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# The Resident Assistant Position: An Overview

Resident Assistant is the position title given to those students who appear to many to only supervise students living in a residence hall and inforce policies and procedures. While both of those items are aspects of the resident assistant position, there are many more things that an RA does as part of the position. I believe that the term mentor describes the Resident Assistant position with a more positive connotation.

A mentor is typically defined as someone who provides knowledge and insight to people who consider the person a mentor, also referred to as mentees. In the Resident Assistant and resident relationship, the RA is the mentor and the resident is the mentee. This relationship is especially evident in a freshmen community. Residents come to campus not policies, procedures, or how to do anything at Longwood in general. RAs have information about the functions of the University and how to go about completing certain tasks on campus. For example, I am an RA to numerous students in the Cormier Honors College. As part of their degree requirement, students in the honors college are required to study abroad prior to graduation. In the beginning of the year, I had several residents approach me because they were unaware how to begin the study abroad process. I directed them to the Study Abroad office and to our new study abroad website. I also showed my residents how to make an appointment with Dr. Kane, the study abroad coordinator. Although not specifically defined in my positon title to assist residents with beginning their study abroad process, I feel as though this action would fall under the responsibilities of a mentor.

A mentor would also want their mentees to feel at home wherever they are and to have a sense of community. In this analogy, the RA is still the mentor and they want their residents to feel at home and become an integral part of the Longwood community. The RA is one of the first non-first year students that residents meet when starting their New Lancer Days period. First-year student RAs conduct a hall meeting the first night students are on campus. During this hall meeting, I had my residents play ice breaker games that involved them saying their names and answering basic questions about themselves. I had a beach ball and wrote different questions on the ball and the ball was tossed around the room. Whoever caught the ball answered the question their right thumb landed on. Some questions were, “What is your dream job?” and “Why did you choose Longwood?”. I attempted to avoid questions regarding majors, because most students are put into an LSEM based on their major. Throughout the semester, RAs host programs that are fun and educational for residents in their hall community, building community, and even campus community. These programs assist in development of community.

Overall, I feel as though the RA position puts a student in the position to become a mentor to their residents. The relationship should not turn into a friendship, despite the fine line between a mentor and a friend. I believe that someone can be a mentor without being a close friend and someone can friend without necessarily becoming a mentor. RAs have knowledge and resources to assist residents in having a sense of community in their residence hall. Education and development of residents is another focal point of programming and general RA and resident interactions. Another term Resident Assistants deserve is mentor.

# The Resident Assistant Experience

I would describe my experiences as a Resident Assistant as a positive one. My favorite aspect of the position is forming relationships with my residents. I am a first-year student RA with a majority of students in the Cormier Honors College. I enjoy this community as I am also a member of the Cormier Honors College and enjoy assisting first-year students. I believe that my experiences at Longwood have allowed me to form relationships with my residents that allows me to share my experiences with my residents as a means of encouraging and supporting them.

Despite my love for this position, there are a few aspects that frustrate me. One particular aspect is the number of times a semester I am on duty in the Cox/Wheeler community. Since we only have seven RA staff members, we each have one night of duty in addition to our weekend duty shifts and flex day during the week. Another part of the position that frustrates me is that there is an RA on duty, but residents do not remember to call the RA on duty. They would rather talk to their RA, which I understand to some extent. If there is a roommate conflict or something personal, then their RA would be able to assist them better than the RA on duty because their RA would know them personally. However, any RA can assist a resident in simple tasks such as submitting a work order. Overall, there have been few things that frustrate me in the position.

Surprise is definitely one element about being a staff member that exists almost daily. One thing I was really shocked about was how little first-year residents check their emails. If there is an important email regarding closing, they have to be reminded to check their email. Another aspect that surprised me was how little people are able to follow directions. I know everyone makes mistakes, but when certain people don’t follow the same instructions several times in a row, it can become annoying. My biggest surprise of all was how much my residents have opened up to me about their lives in a short amount of time.

# The Roles of the Resident Assistant

Overall, I feel as though I am performing how a supervisor or professional staff member would expect of a first-year resident assistant. There are a few areas where I feel as though I can improve on and India and I have discussed a plan for my improvement. I plan on actively participating in staff meetings and not second guessing my opinion solely based on the fact others on my staff have more experience than I do. I will also include connections I have on campus into my programs through collaboration. I believe that I am where I am supposed to be in the Resident Assistant position.

