose of this case study (Poast, 2002). As RAs' meaning making surrounding training and post-training is explored, I found it necessary to identify RAs who represented a diverse array of perspectives, thereby allowing in depth study of training transfer. Twelve RAs were selected to participate in this study, utilizing criterion sampling (Patton, 2001) to represent a cross section of paraprofessional residential staff who are first, second, or third-year male or female RAs. RA staff

members for the 2006-2007 academic year confirmed their employment on April 21, 2006. From there, I sought the assistance of my colleagues at Hunter University who acted as gatekeepers to find RAs interested in describing and actively reflecting on their training and post-training experiences.

Three Smith Neighborhood assistant directors and the graduate resident directors in their employ identified potential participants, as they were familiar with RAs who would be serving on their staffs for the 2006-07 year. Each assistant director agreed to recruit RAs who lived and worked in their individual buildings to be involved in this study. RAs who expressed interest in the study to one of the three assistant directors were then contacted directly in order to verify their participation.

Methods of Data Collection

Case study methodology relies upon emergent themes derived from how participants describe their human experiences (Creswell, 1998). In this case, RA training and the application of skills post-training are explored. Through individual interviews, observations, artifacts, participant journals, and a researcher's journal, data collection was comprehensive, as pressure rested on me (based on perspective and interests) to determine what information would be essential to include in the analysis (Merriam, 1998). With a wide array of data collection strategies, an in-depth picture of this case was developed utilizing thick description (Creswell, 1998).

Interviews and focus groups. In order to better understand RAs meaning making of training and the application of skills post-training, open-ended, semi-structured interviews and focus groups were developed and implemented (Merriam, 1998). For each occurrence of data collection in August, November, February, and April, participants

were contacted via email to schedule individuals interviews, as well as provide their availability for a range of focus group times. Two focus group dates and times were selected each of the four times I collected data so that every participant could attend at least one. During the four to five day time period of data collection, individual interviews occurred before and after the focus groups, due to the complexities of finding a mutually agreeable date and time.

The time frames for these four rounds of data collection were intentionally chosen. Interviews and focus groups in August enabled me to learn reactions to Fall training immediately upon its conclusion and by early November for the second round, residential communities had opportunities to develop under each RAs direction and leadership. During Spring 2007, interviews and focus groups occurred in February and April, providing an opportunity for RAs to continue reflecting on Fall training, Fall semester, and the entire year of community development and learning within the RA position.

Interviews and focus groups occurred throughout Smith Neighborhood in classroom spaces, offices, individual rooms, and the dining hall on every day of the week, except Saturdays. Most interviews lasted approximately an hour and a half, with focus groups stretching beyond two hours each. Throughout the year, it was challenging to focus solely on RA training, as conversations easily transitioned onto topics related directly to their current experience as RAs and to other general, unrelated topics. Each participant had a different background and set of experiences that influenced who they were as RAs and how they interacted with other RAs during the Fall training process. As they participated in Fall training and remained on staff throughout the year, each

participant learned about peer staff members, training, what it meant to be an RA on Smith Neighborhood at Hunter University, and themselves in ways that were challenging for any researcher or participant to measure and document. Throughout all our conversations, RAs were open and honest with me to the level they felt comfortable, in some cases sharing much personal and positional information, and in other cases speaking briefly and succinctly.

Prior to each time period when data was collected, I generated a list of open-ended questions that emerged out of the discourses informing this study, my personal experiences, conversations with peers and colleagues, and data collected from previous interviews and focus groups within this study. Examples of open-ended questions used during individual interviews include: What did you learn during training? What did you want to get out of the RA position? And which RAs did you see interacting the most with other RAs?

Focus group questions were generated to run parallel to individual interview questions, as it was anticipated while participants engaged with each other, additional insights would be revealed. Complementing these questions similar to individual interviews were focus group questions that addressed different topics. Examples of open-ended questions posed to focus groups participants include: How do you learn about RAs' perceptions and attitudes of the RA position? How would you assess an RAs motivation to apply what they have learned to their community? And how do you learn about other RAs perceptions and attitudes of Fall RA training? The complete guide of open-ended questions for individual interviews and focus groups is included in Appendix D. Beyond utilizing a guide of open-ended questions developed prior to each interview

and focus group, asking clarifying questions when necessary to elicit additional information allowed for a deeper understanding of participants' responses (Patton, 1990). With participant permission, interviews were audio taped to preserve data for analysis (Merriam, 1998).

Topics that emerged during the interviews served as a guide for open-ended questions during the focus groups. For example, during the February interviews, participants shared how they were providing one-on-one training to new RAs recently hired in January. The new RAs did not have the benefits of an extensive Fall training, so current RAs were guiding them through the skills and knowledge necessary for the position. As participants shared their coaching experiences, in individual interviews, that lead me to generate questions in both focus groups such as: with mid-year hires this semester, how do you balance the need for Fall training when you have someone jumping into the position mid-year who is just as successful as you are? And what did you learn during Fall training that is critical for mid-year hires to know?

Similarly, experiences shared during focus groups informed the following round of individual interviews. Throughout the four sets of individual interviews and focus groups, I was saturated in the stories of how RAs make meaning of training and the application of acquired knowledge and skills to their communities. This saturation was necessary in order to understand thoroughly how paraprofessionals perceive their experiences.

Observations. In addition to data gathered from individual interviews and focus groups, I was able to observe several training sessions, as well as RAs' living communities over the course of the year when I interviewed them. Utilizing thick

description in the process of describing observations provides readers further insight into participants' lives (Patton, 2002). An observational protocol of descriptive and reflective notes was kept in order to maintain the integrity of the data as well as continuous interpretation (Creswell, 1998, 2003).

The extended nature of this case includes multiple participants and contexts, such as different locations for Fall training sessions and different RAs' living communities. Settings, participants, and activities to observe were intentionally chosen, as well as when those observations occurred (Schram, 2003). Participants were observed throughout the training experience whenever possible, as well as visited in their living communities during both Fall and Spring semesters of data collection, paying attention to verbal and nonverbal communication, relationships, and symbols of training transfer. Symbols I observed ranged from informal interactions of RAs providing resources to residents and each other to the creation of bulletin boards based on information learned in training.

Artifacts. In addition to interviews, focus groups, and observations, tangible items such as training documents provided additional insight into this study. The training schedule (see Appendix E), training session outlines, PowerPoint presentations, and handouts reflected what participants were exposed to during the Fall training period and mirror similar activities, information, and resources I have seen included in Fall RA trainings at other institutions. As an example, the Social Change Model of Leadership Development presentation outline and example case studies is included in Appendix F. Throughout the study, participants were asked to share or provide additional sources of information that may enhance the richness of data collected, but at its conclusion, artifacts were limited to specific resources related to structured training sessions.

Participant journals. Participants were asked to maintain a journal throughout this research study that would give them an opportunity to reflect on RA training, as well as how they transferred skills and knowledge learned during training to their residential community. The act of journaling allows participants to focus on their experiences, while providing rich insight to assist in data analysis (Janesick, 2000). Participants were informed that entries did not have to be limited to words, but may include any form of expression that provides participants an avenue for reflection (e.g., drawing, poetry, and so on). Although provided this opportunity, participants chose not to utilize journals, relying on memory, personal introspection, and our conversations during interviews and focus groups to reflect on their training and post training experiences.

Researcher's journal. In addition to collecting data from participants and their living communities, I maintained a research journal to record additional thoughts, reflections, and questions. Patton (2002) suggests the inclusion of record keeping serves as a research audit trail, documenting what occurs throughout the research process, so that rich data does not get left behind. This medium allowed me to reflect on the research process to ensure I was conducting the case study without leaving out critical information.

Data Synthesis and Analysis Strategies

Methods of data collection such as interviews, focus groups, observations, artifacts, and journals were transcribed. All data was reviewed throughout the study for continuous reflection and analysis in order to move deeper and deeper into the meaning of the data (Schram, 2003). As data collection progressed throughout the study, analysis strategies changed slightly to reflect more appropriately the data collected, which

redirected attention to other aspects of the case not originally anticipated (Merriam, 1998). In order to construct the meaning of RA training and application of knowledge post training, I utilized a combination of coding (Charmaz, 2000), bracketing (Janesick, 2000), and crystallization (Richardson, 1994, 2000). These techniques allowed for clarifying themes and continually exploring new concepts throughout the rigorous research process (Morse & Richards, 2002).

Coding

Throughout data collection, transcripts, observations, and artifacts were examined and coded into meaningful categories (Creswell, 1994). Individually coding all data assisted me in remaining true to participants' views of their realities, as opposed to assuming we share the same views and worlds (Charmaz, 2000). With this strategy, I was more attuned to the data because it heightened my ability to perceive ways participant's see, organize, interpret, and understand their experiences (Charmaz). In general, coding allows researchers to continuously think about what meanings are assigned to data, what gaps exist, and what further questions could be asked to further understanding on a topic (Charmaz).

Bracketing

Due to the extensive nature of data collected, bracketing was used as a technique to break data into manageable "chunks" in order to capture distinct categories that could be interpreted with participants, making analysis more manageable (Janesick, 2000). Once data was bracketed, all components were spread out for examination (Patton, 1990) and developed into meaningful clusters (Bertilino, 1998) that appear to have similar meanings (Stake, 1995). Categorizing or clustering data provided an opportunity to look

for statements, behaviors, or symbols that occur over time or across experiences. Janesick

offers five guidelines for "bracketing" data:

1. Within the personal experience, or self-story, locate key phrases and

    statements that speak directly to the phenomenon in question;

2. Interpret the meanings of these phrases, as an informed reader;

3. Obtain the participants' interpretation of these findings, if possible;

4. Inspect these meanings for what they reveal about the essential,

    recurring features of the phenomenon studied; and

5. Offer a tentative statement or definition of the phenomenon in terms of

    the essential recurring features identified in Step 4 (p. 390).

These guidelines assisted me in identifying emergent themes and patterns within

participants' stories, as well as upon the study's conclusion. In addition to categorizing

"chunks" of data and examining individual themes and patterns as they emerged

(Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 171), bracketing allowed construction of a collective

synthesis of meaning making processes from participants stories (Creswell, 2003).

Crystallization

Classic interpretations of qualitative data include methods of triangulation, where

evidence from multiple data sources are used to build "a coherent, justification for

themes" (Creswell, 2003, p. 196) and perceptions are synthesized to clarify meaning and

verify the repeatability of an observation or interpretation (Stake, 2003). The idea of

crystallization is a better lens "through which to view qualitative research designs and

their components" because it recognizes many facets of the social world as a fact of life

(Janesick, 2003, p. 67). Crystals are prisms that combine "symmetry and substance with

an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach," thereby altering what we see depending on how we hold it (Richardson, 1994, p. 522).

Utilizing crystallization as an interpretative technique allowed me to draw from other disciplines, such as history, business management, and education to inform the research process and broaden understandings of methods and content (Janesick, 2003). For example, as participants shared their experiences and perceptions of the training schedule, it became clear that reasons for their exhaustion ran deeper than just the long days (8 a.m. to 10 p.m.). The history of the RA position reflects the increasingly complex nature of the RA role, requiring RAs to possess more skills and knowledge. Tenets in education and psychology highlight the difficulties in learners' abilities to gain and retain many difference topics within a short time period. Concepts in business reveal the importance of teaching RAs several tools in a short time frame to help them provide good customer service to their residents (being timely in completing administrative tasks, having complete information, and remaining as positive as possible). Viewing interpretations through crystals allowed participants and me to view data from many different angles in order to expose multiple perspectives rather than discovering truth solely through triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Rigor

Trustworthiness and authenticity were key to the rigor of this study (Creswell, 2003). Accepting these criteria for rigor was demonstrated in my relationship with participants during the research, as I was fully aware that I likely influenced both data and participants in some way. I understand our relationship may have empowered RAs to

be driven to social change on issues regarding training and community development, as well as learn more about themselves, their peers, and the processes of training and developing their communities. As there was no one way to interpret phenomena that emerged in this qualitative research, levels of trustworthiness and authenticity ensure the explanation given for a particular description is accurate in the eyes of study participants (Janesick, 2003).

Trustworthiness Criteria

Trustworthiness is based on these criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. For each of these criteria, my duty as a researcher was to be responsible for being self-aware, understanding, and owning my perspectives and experiences, while remaining open to the perspectives of others (Schram, 2003)..

Credibility. The credibility of a qualitative study depends on the credibility of the researcher, as that individual serves as the instrument for collecting data and is the center of the analytic process (Patton, 1990). Three techniques enhance the extent to which reliable conclusions can be drawn from the research process: prolonged engagement, member validation, and crystallization (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

By spending a significant amount of time with participants throughout the duration of this study, I was committed to prolonged engagement. Developing this relationship between researcher and researched over nine months provided an opportunity to build trust and confront pre-existing assumptions that may have existed from my own background and experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Spending time with participants also enhanced my ability to detect distortions in data collected, from either their or my perspectives, which may have been a result of undue attention drawn to my role as

researcher in the study – I understood I could never have been a true member of the 'RA staff team' or experience (Lincoln & Guba).

Throughout the research process, I utilized member validation as a method to gauge accuracy and credibility of data collected and interpretations made (Creswell, 1998). Although my own perspective is important as I made meaning of participants experiences, it was critical for participants' stories to emerge accurately. As each set of individual interviews and focus groups were conducted, participants had opportunities to review their stories to ensure emerging themes and patterns accurately reflected their experiences. Conducting these 'member checks' on a consistent basis ensured my interpretations of the data were plausible (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995).

As described above, crystallization enhances a researcher's ability to interpret data collected beyond the traditional means of triangulation. Through the crystallization process, researchers may employ methods of journal writing, poetry, letter writing, and art to enhance multiple perspectives as they emerge from the data. With my own researcher's journal, experiences and observations were captured throughout the study. Analyzing data from these sources, as well as in-depth conversations with participants and colleagues, allowed me to crystallize findings from multiple perspectives (Poast, 2002).

Transferability. Readers of this research study are responsible for determining its level of transferability to other contexts (Powell, 2003). Qualitative researchers uncover meaning from descriptions provided by study participants throughout a specific time frame and context. In order for a reader to apply the findings of this study to other contexts, a comprehensive, rich description of the case was paramount. Through detailed

description of the location, participants, and context of RA training and residential community settings, readers can make informed judgments about how these findings transfer to their own contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 2003).

Dependability. Assessing dependability is a way to determine the consistency with which decisions were made throughout a study (Lincoln, 2001). Dependability of this study was enhanced through multiple research methods, including interviews, focus groups, observations during training and in RAs' communities, collecting artifacts, and my researcher's journal (Denzin, 1994). My colleagues and peers at Hunter University and across the U.S. who work in residential life primarily with RAs served as peer external reviewers to examine data, interpretations, and findings (Lincoln, 2001) due to their experience working with RAs. Especially valuable were my colleagues at Hunter University, who have knowledge and experience working with the RAs employed on the Smith Neighborhood campus. In-depth conversations with these individuals about the findings as they emerged provided additional insight (Merriam, 1998). A White, female student affairs professional colleague at a large public institution contributed her knowledge and perspectives throughout the dissertation process, as she served in the role of my external auditor. I shared my researcher's journal and data with her to discuss the research process, including emerging themes, obstacles, questions, and feedback (Creswell, 2003).

Confirmability. Confirmability is assessing the level of a study's findings based on supportive data and interpreting the data is reasonable based the relationship between researcher and participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt & Halpern, 1988; Rodwell & Byers, 1997). Throughout this study, my role as a participant observer allowed me to

participate in and observe elements of RA training, as well as watch RAs in their residential communities where they had opportunities to apply what was learned from training. My goal was not to be a detached objective observer, but to strive for "empathic neutrality," implying I did not underestimate or overestimate my affect on the study, but examined and described it (Patton, 1990, p. 475).

Confirmability was also evaluated throughout the duration of this study, paying attention to how closely I followed procedures for documentation, how seriously I sought out multiple perspectives within the study's context, and the extent to which results were reported to my participants and peers openly and honestly (Lincoln, 2001). Maintaining an audit trail documenting actions, decisions, and interpretations, ensured the findings were based on data derived from the study (Poast, 2002). Readers have the opportunity to assess the confirmability of this study as they review this manuscript.

Authenticity

A foundational value of qualitative research is the authenticity of the research process, the researcher, and the outcomes of the research itself (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). It is critical for the researcher to convey a high degree of "internal coherence, plausibility, and correspondence" so that readers identify the data with their own experiences (Adler & Adler, 1994, p. 381). Criteria for authenticity include fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). Fairness recognizes issues of power and identifies the need for me as the researcher to "prevent marginalization, to act affirmatively with respect to inclusion, and to act with energy to ensure that all voices in the inquiry effort had a chance to be represented" (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 207).

Ontological and educative authenticities examine the extent to which participants become more aware of their own thinking and feeling throughout the research process (Lincoln, 2001). At the conclusion of each individual interview, participants were asked to reflect on their participation in this study, as well as a formative reflection on their learning during Fall training they applied in their jobs. Through this process of reflection, participants commented how our conversations helped them gain more out of their training experiences because it challenged them to reflect on what they learned as preparation for each of our interviews and focus groups.

Catalytic and tactical authenticities relate to issues of social justice. As a researcher, it is my responsibility to identify how participants could benefit from resources that may have become uncovered throughout the research study, such as a way for RAs to utilize a campus office to enhance the application of skills learned during training on community development. With access to such resources, participants could become change agents during and/or after the study, thus striving to improve their situation and the situations of others.

Ensuring rigor in this study required I conduct the research ethically, as I intervened directly in participants' lives. In order to maintain a study's integrity, it is important to adhere to both practical and ethical considerations (Schram, 2003). By providing open and honest communication with participants and the contextual organization about my role in the process of interviewing, observing, and collecting data in this study, my presence, selectivity, and subjective perspective was demonstrated. Similarly, I made sure I was aware that as a researcher, I must also maintain my

awareness of how "ethical considerations are inseparable from interactions with study participants" (Schram, p. 100).

When speaking with and observing participants throughout the study, as well as collecting artifacts, I openly shared my role as a researcher and observer in the multiple contexts where we interact, as meanings of our experiences were co-constructed (Schram, 2003). It was also my duty to consider how much personal and professional information to disclose to participants while balancing levels of trust and reporting information for public view. Issues of privacy and confidentiality occasionally emerged throughout the research process and decisions regarding what data to include in the study were made in conjunction with my external auditor and/or research advisor. I was aware that if information was disclosed relating to violations of federal, state, local, Hunter University, or residential life policies, it was my responsibility as a university staff member at the time to document appropriate details. For example, if an RA was not present at a training session, it would have been incumbent upon me to report the situation to that student's supervisor. No violations were apparent during the research process.

Similarly, participants in this study were university staff members and attending all training sessions was mandatory, as well as upholding policies and procedures in their living communities. If a significant ethical dilemma arose (as an administrator in the housing and residential life program at the time, researcher, or student affairs professional), relating to a participant's performance as a staff member, I would be compelled to act on the information. For example, if information about an RA participant arose during the study that contradicted their performance (i.e. the required number of programs is not met; a community standard violation was not addressed, etc.), it would

have been my role to document the situation and inform the participant's supervisor. Therefore, it was critical that participants were informed of my role, as well as my responsibilities at the outset of this study, and reminded throughout as appropriate and necessary. No ethical dilemmas became apparent throughout the research process.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

Theoretical frameworks and methods used to approach this study are discussed in this chapter. The constructivist paradigm on which this study is based, views knowledge as explored and experienced by participants and the researcher. Individuals can only determine their own truth and the goal of this research was to explore how RAs make meaning of the Fall training experience as well as how they applied what they learned to their residential communities. Utilizing intrinsic case study design, I sought to immerse myself in participants' stories about their training and post-training experiences in order to identify themes that emerged throughout data collection.

Twelve participants were selected to participate in this study with the assistance of Smith Neighborhood assistant directors and graduate resident directions. The sample of participants had demographic backgrounds reflecting the RA population on Smith Neighborhood, as well as Hunter University. Each individual participated in four rounds of semi-structured, open-ended individual interviews and focus groups, occurring in August, November, February, and April during the 2006-2007 academic year in order to assist me in understanding their meaning making experiences. As a participant-observer, I also conducted observational site visits during RA training, as well as each individual's residential community throughout the study. Data was collected through interviews, focus

groups, observations, gathering artifacts, and my researcher's journal; all recorded data were transcribed.

Acknowledging my role as researcher and student affairs administrator was a necessity throughout this study because even though I was technically no longer a Hunter University staff member in November, I felt compelled to act on unethical or illegal behavior should that information come forward. This self-awareness allowed me to identify and share with participants my personal biases and build a level of trust with each participant.

Throughout the study, coding, bracketing, and crystallization was utilized to interpret and analyze data. While coding identified individual pieces of data to stand alone, bracketing allowed data to be broken into manageable chunks, and crystallization assisted in viewing multiple sources of data from different perspectives. From participant selection to data analysis and interpretation, I strived to ensure trustworthiness and authenticity when gathering data while maintaining consistent, positive ethical behavior.

Triangulation and crystallization were critical during data analysis to maintain trustworthiness, as I utilized prolonged engagement, member validation, crystallization, rich description, and multiple methods. This project adhered to the demands of authenticity criteria, including fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity. Lastly, I worked to maintain a balance of power in my relationships with participants, in addition to encouraging them to learn more about their experiences, the experiences of their peers, and how they influenced the development of their residential communities.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS: CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANTS

Prior to collecting data for this study, I worked for a residence life program for

two years. It was a phenomenal experience during which I learned much about myself,

personally and professionally. I also learned a great deal about the students and

institutional climate at a large public university in the Southeast. Although this was the

first time I had worked at an institution of this size, I was struck by the similarities

between the Fall RA training and undergraduate student staff at this institution and those

in other colleges and universities at which I have worked. As I interacted with the

residence life staff and observed Fall RA training for this study, I came to know the

participants more in depth and learned that just as there were many commonalities, so too

were there several differences.

While the description of context and participants below may be specific to Hunter

University, readers can examine both similarities and differences between their

institutions, student staff, and Fall RA training curricula and those of Hunter University

to consider the findings and transferability. Following these descriptions are emergent

themes, including Building RA Relationships; Awareness and Influence of RDs; RA

Experience Over Time; RA Training Structure, and RA Training Content Remembered.

Concluding this chapter is a discussion of the meaning making for the 12 Resident

Assistant participants as they experienced Fall RA training and applied this learning to

their residential communities over the course of the academic year.

Wolf City, Southeastern United States

Located close to the downtown area of the state capital, Hunter University has been at home in the "City of Oaks" for over 120 years. Wolf City had an approximate population of 375,000 in 2007 and, at the time of this study, was considered the 15th fastest growing city in the U.S. Throughout the first eight years of the 21st Century, this state capital witnessed a population growth of 100,000 citizens, which was about 35% of its population at the turn of this century.

Only two hours from the beach and two hours from the mountains, Wolf City has become a popular place to live in the U.S. because of the temperate climate, thriving local industry, and relatively inexpensive housing market. Summer visitors to Wolf City generally find it hot and humid, and winter will host cold temperatures without any snowfall. For locals who grew up in the area, or relocated here, the perceived humid summers and cold winters are balanced throughout the year by surprisingly comfortable fall and spring seasons, making the area an excellent year-round climate for people with various weather preferences. In addition to the temperate climate and stereotypical Southern charm of its citizens, the most significant reason for this substantial growth is the research and industrial base which supports the regional economy, including electrical, medical, and telecommunications equipment; clothing and apparel; food processing; paper products; and pharmaceuticals. One of the largest regions dedicated to research in the U.S. is located within several miles of several fast growing cities and the universities within their limits, including Wolf City. Each institution, together with its surrounding communities provides the wealth of talent needed to sustain the world class reputation of this region. In particular, Hunter University dedicates significant resources

to research in high-technology, biotechnology, and textile development, reflected in the high enrollment of some of the institution's most popular majors.

According to the 2000 Census, the demographic in which Hunter University is located is primarily Caucasian (63%), followed by African American (28%) and Hispanic and Latino/a (7%). The same census revealed that approximately 40% of the households in this city consisted of heterosexual married couples, the median household income was $46,600, the median age was 31, and approximately 7.1% of the population lived below the poverty line. Within this context is an educational system consisting of strong secondary schools, which are moving to year-round academic calendars due to population growth, nine public or private institutions of higher education, including two institutions that are identified as a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) and two predominantly women's institutions.

Hunter University

Although situated in what is considered one of the largest 'cities' in the Southeast and located a few miles from the state capital, visitors walking onto the predominantly red brick Hunter University campus from one of six access roads often feel as though they are stepping onto an Ivy League campus. Local deciduous and evergreen trees, in addition to various plants and trees from all over the world, provide a canopy over academic and administrative buildings that are as high as four stories and surrounded by lush green grass. Dotted throughout the campus are high rise buildings, consisting of five residence halls and Southeast Library, the figurehead of Hunter University Collections, containing 3.6 million volumes.

Hunter University is a large public, four-year, land-grant university with approximately 32,000 students and is a nationally recognized leader in engineering, physical science and technology with additional strengths in agriculture and education. The University has many world-renowned graduate programs, including a College of Veterinary Medicine and the largest enrollment of all the campuses in the State University system of higher education. Reaching beyond the Wolf City campus, Hunter University provides oversight for the county extension service, with offices in all 100 counties and one Native American reservation. On a national level, the University has been classified by the Carnegie Foundation as a Doctoral/Research University-Extensive, and is consistently recognized for its innovation in many academic disciplines.

According to the most recently available enrollment information, Fall 2003, the following data generally characterized the student body: although almost 90% of students are in-state, over 100 countries and all U.S. states are represented; more than 77% of undergraduates identify as White/Caucasian with African American as the next largest student population with over 9%; approximately 56% of students are male, and nearly 80% of students are enrolled full-time. Students from within the state predominantly come from small towns and rural areas where family employment can be divided into two broad categories: agriculture and industry/technology. Many students see a college education as a way to either escape their small town environments or as a means to learn skills to improve the quality of life for their hometown communities. Regardless of whether students work toward a degree to return to or leave home, they tend to remain connected with friends and family throughout their collegiate experience.

The academic programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics are a major draw for students who choose to enroll at Hunter University. Nonetheless, the institution and, in particular, the division of student affairs, is responsible for challenging "students to discover the importance of being well-rounded, . . . [understanding] that communicating well both orally and in writing, appreciating literature and the arts, and pursuing a balance of work and life are all critical to success," in their chosen profession (D. Luckadoo, personal communication, April 23, 2008). Such a large campus offers a plethora of opportunities for students to engage in significant learning experiences outside the classroom such as the "Campus Leadership and Service Learning Office," theater, international speakers, Alternative Spring Break, nationally ranked athletic teams, and an extensive intramural program,, to name a few. The numerous on-campus opportunities available for students to learn about themselves, others, and the world in which they live, create a common thread that ties most Hunter University students together.

University Housing and Residential Life

The University boasts a generally high retention rate of first-year students who choose to return to on-campus housing for a second year. This clearly demonstrates the extent to which the residents value University Housing and Residential Life's undergraduate, graduate, and professional staff members' dedication of time and energy to connecting them to the Hunter University campus. This accomplishment is the result of many years of developing intentional living learning villages, partnering with academic partners across the institution, maintaining a residential programming model based in student development theory, and allocating resources to maintain a relatively low student

staff to resident ratio (1:35). My conversations with students revealed that most of them have an energetic school spirit about their on-campus living during their first one or two years of college, as well as an appreciation of the benefits they gain from access to on- and off-campus resources provided by residence life staff.

Of the total student body, nearly 9,000 residents are housed in traditional residence hall and apartment style communities, within four campus neighborhoods. Each campus neighborhood, and the buildings within it, has a unique set of characteristics with which students strongly identify and which generally pre-determines *who* applies to live in which on-campus housing for their first and following years. Overall, residents seamlessly navigate through all four neighborhoods, yet ultimately choose to live in one area that most closely fits their personality and academic focus.

Each of the four neighborhoods is led by an associate director of University Housing and Residential Life who, in turn, supervises one to three assistant directors responsible for the day-to-day operation of one or more buildings. The assistant directors supervise two to three graduate assistant resident directors (RDs), a majority of whom are enrolled in a master's degree program focused on higher education. These RDs supervise six to 15 undergraduate resident advisors (RAs) in one or more buildings. In total, the on-campus housing program employs over 200 RAs each of whom is responsible for 15 to 75 first-year through graduate student residents.

Although the culture and climate of each neighborhood is distinct, there are parallels running throughout the campus that seem to originate from the leadership of University Housing and Residential Life and the Division of Student Affairs. For over 30 years, the Division of Student Affairs has maintained the motto, "Students First,"

championed by the same vice chancellor. A similar environment exists within University

Housing and Residential Life, employing the same senior leaders for over 15 years. Just

as in other higher education institutions, once upper-level administrators begin their

positions, there is limited upward mobility or transition within or beyond the institution,

which has both positive and negative effects on students and staff.

This relative consistency within the University Housing and Residential Life

department at Hunter University allows for significant growth of some programs, as there

exists the ability to build on innovative ideas from year-to-year, where time and resources

are not spent transitioning and acclimating new leaders to their positions. For example,

the University Housing and Residential Life director and associate vice chancellor for

student affairs have been instrumental in developing the following existing or new

programs during their tenure: "Hunter Scholars Program," "University Honors," "Women

Studying Engineering and Science (WSES)," "Students Supporting Educational Partners

(SSEP)," and "Multicultural House," a global themed residence hall.

The opposite side of this driving innovation is a perceived stagnation of the

University Housing and Residential Life department among undergraduate, graduate, and

professional staff who work day-to-day with students in their living communities. Several

individuals comment that senior administrators throughout the institution, including

University Housing and Residential Life, claim the development of new programs and

services to enhance the college experience is continually encouraged. However,

innovative programs are not fully supported internally or recognized externally until they

are proven successful. Some administrators even point to innovative programs designed

to educate and engage students outside the classroom and comment about how supportive

they were throughout the development process – a perspective not shared with the staff members responsible for bringing those ideas to fruition.

This perceived lack of support for new ideas, recurring themes of "protecting the ole boy network," and continual overturning of lower-level administrative decisions under the guise of customer service is disheartening for some students and staff who see and feel the effects of the lack of support by the organization as a whole. Senior leadership consistently emphasize their understanding of the importance and difficulty of departmental undergraduate and graduate positions, yet several students and staff members comment about how seldom they experience upper-level administrative support for their decisions. As a result, undergraduate and graduate staff members become disenchanted with University Housing and Residential Life, Student Affairs, and with the work they do for students suffers. It is generally only the day-to-day interactions with students that remind staff of the importance of what they do and why they do it, thus, helping to maintain their motivation throughout the duration of their employment.

<div align="center">Smith Neighborhood</div>

Although slightly removed from the heart of the campus, staff and students in one of the four neighborhoods, "Smith Neighborhood," face similar rewards and challenges as those residents living in the other three housing neighborhoods. What makes Smith Neighborhood unique is its geographic and student make up because the neighborhood consists of three suite-style buildings with over 700 residents each. Two of the buildings are over 12 stories high with 10 suites per floor. Each of those two buildings holds mostly first-year students, whereas, the third building has four floors and is a favorite with sophomores, juniors, and seniors who choose to stay on campus but want to leave the

predominantly first-year student population of "Freshman Neighborhood." Within this suite environment for all three buildings, eight residents live in four double rooms and share a common bathroom and hallway. Each hallway has an exterior door that serves as a gateway between the individual suite and an external breezeway connecting other suites on the floor. Many students isolate themselves in their residential spaces because with a refrigerator, microwave, other electronic appliances, and bathroom, they can be completely self-sufficient and never need to leave their suites. Due to the size of the buildings, each is lead by an assistant director and two graduate Resident Directors (RDs), each of whom supervises a staff of no more than 11 RAs, for an RA to student ratio that is slightly below the campus average.

Both high rise buildings contain a living learning village where residence life staff members work closely with academic partners. One such village is Women Studying Engineering and Science (WSES), which has consistently grown over the past several years to occupy more than half of the 700 beds in one building. WSES is well known for providing additional support and encouragement to female students who pursue degrees in fields traditionally dominated by men. The Hunter Scholars Program occupies most of the second high-rise building. It is a program that "promotes the intellectual engagement, personal growth and leadership development of its students and provides them with an enriched undergraduate experience through a range of carefully designed out-of-class experiences" (Hunter Scholars Program website, n. d.). Throughout these three buildings, common area lounge space is at a premium, as there are not many places for students to gather for social or academic purposes. This poses additional challenges for Residence life staff as they try to pry students out of their suites to socialize with other residents.

In addition to the typical challenges of being an RA in Smith Neighborhood, student staff underwent a series of personnel changes this academic year, including two new assistant directors and a new associate director. In addition to this relatively rare transition, three new RDs and about 30 new RAs (about half of the total RAs) were hired for the academic year. With RDs in graduate programs lasting two to three years, it is a regular occurrence to hire three to five staff members each year. Although bringing new energy and perspectives helps revitalize a residential life program that has been the same for years, the inconsistency in staffing also causes frustration for staff and students. Within the context of this study, participants were becoming familiar with new supervisors (resident directors, assistant directors, and the associate director) while learning about their new colleagues/peers and the RA position. Thus, time during Fall RA Training is critical to help new and returning RAs acclimate to their new residence hall space, staff, supervisor, and position.

<div align="center">Fall Resident Advisor Training</div>

Most colleges and universities across the U.S. start Fall RA training starts approximately ten days prior to the opening of residence halls and apartment complexes to incoming students each fall term. The University Housing and Residential Life program for RAs in Smith Neighborhood at Hunter University is no different. Although the time frame on each of the four campus neighborhoods is similar, the overall training schedule, session formats, presenters, and topics may differ due to a decentralized training program. Smith Neighborhood Fall RA training is planned by a committee of nine RAs, chaired by resident directors, and advised by an assistant director. Working in

collaboration and referring to feedback from previous years, this committee designed and implemented 2006 Fall RA training.

All Smith Neighborhood RAs checked into their rooms through their direct supervisor by 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, August 8, 2006. This ensured staff was present for training. Over the course of the next seven days, RAs participated in Fall pre-service training, including attending training sessions and team building activities with their individual and building staffs, as well as preparing building communities for residents arriving the following weekend. A more detailed description of the training schedule, including dates, times, locations, presenters, and learning outcomes developed by the training and development committee is included in Appendix E. While I could not attend the entire training due to my work schedule, I chose to attend the following sessions as they addressed what I perceived as the most important components of the RA position: introductions, the programming model, conduct and policies, leadership, peer counseling, and diversity. An example of one session, leadership training, with a detailed description, presentation outline, and educational materials is included for reference in Appendix F. Although I was unable to attend Behind Closed Doors session, a cumulative scenario and role playing activity, I have included below a description of that session, which was provided by participants who referred to it throughout the study.

Introductions

By breakfast on Wednesday morning, all RAs had been accounted for and were eating in the dining hall with their respective staff. Following breakfast, all of the RAs, RDs, and assistant directors meandered into the main quad between the three buildings for an hour of large staff team building exercises. One of the new RDs for this academic

year led three activities designed to help the RAs get to know each other, while the other

RDs and assistant directors stood on the sidelines watching everyone interact.

Following team building activities, general introductions of the residence life

department's top administrative staff were held in the largest common lounge space in

Smith Neighborhood, known as the Smith Neighborhood Lounge (SNL). Some RAs were

out of breath from their team building activities, as they strolled into the lounge and sat

down, grouped primarily with their individual staffs. The RDs lined the exterior of the

room, while the assistant directors, associate director, director, and associate vice

chancellor were clustered near the main door to the lounge. The RD who led the team

building activities facilitated this introductory time, officially welcoming the RAs to this

academic year, and then turned the floor over to the administrators present. The

administrators introduced themselves individually by briefly outlining their educational

and professional background and then described their excitement for this academic year

with the RA staff.

The director and associate vice chancellor explained that during each of the nine

summer parent orientations, they shared with parents the importance of RAs to incoming

and returning students. They also assured parents that the student staff members are well-

trained to give overall guidance to any residential student in addition to offering social

and education programming. Although the atmosphere seemed to be quiet during the

administrators' introductions, it appeared RAs were attentive and the applause they gave

after each administrator spoke seemed authentic. After the introductions, I explained to

those present my dissertation research as well as the role of several participants in the

room. I also let them know that they would see me in occasional training sessions as I tried to gain insight into how they perceived and experienced Fall RA Training.

Programming Model

After dinner on the first full day of training, an assistant director presented the departmental programming model to all the RAs in a residence hall lounge. There were not enough chairs and couches for everyone, so several staff sat on the floor, and faced a screen in the corner of the lounge. The hour-long, primarily lecture style session consisted of a PowerPoint presentation. The presenter disseminated information about the programming model and asked questions of the audience. The questions were answered by several of the same people. It appeared that because of the presenter's outgoing personality and familiarity, several returning staff members felt comfortable asking clarifying questions, and thereby helping their peers learn the information more thoroughly. Immediately following this session was an opportunity for each staff member to get together so that the RD could share individual expectations about programming requirements. As most of the RDs had additional information to cover, most of the staff members adjourned from the lounge to their respective buildings.

Student Conduct and Community Expectations

Mid-morning the following day (second full day of training) was a session on conduct procedures and an overview of the community expectations RA's must meet and procedures they were responsible for following. The lecture style session was presented by a second assistant director, with opportunities for RAs to read expectations aloud and ask clarifying questions. The presenter disseminated about 15 copies of the policies and procedures, printed from the departmental web page, to the 60 participants in the room.

Due to the amount of paper needed to accommodate one copy per staff member, the presenter asked everyone to share. The assistant director wanted this session to be interactive, so he asked returning staff members, RDs, and the other assistant directors to provide input as he covered the policies.

For the first 30 minutes of this session, the presenter asked for volunteers to read the community expectation text. He commented on each expectation and, since there were no questions, he moved on to the next policy. For the second block of 30 minutes, the RAs seemed to get restless and talked to each other, which led others to say, "shh," indicating that the staff members should focus on the presenter and the session. At the 60 minute mark, the session was supposed to conclude; however, since several other important community expectations still needed to be addressed, the presenter decided to allow the RAs to take a ten-minute break. After the break, the presenter discussed the remaining polices and finished speaking after about 35 minutes. As this session was scheduled for 60 minutes, but took over 90 minutes, the time was limited for an RD to talk about students' rights and responsibilities. His presentation took ten minutes, while another presenter set up for the next presentation.

Leadership Development

On the third day of training, from nine to 11 a.m., one of the returning RDs and I presented a leadership development model to the entire RA staff in Smith Neighborhood Lounge. The format of the session included a small group activity, a brief lecture on a leadership model, followed by three additional activities for RAs in small groups to apply their learning to the RA position and report to the larger group. In the first small group activity, the RAs were divided into their individual staffs and asked to brainstorm

leadership characteristics and individuals who exemplified those traits. After reporting to the group, the RD and I presented Astin and Astin's (1996) Social Change Model for Leadership Development, and more specifically, the "7 C's of Effective Leadership." The RD chose this model based on her training experience and how applicable it was to the RA position. We talked about the model for about 20-25 minutes, shared examples from the RA position for each of the seven 'C's,' and asked the RAs to also share examples.

Following our lecture, we divided the RAs into seven smaller groups, with at least one staff member from every staff in each group. For the first activity, each small group was assigned a 'C' word and asked to answer several questions relating to the RA position. The next activity asked the groups to review separate case studies and report back to the group how the 'C' word they had was evident or not evident in the case study, as well as the implications for people and situations involved in the case. The following is an example of one case study entitled *Pitiful Student Pay*:

Nearly 75% of all Atlantic State University students work from 15-20 hours per week. Students have typically liked working on campus because it is closer to their classes, employers are more flexible and understanding about the demands of being a student, and they like being able to identify with the pleasant staff in most offices. However, budget problems have kept on-campus student pay at minimum wage. The Student Advisory Board in Food Services is very concerned. Off campus employers pay more money and more and more student workers who have to work to pay for school are forced to take these off campus jobs. One former student worker said, "My new employer is not at all flexible; I mean it is my job

to be there; but I have 3 midterms next week and my grades are dying! I

wish ASU could raise their pay to make it possible to stay here." Another

student said, "I would much rather work on campus; but I just plain cannot

afford it." A member of the Student Advisory Board adds the question of

pay increases to the agenda of the meeting. She says, "We need to look

into this pay situation that is forcing students who would much rather be

here to work off campus. Surely there is something we could do?"

For the last activity, the participants returned to their small staffs, where they reflected on

how the behaviors they exhibited as RAs related to each 'C' word, and how their

behaviors impacted their communities. Over the span of the two-hour session, not more

than 20-35 minutes was spent on a single component and most of the staff seemed

engaged in the conversations and activities, although few questions were asked of the

presenters or each other.

The weekend followed the third full day of training, much to the excitement of the

RAs. They now had some free time without structured presentations for two days.

However, all six staffs went on separate off-campus retreats, some overnight and some on

day trips. The remainder of the time was designed for RAs to continue preparing for

residents who would be arriving the following weekend.

Peer Counseling

Following breakfast on Monday morning, a session was conducted from nine to

11 a.m. in the Smith Neighborhood Lounge on peer counseling, presented by a full-time

therapist from the counseling center. The presenter had a comprehensive PowerPoint

slideshow, which he followed closely without reading directly from most slides. The

slideshow contained general information and specific skills on many peer counseling

topics, including common causes and signs of distress, depression, and suicide;

symptoms of eating disorders, substance abuse, and sexual assault; general services

available; and so on. He also provided appropriate examples related to college students

and living on campus. A detailed handout of Counseling Center resources was distributed

to all RAs in the room. Over the course of the hour and 20 minute presentation, there was

little interaction between the presenter and RAs in the room, yet most staff members

seemed to pay attention to him as he walked back and forth across the front of the room.

In the middle of the session, the presenter competed with a loud leaf blower,

operated by a Landscaping staff member outside the lounge. When the Landscaping

person realized that there was a group in the lounge, he moved away from the building.

The presenter joked about this audible competition, to which the majority of the RAs

responded in kind. The session continued for about 20 minutes. When the presenter

ended his portion of the presentation, he directed the RAs attention to one of the returning

RDs who then orchestrated a role-playing activity in which the RAs applied their learning

with a partner. The RD had several short case studies distributed among paired teams,

and each staff member practiced active listening and peer counseling. After several

minutes of practicing, the RD asked two sets of volunteers to role model their case

studies, and then led a short debriefing about the entire two-hour session.

Diversity

Following the peer counseling session and a 10 minute break, during which some

RAs visited the adjacent convenience store to boost their sugar intake, another RD rallied

the RAs to attention and initiated the first of two sessions on diversity-related issues. The

presenter distributed four collated worksheets with several blank lines adjacent to categories of humans relating to sex, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and ability. The worksheets were designed to represent, respectively, a miniature Earth, Hunter University faculty and staff, Hunter University students, and a traditional residence hall. She directed RAs to fill out one worksheet at a time guessing the percentage of people in each identity group represented at Hunter University in each of the categories, as well as the global context of a miniature Earth.

The presentation was structured for RAs to list their estimates on their worksheet, then four volunteers read their numbers out loud, and the presenter gave the actual percentages obtained from the Office for Equal Opportunity. After a brief discussion facilitated by the RD, RAs filled out the next worksheet and the process was repeated. This happened for all three worksheets, with opportunities for RAs to share their perceptions of campus and the world (third worksheet) and what that meant for them as humans, students, and university staff members. Towards the end of the session, the conversation turned slightly away from issues of diversity and multiculturalism to how the survey was administered. After a few moments of spirited conversation, the session ended and an announcement was made that staff had an hour for lunch in the dining hall. They were instructed to be back in the lounge at one o'clock that afternoon for a training session on men's and women's health and gender communication. The second half of diversity training would include the movie, *Higher Learning*, later that afternoon, when the theater was open.

The afternoon session immediately following lunch ran about 30 minutes longer than anticipated, so when RAs arrived at the theater to watch the two-hour movie *Higher*

Learning, they settled down quickly and movie started. At the conclusion of the movie, an RD asked RAs to count off by six and meet in different areas of the theater where the six RDs stood. For about 20 to 25 minutes, each RD facilitated a discussion about the movie with their smaller group, asked introspective and thought provoking questions about diversity related issues and different scenes in the movie, and then asked RAs to share their general reactions. Of the six groups, three were finished with their conversation around the 20-minute mark and, as students left the theater, the other three groups immediately concluded, as RAs wanted to go to dinner after a long, emotionally draining day.

Academics

On the fifth full day of RA training, the RAs were given three hours of free time to take care of university and academic related business before getting together at 11 a.m. for a session on their roles as students. One of the assistant directors shared the departments' expectations and asked rhetorical questions about how RAs perceived themselves as role models and academically oriented students. Several returning RAs shared insight about the rigors and difficulties of balancing academic and job responsibilities, and tried to help new staff gain an initial understanding of challenges related to the RA position.

Although the session's goal was to focus on the academic role modeling aspect of the RA position, it evolved into a defensive conversation between returning staff and the assistant director, debating whether the RA workload justified compensation. RAs stated they were overworked and underpaid, to which the assistant director conceded. He then shared several statistics regarding compensation and benefits for RAs at similar

institutions across the country. This information suggested Hunter University RAs are treated well compared to their peers across the country in terms of compensation they received for the responsibilities expected of them as student staff members in their residential communities.

Lunch time edged closer and aggravation in the room continued to rise as several RAs seemed to feel they were not being heard by the assistant director because he was not addressing their statements or concerns. Restlessness among most of the RAs increased. The assistant director appeared to do the best he could to mitigate their frustration by explaining how happy he was to work with this group of student staff members. He also offered that the assistant director team was consistently proud of what they accomplished and the quality of their relationships with Smith Neighborhood residents. He reminded everyone to keep their academics in the forefront, as that was the primary reason for being at Hunter. University Housing and Residential Life's expectation for RAs were that academics came first, the RA job second, and everything else third. The explanation of these priorities helped better frame the position for most RAs in the room and, as they left for lunch, the frustration with the assistant director decreased.

Behind Closed Doors

Fall RA training culminated with three hours of Behind Closed Doors (BCDs), during the evening hours on the fifth day of training. A very common element of RA training across the U.S., BCDs is a series of role playing sessions where returning RAs serve as performers acting out scenarios for new staff members to address in 20-minute blocks. In general, BCDs is the most difficult part of training for new RAs, but also the

most positive and helpful according to new and returning staff. New RAs have opportunities to apply what they learned throughout training, as well as receive constructive feedback from supervisors and peers.

For this Fall training, BCDs was hosted by the RAs in one of the taller residence halls. Six scenarios were acted out in RAs' rooms, including a resident reporting a sexual assault, a party situation, a roommate conflict, staff mediation, a student with an eating disorder, and a room that smelled like marijuana. Smith Neighborhood returning RAs (anyone who had been on staff for at least a semester) were assigned to small groups and sent to the six rooms to prepare for an evening of acting. New RAs went with their individual staffs led by their RD, to each of the rooms. On the breezeway outside or near each room, there was a piece of paper briefly describing the pending situation, to provide new staff with information about the issue they were to confront. Before addressing each situation, the group of new RAs decided who would confront the situation. Then, while one person knocked on the suite door, the remaining staff members and the supervisor stood back and observed. In general, the confronting RAs had approximately five to seven minutes to address the situation, at which point the RD stopped the acting and confronting to debrief what had happened, including providing positive and constructive feedback. Returning RAs, as well as observing new RAs, provided feedback to the individual who confronted the situation, and shared their thoughts and perspectives so everyone in the room learned from the situation.

New RAs were slightly nervous going into BCDs because performers occasionally go overboard and intensify situations to make them more of an anomaly, than 'average' encounters that RAs normally faced when on duty or in the day-to-day

nature of their position. It was also intimidating for many new RAs to confront situations with, and in front of, their peers, as the fear of doing something wrong and being seen as unable to do the job can be overwhelming. Prior to this BCD session, RDs explained to performing RAs the goal of this educational opportunity was not to haze new staff, but provide realistic situations from which everyone could learn. New RAs were told that this was a great time to make mistakes, as they were in a safe, supportive environment among peers. Some new RAs felt that this activity was easy, others were overwhelmed, but all in all, both new and returning RAs shared that this BCDs session was the most important and beneficial part of training because they learned more about the job and each other.

<div align="center">Participants</div>

Upon review of the RA's for the 2006-2007 academic year, I highlighted the names of returning staff members to include in this study because they would provide honest and insightful perspectives, without feeling pressure to say what they thought I wanted to hear. Because I worked with each of them in some close capacity when I was responsible for their residential community, we developed strong relationships and I felt that Mack, Josh, and Michelle would be open and honest participants. I worked with Austin on several occasions and saw him frequently around campus, as he was very involved with his RA position and served as an advocate for his staff.

Having worked with the assistant directors and graduate resident directors of Smith Neighborhood, I trusted them to help me intentionally select additional participants who would provide rich information directly related to the purpose of this case study, as well as be representatives of the RA and student population living in Smith Neighborhood. The remaining individuals I selected could represent a cross-section of the

paraprofessional residence life staff who were first, second, or third-year male and female RAs on all six staffs.

Katie

As a sophomore majoring in social work, Katie was not local to this Southeastern state, but since moving to Wolf City, she became a true Hunter University enthusiast. Katie explained, "I grew up in New York, but once we moved down to [the Southeast] when I was in eighth grade, I became an insanely intense Hunter University fan and supporter." Her energy and enthusiasm for Hunter University was evident in our informal conversations before and after interviews as she spoke about the university football team. Her father was an associate vice chancellor, responsible for the development of a new section of the university designed to work closely with innovative and technology-oriented off-campus businesses. Katie's dedication to Hunter University reflected her father's commitment to the institution. When asked to describe herself and the identities that may or may not have influenced her role as an RA, Katie shared her perspective as a White, liberal, heterosexual, whose socio-economic status was "comfortable:"

> In terms of race, I don't think that plays as much of a role of anything
>
> because I think when you are a majority of a race, you just take it for
>
> granted. That's not really one of those things that plays a role in my
>
> everyday life – I don't think about it. Some people would say that I am
>
> blessed not to have to think about and some people probably wish that I
>
> would have to think about it, but that really is not an issue.

Katie identified as a heterosexual woman and explained, "I'm straight, so that's not an issue to worry about. That's not something I question, you know?" In our conversations

over the course of the year, she continued to explain with passion the differences she

perceived between herself and most of her staff in relation to her political

affiliation/viewpoint:

> I am liberal and I think that there are a lot of people that are RAs that
>
> identify themselves as more conservative politically and socially. I think
>
> that is the only thing that can run into some conflict when you have
>
> conservative-sided and liberal-sided arguments. It felt that some people
>
> feel that as a liberal, you don't have the same moral standards, so you
>
> would be less likely to bust this person for smoking weed because you
>
> think that it should be legalized. It's like, "no I don't," but that's the only
>
> part of anything that really gets talked about. I know that I am one of the
>
> minorities on my staff that are liberal.

Regarding Katie's perception of her socio-economic status, she felt that others

held her father's higher level position within the university against her. When her peers

made comments such as "you must get everything because of your dad," she explained to

them,

> . . . I don't even have a car on campus, so go ahead and make a comment
>
> about me driving a Lexus or BMW. Then you will realize I don't have one
>
> here. My car sits at home. Dad won't let me drive it because I don't have a
>
> permit on campus.

