DEVELOPING LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR RESIDENT ASSISTANT TRAINING

by

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TRAINING

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ABSTRACT

Outcomes have not been defined for the Resident Assistant (RA) position at Towson University. The absence of these learning outcomes contributes to the RAs' inability to articulate what knowledge and skills they gained from the job. Consequently, many students may be falling short of their potential for learning and growth.

To define said outcomes, various approaches to learning outcomes in higher education, leadership development, and self-authorship were explored, including the work of Warren Bennis, George Kuh, and Marcia B. Baxter Magolda. In addition, Towson University Housing and Residence Life artifacts and documents related to the Resident Assistant position were collected and analyzed. Interviews and a focus group were conducted with select members of the Housing and Residence Life staff to determine the various perspectives on what a Resident Assistant should be learning from their experience. Professional staff members and Resident Assistants were included in the study.

Several inconsistencies were found among the collected documents and artifacts, but the interviews and focus group provided many points of agreement about what knowledge and skills the Resident Assistant position should provide for students.

An ability to work with and communicate with others, specifically individuals different from oneself, emerged as the most valuable skills a student can gain.

Nineteen learning outcomes for first-year Resident Assistants and eight learning outcomes for second- and third-year Resident Assistants are proposed in the following domains: communication, diversity, administrative skills, teamwork, conflict and crisis management, and community building. An online portfolio to collect individual Resident Assistant artifacts and reflections, a revised Resident Assistant course syllabus, and an outcome-driven training schedule are also proposed to introduce and reinforce the learning outcomes throughout the Resident Assistant experience.

INTRODUCTION

Towson University Housing and Residence Life

Housing and Residence Life (HRL) at Towson University is made up of more than 400 individuals, including professional, graduate, and student staff members. HRL staff members are responsible for the oversight of sixteen residence halls and more than 4,000 students. The department's responsibilities include educational and social programming, policy enforcement, conflict mediation, crisis assessment and response, and general university support.

The professional staff members of HRL consist of entry-level professionals (Residence Life Coordinators), who oversee the residence halls and supervise student staff members; mid-level professionals (Assistant Directors), who supervise the Residence Life Coordinators, manage the facilities and room assignment process, and chair departmental committees; and senior-level professionals (Director of Residence Life and Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs), who oversee the HRL operations as a whole. Graduate and administrative staff provide additional support across the organization.

Several student staff positions exist within HRL. Students can be hired as Community Center Assistants (CCAs), Administrative Assistants (AAs), or Resident Assistants (RAs). CCAs work at desk operations that exist at the entrance to all

residence halls. They sign in guests, organize mail, and provide general security for

the residence halls. AAs provide support to professional staff members at all levels.

HRL employs over 120 students as RAs. This role entails significant

leadership responsibilities. These responsibilities include designing social and

educational programs for the students who live in the residence halls, identifying and

responding to students in crisis, and assisting with the departmental assessment of

campus-wide programmatic efforts. The Towson University (TU) mission statement

includes the following:

> The academic programs and services offered through the university provide a
> core quality environment for students to acquire the intellectual and social
> preparation to achieve their potential as contributing leaders and citizens of the
> workforce and a complex global society.

While HRL provides jobs to students, the Resident Assistant role is intended to

be more than just a job. The role of a Resident Assistant is also intended to provide

important character and leadership development opportunities for students in

fulfillment of the TU mission statement.

The Problem

Learning outcomes have not been defined for the Resident Assistant position within Housing and Residence Life at Towson University. Leadership development must be a primary component of the experience, and sound developmental practices should be put into place to support this.   The absence of these learning outcomes contributes to the RAs' inability to articulate what they have learned. This is a major concern that demands to be remedied.

The Goal

The goal of this executive position paper is to identify learning outcomes for the Towson University Resident Assistant experience for which the professional staff can design and implement educational strategies.

Key Questions

To develop effective learning outcomes, the following questions must be answered:

- What is the importance of learning outcomes in higher education and student affairs?

- What should a student learn from leadership experiences in higher education?

- What are the key elements of the Resident Assistant position?

- What do Residence Life staff members believe Resident Assistants should be learning from their experience?

Chapter 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

To develop learning outcomes for Resident Assistants at Towson University, a thorough

review of current literature was completed. This literature review is divided into three sections.

The first will cover the call for learning outcomes in higher education, what has already been put

forth by multiple associations, and which outcomes are best suited to inform co-curricular

learning. The second will discuss various theories on leadership and what a student should take

away from leadership experiences. The final section of this literature review will examine how

students best learn as leaders, including perspectives on constructivism and self-authorship.