I believe that I have excelled in the areas of peer helping and facilities, but I have not had as much to handle in regard to behavioral situations as other residents. My favorite experience involving peer helping was when it was time for class registration. As part of LSEM, honors students are required to submit an honor’s four-year plan. The purpose of this assignment is for first-year students to realize how strategic you have to be when selecting and scheduling honors courses and other honors requirements. I had a small group of honors students all ask for my help with their plans. We met in the lounge and I shared my four-year plan with them and explained why I picked to take one honors class in one semester and not in another. One of the students is also in my major, so I was able to help her more than the other students simply because I have experiences in her specific classes. In respect to facilities, I feel as though I submit work orders about lights being out in the hallway each day I am on duty. In the beginning, I was unsure of when I needed to submit a work order versus when an incident report was necessary in certain instances. There was one room on my hall that had only heat blasting in their room. The residents claimed to have placed a work order. When I asked them more about what they did, they emailed the wrong email and had never submitted a work order. They then successfully submitted a work order and now do not have heat blasting in their room. Behavioral situations are situations that I expected to handle more frequently than I have this semester. I have handled one major behavioral situation this semester and that has been with residents having a nerf war in the hallway. Residents were playing at 1am, so they caused several noise complaints. I had to remind all residents involved about the noise policies in residence halls and that hall sports are prohibited inside residence halls as well. Since then, there have been no more hall sports instances. Peer helping, facilities, and behavioral situations are important and RAs have to manage instances in all three categories.

Programs, bulletin boards, door decorations, and other community development activities are important activities and things a Resident Assistant is responsible for throughout the semester. My favorite program I hosted this semester was in the dining hall. Several of my residents were curious about the smoothie bar and omelette station and did not know how those two area of the dining hall worked. I invited my entire hall to go to dhall for breakfast one day. I showed each resident how I make my omelette and smoothie. Each resident who attended made their own and we sampled each other’s. I learned some fruit combinations that I would have not tried on my own actually create a pretty decent smoothie. My residents were curious about the different types of egg at the omelette station and asked me the differences. I was unable to answer their questions, so I asked one of the dining hall staff members. She explained the differences and even which kind was better for what type of omelette or type of scrambled eggs you desired. This was my favorite program for several reasons. One was that I learned from my residents and my residents learned from me, which I believe fosters community on its own. Another reason was that we all learned from the dining hall staff. The last reason is that the information they learned was necessary to use dhall to its full extent and they had fun sampling each other’s smoothies. Bulletin boards and door decorations are not my forte because I am not a crafty or artistic person. My bulletin board theme for move-in was themed “LIFE: Longwood Edition”, as in the board game life. I had the different tiles of the game board with information regarding several offices on campus and resources they provide to students. I also included several events of the fall semester including Rock the Block, First Friday Back, and The GAME. Their first door decorations were different colored cars to represent the game piece of the board game. Overall, I feel as though different small programs really do build a sense of community on my hall.

# Self-Evaluation

Overall, I feel as though I am where I expected to be in my position at this time as a first-year Resident Assistant. I believe that I excel in the areas of time management, resident relationships, mediations, and serving as a resource to my residents. I believe that I have room for personal growth in the areas of confrontation with fellow staff members, diverse hall programs, and knowledge of University and Residential and Commuter Life policies and procedures. I have set goals for myself in order to improve on my areas of personal growth. My first goal is to address confrontation with fellow staff members. I plan to mentally encourage myself to talk more in staff meetings when I have an opinion on a topic. I will not allow RAs with more experience talk more than me, just because of how I perceive them of knowing more than I know about certain subjects. My second goal is to utilize my connection on campus to my benefit and collaborate with different offices and organizations. An example of this is that one of my friends is interested in yoga. I plan on having her come next semester and having a hall program where we all learn about yoga and the history of yoga. The third goal I have for myself is to add more elements of fun to programs. I plan to do this by having programs not related to Longwood or what one would typically think of when they hear education. I want to do a hall program about the history of chocolate and having different chocolate samples for my residents. The program is still educational, but it would stick out in residents minds due to the fun aspect. The fourth goal I have for myself is to become more comfortable with the Student Handbook. I plan on doing this by reading each section of the handbook and asking questions for clarification during my first one-on-one with India next semester. My fifth goal is to become more aware of crisis management procedures. I plan on doing this by reviewing the modules on Canvas from FTLW and memorizing the action steps in the quick reference guide. I believe that my community will grow with my additional elements of fun in my programs.

If I were to return next year, I can grow as a staff member, peer helper, and programmer. I believe that I need to grow the most as a programmer. I am not the most creative person, so adding surprise elements and providing educational components in a fun way is often challenging for me. I believe that I need to learn from fellow RAs who have successful and fun programs and adapt their ideas into my own. Next year, I would want to create similar relationships with my residents to what I have now. I would want them to know that they can come to me with help when they need it, but also understand that I need time to myself in my room as well. I can grow as a leader by becoming more comfortable in my position and trust my experiences and training. I am going to challenge myself with creative programming. I have created five goals for myself for next year and they are: create more fun programs, collaborate with a variety of offices on campus, develop a mentor-type relationship with residents, memorize crisis management policies, and to speak up with fellow staff members. I reapplied for the position for next year and hope I have the opportunity to accomplish these goals.

# Resume

My resume is on the page below.