This topic also seemed to frustrate Katie as other students questioned her financial need

for the RA position, assuming because her hometown was Wolf City and her father

worked at the institution, she did not need to work to attend the university, which was a

major reason several other RAs applied for the position. Katie articulated her passion for the job was about helping residents, not receiving room and board as compensation.

When asked about her perception of the RA role, Katie reflected back to her pre-collegiate years when her father talked about his good friendship with an associate vice chancellor of student affairs. She explained, "all through high school, I kinda got to know what being an RA was and just how passionate everyone in University Housing and Residential Life is about what they do." During another interview, she reflected that "the more and more I heard about it, you know, through high school, the more I wanted to do it." Katie's interaction with her RA during her first year living in Jones Neighborhood across the university from Smith Neighborhood was minimal, however:

> I thought that the RA had this all-powerful, almighty kind of role. The
>
> only time I saw my RA when I was a freshman was when I had to go
>
> knock on her door and say, "there's people screaming down the hallway at
>
> four o'clock in the morning, could you please go do something?" So I just
>
> thought that the RA would be this kind of ignored person, not that they are
>
> supposed to be ignored and they try very hard not to be ignored, but I
>
> thought that it would be sort of like 'I'm ignored unless you need me as a
>
> go-to person' kind of thing.

With these contradicting messages about the RA position, Katie's desire to help others at her favorite university led her to apply for the job towards the conclusion of her first year living on campus. When she received the position offer and subsequent placement in Falcon Hall, located in Smith Neighborhood, she was slightly concerned because she had heard about the challenges of working in a community of mostly upper-

division students. However, she accepted the position and looked forward to the new opportunity. As an RA, Katie said she was determined "to give back to my residents and kind of allow them to realize that they didn't have a choice what RA they were given, but I have a choice to make their lives as good as possible."

Unlike many RAs, Katie was fortunate to hold several jobs prior to arriving at Hunter University as a first-year student. Because returning staff members generally perceived that first time RAs have had few, if any, previous employment experiences, Katie felt as though many of her peers lacked confidence in her ability to do the job before they learned more about her work history:

> This is something that annoys me. People will always tell me that being an
>
> RA is like nothing I've ever done before. But, to me, I have had many
>
> other jobs that are like different facets of being an RA. I have been a tutor
>
> for people my own age. I've been an employee at an after-school program.
>
> So, I have had to manage and be responsible for people who were plus or
>
> minus three years, you know, age difference.

One position similar to being an RA was when Katie worked with incoming high school students. Katie stated that similar first-year college students, incoming high school students "don't adapt well in a very different environment, as the transition from middle to high school, for a lot of people is very difficult." Helping fellow RAs understand her work experience took longer than fall training because Katie had never previously interacted with her current staff.

Upon arrival at Fall RA training, Katie "did not have any pre-existing friendships or anything with anyone." She continued, "I would say that I definitely came into this

with a fairly blank slate, like, I didn't really have any preconceived notions about

anybody. I just sort of approached training and my new staff – you know, just start from

square one and learn from there." Katie shared she could not remember what she

expected to get out of training, but her "biggest goal going into training was just to be

able to get along with everyone on my staff."

When reflecting on her role as a staff member with the other nine RAs, Katie

shared the difficulty she had viewing coworkers as friends:

> That was my biggest worry coming into training, was that I was going to
>
> feel forced to make friendships with everyone on my staff and suddenly
>
> have those nine other people, excluding Jessica, become my best friends. .
>
> . . I wasn't sure if I wanted friendships with everyone on my staff, but I
>
> definitely wanted a functioning, you know, working relationship and to be
>
> able to get along with people for a certain period of time every day,
>
> cooperate with them, to be able to plan projects and programs with them
>
> and then call it a day.

Adding to this distinction between friendship and colleagues, Katie clarified that learning

to depend on others, whether or not she knew them, was a challenge because she

preferred to work alone. As she described in more detail, "I really kinda have to build up

a trust and know whether or not they are responsible and reliable, and whether or not

THEY perform with the same standards that I perform." Being a part of a larger staff and

working together on projects shortly after meeting each other was challenging for her

because she had to learn how to work with people she had just met. She continued, "I

don't know their entire personality, I don't know their strengths, I don't know their

weaknesses, but suddenly I am being forced into a situation where I am going to have to depend on those people whether or not I know them."

Throughout training, Katie continued to build relationships with her fellow staff members through being honest and authentic, which were important characteristics by which she lived her life. She felt many staff members tried to "put on a show" in the beginning of training, trying to be people they were not. She laughed and said, "Why hide it? Why put up this façade that you're somebody that you are not if your supervisor's going to figure it out. Just get it out there, you know." Katie knew she would meet with her staff and supervisor every week, and because everyone would eventually figure her out, it was better to start her RA experience being true to herself.

Katie's relationship with her supervisor was similar to her relationship with the other RAs on her staff. They may not have been the best of friends, but they had a solid working relationship. In describing her relationship with her supervisor, she explained, "I'm glad that we have a balance of professional and personal and I think that the ratio of professional to personal is like 70/30. I like that and I think that it's good that we still talk about cats at home, or football, or something like that." Having this positive supervisor-employee relationship was important to Katie, as it was very important that her supervisor approved of what she did.

Beyond just 'approval' for the accomplishment of work tasks, feedback from her supervisor was critical to Katie's motivation for being an RA:

> I really do value positive feedback and it is really hard for me to keep
>
> performing on a high level if people don't give me positive feedback. If I

am participating in a program, I would like to be recognized for my

participation. If I get positive feedback, then that motivates me.

In addition to recognition from her supervisor, it was ultimately her residents who drove

Katie's determination to be a positive RA, both as she learned about the position in

training and throughout the academic year. She explained, "it sounds so cheesy, but

people say, 'oh, if I impact one person then my job is complete.' Well, I want to say that

I'd like to positively impact all of my residents, so I would like to positively impact 46

people."

Josh

Born and raised in a small rural town about an hour from Wolf City, attending

Hunter University, and becoming an RA was a culture shock for Josh. However, it was a

culture shock that led to tremendous growth. Throughout his growth in the RA position,

Josh maneuvered through and overcame several challenging obstacles which led him to

apply for and receive the leadership-oriented Administrative Coordinator (AC) role his

second year as an RA. An AC's role on staff was to provide leadership, direction, and

support for a team of nine other RAs, in addition to their own 40+ residents, as well as

assist the graduate resident director. During the interviews and focus groups, it was clear

the RA and AC positions meant a great deal to Josh as a person, student, leader, and peer.

Many of his personal experiences at Hunter University shared during this study related

back to his role as a residence life student staff member, as opposed to how he perceives

his own behaviors and attitudes outside the position.

There was a dramatic difference between Josh during his secondary schooling and

Josh as an RA during his collegiate experience. He explained in our first interview that

because he was "from a small town and a single family and a first generation college student, all these things just sheltered me my whole life." His history before attending Hunter University led him to be a quiet and shy first-year student, "I was very introverted as a freshman. I would stay in my room. It didn't help that I had a friend from high school who was my roommate who followed me around and everything. I wanted to get out." Although at first, he was not sure how to get out of his residence hall room, he knew he could not do it by himself. He then decided to apply for the RA position. When Josh became an RA for approximately 50 men on the first floor of a residence hall, and worked with nine other RAs, he realized he had put himself in a position where he would become the "person [he] wanted to be."

Josh explained the growth he experienced through the selection process and RA training his first year:

> I came out of my shell. I've grown so much as a person. I didn't have
> these skills a year and a half ago. Like, I would be talking to you and
> there's no way I would be looking at you in the face, I'd be looking down.
> I've learned how to talk to people, I've learned how to deal with problems,
> I'm still working on dealing with my own [said under his breath], I've
> learned how to be cool in heated situations and stuff. It all goes back to
> talking to people, in some way, because no matter what happens, it's like
> being tactful, and problem solving, and showing concern, and remorse, all
> this stuff, it's like knowing when to do what, and how to deal with
> individual people.

Josh was confident in many situations and able to address people and incidents when he was not entirely comfortable. For someone who first started as a quiet and introverted first-year student who would not look a peer in the eyes when talking to them, Josh developed into a talented student leader who, "…in the course of just like a year and a half, I have done a complete 180."

Although the identities to which Josh belonged have not changed significantly over the past two years, his perspectives on those identities have changed, especially after serving as an RA in a diverse living environment. Josh explained:

> Mentally I am still the same person and background, but I look back and say, 'what the hell was I thinking on some of the viewpoints that I had?' Honestly, I can look back and say, "yes, I had those words in my mouth," but now I tell people not to say them. I am still like, "why was I saying them in the first place?" I guess I was saying them because everyone else was saying them but now, I don't know, I know it's silly, but I have no clue why I was that person. I guess it was just the environment that I was raised in and I was used to it. Now I go back home and talk about that I am a different person, I just don't understand why my mother gets so upset because the people that come to spray our house are African Americans, you know, because she is used to a white guy doing it. It just blew my mind.

Leaving this home environment and attending Hunter University provided Josh new and different experiences interacting with a much more diverse population than he was used

to when he was growing up. As a college student in a more multicultural environment, Josh's view of his role in the world seemed to change:

> I feel like I am dead set in the middle – it has made the job hard because I am white, heterosexual, I am a male, I am in the middle class, Christian, I am educated, no disabilities. All those things just seem to give me nothing to go off of. How can I jump in and relate to others, because I am talking about all of these other people and I am just so normal. It's like, give me something that is different from everyone else. I was happy about that before I was an RA, now I am like, "why was I like that?"

As an RA and then AC, Josh struggled with his identity because he wanted to relate and empathize with residents and his peers who had much different life experiences than he had. He shared that as a white, heterosexual, Christian, male student at Hunter University, "'I know what you are feeling because I have been through it,' but I can't." Relating to issues of diversity, being an RA has opened up many doors to his personality and how he viewed the world beyond his own experience. As Josh reflected on the position and what he has learned, he shared that "before being an RA, I didn't know diversity. I thought it was white versus black. I honestly didn't realize where I came from."

Beyond issues of diversity, Josh learned about several of his other personal skills and characteristics, as well as how they applied to his life as a student, RA, and AC. First, he realized he was,

> . . . the king of procrastination. I will procrastinate on everything because I work best under pressure. In order to compensate for that, I've got to get

everything else out of the way where I'm able to have the last two days

before this paper or test is due, that's my prime time for studying and

everything.

Josh learned to "schedule everything; I have never used a planner so religiously in all my

life. I know exactly where it's at all hours of the day and if I don't, I go nuts."

A second trait instrumental to the RA/AC role was Josh's passion and ability to,

"fix everybody else's problems." With every negative and/or difficult situation, he kept

his pessimism in check and focused on the positives, a difficult lesson to learn throughout

his first year on staff. He explained:

That was something that I finally just grasped the end of last year and the

beginning of this year, I've gotta look for the positive in everything and

try to ignore all these negative things, because it really will bring you

down and it brings staff morale down. [My supervisor] told me that it only

takes one little grain of sand to make a pearl. And, as cheesy as that

sounds, that's something that has stuck with me and even helped me

knowing, that no matter what I do and how big of a flop it may be in the

end, everything can be a learning experience. No matter what the world

throws at me, like, it could be worse, but if I actually stop to think about it,

like, there's some way to get through it. Everything's fixable somehow.

Josh took this trait to an extreme many times, as he made concessions to support his

residents or fellow staff members, including taking phone calls late at night and very

early in the morning, "I always answer it and I always end up going to help out with

random things and staying up way late and going on four hours sleep and walk around as

a zombie." He admitted that with his staff, he was terrible at saying "no," but that did not stop him from answering his phone because he never knew when could be serious. He explained his role as a way to stop peers,

> . . . from making the mistakes I did. And that's when I feel that I need to jump up, 'cause I've been through this before: I can help. Trying as much as possible to let them make their own mistakes, but not letting them make the same ones that I did.

As mentioned previously, Josh took the RA/AC positions very seriously, a third personality trait he realized since working in a residence life setting. He understood the "fish bowl" nature of the RA position in which he was constantly observed by his residents and other staff members because he was seen as a leader. He succinctly explained,

> . . . you can't have it that sometimes you are an RA, sometimes you not an RA. You're always the RA, no matter how bad you want to just be a student sometimes, but if you HAVE to let go, you have to be cautious if you are standing behind people or in front of them.

Among all the aspects of the job Josh viewed very seriously was policy enforcement and documenting situations in which residents violated University Housing and Residential Life policies. Throughout the course of his first year as an RA, Josh seemed to be present for most of the incidents that occurred in his building, regardless of whether he was on duty or not. Due to the number of incidents in which he was involved, as well as his professional demeanor in addressing residents and their guests, Josh developed a nickname known across Smith Neighborhood:

People started called me Officer Fulbright. Even heads of buildings were

calling me Officer Fulbright. It did not bother me personally because I

knew they were kidding. But, they perceived that just because I was

enforcing policy and stuff, people gave staff the wrong perception was that

I was some hard-nosed RA that was going around looking for trouble.

Personally, I have spent a lot of time fighting the stereotype, fighting that

whole type of what it looks like to be an RA.

Josh believed he got out of the position what he put into it, so taking his role

seriously was not just about receiving recognition from others, it was important to do the

best he possibly could. Just as he strove to excel in his job responsibilities and support his

fellow staff members, Josh's relationship with his supervisor was also important,

especially as he was now considered a leader among the staff. His supervisor was a

second-year RD with a supervisory style that reflected Josh's value of relationships. Josh

shared,

. . . [my RD] really tried to get to know us on the friend level. She tries to

be there for us as RAs, and fosters our ideas there, but she also recognizes

the whole personal thing, like, we're people too, making sure we're ok. In

a way, she's our RA.

When Josh was provided feedback on his performance, he explained that "it's not really

my boss telling me I need to fix something; it's my friend telling me a little flaw I have."

This highly personal relationship has been crucial for Josh as he learned the RA position

and then took on the AC leadership role his second year on staff. When reflecting on his

RA experience thus far with his supervisor, he recognized the support he needed in his multiple roles:

I couldn't have done it otherwise. I think with school and trying to have a

relationship, and being a normal person and student, and colleague, and

peer, and everything, and trying to balance all those roles, support was a

big thing.

Although concerned about the limited amount of training he was scheduled to receive as an AC for this RA training, Josh was highly aware of how his experiences over the past year helped support the other RAs on his staff for this academic year. As he reflected on the position, he shared:

I guess it was a lot harder last year because I was still adjusting, trying to

get the job down and trying to do everything. But now, all that is easy and

I know how to do everything, now I can work on the whole people aspect

of it.

Learning from his supervisor how to focus on relationships was challenging and positioned him to reap tremendous rewards as staff and residents grew and developed together.

In sum, reflecting on his life, the RA position, and how he got to where he is now, Josh commented:

It helps that I have a great family and that I am happy with myself. I love

what I am doing academically – that definitely helps. If I didn't enjoy

school, there is no way I could do this job. If I didn't love this University

and love being here, I couldn't do this job. And I guess in looking back, it

was the training, but it wasn't one of those things, if whereby telling me

exactly what to do, they're leading you in the right steps. It's like a stealth

growth thing, where they're giving you the chance to open the door to

learn how to do the stuff. Honestly though, I think I did it on my own. I

think it was a personal growth thing where I was given the skills and the

chance to grow, and I got to go out there and talk to residents and I think I

did it on my own.

Anna

Anna chose to attend Hunter University primarily because the institution's

reputation for engineering curricula supported her choice of majors: Textile Engineering

and Biomedial Engineering. Another reason was that her family, with whom she is very

close, live relatively close to the campus so she can visit them when she has the time.

Anna has one older sister, who, "kind of matured me to become an RA because she is

kind of the wilder, older sister. I didn't live as much as she did at her age." Anna's

seemingly quiet personality was evident in her calm body language and soft tone of

voice, especially in group interactions when if she had something to say, she typically

waited until everyone else had shared. As she explained in more detail, "I used to always

be hindered to express my opinions because I didn't think they mattered as much, but

now I am more open." Anna further explained that her participation level in

conversations also depended on group size, as she was hesitant to share her opinion in

larger groups, but "in smaller conversations I am more open and confident in expressing

myself."

Another significant personality characteristic that arose from interviews was the role religion played in Anna's life:

I believe there is a creator and it has definitely evolved. I went to a private elementary school and then I went to church through middle and high school, you know, being highly influenced by the church, and then coming to college has been a chance to step back which has been eye opening. I have friends of all religions and it has got me thinking about a lot of things.

Throughout her time at Hunter University, she noticed that her involvement with Campus Crusade for Christ decreased, especially upon becoming an RA. She explained that part of this slight withdrawal was due to the increasing demands created by her job as an RA and her academic schedule, but also due to her questioning the role and level of spiritual involvement in her life.

With the responsibilities of the job and her academics weighing on her as she progressed in her majors, Anna's passion became evident:

I guess throughout my life, I don't know if it has been a passion but just doing things well has been something that I have always done - it's just been ingrained in me and that's with getting along with people well to performing well. Like, it is across the board. And that is kind of how it has been in my life. If I were to apply it to the job, which I do, it's like I just don't do things half way. I guess the best way to put it, is commitment, something that I'm passionate about. Before I do something, I really consider the positives and negatives of it before I actually go into it

because a commitment takes time for me. It takes a lot of time and effort

to do something and I guess that's where doing it well comes into play. If

you want to do it well, you have to take the time and effort to do it and

commit to it. Like, my first bulletin board was really, really good and it

took more than the standard 30 minutes to it, I put a few hours into that.

But it was fun.

Anna's dedication to the RA position was obvious during the interview and focus group

process, as she rarely strayed into topics that were highly personal, including her family,

background, friendships, etc. Her responses to questions and participation in groups were

focused primarily on the RA job, as that was the object of this study.

Anna reflected upon her reasons for applying to become an RA:

I lived in a suite with my RA last year, and she's a returning RA, so she

was the reason why I wanted to be an RA, and of course, I look up to her.

She always seemed to really take an interest in me, to care, like, I went

through a pretty tough time, and I went to her, you know, I felt

comfortable going to her. I guess that karma thing, like, I wish I could do

that for someone too, you know.

Anna was on staff with her previous and that relationship eased her transition into the job.

Anna appreciated being able to ask her former RA to get a different perspective on her

coworkers, residents, or supervising graduate resident directors, etc.

With respect to her current peers, Anna shared, "it's always been important to me,

no matter what I go into, any kind of team aspect that, you know, I feel like I'm a part of

the team." Her transition onto this team was made easier because of all the people Anna

knew who were going to be RAs during her first year in that position. She explained that during training:

> I just associated with the people I knew, 'cause I was comfortable with
> them. I had a suitemate, my boyfriend and one of his suitemates who lived
> next door to us, and then my RA, who were all RAs in Smith
> Neighborhood. So, you know, there were five of us, so it was easy for one
> of us to zip on over and say, "hey, how's it going?"

Anna was fortunate enough to be placed on staff in the residence hall where she had lived in her first year at Hunter University. This helped ease her transition from resident to RA as she knew several returning staff members and she was familiar with the layout of the building. Also, there were a significant number of residents in that building who shared majors common to hers.

When asked about what she wanted to get out of the RA position and what kind of RA she wanted to be, Anna shared:

> I hope I just feel satisfied as an RA, 'cause, you know, being a
> perfectionist [laughs], it's all about feeling confident in what you do, and
> if you don't, you'll feel really bad or you're just going to work even
> harder at it and overdo it. So, just that satisfaction which probably comes
> from the residents trusting me, and feeling they can come to me if they
> need me, or just coming to chat. I know I'll get a lot of things out of it,
> even more organizational skills, but really building a good community. I
> hope my residents feel comfortable with me and then, with each other.

Anna gained this perspective from watching her former RA and the building RA staff the previous year, as well as when she attended a leadership institute in May prior to starting the position:

> At LeaderShape, they wanted us to come up with a vision and some
>
> people were like, "I want to end world hunger" and I want to do this, but I
>
> just kind of focused on what was coming up in my life, so I was like, I'm
>
> going to be an RA, I really want my floor to be united. I don't want there
>
> to be stereotypes, I want them all to be pretty open-minded and grounded
>
> with each other, which was my main goal.

When asked how she would know she was accomplishing these community development and relationship building goals, Anna replied that positive reinforcement from residents and her supervisor was critical. She explained: "If someone says 'hey, I really like your bulletin board', that makes me feel better, you know? That helps getting more out of me instead of getting rejected and then I wouldn't want to perform as well." Anna has "… always been a person who has thrived on feedback", and has been challenged by lack of regular feedback, good or bad, from her supervisor. Without consistent feedback, Anna questioned her own abilities:

> Even in school work, you get grades, so you know how you are doing but
>
> with [my supervisor], you really don't know, so I wonder how I'm doing.
>
> It is kind of up to me to figure out how I am doing.

Anna decided not return to the RA position. A major reason for her decision was that lack of consistent feedback from her supervisor. Anna explained:

It's just been one of those things that you learn, because I've seen people,

and if there is something about a person that I like how they treat me, I

kind of adapt that style to my own. If there is something that actually turns

me off to someone, I am going to avoid being that way. That has kind of

been my philosophy. I don't like when people snap at me, so I try not to

snap at people. I like when people encourage me and tell me that I have

done a good job, so I try to do the same to other people.

Anna was consistently positive throughout our interactions. Whether the situation was the

relationship with her supervisor or a project that did not go well, Anna valued the

opportunity and shared, "I've learned from it and I made it a more positive experience

than a negative one. So, I really just adapted and moved on, and made it a good thing."

The same was true for her learning style, which she explained as trial and error,

because if something did not work out the first time, she continued trying new things

until she was satisfied with the result and viewed the experience as positively as possible:

I'm the kind of person that just learns as they go, so, I kind of know where

to begin and where to look if I need help. Knowing those things and

knowing that I can get help, that's good. For example, after the desk

training, I felt okay with handling the desk, but after actually sitting at the

desk for the first night, I felt a lot more confident about being at the desk.

Anna also expressed the initial discomfort she felt confronting her peers. As she

explained with a grin: "One thing that I have always kind of been bad at is confrontation

skills. I have always been the good guy." RA training helped her hone these skills. An

excellent example of Anna's non-confrontational personality, as well as her ability to

overcome challenges, occurred when she was required to confront a party-type situation during Behind Closed Doors:

> Walking into that scene, I was thinking, "oh, I have to be kind of assertive," and that's something I'm not very good at, you know, I just have to look like I'm confident and look like I'm authoritative, instead of little Anna. I don't know, I guess that's just one of those things, when the subconscious becomes conscious, you know.

Mack

Mack's decision to attend Hunter University was because of the University's strong engineering program and location, which is within an hour's drive of his home and his family with whom he is very close. Mack identified as an African American male, yet shared that "my family is like a hodgepodge of people. I have cousins with blonde hair and green eyes, we are all spread out and everyone looks different." Given his diverse family background, Mack did not frequently think about his race because he was never taught to think of himself as different. He shared, "I have always been taught that you count your blessings and you try to help others that aren't as fortunate and appreciate everyone for who they are."

A significant aspect of Mack's identity related to where he grew up with his family. He explained:

> A lot of people where I came from don't have the opportunity to do what I am doing or have the opportunity to go where I am going, so I feel like I have an obligation to succeed, an obligation to pave the way for somebody else. There are so many other things that I could have been doing or could

have done but you know, there are so many people who wish they could

do but they just can't because of their circumstances, especially economic

circumstances. I have so many friends that didn't get to go to college, who

are might be incarcerated, or working jobs that are 12-hour shifts with no

chance of moving up and they just kind of gave up.

Several times over the course of this study Mack said that the reason he was in college

was to be a role model and that "…you do not have to be one of the smartest or fastest,

but if you work hard, you will be OK." In reflecting on why he chose to work so hard, he

shared he is similar to his mother in that way, "I have always been the type of person to

take the hard road, because I realize in the end, it will pay off. I know my mom is like

that." Similar to his mom, Mack felt that by working hard, he was "making things better

for [his] family and others in the future."

When asked to describe what motivated him, Mack pointed to his mother, sister,

and his significant other. Regarding his mother:

My mom just finished her treatment; she was diagnosed with breast cancer

a year ago and she just finished her chemotherapy. She is actually just

about to finish up her radiation treatment. She is definitely motivating me

because she is already back working for two weeks now, and she has

always been the type of person who puts others ahead of her. She

definitely motivates me because I want to be able to take care of her.

Then when thinking about his sister:

She is going through a lot right now, she started her freshman year at

North Carolina Central this year, but a lot of things happened. She

dropped this semester and is working right now, trying to save up to

hopefully go back, but right now, she's not living at home. I don't really

know where that situation is gonna go. But I definitely want to finish and

get to a point where I can do something for her too.

Lastly, Mack's significant other was a woman named Veera, who also participated in this

study as an RA from a different residence hall. According to Mack, Veera motivated him

because:

She was one of the people that I know I was supposed to meet and

supposed to be with – I want to make her proud. I want us to have the

opportunity to be together. She is kind of one of the main reasons why I

am going the route that I am going, professionally, academically, those

kinds of things, so we can be able to have stuff later on.

Each of these motivators helped him balance and accomplish his many commitments as

an engineering student, musician in two music groups, and second-year RA, his three

main identities at the time of this study.

Mack's personality described by other RAs was "pretty low key". He explained

this characterization:

I think for most people, they view me as the quiet, but kind of steady

person, that is the foundation, the kind of person that if you tell them what

needs to be done, that you can depend on them to get it done. A lot of

people view me as quiet, or view me as kind of laid back, which is true to

some extent, but I view it more as, if I have something important to

contribute, I do, and if I don't, then I'll kind of wait to see who has the

most important thing to say at the time.

As a returning staff member, Mack was relatively quiet in many environments until he

felt it necessary to say something, whether among peers, residents, or friends. Beyond

being skilled at remaining quiet to allow others the opportunity to share information and

perspectives, Mack was also sensitive about not creating situations where others felt

uncomfortable, especially if he sensed that he and the other person did not "jive" well.

For example, when reflecting on a Fall RA training activity, he remembered another staff

member interrupted him to explain her opposite perspective, but he chose not to address

her:

> I just kind of wanted to make sure I made my point, and I didn't want to
>
> make the person feel that they offended me, or like I didn't want to come
>
> at them in a combative way, so I let that one go. I mean, I think it's
>
> unfortunate that I can see those situations, but at the same time, when I see
>
> those situations, I kinda cop out and be like, well, I'll work over here and
>
> avoid that situation.

Mack maintained his "low-key personality" when interacting with his peer staff

members. The relationship he had with his residents the first two years he was an RA was

similar, as he reflected:

> I think a lot of them think that I am more laid back, more cool, than some
>
> RA's they've had in the past. I think that they see that laid back quality as
>
> me kind of understanding the role that I need to play. I am on a floor with
>
> all guys, have been for the past two years, and I have kind of understood

> that, like, guys like to make their own way. They really don't want you to
>
> be looking all over your shoulder all the time, you know, being up in their
>
> business all the time. I feel like that my residents know that if they have a
>
> problem, that they can come to me . . . that is all that I really care about,
>
> that they feel comfortable to come to me if they need something.

It was clear when working with him, as well as talking with him over the course of this

study, that this subdued set of personality characteristics stemmed from growing up with

his mother and was reinforced during his first year at Hunter University.

As a first-year student, Mack did not see his RA frequently, except for when the

RA came by to tell residents about programs and put up flyers. Because Mack lived with

several seniors in a suite, he assumed the RA did not check on them because most of

them were ready to graduate and did not need a lot of attention. Mack explained,

> . . . he was a guy we would hang out with every once in awhile and go and
>
> eat dinner with once in awhile. It wasn't like he was always around, or
>
> needed to be always around, like, a negative. I think he understood the role
>
> he needed to play for our community.

Mack's RA significantly influenced how Mack developed his RA personality and how he

viewed his RA position.

His supervisor the first year Mack was an RA also impacted his role on staff and

with his residents. Mack shared that his first supervisor "didn't want to micromanage

you" but aimed to provide a clear direction and allowed his RAs to work in a flexible

environment because "every situation is different." This level of autonomy was shared by

Mack's second supervisor who started in January of his first year as an RA and worked

on his staff for the spring semester. When Mack received a new supervisor during his second year as an RA, her trust in his ability to be autonomous seemed to disappear early in the year. In addition, he chose to "close himself off" from her in the middle of Fall RA Training when he felt that she inappropriately and publicly called out some other RAs who were falling asleep during a training session. Although Mack said he "got through his second year," he explained that having four supervisors in three years (he received a new supervisor for his third year as an RA) added to the challenge of transitioning to new residents and new staffs.

Jessica

Jessica could have been considered a Wolf City native, as she was born and raised within 20 minutes of the Hunter University campus and her mom still lived in the house in which she was born and raised. Similar to many Southeastern residents attending Hunter University, Jessica chose to attend this institution for its strong engineering program – she was enrolled as a Chemical Engineering major in her junior year at the time of this study. Throughout our conversations, Jessica shared how most aspects of her life (personal, academic, social, etc.) were connected in some way to her role as an RA, when she started the position her sophomore year. She explained that because the RA job was so important to her, this personal connection to the position would likely continue throughout her second year on staff as her staff's AC.

Jessica benefited from growing up so close to the Hunter University campus. She explained:

I went to a big high school that had like two thousand students so I can

relate to people who went to big high schools because there were like 450

people in my graduating class. I can really relate to people who have a

huge high school class and feel like they are just a number. I can show

them that you really don't have to be just a number; you can be a person

with a name. I can also relate to people who come from smaller towns

because I was from a smaller town that is in the suburbs of a big town.

Jessica's close connection to her family and long-term boyfriend made it important for

her to live close to home. She shared that her mom and boyfriend have been a

tremendous support network for her. She was happy that she and her mom were both

"night owls" because Jessica could call her mom "at two A.M. and talk to her about

anything because I know she'll be up." Jessica's boyfriend has been a big source of

support as well because she did not have to explain herself when she was with him. She

could say, "I don't feel like talking about it," and he's like, "ok, let's go eat because he

knows I love to eat."

Even with this level of support from her home, Jessica was proud of her ability to

be relatively independent while attending college. As a Black female engineering student,

she was well aware of the resources available specifically designed to help her succeed,

but seldom did she choose to utilize that support structure within the institution. She

knew her mother could not help her financially and similarly, she felt as though she could

not ask her father for money because "that is an issue for him, too." This helped increase

Jessica's level of independence both as a student and Residence life staff member. Jessica

shared an example of how she took responsibility for her education in her chosen major:

I am a Black female majoring in chemical engineering and I am one of a

few in that major. So far, it has been good for me to give information to

my residents as far as where they should sit in class – not in the far back.

Should you introduce yourself to your teacher on the first day of class?

Yes, you should. Even though you are probably the only female, but just

the fact that you had the courage to walk up there and say 'hi, my name is

so and so' shows that you have initiative and courage, and are not afraid to

step out of the box and actually do something because most of the people

won't take the time to do that.

Jessica was connected to her academic program by enrolling in a full load of classes. She

also served as an engineering ambassador, which included being a Teaching Assistant for

a class and participating in the engineer recruitment process for new and transfer

students. Beyond her academics, Jessica was also highly involved in her sorority. Even

with all of these commitments, Jessica continued to be a highly successful RA.

When asked why she applied to be an RA, Jessica's immediate reaction was:

Because I loved my RA, and she was really cool. Like, if I needed a trash

bag, cause I was on the 10th floor of my residence hall, instead of me

having to ride the elevator all the way down to the first floor to get a trash

bag, she'd be like, "just get some out of my room, I don't care, it's in the

bottom drawer, just go in and get one." Being able to realize that she

helped me so much, cause I had some things happen my freshman year

that were really stressful and she was just there. So, I wanted to be able to

do that for my residents, or for someone else, and the RA was an "easy"

way to be able to do that.

Throughout our conversations during this study, Jessica shared story after story of similar

situations in which she was there for her residents, such as attending one of her residents'

hockey games in a freezing cold hockey rink and bringing a resident's favorite candy

when that individual returned to the residence hall after having shoulder surgery. Jessica

made it clear that whether she connected with just one resident when they needed support

or did something for her entire community like sharing cookies, it was critical for her to

be there for her residents. She explained:

> I am always trying to help them out and make them laugh. I let them know
>
> that if they need me, I am there, just IM me and I'll get back to them. If
>
> it's two o'clock in the morning and you IM me, I'm probably up. If you let
>
> me know you need something, I will definitely try to help you anyway I
>
> can.

Although she did not realize how time consuming the position would be when she

first started, she learned that "being around or walking around saying 'hey' was enough

for my residents and they were cool with that." She further explained her feelings about

being an RA:

> It's fun. I love it. Sometimes, I wonder why I'm doing it to myself, but
>
> overall, every time I see my residents and they make me smile, they make
>
> me laugh, they say thank you, or just "hey," it's worth it.

Jessica held herself accountable and took great pride in fulfilling her RA job

responsibilities, as she firmly stated. "I don't want to let myself down, as well as my

residents, because a part of their experience here is on my shoulders because if I am a

horrible person than they are going to have a horrible experience."

As Jessica continuously gave 100 percent to the job, she also learned that she must take care of herself first before she can effectively help others. She explained that sometimes,

> . . . I get to the point where I am just tired of doing everything so I do what
> I want to do and if that means I go sleep for five hours, then I go sleep for
> five hours. For example, one Saturday I stayed in bed till eight o'clock
> p.m., just because. Yeah, there was other stuff that I needed to be doing; I
> needed to study for a test, I needed to be doing some RA stuff, but I can't
> do anymore right now. I need to sleep and just rest up.

Learning to develop this sense of balance was critical because of her commitment to academics, the sorority, her boyfriend, family, the RA job, and her staff. She had multiple responsibilities in each these roles. She also took on additional pressures by serving as a staff leader and role model.

During her first year as an RA, Jessica took the lead on her RA staff by working with her supervisor to provide a climate in which the RAs bonded as a staff and learned what it meant to support one another. Jessica believed this was important because,

> . . . you have to look at them at least once a week in staff meetings every
> week, and you have to be on duty with them, you have to maybe do a
> program with them, or ask for help from someone, so I think it's really
> important to be able to bond with your staff.

In addition, this bonding helped RAs know that, "ok, this person has my back as well as me having theirs. They are going to help me no matter what." In addition to fostering the

positive support network RAs built together, Jessica encountered some frustrating

situations created by her peers' negativity. She explained that her staff:

> Sometimes can also be a big pain in the butt, because sometimes all people
>
> do is complain and it's like, complaining does nothing; you identify the
>
> problem and you solve it. I am an engineer, that's all you do; you identify
>
> it and solve it. You can brainstorm about it, but you can not cry about it.
>
> As an RA you can't wait for something to fall off to say 'I guess I need to
>
> fix it now,' you should try to troubleshoot those things ahead of time,
>
> especially with residents, because you wait for the wheels to fall off a
>
> resident and it may be a suicide case.

Even with some negative situations involving her staff over her first year as an

RA, Jessica maintained a positive attitude because she knew they cared about each other

and about the buildings' residents. A large component of this ethic of care in their

residence hall was the positive and supportive nature of Jessica's supervisor. While being

challenged by her supervisor, Jessica continued to see growth in her RA and leadership

skills which, in turn, led to Jessica's selection as AC for her second year of working for

University Housing. Her relationship with her supervisor played a significant role in

Jessica's first year as an RA. She explained,

> . . . talking with [my RD] has been a real big help. If I need to come to her
>
> office and cry for about 30 minutes, she will sit there and say 'anything
>
> you need at all, I am here.' It's comforting to know that.

In addition to the support they provided each other, Jessica's relationship with her

RD has moved beyond a strict employer-employee relationship. She shared,

. . . I think [my RD] and I've gotten to that point where she can be like,

"Jessica, you're slacking off" and I'm like "sorry, my bad." She realizes

that she can say stuff and joke with me and I am not going to take it that

hard. We can both take jokes and throw them back and forth at each other.

I think that is how I got to that point, because I was always really open and

honest. Also, the stuff that happened to me the first semester being an RA,

I literally had to break down and she was the person I went to break down

to. With all that stuff, I couldn't really go to my mom, dad, or [boyfriend]

because they were all so tightly connected to the stuff going on with them,

and [my RD] was the person who was there to help me through that.

This open relationship with her supervisor was critical because so much happened from

day to day, living and working with college student residents living in close proximity to

each other. In Jessica's opinion, there was no way she could have survived the position

without the caring, supportive relationship she had with her supervisor.

Nathan

Nathan was the older of two siblings. He identified as Asian born, adopted into an

upper-middle class, White/Caucasian, Christian family at a young age. He does not

consider himself as having been raised in an Asian home. Reflecting on his childhood,

Nathan shared, "I think being raised by people like white parents has impacted me more

than if I had been adopted by another Asian family, or any other family." He struggled to

expand on that notion because he could not relate to growing up in any other home than

his own. Higher education was valued by both of his parents, evidenced by his mother's

undergraduate degree, his father's Master's degree, and his younger brother who attended a university in their home state.

Throughout Nathan's elementary through high school education, he lived in a primarily White neighborhood and attended a predominantly White school system. Nathan believed being raised in a White household impacted his entire life in terms of the opportunities available to him. For example, his family's emphasis on the importance of higher education, together with the support of his high school teachers who were strong in science and math, resulted in his ability to attend Hunter University to pursue a degree in Electrical Engineering.

A consistent theme throughout the interviews was Nathan's shyness, his perception that he lacked people skills, and his preference for working on projects rather than working with people, which made the RA position a challenge and a tremendous growing experience. What Nathan perceived in his own lack of being outgoing, he made up for in being extremely independent and self-reliant, as he shared,

> . . . I have been pretty independent most my life. I taught myself how to tie my own shoes at a young age. I like to do things by myself; I don't like to get help from others. I don't know why I never liked team sports growing up, but now I guess it's because I like doing things by myself.

Not only did Nathan appreciate relying on others, he saw himself as a hard worker:

> I have always been a pretty hard worker throughout life, always trying to get that A+ or whatever. I value hard work and perseverance. Granted, independence might not have always been good when I had to go to tutoring, but told myself, "I probably could do this by myself." I try to

apply my hard work ethic – it's like getting the job done and doing it right,

basically. I guess I like to be on time and being on time is good because I

know I don't like to wait on people and I am sure they don't like to wait

on me if I'm late in any degree. I guess that is what I value daily here as a

college student, working hard to get that degree.

When thinking about his professional career beyond college, Nathan realized the

value of building and maintaining relationships even though, at this point in his life, he

preferred to be solely responsible for projects rather than having to interact with people

on a daily basis:

I think it's just something that I've never been good at and maybe I just

thought that I should challenge myself in this job because in the real

world, it's not like you are locked off from everyone all the time. You are

going to have to talk to a supervisor, I'm going to have to know my clients

and coworkers, other people that I'm going to have to talk to and interact

with on a daily basis anyways. I can't always be locked up in my room all

the time and worry about me only. Granted, it is somewhat uncomfortable,

but it's life applicable. I guess it is all for the better in the end.

Based on a perceived need to enhance his skills in this interpersonal area, Nathan

remembered a conversation he had with a friend who had been an RA before and had

encouraged him to apply for the position:

[My friend] said, "I recommend doing it, it's a pretty good job, you get

good interactions with people and your staff. You have regular things like

staff meetings which you are going to have in the real world. You are

going to have duty and to be on call and be vigilant and be more aware of

your surroundings. I recommend doing it for about a year."

As Nathan constantly looked towards his future career as an engineer, he knew

the better he did in school, the more it would only help him be more successful,

especially if he could get good grades and have leadership experiences outside his

academics. Employers would see his RA experience as extremely valuable because, as he

shared, "I would have to handle overseeing all of these residents and school." Although

he did not interact with many RAs during his first year at Hunter University, he

remembered, "What I heard from other RAs, I thought it would be a good experience, to

see the flip side of what RAs do." Then, when he saw the RA Agreement when applying,

he felt the RAs made the job look easy, "so why can't I do it, too?"

Although Nathan did not know many of the RAs in the building during his

freshman year, he saw them around and recognized who they were. Then, when he

became an RA in the same building, he was on staff with his RA from the previous year.

Since working with her, he mentioned,

> . . . I feel kinda sorry that I didn't do more with what she put on with her
>
> programs and stuff because now I'm an RA and I know what she had to do
>
> on a weekly and daily basis. I hope that I am a good co-worker, because I
>
> was not there too much as a resident.

Nathan was not close with his roommate during his freshman year, nor did he know most

of the RA staff when he was a resident. At the end of his first year as an RA, Nathan

reflected it was, "all new people, all new faces that I had to get to know, but we're all

pretty close knit now, that I can see."

When thinking about his current staff, Nathan stated:

> I really like them. There are so many different personalities on our staff,
>
> and we all mix pretty well together. I like working with them so far.
>
> Nothing's come up, nothing I can complain about. I mean, everyone's
>
> pulling their weight and knows what's like to be new, because everyone's
>
> been new before. You know, all the new ones don't mind asking the
>
> returners for help – we're all one big happy family.

He perceived that all the RAs were there to do the job and, in general, they all shared a common goal to work with the residents, even though each person accomplished the goal differently. As he worked on his interpersonal relationship building skills, Nathan tried to "…interact with as many people as I could, just so I could get a full perspective on being new. You want to hear from other people and what they think."

With Nathan's personal history of living as independently as possible, he anticipated holding his residents to those same standards, as they were now in college. He shared:

> They should be independent by now. They shouldn't have to grow up
>
> more. Its college, you shouldn't have mommy and daddy with you. You
>
> have to be able to share space with others and do a schedule. I guess I just
>
> expect more maturity out of people, but that never seems to happen.

According to Nathan, his residents should be independent at this point in their lives, and they should be adept at addressing personal issues and concerns. This philosophy originated from his challenges with building interpersonal relationships. He shared that he was not as comfortable talking about counseling type issues as he was enforcing

policies. Although situations such as, 'hello, my girlfriend's breaking up with me' or 'my boyfriend's breaking up with me' were addressed in training, Nathan said the counselor aspect of the RA position was not fun for him because, "I guess it's just me that I don't like talking about those things."

Relationships with his residents blended into the conversations Nathan had with his supervisor. Although they had what he considered to be a positive relationship, their dialogue during one-on-one meetings was relatively brief because he did what the job required in a timely manner and he did not share too much personal information unless prodded. His RD did submit a brief article in the monthly department newsletter about his performance as a staff member, describing his timely completion of administrative tasks and stating how happy she was to have him on staff. This recognition meant a lot to Nathan.

Bernard

Bernard chose to attend Hunter University because he and his family grew up loving the school, from athletics and the location, to the academic curriculum. He self-identified as coming from a middle-class, educated home, and shared that, although he chose to apply for the RA position for many reasons, the compensation was important. He explained, "You usually don't have a lot of really, really well off kids wanting to be an RA."

In his experience at Hunter University, Bernard did not see that race played a role in his interactions with others; however he identified as a white, male, Christian, college student. Over the course of the study, the role that Christianity played in Bernard's life appeared time and again, demonstrating the depth of his faith and importance of this

identity group to who he was as a student, leader, and RA. In direct connection with the

RA position, Bernard commented:

> As far as being a Christian, the basis of Christianity is love, and if I could
>
> show the love of Christ to my residents, that could be life changing. It was
>
> life changing for me …and it is life changing for me. If I can do that, it
>
> can change my life, but can also change others' lives also.

Bernard further explained he did everything to the best of his ability because of his faith,

but still worked on living a life of humility. When sharing about his social network and

developing friendships, Bernard said,

> . . . I usually look for Christian friends because the trust factor is there. I
>
> mean, a lot of people struggle with certain things. A lot of purity issues,
>
> and if I can help you with that, then you can help me with being humble,
>
> we can really grow together and keep each other accountable.

> Building relationships in a meaningful way was something Bernard saw as one of

the most important things in life, whether he developed a connection with someone

identifying as Christian or not. He connected relationship building to leadership, "my

personal outlook on leadership is that before you start talking about leadership, you need

to get out there and start building relationships. That's what matters in life. You can't lead

without building relationships." Bernard's main goal for the RA position was to build

relationships with staff members and residents, and thus Bernard shared:

> I don't know how or when I learned this in life, but people are the only
>
> things that really matter. Dollars and cents, they're going to come and
>
> they're going to go. I know I'm going to have Jesus Christ at the end of

the day, and when you are visualizing your funeral and there are so many
people there, like, "dude, this guy was an RA and he was awesome. He did
this for me and that for me. He enriched my life in this way." If I am able
to do that by just being around people and helping them and knowing
things and connecting them to different places, that's awesome, that I was
able to have an impact.

Having an impact was something at which Bernard excelled, demonstrated
through his level of involvement on campus. He was highly active on the Student Senate,
as one of the few senators who sought out and made changes that impacted students'
lives. For example, he was able to get the glass size increased in dining halls across
campus and he spearheaded legislation to increase senate procedural effectiveness. He
also served as an Orientation Counselor the summer before starting the RA position and,
through that process, became familiar with not only many campus resources, but the staff
and faculty who were dedicated to student growth and development. Bernard stated, there
was even more to knowing people and resources to be there for students:

I want to know enough things so that I don't have to rely on other people.
I guess I sort of want to be able to support myself and I always have the
Lord as my support as well. He is my support … Him working through
me, I am able to do what I am able to do for students.

Throughout this study, Bernard's role as an RA was superseded only by his
academics and his relationship with God. Bernard's motivation to be an RA was his
desisre to have an impact on students, especially first-year students, as "they need
somebody to really care about them, know how they're doing, and to support them. If I

can do that, that is what I am here for." He loved answering questions and being there for his residents.

When asked about how he learned about the RA position, he shared the following story:

I was working on summer camp staff at Raven Knob and there was this guy from Appalachian State, and I was talking to him, and he said that he was going to be an RA in the fall, so I asked him what an RA was. He said, 'well, I have to do duty, I'm responsible for some people, and I get my room and board taken care of.' I was like, 'what, are you serious?' He was talking about hours, about how he had to be in the building from one to three in the morning sometimes, and it would be a little rough, but that would be doable.

Bernard thought about attending Appalachian State University in North Carolina but, throughout his senior year, Hunter University appeared to be a better option for him as he wanted to pursue a business degree. As a first-year student at Hunter University, Bernard described his RA as "phenomenal" because he saw the RA-resident relationship as a "give-and-take thing, because RAs can help you out, and you can help them out."

Bernard's relationship with his first-year RA and understanding of the RA role heavily influenced his application for the position. He shared that his RA was very open with him about the "ups and downs of the job" and, regardless of what happened, Bernard described himself as a person who, when faced with adversity, "just rolls with it," and whatever he needed to do, he just did it and kept going. More specifically, he stated with a grin, "I try not to let little things affect me very much, at least I try not to."

An excellent example of this ability to "roll with the punches" was his mandatory attendance at Fall RA training, as he had already participated in a significant training experience for the Orientation Counselor (OC) position. According to Bernard, OC training included a semester long class that trained the soon-to-be OCs on everything related to Hunter University. Bernard learned about numerous campus departments, and explained that "you're listening to those presentations when you're not giving them, and you're doing scavenger hunts, going around campus looking for different things that are in pictures." He shared that he felt, "grounded in knowledge of [Hunter University]," and then he learned about the needs of first-year students and how to interact with them. Although feeling that training was full of redundant campus resource information and team building activities for him, Bernard remained positive about his experience with his staff as they all participated in the full Fall RA training.

In comparison to the other first-year RA participants in this study, Bernard had significantly more knowledge about university resources and skills needed to interact with multiple constituent groups (first-year students, parents, faculty, staff, and so on) prior to starting Fall RA training. Even though there were several parts of RA training that duplicated his OC training experience, Bernard explained:

> I know that training is there to prepare you for your job and then once you have situations come up, you know how to deal with them. You don't have to look through the binder to see what the paper says, you just have an idea and you run with it.

Ultimately, he understood the context of the RA position was different from being an OC, although there were common threads between the two positions. This previous

knowledge base helped him to be more successful when learning skills during Fall RA training.

Veera

Veera identified herself as a woman of Indian descent who, throughout this study, related her role as an RA to her experience as a gymnast from a very early age and as a student mentor in the Women Studying Engineering and Science (WSES) program at Hunter University. For Veera, these were two of the largest components of her life that enabled her to connect with more people, whether they were athletes, her resident peers in her second year as a WSES Mentor or, eventually, as an RA in the same building community.

Her highly involved career as a gymnast since she was two and a half years old progressively slowed down because she experienced several injuries (including hitting her head multiple times). As much as it pained Veera to be progressively less active in a sport she loved, her doctor directed Veera to stop practicing as the consequences could be serious. Veera's involvement in athletics helped her become more knowledgeable about who she was as a person. This self-knowledge helped Veera connect more effectively with her peers and residents, as she explained:

> It's important to really know about yourself, being able to connect to my
> residents whether they just enjoy athletics or if they come from the same
> background as I do. . . . I think that is really cool because if you just find
> one little point to connect on, usually you find a ton more and you learn
> about others.

Veera majored in the sciences, as her goal since starting at Hunter University was to apply to medical schools around the U.S. Her major in the sciences and engineering supported Veera's involvement in Hunter University's WSES living and learning program, which was a well known program throughout the Southeast. The female participants in the program were required to meet several expectations above and beyond their academic coursework. Completion of these additional assignments or projects helped the WSES program participants build additional skills and increased their access to university resources to become more successful practitioners or researchers in the fields of science and engineering. Veera was selected to be a WSES Mentor for 40 other women, which supplemented her academic program during her second year at Hunter University.

Traditionally, this WSES Mentor position was seen by many as a stepping stone to becoming an RA because mentors generally assisted RAs to coordinate programs, and helped residents feel connected to their academic major. When she started the RA position, Veera felt as though she was, "kinda in the middle of the new RA and the returning RA just because I did so much with WSES and mentoring; and I've always known a lot of RAs and always helped them with everything they've done." In particular, she believed she was more prepared than other RA applicants because she kind of "knew all of the logistics; like the violations and documenting, and all that stuff."

Not only was Veera able to observe the many positive aspects and attributes of her buildings' RAs prior to applying for the position, her role as a WSES Mentor led other residents on her floor to talk with her about their perception of their specific communities' RA. Veera remembered:

> I know all of my girls came to me and never talked to the RA last year. I
>
> know that because the RA would come by and they're like, 'oh my god,
>
> close the door, close the door, the RAs here.

Witnessing residents' perceptions of her previous year's RA staff before she applied for

the position helped influence Veera's personal vision as a Residence life staff member.

Her ultimate goal in the RA position was to feel connected with her residents so they felt

comfortable approaching her with any issue.

Being selected as an RA provided Veera an opportunity to connect and help

women grow and develop in their academics and personal lives while in college. When

reflecting on how her passion of assisting others played out in the RA position, she

stated:

> I think that helping people and really recognizing people, like, thank you
>
> notes and if someone is having a bad day, like, really caring for them. . . . I
>
> think that the more that you show that concern to people; they are just
>
> going to reciprocate that back to you. I think that's my passion, is taking
>
> care of people and helping them.

She continued that it was not just the relatively intangible attitude of "being there" for her

residents that she enjoyed, but practicing this level of care on a smaller scale, or daily

basis:

> I love helping people, and so, that's a huge thing, just on a day to day
>
> basis. Even if it is something as small as a resident saying, "I am freaking
>
> out because I am failing chemistry," and they really aren't failing because
>
> they have a B and are going to be fine, but you just talk to them for five

minutes, and you know that when they are leaving your room, that their

spirit is much lighter.