What is the Importance of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education and Student Affairs?

"Lacking adequate criteria of purpose, we do not know how well our higher education works in

practice or even what working well would mean" (Carnochan, 1993, p. 126).

Questions about the purpose and perceived gains of participating in higher education

have been asked more frequently since the turn of the current century. More attention has been

paid to out-of-classroom experiences and the learning potential they may provide. Publications

such as the American Association of Colleges & Universities' (AAC&U) *Greater Expectations*

(2002) and Derek Bok's *Our Underachieving Colleges* (2006) highlight areas of weakness in the

higher education experience and suggest approaches to address this.

> In *Greater Expectations* (AAC&U, 2002), the Association of American Colleges and
> Universities posits three key learning outcomes that are fundamental to the development
> of intentional, life-long learners in the 21st century: Students should become *empowered*
> through the development of many intellectual and practical skills; students must take

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responsibility for their own learning and their participation in the civic processes of our democracy; and students must become *informed* about conditions that affect their lives in the US and as citizens of many wider communities. (ACPA & NASPA, 2004, p. 3)

In *Our Underachieving Colleges*, Derek Bok, a former Harvard University president, suggested eight purposes for an undergraduate education. They are:

- Learning to communicate
- Learning to think
- Building character
- Preparing for citizenship
- Living with diversity
- Preparing for a global society
- Acquiring broader interests
- Preparing for career

Both Bok and AAC&U focused primarily on the work of faculty but also explored the ideas of how learning inside the classroom linked to the greater college experience at large.

…administrators have initiated most of the important innovations in undergraduate education over the past few decades – the recruitment of more diverse student bodies, the growth of community service programs, the introduction of co-residential living units, even the creation of centers to help graduate students learn how to teach… student experiences inside the classroom and out are often too closely intertwined to be kept separate in this way. Preparing undergraduates for citizenship in democracy – one of the oldest aims of education – occurs not only in courses on political science or American history but also in student government, dormitory elections, young Democrat and Republican clubs, and many other extracurricular settings. (2006, p. 53)

Skills such as learning to communicate, acquiring broad interests, and living with diversity can be enhanced with the variety of experiences that accompany living and working on a college campus with the guided mentorship of skilled student affairs staff members.

Working with the *Greater Expectations* initiative in 2008, George Kuh wrote *High impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter.* In

this publication, Kuh points out several kinds of high-impact experiences that a student can have.

Two specific high-impact experiences that lend themselves directly to student leadership are:

> *Collaborative Assignments and Projects:*
> Collaborative learning combines two key goals: learning to work and solve problems in the company of others, and sharpening one's own understanding by listening seriously to the insights of others, especially those with different backgrounds and life experiences. Approaches range from study groups within a course, to team-based assignments and writing, to cooperative projects and research.
> *Diversity and Global Learning:*
> Many colleges and universities now emphasize courses and programs that help students explore cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own. These studies – which may address U.S. diversity, world cultures, or both – often explore "difficult differences," such as racial, ethnic, and gender inequality, or continuing struggles around the globe for human rights, freedom, and power. Frequently, intercultural studies are augmented by experiential learning in the community and/or by study abroad. (Kuh, 2008)

Kuh goes on to ask why these types of experiences are more effective than others.

> First, these practices typically demand that students devote considerable time and effort to purposeful tasks; most require daily decisions that deepen students' investment in the activity as well as their commitment to their academic program and the college… Second, the nature of these high-impact activities puts students in the circumstances that essentially demand they interact with faculty and peers about substantive matters, typically over extended periods of time… Third, participating in one or more of these activities increases the likelihood that students will experience diversity through contact with people who are different from themselves. (2008, pp. 14-15)

These criteria – considerable effort, daily decisions, interaction with staff, and exposure to diversity – are all hallmarks of a traditional student leadership role. Student leaders are asked on a regular basis to work with staff mentors and supervisors to create budgets, plan educational events, work in diverse teams of students, and reflect on their experiences. It is not uncommon for students to hold significant leadership roles for several academic years rather than just one semester, increasing their responsibility from year to year.