Specifically within her RA position, Veera believed her identity as a woman

enabled her to more closely connect with her residents, who were all women. She was

also able to assist her male peers in addressing issues with their female residents, as she

was, "able to sit down and explain to them how girls think, what's going on in their

minds." Veera did not just stop with serving as a gender resource for the male RAs on her

staff, but volunteered to take the lead during staff activities and conversations, when

necessary. Having attended the LeaderShape Institute and being an active participant in

the National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI), Veera's facilitation skills were strong.

These accomplishments and her ability to work with her peers rested on the solid

foundation of her supportive family, who held Veera accountable to high academic and

personal standards.

When reflecting on the role Veera's family played in her development and

determination to be successful, Veera remembered being "really, really busy [her] whole

life:"

> When I was younger, my parents and coaches knew my passion was
>
> gymnastics, so they were like, "if you want to go to the gym, you have to
>
> make straight A's." If I came home from school and if I wanted to eat a
>
> snack and watch TV, they said "you can't watch TV until your homework
>
> is done," or "you can't go to the gym until your homework is done." Well,
>
> you get that homework done really fast, and you better do it right because
>
> if you don't make straight A's, then you can't go to the gym.

Learning to balance many commitments and striving to always do her best, Veera shared

that making mistakes helped her gain insight about what was possible in her life. She

commented:

> You just get to the point where you are like, I don't know what to do, I
>
> need to ask for help. I guess you just hit rock bottom and you are like I
>
> need to ask for help. I need to figure out, whatever I am doing now, clearly
>
> isn't working, so like, those mistakes. Hitting that point that you where
>
> you are like "ok, this isn't working, I need to try something new, then
>
> getting out there and trying new stuff."

Asking for help was generally something many people were reluctant to do, but in

Veera's experiences, she knew seeking assistance would make her more successful as

well as assist others in meeting their goals. Throughout her experience as a WSES

Mentor and an RA, she developed a close relationship with the Resident Director in the

building where she worked. She attributed this to her willingness to ask her supervisor

questions. The year Veera participated in this study was her first year as an RA, and when

thinking about her relationship with her RD, Veera shared:

> I have actually known [my RD] for two years. We have always had a
>
> really good relationship. She actually wrote me my letter of
>
> recommendation to be an RA, so I have known her throughout and she
>
> was always a very cool person. It is really amazing to me that she cares so
>
> much about everything that she does. She really cares about us, as RAs, as
>
> people, as her kids. I think that we just had a really strong bond; it has just
>
> grown a lot more. It is kind of like a big/little sister kind of bond. I would

do anything to take care of her and she would do anything to take care of

me.

This relationship definitely impacted her role as an RA because "when you have a

supervisor or somebody like a role model, to look up to, it just makes you want to be

even better." Whether connecting with residents, designing and implementing programs,

or completing administrative tasks, Veera wanted to do anything she could to make her

supervisor's life easier – that motivated Veera to do her job:

It makes me to want to make sure that I do my job better. I don't want to

do my stuff late and I don't want to make anything harder for her. So I

think I am always trying to give a 110%.

Whether as a WSES Mentor or an RA, Veera's dedication to her residents was

surpassed only slightly by her desire to be academically successful. With her high

standards and awareness that she did not know everything, Veera saw the need to be

consistently open to new information. For this reason, Veera viewed training as essential

for all RAs to be better resources and advocates for the residents who lived in their

community. Even though training may be long, she felt that:

If you just go into it with a positive attitude, even if you're really tired, it's

going to make it so much better. I know a really lot of people were like,

"uuugh, training, eight hours today!" But, it's like, we all have to be here,

we all have to do this, so you might as well make the best of it. One

person's attitude can really affect the whole group.

Veera always tried to be as positive as possible throughout RA training.

Michelle

Michelle identified as a white, Lesbian woman returning to the same RA staff for a second year, with a new supervisor and seven out of ten new RA peers. As a White person, with predominantly White residents, she understood she was in the majority group at Hunter University. However, from her perspective, "being White doesn't really affect the job at all, at least, I think. Well, I mean, I don't think that it really affects my interactions with my residents." Similar to her White identity group, Michelle felt being a woman also did not "have a big impact on anything" because the RA staff was evenly split between women and men, as were the residents in her community. In terms of her sexuality, Michelle explained, "I really have never had a resident act with me differently because I am Lesbian." Although she was not "out" on campus, she did not go to significant efforts to hide this aspect of her identity.

As a Psychology major, Michelle worried people thought she was dumb because of her chosen academic program. Therefore, she took difficult classes in other degree programs to challenge her and let others know she was smart. Michelle took an extremely challenging Organic Chemistry class that was required of most science majors, but not of Psychology students. Rather than see herself as a glutton for punishment for taking the course, she was happy to have residents ask questions about it because it helped her see herself as smart. Going out of her way to demonstrate to others her intelligence and skill seemed to be a way to gain attention. Similarly, Michelle's sarcastic communication style brought our conversations to laughter many times as she tried to be random and make me laugh.

When asked about why she was in school, Michelle replied, "I am still in school because I don't want to be a drop out. I really would like to get into grad school, because not getting in would be lame." Michelle had a difficult time articulating her career aspirations, but knew that receiving an undergraduate and graduate degree was essential. Similar to her ambiguity about life after graduate school, Michelle perceived the RA role as not necessarily impacting her career choice, but knew it would "look good on grad school applications." She also thought it would be fun.

Michelle's transition from resident to RA was a story that is mimicked in student across the U.S. She started as a resident, became involved in hall council, and then that led to the RA position. She explained the process more in depth:

My freshman year RA… was fabulous. I thought she was like, the nicest person in the world. Like, she got me involved in hall council, and then I got to know the other RAs through hall council because they were required to go and I was like, "wow, what do you guys do?" And like, I just thought they were all really cool, fun people and it was a neat little community among themselves. I was this random resident, always hanging out with the RAs and like, they'd let me come in the office and stuff, and I was also real tight with the RD, which was kind of sketchy; she actually trusted me with the master keys at one point, and not her RAs – she gave them to me. Then, I don't remember who it was, but they were like, "Michelle, you should be an RA," and then other people started saying it. And then the RD was like, "Michelle, you do more than some of the RAs I know; you should be an RA." And also, it seemed like

something that would be fabulous to put on grad school applications,

which are very important to me. In addition to that, I thought it would be a

fabulous excuse to go home less, because we all know that my home was

not such a delightful place for me to go.

As she learned more about the RA position, Michelle remembered, "I thought all we really did was go around and talk to people and be friendly. It's nice to be paid to be friendly, to give you a free place to live to be friendly."

Michelle's decision to remain enrolled in higher education was heavily influenced by her family situation as well as the fact that she received free housing to be "nice to others." According to Michelle, her family was considered poor from a socio-economic perspective and, therefore, she would be eligible for more financial aid due to their status. However, she had chosen to no longer interact with them and was now completely independent, receiving as much individual financial aid as possible to remain in school. The RA position supported her goal by allowing her to live on campus without paying for housing or food.

Reflecting on her first year as an RA, Michelle gasped, "Oh my God, slightly more work than I thought it was." However, after one year in the position, she realized the amount of work was really "not that bad." A large influence on Michelle's experience as a first-year RA was the role her staff and supervisor played in her life. Michelle became very close to nearly all of her staff members, with the exception of one person who spent very little time in the building due to his other commitments. This strong bond with her peers was catalyzed by their similar dislike and distrust of their supervisor, as

well as several negative experiences when her residents yelled at her while she was

fulfilling her job responsibilities.

When asked how she learned to be an RA, Michelle reflected for several moments

and then said:

Common sense. I don't know, that is a good question. It is a learning

process, mostly from other RAs who had done the job before. Like, last

year, I followed [another RA] around a lot. I don't know…and trial and

error also. Yeah, I suppose with the programming thing, with trial and

error. I feel that much of the RA job, they could just give us a piece of

paper and be like, "this is what you do, and that is all we need," cause so

much of it is just common sense.

After an eventful first year, Michelle's choice to return for a second year was

heavily influenced by her desire to become the Administrative Coordinator (AC) for her

staff, as well as win the "RA of the Year" Award. Although she received neither position

nor award, the anticipation of new residents and a new supervisor "won her over" to

continue for a second year. As she thought about her choice to return, she commented,

"last year I had fun, despite other things. I did have a few fabulous residents that I still

talk to on a regular basis. I don't know. I wanted to better my people skills, I suppose."

Although Michelle believed the RA job involved common sense and she learned

most about the position from other staff members, she approached RA training for the

second year with the goal to:

. . . sit there and be a role model and act like I'm paying attention when

I'm not. We're also people that if new RAs have questions, they can talk

to us. If they didn't understand something, I mean, I feel that I pretty much

know what's going on.

Ultimately, she felt that "everything in training was somewhat applicable in some way

and RAs apply what was covered without realizing we were applying something we

learned, like, it's just stuff we would do." As a returning staff member going through

training again, Michelle shared, "I know all of this stuff so I am just going to use training

as a time to meet new people. It is pretty much what I did my first year also because it is

a lot of common sense stuff."

Jeff

After being an RA for one year with no plans to return, Jeff agreed to stay on as

an RA for one additional semester due to a last minute vacancy in his building. Although

he planned to graduate in December, he said with a grin, "honestly, that year was my

fourth year in school and I really need to save some money." Jeff was a business major

from North Carolina. His parents lived several hours away and his twin brother was an

RA in another building at Hunter University. Jeff self-identified as cynical and sarcastic

and other staff members relied on him to provide a "realistic" perspective on many

things, including RA and non-RA related topics and situations.

When asked why Jeff applied to be an RA for his Junior year, he replied, "I

applied to be an RA previously, mainly because I saw my RA my freshman year and he

was always late in returning forms and giving us things, and it was sort of, well, I can do

better." Jeff continued:

I don't think I could even name a program that I attended that he had us go

to, except when his fraternity had rush events, and he invited us to go, and

I went. That was pretty much the only program I can remember ever

attending.

Jeff did not share much about his first year as an RA because:

I am really not developing as a person. I have written off last year as a

cool experience. I didn't learn anything. I didn't get put into a bunch of

situations – alcohol violations, stuff like that. It gave me situations in

which I was present, but it didn't change me, it just sort of gave me more

experience to drawn upon.

He said the same is true for this last semester as an RA, "I am pretty much set in

my ways and nothing's going to change." He also limited his interactions with

other staff members and the RD because he believed he excelled when allowed to

work autonomously. Regarding programming, he explained, "my thing is that a

lot of the programs that I do, I do them by myself. I don't really involve other

people. I don't really get support from other people, which is OK; I don't mind

that."

Jeff struggled with his residents' lack of attendance at the programs he designed

and implemented, and believed the departmental programming model did not sufficiently

meet his residents' needs. He explained that when he became an RA:

I really didn't know about the program requirements because I never

really attended them, so they didn't really hit me. I thought it was going to

be more about people stopping by, needing help with things and then it

didn't work out that way. I knew I was going to interact with my residents

and help solve problems, but that's about it.

Jeff said he would rather walk up and down the breezeway of all male residents,

connecting the suites to each other, trying to get to know them individually and

occasionally host spontaneous programs.

Jeff viewed his relationships with residents as similar to that with his RA peers.

He was there if they needed him:

> I don't really hang out with people on my staff, that's just who I am.
>
> Although, if someone said, "Uh, hey, I need help with this," I'm like, "oh
>
> OK, I'll help," and then I know that that person's good. I didn't really go
>
> out with many people. It was mainly just RA related business when I
>
> would meet with them. But, every now and then when I would do my
>
> roves, I would stop by and say "hi." So, it's just a personal thing for me.

Although the personal connections on staff were not a priority for him during the course

of this study, he enjoyed knowing that he could guide and assist new staff members if

they needed anything. He also enjoyed the opportunity to train both RA staffs in his

building on administrative procedures related to working the desk and duty protocol. Jeff

excelled and felt most comfortable with the administrative components of the position.

He commented that if the Front Desk Supervisor position was open, he would much

rather have applied for that job because it was highly administrative.

Jeff participated in Fall RA training for the second year and understood it was

necessary. However, he was frustrated with the level of information shared on many

topics, as he thought it was redundant to have RAs take a leadership class based on the

RA position during their first semester as an RA:

I certainly did feel as if my time was being wasted on some things, mainly because we have the class, so that is for the theories of being an RA and the theories of growth and development. When we went into training this year, I noticed that a lot of it was about theory and to me, to be an RA, I would rather be told what we have to do and how to do it, rather than why that works, or what is the whole process behind it. All I could think about was, I learned this during [the class], all the new people here, they don't need to learn this at the very beginning, they can wait for the class to begin if they want to learn theory. It was just really difficult for me to sit through those sessions.

Jeff's previous jobs held brief training sessions that clearly articulated the tasks to be completed, but not why things needed to be done a certain way. He remembered showing up to one job, "and they're like, 'you fold it this way,' 'you hit the button here on this situation,' 'you hit it here in this situation.' That information helps a lot more than, 'you hit this and it started way back when, when we decided to fold it a certain way.'"

Jeff knew participating in training a second time was necessary and he did what he could to make it interesting and helpful for his peers but, ultimately, it was a challenge to remain positive. Over the course of the study, Jeff's involvement in the RA role waned as issues among the staff and with their supervisor grew, and he continued to be more frustrated with poor resident attendance at his programs. Competing with these frustrations was his excitement about graduating, and moving to Florida, where he would live with his girlfriend, and work at Disney World in their Guest Relations department. Several weeks before graduation, Jeff shared with a large sigh, "Honestly Dean, I have

absolutely no motivation anymore. It is just, you come in with the greatest of ideas and then you find out no one really likes it. It is really rough on you."

Ashley

Aspiring to get into Veterinary School, Ashley is a sophomore Chemistry major who was very busy with her academic program before even applying for the RA position. Then, once on staff, her life became far busier, balancing multiple commitments personally, academically, and socially.

Personally, Ashley identifies as a white woman with two brothers. One brother lives in Utah and her younger brother lives at home with her parents. She is from North Carolina and chose to attend Hunter University because it has one of the best Veterinary Medicine programs in the Southeast. Consequently, undergraduates enrolled at the institution generally have a higher chance of getting into grad school as long as their grades are high and academically focused extracurricular activities demonstrate dedication towards veterinary medicine.

Due to the competitive nature of the application process, Ashley's sophomore year is critical to demonstrating this commitment to the College of Veterinary Medicine, even though she still has two full years of undergraduate education before being admissible into the program. The commitments and responsibilities of the RA position further complicated Ashley's already busy lifestyle. When asked why she applied for the position, she explained:

I applied to be an RA because it was either be an RA or live off campus. It

was an easy way for me to decide to live on campus, really. I really like

doing stuff like this, like, I enjoy being a leader. But my main reason was

to find out where I was going to live.

After her initial reaction to my inquiring why she applied for the position, Ashley

thought more about the RA experience. She mentioned that right at the beginning of

training, she was still really not aware of what the RA job entailed. She shared, "I always

thought the RA was like a police force kind a thing. Like, if they came in, they could do

something about it, write you a ticket, and get you in trouble – right then." During the

training experience and then reinforced throughout the year, Ashley learned the majority

of her responsibilities did not include enforcing policies in this 'police force' manner.

Ashley's perception of the position was interesting because, as she shared her

previous year's experience, very seldom did she mention her RAs as a policy enforcer.

Most of the memories from her First-year RA included the fact that her RA did a lot of

programs and activities throughout the year - something Ashley did not think was

expected of her when she became an RA and lived in a different residence hall. She

remembers that, "on my floor last year, when my RA did stuff, people came to it." A

significant component of this high level of attendance at programs was strongly

connected to the type of community. As a Women Studying Engineering and Science

(WSES) community, residents were expected to participate in several programs each

semester. As she remembers, "because we were in WSES, like a village, everyone was

expected to participate, not just in RA things, but in a bunch of other events too."

Even with the high number of programs to which Ashley had access during her

first year at Hunter University, as well as the resources to which she was exposed as a

WSES student, once she became an RA, she realized she was unaware of many of the

resources available on campus. This became a crucial component of training because she was able to learn more about the programs and services offered by the university. Beyond learning about resources, when she reflected on what she wanted to get out of the RA position, Ashley shared:

> I don't know what I want to get out of the position. I guess to feel that I am a better well rounded person. Because it's helping me, it really is making me have to be good at time management – and I'm really not. So it kinda forces you to do that and it forces you to set deadlines.

> With an overall motivation of solely "finishing my undergraduate education", Ashley shared that, largely, deadlines and her self-perceived pressure from others are what motivates her to keep up on all her commitments. She explained, "most of the time, I'm motivated by deadlines. But sometimes, I know other people will have all their stuff done and it'll look really good, and you're like, 'oh, I should really get that done.'" Ashley's motivation helped her accomplish her goals within the RA position. However, occasionally she missed the content necessary for her to do the job, which was largely a new role for her. In thinking about this study on RA training, Ashley reflected on her educational experience, thinking about how she actually learns content.

Several times throughout our interactions, she mentioned the importance of asking questions in order to learn from others. In addition to her own skills of seeing what needs to be done and knowing what needs to be completed when, Ashley seeks guidance from others to gain additional understanding for what she is responsible. For Ashley, this is true for all aspects of her life, including social interaction, job responsibilities, and academics. Similar to her feeling comfortable in classes to ask

questions of faculty and older students, Ashley believes in the RA position, "the best way to learn is by asking others. That is really the easiest way to learn anything is to ask others who may know." She shared that throughout her childhood and education, she felt she was always the one asking questions of others to better understand her responsibilities. Having information from a trusted, experienced individual made it much easier to learn and retain information so that content could be used later.

When it comes to the RA position, Ashley's perception of her peer staff members is that they are trusted, experienced individuals. She commented specifically about the returning RAs as resources:

> They make it easier 'cause they said that it's OK to ask questions and I
> know I can. It's cool because they know they are here for the new RAs.
> And you can ask questions at any time, day or night, like, they don't care
> what you ask them. When you're hanging out down here [pointing in the
> direction of the front desk from where we were sitting] asking questions.
> They know you're going to ask questions because they know a bunch of
> the stuff and they know it's important.

For her, it is not just the returning RAs who are supportive resources; it is the entire staff team that makes a difference in the position. She shared that for her, "the staff helps you do everything, even the little things. And that comes from you getting a real good staff." Having trusted peers to rely on is tremendously important to her, as that is where she gains knowledge about what she needs to do as an RA.

Within the RA training environment, when there is not a significant amount of interaction among her and her peers where she can learn information, Ashley feels she is

forced to try and pay attention to presenters in structured sessions. She explained that

although she does not hesitate to ask questions of training presenters and facilitators,

there are many times when she does not see the importance in what she is learning, so she

has trained herself to "zone out". As she shared with a large grin, "I'm good at ignoring

things because I have two brothers." This way, she is able to look like she is paying

attention to faculty or presenters when she is really thinking about other things. From her

perspective, Ashley explained:

> If is a brand new type of info that we've never heard of, then I'll pay
>
> attention. But if presenters start going into things and I've kind of already
>
> heard about it, like, it makes like common sense that that's what you
>
> would do, then I feel it is really nothing that you really need to make a
>
> huge presentation on. Some things come easier for me, maybe not for
>
> other people, but I will just be kinda chill and I won't really pay attention.
>
> I'll still listen, like hear what they're saying, and then if something catches
>
> my attention that I hadn't really thought of, then I would make a little note
>
> of it.

Regardless of the learning environment, Ashley mentioned on multiple occasions how

important it was for presenters to provide handouts during presentations and lectures. As

she reflected on her learning style and the training environment, Ashley shared:

> I think the best way to learn during presentations is when they give you a
>
> handout and they talk about it, too, because then we can add to our notes. I
>
> just like having that paper in front of me, but I still have to write
>
> everything down, cause when I write stuff down, I'm not paying attention

to what I'm writing, I'm paying attention to what's being said that I'm

writing. So, if I miss something, I really miss it.

Austin

Austin identifies as a lower middle-class white male from "a very small town" in

the Southeast. Although the population of the town in which he grew up was relatively

homogenous regarding racial identity and religious denomination, Austin's participation

in the Governor's School in North Carolina enabled him to meet students from many

different backgrounds and lifestyles. This opportunity eased his transition into a large

public institution of higher education, where he would be living, interacting, and taking

classes with people who identified in different ways.

Even with this experience prior to college, Austin remembers arriving on campus

his first year and feeling that, as a white male, he had "done something wrong". When

reflecting on his experience in college, he explained, "It seems from talks I have heard

that it's like white males were suppressing either women or different racial groups. And I

wondered about myself, like have I done any of that?" Because of that perspective,

Austin felt he has been proactive since getting to college by thinking, "even though I

wasn't part of the problem, I saw myself that I could be part of the solution." This had

been his primary influence in developing relationships with others, because for Austin,

getting to know others who have had challenging backgrounds would help him be in a

better position to improve their experience and move our entire society forward.

Austin's exposure to different races while he was growing up was similar to his

experience with various religious denominations:

I am from a very, very small town and we're mostly Protestant. So when I

got here, it was sort of a big change. I went to Governor's school a

summer or two before college, so I have been able to meet plenty of

people from different religions. It wasn't as much of a culture shock for

me as for someone else from my town, but it's a big difference. Being an

RA has given me the opportunity to learn about all of these other religions.

I interact with people that put a face with just about every religion and I

think that has helped me grow, like, grow past stereotypes and what not.

The RA position has afforded Austin many opportunities to interact with people from

various walks of life, which has enriched his experience and helped him develop strong

relationships both within and beyond his RA role.

With relationships that spread across many different identity groups, Austin feels

that from a socio-economic perspective, he identifies more closely with other students

who come from a lower middle class background. He shared his feelings and experience

about wealth since arriving on campus:

I kind of had a little bit of a grudge when I first got here for people that

were extremely well off, you know. I don't have that so much anymore. I

don't feel sorry for them, but you know they have never have experienced

what it is to live in the real world. I feel myself fortunate that I am not

materialistic, and I think that has grown since I got in college. I have hung

out with people and material things are not the most important. You know,

I don't have to go out and buy the newest toys to be OK with myself.

Throughout the interview process, Austin was very clear about how important relationships were to him, whether in the RA position with staff members, residents, and his supervisor, or beyond the job with classmates and his team mates in Intramural Sports.

With his personal focus on building and maintaining relationships, the RA position seemed to be an excellent opportunity for Austin. He shared his first year experience leading up to applying for the position:

I didn't know what an RA was until I got to college and I ended up being in the RAs suite, right across the hall from him in the front room. I enjoyed my RA. I got to know and then liked, just being around him – I knew he was a good one. Then I told my parents about it; it's good experience, you know. I don't want to say it's a resume builder because I would not say that I am that kind of person who does things to just build their resume, but I mean, it definitely looks good. I mean, to me, it just helps me grow more as a person, 'cause I came from a small town and I like to meet people, too.

In addition to providing training and the opportunity to meet others, Austin has appreciated how the RA position teaches student staff to prepare for the real world, even though he may not have realized how time consuming and demanding the position was:

There is a lot more work than I thought when I applied for the job. I just thought you were on the floor, worked the desk every now and then, and do a program or two. It's a lot more involved than that because you need to know the residents, be involved on a committee, and that kind of stuff.

And then you almost have a family with the other RA's, so when there are

problems, you have to be there for them.

Over the first two years Austin was an RA, and now heading into his third year,

he has realized how the level of his experience really changed other RAs' perception of

him as a staff member. As he reflected on this transition, he explained:

I came to a realization a couple weeks back that like, I'm the one people

are looking up to now. I remember my first year, there were all these

seniors to look up to and now it's just kind of like, me, you know. It's a

little scary at first, it's not like I now have to conduct myself in way that I

should be anyways, but you know, you just kind of have to be aware that

there's more people watching me instead of before.

There is certainly more pressure placed on Austin by other RAs because they look to him

for almost everything related to the position, from what to do to how to do it. He shared

that he does not necessarily mind this pressure because the position is important to him,

but it was not something he expected when returning for a third year.

In thinking about his second year as an RA, even though he was AC for his staff,

Austin remembers newer RAs seeking out RAs who were older than him for guidance.

He felt that throughout his second year, he was, "just someone easy to come to" and he

tried, "to make [himself] pretty approachable." However, as he reflected during the

interview, he did not want to step on the older RAs' toes,so he tried to be a bit more low-

key. For this year, Austin's goal was to be more encouraging to the new RAs so they

knew he was there to help them transition to the position and be successful throughout

the year. He understands this may be slightly easier this year because, "it's the fact that

I'm a third-year. To a lot of the new people, I am just the one that they suspect has the answers. I guess because I have done pretty much every aspect of the job."

In the AC role, Austin is a clear leader and role model for his staff, surpassed only by the resident director who supervises all ten of them. He explained the AC role from his perspective:

> I kind of make sure that everyone is doing what they are supposed to do. I am the one if they don't feel comfortable talking to [the RD] or something like that, because even though [she] is close to our age, it's still like, "the RD." I mean, she's a grad student, but she's also the boss. I am more of a leader and not the boss, so it's easier for people to come and talk to me about different things. Things that are going on in school and there are certain aspects of the job they're not really understanding why we do this and why we don't do this. I guess I would say I would be the leader of the staff - kind of like the big brother.

Having already been in this role for over a year, Austin shared that he is very comfortable continuing in that capacity for another year because he enjoys helping new RAs acclimate to being on staff and working with their residents. As a senior, being the oldest on staff, and serving as the AC, Austin sees his role as RA advocate between RAs and the RD because he maintains an open and honest relationship with both entities. He feels it is important for RAs to understand he will not tell them what to do, and he is always there to listen but ultimately, if something is impacting staff or residents, he will share it with the RD.

Having a close relationship with his RD has also been important to Austin and, after working together for a year, he feels their supervisor-supervisee relationship has developed into a positive friendship. Austin explained the importance of maintaining a positive relationship with his supervisor:

The better the relationship you have, it kind of takes a little bit of stress off. I know I'm not going to mess up anything, but I feel like if I did mess up, she's not going to like, fry me right then and stuff. I feel like I can go talk to her about different aspects of the job. Maybe if she was not as close to my age, it would be difficult to say, like, "I'm having trouble managing stuff right now, could I put this stuff off until next week," stuff like that. I mean it's just the comfort level. If you feel comfortable with who your boss is, then you just work that much better.

Beyond their interpersonal relationship, Austin also sees the ramifications for the staff when they see the AC and RD getting along. From his perspective, "I think that it helps for the staff seeing me hanging out and friendly with the RD." He further explained the consequences of not having a positive relationship with the supervisor:

It would be bad if I hated [her]. If you could tell from my body language when I'm around her that we didn't like each other; other people would see that. Especially because I am in a leadership position and older than the others, it helps to like your RD.

According to Austin, this positive relationship with his RD will likely remain after they both graduate. He shared:

I feel like I can go and talk to her about anything. In my one-on-ones, it's

like having a friend and a boss at the same time. She is able to balance

both. I have really enjoyed working with her.

Even though Austin's relationship with his supervisor has not changed during the

two years on staff leading into this training, his relationship with residents and his style as

an RA have changed slightly. Throughout his tenure as an RA, in almost every interview

and focus group Austin shared he believed his overarching style was "laid back" or "low

key". Although he does not know where this 'style' came from specifically, Austin

shared that as long as he can remember, this subdued nature reflected "the feeling that

nothing really bothers [him]." But, Austin continued, "I can switch into that 'let's get this

done' mode thing quickly, if I need to." All in all, it is important for Austin to remain

outwardly calm when he is around his residents or other RAs:

I am generally not too high strung or tense or stressed out or anything like

that. I might be stressed out on the inside, but on the outside I am like

[shrugging his shoulders], "ehh, you know." It's not that I don't care, it's

just I am not going to let other things bother me. Things happen, you've

just got to keep going.

Maintaining this laid back nature throughout his RA experience, Austin noticed

that his style when interacting with residents as an RA changed over time:

My first year, my community wasn't as good as it could have been. I did

programs of more of what I wanted, instead of what they wanted. I mean,

people still came, but I was only targeting certain groups. I didn't know I

was targeting groups, but my programs only got certain groups on the

floor. They either just didn't want to come or maybe that wasn't their

thing. In my second year, I tried to do surveys to see what people wanted

to get involved with, and then, I am always trying to show my face.

Anytime I have something to pass out, I try to hold onto it until I know

that most of the people will be around, so I can actually visibly see them

instead of throwing it under the door or something like that.

When asked how and why this change occurred from first to second year, Austin

explained that he did not feel as effective as an RA his first year, and that through "trial

and error," the result was what he did the second year. Regardless of how his RA role

changed when interacting with residents, Austin maintained how important it was for

RAs to, "get your residents to like you." When this happens, he shared, "they feel like

they have a sort of an obligation to you. It's worked for the last two years [Austin knocks

on the wood table], and I hope it will work this year."

Based on his experience as an RA, Austin explained how he develops

relationships with residents from the beginning of the year so that they like him, but also

respect him and his position as the RA:

I come into the first floor meeting and I'm all like, laying everything out,

like this is this, these are the rules. I'm not your momma, I'm not your

daddy, like, this is what we're here for, to enforce the rules, that kind of

thing. So, I think people have come to figure out early that like, I'm low

key. And then I'll have like my programs, and they see that I'm pretty

chill and all, I'm fun to hang out with, you know, but at the same time, I'm

also here to hold you accountable. I'm not going to baby sit you if you do

something wrong, I'm here to tell you, you did something wrong.

He has found this type of introduction to himself and the year has been very successful,

as last year, he did not have to document any situations involving his residents where

policies could have been violated. During daily interactions with residents, he shared,

"I've built up a good enough relationship with most of my residents that when I've had to

say, 'hey, your music is too loud,'" they almost feel that turning down the music is a

personal favor to him and not as if he is trying to enforce policy. These types of

interactions reinforce his laid back RA style with residents.

As explained above, Austin is an RA to help students be successful in college

while they live in the residential communities. As an RA for several years, this desire to

help residents has blossomed into similar feelings for helping RAs on his staff be

successful as well. For him, the best feedback he could receive comes directly from his

residents or other RAs:

> I don't expect RAs or residents to be like, "hey, you know, you're doing a
>
> great job," but when they do, it really hits me better than it does when
>
> someone in a higher position says that because I know they mean it. I
>
> mean, it's good to know that the people you are working with and the
>
> people that you are helping actually appreciate you. I do care if the RDs
>
> think I am doing a great job, but they're not the ones that I am out to
>
> please, *per se*, or help. It's the residents and other RAs.

When asked about the role of RA Training in his growth and development as an

RA, Austin was hard pressed to remember specific things that helped him develop his

community building approach and skills in the AC role. He did, however, reiterate how important it was for him each year:

> Training has helped because when I first got in, it was good to have that
> two weeks of background, so I just wasn't thrown into [the RA job] all of
> a sudden. Each year afterwards, you just kind of pick up something
> different every year that you really might have spaced out on or really just
> didn't catch the year before or is a new topic also. It also kind of refreshes
> you and puts you back in the zone, so to speak, after you have been gone
> all summer.

In reflecting on some of the important concepts covered during the training time frame, Austin remembers learning about how to program for specific communities, some of the administrative duties required of the position, and how crucial it is for RAs to be present in their communities the first six weeks of class.

However, throughout the interview process, Austin shared that from a returning RAs perspective, training was painfully redundant for RAs who had been through RA training previously. During each interview, he suggested the need for incorporating a "returning RA track," as well as adding more days onto the training schedule so there would be time for administrative tasks, rest, and catching up with friends. He understands the complications of creating an alternate training for returning RAs, but as he stated succinctly:

> It would be nice to have something to kind of go a little bit beyond what
> we've already heard, you know, for more personal growth. I wouldn't say
> any of training was boring [saying this with a large grin], by any means,

but you know, it was kind of redundant, having to hear stuff again, and

again, and again.

Summary

The context of this study focused on Smith Neighborhood at Hunter University,

where an undergraduate population of primarily first-year and sophomore students lived

in traditional suite style residence halls. To meet the needs of the 2400 residents who

resided in three buildings on Smith Neighborhood, the residence life program hired and

trained 60 RAs who worked on six staffs, each supervised by a graduate resident director.

Every August, these RAs participate in a Fall training process that occurs over an eight to

ten-day period of time, with a curriculum that addressed many topics essential to

community living: conflict mediation, relationship building, programming, crisis

response, facilities concerns, and so on.

With two years' experience in this particular residence life program, I felt I had a

basic comprehension of the RA training process, as well as the nature of the position,

once employed. Based on my knowledge of the department, and professional, graduate,

and paraprofessional staff who worked in Smith Neighborhood, this population of

students provided an excellent framework to learn more about the training experience,

how RAs made meaning of that experience, and the meaning making of applying what

they learned to their communities when training concluded.

All 60 Smith Neighborhood RAs participated in an eight-day Fall RA training

program during August, 2006. The training curriculum and schedule were developed over

the previous spring semester by a committee of RAs, led by a team of two graduate

resident directors. Due to my inability to observe the entire training, I chose seven

sessions over the course of the Fall training that represented major components and job responsibilities of RAs at Hunter University: Introductions, Programming, Peer Counseling, Diversity, Leadership, Academics, and Conduct Policies. During these sessions, I observed the participants in this study, as well as all 60 RAs as they experienced their first, second, or third training. Throughout the intensely scheduled training, sessions ranged from small to large group presentations, lecture style to highly interactive, and presenters from within and outside of University Housing and Residential Life, with very different components in every session.

Similar to other Fall RA trainings I have been a part of or witnessed, RAs seemed to get progressively more tired and more irritable as the training neared its conclusion, yet many seemed to understand that the information they were receiving was important, so they tried to pay attention the best they could. My perceptions of RA attentiveness during the sessions were largely based on how many people were able to participate and engage with the information, with smaller, more interactive groups seeming to possess more energy. On the contrary, lecture style sessions with all 60 RAs listening to a speaker for longer than 30 to 40 minutes with little interaction, seemed to cause RAs to disengage, have side conversations, sleep, and the like.

Towards my goal of better understanding RAs' experiences in Fall training, I selected 12 participants whom I either knew or who had been recommended by my Smith Neighborhood professional peers. These 12 individuals represented a broad spectrum of backgrounds and experiences that served as an excellent foundation upon which to synthesize and build a story of the training and post-training experience for RAs. Each individual accepted my request to participate in this study, with the only significant

concern being the level of time commitment involved. In brief, there were RAs in their first, second, and third year; both males and females; multiple majors represented; and a diverse representation of race, ethnicity, spiritual faith, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and family status. Together, the 13 of us would interact several times over the course of the academic year, individually and in focus groups, to help me better understand the meanings they assigned to the Fall RA training experience, as well as how they applied what they learned to their RA jobs, living communities, and personal lives throughout the year.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS: THEMES

Based on the descriptions above of this study's context and participants, it is now time to explore how these individuals made meaning of their Fall RA training experience and the application of what they learned in training to their jobs and lives throughout the 2006-2007 academic year. Immediately following training, they welcomed the student residents who would be Smith Neighborhood community members for the next nine months. Shortly after the academic year began and the participants settled into their classes, I interviewed all 12 participants individually to learn about their perceptions of the training experience. Over the course of conducting interviews and focus groups for this study, themes about their collective experiences as RAs participating in training and applying what they learned to their communities emerged. Similarly, themes I expected to come forward based on my several years as an RA and residence life professional did not emerge from the participants.

Underlying each theme and described briefly by some participants was the reason they applied for the RA position. Each participant had a compelling reason to become an RA, a distinct perception of the RA position, and an individual perspective of the training needed to be successful. An in-depth look at each participant revealed how their individual backgrounds, experiences, work histories, and motivations led them to apply for this position, as well as how each participant truly drew meaning from the Fall

training experience. My goal was to develop an understanding of the meaning making

process of these 12 RAs within this geographic and institutional context. In our

conversations, although the reasons and personal histories are different for becoming an

RA, every participant their common excitement to start the year as an RA, even if they

did not anticipate the 10-day training experience in which it was required to participate.

As diverse as the reasons these participants chose to apply for the position were

their varying perceptions of RAs before applying. On a continuum of RA position

knowledge prior to applying for the position, Anna's experience rested on one end:

> My RA did the job so well that it was kind of misleading. A suite mate
>
> and I both became RA's this year and we were talking about it the other
>
> day that our RA last year made it look so easy, we didn't know she went
>
> to committee meetings, we weren't aware how often she sat at the desk,
>
> and we didn't know so much went into programming, and with the
>
> committee, doing the educational events and stuff. We just weren't aware
>
> of how much she really does. So it was a shock. It was just a little
>
> misleading because she did it so well or we were so busy living our social
>
> lives that we didn't see her doing all of the RA stuff.

Moving into her residence hall space as an RA and participating in training became a

quick shock to Anna because she was not aware of all that was required of RAs. Bernard,

on the other side of this continuum, shared that he was very close with his RA and had

several friends who were RAs prior to applying. When training began and he learned

more about the position, there were few, if any, surprises.

For participants in this study, their breadth of experiences and perceptions of their RA before they applied for the position, as well as the RA position in general stretched across a significant continuum. Each individual held a distinct perception of how much they knew was involved with being an RA and the investment required of them in Fall RA training. Once they arrived in their residence hall room and began the training experience, they were exposed to two significant aspects of RA training: people and information. Over the course of a comprehensive 10 day training curriculum, every RA had multiple opportunities to learn about themselves and others, as well as learn what was required of the RA role.

Regardless of whether participants were returning or new RAs, they embarked on a new experience with seven to nine other RAs and one RD on their individual staff. Even if they knew several individuals from the previous year, they worked closely with a group of unknown and known individuals for the academic year. Nathan summarized this aspect of training:

> I think that Fall training gives you heavy exposure to who you are going to be interacting with, even more during the school year. I think every job needs a little bit of exposure to the staff that you are going to be working with before you actually start working with them. So you can get an idea of this is who I am going to be working with this semester, I should get to know who is who and how this person might react to this situation or the personalities, or how the staff will get along when we are doing actual work. And not just team building activities or learning about policy or something. I think that is important. Towards the actual job, it is just

orienting you to Housing and to what a Resident Advisor should do and how to do it.

Information was a second aspect of training to which every RA was exposed. Training was designed to provide numerous opportunities for RAs to learn knowledge and skills that could significantly enhance their lives. Even if an RA deliberately tried not to pay attention throughout training, they were ultimately influenced by various topics and activities in some way. Bernard framed the information learned in RA training,

I think you start off having this caring, patient, flexibility, fun as your foundation and you build on top of that just basic knowledge of Hunter University: the university, the college atmosphere, and departments. And then what you do is come to this thing called RA training, and they have this brand new contact lens called, "University Housing and Residential Life Contacts" and its all those policies and it is the way that University Housing and Residential Life wants you to view situations. If you see alcohol, there is little something in that contact lens that makes you see that as a problem. They throw those in your eyes and you are ready to go. You are using all of that stuff that was already in you and then looking through the lens of a trained eye.

Realistically speaking, every training participant did not learn everything needed to be a successful RA, even when wearing these "contact lenses." Both new and returning RAs were fully aware that although training was important, it did not cover everything they needed to know. Most of what RAs learned was on the job working with residents through continuous and various trial and error circumstances. As Austin explained,

training provided a foundation upon which RAs built their own lives and identities as

staff members:

> Of course you're going to get things that you didn't go over as much in
>
> training, but it's not a shock. Training helps you learn to just go with the
>
> flow once you get the job and then you pick up things. With the training as
>
> a base, it's not so much of a shock, you're just kind of like, you know,
>
> we've done this. At the same time, we're not a robot or anything, like if
>
> you see something, oh, let me refer back to this and this page, it's just kind
>
> of like embedded, you already know what to do.

As shown through the theme descriptions in this chapter, many participants could not

share when they learned what information, but they knew that they knew it. Information

needed on the job could come from a presenter in a session, a peer RA at a local

restaurant called *Cook-Out*, a supervisor walking to the dining hall with an RA, a family

member visiting in the middle of training, and so on. Although some participants

perceived RA training to be all encompassing with information sharing, learning, and

retention, these participants were aware that albeit important for the job, much was

learned throughout the course of the year not connected to the training experience.

Similarly, just as not all content was learned in training, the same was true for the

diversity of skills necessary to relate to all undergraduate residents. While the training

experience gave RAs skills to address various situations and different people, ultimately,

the pressure relied on the individual and an understanding of working with others. Josh

described this concept by following Austin's lead of seeing training as a base on which to

build:

I think training is a foundation, I really do. I think it's crucial, because

once you develop the skills as far as doing everything, like, you have to

know how to carry out the programs and do the bulletin boards, like,

people-wise, training can't teach you how to be a person. You can't be

taught kindness and people skills, and humility. You can't be taught these

things, I mean, you just have to learn how to interact with people on your

own.

This knowledge came from experience and guidance from others. RA training helped

provide a solid base upon which to build skills and interpersonal styles, but practice and

experience was necessary to further develop flexibility and adaptability for specific

situations.

The following themes emerged from the 12 participants during the academic year

related to their experiences in Fall RA training. Based on four rounds of individual

interviews and focus groups, five main themes emerged and include: Building RA

Relationships; Awareness and Influence of RDs; RA Experience Over Time; RA

Training Structure (the influence of the training schedule, format, and presenters); and

RA Training Content Remembered. A discussion of how RAs in this study made

meaning of RA training and the application of skills, knowledge, and abilities learned

during training during the academic year concludes the chapter. The following comment

grounded in an RAs' experience with attitude and being overwhelmed with information

during training, offered by Veera, is an appropriate analogy for this research:

I think if you just go into stuff with a positive attitude, even if you're

really tired, it's going to make it so much better. I know a really lot of

people were like, "uuugh, training, eight hours today!" But, it's like, we

all have to be here, we all have to do this, so you might as well make the

best of it. One person's attitude can really affect the whole group.

<div align="center">Building Resident Advisor Relationships</div>

RA training participants were subjected to comprehensive, time consuming, and

intense close interactions with seven to nine other RAs over the next academic year. For

every participant in this study, the most important part of the entire training experience

was the opportunity to meet and get to know their peer RAs. During this time, Jessica

described the experience succinctly,

Fall training puts us together all the time. And so, it's like doing the

human knot. You are there in everyone's face, and they are in yours. It

brings you closer together real fast and you are in each others face almost

all the time. It makes you get to know a person really well.

The following section details how participants described their RA relationships, including

the importance of staff retreats during training.

The relationship building process for participants started in the Spring Semester

when each RA was notified of their staff assignment for the 2006-07 academic year.

Under the guidance of the RD, each staff gathered on a Friday, Saturday, or Sunday

evening for introductory activities so RAs had an initial opportunity to get to know other

staff members. After that, there was little to no communication between the RAs over the

summer until the beginning of Fall training.

Nathan remembered the spring introductory session, but shared when the

important team building started:

Our little spring thing we did the semester before the Fall, the getting to

know you thing was good, but it wasn't like, really spending time with

each other. So now, ALL during training, you're like, get up, eat together,

go to meeting together, doing your work at midnight together [laughs],

trying to stuff those rooms and things. That's where I thought we got that

sense of staff, I guess, like, as a whole, instead of just being an individual.

For the most part, RAs enter the position as individuals with limited connections to their

peer staff members, heightening the importance of getting to know each other beyond

name, major, and favorite ice cream flavor.

There are generally connections between some returning RAs and new RAs who

were hired onto a staff in the building where they lived. Even with these pre-existing

relationships and the introduction session during the Spring semester, there were still

several staff members who did not feel connected to anyone else on the staff when

training started. Katie remembered, "feeling very uncomfortable because I didn't know

anybody coming in. I had no clue, coming from Jones Neighborhood; I never was around

this area. I've never seen any of these people, you know. It was totally new to me." This

transition to a new living environment can be, and generally was, a new and

overwhelming experience for beginning RAs. Not only was the position new to them, but

so was the geographic location, as well as their building staff of 18-20 RAs. For this

reason, training was considered the first time when an entire staff worked together as a

team, beyond the spring introductory session.

With the significant amount of information to cover throughout training, it was

challenging for training designers to allocate enough time for many skills and resources

RAs needed to learn, as well as incorporate time dedicated to RAs building relationships

with each other. Based on this limited amount of time, Josh believes, "it's really hard to

build a community when you're all in the seminars together. That is just one thing that

bothers me as far as training goes. It is just like you never have enough time to get to

know each other."

> Veera agreed with Josh:
>
> I know that we are around each other in training a lot, but we really aren't
>
> interacting with each other as we are just learning our resources. So I think
>
> that is something that we have to develop on our own. I don't know that is
>
> something that can really be taught, I think it might be something that has
>
> to be experienced.

While participants understood team building and group facilitation skills can be taught to

RAs so they can apply that information with their communities when residents arrive, the

process of getting to know each other rests on RAs to want to build those relationships.

Mack identified the importance of allocating time during training to build staff

relationships:

> I think as long as you set aside that staff and area time, and bonding time,
>
> and if you have a positive experience at the beginning, I think it will just
>
> promote that process. Like we went to the zoo and that was really fun.
>
> That was good for us as a whole. The more interaction you have, the better
>
> it is going to be. The more it is informal and everyone is allowed to be
>
> themselves to a certain extent that is going to speed up the process. I
>
> definitely say the more time you spend just interacting is important . . . I

know people complain about "why do we have to have dinner together?"

But I mean those times where you just sit and talk are when you really get

to know people and kind of make those connections.

The importance of including relationship building time into training schedules

was well known by training designers. The training committee sought to include some

team building activities into the training schedule to help RAs to know each other better.

With a few hours dedicated to team building activities, Veera still felt that was not

sufficient:

Team building was like, "Ok, who are you? What's your name?" It was

very, on the surface. I think that is not something that can be taught in

training unless you spend a couple days somewhere and don't do anything

besides hanging around each other. And with that, I am not even sure a

retreat would help. It just needs time to grow and change. I think that it is

pretty important that we are learning that we should probably get together

more outside of just staff meetings, and stuff like that. Because that helps

to develop our relationship a little bit more. And if we are on good social

terms, then we should be better working together.

Ashley and her staff found that by leaving campus, they were able to build

stronger relationships with each other. She explained,

. . . when we went to Cook-Out, or whatnot, it was just a great way to get

to know everybody during training and they still talk to you afterwards.

Then you realize it wasn't just because you are on staff together, they will

actually just talk to you because they want to talk to you. It's not like they

are forced to talk to you.

These informal opportunities helped RAs on her staff get to know each other away from the boundaries of the training schedule and environment.

Why were these relationships important? Why was it important to know peers on a deeper level when during the course of the year RAs consistently interact with their residents and their staff only once a week in staff meetings or when on duty? As a third-year RA, Mack had served on several staffs and learned:

Building a relationship with your supervisor and staff members is

important because that is going to be your support group for the rest of the

year. If you have a positive outlook on the staff and interaction with them,

then you know it is a lot easier to get things accomplished. It's easier to

put in extra time and help someone else when they need it. The more you

can do to promote that connection with the staff, the better it is going to be

for the residents.

Josh followed this perspective by explaining the importance of building strong staff bonds during training because,

training is the one time when we are all together as just a staff. If we don't

form up a strong relationship, going and dealing with all the stuff like

resident issues, having to call people at 3 a.m., and all this stuff, it really

tears down actually after a while. And you have to build that strong

relationship during training.

This placed a great deal of pressure not only on training designers to incorporate time into training schedules for RAs to build strong relationships, but also on the RAs themselves to be open to building those relationships.

Some staff members were leery about self-disclosing personal information or taking the time to get to know others on a deeper level because some RAs were just meeting their staff team for the first time. Taking time to share and being willing to be vulnerable were keys to building lasting strong relationships, as Veera shared her experience this year:

Bonding through training has really helped. Seeing each other at our worst usually brings people a lot closer together . . . stuff starts to get really tough, like people stress out badly and you see people's true colors. That applied from training just straight onto the community. I guess because we had already experienced the up's and down's with the staff, it was really easy to make that transition right into the community.

Some staff members commented on the importance of learning more about each other during the academic year. For most of the RAs in this research, they remained on staff for a full academic year, thus increasing the necessity of getting to know those individuals on staff. As a seasoned, third-year RA, Mack explained that during this year's training, he, "learned the most from [his RA staff], learning about them and who they are, how this new staff is going to work together, and how we're going to set that tone for the year." Seven to ten days of training was the start of an important process to get to know the other RAs.

Occasionally during the process of building the RA staff team, some personal characteristics and attitudes bubbled to the surface that impacted the entire staff. In thinking about the range of these characteristics and attitudes that existed on a staff, Austin shared his experience:

Usually when a few people make like the job is crap then it starts to trickle over the whole staff to where everyone is like, "this sucks." And the other direction, if you get a few people that are real passionate, then hopefully it also trickles to the rest of the staff. I mean I think this year we kind of had where there is a little divide. There are four or five parts. There are some people who think the job sucks and just mope around together, and then six or seven think it's the best thing ever, and then you have the people in the middle that are just sort of there. It's not like they think it sucks or is great, they just want to do their job and get out.

During training, new and returning staff members, and RDs began to see where RAs fit on the positive-negative continuum. Unfortunately, throughout the course of this research, it seemed as though the negative attitudes made a larger impact on staff dynamics than the positive RA attitudes.

Nowhere were staff attitudes more important than during training, because as Mack described, this was when "the tone is set for the year." Austin saw this attitude continuum play out even before training began, with staff members' negative attitudes impacting their own experience, as well as the training and job experience of peer RAs:

You will have one person, a returner, who before training is saying, "oh, this is going to suck," you know, telling staff. And what does that make

the new people do? They're going to think, "oh, this is going to suck." It

just brings the staff down. Because you can have plenty of happy people

but if you just have one negative person, it's just gonna pull all those who

are kind of in the middle.

When thinking about how negative attitudes influenced a staff, Veera compared

this training to other experiences she had with a less positive staff team,

it was a different kind of feeling because the staff wasn't as close. We

really didn't have relationships between each other to be able to really

enjoy what we were doing, even if it was the most fun thing in the world.

Even with the stress of RA training and what some participants considered redundant or

boring training sessions, experiencing positive relationships with each other made the

entire training more enjoyable and helpful.

This foundation of the relationships was built over the course of an eight-day

training curriculum, cemented by participants' experiences together, and impacted by the

relationships formed by individual small groups. These cliques become imbedded in the

staff foundation, which for better or worse influenced these participants' experiences

from training through their academic year experience. Jessica's commented:

I think a lot of times cliques start forming in staffs, with returners and new

people. The returners, because they know each other from last year and

have worked with each other – sometimes they unintentionally clique

together because that's who they know versus trying to get to know the

new people that are there. And the newbies, they clique with each other

because, "I'm new, I don't know anyone," "ok, I'm new, I don't know

anyone either, let's know each other," kind of thing.

Beyond the new RA and returning RA groups that formed within staffs, Jessica further

articulated:

It also forms across buildings because some people were friends before

they became RAs, so they go with their returner friends. Unfortunately,

that's all the people they talk to, so they don't get to know the rest of the

staff.

Returning RAs also worked with other RAs from other buildings throughout the

previous year. As one example, Michelle remembered, "I kept wandering over to the

Sullivan returners, for example, because I hung out with them over the summer." The

formation and maintenance of cliques on staff had both positive and negative

implications for how RAs within and beyond those small groups made meaning of the

training and after-training experience. Nathan shared his perception of these positive

bonds:

You could always see all the other returning staff, they had a strong bond

from living and working together for a whole school year. It was really

good, you know, like, the minute we started training and got to know each

other, all the new RAs, it felt like we were immediately integrated, you

know, that sense of staff bonding. It was good that I felt pretty welcome

and they still pick on us every once and a while, but I mean, that's what

the new people are for anyway.

Another perspective on how cliques impact RAs' experiences was not as positive because it involved in-area staff meeting time, which for RAs was often the only time they interacted with each other in a group setting. Ashley reflected on a staff meeting where both staffs within a building were together:

> You could really tell who was in what cliques. We were all talking a lot because it was our all-staff and then you would have little groups having their own conversations. It was sort of funny to watch everyone. There were some people where you could tell how they really don't care and are like, "you really don't like anybody on this staff, do you?"

Even without interacting with these more negative influences on staff, the effects were far reaching for both the more "impressionable" new RAs, as well as returning RAs seeking to build positive relationships with all staff members.

Building relationships early was critical to the RAs in this study because by the time residents arrived on campus, they naturally began interacting less with each other on a personal level because with classes beginning, RAs became increasingly busy with their own lives. Even though they worked together to accomplish administrative tasks, plan programs, or attend staff meetings, RAs found attempting to alter or break the foundational relationships developed in training became extremely challenging. This heavily influenced staff dynamics when negative relationships or perceptions existed among the staff because there would not be enough structured time to address these issues and rebuild positive relationships and attitudes. With the high turnover of RAs from year to year, this dynamic became even more difficult for new RAs because there were usually more new RAs than returning staff members, which created a significant

opportunity for positive and negative role modeling. It was also important to learn how new RAs perceived these returning staff members.

As a new staff member, Nathan remembered putting a lot of faith in what returning staff members said:

Going through training as a new person, I saw all these new faces, like, who are all these people? I'm like, "those returners, they're like my big brothers and sisters," and if my big brother or sister told me that something was bad and I was looking up to them, like, "oh, big role model, they've done this before, new experience for me, not so much for them," like, if they said, "Nathan, this things going to be just terrible, you're not going to enjoy it at all," I'd be like, "well, if big brother said it was bad, so I'm sure it's bad too." So, it's kind of a weird way to put it, but it's kind of how I saw it, they've been through it before, they must know what's what.

Bernard's experience was similar:

You have the returners. The young people respect the returners, so at least from the start, they more or less respect what they say. Because they are in a higher position than the new people are, so you start off with that, and then since you respect what they say, when they say bad things, you take them more heavily than maybe they should be taken. I think that is where it starts. It does implant something in your head like "oh, they said that, so that is gospel truth."

Based on the perspectives shared within this theme, both new and returning staff members were attuned to more negative behaviors and the results of these behaviors. Therefore, it was important to note the benefits of positive role modeling by returning staff members, as one RA in particular learned how to better organize his time. As a returning staff member who was perceived by new RAs as a role model because of his position and experience, Josh remembered shadowing other RAs and his supervisor to gain better life balancing skills. Reflecting on his RA experience, Josh explained:

I watched RAs last year. I mean, I guess they weren't as good at time management as their first year, but shadowing them and following in their footsteps and being like, "yeah, he studied all the time, but he still had a personal life, how's he doing that? Well, he balances his schedule and he takes time for himself and he doesn't drive himself insane."

Not only was role modeling positive behavior important for new RAs, but so too was the time invested by both groups to build their relationships with each other. Even with the negative perceptions and occasional negative attitudes, several participants enjoyed the relationships and friendships that emerged over time. In summarizing multiple perspectives, Nathan shared with a huge smile:

I love my staff, it's great. All the other RAs in all the other buildings will probably say that, I don't know. I'm sure each staff's unique. I mean, I really like them. There are so many different personalities on our staff, and we all mix pretty well together. I like working with them so far. Nothing's come up, nothing I can complain about. I mean, everyone's pulling their weight and knows what's it like to be new, because everyone's been new

before. You know, all the new ones don't mind asking the returners for

help – we're all one big happy family. That's what it seems like right now,

hopefully that will stay contained in that bubble and not be a big fighting

family or something like that.

Although not every participant described their experience in these terms, the closeness of

all the participants to one or more peers on staff should be noted. Team building activities

in the beginning of training and the informal time throughout training where staff

members got to know one another were important. Within the power of relationships

emerged the importance, timing, location, and structure of the staff retreat.

Staff Retreat

As one of the single most memorable and meaningful components of training, the

staff retreat was described by several participants as the most important. Josh shared:

The most important part of training to me was the Friday, Saturday,

Sunday, when we actually got away from here and got to work together as

a staff. Like, when we went to the zoo and did the team building stuff, that

was the most important part of training to me.

Every participant's staff left campus for their retreat, either to go somewhere for the day

or stay overnight elsewhere in the region for a staff bonding adventure.

Mack and the staff from his building chose to visit a local zoo for the day, and

conducted a scavenger hunt to help the RA staff get to know each other better. In

reflecting on his experience, Mack shared:

It was rewarding because it seemed to me more open, it seemed like

everyone really wanted to be there in the first place. It actually turned out

to be a really good experience. We now have pictures up on Facebook

from the zoo, and like, it was something people will remember. I think it

will be one of those good memories that somebody will have, like a couple

of years from now, like, "well, when I was an RA, we did this and it was

really fun, I was glad to be a part of it."

In past years, Mack's RA staffs went to challenge courses, and he felt staff members

were not excited about that idea, so heading to the zoo and conducting team building

activities was an refreshing change from usual.

One staff chose to leave campus for the entire weekend and stayed at a camp "off

to the woods somewhere . . . in the middle of nowhere" as Nathan fondly remembered..

At the retreat destination, some RAs chose to sleep in designated cabins, whereas others,

according to Ashley, "took the mattresses off the beds and threw them on the floor. We

would watch movies and like, everybody was there." In reflecting on his experience away

from campus, Nathan shared that it was important to have that "time away from the

residence hall to kind of like, bond more. I don't know, you're together for a lot of time

during training anyway, so just being in that close proximity with each other was good."

The third staff was supposed to attend an overnight retreat at a similar camp, but a

large storm caused them to "miss the night away" and thus, they left campus at 6:00 a.m.

for a day of activities. This delay created a tight schedule with sessions planned for that

day "crammed together" as Veera reflected. During this retreat, there was a challenging

goal setting session planned for an hour, but lasted three hours instead. Veera recalled"

I think our staff grew as a whole in those three hours probably more than

anything else in the training, just because they learned so much about

ourselves and each other. And the RDs learned about us and themselves,

too.

As she reflected on her staff's retreat, Veera suggested advice for future RA retreats:

I think that a retreat is really important. I almost feel like at the retreat, you

shouldn't be able to talk anything about work. That they should be purely

bonding I think that would just give the staff an energy boost at the

beginning of the semester. I think that would make a world of a difference.

I also think that would work towards building that trust as well.

A significant component to each retreat, whether during an overnight or day-long

session, was the importance of learning about shared commonalities among each other

outside the RA position. Josh shared how positive it was to get,

away from the residence halls, actually get to know each other as people,

other than just RAs. And it was really nice to know that I have this in

common with this person, and this in common with this person, and we

had some of the same dislikes and likes and stuff. We got to know each

other on a different level.

Austin shared Josh's sentiments:

I really think that's probably my favorite part of training. I mean, because

we do a little work there, but it's mostly a lot of team building, and

hanging out. You really get to figure people out, especially if you are

staying in close quarters and the conditions aren't favorable for a lot of

people. I really enjoy that, it really gets people to bond together.

Austin continued talking about his experience at the retreat, especially related to his concerns that because he was a third-year RA, he would not be able to relate to the younger members of his staff:

> I learned that I had a lot more in common with most of them than I thought I did. I mean, at first, it was a little weird since I'm kind of the oldest guy and you've got all the new guys, and I'm like, "I don't know if I'll mix in with them well," but once we got out there, hanging out, we're all pretty much, you know, kind of alike in certain aspects. As for the girls, I thought it might be a little awkward, being the 'old guy' and maybe they wouldn't want to come and talk to me, but I mean, everyone just kind of opened up and was very relaxed. It's like the ice has been broken, no one has a problem with anyone, like, going to each other and talking about non-RA stuff.

In terms of what was covered on the retreats beyond introductory and team building activities, Austin remembered an excellent two hour conversation on staff attitude. He explained that the RDs were very clear about what attitude they expected from each RA, to the point that these attitudinal expectations were then included in the RA agreement. He said he learned,

> you can be put on probation for attitude. I believe that's good in my opinion, RA's need to be accountable. The RDs said that if I see someone having an attitude, I talk to that person. Because of that conversation, we knew through training that you are what residents see and you're a role model.

Beyond intentionally setting expectations for RA performance for the year, the actual retreat experience served to establish a tone for one staff for the year. Bernard explained:

> One thing that happened with the retreat was a culture was set. We did the goal setting thing. What would happen is we would throw out goals, Paul was running the goal setting session, and we would throw out the goals and he would throw them back at us "to do better." We would find out what he wanted us to say, say it, and then he would right it down. It just got so frustrating, the thing would never end. People would just get pissed off. I mean I am not the type of guy that gets frustrated that easily, but I got to the point that I had to go to the bathroom, wash my face, take deep breathes, and come back. It was bad. It was that stressful and I don't get that way. It was insane how upset people were getting and the fact that he didn't see it was the most upsetting thing.

This relatively brief interaction amid the entirety of Fall RA training, led participants on this staff to see their RD in a certain light for the remainder of the year. This impacted all of their RA experiences during and after training. Every participant in this study commented on the power of their staff retreat and what they learned about themselves, each other, and their supervisors. Throughout the duration of this research, perceptions learned or disclosed during the retreat persisted over the course of the academic year.

In general, relationships between RAs were developed and tested during the retreat, deeper levels of knowing and understanding increased during the time away from campus. And, as most training sessions occurred after the retreat for these participants,

the timing was positive. As Austin shared, "once you've already kind of bonded with your staff and feel comfortable with them, it's much easier for the new RAs to ask questions." Dynamics of positive staff relationships, where new and returning staff members communicated seamlessly between each other was one of the most prevailing and meaningful themes that emerged through this research. The importance of this relationship did not lie solely on the shoulders of training designers, supervisors, or the RAs themselves, but a complex combination of all three. As Mack described his retreat experience, it was clearly translated to the entire training experience:

> There are so many variables happening. I don't think our retreat might
> have happened the way it did if we had a different RD. Or we had
> someone else on staff. My gut feeling is that one little puzzle piece can
> stop the whole thing from coming together.

Awareness and Influence of Resident Directors

Based on data collected throughout this research, the RA relationship with their supervisor was just as important, if not more so, than their relationship with their peers because in most cases, they looked up to this individual who oversaw their experience for a full academic year. The relationship between RA and RD began before Fall training when RAs were selected to serve on a particular staff and as shared earlier, most staffs met in the spring semester for basic introductions. These introductory activities were generally brief and few RAs had a relationship before training started with their soon-to-be supervisor outside of this spring introduction.

With the generally higher turnover of graduate or entry level professional staff members who supervised RAs, most new and returning RAs received a new supervisor.

Such was the case for nine participants in this study. Jeff commented he, "did know that [the previous RD] was leaving and that someone new was coming in and that it would take a lot to have to get used to the new guy." He explained further about the transition from last year's supervisor to a new RD as well as the impact returning staff had on new RAs:

> I think a problem is that for some of the returners, they are used to last year and this year, they're not wanting to change. Then, I think the new RA's that just came in, sense that, so they're kind of exacerbating the problem by making it a lot worse than it really is. People do things differently, and the problem is when new people try to do the same thing in a different way, and the staff has to realize that.

When a well-liked supervisor left their position, the new supervisor had a significant challenge to demonstrate who they were as a supervisor, while at the same time, appreciate their staffs' previous experiences. Some returning staff members were able to make this distinction and allowed the new supervisor space to develop and demonstrate their own style. However, other returning staff members missed the former supervisor so much, that it shaded their ability to provide space for the new supervisor to grow and build relationships with them. When new RAs looked up to returning staff members and saw either of these behaviors (unwillingness to adapt to a new supervisor or providing opportunities for new supervisor to demonstrate leadership), they also fell into the same paradigms of thought.

As a new staff member, Bernard shared he was unsure about his new supervisor because Bernard did not have any experience with the former RD,

I came in with a perception we were either going to have a really good RD

or a really bad one. Then I was like, "everything was cool, everything's

great." Everything seemed to be really fine and then as we progressed

through training, it was a training where we were going through that

honeymoon period. Everybody was getting along fine, then the staff

meetings were lasting a full two hours, and it's all business and they are

really terrible. Some of the staff members, especially the returners, were

really sort of having a hard time with [the new RD]. They are influencing

the new people, mostly negatively, by saying a lot of negative things,

which is interesting to see how much that can affect the entire staff.

The new RD had significant challenges because his leadership style was very different

from his predecessor and there were several returning RAs who were close to that former

supervisor and had expectations that there would be a seamless transition between them.

This was not a novel dynamic to many organizations when supervisors transition

in and out. The situation became slightly more complex when the supervisor maintained

his or her role over a staff from year to year and there were staff members who did not

like the supervisor. As in most organizations, perceptions and rumors about supervisors

lay within the fabric of currently employed staff members. Those stories are then told to

new employees prior to beginning the job and shortly thereafter, so they feel they have a

general idea of what it would be like to work with their new supervisor. These stories

persisted into the formative stages of relationship building between supervisor and

supervisees until the staff members generated their own story or perspective of their new

supervisor.

As a first-year RA, Ashley experienced this situation with her new supervisor as she explained what she heard from several other staff members, "other RAs give you pre-conceived notions, like my RD, a bunch of RAs were saying that she is really strict and gave me the impression that they did not enjoy working under her." However, after just a short period of time in training, Ashley's ability to form her own opinion of her supervisor showed a different perspective. She stated, "I like [my RD]. She is funny. I don't think there is any problem with her. I think it is good that she actually gives a kind of a structure to the job. It seems like she has a lot of fun, which is good." The longer Ashley worked for her new supervisor, she gained a fresh perspective on those RAs who said they had issues with the RD. She remembered thinking, "I am going to try to take in everything that they judge, things that they say about other RAs, and others, because it could be true, but it might not, because it wasn't with our RD."

This was a powerful learning opportunity for Ashley as she was thrown into a situation where people she perceived she should listen to provided information that did not match her experience. Further, her own experience and work ethic prior to becoming an RA was a close match with her supervisor's, which continued to help foster their positive relationship. Ashley thought it was a good thing that her RD, "does let you know when you need to improve on your actions, uh, constructive criticism. I just think that some people don't like it. I don't like being criticized, but if it's to help me, then I'm all for it."

Ashley's relationship with her new supervisor was indicative of other participants' experiences with their RDs during training, where the new or returning supervisor set the stage for RA training and the job environment throughout the year.

Several RAs appreciated when their supervisors clearly articulated what was expected of paraprofessional staff throughout the year. In particular, Jessica shared:

It's really important that she sets the bar and her expectations of us. Sometimes she is killing me, but also understands when we can't meet her expectations, it's usually some valid reason like we are students first, and she always takes that into consideration.

The ability to be honest, flexible, and caring were important character and supervisory traits for several participants. According to his staff, this supervisor demonstrated these attributes all the time and Mack chose to highlight staff meetings, an important occurrence in which every RA participated. Shrugging his shoulders because he did not know where his RD learned his skills, Mack said:

It has to be his leadership style because I can't think of any other thing that could have facilitated it. Particularly, the way meetings go, it feels like a meeting but it's not like this tight, "We have to get to these things on the agenda" type of thing. It is a very open atmosphere. Sometimes we get off on tangents and that happens, but I mean everyone is ok with it. I think that a big part of it has to be the way that [my supervisor] has decided to handle those types of things.

Most importantly, Mack felt his RD set the tone during training for staff meetings and the rest of the year, when his supervisor said, "this is how I roll and this is how our meetings will be." Reflecting on that statement, Mack did not remember specifics, but he described the overall essence of his supervisor's style as, "this is going to be open, and fun," and, "I'm here for you, to help you." Mack saw his staff loosen up significantly to the point

where, everyone would be able to be themselves. From there, he shared, "I think it just

snow balled and as people became more comfortable in their own skin and being able to

be themselves around everybody, it kind of ended up working out well for everybody."

With a staffing structure of two RDs with up to 20 RAs on two staffs in each

building, having both supervisors be consistent was tremendously important, especially

when they shared these positive characteristics. RAs designed and implemented programs

with RAs from the other staff in their building, and generally, nightly duty per building

consisted of an RA from each staff, thus increasing interactions between staffs. When

RDs shared similar principles and communicated regularly, it was highly noticed by all

the RAs.

Mack attributed the close knit nature of his staffs' relationships with each other

based on his supervisors' interactions with his Co-RD. Mack shared, "I feel like they

seem to jive pretty well and they are very committed to this residence hall being a whole,

like, united front. I think that really carried over to the staffs." He continued more in

depth, by commenting that both RDs:

> Presented themselves in a way that was very open. I think the biggest
>
> thing is that you are human and that you go through the same things as
>
> everybody else, and that even though I'm in this position that's higher
>
> than yours, that doesn't mean that I have the right to disrespect you, that
>
> doesn't mean that I am any better or any worse than you are. We are all
>
> working together towards a common goal.

This type of cohesive leadership was not necessarily portrayed in other

participants' experiences. Some individuals mentioned a perceived disconnect between

the leadership in their buildings that resulted in a negative impact on RAs. When reflecting on her experience, Veera believed that:

> When followers see that leaders aren't really in unison, it's kinda like kids who see parents in a marriage. They're going to work parents against each other if they see that they're not getting along. By our leaders, not being a unit, it kinda made it a lot harder for the new staff to be, "yeah, we are staff, we're in unison, we agree." It was more of like, "everyone should get their own way." It kinda made it harder to sign up for duties and agreeing on something, like who should do a bulletin board. Everything was very unorganized in that sense.

Just as RAs perceptions of their supervisors were important in staff meetings and individual encounters, so too was the RDs' role during training. Beyond the leadership they provided to ensure their staff members were on time to sessions, brought paper and pens to take notes with, and encouraged reflection based on the day's learning, RDs also were instrumental in presenting sessions, coordinating presenters, and preparing for resident move in. Regardless of their actual visibility in training sessions, participants in this research study noticed the leadership RDs took throughout the training process. Jeff commented, "it looked as if they knew what they were doing, so it establishes early on that, 'ok, we've already been through training, we've already done this, so we know how this works best.'" This was important for building RAs' confidence that their supervisors were knowledgeable of the job and prepared to support them.

As the themes emerged during this research reflecting the importance RAs placed on learning skills, attitudes, and behaviors from returning RAs, so too was the importance

they placed on their learning from the RD staff. Succinctly put, Ashley revealed where she learned information: ". . . by asking people that have been here longer or asking [my RD], because she is trained to know things and if she doesn't, she usually knows who to contact to find out." Specifically regarding her reliance on her supervisor, Ashley continued:

A couple times, I have been searching for something on the computer and I can never find it. Then, I go and ask [my RD], and she is like, 'here you go, it's right here.' Then you know where it is and if someone comes to ask you, you know the answer. The best way to learn is by asking others.

Mirroring new RAs' perceptions of returning staff members in how they learned about the position, new RAs also relied on their RDs for information. Nathan recalled his reliance on his supervisor:

I know for me, if I have to ask my supervisor something, it is usually very big, or something related to an ad memo, some policy, or something that is very specific that someone else may not know the answer to. You would expect your supervisor to know something more than you.

This expectation was shared by most participants, as they relied on supervisors to provide direction, resources, and support so that they would be more successful at their jobs.

Not only were supervisors important for information, they were looked up to as role models by the staff, individually and collectively. Anna commented, "I feel like the way the RD acts sets the stage for the rest of the staffs' actions. [My RD] has been pretty lax and as long as you get the job done, he doesn't care how you do it." This created an experience that made being an RA during training and throughout the year more

challenging. As someone who appreciated recognition as one source of motivation, Anna shared that from her RD, "we wouldn't get a 'great job' or a pat on the back for anything we did."

Feedback was important for most participants, as they felt they needed some indication if they met job expectations. Michelle was one participant who thrived on the level of recognition and support she received from her RD. She explained, "it's really great to have a supervisor that's kind of supportive and tells you that you're good, because then you're like, 'oh, I'm good,' and that helps build your confidence." As a new or returning staff member, participants shared that sensing a supervisor has confidence in their ability to be an RA for residents and a positive contributing staff member influenced their motivation to learn, apply what they learned, and perform better on the job.

Beyond just demonstrating support and confidence in RAs during training, participants became physically animated when they shared the positive interactions they had with their supervisor. Josh stated that during his two years as an RA with his supervisor, she "really tried to get to know us on the friend level." Similarly, Veera's relationship with her RD began a year before she became and RAs, when Veera was a WSES Mentor:

> I have actually known [my RD] for two years and we have always had a
> really good relationship. She actually wrote me my letter of
> recommendation to be an RA so I have known her throughout and she was
> always a very cool person. It's really amazing to me that she cares so
> much about everything that she does. She really cares about us, as RAs, as
> people, as her kids. I think that we just had a really strong bond, it has just

grown a lot more. It is kind of like a big/little sister kind of bond. I would

do anything to take care of her and she would do anything to take care of

me.

The supervisors who were seen in the most positive light by their RAs took the

time to learn about their staff members, not as RAs, but as people and college students.

At Hunter University, the RDs are graduate students and as Jessica explained:

[My RD] as a student, also understands most of what we are going

through. She also did her undergrad and knows that sometimes things to

get hard, so when I am talking about four papers due in three days, she

says, "well you need to take the time for yourself." Or if we are in one on

one and I am really stressed out, she says, "well if you need this hour to go

do homework, then go do it."

Recognizing the departmental expectation that RAs are students first and RA

responsibilities were to come second, sometimes created a gap between RDs who were

well liked and respected by their RAs and those who strictly had working relationships

with their staff members. Whether RDs had been RAs previously was irrelevant for

participants, as they sought relationships with supervisors who cared about them as

people, taking time to empathize with the RA experience.

Participants recognized taking graduate level classes while overseeing residential

areas of over 350 students was certainly a challenge. Even with all their time

commitments attending class, completing homework, addressing residents' needs and

issues, and working on administrative duties, participants who built and maintained

powerful relationships with their supervisors during and after training did so because of

the mutual need for conversation on topics beyond the job. During and after training, participants commented on the importance of personal conversations with their RDs. Josh explained his relationship with his supervisor:

> She tries to be there for us as RAs, and fosters our ideas there, but she's also, like, the whole personal thing, we're people too. She's always making sure we're ok. In a way, she's our RA. I know she's knows that, she's good at that, but I don't really think she realizes how much that is actually important. It's crucial for me because I need that. Because there is just so much going on as a student leader, its just that I need somebody to go talk to, and vent to, like, I've got a problem, how do I fix it, or point me in the right direction or at least talk me through it or let me talk myself through it.

Although RDs maintained a busy schedule during training, RAs noticed when their supervisors made time for them, even through it was not convenient. Many supervisors claimed to have an open door policy, but it was only in effect when they were not busy attending to other issues. If these RAs needed something, it became an inconvenience even when their door was physically open. Josh's affect almost bubbled over as he continued sharing about the relationship with his RD:

> It's pretty much just being open to me dropping in whenever I need to. I think she's a little bit more understanding when I drop in, so I take advantage of it. When she is there, I will stop in and say hello. I think it's good that I have a relationship with her where she tells me her personal stuff I tell her mine.

Identifying with each other on a personal level was clearly a crucial aspect in relationships between RDs and RAs. Conversations and interactions where RDs took valuable time to acquaint themselves with their staff members, learning about who they were and what they needed to be successful students and RAs, led to relationships that stretched beyond the supervisor-supervisee dynamic and into the world of friendship. A significant component to this dynamic rested on what Jessica termed "an open relationship:"

I think having an open relationship with your supervisor is really good. I don't know, I am a pretty open, honest person. If I really feel like something sucks, I would probably say it. I think [my RD] and I've gotten to that point where she can be like, "Jessica, you're slacking off" and I am like "sorry, my bad." She realizes that she can say stuff and joke with me and I am not going to take it that hard.

When asked how this positive relationship developed over time, she shared that her first semester as an RA, Jessica ended up in her RDs office because:

I my grandmother died. My grandfather had a massive heart attack and was in the hospital for about six weeks. My boyfriend's grandfather was diagnosed with lung cancer and had to have surgery. After my grandfather had his heart attack, he had to have open heart surgery for a bypass. One of my residents told me she was pregnant, an unplanned pregnancy, another one's father had a massive heart attack, and another one of my residents boyfriends died in a fire. So I had six, seven major things happen within a month period and I was just so overwhelmed emotionally that I

couldn't do anything, academically, physically, socially, anything. With

all that stuff, I couldn't really go to my mom, dad, or boyfriend because

they were all so tightly connected. I literally had to break down and she

was the person who was there to help me through that.

The strength of Jessica's character and relationship with her RD that started in

training served as catalysts for their relationship to expand quickly past the confines of

roles on an organizational chart. According to Jessica, it was not just an intense chain of

circumstances that helped foster her relationship with her RD. Both the supervisor and

supervisee needed to be in a place where they were open to sharing themselves and

receiving the gifts from the other. As some of the participants reflected on their positive

relationships with their supervisors, it became clear the importance of maintaining a two-

way communication, where both individuals needed to feel as though they could share

honestly and feel heard.

As much as a supervisor effectively demonstrated support and care for their RAs,

the other half of the supervisor-employee relationship must also consist of a personal

connection. Participants explained that a significant contributor to this relationship

quandary was the RAs' perception of their position. Austin shared his three years

experience on this dynamic:

There are some people who the only thing they accept an RD as, is their

boss. You can definitely see that that is as far as their relationship will go -

because they aren't open. Those are also some of the people who don't

care, I mean, they're basically just here to collect a pay check. Whereas

people you know genuinely enjoy the job, I have seen them be able to

grow a better relationship with the RD. They are kind of the same way as

our relationship, in that they treat [the RD] as not just their boss, but as

their friend. Once you get to that stage, I mean just everything starts to

mesh and you are able to talk about different things.

Participants in this study stretched across this relationship continuum from seeing

the position as a means to an end, to enjoying the job but not connecting with their

supervisor, and then to valuing the RA role and relationship with their RD. Jeff saw this

position as a way to help defray costs in his last semester until he graduated and did not

see a need to develop an in-depth relationship with is supervisor. Katie recognized that,

"[my RD] and I have realized that we have different ways at looking at things. We have

different personalities and the way I interact with staff is different than other people." She

had a positive experience as an RA and said she enjoyed her meetings with her supervisor

when they talked about topics of a personal nature.

Veera's relationship with her RD was summarized with her huge grin as she said,

"I love [my RD]." When asked to clarify this statement, she continued:

Anything that I can do to make her life easier I feel is good, as that kind of

motivates me to do my stuff. I don't want to do my stuff late and I don't

want to make anything harder for her. So I think I am always trying to

give a 110%. Just because if everyone slacked off 10%, I mean, that would

kill her. There are 10 of us she can't take on all of that stuff. I think that

everything she does is pretty amazing. I really like to help her out.

RAs' connections with each other were important and so too were relationships

with their supervisors. The weight of responsibility for a positive relationship was shared

between both RA and RD, as they must appreciate and respect themselves, their

positions, and most importantly each other. As with any positive supervisory relationship,

the components for individuals and positions were complex and not easily identifiable,

yet everyone involved must examine their own motivation to learn and build

relationships. The outcome of this self-reflection influenced RAs' experiences with each

other and the responsibilities on which they selected to work.

Based on the these two themes describing the importance of relationships for RAs

in the meaning they associated to pre-service training, the framework by which all RAs

perceive the training experience is now explored. Regardless of when RAs began the

position, they entered with certain levels of knowledge and life experiences that informed

their motivations and choices about learning and applying information. The participants

in this study fell into three stratified categories according to their experience as RAs:

first-year, second-year, or third-year. They described their perceptions of Fall training as

being heavily influenced by how long they had been RAs.

Resident Advisor Experience Over Time

Every participant in this study was hired during a spring semester RA selection

process and placed on a residence hall staff for the next academic year. RAs met their

peers briefly during an introductory activity in the previous Spring semester and then,

moved into their assigned room to start RA training in early August. Although many RAs

in the U.S. were hired mid-year or mid-semester, this was not the case for participants in

this study as each one started their RA position with the first day of Fall training. Each

RA experienced a different level of growth and development prior to, and during, their

tenure in the position, thus influencing how they perceived and made meaning of Fall

training. The findings within this theme are shared based on the experiences of five first-year RAs, five second-year RAs, and two third-year RAs.

Resident Advisors New to Staff

As the first two themes emerging from the data clearly showed the importance of relationships during training for all participants, interpersonal connections continued to serve as the foundation for how new RAs learned information during and after training. Reflecting back to the early part of training, Nathan remembered,

> you could always see all the returning staff, they had a strong bond from
>
> living and working together for a whole school year. It was really good,
>
> you know, like, the minute we started training and got to know each other,
>
> all the new RAs, it felt like we were immediately integrated, that sense of
>
> staff bonding.

Feeling connected to the staff was paramount for first-year RAs because everything about the position was new. Nathan continued on this idea:

> I guess being that new kid on the block, like, you don't know what all to
>
> expect, where the other RAs had gone through the whole training
>
> experience before. Most of them, went through the two week training and
>
> now know what to expect, so they can say like, "this, you guys should
>
> really listen to, I mean, the other stuff is important as well, but this is good
>
> stuff."

When needing additional information throughout training and once residents arrived, participants overwhelmingly stated they sought the assistance of returning staff members because as Ashley shared, "the best way to learn is by asking others who may

know the answers you are looking for." Both returning RAs and RDs shared this resource

role for new staff members, but the level of guidance new staff members received was

different. With a smile and animated hand gestures reflecting parceling out information,

Nathan explained:

> Your RD will say, "we have you here at training for a reason. Go to it,
>
> absorb what you can, hopefully you'll absorb all of it. Take it away, reflect
>
> on it." Then returners will be like, "this session, oh, yeah, I remember this
>
> session, this is what he talked about, this is good stuff. This, this, and this,
>
> you should probably take away. This stuff, don't ignore, but you know,
>
> just sit there."

Throughout his time in training, Nathan shared he would be sure to sit with returning

RAs during the sessions because they "kind of know what they've absorbed before" and

have a better understanding of what information is really needed to be a successful RA.

Most RA training sessions across the U.S. are designed so new and returning staff

members are together throughout all training sessions (Delworth et al., 1974; Greenleaf,

1974; Schuh, 1981; Upcraft, 1982; Winston & Buckner, 1984) and this RA training was

no different. Although beneficial for Nathan and other new staff members to have more

experienced RAs adjacent with them during training, the perception of content

redundancy created a sticky point between first-year and returning RAs. Veera

remembered several training sessions in which new RAs sought additional or clarifying

information and frustrated returning RAs:

> I can definitely see where the returners were getting really pissed off.
>
> They would say, "why are you guys asking stupid questions," like, the

new people. At the same time, I felt the new people are asking valid

questions, that they might not really know. Sometimes it feels like you're

kinda just thrown in there and a lot of things through training are very

scattered. For example, you don't necessarily get your programming

requirements until later or RDs will refer to something like an ad memo

and you feel really lost if you don't know what it is. I could see people

getting really frustrated, like, what's an ad memo and RDs would be like,

"well, we'll explain that on day five." That's really frustrating; you can't

really refer to something if people don't know what it is. The new RAs

would be like, "wait, what's an ad memo, I don't understand." Then the

returners were like, "they're gonna explain that later." They'd get really

annoyed and they'd snap [Veera snapped her fingers].

This dynamic occurred throughout training as new RAs asked questions on topics to be

covered later, but by the end of training Veera shared:

Everyone realizes that they're going to receive everything and that they're

going to be okay. Some people just don't like loose ends and I think that

it's really hard for people to trust that they're going to get that information

later.

Beyond the content of what was covered in training, new RAs also relied on

returning staff members' attitudes about training, the position, and staff dynamics. In a

matter of fact tone, Bernard said, "this is how it works, the new RA's…their perceptions

are going to be based on the RAs who are returning on that staff." He continued by

explaining that during training, if just a few returning RAs "have a positive attitude

towards training, that will exponentially affect the perception of training by the other

people." According to Bernard, it was ultimately up to returning RAs attitudes that

influenced how new staff perceived training and the position.

Occasionally, every returning staff member had a positive attitude that carried

over to newly hired RAs, but in these participants' experiences, not every returning RA

maintained that positive outlook. As new staff members, first-year RAs felt they were in

a position to choose who they reached out to for advice and support. Reflecting on her

experience, Anna shared:

> You always know which returners you can go to, to ask questions. We are
>
> all on the same page, but some of them who have had more experiences
>
> are more approachable than others, so I feel comfortable calling them to
>
> help with certain situations.

Choosing which returning RAs to listen to influenced how new RAs experienced training

as well as the position through the year.

Regardless of positive or negative influences from returning RAs, new RAs

shared a common frustration about how much was expected of them in the RA position

that they did not anticipate when applying for the position. Jeff remembered new staff

members during the first few weeks of the RA position because there, "was the

frustration of being put into a new position and they had these things they've never done

before, so they get frustrated with that." Being one of the new RAs, Nathan shared his

experience between what he expected from the administrative part of the position prior to

applying and when he was on staff:

Now I realize there's a lot of paperwork so there, that was an eye opener.

As a resident, I never saw the paperwork that we have to do now and now

it seems like paperwork is everywhere, or can be, if you want it to be. I'd

rather it not.

Having been on staff for three years, Nathan's comment in a focus group spurred

Austin to remember when he first applied for the position and it was not just the

paperwork that was unexpected:

I guess it was like what Nathan was talking about, not just the paperwork,

but all the extra things, like, I knew there was bulletin boards and working

at the desk and program stuff, but like, I didn't know there was all this

like, committees, in-services, all that kind of extra stuff. I mean a lot of

people just don't know about until they get to training, but that's what the

job is, a side of it anyways.

Throughout the interviews, Anna consistently raised her frustrations with not feeling

prepared for the position when she became an RA:

I don't really think [the RA position] was outlined as well, you know, at

least, when I talked to my RA last year, it didn't seem like she was doing

so much all the time but she really was. Then, looking into the position

online and with the housing website, they really never said anything about

all the committee meetings, that kind of threw me for a loop, and then

going to in-services - all the extra things. It didn't mention how long

training was and that you have to be in the building. They didn't mention

that you can only have so many nights off a semester, etc. I knew there

was paperwork, but didn't really know how much, but it all seems to come

and go, like, come in big rushes. So in that sense I feel that it is a little

misleading because you don't see a contract before you apply to be an RA

you don't get one till you are assigned to a building. You basically find all

this stuff out in training, unless someone tells you prior to training. There

were just so many surprises like, "oh, wow, I can't do that either or I have

to do this, too." I guess the time commitment was a little shocking at first,

but, it's all about adapting to it.

Anna did adapt to the position. Over the course of the year, she learned to balance her RA

responsibilities, a large class load, significant other, family, and became an advocate for a

local women's crisis hotline. She remembered the position positively and although

frustrated about the communication from residence life staff prior to applying, Anna

seriously considered returning for a second year.

Second-Year Resident Advisors

When new or returning RAs began the position prior to the beginning of Fall

semester classes, they understood training was necessary and important. Although most

information was presented in structured training sessions, because new staff members

relied on returning RAs for direction, clarification, and applicable examples based on

their first-year RA experiences, the need for returning RAs to attend all of training

heightened. However, from a second-year perspective, once having been an RA for a

year, the need for them to participate in a similar, if not identical training schedule and

curriculum lessoned. Austin summed up this need for replicated training:

Well, training helps you through your first year, but I guess once you get

to your second or third year, it's kind of more often the experiences of the

position that helps you. But for the first-year people, training is definitely

a need.

Every participating returning staff member felt similarly, as Jessica remembered,

"a lot of the stuff, it was like, 'I remember that from last year, it's a little redundant.'"

Michelle mirrored Jessica's comment, "a lot of stuff this year, I really didn't learn, it was

all stuff from the year before. It was kind of reiterating everything we've already learned,

being painfully redundant."

Albeit repetitive, several new staff members towards the end of their first year on

staff reflected on their experiences and felt going through training a second time could be

helpful. Bernard said very honestly, "I will be the first to admit that I don't remember that

much from training. So getting a refresher on a lot of this stuff would be good for me."

Although Anna understood returning RAs did not necessarily want to go through another

10 days of training, she suggested this "refresher" would be very positive:

I know the returning RA's don't want to go back through it again. But at

the same time, with all that training, you don't apply everything you learn

so you are going to forget some of the situations. A refresher course won't

hurt anyone. I might have to deal with more roommate conflicts or

something totally different. I think that it is wise to make people go

through it. I mean, they aren't going to enjoy it but at the same, time they

need it.

Josh viewed returning staff member's attendance at training as two-fold, "it was more of a refresher course on basic stuff, like some of the stuff that changed from last year to this year, as well as I was able to teach some of the new people what different things were." In addition, most returning RAs saw the need to attend training to learn about changes in job expectations and requirements so they were on the same page with new staff members.

As demonstrated in the first two themes emerging from the data how important relationship are to RAs in general, it came as no surprise that for returning RAs, training was more about staff than stuff. Michelle shared her perspective with a tinge of sarcasm:

I thought of training as more something to get to know the staff, rather

than knowing the stuff, especially this year because I was a returner. I

mean, with so much new information [rolling her eyes], I thought of it as

definitely more of an opportunity to get to know who I was working with,

rather than to obtain new RA information stuff. That was fun and exciting

to me, and important.

By building relationships with new staff members, returning RAs felt they helped connect new RAs to the staff, building, and ultimately the position. Generally in the beginning of training as these relationships were forming, returning RAs noticed new staff members did not ask questions in larger training sessions because they were not comfortable yet. To address this, Jeff took an empathetic leadership role in several sessions where he asked, "a lot of questions about procedures and policies and stuff to hopefully help the new RAs in case they're afraid to speak up. I don't mind, because honestly, that's who I was a year ago."

In smaller group settings, other participants mimicked Jeff's behavior to help new RAs get a better feel for the position. Mack said that in staff meetings during training, he and his two returning peers, "emphasized some things, and just kind of went over some things again, hopefully helping the newer people learn." With staff time so limited during the training schedule, Josh found it challenging to meet the new RAs' need for stories: "there isn't that time during staff training to sit around and just share stories that are so beneficial." During training sessions, Michelle felt she spoke for her returning staff peers when she stated:

> We're also people that if they have questions, they can talk to us. If they
>
> didn't understand something, I mean, I feel that I pretty much know
>
> what's going. I know that if you have a question to ask the presenter
>
> during the middle of the presentation, wait until it's over and give a
>
> returner a little elbow and be like, "hey, what's that mean?"

Returning RAs felt it was their responsibility to be role models for the newer staff members, both by answering questions as they arose and in their general behaviors.

Josh was very aware of how visible returning RAs were to new staff members, whether or not they shared a staff. Similar to how other participants described this awareness level, Josh said, "as role models, they are looking up to us and seeing what we are doing. If we're there slacking off, they are going to be slacking off, too." In sharing Josh's sentiment, Jessica remembered her RD explaining her expectations to returning RAs:

> They told us as returners, we should be really good role models as far as
>
> going to training. Yes, this is long and yes, this is sometimes boring, but if

you get it put into a new person's head that this is pointless and redundant, and there's no point in being here, then they'll feel that way, too. Then that will all start to rub off on everyone throughout the rest of training and that would make training a whole lot worse. Versus, if everyone was like, "ok, we got this session, and I may not really want to be here, but I'm here, so I'm going to make the most of it," all our lives will be better.

Michelle was proud that she met these expectations throughout training when she reiterated what her supervisor told her to do, "So, I'm just supposed to sit there and be a role model and act like I'm paying attention when I'm not? Yeah, I think I did that pretty well."

This ability to choose a positive attitude had tremendous impacts on new staff members, as shown above on multiple levels. In looking at the whole training experience, it was still challenging for some returning staff members to remain positive and open to learning new information. Jessica recalled:

A lot of our returners are a little disgruntled; they really didn't want to be there. Some of them, this was like their third year, so they were like, 'why am I really here in training again? We're going over the same stuff again.' They didn't really see the point.

For Jessica, it was almost worse at times during staff meeting times because relationships were strong enough that RAs felt they could be more open than at the larger training sessions:

It was during in staff time or in-area time and we would have stuff to talk about, but some returners were like, "ok, let's speed this up, let's speed

this up [snapping her fingers]." From my perspective, it's like, "for you, yes, you know this information, but for somebody who hasn't heard this before, speeding it up is going to make it really difficult for some of them to understand." This made the new people feel like they couldn't ask questions because the old people were like, "you need to hurry this up [snapping her fingers], we need to get this done, because I've got stuff I need to do."

Michelle's viewpoint was similar reflecting on her experience:

I think everything is important to the new people, cause like, my first training, I really didn't mind it. I didn't think it was horrible, but we had a lot of like returners on the staff who were like, "oh my god, this is sooo stupid." Now I understand why, because they had already covered a lot of the stuff and didn't really need it again.

With this powerful dynamic of returning RAs not wanting to replicate their first-year training experience, participants in this study shared their perspectives about the opportunities and challenges of having separate training schedules, sessions, and curricula for new and returning staff members. Jeff felt he was talking in circles about this complex situation:

If you have returners doing things differently than the newbies, then there's going to be a division between groups. Getting to know your staff is important also, you have to find that balance right there. You have returners, you have new people, so what's the balance between teaching

new stuff to everyone to help build a community, but not wasting our

time.

Several returning RA participants shared Josh's perspective that,

. . . there are certain things we know that we really do not need to hear

again. Last year I was still adjusting, trying to get the job down and trying

to do everything. But now, all that is easy and I know how to do

everything, it's just I can work on the whole people aspect of it. It makes

the job a lot better.

Having one or two years experience as an RA placed returning staff members in a

position during training to do just as Josh suggested, focus on staff relationships and

assist new RAs' acclimation to the job and each other. Bernard believed,

. . . it's very healthy to have both the old and new staff go through the

same training because everyone is experiencing the same stuff, and no one

is better than someone else for information. It also helps build that group

connectivity.

Returning RAs attendance at training placed them in a unique situation where they

empathized with their new colleagues. Josh shared the positive implications, "by us being

there, being the role models, being a support group for the new people and saying, 'we

went through this, I know it is boring, but it really does come in handy.'"

Participating in the same training and identifying and empathizing with new RAs'

experiences was a positive way to build connections with all staff members, which

increased the community atmosphere for a staff and the buildings' residents. However, as

Jeff first stated with this concept, where do you find the balance between team building

and returning staff members' needs to feel challenged in a different way? Ultimately, returning RAs had different developmental needs that were rarely addressed in RA training curricula. Josh shared his perspective on the needs of returning RAs:

> I think that we as returners need to know how to prepare for meeting staff, how to deal with getting burned out, how to keep going, how to get residents involved, and how to come up with new and good program ideas. So yeah, there is stuff that I think as returners, we miss out on because you have to sit through so much stuff that we already know.

Jessica agreed with Josh and suggested, "it would be helpful to have a separate training for new and returning RA's because some things I have heard like 15 times. I really don't need to pay attention on bulletin boards and door decorations again."

Through this study, several participants thought about different ways to invest returning RAs in the training experience while also not creating an "us-them" dynamic with new staff members. Austin and Jessica mentioned returning RAs presenting sessions during training to increase the level with which they were engaged with training. Austin said that in addition to not requiring returning RAs to attend every session, "you are forcing them to take on responsibility and they are going to need to do some research to put together a training session." Jessica supplemented Austin's comment by saying that as returning RAs, "we don't know it all, but we have some experience in whatever we may be presenting."

Beyond the possibility of leading sessions for returning staff members to feel more engaged in their training experience, participants were hard pressed to think of, "other ways to make training less painful," as Michelle shared with a smile. Jessica

mentioned that throughout training, there could be a more dedicated effort by presenters and RD to include returning RAs in facilitated conversations, presentations, and activity debriefing sessions:

> A lot of returners give good feedback, so when someone asks a question and instead of having an RD answer, direct the question to a returner. This will get them involved in training more, so that hopefully they can feel, "yeah, I've been through this, but now I'm helping out, I'm helping present, I'm helping give the newbies information, versus just sitting here listening to the information pretending like I didn't know it."

Based on returning RAs' perspectives, including returning staff members can help decrease boredom and feelings of redundancy during training to some extent, which participants felt would help their level of engagement in the training experience. With two RAs who went through Fall training twice before, the next section explores the meanings they associated with the training experience.

Third-year Resident Advisors

Having experienced RA Fall training twice before, Mack and Austin knew what to anticipate regarding the schedule and curriculum for this year's RA training, which provided them a challenge to be as optimistic as possible. They knew new RAs, as well as second-year staff members would look up to them. As much as it pained Austin to say, he shared,

> . . . honestly, I hate to say it, but really, after the third year, I didn't gain any kind of personal growth during training. It really didn't help me *per*

se, with building my community, because it was my third time doing the

same thing.

Both Austin and Mack described this training as better than their two previous Fall

training sessions. Mack shared his experience, which was mirrored closely by Austin:

For me, this training was a lot more positive than last year. Part of it was

that it was a different staff and it was kind of exciting to get to know all

these new people. I also didn't really put out there that training was

supposed to be educational, because I tried to go through it with

everybody else, as if it was my first time.

Although they may not have experienced significant personal growth during their

third training, Mack and Austin did learn different information and resources as Austin

shared honestly, "that you really might have spaced out on or really just didn't catch the

year before." Regardless of the level or type of information they gained from training,

both were very aware of the consequences of their attitudes on their RA peers. Austin

explained pointedly:

Sure, it's going to be a little boring for people like me and Mack, cause

we've been on the full bus ride for a while. I try to look at it as, "well, it

may be boring for me, but it's all new for the new people," so I try to go in

with the whole positive attitude and whatnot. Because if I'm being

negative, like if I tell Nathan, "Man, this session's gonna suck," then he's

gonna think that and he's not going to take anything in. But, if I'm like,

"man, this speaker's just dynamite and Dean is going to tell it like it is,"

and Nathan goes in all excited, even if it's not the greatest speech ever, I

mean, you're going to take a lot more out of it. It's all about being positive

and keeping it upbeat, you know, if you stay positive, things are just going

to be a lot better.

Being an RA for two full years brought expectations from both supervisors and

RAs, and it was important to be aware of those perceptions. Mack explained,

. . . I think as a third-year, a lot of people see me as kind of like, I know

what's going on, so I get a lot of questions. A lot of people come to me

about small things like how to do things at the desk, but also how to

handle those random situations that happen on the hall.

Austin's experience was similar, as he shared:

It's the fact that I am a third-year and all of that. For a lot of the new

people, I am just the one that they suspect has the answers. I guess because

I have done pretty much every aspect of the job. I try to make myself

pretty approachable.

Learning to be a third-year was not a session covered in this year's Fall RA

training, nor was the topic broached with either Mack or Austin prior to their position

starting in August. Without guidance from training designers or supervisors, Mack and

Austin relied on their own experiences with supervisors, peers, and residents to chart

their own courses into third-year territory. In exploring the general course of an RA over

three years, Mack shared his perspective which was matched closely by Austin:

I think my first year was kind of getting my feet wet, trying to understand

my role on the staff, and spending time learning how to juggling

everything like class, work, the job and social life. I had to really figure

out how to manage everything. I was also kind of looking around and observing everybody and putting my two cents in once in awhile. My second year, I guess I felt more like a part of the staff and less of a spectator. I felt that I was on the same level as everyone and got more involved because I got to know people better. I did I feel that I was working just as hard, but everything was getting done a lot easier and I was doing a lot better in classes. Then this year, I think I have definitely focused a lot more on the staff and on the RA's around me. Being a third-year, I feel I want to step back and see the staff as a whole and see how things are going.

Just as interpersonal relationships heavily influenced RAs' meaning making experiences during and after training, so too was the level of experiences they had in the position. New RAs sought relationships with their returning RA peers to get a better sense of what was expected of them as RAs. Returning staff members saw the content of training as redundant, but it was more important for them to participate in training to assist new staff in adjusting to the position than to have a training curriculum solely for them. At the point of being a third-year RA, finding meaningful connections in training was left primarily to staff relationships and ensuring less experienced RAs learned to be as successful as possible, both individually and collectively.

The next theme emerging from the data suggests that RAs are probably one of the most extensively trained groups of individuals in higher education (Carroll, 1981; Schuh, 1981; Upcraft & Pilato, 1982; Wemple, 1979; Winston & Buckner, 1984). Although the participants in this study anticipated a rigorous multiple day training curricula, their

perceptions of the logistics of Fall RA training clearly influenced their participatory experience.

<div align="center">Resident Advisor Training Structure</div>

All RAs who participated in Fall training were well aware of the stresses involved in getting to know a staff team, learning information, and preparing a community for the impending arrival of new students, all within a general time period of eight days. New and returning RAs at Hunter University were aware when training was scheduled, but they knew little else. As the participants in this study moved in to their Fall residential assignment, they received a copy of the training schedule which was finalized by the RD staff a few days earlier.

On this itinerary, RAs saw the next several days of their lives occupied by a tight schedule of meals, team-buildings sessions, presentations, in-area and building staff meetings, and designated "free time." Throughout the duration of training, participants shared similar sentiments on four areas related to the overall context of the training structure: training schedule, session format, and presenter ethos. Participants' responses were fluid across these areas, indicating one was not more important than the others, but all were relatively equal in how RA participants made meaning of the training experience and applications of learned skills when residents arrived in the halls.

Training Schedule

Although most participants felt training was a necessary introduction to the RA position, the schedule of RA training was overwhelmingly thought of as exhausting. In thinking back to training, Veera recalled:

I guess one thing that I definitely remember is a lot of us seemed drained and we weren't really excited. I just remember having a lot of lecturing kind of programs, like having speakers come in and talk to us about things. I was just like, "Ok, this is a lot to take in."

Austin's experience over three years of trainings was similar, "I mean there is a lot of stuff - you have RA's staying up till like, 12, one, and that kind of adds to the stress of training." In addition to being inundated with a lot of information and receiving little sleep, participants also shared frustrations about the amount of time they spent with their peers. In blunt terms, Katie said:

I will tell you how it is. I mean I can't stand training. I will tell you the worst part of my year is usually training. It is just getting up early in the morning and being with the same people for 13 hours a day.

New RAs who were not prepared for such a demanding training schedule looked back to the selection process and job description, seeking clarification. As a returning staff member, Jessica explained how training was related to the requirements for the position:

As any job description, they don't put everything in there. You know what, they couldn't put everything that you're really responsible for on the job description, because most people wouldn't take the job. Honestly, they really wouldn't take the job, cause I know when they get to training, a lot of new RAs are like, "Ohhh, my gosh, what did I get myself into?"

Although feeling overwhelmed was part of the training experience, several returning staff members were aware of these emotions and did what they could to support new RAs in

their transition to staff. Jessica remembered telling several new RAs, "this is the rough part, you can deal with this, you got this. And if you can deal with this, then everything else will be fine."

Several participants shared how the training experience prepared them for being an RA. Jessica summarized several RAs' thoughts, "RA training is the best training basically, for helping you learn to balance your classes and actually doing the job." Bernard explained this relationship more in depth:

> I think a large part of it, separate sort of from sitting down in the Smith Neighborhood Lounge and just listening to presentations, is the other stuff. Dealing with your RD, the in-area time, making the door decs, doing RCRs, is just sort of showing you a preview of how busy you're going to be during the school year. Cause, I mean, if you look at the presentations as classes, and then the RCRs and your door decs are like your roommate agreements and interest surveys that we have to do, it's a lot of work. So, if you can't balance that first week very well, of training, then you're not going to do too hot during the school year.