In *Learning Reconsidered 2*, Gwendolyn Jordan Dungy points out that:

The quality of educational experience and outcomes advocated in *Greater Expectations* would require the broad participation, contributions, and commitment of all campus educators – notably including student affairs professionals – and that the integration of learning must embrace out-of-classroom experiences as well as all aspects of the formal academic curriculum. (2006, p. 1)

It is also pointed out in *Learning Reconsidered 2* that:

On many campuses, students may perceive little coherence in the student affairs curriculum, and individual episodes of acquiring knowledge fragments (such as resume writing, developing group living agreements, or alcohol education) or developmental experiences like leadership in student organizations or volunteer service simply orbit the student's world with little sense of their relationship one to another or to academic courses. (2006, p. 8)

Intentional learning outcomes connected to specific experiences can and should drive sound educational practices in student affairs. If we, as student affairs professionals, are to take credit for learning on college campuses, it is imperative that we also map out what it is we want our students to learn, and how we stimulate the learning. Otherwise, we are simply hoping and assuming that learning is taking place. For student affairs practitioners to take on this challenge, we must continue to educate ourselves about the established theories of leadership, teaching, and learning.

Student affairs educators have often worked with student groups to produce concrete outcomes or good events, such as homecoming or a film series, but have not intentionally or systematically focused on abstract or transferable learning derived from those experiences. (ACPA & NASPA, 2006, p. 9)

It cannot be enough that we teach a student how to achieve a short-term goal. We must also ask ourselves what transferable knowledge and skills each participant should gain as a result of their experience.

Caine and Caine (as cited in ACPA & NASPA, 2004, p. 12), using a concept they call brain based learning, developed important new methodologies that serve as a foundation for the mapping approach to student learning. Their concepts have a neurobiological framework – the activation of neural processes that contribute to the deep transformation of cognition and patterning, or meaning making. For such transformative learning to occur, students must 1) enter a state of relaxed alertness, 2) participate in an orchestrated immersion in a complex experience that in some way illustrates phenomena that are connected to the subject and 3) engage in active processing or reflection on the experience. (1994, 1997)

Caine and Caine go on to say that:

Students are in a state of relaxed alertness when they participate in student development education sessions because they know what they need to know and, while challenge may be present, the threat is low. Although they may receive evaluation and feedback, grading is generally not involved. (ACPA & NASPA, 2004, p. 12)

Traditional student leadership roles can provide what Caine and Caine are discussing. While students may be formally evaluated, the perceived consequences of failure are lower with volunteer and even student staff positions. This allows students to feel more comfortable making decisions, taking calculated risks, and even failing. Student Affairs mentors and supervisors are involved throughout most processes and can provide students with the opportunity afterwards to reflect on their actions, inactions, results, and achieved learning. Having learning outcomes to guide which opportunities students should be participating in and what questions need to be asked afterwards enhance the overall experience and learning potential.

AAC&U, through their work on the *Greater Expectations* initiative (2002) and LEAP (Liberal Education and America's Promise), have developed a set of student learning outcomes that they believe are essential. They include:

- Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World
- Intellectual and Practical Skills
- Personal and Social Responsibility
- Integrative and Applied Learning" (p. 78)

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These essential learning outcomes demonstrably build on the enduring aims of liberal education: broad knowledge, strong intellectual skills, [and] a grounded sense of ethical and civic responsibility. But the essential learning outcomes also move beyond the traditional limits of liberal or liberal arts education, especially its self-imposed "non-vocational" identity and its recent insistence on learning "for its own sake" rather than for its value in real-world contexts. (Kuh, 2008, p. 3)

In addition to the work AAC&U was doing, the Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education developed six learning domains in the fall of 2008 (Komives & Smedick, 2012):

1. Knowledge acquisition, construction, integration, and application
2. Cognitive complexity
3. Intrapersonal development
4. Interpersonal competence
5. Humanitarianism and civic engagement
6. Practical competence (p. 79)

Komives and Smedick (2012) suggest the use of domains just like these to assist in the development of more specific outcomes.

Although many higher education professionals are capable of identifying learning outcomes related to programs and services for which they have responsibility, utilizing standards to guide program design, along with related learning outcomes widely endorsed by professional associations and consortiums can help provide credibility and validity to campus specific programs. (p. 78)

Outcomes in Student Affairs

While many of the learning outcomes, domains and purposes listed by Bok (2006), AAC&U (2008), and CAS (2008) are primarily addressed in the classroom, there are several common outcomes that can and should be contributed to by students participating in co-curricular activities. Common outcomes illustrated in Table 1 include communication, diversity, and citizenship.