This placed a lot of pressure on new RAs in particular to make sure they kept as balanced as possible during training, as they were still responsible for a large amount of information, getting to know their peers, and preparing their community for arriving residents.

A common trend among new and returning RAs was the lack time in training to accomplish what needed to be done. Even after going through RA training his first year and a full year of experience, Jeff still felt,

. . . that in addition to the training, we had to do stuff to set up for the building

opening and I kind of felt as if not enough time was given for me to do it. Like, I

had to do a lot of the stuff at the same time and I just wish we had a little more

time ourselves to work on certain things.

Mack noticed that during this year's training, even though time still felt crunched, there

was more free time to work on projects. He shared:

I think that was good, cause if you're frustrated trying to get everything done, it'll

affect how you interact with everybody during the actual training sessions. Um,

all that stuff is part of the job, it's part of that responsibility. I think as long as you

give ample time to do it, it's not like a big issue.

Almost worse in the eyes of RAs going through training was when they saw "free

time" on the training schedule and were excited for that down time. Several participants

shared how the concept of free time felt like a myth. Anna explained:

That thing that says, "free time," it's really not much free time. We started

so early that by the time you're done with training, it's late and you don't

want to stay up all night. What free time you get during the day, you want

to go out and do your door decs and stuff like that, you don't really want

to stay up until 2 o'clock working on them. Really, my spare time during

RA training was devoted to preparing the door decs and getting the

checklists done and everything.

Working on job related projects was not the only thing RAs did during their, "free

time." Several RAs indicated they used that time for to catch up on sleep and hang out

with friends, just to remove themselves from training for a short while. For Josh,

"personal and free time when we do get time, it is usually used for sleep and should be used for sleep. Honestly, that is how some of us reboot, some of us just need to get away from here." Finding this personal balance was very important to some participants because as Katie shared, "it is really hard to sit with the same people for 12 hours straight, pretty much, with no time for yourself or anything."

It was important to the participants for training designers to keep the promise when the schedule designated "free time." Austin shared from a third-year RAs perspective,

> . . . it would be nice for a little more free time. They say free time, but free time really means free time to do all of that other stuff. If you actually had real free time, that's when you could actually be seeing your friends or just kind of hangin' out with the staff, like watching a movie, or something not structured.

Having unstructured time where RAs chose to be by themselves, bonded with staff, or reconnected with non-RA friends was important because every individual recharged in different ways to prepare for the next day's training curriculum.

Identifying clearly designating free time in the training schedule was important to these participants. If there was free time, RAs were free to do anything not work related. However, several RAs mentioned having designated staff project time was a way to accomplish the many tasks needed for the building to open. Anna recalled it being a good idea where she "worked with other people at the same time, having a door dec party." Austin moved this idea past being productive on tangible things to more team building, "I think there should be time to plan staff outings, like the staff goes out to eat, or go to the

movies, something like that kind of thing." Both comments reflected the first major

theme in this study, the importance of RAs building relationships with each other. From

Josh's perspective, there was a disconnect surrounding time for relationship building and

information sharing, "the big thing that I have discovered with training is that we sit

around and as soon as we get here, they drill us with all of this information. Then we

have time as a staff to bond." The order by which these training components occurred

impacted RAs ability to learn and retain information. Josh suggested:

> Ok, why not give us some time as a staff to bond and then we feel
>
> comfortable enough to talk about questions that we actually have during
>
> training. Most people are still adjusting to the overall thing of, "I'm
>
> nervous, I'm new, and so I don't feel comfortable asking questions." Or,
>
> I've heard people say, "I don't know these people so how do I know if it's
>
> a stupid question?" But after that, we got out and went to the zoo, or we go
>
> do a ropes course or something like that. Then we get to know each other
>
> and then all of these questions pop up like "how do I do a bulletin board
>
> again?"

When asked about spending time getting to know individual staffs or the entire

Smith Neighborhood RA staff, every participant said with conviction that while it was

important for all RAs to get acquainted, it was critical to the success of any RA to have a

significant amount of time within the training schedule with their individual or building

staff team. As Austin succinctly put it:

> I think in-area time, like the time you spend with just your staff, is
>
> important. Most of the time in Eagle Hall, we all spend it together, instead

of separate little staffs, and I think that all the in-area time is really key. I

mean, a lot of times we make Cook-Out runs at 10 or 11 p.m. You know,

it's just kind of like, things that really aren't on the agenda, the kind of the

impromptu stuff, are the things I value the most. I mean, it's kind of like

we're doing stuff we don't have to be doing together, but we are, you

know.

For there to be sufficient time for staff members to hang out with each other

informally, maintaining the training schedule was key. A common source of malcontent

in RA training sessions occurred when the schedule lapsed because of a late presenter, a

room not being open, audio/video equipment not functioning, etc. Regarding this

timeliness, Veera commented, "if the session goes over by five minutes or 10 minutes,

that's okay – but if it goes over by 15 and 20 minutes, then we definitely need to have 15

or 20 minutes more for lunch." Because the RAs were given the schedule ahead of time,

Veera explained they counted on that itinerary to be accurate,

. . . especially if people are expecting that break time, if they need to run

errands or if they have planned stuff. If it's on paper, then I feel like it is a

little bit more unacceptable. Especially people do not get very much free

time during the day and by the time we get out of training pretty much

everything is closed, if we need to run our errands.

To some extent, time wasted in training caused RAs to disconnect from each other

and the materials covered by presenters. Katie remembered,

. . . a couple of those days I was really writing down about how much time

didn't we really waste. Like, how much time wasn't spent waiting for

somebody? We just spend that extra time hanging out until someone else

felt like getting up there and doing something.

Perceiving training time being wasted was just as detrimental to RAs' experiences as

perceptions of redundant information being delivered because they had so much on their

minds, with residents arriving shortly. Ashley believed,

. . . the most important thing was the time to get ready for the residents to

come. That was the only major thing that I had to deal with in training.

Doing my RCR's and door decorations and stuff like that … it was nice

getting to know everyone but I thought that the training was sort of

repetitive.

As a new staff member, Ashley was focused on her job, which was to be a resource and

referral agent to her residents when they arrived, and the training schedule did not seem

to address her needs in that area, both in time dedicated to preparing for arriving

residents, and in the content shared in training. Several of the new RAs shared these

thoughts because as much as they enjoyed bonding with their staff team and attempted to

attentively participate during the sessions, the goal of their RA position was to welcome

the residents. The time permitted on the training schedule did not provide sufficient time

for this to occur.

An idea surfaced during this study to shorten or lengthen training by one or two

days to allow for more free time. Several participants felt more days in training would be

helpful to build a sense of team and provide more space to prepare communities for

arriving residents. When asked about the length of training, Austin said:

I like the length that it is right now. I don't think it could go any shorter, I

tell ya, we were pushing this year, putting stuff in. I could even go for,

maybe adding another day or two, just so people get more free time. They

may not appreciate it at the beginning, "oh, we're going to have to come

back two days earlier," but they'll appreciate it, like, when they're getting

out of sessions, DONE at five and they have the rest of the day to take

care of stuff. I think the long days really start to wear on people.

Jessica concurred with this thought of coming back a day or two earlier by adding, "I

don't think that the nights need to go until 10 o'clock at night, because if I have to be up

at 8am, I don't have time to get the other stuff done that I need to get done." Katie added

that training sessions should "end at 6, and then everyone can go to dinner together, so

really, training ends at 7:30 instead of 9:30."

Session Format

When information was disseminated or team building was orchestrated during

training, RAs felt that in addition to how training was scheduled, what occurred during

sessions was also important. It was already shared that small group settings created the

most positive and optimal environment for RAs to participate in their training experience,

but with 60 staff members, 10 days, limited presenters, and a lot of information to be

covered, it may be necessary to utilize a large group session format. From Jeff's

perspective, "larger groups are definitely just for dispensing information and not really

thinking too much and the smaller groups are much better for discussion."

From Jessica's perspective, large groups had a slightly larger role for RAs

learning information. She explained:

> I think big groups are important because you can get a lot of peoples'
>
> experiences like dealing with that situation or issue. Like, if it was a small
>
> group, if you don't have as many returners, then you wouldn't have as
>
> many opinions about the more practical ways to do the things that may
>
> come up.

Again, the importance of relationships with returning staff members was evident. In thinking about what information was best for small groups, Mack relied on his three years of RA training. He commented, "I would say things where you really need to know the details, like, policies, writing ad memos, desk training, where it's very detail oriented, the tasks are very detail oriented, you have to do those in small groups." Anna shared:

> I learn better in small group things. I think that the really, really important
>
> things should be in small groups. I don't know if everyone learns the same
>
> way I do, but I would benefit from the really important things that you
>
> want iterated in a small group setting. I would also feel a little more
>
> important in the small groups because it's not just one person in a whole
>
> big group of people.

In smaller group settings, there was a closer connection between the person(s) sharing and receiving information, which helped some people learn more information at a deeper level.

With time, staff, and resource constraints impacting RA training, as well as RAs different learning preferences, participants shared that creating a combination of large and small group sessions helped increase optimal learning. Mack explained:

For things like discussions, using both is the best way to go through those kinds of things, cause big discussions about a big topic can be good because you can get a lot of different viewpoints, but at the same time, it's good to have small, intimate settings, too, so everybody can have a chance to contribute. I think if you really want to know, really grasp what you're learning; the small group setting is the best.

Ashley felt similarly, as she added:

I like how they did the large group and then they split you up into smaller groups doing different topics. They number you off so you would have a more random group of people, like returners and new people that you could get a bunch of different opinions on different situations, so you could cover a lot at the same time.

It was possible to maximize the best of both worlds when necessary, as large group sessions could be important and helpful, although, RAs preferred to learn in smaller group settings.

Several participants shared the similarities of training to their smaller academic classes, where they found it easier to pay attention to the faculty member than in larger lecture halls. RA training was no different and the participants clearly noticed how important their attention span was in both large group and small group activities. Veera likened attention in training sessions to class:

I think it's kinda like any general class, like, 50 minutes is the max. Like, 45 minutes is when people start zoning out. It seems 50 minutes is pretty much the attention span of anyone and after that, even if you are focused,

you won't gain as much out of it, like you may be copying and taking

notes, but you won't really retain everything.

Austin felt the time frame was even shorter:

If you are just going to sit there and lecture, once you go over thirty

minutes, you're at a greater loss cause people are going to just stop caring.

They're just gonna kind of sit there and be like, "I'm ready to get out of

here, I'm not paying attention. I've already forgot everything you just told

me." I would suggest not going over 45 minutes to an hour. Like, around

45 minutes to an hour, like, once you go over that, people really just kind

of start to lose it. And, if they can't get said it needs to be said in that

amount of time, then maybe they are not covering the most important

points.

Participants in this study had significant concerns over the amount of time some

presenters took to get their points across. They felt similar to Austin in that if information

could not be condensed into the most important points and processes within a shorter

time frame, then RAs time was wasted. With the significant amount and complexity of

information expected for RAs to know at the conclusion of training, short, concise

presentations with bullet points for RAs was key.

One way to help RAs retain information, especially the key points of a

presentation, was by using handouts for RAs to keep track of information, write notes and

questions, and have something that summarized the information when training was over.

Jessica provided her insight for the use of handouts:

If it is written down, then we can go back and look at it. Like, some things,

we may have missed. When you are sitting in sessions all day, there are

going to be things that you miss. I think there are some things that are

important to have handouts for. People like color and different fonts, just

so it's not all white paper. Just like residents don't like all white paper for

flyers and stuff. We don't like that either.

Every RA received a training manual at the beginning of training and if presenters or

facilitators provided handouts to the staff, everything could be kept in the RA manual,

should staff members need to refer to something learned in training when addressing a

situation during the academic year.

Also assisting in memory retention beyond RA training were presenters and

facilitators who designed each session to be interactive. By feeling engaged during

training sessions, RAs were less likely to "zone out" and when they needed to recall what

they learned, they were generally more likely to remember information. Josh remembered

from training:

There were quite a few training exercises where we actually got to work

together. And that was one of those things where, people were building

relationships throughout campus, we were building a community within

our staff, we were working together to complete tasks, which is what the

whole RA job is about. Those things were a lot more beneficial than

sitting in a room, listening to somebody go on and on about something.

Mack likened training to an academic environment where there were generally

opportunities for both lecture style and interactive learning. He shared about training:

You have to sort of make it like school. Sometimes you have to sit in

lecture and take notes, but the more interactive you can be and the more

you are put on the spot to be a real part of it and engage in it, I think the

more you get out of it. Even if you don't enjoy it at first, once you are

done with it, you are better off than just sitting there and listening to

someone talk.

Austin remembered two specific sessions where large and small groups were used to

increase interaction and another session that was more lecture style:

I like the way that you and [an RD] did the leadership thing, 'cause you

have us splitting up into all these different groups, and you know, you're

meeting new people. It's almost like, what was that, a two-and-a-half,

three hour session that just kind of like flew by like nothing. Where the

session that was mostly just talking about the policies and all, [the

presenter] went an hour, hour-and-a-half, but it felt like forever. You

know, because it was just one person sitting there reading off a piece of

paper. I mean, it just gets really boring.

Interactive sessions can impact RAs more than just helping them learn and retain

information to be applied later on the job. Anna also shared how important interaction

was during training, but took one session to a new level. She explained how more

interaction,

. . . is important to me, especially when we did the walk through with the

rape and sexual assault and took on the role of someone who had been

raped. It totally affected me. I was totally down in the dumps afterwards,

but at the same time, that totally affected me and I was inspired to go

become an advocate.

Not only did she feel prepared to handle a similar situation based on the interactive

training session, but feeling engaged in her own learning spurred her to explore a campus

resource more in depth and get involved.

In the sexual assault training session, both presenters created some practical

situations for RAs to experience what it may have been like to be assaulted, or be the

friend who was assaulted. Using practical examples as a way to help participants connect

with training material was a tremendous way to help RAs learn and retain information.

Jessica explained:

I learn the best by just doing. A lot of stuff that RAs are required to do,

you just have to do it. You can't just look it up, like a formula or code or

something, and be like, "ok, this is what I need to do." I also think it's

important to talk about it first and then let us reinforce it by doing it.

According to the participants in this study, this method of learning something, then

applying it immediately afterwards was the best way they learned. After three years of

going through the same RA training, Austin said, "when we are going over these things

like activities and stuff, give some real scenarios of what has happened and why these are

important." Generally, RA training sessions have a cumulative Behind Closed Doors

session (BCDs) where RAs practiced seven to 10 different types of scenarios of

information covered in training, but Austin commented that waiting for BCDs was too

long, RAs left sessions thinking, "how does this relate?"

The keys to RAs relating to information covered in training sessions was influenced by their desire or motivation to learn the content, their perception that the content related to the college students they worked with and their perception that the presenter connected with RAs and the material. Josh suggested when planning RA training session formats, that RAs be included to, "show the speakers what we really need them to talk about and what we really need to know from them. Maybe that will keep our attention better." This might help make session content and format more engaging for RAs while developing a connection between presenters and audience members.

Presenter Ethos

Another significant theme emerging from the data was the power and responsibility presenters held in RAs' eyes throughout the training experience. For RAs to maximize their learning, presenters had to engage them, be energetic, care about the topic matter, and keep on time. The first step in this process was developing a connection with RAs, which was challenging with one presenter and 60 RAs in a room. Mack shared from his experience:

> It's just like when you're in a class with 300 people; it's really hard to
>
> connect with the person who's speaking. It's all up to you to really focus
>
> on that person, because that person can't really share themselves, even
>
> though they're trying to connect.

This pressure created the need for training designers to develop ways to help RAs and presenters feel more connected.

Beyond a connection, RAs also shared the importance of identifying with a presenter who had been through the RA experience, or who demonstrated some level of

credibility with the topic matter they presented. One group of presenters who were not used in many training sessions were returning RAs, who possessed intimate knowledge of the position and training environment. Michelle shared her perspective about credibility, "a lot of people would rather listen to a fellow RA talk about RA stuff than like, an RD, even though most RDs have been RAs." Crucial to returning staff members effectively presenting during training is to be given time during the summer or training to prepare. They also need to be invested in their presentation. During this training, there was a series of conference style sessions presented by returning RAs, campus partners, and RDs on various topics. While some of the sessions were well attended and liked, others received poor evaluations. The common reason among the well and poorly-received sessions was presenter knowledge and attitude towards the material and presenting to RAs.

Similarly, participants in this study shared the belief that presenters who were interested in the material they presented had much more interesting, thought-provoking, and engaging sessions. From Mack's perspective, "I would say in general, if the person who's presenting can convey they're interested in what they're presenting, I think that the people who are viewing them can kind of feed off that energy." Michelle sarcastically agreed with Mack:

> If the person presenting is excited about what they're presenting, then it
>
> tends to bring up everyone else, instead of like, "ummmm, blah, blah,
>
> blah. We have to do this, this, and this." Be excited about it and don't just
>
> be . . . blach.

Presenters who were excited while presenting was an important aspect in training to help RAs stay engaged with the subject matter and therefore more likely learn and retain the information. In addition, with the amount of information covered during training, having an engaging presenter helped keep RAs awake. Anna shared her preference:

I really like energetic [presenters], that was helpful, cause, we're just kind of like going through the motions and, like, going to another session at three, . . . five, . . ., so if the person presenting has some energy, it's kind of contagious.

Energetic presenters also had a tendency to read their audience, which most participants in this study addressed because they were frustrated when their peers fell asleep or disengaged during sessions. Jessica believed,

. . . a good facilitator realizes the needs of their audience and I think that they should mix it up, being sure to engage in the audience, so RAs don't feel like they're just talking to the wall. I think they can gauge that this group needs this, but that group needs that.

As every RA training session was different, even if a presenter led a session for another RA staff team on campus, the participants felt it was important to treat these West Campus RAs as their own individual group, as opposed to lumping them together with all RAs.

The ability to read an audience was only as good as the ability to do something about it. Participants shared their frustrations with presenters who either did not notice

the room was falling asleep, or did notice and chose to keep talking. Nathan remembered in one training session,

> . . . when people looked around and saw others not interested, it got to the attitude of, "not another meeting that we have to sit here for so long and listen to someone's spiel, and that we might only absorb a little piece of."

When he witnessed that group affect, he said it was clear that if the presenter could keep it down to 20 minutes, "that would be sufficient."

In addition to the above attributes, participants also noticed some presenters' abilities to include multiple forms of communication and teaching methods in their sessions. This helped RAs with different learning styles reap the most out of training sessions. Jessica expressed her perspective:

> You have to take into account different learning styles, so visual learners versus people that do better by listening; people that do better by doing, hands on things like that. I think it's good to take into account a lot of different aspects, so you make sure that everybody's getting it, not just all those people that learn by hearing it, or those people that are good with just seeing it on a piece of paper, or those who are good by doing it.

As with any training session, the responsibility to learn and retain information rested on the shoulders of training designers, presenters, and attendees. To maximize RAs learning and create the most positive training experience, participants in this study clearly expressed how important schedule, session format, and presenters were to their training experience, as well as their ability to remember what was covered after training, which, for most participants, was not much outside of information learned from peers. With a

training foundation built upon relationships, seen through the eyes from varying level of experiences, and perception of the actual training process, the final theme explores the impact of training content on RAs.

<center>Resident Advisor Training Content Remembered</center>

The final theme that emerged in this study includes the meanings participants associated with the actual content remembered of RA training, in structured sessions and meetings, as well as unstructured time. This section explores how RAs perceive the content of training and its applicability, or lack thereof, to the RA position through the academic year by examining content as a whole during training and concluding with an in depth presentation of two specific training sessions: Behind Closed Doors and Diversity.

Initially, participants struggled to remember what was learned during training, even just days after it concluded. Josh provided some insight into how this transpired:

> I think that the first semester training provided a lot background
> information that, like, I really didn't think that I would need to know, but
> when it does come up every once in awhile, I think, "where did I learn
> that?" Fall training. Or, "I know that you are supposed to do this, how do I
> know that?" I heard it one day in training. All the answers are supposed to
> be in training so you look back to it. I actually put little notes in my
> notebook from training.

With so much time and resources invested in planning and implementing training, it was concerning that RAs did not remember what they were exposed to during training. Yet, when thinking about the shear amount of information and schedule RAs kept during this training period, one better understood why RAs may not remember everything.

In addition to the schedule and incredible amount of information RAs are expected to learn, retain, and apply, there are other elements that influence their ability and motivation to initially learn content. Michelle said very honestly, "I remember the stuff I care about." Inherently, every training participant has some level of feelings about the presentation content and if a connection exists, they were more likely to learn and retain that information. The same was true for RAs and Fall training, as Veera shared one example that directly connected to her career choice of becoming a doctor, "I really enjoyed the blood borne pathogens thing. I don't know, I thought it was good because a lot of people don't know how serious how many diseases and stuff there is." Of all the training sessions, this particular session was negatively described by nearly every participant as painful and boring, yet because of Veera's personal interest in the subject matter, not only was she attentive during the presentation, but she remembered it well after training concluded.

Individual interest in specific content was supplemented by the perception of individual need. Several participants shared that whether or not they had been through RA training before, they may or may not have had a need to attend specific sessions. With Mack's three years experience, he explained, "the gist is that there are parts of training that everybody shouldn't go to the same thing all the time because everyone has different needs." There may exist a difference between an individual's perception of their needs and the needs their supervisor felt were important for them to learn. Based on performance or experience, RDs may have felt individuals needed introductory or additional training in a particular area, but during a training session, if the participant felt

the content was redundant or they did not need the information that influenced their attention span and ability to learn and retain new information.

In addition to participant's personal feelings regarding the material presented to them, was their perception of its importance and applicability once residents arrived. This was a challenge because similar to most first-year RAs, Veera shared:

> I don't know if we really knew what we were supposed to get out of
>
> training because I don't think we realized how much of it we would have
>
> to apply, or what we would be using, I guess in our jobs. We were like
>
> "why are they telling this ridiculous stuff," but like, it really has happened.
>
> So it is sometimes hard to pay attention to stuff that hasn't happened yet.

Without seeing the greater context of where, when, and how information learned could be applied, participants felt it challenging to see beyond the training environment.

Added to this perception of a lack of applicability of information was the first-year RAs' preoccupation about what they needed to do to prepare the buildings for incoming residents. Throughout training, they anticipated the arrival of up to 45 residents who would rely on them for the next nine months. RAs knew residents would move into their community with completed bulletin boards, door decorations, and an RA to help make their first weekend and semester be fun and meaningful – because that is what they experienced when the moved into the residence halls their first year. Nathan provided his perspective, "I don't know, training might be all information that's pertinent to being an RA, but not necessarily that we would need to take away immediately for entering the job that next weekend."

Training designers hoped that because RAs participated in Fall training, they were able to understand how the information covered in training could be useful throughout the year, as Josh's earlier perspective demonstrated. With most RAs attending every training session together, there was a strong likelihood that when one person zoned out because the information was boring and not applicable, there may be another person who paid attention. As demonstrated by previous themes, a significant amount of information learned in training was done through peers, either in structured training sessions or more often, during unstructured time when RAs interacted informally. This interaction increased the opportunity for information to be shared between RAs, because as Veera pointed out, "what I take away from a training session might not be the same thing that my co-RA takes away from the session, so learning that stuff from each other is important, too."

All the participants mirrored this notion of learning from other staff members, whether it was content from a session or experience as an RA, student leader, or from a previous job. Two years of experiencing RA training, Josh described this learning clearly:

> Training kind of gives you a routine set of ways to like, handle a situation. But like, every situation is not the same. So, just like, I know for myself, when I was a first-year RA, it helped hearing what the second-year RAs and everybody had to say as far as, "ok, certain situations, this is how you would do this, or this is how I handled this." That helped more than just learning from training, "ok, in this situation, do this; in that situation, do that."

As a first-year RA in this Fall training, Ashley's experience was similar to Josh's:

I felt like throughout training they pulled up a bunch of information – like

resources – but they never really told us how we needed to just do our job.

I got how I needed to do to my job through other RAs more than anything

we did in training. Like, when I walk into a room, can I say this? Can I say

that? I don't think ever in training did they say, like, "you can't touch the

resident," or, "you can't touch the alcohol" or anything like that. They

didn't give you anything concrete that could explain you do this and you

don't do that. When you go on a rove, make sure you have paper and a pen

in case something happens. Have your cell phone and, you know, do stuff

like that. Dealing with situations came from me asking other RAs how

they dealt with it.

Similar to what was shared in previous themes, the relationships between RAs

were paramount for staff members to gain information from their training experiences.

Several participants believed that the process of learning to build relationships in training

was content that was not covered in terms of how to do it, but was important,

nonetheless. Anna shared why this content was important to her:

You have to learn how to interact with your co-workers, like, when you

eat with them, every meal, and then go to all the sessions with them, also

the time in smaller staff meetings and retreats. So, just interacting with

them, you're learning how your coworkers work, what kind of styles they

have, how you think they'll go about their job, and you kind of get

feedback early because as a new RA, you want to know what they've been

through, so you already kinda get the tricks of the trade from the people

who have been through it before. It's always been important to me, no

matter what I go into, like, any kind of team aspect that I feel like I'm a

part of the team.

The sense of teamwork and importance of relationships continued to emerge as a theme

throughout this study, whether RAs were participants in structured sessions or hanging

out with peers informally.

With new RAs looking to returning staff members as role models and experts in

the inner-workings of the RA world, perspectives were freely shared about what

information in training was considered important and what was not important. Generally,

if returning RAs experienced situations where elements of training were seen and

applied, this information became necessary for new staff members to know and

remember. However, if returning staff members did not use information learned in

training, new RAs likely heard that content was not as important, if at all. This did not

appear to be an intentional sabotage by returning staff members aimed at getting new

RAs not to pay attention. However, if content was viewed as irrelevant, returning RAs

may be more likely not to pay attention in training and share that perspective with new

staff members.

Several staff members expressed specific training content was not applicable to

the RA experience because it, "would never happen" or because the examples used by

presenters were not seen as applicable to the college experience. Jeff explained his

perception:

I think a lot of things with training, like the rape and sexual assault and all

that, and when the Counseling Center came in, a lot of those are worse

case scenarios, stuff that RAs wouldn't deal with that often. So, the

problem is that I never had to deal with any of those. I mean, for a lot of

those situations we are told, well, call the RD or someone who has more

experience. That was basically what they said, but they still went through

the signs and the symptoms and all that. It just really didn't apply to me.

Jeff went on to explain that in the sexual assault session where RAs were asked to walk

in the footsteps of a victim, he felt it was, "kind of like scare tactic sort, trying to put

yourself in their shoes, but the scenarios and stuff were not something that I've faced or

would have to face any time soon." Ashley's experience was similar for that session:

The rape awareness thing that they did was impactful. It is interesting, but

I don't think it really helped, because every situation they used, we as RAs

wouldn't address because it wasn't like a student situation – it was like

family things. So it wasn't something that would overly help us through it.

I mean, it made us think about things that can happen, but they was not

really realistic situations.

Jeff, Michelle, and Ashley commented that for all training sessions, it was important that

content be applicable to college students' experiences, because otherwise, training

participants may not see how the skills and information were truly applicable to the RA

position. RAs who struggled with whether information was applicable tended to not

necessarily learn as much training content, unless they were told by returning RAs that

the information was indeed useful when working with residents. Jeff understood why this

information was presented in training when he said, "I see why they make everyone do it,

but it just seems as if a lot of time was spent on stuff that really possibly couldn't

happen."

This is a struggle for every Fall RA training designer and presenter because when

residents live on campus for nine months, almost anything can happen. With RAs who

were on duty every night and weekend, professionals and graduate students in residential

life felt it was important to give as many skills to RAs as possible so they can address any

situation. However, a reoccurring theme throughout this study continued to be similar, as

Anna shared:

> Because there were so many details at once, I'm the kind of person that
>
> just learns as they go, so, I kind of know where to begin and where to look
>
> if I need help, so, like, knowing those things and knowing that I can get
>
> help, that's good.

A significant component of training was providing access to campus resources for

RAs because in their daily interactions with residents, they referred students to campus

agencies and department to better address their needs. Veera shared about what she

remembered from training throughout the year:

> All of the sessions were helpful in that they were just all so different.
>
> Knowing the resources at the health center, knowing campus rec
>
> resources, because anytime you have a conversation with a resident and
>
> you would hear them wanting to do something or you listen to them say
>
> something, you can be like, "you should go to this place." It makes it
>
> easier to refer them to places.

Ashley had a similar experience with training:

I learned about a bunch of places on campus. We learned about using

those resources and when residents ask me questions, I only knew about

the answers because they talked about it in training. Before becoming an

RA, I didn't know about a lot of resources that are on campus.

Once RAs learned about campus resources, even if they did not connect that

information to Fall training, residents received important information in a timely manner.

Anna shared her experience in her community that connected back to training:

It prepares you to meet your residents' needs right in the situation, instead of, "let

me get back to you, let me go back to my RD or another RA that's been there

before." Training gives you a preview of what's to come, so you're kind of

prepared for certain things.

Participants who directly provided information to residents tended to gain more

confidence as the year progressed because it was important for them to address residents'

concerns quickly.

Most participants gained their knowledge of campus resources from Fall training,

as well as their ability to get to know their residents individually. Austin explained with

his residents, "there isn't a kind of general cookie cutter type of person," so it was

important to get to know each one of them individually. When asked how to do that, he

shared:

You just have to go with it, once you meet them and see what their

interests are what kind of person they are. Training did help in that

because it taught us how to identify different kinds of people and what

communication style is best for each person. It's not like a sign goes up

when you are talking to them that states, "Oh, they are this type of

person." You just kind of know that, maybe this is affecting the

communication that you have with them.

Similarly, Veera explained:

I really think that we talked a lot in training about how every resident is

going to be really different and you can't just expect every resident to

want to come talk to you in person. I really think that has helped more

than anything.

Acknowledging residents' differences was only possible when RAs intentionally

tried to get to know every member of their community. Anna remembered specific

content about this area from training and how important that process was to residents,

RAs, and the institution:

I know we were told to get to know residents and stuff like that, and that

in itself is important – having an RA that cares and knows your name. I

think that helps. Makes them be happy where they live. It's annoying to

have an RA that's going on about their own life and doesn't pay their

residents any mind, and their housing experience may not be as great,

because they may have had expectations for their RA and they may not

want to come back and live on campus next year. Especially in the

freshman residence halls, this is their first year at college, so you'd want to

make sure their first experience is the best.

Learning how to build these relationships was a component of training that did not

emerge as a theme for all participants in this study. Some RAs identified aspects of their

personal history, family influence and previous work histories as where they learned

relationship building skills, and others shared that overall in training, not one session in

particular, contributed skills and knowledge to their ability to connect with residents.

After gaining skills from training, participants identified the responsibility for

building relationships with residents rested heavily on RAs' ability to take what was

learned in training in combination with their life history and work experience to apply to

their communities. Josh shared that from his perspective:

> Throughout training, they give you the tips of what, these are good
>
> bulletin board ideas, these are good ways of advertising, these are good
>
> ways programs to have, but they really can't tell you, "ok, this is how
>
> you're supposed to interact with people." I guess it all boils down to
>
> people skills and stuff, like, things that I've known all my life, just like
>
> common courtesy and being polite, respecting each other's viewpoints,
>
> and trying to find some source of common ground to get them to relate to
>
> you as a person, before they relate to you as an RA. If they only see you as
>
> an RA, they'll only come to you when they have problems. If they see you
>
> as a person, then they're going to come to you with their friends, just to
>
> hang out with you, or attend your programs.

Identifying where these interpersonal communication originated for RAs was challenging

because breadth and depth of life experiences varied significantly, even among RAs in

their first year. However, participants heavily relied on their previous life experiences as

a frame of reference as they built relationships with each other and residents.

One specific area that participants relied on training content was the policies, protocols, and job responsibilities necessary for the RA position, especially as many new RAs commented they did not have a solid understanding of the positions requirements going in to training. Bernard remembered specifically learning one thing during training:

> One thing that I did learn was just protocol, simple protocol. Definitely
> just going through the hoops, like, "how do you do the reports? How do
> you fill out the evaluations and proposals?" We go over that in training.
> "What exactly do RDs want?" Going over those things directly applies
> every week, month, and day, and every time I'm on duty. I would not have
> known to have called the RD on Duty if it hadn't been for training. Also, I
> remember BCD's and just knowing how to do simple things. Wow, see I
> didn't even think about that.

Every participant shared their perspective and dislike on the amount of administrative paperwork involved with the RA position. Although they understood the implications and necessity of this job component, it did not mitigate their frustrations. Most of them attributed training as the time and place where they learned about these specific forms and processes, but the findings varied as to if this content was learned during structured sessions or from returning staff members throughout the training schedule.

An important characteristic of training for participants was that it established a background of information and skills that RAs could draw on whenever they needed to address particular situations. Bernard explained it was during training when he learned about this background information that guided him,

. . . in this situation, do this. It gives you a lot of "what if" situations to get

you thinking right. So then when you come in you sort of just have a good

overall knowledge of things and you can sort of dive in.

Nowhere was this more practical or helpful than the Behind Closed Doors session

conducted towards the end of training.

Behind Closed Doors

Across all participants in this study, Behind Closed Doors (BCDs) was reported

as the most important, valuable, and applicable element of Fall training regarding all of

the content learned. Veera summarized multiple perspectives:

I think that probably that was one of the most effective parts of training. I

know a lot of people, like myself included, we learned more in that than

words can probably teach somebody. . . . I think that is probably the most

helpful part of training because to think on your feet and that quickly is

like, "wow."

In addition to being an important part of training, Behind Closed Doors was also

exhausting, as several participants discovered. Anna shared with BCDs falling at the end

of a long week of training, "you are going through so many situations all at one time.

They kinda blend because you're really tired." However, as Veera pointed out,

participating in or observing so many different scenarios was positive because, "every

situation is always going to be different. You never know how RAs are going to act or

what they're going to do in a certain situation."

A significant reason why BCDs was such a powerful session was due to its ability to synthesize several components of training into one highly applicable opportunity focused on RAs doing what was expected of them in the position. Nathan believed:

> I think the best thing we did, that was strictly RA-oriented, not safety or things like that, was Behind Closed Doors training, because that was real role playing where people act as if they're a resident and you have to go solve their problem, more or less. I think a lot of the other RAs that I've talked with have agreed that that was one of the better parts of training, like after you've gone through your endless meetings that we go through and teambuilding activities, it all comes down to the point when you really have to start being that RA and enforcing policy or talking with your residents about issues, or just being there for your staff and community. That was really good. Even though that was kind of nerve-racking for me, it was like, I look back on it and it was one of the better parts of training.

Throughout this study, an underlying theme was the notion of new RAs not knowing what was expected of them in the job as they participated in training activities. They sat in training sessions where information was disseminated because training designers and campus partners felt they may need those resources or protocols at some point when interacting with residents. Learning about what it meant to be an RA fell heavily on their previous experiences with RAs and asking questions of returning staff members. As a training activity, BCDs took all of the information they learned from previous experiences, in training, from presenters or each other, and directly applied it to different scenarios that could happen throughout the year.

This created a powerful and overwhelming learning opportunity for RAs, both new and returning, as every scenario was different regardless of the pre-determined script and every confronting RA possessed a different skill set and comfort level compared to the staff members in their group. Ultimately, BCDs were designed not only to provide opportunities for RAs to apply what they learned, but to do so in a safe setting where it was acceptable if they made a mistake. From his third-year perspective, Austin shared, "the purpose is to learn. That's why, not that you want people to fail, but you want people to have flaws so that you can have something to work for and get better at." This type of activity was one of the few training sessions where making mistakes was encouraged because that was how performers, observers, and the confronting RA all learned about different situations and the skills necessary to confront them.

Earlier Nathan mentioned the "nerve-racking" nature of BCDs, which was a perception of this type of activity passed down through generations of RAs. Returning RAs talked about BCDs with new staff members and although most of their goals were not to scare new RAs, their descriptions of the experience tended to create fear in the hearts of new staff members who did not want to make mistakes in front of their peers. Scenarios were acted in a way that the performers, who were generally returning RAs, felt was the best way for new RAs to experience different situations. This meant that some scenarios were routine in nature, similar to an average night on duty, while others were more extreme situations that may happen once or twice a year.

Participants shared opinions about their experiences on both ends of the spectrum as to if BCDs should be acted out identical to routine situations or if they should be slightly more challenging to confront. Ashley commented:

I know there were the scary BCD's because I think they were really
played up – I think a lot of people stressed out about that. I don't think you
should stress new RAs about that it. I know I was not stressed out, it was
just going to be funny.

From a returning RAs perspective, Jeff understood that some of the extreme examples
may happen over the course of the year, but were not likely:

The thing with the BCDs is, a lot of those things are pretty stretched. You
may or may not have to deal with those types of situations. I know I didn't
have to deal with a lot of those, but at the same time, it's something that's
out there, it's possible.

Austin saw the benefits of scenarios acted out in ways that reflected some of the
infrequent occurrences when on duty throughout the year. From his perspective:

I don't want BCDs to be watered down, you know, let's go easy on them,
because if you can deal with a situation in BCDs that's like 10 times worse
than you'll ever face, I know for me, that when I actually face the real
thing, it's just kind of like, *pffffft*, that was easy. I did the party room my
first year as an RA and it was like 10 times more intense than what we did
this year and when I had my first situation on duty, the first one I had was
pretty big, but it didn't really feel like anything, it just felt like going
through protocol type stuff. I always think you should face something in
BCDs bigger than you're actually going to face so that when you actually
face that, you don't start to panic or anything. You're like, "Oh, this is
nothing, I know what to do."

Although the level of the scenario was generally left up to the returning RAs, it was possible for supervisors and training designers to place parameters on performers' behaviors to mimic normal situations that occurred throughout the year, but with slightly elevated tones. This way, new RAs learned from confronting average-type situations, but developed skills to address more challenging circumstances at the same time.

Ultimately, the whole purpose of BCDs was to provide a learning opportunity for new staff, preparing them for being an RA and addressing situations beyond the supportive environment of training. Austin continued his perspective on BCDs by sharing, "I think they prepare people. You will hardly ever get something where you walk in the room and it's a slam dunk, which to me, I think is good because you want people to have that sense of improvement." Participating in BCDs was designed to help new RAs improve their confrontation skills when addressing situations, and most participants in this study understood that to improve, there had to be some level of challenge with the potential for making a mistake. Austin brought this point home when he said, "you don't want to have someone just like come in and knock it out of the park because they are not really learning anything."

Having returning staff members act out situations, as well as the presence of supervisory staff was important because it provided a significant amount of resources in one room for the new RA confronting a scenario and any observing staff members. Although Ashley felt BCDs were overplayed, she did find them useful:

> It makes you think about what you're gonna do and what you're gonna
>
> say. And then if you realized that you do need to ask a lot of questions
>
> about how you should handle the situation because you do not have a lot

of specifics, that is what the staff is for, asking people who have done it already, "What would you do? What should you do? What do you recommend I do?"

A critical component of BCDs is returning RAs offering positive and constructive feedback for their newer peers. This was one of the few times during training, if not the only one, where new RAs heard directly from their more seasoned peers feedback on what they did, as opposed to solely offering advice or counsel about what being an RA was like. Veera explained from her perspective:

It is really nice to hear advice from your peers, and not hear it just from just your supervisor because I think that it makes a difference. As new RAs, we are like, "they have experienced the situation and usually they will tell real stories." It just hits home a lot more than someone standing up front with us saying "you have to do this." It just gets you more engaged in learning about what you have to do.

Receiving feedback definitely impacted the person it was directed at, but also important were the other new RAs who observed a peer confront a scenario. Bernard remembered witnessing other new RAs doing well and not so well when confronting situations:

You get to see other people and their faults in BCDs and what they're doing right in BCDs. You're able to sort of pinpoint things, like, "you're supposed to do this, this, and this, turn on the lights, don't turn on the lights in this situation," and you're able to visualize it. You're being fed all of this stuff, but until you are able to visualize, it really doesn't take

shape until you're able to see it. That is the culminating point of RA

training.

Veera had a similar experience when watching her peers confront situations. She shared:

I was in the room observing and I'm thinking "oh, my gosh, what are you

doin? What are you doin?" It's interesting hearing somebody be like, "oh,

hey, I wouldn't have thought to say that say that, that's really, really good,

that helped me a lot." I think that everybody I talked to really enjoyed it.

In addition to learning to address certain situations, the knowledge of others on staff who

had strong skill sets in certain situations was critical. Veera also learned,

. . . who is good at what situations. If I am not totally comfortable with a

situation, I know who's really good at it and I can call them up. I think it is

extremely helpful to know that everybody can't be good at everything.

This level of experiential learning was important for when new and returning RAs

were on duty and interacted with residents during the course of the year because it

provided a basic set of skills to be referred back to when needed. Mack explained,

. . . BCDs set the tone for how you are going to handle situations on your

own even if you aren't in those specific situations themselves. Hopefully

you absorb what you did right and wrong because a lot of the things that

you learn, you have to use when you have a real situation. The basics are

always there.

Once RAs experienced BCDs with their peers acting as residents, Mack felt it was much

easier to understand how RAs were supposed to approach residents in various situations.

Michelle's perspective was similar, "I think BCDs are super helpful, just in case you do

come in contact with certain situations, you have kind of an idea of what to do. I think that's important."

During the course of the study, participants shared experiences in which they directly applied what they learned in BCDs to their position as RAs. Even though Anna was only able to confront one scenario during BCDs, she remembered:

The first time I had to confront a real situation with drinking, and it was

my first time addressing anything. I wasn't sure because we were first-

year RAs and just walked on by it. Then we were like, "ok, we really gotta

go do something about this." That was the BCD I had and even though I

knew all the people in the room during that BCD, it still made confronting

this situation easier, even though it still just doesn't compare to actually

doing it.

Training and BCDs in particular, provided some instruction on how to address some situations, but when RAs actually applied what they learned, they learn more about themselves, others, and various situations. Mack explained:

You get some instruction during training but when you actually have to

apply it, I think you learn a lot more. There are some things that you don't

get until you are in that situation for real. Until you really have to bust a

party, you really don't know how to handle it for real.

With everything learned during BCDs, it was unanimous among participants that BCDs were the best part of training. Anna explained the direct connection of BCDs to her job as an RA throughout the year:

I would say that the Behind Closed Doors would be the most important

component of training cause that was really when I felt more comfortable

with the position as like, an RA. It was during BCDs that I actually had a

chance to be an RA, and put all the things in training to use.

Jessica's experience was almost identical:

I think BCDs kind of tie a lot of that learning in together, as far as letting

people see, "here's what you do, you gotta listen, you gotta hear, you gotta

watch everything, and now do it, all at the same time."

Although new RAs confronted scenarios, learning occurred for everyone

involved, confronting RAs, observing RAs, and returning RAs who acted. Even after two

years of participating in BCDs and two full years on staff as an RA, Austin pointed to this

year's BCD session as helpful:

I think I learned a lot from it, just watching people do it as an actor, and

seeing what they're doing wrong. It's almost like you're going through the

room with them. In the party situation, I got up and walked out, thinking

to myself the whole time, "hopefully they won't touch me." So, it's an

important refresher for the returners, too, it's amazing how much you pick

up on by just watching people do it.

Every participant in this study clearly found this component of training to be most

important and valuable because they had an opportunity apply what they learned over the

previous eight days to relatively realistic situations. Just as every RA had a unique

background of experiences and skill set, so too did their new residents, which was why

one other specific training session was highlighted by the participants in this study –

Diversity Training.

Diversity Training

The concept of diversity training for RAs has become a large issue over the past

several years, with the increasing diversity in students attending higher education

(American Council on Education, 2000-2001; Kezar, 2008; Pinel, Warner, & Chua,

2005). Participants shared they have been receiving multicultural and diversity-type

training throughout their primary and secondary schooling, so by the time they reached

college, many felt they were "diversity-trained out." While all participants in this study

shared the common belief that learning about diversity was important, they also reflected

a continuum of thought from those who believed diversity was an issue that needed to be

included in training to those who felt it was unnecessary.

As a second-year RA, Michelle believed, "an understanding of diversity is

important for RAs." Jessica took this notion a step further by stating, "as a staff, I think

we need to do more diversity training because, yes, we have a racially diverse staff, but I

don't think people realize how some comments that are made are really inappropriate."

Several participants shared this viewpoint because a number of past diversity related

training sessions, workshops, and classroom lectures they participated in focused on race,

gender, and sexual orientation. For this reason, Jessica described her perspective:

> I also think diversity training is really important because a lot of times,
>
> people look at diversity as like, race, languages, and just like, the very
>
> visible things, but not like [pointing to two different imaginary people],
>
> "ok, well, she's from Gardner and she's from Gardner, but they're really

different, even though they're from the same place." So, I think that is

really important because it teaches people to look below the surface.

Agreeing partially with his fellow second-year RAs, Michelle and Jessica, Jeff

explained that from his perspective, "I think the problem with diversity is that it's one of

those things that we all want, but we're pretty much set in our ways already, so it's kind

of hard to change things." He continued to explain that it was not that RAs, or college

students in general, did not view diversity and multicultural as important, but diversity

training tended to focus on identity groups he felt he already learned about from his K-12

schooling and did not need supplemental instruction as an RA. Rather, he explained he

would appreciate,

> . . . being introduced to different ideas, I guess, and different ways of
>
> thinking, rather than focusing on our differences in race, gender, sexual
>
> orientation, those things. I think those things have been pretty much done
>
> A LOT, maybe focus differently on how you would see different things.

After laying the foundation for participants' perspectives regarding diversity

training in general, it was important to explore how they perceived the diversity session

during this year's RA training. As stated earlier, diversity training occurred on a Monday

and consisted of two sessions on either side of lunch. The first session was a description

of global diversity-related statistics, narrowed down to the Hunter University campus,

and the second session involved all RAs watching the movie, *Higher Learning* and

participating in an RD-facilitated conversation afterwards. As demonstrated by the

following RA perspectives, very few remembered the first session, while most

participants remembered the movie, not necessarily the name, characters, or plot, but some of the messages contained within.

After having been through several diversity training sessions, Austin appreciated this year's diversity component, as he explained:

I think diversity is good, but it just seems like the way it's always presented in training is like "boom, here it is, take it in your face," kind of thing. Whereas this one was very relaxed, you know, you're going over some figures, here we're watching this movie with a discussion afterwards, and the movie really hit home on a lot of people. I thought that was better than someone sitting there and talking to us about diversity for an hour and half. I think you can interact with each other a lot better after you have watched a movie than when you are just sitting there listening to someone talk.

The movie was something that struck several participants because it stimulated more senses than just listening to a speaker or viewing a training video. Also, with participants quietly watching a movie in a theater, there was no room for distraction from other RAs, especially with the intensity of several scenes in the movie.

Such an intense training tool was useful because it helped make people think about themselves and their relationships with others. As Veera remembered, the movie "was definitely very impactful," but left RAs in the theater feeling slightly overwhelmed. Veera continued sharing about the movie and discussion, "I feel like watching the movie, we become aware of diversity in our environment, but everybody was so numbed over the movie, that I know our discussion didn't really go anywhere." Several of the small

RD-facilitated discussion groups ended quickly after the movie, which caused some

participants to feel as though they wasted their time that afternoon. Reflecting on that day

Ashley recalled, "that was a big block of time that I don't really think was necessary,

cause we had a little discussion that lasted about 5-10 minutes and then we left. I don't

think I learned anything in that movie that would help me."

Where some staff members felt as though watching the movie was not very

productive, Veera offered a perspective for its influence on others:

> Everybody was just so sad after it, which, I mean is normal and okay, but,
>
> I feel as RAs, most of us already have a sense and appreciation of
>
> diversity and we're all pretty much compassionate, so it makes sense that
>
> we're really sad after the movie. Because obviously we all appreciate
>
> different people and we are okay with different people or we probably
>
> would not be in this job anyway.

This thought raised an important point about individuals who were chosen to be RAs and

what experiences and perspectives they brought to the position. In general, residential life

professionals and graduate students who selected RAs hoped they chose RAs who were

ready and willing to build community with their residents, get to know their staff and

community members as individuals, and learn about themselves at the same time. Part of

this desire for selected staff was that they stretched themselves to open their mind to new

experiences beyond what they had known.

In his small group debriefing session, Mack experienced a staff member whose

reaction to the movie caught him off guard and helped him understand there were RAs

who had different experiences than his own:

One of the first comments we got was, "well, I felt like everything was exaggerated, everything was overwhelming, like, none of that stuff happens all at once in one place at one time." That kind of shocked me because, well, one thing was that this person was a minority and it kind of shocked me that they're in a place where they feel like those kind of issues aren't prevalent, at least to the point that they didn't see the point of the movie was to exaggerate these things so that we could talk about it. It was meant to shock you, but they kind of wrote it off as being unrealistic and they didn't get the message behind the movie.

Mack's experience with this one staff member was not isolated, as when Ashley reflected on the movie, she had a similar reaction, "I remember that movie we watched and we had the little discussion afterwards. The movie was just a bunch of stereotypes compiled. You would not see that type of stuff everywhere, it took things to the extreme." However, she mentioned that although exaggerated, she saw how the movie "showed you different situations that you might encounter on the job."

It was important to know several participants connected the movie to their role as RAs in their communities, but according to Mack, diversity was still a topic that was not covered enough in this year's training:

I don't think we really had some good discussion time on diversity. After seeing *Higher Learning*, I thought we really needed to spend some time really talking about those issues. Based on the short time we had after *Higher Learning*, I saw that there are a lot of RAs, and I've already known

this, but there are a lot of RAs who have issues dealing with diversity
themselves.

Hearing this insight from a participant was important for training designers and
supervisors because it impacted diversity and multicultural-related topics covered in
training, especially with the input from other participants who found diversity training
unnecessary or extreme.

Katie offered a comprehensive synthesis to this exploration of RAs' meaning
making of the diversity training experience:

I like the fact at least once during training you're told to watch a thought
provoking movie. I think that watching a movie like *Higher Learning*
should definitely be kept in training. I think that what is really important is
that when you listen to a speaker talk about an uncomfortable issue or
watch a movie talking about an uncomfortable issue to remind your staff
that it's as important as anything else in training, so they should pay
attention. I understand that there are things about it that people are
uncomfortable with and may not want to participate in, but I think that
watching that kind of movie is really important to because it makes you
examine how you view other people and how you are going to view your
residents. I think that any activity that makes you second guess or question
how you have acted in the past, or how some of your words or actions if
they are bigoted or racist come across, you definitely help people review
their life before they apply it to their residents.

Everything learned in RA training is designed and intended to be used for self-exploration, as well as getting to know peer RAs and residents. With this knowledge, RAs can be in a place where they can better meet residents' growth and development needs.

To close this section with a highly practical example, Anna had a situation around mid-year where several residents in a suite, "ganged up" on one resident because of his ethnicity. She shared how diversity training related to that situation as well as her entire experience on staff:

> The diversity training was definitely helpful with that incident that
>
> happened in one of my suites this past year. It made me aware of
>
> stereotypes that are used and how slurring others could be hurtful. I have
>
> used that throughout the job because I try not to say things that would put
>
> me in a position to reflect poorly on Housing, where as in my previous
>
> year I might have come out and say something that wasn't correct. I
>
> wouldn't do it all the time, but I am just more aware that if I do say
>
> something, it reflects more than on myself.