Table 1: Shared Learning Outcomes in Higher Education and Student Affairs

	Our Underacheiving Colleges (2006)	**AAC&U (2008)**	**Council for Advancement of Standards (2008)**
Communication	Learning to Communicate	Written and Oral Communication	Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Communication
Diversity	Living with Diversity	Intercultural Knowledge	Not Represented
Citizenship	Preparation for Citzenship	Ethical Reasoning and Civic Knowledge	Humanitarianism and Civic Engagement

The classroom offers opportunities for students to practice their oral and written communication and explore the theoretical concepts of diversity and citizenship. However, in co-curricular activities (workshops, residence hall programs, on-campus jobs, student organization membership), students can experience each of these in tangible ways. Interactions with peers and administrators can lead to thought-provoking moments, ethical decisions, and further clarity about an individual's role in society. If and when these interactions are guided by specified learning outcomes, these educational moments can be capitalized on with greater intentionality. The three outcomes listed in Table 1 can serve as a touchstone for developing learning outcomes for student leadership roles.

While developing learning outcomes, it is important to keep in mind that student leadership positions can sometimes last for several years, while some are short-term. It may be important to consider what a student who held a leadership position for one year may learn compared to another student who may achieve deeper outcomes over two or even three years.

Within the field of higher education, it is possible to locate two broad streams of research that both focus on outcomes. One stream deals with students' learning outcomes. These have been defined as cognitive outcomes, such as knowledge, skills, competencies, personal attributes and abilities, and affective outcomes such as personal goals, values, attitudes, identity, world views, and behaviors. The other stream deals with student outcomes – the aggregate institutional outcomes such as graduation rates, retention rates, transfer rates, and employment rates. (Nygaard, Holtham & Courtney, 2009, p. 20)

Types of student learning outcomes discussed by Nygaard, Holtham, and Courntey:

Surface Learning
New knowledge is created through memorization of facts and practice. Lack of context inhibits transferability, but surface learning can be a pre-requisite (e.g., in medical diagnosis) for deep learning.

Deep learning
New knowledge is created by actively linking existing knowledge and experience with new information and practice. Students are able to further contextualize or synthesize the knowledge. (2009, p. 22)

There are student staff positions that require a great amount of knowledge (surface learning) to be attained in the first few weeks for a student to be effective. This knowledge may include administrative tasks, policies, or procedures. Once a student has been in this position for an extended period of time, they may be ready to take on less-structured learning, such as leadership for policy revising, program design, etc. As we begin to develop learning outcomes, the specific aspects of the leadership position should be taken into account, as should the length of time in the position and potential for changing responsibilities and experiences.

What Should a Student Learn From Leadership Experiences in Higher Education?

The Resident Assistant position is a significant student leadership opportunity. To develop learning outcomes related to college students' experiences as leaders on Towson University campuses, we must have an understanding of modern leadership paradigms and how students learn.

Leadership skills can grow by theoretical study, leading a group in class, holding office in the student government, or being captain of a sports team. With a stress on learning, a student's capacity or proficiency matters more than the subject matter taught, courses completed, or credits earned. (AAC&U, 2002)

In a study of national and international leaders, James McGregor Burns stated that "true leadership is a dynamic and reciprocal exchange between leaders and followers" (1978, p. 3). Building upon Burns' work in his book, *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century*, Joseph Rost (1991) from the University of San Diego put forth a more contemporary definition of leadership. Curtis Brungardt (1998) paraphrased this definition as "an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes" (p. 3). According to Rost, for a relationship to meet this criterion for leadership, four essential components must exist:

1. The relationship is based on influence. This influence is multidirectional, meaning that influence can go any which way (not necessarily top-down), and the influence attempts must not be coercive. Therefore, the relationship is not based on authority, but rather, persuasion.

2. Leaders and followers are the people in this relationship. If leadership is defined as a relationship, then both leaders and followers are doing leadership. Rost does not say that all players in this relationship are equal, but he does say all active players practice influence. Typically, there is more than one follower and more than one leader in this arrangement.

3. Leaders and followers intend real changes. "Intend" means that the leaders and followers promote and purposefully seek changes. "Real" means that the changes intended by the leaders and followers must be substantial.

4. The changes that the leaders and followers intend reflect their mutual purposes. The key is that the desired changes must not only reflect the wishes of the leader but also the desires of the followers. (Brungardt, 1998, p. 4)

Rost contends that leadership is in the midst of a paradigm shift away from the industrial paradigm and redefining itself in the postindustrial age. The industrial paradigm of leadership

focused on "great men and women with certain preferred traits influencing followers to do what the leaders wish in order to achieve group/organizational goals that reflect excellence defined as some kind of higher-level effectiveness" (Rost, 1991, p. 180). In his book, Rost talks about this paradigm shifting away from management and toward other social values, such as diversity, critical dialogue, and consensus-oriented policy-making processes.