The diversity component during this year's training provided an experience for new and returning RAs to explore their own identities and how they related to others in the world around them. Although this occurred during two sessions on one day, the entire training curriculum was generally designed to do this on multiple levels and various topics.

Content was seen as relationship building with staff peers, RDs, and residents, just as much as it covered the skills and knowledge needed to follow protocols and fill out the correct forms as an RA. Participants in this study each experienced training in a

different way, even though they all went through the same curriculum. The content learned from each structured session and unstructured interaction with others impacts how RAs view training, as well as how they view the RA role. By exploring all of these components in depth, individually and collectively, training designers and supervisors can better address the needs of RAs participating in RA training prior to the Fall term.

Discussion

Reviewing transcripts and reflecting on field notes, observations, and my researcher's journal drew these five themes to the forefront of my experience in this study. Yet, when I think about the data and the individual experiences of these 12 participants, I question whether I have truly honored their meaning-making of Fall RA training and what they have applied throughout the year. Each person had an intricate and elaborate story of how their previous life experiences brought them to apply for the RA position, and that background did not get wiped clean when entering RA training. Thus, each person experienced RA training in very different ways. Although the five themes of Building RA Relationships, Awareness and Influence of RDs, RA Experience Over Time, RA Training Structure, and RA Training Content Remembered stretched across all 12 participants' lives, I feel I have missed so much about their individual experiences both in and after training that I question how much I have been able to honor their stories in this manuscript.

I know and understand my experiences as an RA for three years and my many years working with RAs from Fall training through the academic year influenced how these themes emerged. Through continuous reflection on this data, participating in two Fall RA training sessions, and insightful conversations with peer reviewers

knowledgeable in the residential life field, my confidence in these five themes remains high. One reason for this lies in my own expectation that additional themes would arise that did not, which caught me by surprise when reflecting on the data and talking with colleagues around the country regarding RA training.

What became clear throughout this process was the importance of building and maintaining strong relationships for RAs during and after Fall training. This was the only time during the year where they had each other's undivided attention for eight full days. Although the training schedule was rigorous and demanding, and the sheer amount of information shared with RAs was overwhelming, their priorities remained getting to know each other and their supervisors prior to the arrival of residents. Each participant knew how important this team building time frame was, because once residents moved into their residential spaces, RAs saw each other less throughout the course of the year, but continued to work closely. While new RAs may not have expected the inevitable separation of RAs from each other when classes began based on their limited experience, returning RAs quickly shared the perspective through training.

Strong relationships served in multiple roles for RAs over the course of the academic year, from switching duty shifts, to collaborative programming, to knowing who on staff had the most experience in addressing various crisis and non-crisis situations with residents. Without the foundation of close, intentional relationships built during Fall training, these aspects of working as an RA on a team become significantly more challenging. Returning RAs were well aware of this and were sure to explain the importance of relationships to new staff members immediately upon arrival.

The significance of these relationships included RAs getting to know RDs and feeling confident in their supervisors' abilities to be strong RDs, in addition to being supportive, honest, and respectful employers. New and returning RAs alike were aware of, and experienced both positive and negative relationships with supervisors and shared their stories with each other. Having a supportive, caring supervisor helped RAs feel confident in their abilities during training to learn information that applied to their job when residents arrive. However, an unhealthy relationship with a supervisor was detrimental to individual RAs, their staff teams, and residents. This potential dynamic places a tremendous amount of pressure on supervising RDs, as well as the department administrators who hired and trained them.

In a perfect world, every RA would meet one another and their RD at the beginning of training, if not before, and everybody would have an opportunity to get to know each other on an equal level. This was impossible, due to human nature's innate ability not only to pass judgment quickly on people and situations, but also in sharing personal perceptions with others, which then impacted others' abilities to build relatively non-biased relationships. The data in this study showed how new RAs' abilities to develop relationships with each other and supervisors was influenced by returning staff members' perspectives. This impacted relationships yet to be formed, as well as how RAs perceived training and the RA job.

While I have seen this relationship situation within most every position I have started, the power of perception in an employment environment still surprises me. Participants in this study perceived the world around them, RA-related or not, based on little-to-no facts, and those perceptions influenced their entire experience, from building

relationships, being on time for presentations, engaging in activities, finishing projects, and so on. Positive perceptions can reinforce an individual's ability to view new people and situations with an open mind, which then leads them to experience a situation or person with fresh eyes and build relationships or perspectives solely on the information they have. However, negative information about someone or a situation significantly impacts one's perception and it becomes a much more challenging process to build a positive image. Throughout this study, the sociological ramifications of how participants' perceived relationships altered RAs' connections with each other and supervisors, as well as how they viewed and experienced training and the RA position.

Adding to the power of what was shared with whom, was the level of experience each RA had prior to training. As the RA Experience Over Time theme emerged, it became clear how overwhelmed new RAs were with the intensity of training, as well as all that was required of them for the position. While each participant's perspective of the RA position and training was different the day they started training, the overall common thread among their experiences was that they did not realize the extent of what was expected of them during training or over the course of their RA position. This overwhelming nature of training and the position influenced each new RA throughout their experience, and in some cases was the prevailing reason why they chose not to return to staff for a second year. Although still dedicating themselves to staff peers and residents, feelings of being misled and lied to by previous RAs and residence life staff seemed to take a heavy toll on some participants' experiences.

Being an RA was still seen as valuable and an incredible growth opportunity, which led new RAs to continue investing time and energy into the position and the

communities for which they were responsible. Even though these first-year staff members saw a gap in what they perceived of the position and its actualities, they still touted the positive aspects of their job with residents and others interested in applying, which I found fascinating. As new RAs became acclimated to the position by the end of the first semester, learning how to balance job, class, social, friendship, and family responsibilities and commitments became second nature. Looking back at Fall training helped them reflect that their experience during that time was more about gaining an understanding of what it meant to be an RA and how to balance their lives than it was about the information needed to be successful staff members and resources for residents.

As a residence life professional working with RAs and staff members to design and implement training over the past 10 years, this phenomenon was intriguing. Training designers spend a significant amount of time piecing together an enormous puzzle of topics, learning outcomes, presenters, and locations into a comprehensive schedule so new and returning RAs can be exposed to, and benefit from, all the information and resources to help them enhance their residents' lives. Participants in this study relayed to me over a full academic year that they seldom specifically remembered anything from training beyond the relationships they formed with other RAs, other than the fact that if they could survive training, they could survive as an RA. Whatever they learned from training was from conversations with returning RAs that then led to a continual series of trial-and-error experiences once training was over.

This seemed to be slightly ironic, because if they did not learn anything in training sessions, why did they view the training schedule as so intense with so much information presented? The only conclusion I can draw from this dichotomy was that

while they were trying to be attentive during training, they gained as much information as possible that as individuals, they thought was important. At the conclusion of training, they understood the value of team work, the importance of returning RAs' perspectives, the need for community building, and the necessities of upholding university and department policies. While they may not have remembered specifics from training sessions, the information, guidance, and perspectives shared by returning staff members heavily influenced their perceptions of training and the RA position once residents arrived.

Overwhelmingly, returning RA participants found training to be long and boring, with the exception of opportunities when they built relationships with RAs on their staffs, RDs, and other RAs across the neighborhood. Any content covered during structured training sessions was redundant for the most part and thus, returning RAs were responsible for helping new RAs make sense of what was supposed to be learned. This dialogue generally occurred during unstructured staff bonding time between sessions and after the structured training schedule concluded each day. Returning RAs found their second year to be much easier than their first year and they continually focused on building and maintaining staff relationships. Their feelings about the training schedule mirrored those of their first-year colleagues in that it was time intensive, but where new RAs tended to pay attention during structured sessions, returning RAs struggled to be attentive because they already knew the information and either had opportunities to apply it or felt it did not apply to them.

Returning RA participants expressed their desire for a separate training curriculum that offered more challenging information beyond what new RAs learned, but

struggled because of the importance they placed on building relationships with new staff members. Even though the content in structured sessions may not have been applicable for them, they saw these sessions as opportunities to continue building relationships with new RAs and offer their perspectives about how to address situations raised in those particular training sessions. This clearly created a rather large question for training designers: Do returning RAs have separate training sessions so they get different information from new staff members at the cost of building relationships, or do new and returning RAs remain together with the hope that returning staff members stay engaged? In our conversations, new and returning participants bounced back and forth over this question because of their desire not to be bored in redundant training sessions and their desire to build relationships with each other. Returning RAs knew that sharing their experiences would help new RAs visualize the application of learned material and skills to residential communities and the RA role.

While they emerged as separate themes during this study, it became clear how RA Training Structure and RA Training Content Remembered were inextricably woven throughout the fabric of how new and returning RAs made meaning of the training experience. However, there were important points to be associated with these themes that stood alone separate from relationships and each RA's level of experience over time. As mentioned earlier, the training schedule was developed over several months to provide information that would help RAs meet their residents' needs. Providing a significant amount of information and resources delicately balanced with the needs of the RA audience during training created a situation where the need for information tipped the scales leaving RAs tired and overwhelmed.

At Hunter University, the time frame for training was influenced by how many meals the residence life department could afford for RAs prior to resident check-in. In addition to this determining the length of training, structured sessions involving campus partners were set based on when those partners were available. This created a situation where many RAs who returned from a summer of sleeping in and relatively open schedules returned to campus and immediately inundated with information from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. Then, because that time period was just when campus partners were available, RAs participated in additional staff meetings and other presentations until 9:00 or 10:00 p.m., leaving limited free time and time for sleep.

During the training schedule, training designers incorporated free time to allow RAs opportunities to take care of personal business or sleep, but that time became occupied with the projects to be accomplished by the time residents moved in, such as bulletin boards, door decorations, facilities inventories, and placing welcome kits in students' rooms, among other tasks. Seldom did RAs in this study feel as if they actually had free time to purchase books for class, address their financial status with the institution, or visit friends they had not seen since May. However, during some of this free time, RAs found opportunities to hang out with each other, which continued assisting in the development of a team atmosphere on each staff evident when staffs showed up and sat together during training sessions.

Having all the RAs in a large room to participate in training activities was beneficial mostly for training designers and presenters, as opposed to RAs who were the recipients of presented information. Some returning RAs highlighted the positive aspects of having all 60 staff members in one room, such as the ability to interact with, and build

relationships with, RAs across the neighborhood, as well as being a learning environment where returning RAs shared perspectives and stories. By far, a preference from new and returning RAs was that information be shared in smaller groups, ideally within each staff team. RAs felt this environment was more conducive to learning new information because new RAs had built trust with returning staff members, who shared experiences that helped new RAs visualize the application of learned information, thus increasing the likelihood of retaining and then applying what they learned. If large group activities were necessary for training designers, then limiting lecturing to 45 minutes and including smaller group activities created a better learning environment.

In addition to the format of structured training sessions, participants shared the importance of energetic presenters who knew their subject matter and were excited about presenting it. The ability for presenters to assess the their audiences' needs was crucial, because as new or returning RAs fell asleep, they expected presenters to be aware and alter direction of the learning environment in order to reengage a tired audience. Just as most participants could not share with me what they learned in training, they also could not remember the names of who presented what sessions without the training schedule in front of them. This surprised me because presenters consisted of their RDs, assistant directors of that campus, and campus partners RAs contacted throughout the year to schedule educational programming for residents. This increased my awareness as a training designer and residence life professional about the sheer amount of information RAs are expected to learn and retain. Participants shared that if there was a connection between audience (individually or collectively) and presenter, information was more likely to be learned. If RAs cannot remember individuals whom they worked with on a

daily and weekly basis who presented information less than a week after training concluded, how much content can they be expected to learn, retain, and apply?

This brings me to the actual content of training that RAs remember, which administrators and training designers generally insist on being the most important part of RAs' experiences in training. The symbolism of where this theme is in relation to the four others is as clear as the meanings both new and returning RAs made of content during training and its application afterwards. As shared above, most of the training content learned and retained by participants, which they could remember and relay in our conversations, occurred during informal interactions with experienced RAs. I believe the reason this information from returning staff members was so valuable was that they were able to do what presenters struggled with: provide practical examples through real life stores to which new RAs could relate.

Most training sessions allocated time for the presentation of knowledge and skills, but tended to lack opportunities for RAs to actually apply information they learned. As shared above, sessions where RAs learned the most were when small groups engaged in dialogue, and when that happened, new RAs benefited from the breadth and depth of experienced staff members who walked through specific situations with what happened and how the situation was addressed. Training sessions that infused background information, necessary skills, and applicable examples were more likely to meet the needs of new RAs looking for that educational combination.

Participants also mentioned the significance of training content being age- and college student-appropriate, such as examples, case studies, and role playing activities, as well as all pertinent information applicable to the population for which it was intended.

All examples and resource information applied to the age group and college student status that RAs work with helps them apply what they learned. Providing other examples to demonstrate the applicability of skills learned beyond the collegiate environment tended to be lost on RAs. Participants shared feelings of anxiousness during training as they were focused on trying to determine what information they were responsible for that would directly apply to their prospective residents who would arrive shortly.

In addition to RAs' general perception of their residents' needs, was their perception of their own skills, both of which dramatically influenced their motivation and ability to learn, retain, and apply information learned in training. As some of the participant biographies and themes indicated, RAs who were confident in their skills and felt no additional learning could be attained through training, went into training with that mindset and commented that they did not learn anything when training concluded. However, RAs who desired to learn new information, were concerned about the intensity of the training schedule, and were overwhelmed by the nature of the position were more likely to seek additional knowledge and skills during training. As shown through the emergent themes, every participant experienced training in different ways. This was largely based on past experiences; confidence level regarding RA responsibilities; perception of the position, peer RAs, and their supervisor; motivation for becoming an RA; and the complex synthesis of their motivation and ability to learn particular content matter.

In addition to the complexity of attributes that influenced how much RAs learned during training was their perception of what information was important. Demonstrated by participants' lack of remembering information from training, I feel there was a significant

gap in what training designers, supervisors, and presenters highlighted as important and what RAs felt was important in their jobs. Throughout this study, it became remarkably clear that those organizing and implementing training felt all the information within was important and communicated that importance to RAs. Prior to training, RAs heard that everything they would experience over the next eight days *was important* and that they needed to be attentive and learn everything; while at the same time they needed to build relationships with their staff team, because that *was also important*; and then also get their communities ready for residents because that *was important*; it is no wonder why RAs felt training was overwhelming.

While feeling inundated, RAs did what they could to make sense of what information was really important that they and their residents could not live without. Placing RAs in situations where they decided what was important for their residents without the experience to know what could be more important than something else was potentially dangerous. For this reason, it made sense that new RAs relied so heavily on returning RAs to determine what information was really important and what sessions were not. As the literature review demonstrated, providing too much information during training sessions can result in decreased retention, as opposed to focusing on fewer items and having staff members feeling well versed in those fewer items (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Kelly et al., 1985; Mozel, 1957; Noe, 1986). Participants in this study sensed this overwhelming nature of training content, which left new RAs struggling to make sense of its importance and returning RAs questioning why they needed the information again when they had not applied it their previous year on staff.

Without a common understanding from new and returning RAs of what content was truly important for them to learn throughout training, the significance of RA training became relationship building between new and experienced staff members. A full circle of discussion returns the reader to the beginning of this section, which reflects in part the complexity and interwoven nature of these participants' experiences during training and throughout the academic year when I had numerous conversations with them.

Researchers' Reflections

At this point, I would like to step outside the data for a brief moment to share two themes I thought would emerge, but did not for most participants. Just as there are exceptions to every rule, the following themes were shared in part by some participants, but not to the level I originally expected. After redirecting several questions during interviews and focus groups, I continued to be surprised that most participants did not, or could not, share with me how the identity groups they associate with influenced their positions as RAs, nor was there significant mention about how Fall training connected to their residents. Although I was not too surprised during our first round of interviews and focus groups as participants were becoming acquainted with me, the job, and their residents, this trend continued throughout the year with very little mention of either theme I anticipated would emerge. There were occasional individual conversations where either or both of these topics surfaced, but not across participants.

In my experience working with RAs, as well as organizing and implementing RA training activities for over 10 years, individual and group conversations occasionally yielded information about how a staff member with a certain background saw how their personal story impacted their life, as well as their residents' lives. I have seen this occur

at a number of institutions where I worked across the U.S. and assumed that during this study, when I inquired as to how RAs' identities influenced their positions, a wealth of information would be disclosed. It was highly possible that due to the nature of the study, how infrequently they saw me, and their perception of our relationship led them to feel uncomfortable disclosing this level of personal information. I struggle with this possibility, as I worked closely with several participants prior to the study and felt we had a strong relationship where details about who they were and how their identities influenced their roles as RAs would be drawn forward.

Attempting to take the researcher out of the situation for a moment and reflecting on the data leads me to have concerns about RAs in today's higher education environment and their ability to know their own identities. Re-examining the training schedule and my field notes, I noticed the team building activities with all RAs on the first day of training were not only brief, but focused on solely physical activities, where the goal was to get to know other RAs' names. There was limited disclosure past the point of name and face recognition. Traditional diversity sessions occasionally elicit personal disclosure in small groups, but that type of activity did not occur during this training curriculum. The first part of diversity training within this curriculum was a sample of international facts and percentages about identity groups, which were then narrowed down to Hunter University. In this session, minimal conversation among participants occurred. The second component to the diversity training was a movie, followed by brief small group facilitation, where only one group of six stayed beyond 20 minutes.

Towards the end of the training schedule was a session on the DISC Inventory (Marston, 1928), designed to help participants learn more about how they communicated and interacted with others in various situations. While the activity was initially designed to spur significant conversation among participants, this session lasted approximately an hour and a half. According to some participants, the facilitator did not seem too familiar with the instrument, nor was he able to answer specific questions, causing lack of interest and attention on behalf of attendees. Otherwise, there were no additional opportunities in training for RAs to examine in depth their communication, leadership, or learning styles, nor how their backgrounds and identity groups impacted, or influenced, their experiences as college students and RAs. Due to this lack of personal identity exploration during training, my surprise of limited self-disclosure related to their roles as RAs lessened, but still remained. As RAs who interact daily with residents, I feel it is crucial that RAs have a better understanding of who they are and how they interact with others before supporting and challenging residents.

The second theme I was surprised did not seem to emerge was the role RAs' residents played in RAs' meaning-making of training and the application of what they learned during the course of the year. In my experiences, RAs generally apply for the position because they want to help others have a great on-campus living experience, they enjoy giving back to their community, the position would look great on job or graduate school applications, and/or they found the free room and board to be a great incentive. When asked about why they applied for the position, participants in this study were no different.

However, I was surprised that in all my questions and re-directed questions about the RA position, training, staff relationships, supervisor, and residents, seldom was a connection drawn between the RAs' experience in training and being a Resident Advisor to their residents. Stories were shared about how they knew training was important to go through, and they did learn some things during training, but when it came to their relationships with residents, their previous life experiences and specific personal characteristics that helped them build connections with their community. When asked what about their personal characteristics and character helped with this community relationship building, they seemed to be stumped. Ultimately, relationships with residents rested on who each one perceived he or she was as a person (which several struggled to define), a lot of trial and error, and ideas from other RAs on specific skills or activities that help in building relationships.

Several participants shared stories about their residents and interpersonal connections throughout the year, but training did not seem to play a role in that process. It was largely for this reason I was surprised that no theme about residents emerged from the data. Participants seemed to have positive connections with their residents, but those relationships were not influenced by participation in RA training. This was a relatively large disconnect for me when participants in a study on RA training were not able, or did not know how to connect the training they received with the job for which they were hired.

<center>Summary</center>

Over the course of the 2006-2007 academic year, I individually interviewed and facilitated focus group sessions in late August, November, February, and April to better

understand how 12 participants in this study perceived Fall RA training and to what level they applied what they learned during training to their RA positions. With a significant amount of reflection over the data, my field notes, researcher's journal, and dialogue with professional colleagues and an insightful peer reviewer, the following themes emerged: Building RA Relationships; Awareness and Influence of RDs; RA Experience Over Time; RA Training Structure; and RA Training Content Remembered. These themes seemed to spread across all participants' experiences as described to me and each other during interviews and focus groups.

By far, the most important theme for these participants was their relationships with other RAs developed during training, as well as throughout the year. Starting with team building activities and a retreat in the middle of their training schedule, almost all data pointed back to how valuable and important it was for RAs to connect with their staff. The second theme emerging from the data was similar in nature and slightly less noticeable during training: how much participants were aware of, and were influenced by their supervising graduate resident director. These graduate students were seen as the primary element in setting the tone for training, staff relationships, and the residential community. Perceptions of these supervisors prior to training, and their initial actions and decisions during training, heavily impacted the connection each participant had with his or her supervisor. With such weight placed on this relationship and the importance of the supervisor role for participants, a positive or negative connection with the RAs' supervisor greatly influenced RAs' training experiences, as well as their time as RAs over the academic year.

The third theme, RA Experience Over Time, provided a framework or window for how RAs viewed their training experience; specifically, the number of years they had been staff members. New RAs were clearly overwhelmed by training and the RA position until late in the first semester of the job and believed they learned how to balance their multiple commitments from learning how to survive the intense and rigorous training schedule. While most of them felt they did not learn anything during structured training sessions, it became clear throughout the study that in actuality, participants struggled to identify what they learned and where it was learned. It seemed that for these participants, they learned skills needed to be RAs by seeking guidance and support from returning staff members. Second-year RAs were frustrated and bored by the redundancy of training, but realized their importance because they held the answers new RAs were seeking in terms of how to do the RA job. By far, returning RAs' meaning making experiences of training were to build relationships with new RAs, guide them through the comprehensive and rigorous training schedule, and try not to look too annoyed or bored during the sessions they saw as redundant. For third-year RAs, their perception of training's redundancy was similar to the second-year staff members, but the value they placed on relationships and guiding new RAs to success far outweighed their boredom during training.

Generally, training curricula has elements of a schedule, session formats, and presenters who share and facilitate programmatic sessions to relay information to participants. This training was similar. Participants who were new and returning RAs shared how overwhelmed and tired they were throughout the training because the schedule was filled with back-to-back structured sessions. With limited time beyond

sessions, RAs also felt pressure to squeeze in time to build relationships with each other and prepare their communities for incoming residents. Even though they were tired for most of their training experiences, participants made significant efforts to put on their "game faces" for training sessions where they were inundated with information for eight days. During structured sessions, participants shared the same perception that more engagement through small groups and activities applicable to their residents helped RAs learn information, retain it, and later apply it. Presenters played a large role in this process because they were responsible for creating a positive learning environment where training attendees could maximize their learning. Therefore, participants felt presenters needed to be engaging, exciting and energetic, experienced with what they shared, never speak more than 20-45 minutes at a time, and always provide handouts that RAs could take notes on and include in the training manual.

Although content technically included every facet of RA training, a theme of training content remembered by RAs emerged from the data in two specific topics: information shared during structured sessions and information RAs learned from their returning peers. The most significant surprise for me was the participants' inability to remember where and when they learned what they learned to be successful RAs. As a group of 12 RAs, other than Behind Closed Doors and the Diversity sessions, participants could not attribute aspects of their learning to specific individuals, sessions, or interactions. Mostly the content they learned during training came from returning RAs and was tucked away in their minds, only to come out when asked or because they were involved in a situation where that information was relevant. Aside from negative perceptions of training stated previously, several participants mentioned how training was

essential for every RA to go through because it was helpful, and if returning as an RA,

they still wanted to go through it again as a refresher and way to build relationships with

other RAs.

  After conducting this research and reflecting on the themes as they emerged, I am

now more aware than ever as to the complexities of the RA training environment. Even

as these five themes emerged from the participants, there were a multitude of other

factors that may be similar and different for each individual participant as they made

meaning of their training experience. Each participant brought into the training

environment a background, set of experiences, personal characteristics, motivation, and

attitudes that were unique to the individual and created the foundation for how they

viewed, engaged in, learned, retained, and applied information learned in training to their

residents and communities. While there were themes that drew these 12 participants

together in their 2006 Fall RA training experience, it seems with the multitude and

complexity of each student's identity, it was likely there were more differences than

similarities in their experiences, which creates challenges for supervisors, training

designers, and residence life professionals in the future.

CHAPTER VI

MEANING MAKING AND IMPLICATIONS

While this study focused on the meaning-making of 12 participants through Fall

RA training at a large public university in the Southeastern U.S., RAs, graduate students,

and professionals in residence life programs across the country can likely resonate with,

and connect to, stories emerging from this data. Every resident advisor enters Fall RA

training with a set of experiences, priorities, motivations, and overall background that

makes their meaning-making of training solely their own. This individuality enriches the

lives of RAs, residents, and residence life professional and graduate staff members and

challenges residence life training departments to create a comprehensive training program

in which all RAs will identify and maximize their individual learning.

Training designers in residence life and student affairs, as well as trainers beyond

higher education, can benefit from findings emerging from this study. The voices of

these 12 diverse participants can help inform organizations seeking to enhance staff

training across the U.S., for which I can not thank them enough (See Appendix G for my

thank you letter to them and Hunter University). As themes emerged from the data and

dovetailed with my experiences at multiple colleges and universities across the U.S., it

seems that the topics residence life administrators want RAs to learn in fall training were

dramatically dissimilar to what RAs expected to gain from RA training. It appeared from

participants' perspectives, as shown in the previous chapter, their successes as RAs were

largely a compilation of previous experiences, backgrounds, and personal knowledge, not

necessarily connected with their Fall RA training experience. By far, participants in this study shared how little they learned from training sessions, and what they did learn was based on returning RAs' stories and perspectives during and after training. This paradox creates a quandary surrounding what should be included in training to increase RAs' skills so they are not necessarily relying solely on personal history, but are basing interactions with each other and residents on the wealth of knowledge and skills potentially learned in training from professionals, graduate students, campus partners, and experienced peers.

RAs are expected to be first responders in crisis and non-crisis situations, as well as knowledgeable of all campus resources to meet residents' needs (Willenbrock, 2008). Given the significant amount of information necessary to absorb and the limited amount of time to learn this content prior to residents' arrival, Fall RA training will remain an environment in which RAs are exposed to a tremendous amount of information and resources needed to be successful, with limited amount of time devoted to RAs' personal needs or time to focus on building relationships. Training designers can use the findings from this study to reframe how they look at Fall training to enhance schedules and curricula to maximize RA learning, retention, and transfer, thus helping RAs more successfully guide residents through campus living experiences.

The pages that follow summarize the findings of this inquiry as well as connect the findings to implications and recommendations for both practice and research. Throughout the 2006-2007 academic year, it appeared that with almost every experience and perspective shared, participants raised issues that led beyond the scope of this study on Fall RA training, which heavily influences opportunities for future research. In

addition, with Fall RA training serving as a foundation for RAs' experiences working in residence life programs, the section on implications and recommendations for practice is explored from two perspectives: the specific process of training related to training transfer, as well as several organizational processes that impact RAs in their jobs.

Inquiry Summary

Using intrinsic case study design (Creswell, 1998), I explored the meaning-making of RAs participating in Fall RA training at a large public university located in the Southeastern U.S. Data gathered from participants was then analyzed and constructed into themes designed to emphasize the intrinsic nature of how RAs perceived and experienced Fall RA training (Stake, 1994, 2004). The 2006 Fall RA training experience, 12 student RA participants, and their application of what they learned in training over the course of the year became the "case" I explored.

While I began the academic year working at Hunter University and connected with several participants beyond the context of the study at that institution, I accepted a job offer in a separate state in mid-October, and communication between interviews was solely through electronic correspondence. Although I have a background in residence life of over 10 years, including serving as an RA for three years and residence hall director supervising RAs for four years, my goal in this study was not to identify with participants in their role, but to work with them as they reflected on and made meaning of their training and post-training experiences.

I conducted individual interviews and focus groups with all participants over the course of the 2006-2007 academic year, meeting in August, November, February, and April. Each time, I attempted to focus questions to elicit participants' thoughts and

reflections regarding Fall RA training, as well as their current experiences as RAs. Although I tried to maintain focus on the training experience, conversations with RAs stretched beyond training to a diverse array of elements impacting their lives, such as academics, family and friends, residents, peers, supervisors, the RA position, and the organizational context of University Housing and Residential Life. This provided significantly richer data than I expected when the study began and helped me better understand RAs' experiences, both within and beyond the training environment.

Interviews and focus groups were open-ended and semi-structured (Merriam, 1998), with guiding questions developed prior to each session. I remained flexible to participants' experiences and stories, asked clarifying questions when necessary to elicit additional information, and therefore allowed for a deeper understanding of participants' responses (Patton, 1990; Stake, 1995, 2003). All sessions were audio-tape recorded with permission, and after being transcribed, were provided to participants for review and comments, thus helping enrich my understanding of their experiences (Merriam). Throughout data collection and analysis, I maintained a researcher's journal, which allowed me to reflect on participants' and my experiences. This experience was instrumental in documenting my thoughts on the wealth of rich data as it emerged. In addition, ongoing researcher support was provided by peers at Hunter University, my dissertation committee, peer reviewers, colleagues, and students at multiple colleges and universities, as they all assisted me in developing questions, reflecting on the data, and identifying emergent themes.

Five themes emerged from participants' stories and reflections on Fall training. Although there were many smaller themes that connected two or three participants'

experiences, the following themes stretched across all participants' meaning-making of Fall RA training: building RA relationships with peers; awareness and influence of RDs; RA experience over time; training structure; and training content remembered. In addition, themes that did not emerge from the data are cause for my own reflection.

Building RA Relationships

By far, participants emphasized in every interview and focus group the importance of building relationships with other RAs on their staffs during training, as well as maintaining those connections throughout the year. While they had a sense that information presented to them during training sessions was important, the RAs believed they learned what it meant to be an RA and how to actually do the job from each other and from returning RAs in particular.

Awareness and Influence of RDs

The second most significant theme emerging from the study was also relationship-based. This theme focused on the importance of having a supportive, respectful, and empathetic supervisor. If these characteristics existed between employee and supervisor, RAs were more likely to pay attention during all aspects of training. Reasons RAs may have paid more attention were participant-specific. For example several RAs who liked their supervisor and did not want to disappoint them, while others who trusted their supervisor's perspective about important content to learn in training. As diverse as these participants were, so too were their relationships with the RDs who supervised them. Conversely, a negative relationship between RA and supervisor not only impacted the RA's experience during training related to how much was learned, but

lingered throughout the year and ultimately impacted some participants' choice to return for a consecutive year as an RA.

RA Experience Over Time

The number of years participants were employed as RAs also significantly influenced their meaning making related to training and application of their learning from training to the RA job. New RAs were overwhelmed by the amount of information covered in training and what was expected of them as RAs during the year. In terms of content, they did not remember what was covered during training sessions, but instead, clearly articulated what they learned about the position from returning RAs. Second-year RAs were confident in their abilities to do the RA job and saw training as painful and redundant. Although training was seen as useless from a content perspective, because they already knew how to be RAs, second-year RAs valued participating in training because they remembered learning information about the position their first year from more experienced staff members. Seldom did participants who were returning RAs comment that they were glad to revisit content a second time, yet they did appreciate being able to provide information to newer RAs. Similar to second-year RAs' perceptions of training, third-year RAs also saw training as redundant, but they placed even more emphasis on relationship building and ensuring staff dynamics were positive, because their experience of training and the RA position was founded on relationships.

RA Training Structure

When exploring the logistics of Fall RA training, the fourth theme that connected participants revealed the importance of how schedule, format, and presenters influenced

RAs' training experiences. For all participants, the schedule was exhausting, because they woke up early and went to bed late, causing a significant loss in sleep and personal rejuvenation time. For most participants, summers were spent in relative relaxation where they could get the sleep their bodies needed, even if they were working part or full time jobs. In addition, the schedule consisted largely of times when RAs participated in structured training sessions, leaving little time to accomplish administrative tasks needed to prepare their communities for incoming residents. For structured presentations, participants' training experiences were enhanced when sessions were engaging and there were plenty of opportunities to interact with each other, as well as directly apply their new knowledge. Similarly, RAs noted their increased learning from presenters who were engaging, knowledgeable, and excited about the topic on which they presented.

RA Training Content Remembered

Regarding training content, participants struggled to remember what was covered in training sessions but tended to remember what they learned from more experienced RAs. However, there was an ironic distinction in their learning, because participants mentioned that they did not learn anything in training, but when faced with situations in the context of their RA role, somehow they knew what needed to be accomplished. Of information covered in training sessions, participants were clearly influenced by content that included practical examples they could relate to as college students, as well as opportunities to directly apply what they learned. By far, the most important training session was Behind Closed Doors, where RAs had opportunities to act on or address various situations that generally occur when students live on campus. This session was critical, because participants were able to practice skills learned during training in

realistic situations and receive immediate feedback from supervisors and peers. Another

session discussed by all participants was Diversity Training, but feelings about its

importance to the RA position stretched along a continuum from most important to not

important at all. For individuals who identify as members of underrepresented

populations, this particular training session was highly valued, but several participants

who identify with the dominant group felt it was unnecessary.

Researchers' Reflections

While none of these themes were necessarily surprising, based on my experience

as an RA and supervisor of RAs, I was caught off-guard by the absence of the RAs'

articulation regarding how their various identities influence training, as well as the

importance of working with residents. The reaction and thoughts regarding diversity

training help illustrate this point, because most participants did not see the groups with

which they identify as impacting their roles as RAs. Although their backgrounds and

histories helped them do the RA job, the RA participants believed it was more their

personal characteristics and upbringing (not related to identity groups) that influenced

how they perceived training and then experienced the RA role. For example, several

participants mentioned their desire to learn and be hard ethical workers in the RA

position arose from family and K-12 influences and led to their success as RAs. Similarly

absent from the data was the role residents play in how RAs perceived training and the

application of what they learned during the course of the year. While RAs were

predominantly in the job to help residents be successful in college and their priorities

during training were to prepare communities for arriving residents, very seldom did

participants connect what they learned in training to the notion of applying that information to their residents.

Readers of this manuscript are encouraged to seek their own meaning within these participants' stories and perceptions of Fall RA training, as well as the emergent themes identified in the previous chapter. Training designers, residence life professionals and graduate students, and faculty can apply and translate the findings of this study into personal and professional experiences within their own institutions and work. Participants of this study were excited to learn about the emergent findings from the data in hopes that future training designers would create more meaningful Fall RA trainings for RAs who follow in their footsteps. The following sections share implications and recommendations for practice and research with this in mind.

<center>Implications and Recommendations for Practice</center>

When examining the data through multiple lenses, the findings of this study lead to several implications for practice in residence life programs. Through reflection and conversation with participants, peers, and colleagues, I see implications and recommendations from two perspectives. The first lens includes the direct transfer of what I learned through this study to the design and implementation of Fall RA training curricula across the U.S. using the conceptual framework of training transfer discussed in the review of discourses. The second lens consists of applying the findings of this research to the broader context of organizational staffing patterns within residence life programs related specifically to the RA position. While the following sections may categorize specific recommendations for practice, readers should be aware that many of these implications are quite fluid and stretch across topics. For example, including

returning RAs in the design and implementation of Fall training influences the following

four sections discussing increasing transfer, as well as organizational processes of

training, supervision, development, assessment, and evaluation.

Increasing Training Transfer

Entering this study, I felt RAs' motivation to learn, motivation to transfer, and the

process of training transfer would serve as a foundation for RAs' experiences during Fall

training, solely based on my history of working with RAs. While I did not discuss

principles of training transfer with participants, stories of how they made meaning of

their training and how they applied what they learned afterwards clearly rested on the

conceptual foundation of training transfer. Based on these findings, the implications for

practice are shared in the framework of the following training transfer categories:

organizational climate, knowledge acquisition, participants' motivation to learn, and post-

training transfer.

Organizational climate. When residence life staff members and training designers

create schedules and curricula for Fall trainings attention must be given to how RAs view

the department, its graduate and professional staff, other RAs (including other RAs with

whom the new RAs may or may not have had contact), and the actual training process.

The organizational climate surrounding training is influenced by RAs' attitudes about the

position, with a full range of positive and negative RAs who are returning for a second,

third, or even fourth year. As the findings indicate, positive returning RAs slightly

influence the building of staff morale that leads to positive perceptions of training,

whereas negative returning RAs can significantly impact new staff members' perceptions

of training, supervisors, and the department. Therefore, training designers need to

examine the attitudes and skill sets of current RAs when planning training. Taking time prior to training to work with RAs to bolster their positive energy about the department, position, and multiple roles and responsibilities they are responsible for can only help improve the organizational climate. When negative perceptions and attitudes come to fruition in the training environment, presenters and supervisors need to be prepared to offset them with positive ones.

Many new RAs' perspectives of training and the position were heavily influenced by their RAs or based on interactions with RAs prior to applying for the job. Again, this can lead to a range of perceptions even before new RAs move back on campus for the beginning of Fall training, stretching from extremely positive and excited to negative. Residence life staff members and training designers need to assess relationships that exist between RAs prior to the start of training, because those relationships will influence how RAs make meaning of the training experience, both individually and collectively. Being aware of the climate that exists among RAs may or may not impact negative influences on newer staff members when training begins, but not paying attention to these relationships can be detrimental for supervisors who are working to foster RA learning and staff team development.

Given the importance of relationships to RAs, residence life staff members who supervise RAs can create a process by which RAs get to know each other and the position over the summer prior to training. Connecting staff members to each other fosters relationship and team building so when training starts, although RAs may not know everything about their new colleagues, they are not starting from scratch where team members know nothing about each other. Initially, this connection would start when RAs

are assigned to a staff during the Spring term. Once staff members know their placement, supervisors can create space where RAs can initially meet each other, whether that supervisor is returning to a particular building or not. The more an RA staff get together and become acquainted before the end of the spring term they are selected, the more likely they will bond over the summer and come to training prepared and excited to work together. From there, with today's technology of online bulletin board applications (e.g., Facebook, My Space, Twitter, interactive websites, and so on), RAs' supervisors can help connect their staff members immediately upon selection and begin forming a "virtual" community over the summer.

Regardless of the extent to which RAs had an opportunity to bond over the Spring term and Summer, introductory and team building activities occurring the first several days of training, as well as opportunities throughout training for formal and informal team building is essential. This sense of connecting RAs to each other in the training environment leads to developing an organizational climate that truly supports what RAs deem the most valuable - staff relationships. Ice melting and team building activities can be incorporated throughout training for the entire RA staff, but participants in this study reiterated several times the importance of these types of activities within individual staffs. Although general activities are positive ways to build relationships, having individual RAs attend a focused team building retreat helped develop a better sense of team.

Participants' perceptions about the best time for a retreat during training stretched from the beginning to help RAs get to know each other quickly, to almost two-thirds of the way through training, serving as a culminating team building experience. No matter where the retreat is placed, and to some extent, what is covered in the retreat, having an

opportunity where RAs to leave campus and spend time getting to know one another is crucial. The most successful retreat over the course of this study involved RAs leaving campus for two nights, and during that time, there was more informal time during which staff members got to know each other than formal structured activities or presentations. The decision about timing and location of retreats and other team building activities rests with RAs' supervisors and training designers, but ultimately, the success of a staff team rests primarily on students' abilities to get to know each other as individuals as they become acquainted as RAs.

A supplemental aspect to enhancing the organizational climate during training is to help RAs identify their roles as student affairs educators and their resources when feeling overwhelmed by the position or commitments outside the job. Every participant in this study shared how overwhelmed they felt during training and how challenging it was to seek support, because they did not want others to feel they could not handle their responsibilities. When RAs felt stressed or overwhelmed during training, their ability to pay attention, learn, and retain information covered during structured sessions was negatively affected. Training designers must plan sessions specifically related to the requirements of the RA position (almost a daily, weekly, or monthly description of responsibilities), as well as helping new RAs draw connections between their own feelings when overloaded and to whom they can reach out. The combination of information and relationships in training may help reduce stress and increase learning. This, in turn, helps RAs be better sources of support for their overwhelmed residents.

With a strong relational foundation, RAs will be more secure in learning about their RA responsibilities and taking risks because they feel more valued and respected by

their peers (Contreras-McGavin & Kezar, 2007) and comfortable in sharing personal experiences. With this comfort level, training designers can further enhance trainings' organizational climate by helping RAs better understand their own identities, characteristics, and skills, as well as how to identify and work with other RAs who have similar or different traits. I was surprised by the lack of participants' abilities to describe their own identities, as well as connect these identities to the RA position and how they worked with each other. It seemed participants entered the position without acknowledging how their backgrounds and histories could influence their roles as RAs, even after participating in training sessions designed to help them do just that. This perceived disconnect increases the importance of helping staff members better understand who they are in relation to their position *before* they can assist residents. RAs who learn more about themselves, those around them, and how individuals with different identities, histories, backgrounds, and personal characteristics interact, their comfort with the position and learning during training may increase, which generally leads to more learning, retention, and application of what they learned (Biggs, 1996; McCoombs, 1998; Theall & Franklin, 1999).

Returning RAs are generally more comfortable with their staff roles as they have "done the job" for a year or more. Returning RAs see themselves as "experts," and do not feel they need the same or additional information and resources. Participants' stories in this study reflected their perceptions of other returning RAs who were bitter about having to participate in training and how those negative attitudes impacted their own experiences. Each returning RA mentioned how much more invested in training they would be if they had a more significant role in its design and implementation. Training

designers have the opportunity to engage returning RAs in their own learning by

including them not only in the training design, but also in presenting or co-presenting

sessions during training. Creating opportunities for returning RAs to have active roles in

training would require flexibility on behalf of training designers by creating time in the

schedule for RAs and co-presenters to work together on their sessions. While some

sessions could be designed during the Spring term, staff turnover and the need to make

last minute improvements or changes to presentations require allocated time in training.

This may cause incongruence in training because returning RAs may not be present for

some sessions, as they would be busy planning future presentations. This is an important

conversation among residence life staff members and training designers about what is

most important – having returning RAs attend all sessions or allocate time for them to

prepare for upcoming presentations they would lead or co-present.

An idea that emerged from the data to help increase a positive organizational

climate during training and the beginning of the academic year was to create a shadow or

buddy program between new and returning RAs. Although this may be a challenge,

depending on the ratio of new to returning staff members, the benefits could be

significant. Participants in this study continually emphasized the importance of

relationships and that their primary learning about the job came from returning RAs. A

shadow program would be a powerful way to connect new and returning RAs, as well as

helping new staff members learn about RA responsibilities. This idea would be

contingent on the availability of returning RAs to serve as mentors for the number of staff

members new to the position. If RAs learn by listening to other RAs, this mentoring

program may be an opportunity for training designers to increase RA learning beyond the first year.

Knowledge acquisition. Regardless of what strategies are used to foster learning, the sheer amount of information covered during an eight-day training curricula may be too great for any learning to occur (Kelley et al., 1985). This thought may seem rash, but when hearing the consistent story from all participants in this study about how overwhelmed they were walking into and throughout training in the first year, the primary reason their learning was limited was because they were exposed to so much information. Additional elements influencing participants learning during training included their anxieties about preparing communities for arriving residents, meeting new residents, and not having enough time to visit friends who may be on or around campus during the training timeframe.

Residence life paraprofessional staff members can benefit from "RA Classes" that occur prior to, during, or after the selection process. This class can contain much of the information covered in training regarding campus resources, crisis and non-crisis protocol, administrative paperwork, and general skills needed to be an RA over an extended period of time; rather than focusing all this content during an eight- to 10-day intense training schedule. RAs may or may not get academic credit for this required class (which they would appreciate, if possible) depending on the ability to find an academic department to sponsor it, but the point is to spread out content over at least six weeks to a semester. Having this information leading into Fall RA training better prepares RAs to build relationships with peers and provides more time to complete projects to welcome arriving residents. In addition, content covered in fall training can reiterate what was

learned in the RA class, thus providing further opportunities to practice and apply knowledge and skills.

RAs need to understand what they learn in is important and why it is important. Reflecting on her experience going into training, Veera explained:

I don't know if we really knew what we were supposed to get out of it

because I don't think we realized how much of it we would have to apply,

or what we would be using, I guess, in our jobs. We were like, "Why are

they telling this ridiculous stuff?" but like, it really happens. So it is

sometimes hard to pay attention to stuff that hasn't happened yet.

With the sheer amount of content covered during an eight-day training experience, it is not surprising RAs are too overwhelmed to absorb and retain information training designers and residence life staff deem important. Apparently, at this research site, participants seek guidance from returning RAs to identify what information is essential to their success as community builders, policy enforcers, and resources for residents. Training curricula that can incorporate clear and concise explanations about why content is important will produce RAs who are more likely to learn, retain, and apply new knowledge.

Training designers or supervisors explaining what topics are important and why they are important is helpful for giving training more meaning. Presenters from across the institution and returning RAs also need to be included in the conversation about why content is important. If RAs receive consistent messages from supervisors, presenters, and returning RAs about what is essential to know and why it is important, they can learn more and be more effective in their jobs.

Several training curricula at institutions where I have worked use learning outcomes (Keeling, 2004) to highlight what RAs are expected to learn from individual sessions, days, or the entire training experience. Some participants in this study remembered seeing those outcomes listed on the training schedule, but it was only when I provided the schedule for them to look at during our interviews did they read these stated training outcomes. Even then, none of the participants remembers supervisors or presenters following up with them after sessions or in nightly staff meetings about those outcomes to reiterate the importance of what was learned. Similar to Veera's perspective above, other participants shared that outcomes need to be discussed prior to presentations, included in information covered during sessions, and followed up on by supervisor after training. If outcomes are included throughout the training process, RAs may be more likely to learn, retain, and apply that information.

In addition to creating opportunities for RAs to get to know each other and develop a safe, comfortable learning community, training designers need to gauge RAs' abilities to learn and understand new information, as well as their comfort levels in experimenting with new knowledge and skills (Huczynski & Lewis, 2001). This can be done by incorporating pre- and post-assessments during the course of training, either by session, day, or the entire training experience. Providing training designers, presenters, and supervisors with current data on knowledge learned and comfort levels for RAs can assist residence life staff members in adapting the training environment and/or strategies for knowledge acquisition to be more meaningful to training participants.

As shared by every participant in this study, the ultimate strategy to help RAs learn, retain, and apply information was the use of a Behind Closed Doors session. This

Fall RA training schedule had one culminating BCD session and several participants mentioned the need to include a few smaller informal BCDs during individual sessions throughout training. Training designers can work with presenters and supervisors to ensure that every day there are opportunities for new RAs to experience the practical application of skills and knowledge they learned that day. Whether through informal role-playing scenarios or reviewing case studies during weekly staff meetings or structured activities during training sessions, all training curricula should include these types of experiential learning opportunities, where returning RAs are role modeling skills and/or are acting in role playing activities.

The necessity to include opportunities during training for individual and group reflection time is apparent. RAs can learn knowledge and skills, and then have experiences to apply what they have learned, but without an opportunity to reflect on what they have gained from the experience, retention and further application in the position may be compromised (Crotty & Allyn, 2001; Dewey, 1933; King, 2008; Schön, 1983, 1987). The nature of this study challenged participants to reflect on their training experiences. Throughout our conversations, they remembered components of training they put to use in the context of their job solely because we had a conversation. Without these conversations, RAs might not have tied their knowledge to fall training, and instead, have linked the knowledge to their own innate abilities or to knowledge gained through the returning RA influence.

Participants in this study reiterated the overwhelming nature of Fall RA training, with an intense schedule and a great deal of information disseminated over a short period of time. This created exhausted RAs who were driven so hard to learn information, get to

know peers, and prepare their communities for residents that they had no "down time" to let their minds and bodies rest and reflect on what they learned. Participants shared that when alone, they were focused on completing administrative tasks, and when going to bed, being so exhausted they immediately fell asleep. Training designers can create structured opportunities folded into training curricula for solitary and staff reflection time, where RAs can reflect on their experiences in solitude or engage in meaningful dialogue with peers. Reflection time can be relaxing and powerful to help RAs rejuvenate, while also assist them in making meaningful connections from what they learned in training.

Participants' motivation to learn and transfer. In a positive organizational climate where RAs feel they have an ability to acquire new knowledge, they still may not do so unless they are motivated (Ayers, 2005; Holton, 1996; Noe, 1986). When I observed during the 2006 Fall training at Hunter University, several RAs did not pay attention or fell asleep during structured sessions where information was relayed to them by presenters who, in my mind, articulated the importance of what they presented. When discussing the phenomenon with participants in this study, they shared with me how many RAs, both new and returning, felt they knew the information already so they did not need to pay attention. These were some of the same individuals throughout the course of the year who asked other RAs or supervisors questions about the same topics they slept through during training.

Not only must RAs have the ability and capacity to learn new information in training, but they must also be motivated to be present, to be engaged, and to learn what is presented. Pressure falls on residence life staff and training designers to determine

various levels of RAs' motivations prior to, and during training to maximize learning. A resulting implication for practice regarding RA motivation has two components. First, it is important to discuss motivation before students apply for the RA position with information regarding job responsibilities and the training process. Relaying positive aspects of the position in addition to the amount of useful positive information gained in training may encourage applicants to apply for the position. In addition, once selected to be RAs, candidates may also be excited to fully engage in Fall training because they truly understand the multitude of responsibilities and learned skills required of the RA position are transferable to future careers and employment.

The second part of this process is for training designers to continually gauge the motivation and interest level of RAs during Fall training and be prepared to alter the schedule, if necessary, to address students' motivational concerns. Quick and informal assessment instruments can be used throughout training sessions, as well as supervisors' asking honest, open-ended questions on a daily basis to determine energy levels and how training is affecting their staff. It is important for training designers and supervisors to realize that seldom will an RA team's motivation to learn be unanimous. The goal of conducting an assessment is to determine themes of what RAs are experiencing during training to make subtle changes to the schedule, if needed. Participants in this study commented that when they saw supervisors and training designers attempting to alter the training experience to be more beneficial for their learning and personal needs, they were more likely to reciprocate that flexibility by trying harder to pay attention and engage in their own learning.

While one cannot make someone learn, supervisors and training designers can implement systems during and after training to help RAs showcase what they learned. Whether assessments, practical application activities, or opportunities for immediate feedback from supervisors or peers incorporated into training on a daily basis, per individual sessions, or training as a whole, such systems should provide RAs with opportunities to reflect on training and what they have learned. This will yield positive results because RAs can see that they learned and what they may have missed during the training session. Once RAs see that they have learned new information and applied it, they are more likely to continue to learn (Noe, 1986). Developing motivation to learn may also impact those RAs who feel like they "know it already," because even though their confidence level may be high in certain content areas, the action of actually applying what they know and receiving immediate feedback surrounded by their peers is a powerful experience that may increase motivation to learn other content and skills.

In general, a significant portion of RAs participating in training who "know it all" are returning staff members. Not only did they participate in training the year before, and multiple years in some cases, but they have applied their knowledge, skills, background, and what they have learned from the job and other RAs to their residence community and RA staff for the previous year(s). This significantly affects their motivation to learn anything in another fall training experience, even if their passion for the position is exemplary. Because returning RAs may not feel they have much to learn, findings from this study suggest that training designers incorporate a highly participatory role for these staff members into training. Returning RAs can present sessions, co-present sessions with supervisors and/or campus partners, participate in mentor-mentee relationships, and/or be

responsible for various logistics of training: food, room set-up, presenter introductions, awards, etc. Because new RAs look up to, and learn most facets of the position from returning staff members, placing these experienced RAs in a position to share knowledge, skills, and experiences in structured sessions can significantly benefit newer staff members.

Returning RAs in this study suggested the benefits of creating a separate track for RAs who had been through training before. While not completely separating new from returning RAs, training designers can explore what sessions could be expanded into multiple levels. For example, new RAs would attend a session where counseling center staff discuss conflict resolution, peer and gender communication, common stresses colleges students face, and so on., whereas second-year RAs take a tour of the counseling center to learn more about the in-depth processes when students make an appointment to see a counselor. Third-year RAs could take this resource presentation even further by co-presenting either session for new or second-year staff members, thereby having more ownership for their experience, as well as the experiences of their peers.

Training designers cannot control RAs' motivations to learn or not learn, but being aware of how they perceive the training experience is a tremendous first step. One of the most significant stories shared by several participants in this study focused on their desire and motivation to be resources and advocates for their residents (who had not arrived yet), but they did not need training to gain those skills. Participants explained that their RA styles, whether they were new or returning staff, were functions of their experiences, backgrounds, and personalities, _not_ knowledge and skills learned during training.

For this reason, many RAs enter Fall RA training with the mindset of, "I don't need to pay attention to any of this," because these RAs already have in their minds how they will prepare their communities for residents, as well as what kind of RA they will be during the year. RAs who have this mindset fall into two general categories: those who think training is important, but are more focused on their residents' impending arrival, and those who feel training is just unnecessary. Regardless of which group an RA more likely identifies with, they may find it difficult to think about learning in a training session when focused on the floor community or thinking about the year. Therefore with these RAs, it is critical for training designers to work closely with residence life staff members responsible for recruitment and selection, as well as supervisors, to assess individual and collective motivation to learn prior to and during training and implement strategies designed to validate these feelings while engaging these RAs throughout training.

Post-training transfer. As much as this study focused on the time during training when participants were exposed to information during structured sessions and informally from more experienced RAs, the true representation of what RAs learned during training occurred afterwards, when knowledge and skills are applied to the position (Burke & Baldwin, 1999). Without a system set in place by training designers, supervisors, and other residence life staff members, where RAs feel as though they are applying newly learned information, the most meaningful training experience for RAs may be moot (Parry & Reich, 1984). Thus, in addition to a positive organizational climate where RAs feel they can learn new information and are motivated to learn during training, the post-training environment is crucial for residence life staff members to examine.

Findings from this study reveal how using practical, applicable examples and reflection activities as learning tools are essential for any training curricula. Implications arising from participants' stories and experiences suggest the meaningful nature of these learning processes maintain their power well into and through the academic year. A strong recommendation for training designers and supervisors is to create a system of in-services, meetings, or staff development activities over the year to reaffirm what RAs learned during training by giving them opportunities to re-apply, or re-learn if necessary, content and skills.

Participants in this study who served on the training and development committee for the Smith Neighborhood RA staff shared that in-services were planned throughout the year to cover topics the committee and supervisors felt RAs needed to know or have reinforced. However, there seemed to be little, if any, connection to the fall training experience. Therefore, it is important for residence life staff members to draw the

connection from every staff development opportunity back to the fall training experience. If RAs are continuously reminded of Fall training, what they learned, and its connections to what they are currently experiencing in the position through new and updated information during in-services, they can potentially see the lasting effect of Fall RA training. This concept was demonstrated by the very nature of this study's methodology, wherein participants reflecting on Fall training tended to remember more about the content learned during training simply because they were challenged to think about their Fall training experiences.

In addition to hosting in-service opportunities and staff meetings where supervisors or training staff members share content to further assist RAs in their jobs and connect what they learned back to Fall training, the reasons why that information is important should also be communicated to RAs. On-going staff development opportunities can share excellent resources and skills, but if RAs do not see the importance of what they are learning, they may not be as likely to learn, retain, and apply new information. This concept mirrors what has been shared above regarding the necessity of sharing the importance of training topics to RAs during Fall training. While training designers may easily see the seamless relationship between content, importance, and application of information and skills throughout the year, RAs who have never been in the position before, have never experienced various situations, or feel they already know what to do, may not see those connections.

The last implication for post-training transfer based on the findings from this study is firmly rooted in the predominant theme of how important relationships are to RAs. Training designers, supervisors, and residence life staff members must be aware of

how staff and supervisory dynamics influence RAs, both individually and collectively. Just as participants learned more during training if they had positive relationships with peers and their supervisors, that concept persists into the academic year. Supervisors should continually assess staff teams to examine relationships with and between RAs and supervisors for general staff development purposes. Similarly, those same principles apply to assess how relationships influence the transfer of knowledge and skills to the RA position.

In sum, the implications and recommendations for practice resulting directly from this study are extensive, given the complex and often ambiguous interplay between training and participants. Creating training curricula and schedules with immediate opportunities for reflection and application increases the likelihood of skills being transferred to the position, which ultimately helps meet staff members' and residents' needs in more meaningful ways. Training designers and supervisors have a significant amount of responsibility to ensure training environments are conducive to learning, retention, and transfer. However, RAs also share complementary responsibilities for their learning, retention, and transfer of skills. Thus, all residence staff members and campus partners must collaborate to create a Fall RA training curriculum designed to maximize the RA meaning making experience.

Organizational Staffing Processes

While the previous section explored implications from this study through the lens of training transfer and provided recommendations for improving the practice of Fall RA training, this section broadens what I learned to seven organizational processes in residence life that involve and impact RAs. Throughout my experiences working within

and outside of higher education, I have experienced and participated in what I see as the foundational components of how organizations function. Without the following processes working in harmony through which all levels of staff members' voices are heard, I feel that organizations will not be able to experience the goals they hope to achieve in the ways they seek. Every organizational process begins with the recruitment and selection of staff, followed closely by the training of those individuals. Once trained and prepared to begin working, staff members are supervised and encouraged to participate in developmental opportunities to optimize their performance. Lastly, in order to continually advance the nature of a learning organization, employee performance is assessed and evaluated, which results in recommendations for improvement for individuals and organizations. The following sections explore recommendations for practice through these processes, based on the findings of this study.

Recruitment. Based on my experiences as a candidate, staff member, and hiring administrator in residence life, I honestly feel there is no way for employers to share with RA candidates every intimate detail of what to expect once hired. As seen throughout this study, there are a multitude of aspects to the RA position that rely solely on chance: an RAs fit with his or her staff team, supervisor, and residents; crisis and non-crisis situations that occur throughout the year; building layout; and dynamics between RAs, residents, the residence life department, and the institution, to name a few.

With this being said, all participants in this study felt they were not prepared for RA training, nor were they ready for all the time commitments related to the RA position once residents arrived. There were several instances in which participants relayed that they may have been unprepared to work through a particular situation, such as a

roommate conflict, or disagreement among their peers, but they understood that not every single situation could be covered in training. However, they were frustrated because they felt University Housing and Residential Life staff members at Hunter University were not forthright about the amount and nature of responsibilities required of RAs.

For this reason, it is highly recommended that residence life staff members responsible for recruitment strategies and initiatives develop informational resources and presentation forums where candidates can gain a much needed sense of the extensive time commitments of the RA position. Solely providing the position description is not enough, according to participants in this study, as these documents tend to be "too wordy" and broad, and do not cover information RAs feel is important to share with candidates. Position time commitments such as committees, mandatory attendance at programs, required meetings, and participation in departmental processes are a few items that require RAs to allocate additional time within their already busy schedules. Regarding Fall training, providing candidates the previous year's schedule can serve as base from which they can develop an idea of what training may be like.

In addition to printed materials, creating opportunities where candidates can learn directly from first and second-year RAs can be tremendously beneficial. These RA presenters should be prepared to briefly share their experiences on staff and then time should be turned over for candidates' questions, both in a structured panel format and individually. Such an environment is an excellent venue for current RAs to describe what they do, and also include the importance of being actively engaged in fall training because that is where new RAs can and will learn skills necessary to be highly successful in the position.

Providing so much information to candidates applying for the RA position creates

some challenges in overwhelming them before they even submit applications. The

necessary balance for residence life recruitment specialists to determine is how much

information is enough to satisfy candidates' needs while not scaring prospective student

leaders away from the position. After listening to participants' stories in this study about

how important the RA position is to them and their abilities to make differences in

residents' lives, I feel more information in the selection process about rewards, and

benefits as well as time commitments and potential negative outcomes of the position,

both in written and verbal media, will help provide a more realistic picture for candidates

exploring the RA position.

Selection. After students explore the option of being RAs and then choose to

apply, they become intimately involved in the selection process. Within this section,

implications for practice are directed primarily to a centralized selection process that

happens from January through April, resulting in the hiring of RAs (both new and

returning) for the following academic year. However, suggestions listed here are equally

applicable during mid-term selection processes as vacancies occur.

I was fortunate in this study to have dialogue with participants who wanted to be

RAs because, for the most part, they wanted to support and guide residents in a

community towards being more successful at Hunter University. While there were

elements of "resume builder" and "room and board compensation" in most participants'

reasons for applying, overall, their motivation to be RAs was intrinsically driven to

support students. A recommendation for residence life staff members responsible for

selection is to include questions and scenario-based case studies into the selection process

to help determine why candidates are applying for the RA position. Out of participants' stories came concerns of RAs who solely applied for the position because of the compensation and then were not positive colleagues for staff or residents, amid candidates who desperately needed the compensation to stay in school but also intrinsically wanted to support students, the latter proving to be more valuable team members.

In my experiences, selection processes tend to be logistically intricate and difficult to design and implement. This sometimes causes staff members reviewing candidates' paper applications, interviews, and group process interactions to get lost in looking for the deeper reasons why individuals apply for the RA position, especially when the process is condensed to save time and resources or make it more efficient. It would serve as an asset if selection processes were slowed down to some extent and stretched out over time, in order to give candidate reviewers more instances to see candidates' "true colors." Participants in this study shared how easy it was for someone wanting to be an RA to be selected because they said what reviewers and supervisors wanted to hear, but ultimately, they would not be good staff members for residents or the staff team. Drawing out the selection process to incorporate more opportunities for feedback increases the complexities of an already complicated process, but it may be worth the additional effort and observation to find candidates who applied because they want to work on a team to help support student growth and development.

Motivation to be an RA should serve as a strong foundational criterion for selecting candidates to be RAs. A secondary component of motivation is just as important and focuses heavily on their training and post-training experiences. Determining an RA

candidate's motivation to learn about the position, department, institution, and how to best help students is a tremendous asset for any selection process. Participants in this study who had a positive training experience shared the importance of their willingness and desire to learn information necessary for their success in the job, as well as the importance of being around other RAs who also wanted to learn what presenters and more experienced RAs had to share.

Beyond determining RA candidates' levels of motivation, selection designers are encouraged to incorporate various methods throughout the selection process to determine candidates' abilities to balance multiple complex responsibilities, as that skill is an inherent necessity of the RA position. Participants shared how training curricula (Fall training and in-services) at Hunter University typically have individual sessions dedicated to "time management," but those sessions do not address how to actually balance RA specific responsibilities. Most participants explained their abilities in balancing multiple commitments came from previous work or academic history, and RAs who did not have that prior experience struggled significantly in completing job requirements.

This is not to say new RAs who are missing previous experience balancing job-related commitments will not be good staff members, but their inexperience in this area impacts their training and position experience, because they tend to focus more on trying to balance priorities, become stressed, and end up not learning what is necessary to be successful RAs. The selection process becomes a medium where reviewers can assess candidates' abilities to balance conflicting priorities, because learning this about RAs in the middle of a demanding training schedule is too late. To increase the educational nature of RA selection, coordinators could incorporate time management sessions into the

process, either through a presentation, skill-building workshop, or having returning RAs honestly share their experiences balancing multiple priorities.

It is also recommended that through selection, candidates' geographic and community preferences are ascertained and discussed with them if hired. Finding out at the beginning of training that an RA did not want to be placed where they are currently located is also too late to help them to be as resourceful and supportive for their community of residents as possible. Findings from this study helped inform this implication, because some participants disclosed concerns regarding those RAs who were placed where they did not want to be and who, as a result, had a negative impact on their residents, the staff, and the supervisor. Sometimes, candidates will be hired for specific communities where they may not have preferred, but selection officials are highly recommended to engage these candidates in dialogue about the placement choice and reasons behind the decision. In general, findings from this study indicate that once RAs have the background behind a decision, they are much more willing to fully support this decision.

Training. Recommendations for Fall RA training arising from this study's findings have been addressed in multiple areas throughout this chapter, but not necessarily what residence life departments should consider when looking at an entire training program for RAs. This section reveals implications for training designers that stretch beyond the multiple-day, pre-service training program occurring prior to the Fall term.

With the importance participants placed on building and maintaining relationships in this study, it is highly recommended that for every training opportunity, activities are

included to provide RAs further interaction to help them get to know each other. Most

participants experienced disappointment at the conclusion of training when they no

longer saw their peers for 12-14 hours a day. Even though Fall training may have been

exhausting and overwhelming, RAs enjoyed the camaraderie they felt spending time with

their peers, especially returning staff members from whom they learned so much. When

classes started, they saw their peers a few times a week, and, depending on schedules,

only during weekly staff meetings. Therefore, participants suggested every training or in-

service opportunity should include elements of relationship and team building to help

RAs reconnect throughout the year.

　　　　As mentioned previously, implementing a shadow or buddy program where

returning and new RAs are paired up during Fall training, would be tremendously

beneficial, based on the importance new RAs in this study placed on how much

information about the position they learned from more experienced staff members. When

reflecting on training curricula, I feel it is necessary that if relationships are developed

between RAs during Fall training, those relationships should be revisited throughout the

year. Whether "buddies" meet informally a certain number of times per month, or time is

allocated for these relationships to pair up during every mandatory in-service, providing a

framework where new and returning RAs can connect will help both staff members be

successful RAs. Together, new and returning RAs reflecting on Fall training and the

position based on guiding questions or statements provided by training designers, RAs

are challenged to reflect on their job, what they have learned and applied, and how they

have impacted residents' lives. Training designers and supervisors should be aware that

returning RAs would benefit from receiving additional training on being role models for

newer staff members, as the relationship among staff peers is inherently different from RAs relationships with their residents.

An additional aspect of Fall training that should be included in training initiatives throughout the year is the concept of identity development. If RAs participate in a Fall training session where they complete personality-type, leadership, and/or learning style assessment instruments, the facilitator who guided them through these tools should reappear throughout the year to help connect or reconnect how RAs' identities, characteristics, and styles impact all elements of the RA position, and vice versa. Skillful facilitation of activities where RAs are challenged to reflect on an instrument they completed during Fall training will help them see how they have or have not changed, which can be a powerful process for RAs to experience.

Beyond learning about themselves, this continual process of helping RAs reflect on how they communicate and interact with others can assist them in providing support and guidance to residents and peer team members. Training designers and supervisors could further benefit RAs by incorporating examples, role playing activities, and case studies related to working with peers and supervisors into all RA training initiatives. A significant portion of RA training (Fall training or in-services during the year) is focused on working with residents, so that when conflicts or issues arise on a staff team, RAs are challenged to know how to address these tenuous situations. Participants shared throughout this study how they sought additional knowledge and resources for working with peers and supervisors who negatively impacted their experience, or staff dynamics.

When considering the planning of residence life training activities, the two participants in this study who served on the training and development committee for

Smith Neighborhood mentioned how positive it was that they could help draft and create training curricula for themselves and their peers. However, because they only experienced training at Hunter University in Smith Neighborhood, they felt they missed out on different training methods and activities that may occur at other institutions. Training designers are encouraged to work with peers at local colleges and universities to expose RAs to various training initiatives. With this outside influence, RAs and training designers can look beyond "what we did last year" to new and different training experiences that could be more meaningful for RAs. Having coordinated and participated in several Fall RA trainings, as well as planning training throughout the academic year, I am guilty of looking at what was done previously at my institution and only changing things that may not have made sense to me. Seldom have I explored how peers at different institutions conduct training initiatives and then adapted what I learned to the training I was coordinating. This is a significant challenge in the light of other time commitments for training designers and supervisors, but investing time into changing RA training to be more powerful can be reflected in the continued growth and development of RAs.

A necessity in designing and implementing Fall training is including RA feedback and input. There is a tremendous sense of ownership and empowerment for RAs who are responsible for planning and implementing training for themselves and their peers. This generally causes more work for supervisors and training designers as they guide RAs in this design process, because RAs may not have the wealth of experiences in creating training curricula on their own. However, skills gained by RAs for coordinating these activities will help them in the position, and also well beyond as they graduate and pursue

career goals. Returning RAs participating in this study believed they would have felt more engaged in the Fall training experience, as well as other training activities during the year, if they were included in the planning and presenting of training material to their new peers. Incorporating RAs' experiences and feedback into training curricula will enhance the entire training experience because RAs will feel more included in the design process, will be challenged to build skills and confidence, and will be placed in positions where other RAs learn directly from them in structured sessions.

Lastly, one finding from this study that concerned me as a residence life professional was the inconsistency related to the value placed on diversity training by participants. Most RAs in this study who identified as an underrepresented group found the diversity session during Fall training as important and necessary. With the exception of one participant, this belief was not held by any of the RA participants who identified with the majority of students at Hunter University. This phenomenon highlights the need for concepts of diversity and multiculturalism to be incorporated throughout all training activities, not solely included in a "diversity session." I recommend that training designers seek resources, case studies, role playing activities, and speakers with personal stories to be included in training curricula, but not label individual and multiple sessions as specifically related to diversity. Several participants commented that they have been "diversity-ied" out and that entering a session about diversity immediately turned them off to learning about people who are similar to, and different from, themselves.

Supervision. Almost as important as RAs' relationships with each other were their relationships with supervisors during and after training, a notion that has been thoroughly supported in research conducted by Anderson (2005). As the findings in this study clearly

indicate, developing and maintaining a positive connection between RA and supervisor can lead to RAs having a positive and powerful experience on staff; whereas a poor relationship can yield disastrous results for both employer and employee. Based on participants' stories, the need for superior recruitment, selection, training, supervision, development, assessment, and evaluation is just as important for RAs' supervisors as it is for the RAs themselves.

While the focus of this study and implications resulting from the findings are directed at RAs' experiences during and beyond training, recommendations for practice affect graduate and professional residence life staff training to a similar degree. Throughout this study, I was consistently reminded through participants' stories that just as they found RA training to be information-heavy, so too is the training in which supervisors have participated as long as I have been employed in residence life. In my experience, training for RAs' supervisors focuses primarily on what information, skills, and resources are needed to be successful, but not necessarily how to apply what they learned with the RAs they would soon supervise. For this reason, individuals who plan training for those who supervise RAs are advised to focus on relationship building with each other, as well as how to build and maintain positive relationships with a diverse array of paraprofessionals who will be on their staffs.

Elements such as listening, asking open-ended questions, seeking clarification, and attempting to truly understand RAs' experiences at the college or university where they are employed are paramount. Participants in this study highly valued supervisors who took the time to get to know them as individuals and students first, with their skills and motivations to be RAs soon thereafter. In addition, participants who had positive

relationships with their supervisors knew that connection was going to be positive and strong from the very beginning of training. Similarly, RAs who knew their supervisors prior to applying for the position also maintained close connections with that RD throughout the academic year. Unfortunately, the same is true for RAs who had negative first encounters with their supervisors. These RAs experienced a negative relationship that lasted throughout the year.

Although potentially challenging, supervisors must learn to be more aware of relationships on their staffs, both within RAs, as well as between RAs and themselves. With proper training and feedback, supervisors can develop their skills to not only increase their perception of staff dynamics, but also learn to provide a seamless integration of these organizational staffing practices for RAs on their staffs, both individually and collectively. From the recruitment and selection of qualified, energetic, and positive candidates into the position, to providing support, acknowledgement, and resources during the training, supervision, and development of RAs, supervisors need to be hyper-aware of every individual on their staffs. From there, it is also the supervisor's responsibility to provide consistent and continuous recognition and feedback (Anderson, 2005) as they coach RAs through the assessment and evaluation of their jobs, as well as what residents are experiencing while living on campus.

This places a tremendous amount of responsibility in supervisors' hands to make sure they are knowledgeable about everything that could impact RAs' experiences. While this level of power and responsibility may be overwhelming for many new professionals and graduate students, the pressure exists for supervisors to be almost omniscient about what their staff members are feeling and thinking during training, as well as when they

are actively engaged in the RA position throughout the year. Throughout this study, it was very clear that in addition to looking up to returning RAs, participants looked up to their supervisors for answers and guidance consistently, regardless of whether they perceived the employee-employer relationship as more positive or negative.

RAs' supervisors, as well as professional staff members who supervise them would benefit from regularly assessing the organizational and relationship climates existing on staff teams to capitalize on developmental coaching opportunities. Just as participants in this study saw growth and development among themselves and peers through positive coaching, so too could supervisors benefit from prompt and respectful feedback from their supervisors.

Staff development. Continuous growth and development is critical for both RAs and supervisors, as the residence living environment is quite fluid and anything can happen at any time. Several participants in this study shared the importance of supervisors providing continuity between information covered during training and their experiences as RAs throughout the year. When supervisors took advantage of structured in-services, training initiatives, or situations to draw connections back to what RAs learned in training, several RAs who experienced this connection felt they were better prepared to learn content and apply it to various situations. I recommend that supervisors pay attention to information RAs learn during training to follow up with them on a nightly basis, and also seek opportunities over the academic year during staff meetings and individual conversations to connect situations back to what RAs learned during training. This will help RAs see that what they learned in training is applicable to their communities and staff teams beyond the training environment. Several participants

viewed training as a static environment where they were exposed to a tremendous amount of information with little application of what they learned. This environment is in stark contrast to the highly dynamic nature of a residence community and team development occurring over the course of an academic year. Participants noticed that relationships they had with residents and peers changed over time, and seldom did training or development activities prepare them for such changes.

Especially noticeable with first-year residents for RAs in Smith Neighborhood, students tended to be more social immediately upon moving into their residential communities in August, in addition to being more comfortable in seeking the guidance and advice from RAs. Over the Fall semester, the relationship became more distant or detached as residents generally became more familiar with the building, neighborhood, university, and surrounding community, and therefore needed their RAs less. By the end of spring semester, residents tended to be more self-sufficient and only sought out RAs when they really needed something. RAs in this study did not expect this transition over time, even though they were residents themselves prior to becoming residence life paraprofessionals. Several participants commented how this information would have been helpful to learn during training, as well as throughout the year during in-service opportunities where RAs could compare their experiences with peers in structured sessions, facilitated by experienced RAs and/or residence life staff members.

The implications of this transition are complex, because every RA enters the position with different backgrounds and skills, experiences the RA position in unique ways, and has a multitude of needs, regardless of whether they perceive those needs. This creates a situation in which supervisors need to knowingly and intentionally keep track of

each RA's skill sets and experiences to follow up with them individually throughout the year. This is an exhaustive and exhausting task, becoming more complicated as the number of RAs a supervisor oversees increases. However, comprehensively documenting interactions with RAs, including informal and formal assessments through training and over the year, is beneficial both for RAs and supervisors. Also, including RAs in this reflection and documentation process helps show them their learning, growth, development retention and application of information, and benefits to their experiences, as well as the positive outcomes for residents living in their communities.

If done intentionally and thoroughly, on-going development becomes the synthesis of training, supervision, assessment, and evaluation over the course of the year, creating an intricately woven fabric of RAs' experiences. Challenging and supporting RAs to reflect on their own growth and development demonstrates the individual nature of each staff member's experience. Not only will this help create a stronger bond between RAs and supervisors, but RAs should also be able to identify what they have learned, retained, and applied from their fall training experience, thus demonstrating its power as a resource for helping RAs become successful in their communities.

Assessment. Identifying what individuals learned from training and post-training situations is the very nature of assessment (Lucier, 2008; Torrance, 2007). However, findings from this study direct me to think about assessment initiatives prior to Fall RA training, because participants' stories revealed how varied their backgrounds and skills were related to the RA position before they even applied. Some individuals had extensive experience working with traditional college-aged students, where others had never held a job before. Therefore, a recommendation resulting from this study is to conduct a skills

assessment for all new and returning RAs at the end of the Spring term or prior to the

beginning of Fall training to gain insight as to what would be beneficial to address in

training, as well as what methods for presenting information may be most meaningful.

This type of assessment would need to be completed in conjunction with a Fall

training design process that includes RA feedback and perspectives, as shared above. In

addition, this assessment would need to be completed in a way that represents multiple

perspectives or viewpoints for each staff member. Participants explained that several

peers may have felt they were proficient in some skills, but from a peer and/or resident

perspective, much learning was still needed. Therefore, I recommend folding into the

selection process ways for individuals to complete self assessments, as well as require

them to have peers and former supervisors complete skills, performance, and behavior

assessments. Training designers and committees could then use this information over the

summer to fine tune previously developed training sessions and activities to be more

representative of incoming RAs' needs.

Once in training, Anna suggested how helpful it would be to complete an

assessment instrument at the conclusion of every day during training to gauge what RAs

did and did not learn. This data could be used by training designers, presenters, and

supervisors to further fine-tune structured training sessions, as well as possibly alter the

training schedule to better address RAs' needs. This process would be time intensive for

training designers, given the complicated nature of coordinating logistics, presenters, and

content, but being highly responsive to RAs' experiences during training demonstrates

how attuned supervisors are to ensuring that RAs gain the most out of training. Most

participants in this study explained that they would tend to work harder if they knew

supervisors were doing what they could to improve an already overwhelming training curriculum.

Due to how overwhelming participants felt training was for first-year RAs, and boring for returning staff members, I think it would benefit training designers and supervisors to continually assess what RAs learned from training after it is over. The sheer nature of this study caused RAs to reflect on their training experiences and how they have applied, if at all, what they learned to their RA positions. For the two participants who served on the Smith Neighborhood Training and Development committee, the assessment designed to capture RAs' experiences and what they learned in training was not as useful as the conversations they had with me. They shared that our conversations led them to actively reflect on training, which helped them see what they did and did not learn.

The challenge for training designers and supervisors then becomes the implementation of a way to challenge RAs to meaningfully reflect on their experiences during and after training. The power of reflection assists training participants in describing what they learned and how they can apply that new knowledge, which further develops their self-awareness and ability to learn autonomously (Contreras-McGavin & Kezar, 2007). This is further complicated because, as the findings of this study revealed, fall training was more about building relationships and participants' learning to balance their lives, as opposed to their learning content needed to be successful in the position. Creating assessment methods to collect this data in meaningful ways so that it can be used to adapt training to better meet RAs needs is challenging.

Evaluation. After collecting data capturing RAs' experiences during and after training, the next step for training designers and supervisors is to make sense of the multitude of perspectives that lie within the information. The process of evaluation can be used by RAs and supervisors alike to examine data and provide recommendations for changes to each of the six previous organizational staffing processes (recruitment, selection, training, supervision, development, and assessment). In my experiences as a graduate student and professional in residence life, I continue to see my peers and me focusing on what content RAs need to know to be successful in their communities. Participants' stories in this study revealed that training was less about content and more about relationships and "the RA way of life." As I reflect on this dichotomy between my experiences assessing training and how participants described their experiences, as well as what they learned and applied from training, my frustration grows.

It feels as though training designers and supervisors are creating training curricula where we expect RAs to open their heads while residence life staff members and campus partners insert knowledge without truly paying attention to what RAs are learning and why they feel certain content is more important to learn. Residence life staff members need to be more cognizant of how much we focus on assessment, compared to how often we take authentic inventories of those assessments to make beneficial changes to positively impact RA experiences during training and while in the position. Honest and inclusive evaluation of training curricula and what RAs gain from this learning environment is critical to improving future trainings RAs are required, and volunteer, to participate in to enhance their knowledge and skills. In my mind, the key is "inclusive;" that is, being sure to include RAs when interpreting data gained from training

assessments as they are the participants who are engaged or not in their own and each other's learning.

Implications for Future Research

Over the course of this study, I found it a continual challenge to focus questions and interactions with participants on Fall training and the application of what they learned in training to their RA positions. RAs have an intricately complex role in student affairs and the participants' stories consistently led me to question various aspects of the position and residence life programs in general. The future studies that could arise from this research are numerous and vast, as each study would be an asset to faculty, professionals, graduate students, and paraprofessionals. However, the scope of this study was to focus on Fall RA training. As I reflected on the data and shared insightful dialogue with participants, peers, and committee members, the following areas of potential research emerged from this study to inform training designers and residence life staff members about the Fall training experience and how RAs apply what they learn to their roles as paraprofessional student affairs educators.

When specifically looking at the training experience, several participants mentioned how helpful it would have been to explore what RAs learned immediately after each training session, or at the conclusion of each training day. Participants commented that interacting with me in the context of this study was helpful because my questions challenged them to reflect on the training experience, remember what they learned, and think about the application of their learning. Many RAs report that knowing I would ask questions about training and their jobs throughout the year caused them to "prepare" for our interviews, and as they prepared, they recalled aspects of training they

might not have remembered if it were not for our conversations. Because the general RA training environment significantly focuses on information dissemination, training designers are encouraged to incorporate tools that capture what RAs are and are not learning throughout Fall training. Participants who served on the training and development committee of Smith Neighborhood at Hunter University stated that the committee conducts an overall assessment of Fall training at the end of August, but data they received was very general and vague. A daily assessment exploring what specifically RAs experienced during training and then what they learned that day would shed a tremendous amount of light on what information RAs perceive as valuable, as well as the type of formats and presenter styles that best support the most learning.

Similar to the concept of on-going assessment during training is research to broaden this process to the academic year to gain more insight on how RA staff teams, supervisor-supervisee relationships, and communities develop over time. This study focused questions and dialogue around Fall training, but for participants who felt overwhelmed by both training and the position, several mentioned how helpful it would have been to have a better sense of what to expect as the year progressed. This is not just limited to job responsibilities, which was a concern for most participants not knowing what their RA responsibilities entailed, but expanded to include all facets and interactions of the RA position. An in-depth study of several RAs from the beginning of training through to the end of the year would help provide additional perspectives about individuals, teams, supervisory relationships, communities, and the RA position in general as RAs grow and develop in their positions over the academic year.

Another element of this year-long longitudinal study that could be done independently or in conjunction with other elements would be to chart the course of how on-campus residential communities develop over time under the RAs' leadership. Stories emerged from this study indicating that RAs felt training designers expected them to build community with their residents, but the RAs did not feel a community had been built with their staff first. Participants supported the idea of a study exploring the process of community development, which could then be deconstructed and constructed within the context of RA training. As RAs participate in Fall RA training, some learned how to build community with their peer staff members (based on data gathered on building a residential community). When residents arrived, RAs then transferred what they learned during training about building community with their staffs directly to their residents. This learning was not shared by all RAs unfortunately.

This type of study would be inherently complex, as there are a multitude of factors that impact how communities develop: type of residence hall or apartment, community floor layout (i.e. suite-style, studio, individual or community bathrooms), theme housing, predominant resident age and/or class standing, and the list continues. Therefore, exploring community development across different types of on-campus living arrangements on one campus, or similar types of communities across multiple campuses would provide insightful perspectives. Data gained from these studies could assist training designers in creating curricula that serve to educate RAs on the process of community development that easily translates from staff interactions during training to their communities of residents.

Exploring the RA role over the course of an academic year from a more introspective approach would also be beneficial for training designers. Similar to other identity development models rooted in student development theory, conducting research to develop a First-Year, Second-Year, and Third-Year RA Identity Development Model would provide additional insight for RAs and their supervisors so RAs are better prepared with what to expect in the position. Also, supervisors would have additional insight in how to provide appropriate levels of information and support to their newer staff members, thereby likely increasing the connections between supervisors and supervisees. As a thread running through this study across themes, participants tended to be overwhelmed by training and the RA position when they first started, so having training designers include tenets of how RAs may develop once in the position would be helpful.

A likely component in an RA identity model is how RAs learn to balance commitments across the position with their academics, co-curricular activities, and social connections. Research focusing specifically on how RAs manage their commitments would also be a tremendous asset to training designers. In addition to being educated on job requirements during training, training designers could help RAs learn how to balance multiple position commitments in addition to other commitments beyond the job. Every Fall training schedule I have been a part of has had a session specifically designed to address time-management issues, but similar to the stories emerging from this data, reflection on my own training experiences revealed that every time-management workshop and presentation tended to be generic in nature. Research designed to specifically look at the delicate balancing act most RAs accomplish within the position

could then be incorporated into Fall training curricula, again, providing more information to new RAs about what to expect while in the position.

Based on findings in this study where relationships among RAs, as well as connections between RDs and RAs, were critical to positive experiences while in the position, I feel additional research to explore how different personal characteristics, learning, and/or leadership characteristics influence the RA role would be a tremendous asset to residence life programs. Given the constant interaction among RAs, residents, and supervisors in a residence life setting, having a better sense about how RAs engage with each other and how relationships develop over time would assist training designers in incorporating identity-type assessments into training curricula. Although relationships were instrumental to these participants, I became concerned at how little they knew about themselves and how they developed relationships with others based on their own backgrounds and characteristics. I believe research using any personality-type, learning style, or leadership style assessment tool from the time RAs are selected through the end of their tenure as RAs (first, second, third-year, etc.) would help inform training designers of the best ways to encourage RAs to look at their own lives in relation to others, which will ultimately help RAs to be more successful in the position.

Just as following RAs through training and exploring their role in the position over time would be helpful, so too would it be beneficial to training designers if research were conducted exploring the experiences and needs of first-, second-, and third-year RAs in general. What are the specific needs of RAs based on their level of experience in the position and how can training identify and address those needs? Participants who were returning staff members unanimously stated how training was redundant and the

only reason they felt it was beneficial was to help support new staff members acclimate to the position and learn how to be RAs. Incorporating what returning RAs feel is important into fall training curricula will encourage them to be more engaged in the training process, which could potentially not only increase their learning, but also improve the ways they help support their newer staff peers. Similarly, examining returning RAs' perspectives on training could significantly inform training designers on what specific needs second- and third-year RAs have that could be addressed through separate curricula. By addressing specific learning needs of RAs with varying levels of experience on staff, residence life supervisors and training designers can further help them engage in their own learning, because they would be building on existing knowledge.

During each focus group throughout this study, I challenged participants to reflect on their RA experiences and choose whether selection, training, or supervision was more important to their success as staff members. Regardless of their level of experience in the position, participants' responses throughout the year varied as to which element was most important. While this study focused on Fall training, I believe research exploring all three facets of the RA position would be significantly beneficial to residence life staff members who plan and implement selection and training processes, as well as graduate and professional staff members who supervise RAs. Based on the findings in this study, I feel the connection between the three is much greater and intricate than current professionals and graduate students realize. In my experiences at seven different colleges and universities across the U.S., I continue to experience a model in which individuals oversee selection or training or supervision with little integration among the three areas;

and in general, supervisors perceive supervision of RAs as very distinct from selection or training.

Each of the above opportunities for further research would enhance the process of Fall training, as well as the overall experiences of RAs once selected to be on staff. By no means are the ideas above exhaustive of additional research opportunities regarding the RA training and post-training experience. From participants' perspectives emerging from this study, as well as my own reflection on the data, the several identified areas of research are some initial next steps to continue advancing knowledge in the field about how RAs experience and make meaning of Fall RA training.

Summary

I believe findings from this study direct training designers and supervisors to realize that methods to increase training transfer and these seven organizational staffing processes are tightly interwoven, with no distinct beginnings and endings. I feel I have gained new insight as to the power reflected in these overlapping circular and concentric processes of exploring how RAs make meaning of Fall training, as well as the application of what they learned during training to their residential communities. Every implication and recommendation articulated above directly and indirectly influences the others, making it challenging for residence life staff members to continually assess and improve them individually and collectively. As we look to the future of Fall RA training and incorporate lessons learned from this study, we have tremendous influence in how RAs make meaning of their training experiences, as well as how they apply what they learn to their personal lives, positions, and ultimately the residents who rely on their guidance, provision of resources, and support.

Training designers, supervisors, and residence life staff members in general can truly benefit from engaging in honest dialogue with new and returning RAs about their experiences in training, paying close attention to what they did and did not learn. This conversation should not stop at the conclusion of training, but continue throughout the year as in-services and additional training opportunities supplement what RAs learned during Fall training. Looking at the complete picture of how RAs experience all training curricula will assist professionals and graduate students in adapting future training experiences to be more meaningful for the RAs who participate in them.

Viewing this portrait of continual learning reveals the primary features that have been highlighted throughout this chapter, each of which mirrors stories shared by participants during this study. In review of these features, the initial and critically important component of training curricula that training designers and supervisors would be well advised to incorporate are continuous introductory and team building activities throughout all training initiatives. As woven throughout the fabric of this study, relationships are paramount to RAs as they participate and make meaning of their training experiences. Therefore, providing multiple opportunities for RAs to connect with each other and their supervisor will enhance how they engage in their own learning during training activities, as well as when they apply what they have learned to their residential communities.

Another future implication of this training landscape is the importance of incorporating returning RAs in the design and implementation of training activities. Beyond seeking and including their input and ideas to enhance training schedules and curricula, training designers and supervisors must provide different training opportunities

where returning RAs are more engaged in their own learning. This could include, but not be limited to more advance concepts, theoretical backgrounds, and in-depth information about campus programs, services, and resources. The key for residence life staff members is to recognize most RAs returning to staff have participated in the full Fall RA training curriculum previously, and they see going through it again as being repetitive, regardless of how *different* the schedule or content is perceived by training designers.

Also critical to be aware of is the importance of continual assessment and evaluation of RAs' skills, learning, and motivation, as well as all training curricula. Every RA enters the position with a diverse background of experiences, skills, and knowledge that influences how they perceive Fall training, their peers, and their supervisors. In addition, each staff member has different levels of motivation related to how motivated he or she is to learn information presented throughout training, either from structured sessions or informal interactions with others. While reflecting on the data, and writing the above implications and recommendations, I feel confident when I say there is no way to please every trainee, thus guaranteeing maximum learning for all training participants. Given how daunting that feeling is for most training designers, including myself, I have seldom taken time to chip away at the iceberg of RA motivation in an effort to truly assess and determine various levels and sources of how RAs are inspired to engage in training and apply what they have learned to their jobs. I believe training designers and supervisors would significantly benefit from initiating this process of learning where RAs come from in terms of skills and motivation, in order to enhance training curricula to maximize learning.

Lastly, a feature embedded throughout RAs' training experience that training designers and supervisors must acknowledge is that training does not end when residents move into residence communities. Similarly, independent training activities or in-services occurring throughout the year do not necessarily enhance the overall training experience for RAs, unless they are all connected to each other and Fall training. As long as RAs see Fall training as a standalone boot camp or hazing opportunity that they have to participate in as a requirement to access the right of passage to be a real RA, their incentive to attend and engage in their own learning will be limited. Fall training must be integrally connected with recruitment and selection processes, as well as within all RA interactions with supervisors and staff development opportunities occurring throughout the year. In addition, cumulative training programs need to be inherently seen as positive aspects of the RA position, not a required item to check off. Responsibility lies with training designers, supervisors, administrators, graduate students, faculty, and returning RAs to ensure that all training activities are seen as positive opportunities to enhance individuals' skills. Being aware of and acting on this need to represent training curricula in a positive light will surely benefit residents' lives and help prepare RAs for the world beyond graduation.

When reflecting on what I have learned from reviewing the data, speaking with colleagues, peers, and students, and thinking about what this study means for the field of residence life, I feel, much like new RAs experiencing training, totally overwhelmed. The implications and recommendations included in this chapter seem to overlap so significantly that I would not know where to start. However, the sheer nature of this chapter, as well as the whole study, has provided me with several starting points that I

can and will integrate onto the canvas I am painting where I currently work. By including

my staff of professionals and RAs, we are slowly implementing recommendations

provided here in hope that over time, the picture of training for RAs at this institution

takes into account their myriad of motivations to learn and apply knowledge and skills

and portrays a continuous meaningful training curriculum that enhances lives of RAs and

residents who live in their communities.

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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPLICATION

University of Northern Colorado State University
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Application for Expedited Review

Section I – Statement of Problem / Research Question
The primary research focus for this study is to explore the ways residential life paraprofessionals, called Resident Advisors, make meaning of the training they receive and how they transfer that information to their living communities. A secondary research focus is to learn about the timeframe of when RA's transfer what they learn during training to their communities.

Section II – Method
1. Participants:
a)   Are the participants adults (18 years and over)? *All of the participants will be adults, at least 18 years of age, who have attained their sophomore year in an institution of higher education.*

Are the participants vulnerable (e.g., prisoners, illegal immigrants, pregnant, cognitively impaired, financially destitute)? *I cannot know for sure if any participants fall into the vulnerable categories, i.e. a participant could potentially be pregnant, cognitively impaired, an undocumented immigrant, or financially destitute. Nor do I anticipate including any prisoners in this research because they would be eligible for employment by University Housing at North Carolina State University.*

b)   Describe the source from which you plan to obtain your sample of participants. It is notenough to say, for example, that participants will be UNC students or Greeley second graders. Be more specific. *I will work with three Assistant Directors of University Housing to determine a number of students who fit the criteria of being first or second-year Resident Advisors(RA's), employed on West Campus at North Carolina State University. Once identified, the students will be sent a letter describing the research and instructed to contact Dean Kennedy if they are interested in participating in the research or if they have questions regarding the research.*

c)   How are participants to be contacted initially? *Interested students will be called on the telephone in order to talk about the general nature of the research project. If students remain interested, we will meet in person to discuss the full nature of participation. The goal is to identify eight to ten students interested in participating throughout the duration of the study.*

d)   How will they be made aware of their right to volunteer or not, procedures to insure confidentiality, and the general nature of activities for which they are being asked to volunteer? Typically, the LI will explain that these questions are answered through the process of documenting informed consent. *I will explain the full nature of the research project to each participant which includes their right to*

volunteer and to request withdrawal from the research study at any point. I will ask participants to create a pseudonym by which their information will be identified, and will explain that their research records will be kept confidential and locked in a file cabinet in my office. The general nature of the activities will be described including participating in at least three individual interviews, three focus group with all participants, and maintaining a journal throughout the study, in addition to my personal observations of pre-service RA training and their residential community for 2006 Fall Semester and the beginning of the 2007 Spring Semester. All of this information will be included on the Informed Consent Form that will be provided in advance of their participation.

e) Describe how confidentiality or the anonymity of the source of your data will be protected (e.g., data will be recorded by geographical area or group rather than by individuals, numeric identifiers will be used for interview or field data, records will be stored in locked file cabinets etc.). If participants are to be anonymous (i.e. no one, including the researchers, knows their identity), explain how this will be accomplished. Explain whether or not the data can be traced back to the original source from identifiers used in the records. Remember that it is impossible to *guarantee* confidentiality. Information submitted electronically or in a group setting cannot be considered secure, and there is a legal obligation to report suspected mistreatment of children and serious threats against self or others. It is also possible that a court might order the release of data or a list of participants. Again, focus on the steps you will take to maximize confidentiality. *Participants will select pseudonyms by which they will be identified in the interviews, transcripts, and final research report. Upon selection of pseudonyms, their real names will not be revealed throughout the entire research process. Transcriptions, observations, and artifacts will be maintained in the Lead Investigator's office in a locked file cabinet for at least three years after completion of the study. After three years, collected materials will be destroyed; however, transcripts may be kept to inform the Lead Investigator's future research in this area.*

f) Informed consent: Attach a copy of the informed consent document to be signed by the participants, or explicitly request waiver of informed consent. If participants are minors, provide the informed consent document to be signed by parents and address the documentation of assent by the minors. If written assent is to be obtained from minors, provide a copy of this document. *Copies of the Informed Consent Form is attached.*

Describe any special arrangements to protect the safety of special populations, if applicable (e.g., hospital patients, developmentally disabled, young children, prisoners, etc.) *I do not anticipate participants who may have special needs to be included in this research. However, regarding personal comfort throughout data collection, bathroom breaks will be granted during individual interviews and focus groups as needed.*

g) Describe any plans for debriefing your participants. As a compensation for participation, it is considered appropriate to provide participants with additional information concerning the nature and purpose of the study. It is also desirable to provide them with some information, presented in a form they are likely to understand, about the basic concepts and theories related to the study. Provide a copy of any debriefing information provided to the participants. *Participants will be invited to assist in the writing of the final report in order for them to have an opportunity in sharing their stories. As we work together to co-construct the meaning of their experiences, thoughts, and feelings, they will be involved in identifying the themes and creating a narrative of the study. Upon completion of the study, I anticipate spending time with participants to share the final product and discuss our experiences from the process together. Based on the final product reveals about the training and post-training experience for RA's, I will provide additional resources to support our continued learning.*

2. **Procedure:**

    a) Describe your sampling or participant assignment procedures. *Eight to ten first and second-year RA's will be identified by the three Assistant Directors for University Housing on West Campus at North Carolina State University. These individuals regularly interact with RA's, as they live and work in the buildings. Once identified by an Assistant Director, potential participants will receive a letter detailing the nature of the study and expectations of participation. Letters will include the name and contact information of the Lead Investigator for students to contact if they are interested in participating in the research study. If students are interested, I will contact them by phone and visit with them in person to further inquire if they are interested in participating. Recruiting participants will include multiple methods of communication, including email, phone, and meetings in person.*

    b) Provide a step by step protocol of everything participants will be asked to do in your study. Stipulate the nature of all data to be collected. For example, rather than saying that "participants will be observed" and "artifacts will be collected," specify what they will be observed for, and specify the nature of the artifacts. Make sure that this same information is provided in the consent form. *I will utilize individual interviews and focus groups of all participants, observations, and artifact analysis as multiple data collection methods for participants' voices to enrich my understanding of participants' experiences. Individual interviews and focus groups will be utilized to develop relationships between the researcher and participants in order to learn about participants' experiences. The interviews will be flexible and open-ended allowing for emergent themes, occurring at locations chosen by participants. I anticipate conducting three rounds of individual interviews and focus groups, occurring in late August and mid-October of 2006, as well as in January, 2007. Each interaction will be scheduled for one hour; however, participants' wishes to discontinue the interview or focus group at any time will be respected.*

In addition to interviews and focus groups, I will visit RA pre-service training sessions, as well as participants' residential communities, observing participants' experiences and collecting artifacts representing those experiences. Documenting field notes during these opportunities will allow me to better understand the contexts in which the participants live, work, and make meaning of their experiences. I anticipate spending time with the participants, individually and collectively, over six months building relationships, listening, observing, sharing, and interviewing.

Journals will be provided to each participant to reflect on their experiences during and after training in writing. Although journals will be provided, no expectation will be communicated that journal writing will be required; however, it will be shared that the journals provide an opportunity to record thoughts, feelings, and experiences utilizing writing, pictures, or other forms of expression, should participants choose this avenue of reflection. Journals serve to supplement interviews and focus groups, in addition to providing a medium for participants to reflect on their experiences in a way they may feel more comfortable. Journals will be collected monthly with entries being copied, so that journals can be returned to participants. Integrating information from journals along with interview and focus group data will allow for themes to emerge throughout the study in order for continuous exploration by participants.

c) Describe and provide clear rationale for the use of any deceptive practices. *No deceptive practices will be utilized in this research study.*

d) Include copies or complete descriptions of questionnaires, interview protocols, or other measurement procedures. Investigators using their own instruments should include a full copy of the measure. Copies of widely used standardized tests are not necessary. If an interview is to be conducted and the questions are not standardized, indicate the range of topics and examples of possible questions. *Interviews will be flexible and open-ended aimed at covering participants' experiences during training as well as the extent to which they apply information learned in training to the development of their residential communities. Topics will range from participants perceptions of training topics and presenters, thoughts and feelings of training, what is means to be an RA, how they develop their residential community, how they feel supported or hindered in their RA role, and questions about the RA position, training, or the development of their community throughout the academic year. In addition, it is anticipated that questions may encompass participants' backgrounds, including why they chose to apply for the RA position and what they hope to learn from being an RA.*

3. **Proposed data analysis:**

   a) Describe the form of the data to be analyzed (e.g., numbers from a Likert-type scale, journal entries, reaction time, heart rate, dichotomous 'yes' or 'no' responses, tape recorded conversations, photographs etc.). D*ata to be analyzed will be in the form of observational field notes, transcripts from individual*

interviews and focus groups, journal entries, documents provided by participants, and artifacts collected from RA training and RA's residential communities.

b) Explain the statistical design and how the corresponding analysis will address the research questions and hypotheses proposed. *As a qualitative research study, no hypothesis is offered in advance; nor is there a statistical design. The focus of this study is to explore and co-create how RA's make meaning of their experiences during pre-service training and the application of learned knowledge and skills to their residential communities. This study will utilize a Constructivist ontology and epistemology. The methodology is consistent with case study research, therefore data analysis will consist of Coding, Bracketing, and Crystallization. In addition, I will ask a colleague in the doctoral program to serve as a peer reviewer to enhance the trustworthiness of the study.*

Section III – Risks/Benefits and Costs/Compensation to Participants

Participation in this study will most likely not result in any direct benefit to volunteer participants. However, RA's may increase their awareness of the purpose of RA training, as well as how they and other participants may apply knowledge and skills to the development of their residential communities throughout the year. Conducting individual interviews prior to focus groups will allow a relationship to be developed between participants and the researcher, therefore hopefully creating a safe environment where information and perspectives are shared openly, both individually and collectively.

Potential risks to participants are minimal although they may experience discomfort surrounding what is revealed to the researcher during individual interviews or focus groups. In addition, participants may feel psychological or social stress when the researcher observes them during training and in their living communities. Therefore, due to the nature of the study and integrity of the research process, volunteers have the ability to contact the researcher to indicate changes in the story shared or ask to have their experience removed from the study.

Section IV – Grant Information
This study is not funded by any federal or local grants.

Section V - Documentation
- *A copy of the range of topics for individual interviews and focus groups is attached.*
- *The Informed Consent for Participation in Research Form is attached.*
- *The Application Cover Page for Expedited IRB Review is attached.*
- *Recruitment of participant will not be through fliers, therefore, no flyers or advertisements are attached; however, an initial letter describing the study to potential participants is attached.*

Potential Interview Areas and Topics to Be Addressed

Interviews will be flexible and open-ended, based on the following topics:

The RA Training Experience
- Importance of training topics
- Skills and experiences of presenters
- Fears and concerns about information learned in training
- Expectations of what would be learned in training
- What was learned during training
- Anticipated application of what is learned during training to community development
- Satisfaction with what was learned in training
- Role of supervisor during training
- Aspects of training and the roles of peers and supervisors that support or hinder learning
- Comparing the roles of First- and Second-year RA's
- The extent to which RA's change from beginning to end of training

The RA Role
- Expectations of first- and second-year RA's (self, peer, supervisor)
- Why RA's applied for the position
- What RA's anticipate getting out of the position
- Hopes and fears about being an RA
- The importance of training for RA's

The Experience Applying Information and Skills to Community Development
- How the community develops over time
- The role of RA's and residents in the community
- The role of supervisors in community development
- Perceptions of first-year RA's to second-year RA's
- Training topics directly and indirectly applied to community development
- Training topics not utilized in developing community
- Goals for further community development

Informed Consent for Participation in Research
University of Northern Colorado

TITLE OF THE STUDY: Exploring How Resident Assistants at One University Create Meaning of Their Paraprofessional Training and Its Application

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dean Kennedy, 418 McKee Hall, University of Northern Colorado, (970) 351-2861, kenn6789@unco.edu.

RESEARCH ADVISOR: Dr. Florence Guido-DiBrito, 418 McKee Hall, University of Northern Colorado, (970) 351-2308, flo.guido-dibrito@unco.edu.

GENERAL PURPOSE AND NATURE OF THE STUDY: The purpose of this study is to learn more about RA's experiences during pre-service RA training and the application of knowledge and skills to living communities after training. You are invited to participate in this research because the Assistant Director in your building has identified you as a staff member with a valuable perspective. I am interested in learning more about your experiences, thoughts, feelings, and ideas regarding RA training and the development of your community after training.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? The study will take place during RA training, in your living community throughout the Fall 2006 semester, and in January of 2007, in mutually agreed-upon locations. Together, we will decide when and where interviews and focus groups will be held. I will ask for your permission to visit you during training, as well as your residential community after training. My goal is to learn more about how RA's experience training, as well as the application of learned knowledge and skills to your residential community after training. Interviews and focus groups will be scheduled for one hour; however, you can stop the interview at any time or extend the interview if requested.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO? As a participant in this research study, you will be invited to participate in three individual interviews and focus groups with Dean Kennedy. The interviews will be tape recorded to accurately report your thoughts, feelings and experiences related to your experience being an RA. Examples of the types of interview questions include:

- Describe what you learned during RA training this Fall?
- What was the most helpful part of RA Training?
- What elements of RA training do you foresee applying to your residential community this Fall?
- Describe the role your supervisor has played throughout RA training.

You will also be invited to write your thoughts, feelings, and experiences in a journal prior to and in between the interviews and focus groups. This will allow you to record your thoughts, feelings, and experiences when Dean is not present.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE? I will keep all data pertaining to this study in a locked cabinet in my office, including any information that may identify you as a participant, to the extent provided to me by law. You will be given an opportunity to select a pseudonym at the beginning of the study by which your information will be identified. I will make every effort to prevent anyone from knowing that you gave me information, or what that information is. Upon completion of the study, I may publish the results; however, your name and any identifying information will remain private. Please know some circumstances may require me to share your information; for example, the law requires me to show information to a court or the authorities if you pose a danger to yourself or others.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS? Possible risks involved in study are a time commitment of up to 6 hours over a six month time period, as well as any time you invest in journal writing. In addition, you may risk discomfort as you share your thoughts, feelings, and experiences about RA training and the application of learned knowledge and skills to your residential community. It is not possible to identify all potential risks involved with participation in this study, but Dean has taken reasonable precautions to minimize any known and possible risks.

WILL I BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? One of my goals is that you benefit from time reflecting on your experiences during RA training and as you develop your community throughout the year. By participating in this study, you may become more aware of your own, as well as other RA's, experiences and how they impact you as an RA.

WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? You will receive a personal journal at the beginning of this study that you will be able to keep upon the study's conclusion. Also, depending on the mutually agreeable times of interviews and focus groups, I will provide participants with meals, as an appreciation for participation.

WHAT WILL IT COST ME TO PARTICIPATE? The only costs to you throughout the duration of this study is the time you invest in participating in interviews, focus groups, and reflecting in your journal, if you choose to do so.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW? After participating in the interviews and focus groups, I will send you a copy of each typewritten transcript to review for accuracy. You will have an opportunity to make suggestions for changes or additions to the transcripts at this time. I will also invite you to assist in writing parts of the final report to involve you in sharing your experiences.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of

this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact the Sponsored Programs and Academic Research Center, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1907.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing _3_ pages.

_____
_____
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study   Date

_____
Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

_____
_____
Name of person providing information to participant   Date

_____
Signature of Research staff

Obtain your parent or guardian's permission ONLY if you are under 18 years of age.

UNIVERSITY *of*
NORTHERN COLORADO

Dear Student:

Thank you for taking the time to read this research proposal and consider participating in a case study examining how RA's make meaning of their experiences during RA training and the application of learned knowledge and skills to their living communities after training.

My name is Dean Kennedy and I am a Ph.D. student in the Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership program at the University of Northern Colorado. I am currently working as an Assistant Director of West Campus at North Carolina State University. Based on my experiences in residential life over the past several years, I am curious about exploring RA's perspectives about RA pre-service training (extensive training occurring prior to the start of the Fall Semester) and the application of knowledge and skills after training, therefore I am proposing to conduct a qualitative research study for my dissertation.

In this study, I will be conducting three individual interviews and focus groups over a period of six months (from August 2006 to January 2007) with eight to ten participants. Interviews and focus groups will be conducted over the phone or in person, based on the availability and comfort level of participants. Please know that interviews and focus groups should last no longer than 60 minutes and participants can choose to end the discussion at any time. You will have an opportunity to choose a pseudonym, so that all names will remain private throughout the study. When results are disclosed, only pseudonyms and themes will be shared.

I anticipate when synthesizing data from these confidential interviews and focus groups, themes will emerge surrounding perceptions of the training experiences, as well as the application of learned knowledge and skills to participants' residential communities. My goal is to utilize these themes to enhance RA's experiences during and after RA pre-service training.

If you would like to participate in this qualitative study by sharing your story, experience, or and/or perception, I invite you to contact me at the address below. If you know a peer who may be interested in participating in this study, please feel free to forward this message directly to them and they, too, can contact me for additional details about the study.

Thank you for taking the time to read this proposal and for considering participating in this study. If you have questions or comments regarding this case study, please do not

hesitate to contact me. I look forward to hearing from you if you are interested in participating.

Dean Kennedy
(970) 351-2861

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

Informed Consent for Participation in Research
University of Northern Colorado

TITLE OF THE STUDY: Exploring How Resident Assistants at One University Create Meaning of Their Paraprofessional Training and Its Application

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dean Kennedy, 418 McKee Hall, University of Northern Colorado, (970) 351-2861, kenn6789@unco.edu.

RESEARCH ADVISOR: Dr. Florence Guido, 418 McKee Hall, University of Northern Colorado, (970) 351-2308, flo.guido-dibrito@unco.edu

GENERAL PURPOSE AND NATURE OF THE STUDY: The purpose of this study is to learn more about RA's experiences during pre-service RA training and the application of knowledge and skills to living communities after training. You are invited to participate in this research because the Assistant Director in your building has identified you as a staff member with a valuable perspective. I am interested in learning more about your experiences, thoughts, feelings, and ideas regarding RA training and the development of your community after training.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? The study will take place during RA training, in your living community throughout the Fall 2006 semester, and in January of 2007, in mutually agreed-upon locations. Together, we will decide when and where interviews and focus groups will be held. I will ask for your permission to visit you during training, as well as your residential community after training. My goal is to learn more about how RA's experience training, as well as the application of learned knowledge and skills to your residential community after training. Interviews and focus groups will be scheduled for one hour; however, you can stop the interview at any time or extend the interview if requested.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO? As a participant in this research study, you will be invited to participate in three individual interviews and focus groups with Dean Kennedy. The interviews will be tape recorded to accurately report your thoughts, feelings and experiences related to your experience being an RA. Examples of the types of interview questions include:
- Describe what you learned during RA training this Fall?
- What was the most helpful part of RA Training?
- What elements of RA training do you foresee applying to your residential community this Fall?
- Describe the role your supervisor has played throughout RA training.

You will also be invited to write your thoughts, feelings, and experiences in a journal prior to and in between the interviews and focus groups. This will allow you to record your thoughts, feelings, and experiences when Dean is not present. Further, you will also

be asked to allow Dean Kennedy to observe you during training and throughout the year in your residential community.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE? I will keep all data pertaining to this study in a locked cabinet in my office, including any information that may identify you as a participant, to the extent provided to me by law. You will be given an opportunity to select a pseudonym at the beginning of the study by which your information will be identified. I will make every effort to prevent anyone from knowing that you gave me information, or what that information is. Upon completion of the study, I may publish the results; however, your name and any identifying information will remain private. Please know some circumstances may require me to share your information; for example, the law requires me to show information to a court or the authorities if you pose a danger to yourself or others.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS? Possible risks involved in study are a time commitment of up to 6 hours over a six month time period, as well as any time you invest in journal writing. In addition, you may risk discomfort as you share your thoughts, feelings, and experiences about RA training and the application of learned knowledge and skills to your residential community. It is not possible to identify all potential risks involved with participation in this study, but Dean has taken reasonable precautions to minimize any known and possible risks.

WILL I BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? One of my goals is that you benefit from time reflecting on your experiences during RA training and as you develop your community throughout the year. By participating in this study, you may become more aware of your own, as well as other RA's, experiences and how they impact you as an RA.

WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? You will receive a personal journal at the beginning of this study that you will be able to keep upon the study's conclusion. Also, depending on the mutually agreeable times of interviews and focus groups, I will provide participants with meals, as an appreciation for participation.

WHAT WILL IT COST ME TO PARTICIPATE? The only costs to you throughout the duration of this study is the time you invest in participating in interviews, focus groups, and reflecting in your journal, if you choose to do so.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW? After participating in the interviews and focus groups, I will send you a copy of each typewritten transcript to review for accuracy. You will have an opportunity to make suggestions for changes or additions to the transcripts at this time. I will also invite you to assist in writing parts of the final report to involve you in sharing your experiences.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are

otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact the Sponsored Programs and Academic Research Center, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1907.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing _3_ pages.

_____
_____
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study   Date

_____
Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

_____
_____
Name of person providing information to participant   Date

_____
Signature of Research staff

Obtain your parent or guardian's permission ONLY if you are under 18 years of age.

APPENDIX C

NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER

**Office of Research
and Graduate Studies**

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

Sponsored Programs and
Regulatory
Compliance
Campus Box 7514
1 Leazar Hall
Raleigh, NC 27695-7514
919.515.7200
919.515.7721 (fax)

From: Debra A. Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator
            North Carolina State University
            Institutional Review Board

Date: August 09, 2006

Project Title: Exploring How Resident Advisors at One University Create Meaning of
                  Their Paraprofessional Training and Its Application

IRB#:   254-06-8

Dear Mr. Kennedy:

The research proposal named above has received administrative review and has been
approved as exempt from the policy as outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations
(Exemption: 46.101.b.2). Provided that the only participation of the subjects is as described
in the proposal narrative, this project is exempt from further review.

NOTE:
    1.   This committee complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of
       The Code of Federal Regulations.
       For NCSU projects, the Assurance Number is: M1263; the IRB Number
       is: 01XM.

    2.   Review de novo of this proposal is necessary if any significant
       alterations/additions are made.

Please provide a copy of this letter to your faculty sponsor. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Debra Paxton
NCSU IRB

APPENDIX D

OPEN-ENDED QUESTION GUIDE FOR INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

Individual Interview Questions

<u>First Individual Interview (August)</u>

Statement to each RA: Please keep in mind I am exploring the entirety of the RA Fall Training experience, including time spent with all West Campus RAs, your building staff, your own staff, and your RD – regardless of the day or time. So during this conversation, please think about the time period from when you moved in until the end of Training last Wednesday.

Training in General
- What did you learn during training?
- Which components/parts of training meant more to you? Less to you?
- Which training sessions (meeting in the amphitheater, BAR, etc.) meant more to you? Less to you?
- Looking back, what did you wish you had learned during training?
- Describe some of the consistent and inconsistent messages throughout training (from RDs to AD's to outside presenters)?
- What did you want to get out of training? Of the RA position?

Training Format
- What did you think of the large group training sessions and 'break-out' sessions with your individual staffs (i.e. Transitions philosophy, then programming model with each staff)? What did you learn from both sessions?
- What is the difference between training sessions with a large group (all West campus) and small groups (i.e. Transitions philosophy, then programming model with each staff)?
- When the larger group is broken up into smaller groups, what is the difference when breaking up into cross-staff groups compared with being grouped with you smaller staff?
- How did you feel when sessions ran under or over? How did that impact your attention during that session and/or other training sessions?

Presenters
- Share with me your perceptions of the presenters and their presentation styles? Who was helpful, who wasn't? Why or why not? Who had good information and poor presentation skills? Who had unnecessary information, but was fun? Combo's of either?
- During the sessions where presenters provided a theoretical background as to why we do what we do (programming, conduct, leadership) how important was that background to you?
- When a presenter looks/sounds like they made a mistake and you can tell, how did you notice them addressing the error (avoidance, take responsibility, etc.)? How does that impact your perception of them, the training, and the information they are sharing?

- Do you think presenters notice when RAs are bored, tired, falling asleep, don't care? How can you tell? What suggestions would you give them (either as individuals or as a groups of presenters) – be specific (ideas and names)?

Training Attendees
- What RA's did you see interacting the most with others or talking during sessions? Why do you think that is?
- Are there RAs that you look up to during training? Who are they? Why do you look up to them? What do they have to offer RAs during training?
- What groups/cliques hung out together during training? Why? How did that impact the training experience for others?
- How do you feel about staying after to talk with presenters if they have questions? What do you do when you have a question about something covered during a session or staff time? Do you ask someone? Who do you ask? When do you ask it (during session, afterwards with presenter, RD later, when it comes up again?
- What do you think are the factors that lead RAs to not pay attention during training sessions?
- There seem to be RA's during training that just don't care about the training, like they are just waiting till it is over so they can start their job as a RA. How does that impact you? What can presenters do to combat that? How does the topic influence RAs level of participation?
- How would you describe the role of the RDs during training? When the present? When they are not presenting? How helpful is the input provided by RDs throughout training? Are some RDs more helpful than others? Why?
- What is your perception of Assistant Director involvement during? What do they do or not do?

Clarification on specific sessions
- Talk with me about Behind Closed doors. How was that experience? What did you learn from the situations you addressed? Others addressed? How was the format?
- During the policy session with Hassel, did you already know that stuff, how important do you think that information is?
- How important is training on diversity related issues? Why? How helpful do you think this will be in your job?
- Talk to me about your perception of the Diversity Training session? How was it? How helpful do you think this will be in your job? What would you want to get out of that type/topic of training?

Administration Items during training
- What were the expectations for the staff regarding RCRs? Turn around time? Expectations for accuracy? Describe how you felt about having this project and the timeline you were given in order to accomplish this task.
  - For returners, how did you frame this project for new people? With knowing this paperwork has to get done, do you have any suggestions on how to make the process/timeline for doing them better?

- Share with me your experience in creating door decs. What were the expectations from your RD/staff (shared or implicit)? How was the process of getting your roster of residents?
- What were some other things you had to do during training to prepare for your job?

Closing Questions
- If you were an RD, what things would you do during training next year that would be the same as you all did this year?
- What would you change about the training experience for RA's next year? Why?
- What will you apply from training? Your personal or academic life? Residents? Staff? Etc.
- What am I missing? What else would you like to share about RA Training? Give me a better understanding of what training means to you?
- Are you using the journal at all? Is that helpful? Could I collect that at the Focus group (whether you used it or not, no worries)?
- What are some good times for a focus group (trying to get 12 RAs together)?

<u>Second Individual Interview (November)</u>

You
- Why did you choose to apply for the RA position?
    - How prepared were you, pre-training? When students moved in?
- How has your experience being an RA matched your perception of what you thought the position would entail?
    - Are you getting something out of the position you anticipated?
    - When you applied for the RA position, what kind of RA did you want to be? How is that similar or different from how you would describe your role now?
    - Returners: Why did you choose to return for a second/third-year? How has your experience this year related to what you thought the position would entail?
- What have you learned in the job that you wish you had learned during training?
- What building did you want to be placed in for this year? Where were you placed? Why? How has that affected your RA experience? Training till now?
- How you describe your RA Style/identity? How did that develop? What were the largest influencing factors?
    - For returning RAs, walk me through the process of how you decide to make alterations, if any (or not) to your identity from year to year – do you think about it in the spring, summer, during training, wing it with your new residents?
- What motivates you in your job?
- Talk with me about what are your commitments beyond the RA position and how those have impacted you and your job.

- What is something you are passionate about that you have applied in your job as an RA?

Staff
- What has been the role of your staff in your life thus far this year? What role have they played in helping you do your job (applying skills to your job)?
- Who do you learn from? Why?
- Who supports/challenges you?
- Where does recognition come from (and who recognizes who)
- Talk with me about the relationships between RAs on your staff. RA's who are 'popular' on staff, those who keep to themselves, different (possibly conflicting personalities) - how have those relationships/personalities impacted your staff from training till now?
- Talk to me about your perception of other RAs' commitment to the position. RAs who are "Res Lifers," those who do it for the housing/pay, and the middle-of-the-road folk. How does their performance/attitude impact you, the staff, residents, and/or your ability to do your?
- How would different RAs on your staff describe your RA style/identity?

Training
- What do you remember from training
- What was your favorite part of Fall Training
- What scenarios do you think should be in BCD's based on your experience thus far? For example, what would you have wanted to practice that you didn't get a chance to do or see during training?
- What in-services do you think would be beneficial? Why? How would they connect to Fall Training?

Community
- How have you developed your community over the past 2+ months/
  - Where did you learn how to do that?
- What is your relationship with your residents (individually, in groups, or as a whole community)?
  - How would your Residents describe your style/identity?
  - What do your residents expect from you (job-wise, personally)?
  - What have you applied to your community that you learned during training (again, think all training, not just the sessions)?
- How would your residents describe you as a RA, student, staff member? What would different residents say (those close to you, those you never see)?

Supervisor
- What is the relationship your supervisor has with the staff (individuals, groups, the whole staff)?
  - How has this relationship developed?

- How would your supervisor describe your style/identity (as a staff team member and as an RA for your residents)?
- What has been the role of your RD as you do your job? How do they help you apply what you learned during training to your community, staff, entire job, etc?

Administrators
- What has been your experience with your Assistant Director since training (your perception of their involvement in your role as an RA)? For returners, how similar is this from what you remember last year?

Final Thoughts
- How would you say the RA position has changed you? If at all?

Interview Wrap-Up
- For the third round of interviews and focus groups, what would be more meaningful – beginning or end of January, beginning or end of February, when thinking about Fall Training.
- Would you be interested in participating in a fourth round of interview and focus groups in late April?
- Collection of journals for photocopying
- Best way to send transcriptions for review (email or hard copy; if hard copy, what address works best)?

Third Individual Interview (January/February)

You
- What do you remember from Fall Training?
- What have you applied to your personal life, academic life, job, staff, and relationship with your supervisor?
- What are some examples of mistakes you may have made thus far this year?
    o -How do you plan to address/fix those this year?
    o -If you were to return as a RA next year, what would you change?
    o -How could those mistakes have been addressed in training so they would not have happened?
- Talk to me about the administrative aspects of your job?
    o -What do you think is necessary? What is not necessary?
    o -Where did you learn how to do those things?
    o -How could training have made your life easier with these administrative tasks?
- How has your community developed thus far?
    o What is the role of the RA in a community – what do you think they should do and should not do?
        ▪ Where do RAs learn that?
- With your RA style, where did that come from? (Training, OJT, upbringing/individual)

- Community Development since training – how did you do that? What role did training play?

Staff
- What is the role of your staff in you doing your job?
  - How did that develop?
- What is the perception of returners and first-year RAs on your staff?
  - -Does a divide still exist? Why is there a divide?
  - -When did the divide end for you/your staff?
  - -Describe that evolution from Fall Training
- When does the transition happen to where everyone on is on the same page (all are returners)? And how does that transition work?
- What are the expectations of first-year RAs compared with returning staff (from supervisor, 1st year staff, returners)?
- What is the dynamic between first-year and returning RAs from training till now?
- Describe the experience being a new staff member on a largely returning staff?
  - -How has that developed since training?
  - -How has that impacted you and your job?
- Describe the experience being a returning staff member on a largely new staff?
  - -How has that developed since training?
  - -How has that impacted you and your job?
  - -How have you seen that impacting new RAs and other returners?
- What is the role of conflict on staff? How is it addressed? When? Is it? What do you learn in training that helps in these situations?
- What advise would you give new RAs who have not been through RA training?

Supervisor
- Describe your supervisors style and how it has developed since training?
- What is your supervisors role in you doing your job?
- What is your connection between you and your RD? How has that developed since training?
- How do you think your relationship with your RD impacts the staff?

Follow-up Questions
- At this point, what are your plans for next academic year?
  - How did that choice develop?
- From this year thus far, what do you think HAS to be included in Fall Training and what shouldn't?
- For the fourth round of interviews and focus groups, what would be the best weekend in April when thinking about Fall Training.

Fourth Individual Interview (April)

- Now that you have a year (or more) under your belt as an RA, what is your role as the RA in your community?

- o How has your perception changed over the year(s) – from application, through training(s), to now?
- What is the role of Fall Training in the RA position?
- What do RAs need to learn in training in order to be successful?
- What did you learn in training that you applied to your job (community/residents, staff, relationship with supervisor) and/or your personal life?
- Is there anything in particular you wish you had learned?
- What did you learn in the process of doing your job? Could that have been learned in training? Why or why not?
- Looking back at the entire year, what are some challenges you faced and what could have been incorporated into training to give you a heads up for being better prepared for addressing those challenges?
- Looking at the possibility of participating in Fall Training, what role would you want to play as a new person AND/OR returner to make training more beneficial? For yourself? For others?
- What could be done to training to make it more interesting? Fun? (think format, timeline, schedule, sequence, prizes, recognition, games, etc.)
- How would you get new RAs excited about training?
- How would you get returning RAs excited about training?
- Using the attached sheets (Pie Chart and 2-Week Grid), how would you allocate educational information dissemination (learning how to do the job) compared to other things like personal time, administrative tasks, socializing with staff, etc.?
- As human beings, we belong to different groups based on our background, experiences, and upbringing (biologically, environmentally, and socially). To what groups to you belong? Gender, Sex, Religion/Faith Tradition/Spirituality, Race, Ethnicity, Social-Economic Class, family order (oldest, youngest, middle), siblings, parents educational background, major, educational class level (Frosh, Soph, Junior, Senior, 5th Yr Senior, etc.). How have these identities played out in training and throughout the year for you?
- How have you changed as a person (RA, student, friend, etc.) over the course of our RA experience?
  - o What is the role the RA position played in these changes?
- What skills have you gained that you can attribute to the RA position?
- When thinking about your role as a participant in this research, what have you learned about yourself, your staff, your supervisor, your community, and being an RA?

- For the Focus Group, I will be asking folk for a fun quip, phrase, or comment about the RA position and/or training, just to be prepared (saying nothing is fine too)
- In the Focus Group, I will be asking participants to plan the perfect training schedule, so think about what that may look like (length of time, what days look like, retreat timing, etc.).

Focus Group Questions

- What did you expect being an RA would entail before training? Based on your understanding of this job now (returner or new), how does training impact?
- How would you say RA training impact your residents?
- How would you say RA training impact your career goals?
- How do RAs stay motivated during training?
- What do you think are factors that lead RAs to pay attention or not pay attention throughout training (sessions with formal presenters, in-hall time)?
- When thinking about training sessions where there is a presenter, are there some topics where it is helpful to provide the background and skills?
- How do RAs develop confidence as a RA? How is that similar or different for new and returning staff members (different expectations and roles)?
- What are some specific examples of what you learned during training that you have applied to your RA position thus far?
- How are you and your staff impacted when training ends and you no longer see each other as much?
- How would you let RAs know training is important and beneficial to them before training begins – without sounding like a mom ("this is important for you, even though you don't think you need it)?
- What would be a way to transition RAs into training from the summer? RAs may be ready to come back to learn (classes), but classes don't really happen for a week and a half after RAs move into the halls – are their minds still in Summer mode, because they are not actually in classes.
- Selection, Training, Supervision, which is more important

Second Focus Group (November)

- Thinking about Fall Training
  - What did you learn during Fall training that you are using as an RA?
  - What was the most important thing you learned during Fall Training?
  - What have you learned since Fall Training, that you wish you had learned during training?
  - What are the components of your job you don't think you could learn during training?
  - What was your favorite part of Fall Training?
- Talk with me about the similarities and differences of what you learn and how you learn it (academic knowledge/skills, job knowledge/skills, personal knowledge skills).
  - How do you see in-services, staff meetings, 1-1's with your supervisor, etc. impacting you and/or your ability to do your jobs?
  - How often and when do you reflect on what you have learned in this position (about yourself and about the RA job)?
- Your building/community

- o How does building placement impact an RA's performance and life in general?
- o What role does an RA play in their community?
- o How does an RA's community impact them? Applying what they have learned?
- What motivates you as an RA (role of staff, supervisor, residents, etc.)?
- Describe the perfect RA. How does someone get to that point?
- An RA is hired today (mid-semester hire), what do they need to know? How would they learn that?
- How often and when do you reflect on what you have learned in this position (about yourself and about the RA job)?
- With four components (RA, Staff, Residents, Supervisor), what happens when one or more are not the most positive (aka – a bad experience)?
- Selection, Training, Supervision, which is more important
  - o Would you change your perspective based on your experience thus far?

Third Focus Group (January/February)

- Describe some examples of things you are proud of in your job. How are those things connected to Fall training or something else/
  - o -how did you learn to do that?
  - o -what role could Fall training play in making sure those things happened?
- What have been some challenges for you this year in the RA position?
  - o -why have they been challenges?
  - o -how do you think Fall training could prepare you to address those challenges before they are challenges?
- What information, skills, and abilities are necessary for the RA position?
  - o -where do you learn that?
- Training is a short period of time, I hear that there's a need for more information, but how do you cram more information into the same amount of time?
- Privacy v. boundaries – where do you learn then and what information do you need to know?
- Training, Selection, Supervisor – which is more important?
- How well do you know yourself?
- How well do you think your staff knows themselves?
- In thinking about three RA 'styles;' Authoritarian, Administrative, Relational/Social – where do you fit in and how do those styles impact the job (residents, staff, supervisor, etc.)?
- With mid-year hires this semester, how do you balance training with no training – justify why you should have Fall training if someone jumping into the position mid year is just as successful.
- What did you learn during Fall training that is critical for mid-year hires to know?

Fourth Focus Group (April)

- How do you learn about RAs perceptions and attitudes of the RA position?
    - -What are some sample questions you could ask? Individuals? The Staff as a whole? When would you ask those questions? In what format?
        - Would it make a difference if you knew ahead of time?
    - -How have you seen RAs attitudes and perceptions about the RA position impact RAs themselves, residents, communities, staff, and/or supervisors?
    - -How do those perceptions and attitudes change (if at all) and why do think that happens (determining factors)?
        - Where do you think those behaviors come from?
- How do you learn about RAs perceptions and attitudes of Fall RA training?
    - -What are some sample questions you could ask? Individuals? The Staff as a whole? When would you ask those questions? In what format?
    - -How have you seen RAs attitudes and perceptions about training impact RAs themselves, residents, communities, staff, and/or supervisors?
    - -How do those perceptions and attitudes change (if at all) and why do think that happens (determining factors)?
- How would you assess each RAs motivation to be an RA prior to training and throughout the year?
    - -How is that important for each RA, their community, the staff, the supervisor?
- How would you assess an RAs motivation to apply what they learn to their job (not necessarily from training)?
- How would you learn about each RAs learning styles? When? How could you incorporate that into training so that there is the greatest benefit for the most people?
- As human beings, we belong to different groups based on our background, experiences, and upbringing (biologically, environmentally, and socially). Gender, Sex, Religion/Faith Tradition/Spirituality, Race, Ethnicity, Social-Economic Class, family order (oldest, youngest, middle), siblings, parents educational background, major, educational class level (Frosh, Soph, Junior, Senior, 5th Yr Senior, etc.). How have you all seen these identities played out in training and throughout the year (impact on self, staff, community, supervisor)?
- Using the attached sheets (Pie Chart and 2-Week Grid), create the perfect Fall Training Schedule with time allocations and actual schedule

APPENDIX E

SMITH NEIGHBORHOOD 2006 RESIDENT ADVISOR

FALL TRAINING SCHEDULE

Smith Neighborhood 2006 Fall RA Training Schedule

Tuesday, August 8, 2006				
Time	Topic	Location	Presenters	Objectives
10 a.m.-5 p.m.	RA Check-in	24-Hour Desk	Office Staff	▪ Issue keys and check-in packet
5 p.m.-6 p.m.	*Dinner*	On your own or as staff		
6 p.m.-9 p.m.	Informal time with staff	TBA	RDs	
9 p.m.-?	Room Setup/In Area Time		RDs	▪ Have in area time or allow RAs time to move in ▪ Discuss with RAs opening responsibilities

Wednesday, August 9, 2006				
Time	Topic	Location	Presenters	Objectives
8-9 a.m.	Breakfast	Dining Hall		
9-10 a.m.	Teambuilding	Amphitheatre	RD	▪ Introduce RA Staffs
10-11 a.m.	Housing Welcome	Smith Neighborhood Lounge	University Housing Leaders	▪ Vision of University Housing & Residential Life ▪ Importance and purpose of Resident Advisors
11 a.m. – Noon	In-Area Time		RDs	▪ Training expectations ▪ Building tour ▪ Staff ice melters
Noon – 1 p.m.	Lunch	Dining Hall		
1-1:30 p.m.	Greek Life	Smith Neighborhood Lounge	Director of Greek Life	▪ Discuss the partnership between UH&RL and GL ▪ Learn about GL recruitment events
1:30-2 p.m.	Inter-Residence Council (IRC)	Smith Neighborhood Lounge	IRC Exec Board	▪ Purpose of IRC ▪ Utilizing IRC for funding and programming
2-2:30 p.m.	National Residence Hall Honorary	Smith Neighborhood Lounge	NRHH Exec Board	▪ Purpose of NRHH ▪ Importance of OTMs ▪ Writing OTMs
2:30 p.m.	Student Activities and Welcome Week	Smith Neighborhood Lounge	Student Activities Staff	▪ Overview of Welcome Week ▪ Overview of Student Activities
3-3:30pm	Residential Computing and Networks	Smith Neighborhood Lounge	IT staff	▪
3:30-5 p.m.	Free Time/Floor prep time	Hunter University Campus		▪ Take care of university business (financial aid, registration, setting up room, books, etc.)
5-6 p.m.	Dinner	Dining Hall		
6-7 p.m.	Programming Model and Overview	Smith Neighborhood Lounge	AD	▪ Purpose of programming model ▪ Overview of the various facets of the model
7-9 p.m.	*In-Area Time*	Buildings	RDs	• Programming models • Programming expectations • Staff expects & development

Thursday, August 10, 2006				
Time	Topic	Location	Presenters	Objectives
8-9 a.m.	Breakfast	Dining Hall		
9-10 a.m.	Housing Policies	Smith Neighborhood Lounge	AD	▪
10-11 a.m.	Residents' Rights	Smith Neighborhood Lounge	RD	▪
11 a.m. - Noon	Blood Born Pathogens – new RAs Floor time - returners	Smith Neighborhood Lounge and buildings	EH & S staff	▪ New RAs learn about BBP safety ▪ Returners plan programs and work on tasks
Noon – 1 p.m.	Lunch	Dining Hall		▪
1-1:45 p.m.	Fire Safety	Campus Cinema	Fire Department Staff	▪ Use of fire extinguishers ▪ Expectations for assisting fire safety personnel during evacuations/drills ▪ Identification of specific fire code violations
1:45–230 p.m.	Campus Police	Campus Cinema	Officer	▪ Expectations for RA's role in interacting with campus police ▪ Drug identification and discussion ▪ Overview of protocol police must follow in responding to situations
2:30-3:30 p.m.	Sexual Assault Awareness	Smith Neighborhood Lounge	Reps from the Women's Center and Men's Health	▪ Completing paperwork ▪ Providing support to students ▪ Following appropriate protocol in contacting personnel about a sexual assault
3:30-4:30 p.m.	Administrative Memo Workshop	Smith Neighborhood Lounge	RDs	▪ Details to include in Ad Memos ▪ Format of Ad Memos ▪ Practice in writing Ad Memos
4:30-5 p.m.	Judicial Overview	Smith Neighborhood Lounge	Student Conduct Office staff	▪ Purpose of judicial hearings ▪ Timeline of what happens after submitting an Ad Memo ▪ Expectations for RAs in working with residents who have been documented
5-6 p.m.	Dinner	Dining Hall		▪
6-7 p.m.	In-Area Time			▪ Duty Overview ▪ Roves ▪ Fire evacuation plan
7-9 p.m.	Staff Reflection			▪ Process information from the day ▪ Role plays ▪ Other business

Friday, August 11, 2006				
8-9 a.m.	Breakfast	Dining Hall		
9-?	Leadership Development	Smith Neighborhood Lounge	RD and AD	▪ Aspects of leadership and importance of leadership in RA position ▪ Development of leadership potential ▪ Ethical leadership
?-noon	RA work time/floor prep time			▪
Noon-1 p.m.	Lunch	Dining Hall		▪
1-5 p.m.	Conference Style Sessions	Various	Multiple	OTM writing, bulletin boards and door decs, time management, programming and publicity, leadership, assessing floor needs, dining
5-6 p.m.	Dinner			▪
6-9 p.m.	In-area time	Dining Hall		▪

Saturday August 12, 2006 and Sunday, August 13, 2006
OPTIONAL RETREAT DAYS

Monday, August 14, 2006				
8-9 a.m.	Breakfast	Dining Hall		
9-11a.m	Peer Counseling	Smith Neighborhood Lounge	Counseling Center staff and RD	▪ Working through peer-to-peer conflicts ▪ Recognizing warning signs of depressed/troubled students ▪ Supporting troubled students ▪ Referring students to the Counseling Center ▪ Role playing
11-noon	Diversity Activity	Smith Neighborhood Lounge		▪ Miniature Earth
Noon-1 p.m.	Lunch	Dining Hall		▪
1-2:30 p.m.	Men's/Women's Health; Gender Communication	Smith Neighborhood Lounge	Reps from the Women's Center and Men's Health	▪ Men's/Women's issues commonly encountered by college students ▪ Services offered through Hunter University offices to provide support, education, and awareness of these issues ▪ Round-table discussions
2:30-5 p.m.	Diversity Movie/Activity	Campus Cinema		▪ Higher Learning (RDs will facilitate discussions)
5-6 p.m.	Dinner			▪
6-7 p.m.	Committee Structure Overview	Smith Neighborhood Lounge	AD	▪ Overview of the Smith Neighborhood Committee Structure

7-8 p.m.	Staff Discussions			▪ Process the day's information ▪ Practice new skills
8-9 p.m.	In-Area Time			▪ Committee Preferences
9-10 p.m.	RA work time			▪ Returning RAs work on presentations

Tuesday, August 15, 2006				
Time	Topic	Location	Presenter	Objectives
8-11 a.m.	Free Time/ university business			▪ Take care of university business ▪ Complete "to-do" list tasks
11 a.m. – Noon	Academics	Smith Neighborhood Lounge	AD (academic resources)	▪ Succeeding academically RA ▪ Providing academic support to residents ▪ Role modeling appropriate academic behavior
Noon – 1 p.m.	Lunch	Dining Hall		
1-1:30 p.m.	Committee Meetings	Various Locations	RDs/ADs	▪ Committee Expectations ▪ Committee meeting times for the semester
1:30-4:30 p.m.	Conference Sessions	Various Locations	See Schedule	▪ Academics (RA tips), stress relief, community development, role modeling, assertive communication
4:30-5 p.m.	Staff Discussion			▪ Process and share information from conference sessions
5-6 p.m.	Dinner	Dining Hall		
6-7 p.m.	BCD Prep for returning RAs / Free time for New RAs	Residence Hall Classroom	Returning RAs/RDs	
7-9 p.m.	Behind Closed Doors	Residence Hall	All RAs/ RDs	▪ Confronting policy violations ▪ Applying skills and knowledge from training
9-10 p.m.	BCD Debrief		Returning RAs, RDs	

Wednesday, August 16, 2006				
Time	Topic	Location	Presenter	Goals for Session
8–9 a.m.	Breakfast	Dining Hall		
9 a.m.- Noon	Desk Training or In Area Time	Buildings	CACs, returners	
Noon-1 p.m.	Lunch	Fountain		
1-4 p.m.	West Teambuilding		RD	-DISC
4-5pm	Staff prep time	Buildings		
5–6 p.m.	Dinner	Dining Hall		
6-8 p.m.	End of Training Celebration	Smith Neighborhood Lounge	6-7pm RDs	▪ Ice Cream ▪ Skits

Thursday & Friday – In Area/Ask RD/Early Arrivals
Saturday & Sunday – OPENING!!!

APPENDIX F

SOCIAL CHANGE MODEL OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

PRESENTATION OUTLINE AND CASE STUDIES

A Social Change Model of Leadership Development

Equity, Social Justice, Self-knowledge, Personal Empowerment, Collaboration, Citizenship, Service

Outline for session:
1. Personal Experience with Leadership
   a. Break into small staffs
      i. Share with each other a person you consider a leader in your life
         1. Why are they a leader to you
         2. What characteristics do they have that you consider leadership?
   b. Report back to the larger group
      i. One or two people share per group the answers to the above
      ii. As a whole group, what are common themes/characteristics?
2. Social Change Model of Leadership Development
   a. Share model, including three circles (individual, group, society)
      i. Individual- what personal qualities are most supportive of group functioning and positive social change?
      ii. Group-how can collaborative leadership development process effect social change?
      iii. Community/Society- what kinds of service activities are most effective in energizing the group and in developing desired personal qualities in the individual?
   b. Goals:
      i. To develop:
         1. self-knowledge- understanding one's talents, values, and interests
         2. leadership competence- capacity to mobilize oneself and others to serve and work collaboratively
      ii. To facilitate:
         1. positive social change
   b. Seven "C's" of the Social Change Model (see below for more in depth description of the 7 C's)
      i. Collaboration (Group Process)
      ii. Consciousness of self (Individual)
      iii. Commitment (Individual)
      iv. Congruence (Individual)
      v. Common Purpose (Group Process)
      vi. Controversy with Civility (Group Process)
      vii. Citizenship (Citizenship)
   c. Change = ultimate goal; to make a better world and a better society for self and others
3. Group Activity: Breaking Down the Seven C's
   a. Get in a circle and count off by seven (to form 7 groups)
   b. Each group is assigned a "C"
      i. Answer the following questions
         1. Why is this "C" important?
         2. Where do you see this "C" in leadership?

          3. What happens when this "C" is not present?

          4. What does this "C" mean to you (group) and leadership?

       ii. Share answers to questions back to the group

4. Group Activity: Case Studies
   a. Get in a circle and count off by seven (to form 7 different groups)
   b. Each group is assigned a case study to address
      i. Answer the following questions
         1. Brief overview of case
         2. What action did your group decide to take, and why?
         3. How do the 7 "Cs" apply to this case?
      ii. Share answers to questions back to the group

5. Group Activity: Bring the Social Change Model of Leadership Development Back to your job
   a. Break into small staffs
      i. As a group, describe behaviors related to your position that represent each "C"
      ii. Think about what others see in you for each "C" – i.e. how do they know you collaborate, that you are conscious of self, etc.?

7Cs and group activities to go with them

1. Consciousness of Self – Self Awareness
   a. Personal creed

2. Congruence –
   a. Do others see me as I see myself?
   b. Am I contrary? Do you know where I stand?
   c. Group choices for survival exercise

3. Commitment –
   a. "I really care about…"
   b. Case studies on people who do or do not persist goals

4. Collaboration –
   a. Group members identify mechanisms to maintain open communication and to share info

5. Common Purpose –
   a. Enrolling and engaging others to go with idea
   b. Students brainstorm variety of local campus (west) or community issues about which the students have concerns. Group needs to define and rationalize a common purpose for subsequent leadership development work. Problem likely to arise: range of issues and problems group will discuss. Likely outcome: no unanimity about choice of issue, some students may drop out, lose interest, etc. Remaining students could be encouraged to "flesh out" common purpose in terms of specific strategies, division of labor, and so on.

6. Controversy w/Civility
   a. Skills/tools needed (negotiation, role playing, listening)
   b. Exercise to discuss how actions and words influence reactions and behaviors of others

      c. Concern for common good
      d. Barriers to resolving disagreements w/civility: strong self-interest, unwillingness to cooperate w/others, defensive communication, fear that something will be lost or given up, and a lack of a cooperative or win-win philosophy among group members

7. Citizenship –
      a. Does group effort serve or enhance experience of others w/in academic community?
      b. How do the service recipients view their own needs and problems?
      c. Good citizenship must begin at the level of the leadership development group. Each member is responsible for enhancing the experience of every other member and the functioning of the group as a whole

Violence and the PTA

Lunchtime at Edgeville Community College is a lively time. Because space is tight in the lunchroom, groups of students have started eating together and some regularly now look forward to their new friends. One group of adult learners were particularly grateful to find each other.

In one discussion, they discover that they each have one or more children in the local elementary school system. The morning paper contained a frightening story of a local fifth grader who was beaten up at recess by three to her children for no apparent reason. These parents all realize they each have additional stories to share that their children have told them of various acts of violence in the local schools. One says, "I just thought what my little Sarah told me last week was an isolated incident. How much of this is really happening?" Another replies, "oh no, my son goes to her school and told me the same thing. He also told me of another incident the next week involving some of the same children." Chris has been listening thoughtfully and said, "My husband teaches at a different elementary school and said he is really concerned that more and more violence seems to be creeping into the elementary schools. He says it's hard to get anyone's attention because they think little kids can't do much harm."

Further discussion over the next two weeks increased their alarm about the potential of increasing violence. Finally, one student said, "You know, most PTAs operate in isolation- I know ours does- but we here cover about five different schools. Couldn't we do something?"

Fees for Service

Broke State University has experienced five years of severe financial cut backs. The Board of Trustees accepted a plan to phase out five majors over the next three years. Tuition has increased 8% each of the last three years and the room and board charges increased 12%.

The campus paper today contains an interview with the Vice President for Administration that the BSU Board would consider several new fees-for-service starting next year. Students have been fairly understanding that times are financially difficult, but the pattern of adding separate fees is new. Student Government plans to discuss the next fiscal year budget at their next meeting. Freshmen senators in Student Government are very concerned. One says, "if they start adding separate fees now, there will be more and more added over the next four years. Where is all this going?" Another says, "Maybe it would be better not to have some services than to pay an add on for each one. I never even use the new recreation center at all- why am I paying for it?" Another says, "Why not just raise tuition another 1%- at least then it's all covered in one total concept. What do we want to do about this?"

Library Hours

The Academic Affairs Subcommittee of the Student Government Association at St. Mary's College has been inactive for years. St. Mary's is an undergraduate coeducational college enrolling 3,000 traditional age students, with 95% living on campus. Spurred by a spirited student government election, several devoted students volunteered to serve on the new committee. None of the students have been active in campus politics but all were motivated to be involved in academic issues.

The committee ran a half page survey in the school paper, The Torch, asking for identification of problems and issues students would like this committee to address. Only 60 students returned the surveys but over half of those surveys that were returned said something like: "How can this be a college and have the library close at 5pm every night?"; or "Why in the world is the library open on the weekend for only 4 hours on Saturday morning?- I don't even get up until 11am!'"; One wrote, "I work every afternoon and have classes every morning- when am I supposed to get to the library?" Still another wrote, "My parents pay a lot of money for me to go here, services like the library should be more user friendly."

The committee decides there is a clear mandate to make modification in the library hours a high priority. One member says, "Let's just circulate a petition and demand they change!" Another says, "Let's go to the President and ask her to look into it!" Another says, "Now wait a minute, let's think this through."

Revitalizing a Youth Tutoring Program

Five years ago, the membership of the Black Student Union adopted a local elementary school for a mathematics tutoring project. Men and women from the BSU met twice a week with groups of children to work on arithmetic skills, provide general mentoring, and serve as big brothers and sisters to the children. The program was very successful and persisted for two years with consistent support from BSU students. After the primary organizers graduated, the third and fourth years of the project had sporadic attendance from the BSU students. The project basically died in its fifth year.

The Assistant Principal from the elementary school has called the BSU to see if the group can reinvigorate the project. She says, "This meant more to our children than you may know. Some of the sixth graders now say they would not be doing so well if you hadn't helped them in second grade. PLEASE see if you can do this for us." The BSU Executive Committee is meeting to discuss this project. One member says, "We are into so many other projects now, I don't see how we can manage this one too." Another says, "We really need to do this. I participated two years ago and would be glad to do it again." Still another says, "Does it only have to be us? How about Pan Hellenic? How about the African Culture House? One thing's for sure, these kids need attention. Can't we make sure something happens?"

Transfer Articulation Agreements

"Oh no" Jim groans. "I just got my new transcript evaluation and I lost 15 credits from Riverdale Community College. New State University won't accept 5 whole courses even though they are taught here too!"

"That happened to me too," classmate Jennifer chimes in. "How can they do this to us? Transfers have a tough enough time and to have to add a whole semester's worth of course work is ridiculous. I think they do it just to get our money. It's also so elitist, as if NSU is the only place that can teach those courses. Absolutely everyone I know loses credits coming here."

Both students go by to see the Director of Academic Advising in their major department after class. Jim pleads, "This just is not fair, Dr. Scott! My advisor at RCC assured me all these college track courses would transfer and now I am screwed! It's not fair to me and to everyone else… What can I do?"

10 AM or 7 PM?

Over the past ten years, student enrollment patterns have shifted dramatically at Bay State University. The student body had traditionally been 90% average-aged students, with equal numbers of men and women. Changes in the region and curricular offerings have led to a current student body where only 50% is of traditional age, with a big increase in older students, most of whom are part-time women.

The Education Department has historically offered its core courses during the morning hours, only one large section of most courses is offered. Residential traditional age students really like this morning model because it leaves them free for afternoon jobs or other courses. Their evenings are spent in social activities, student organization meetings, and studying. However, the growing new majority of older adult students find this schedule very confining. One sadly noted, "I just cannot afford to take classes every morning; I have two small children. I need to wait until my husband is home from work before I can come to campus. I guess I will have to drop out and wait until my children are in school." Graduate Education 220 is scheduled as usual for next Fall at 10 am. The 80 students in the prerequisite class (Education 210) ask the professor if this could be discussed in the next class session.

Asian Culture Center

Although Pacific Coast College is a fairly traditional undergraduate liberal arts college, it does put special emphasis on ethnic and cultural studies. This is because growing numbers of students come from Pacific Rim countries. A new coalition of Asian student organizations, the Asian Confederation, has requested space in the student union to become an Asian Culture Center. Once this request became the cover story in the campus paper, the Hispanic Student Association, the Mexican-American Coalition, and the Black Student Union also requested space in the in the student union.

The Director of the Union has consulted with the Student Union Advisory Board for guidance. Once faculty member says, "This is very understandable, each group has strong identity development and wants a place to be home base." A student replies, "Yes, but if this continues we cannot accommodate all groups. When do you stop? How do you make these decisions?" Another faculty member observes, "Is the union the only space possible? What is the College's commitment to this kind of need and request?" An Asian student member of the Board says, "I think some competition-thing is happening; why does everyone want space now?" The Director of the Union says, "OK, how do we make meaning out of these requests and what can we do?"

Controversy in Student Activity Funds

One of the major roles of the York University Student Government Association is the allocation of nearly $300,000 in annual student activity fees. Past practice and procedure has been that recognized student organizations are to file an allocation request including a plan of annual activities. SGA policies stipulate that some of each organization's events must be open to the entire student body and that at least one event per semester must be of an educational or cultural nature. Each organization is given a 15 minute time slot in an open hearing to answer SGA questions about its budget and proposed plan. Any member of the student body is also invited to attend to present support or disagreement with the allocations requested.

The newly approved Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Association has never been eligible for funding until this year. The approval of the LGB group was clearly within campus policies, but generated a greater deal of campus protest and dissenting letters to the editor. The Chair of the SGA Allocations Committee anticipates a difficult budget approval process. Even some SGA representatives have sad they cannot see funding this group. At a planning meeting, the Chairperson says, "We better think through our process again. Are we going to have problems?" A member adds, "Is there anything we can do to make this fair and smooth?" Another says, "Hey, wait a minute, you cannot change the process. It's specified in the SGA constitution and would be challenged if anything was biased or closed. "The Director of Student Activities and advisor to the committee says "Good point to raise. What do you think you might consider?"

Campus Safety

The Panhellenic Council's meetings are usually laid back and relaxed. Presidents from the 15 national sororities and their advisor meet to plan upcoming programs and make policy changes as needed. Tonight's meeting was a big exception.

Three women students were assaulted on campus last week. The local paper reported one student was abducted and subsequently raped. Another was walking back from the library to her residence hall room at 10 PM and a man attempted to grab her from behind but she broke away and ran for help. Another was grabbed as she walked back to her residence hall from a sorority chapter meeting. There haven't been many safety incidents over the years; campus lighting is minimal and no one has been too worried about being safe. The school paper just printed a story with an interview with the Dean of Students emphatically stating that student safety is a top campus priority. She was going to work with many groups and offices on campus to raise awareness of safety and ensure safe practices. Although many Panhellenic participants are gripped with fear, one president says, "We can do something about this. It isn't just theirs to solve, but we need to be part of the solution too."

Pitiful Student Pay

Nearly 75% of all Atlantic State University students work from 15-20 hours per week. Students have typically liked working on campus because it is closer to their classes, employers are more flexible and understanding about the demands of being a student, and they like being able to identify with the pleasant staff in most offices. However, budget problems have kept on-campus student pay at minimum wage. The Student Advisory Board in Food Services is very concerned. Off campus employers pay more money and more and more student workers who have to work to pay for school are forced to take these off campus jobs. One former student worker said, "My new employer is not at all flexible; I mean it is my job to be there; but I have 3 midterms next week and my grades are dying! I wish ASU could raise their pay to make it possible to stay here." Another student said, "I would much rather work on campus; but I just plain cannot afford it." A member of the Student Advisory Board adds the question of pay increases to the agenda of the meeting. She says, "We need to look into this pay situation that is forcing students who would much rather be here to work off campus. Surely there is something we could do?"

APPENDIX G

LETTER TO STUDY PARTICIPANTS AND HUNTER UNIVERSITY

Dear Resident Advisors and Staff/Administrators at Hunter University,

Words can not express the gratitude I feel for all of you in my heart, so the "Thank You's" printed on this page will have to suffice until I can tell you in person, if I have not done so already.

To the department leaders who allowed me to conduct this study on your campus and within Smith Neighborhood, thank you very much. I have experienced a significant amount of personal and professional growth through this opportunity to explore students' meaning making experiences of Fall training. I feel as though I have a much better sense of RAs' perceptions of the department, campus, and students living at Hunter University, as well as what they are learning that will help them be resources to their residents. There is no way I could have followed through on this research study without your support and trust, for which I am eternally grateful.

For the Resident Advisors who participated in this study, thank you for being honest and open, feeling comfortable in sharing stories about who you are, your backgrounds, and ultimately what you learned during training and applied afterwards. While this study was designed to focus specifically on Fall training and the application of what you learned, our individual and collective conversations quickly and seamlessly transition from topics related directly to the RA position to much deeper issues you had or were experiencing. For this level of sharing, I truly appreciate your involvement in this study because I feel I gained so much more about who you are, why you chose to be an RA, what you wanted to gain out of the position, AND the meanings you drew from the Fall training experience.

Beyond the context of this study, I want to thank the participants and staff members who engaged me in conversation about the RA position in general. Not only did I learn a tremendous amount of information that will help me enhance training curricula where I work, but through our dialogue, I learned so much more about the RA position in general, dynamics of community building on RA staffs AND with on campus residents, the critical nature of developing and maintaining positive relationships between peers and hierarchical employment relationships, the need for comprehensive training for supervisors, and the importance of consistent and frequent methods of support and recognition for all staff members. My learning continues as I interact daily with students, staff, and colleagues from around the U.S. but my experience conducting this study provided a much more solid foundation than I could have hoped for in my professional and academic journey.

Thank you again, RAs, staff, and leaders at Hunter University. I hope the stories contained within this manuscript at least partially captured the essence of Fall RA training at this Southeastern university so readers will have an opportunity to apply what they learned here to their personal and professional worlds, just as I have done, in order to enhance the lives of student staff members participating in training curricula.