In 2006, John P. Dugan, Coordinator of Student Involvement and Leadership at the University of Maryland College Park, conducted a number of studies using the Social Change Model of Leadership Development (HERI, 1996) to determine student involvement's effect on change-agent skills. He wrote:

> The social change model of leadership development was created specifically for college students and is consistent with the emerging leadership paradigm. This perspective, also referred to as the postindustrial paradigm, suggests that leadership is a relational, transformative, process-oriented, learned, and change-directed phenomenon (Rogers, 2003; Rost, 1993). Similarly, the central principles associated with the social change model involve social responsibility and change for the common good. These are achieved through the development of eight core values targeted at enhancing students' level of self-awareness and ability to work with others (HERI). (2006, p. 335)

Dugan used an instrument, the Socially Responsible Leadership Scale (Tyree, 1998) to analyze the difference between involved and uninvolved students in the following 8 areas:

- Consciousness of Self
- Congruence
- Commitment
- Common Purpose
- Collaboration
- Controversy With Civility
- Citizenship
- Change (HERI, 1996)

Dugan found that there were significant mean differences between students who were involved and not involved in campus organizations or formal leadership programs in common purpose and citizenship (pp. 338-339). In 1993, another colleague of Burns, Robert J. Starratt, wrote that:

> There should be no 'terminal degree' in leadership. Rather, such programs should be conceived as offering an intense developmental experience to people already exercising leadership, but who want to stretch themselves and their institutions toward a more ambitious vision of greatness. This kind of continuing education experience should place them with a group of similarly minded colleagues from a variety of fields and locales. A cohort of leaders who stay together through one, two, or three years of seminars, courses and workshops develop the trust and cooperation needed to create a genuine learning community. (p. 153)

In the preface of their 2003 book, *Learning to Lead: A Workbook on Becoming a Leader*, Warren Bennis, distinguished Professor and Chairman of the Leadership Institute at the University of Southern California, and Joan Goldsmith, former faculty member at Harvard University and UCLA, said:

> To grapple with your own growth as a leader, we ask you to assess your character and commit to adopting a set of core competencies. In the process, we propose that you look at all aspects of your life. The skills you develop will not only enable you to become the leader you envision but also support you in expanding your capacity to live your life more fully and completely. (p. xv)

In the 2009 edition of *On Becoming a Leader*, Bennis put forth what he describes as the four lessons of self-knowledge:

1. You are your own best teacher.
2. Accept responsibility. Blame no one.
3. You can learn anything you want to learn.
4. True understanding comes from reflecting on your experience. (p. 52)

While expanding on the fourth lesson, Bennis writes:

> Reflecting on experience is a means of having Socratic dialogue with yourself, asking the right questions at the right time, in order to discover the truth of yourself and your life. What really happened? Why did it happen? What did it do to me? What did it mean to me? In this way, one locates and appropriates the knowledge one needs or, more precisely, recovers what one has forgotten… (p.56)

Student leaders have the opportunity to engage in personal and professional relationships, leadership training sessions, and a wide variety of educational programming. Unless students are examining who they are in this process, it may quickly lose meaning for them. If students are to take away skills and abilities from these opportunities, exploring their own values and identity has the potential to add depth to their learning experience.

Susan Komives, Professor Emerita at the University of Maryland developed a Leadership Identity Model in 2005 which provides a six-stage framework for how students progress through their own leadership experiences. Models such as this can help to shape what a student is capable of learning based on where they are in their own development.

> Leadership Identity Model:
> *Stage One: Awareness*
> Stage one, awareness, involved a beginning recognition that leadership was happening "out there somewhere."
>
> *Stage Two: Exploration and Engagement*
> In stage two, students began to experience themselves interacting with peers by seeking opportunities to explore their numerous interests. They sought new friendships in group settings, such as scouts, choir, sports, band, dance lessons, and religious youth groups.
>
> *Stage Three: Leaders Identified*
> Students in this stage believed that leadership was a position and, therefore, the person in that position was the leader. If one was not the positional leader, then one was a follower or group member and looked to the leader for direction.
>
> *Stage Four: Leadership Differentiated*
> In stage four, participants differentiated their view of leadership but also saw leadership being exhibited by non-positional group members. Leadership also began to be thought of as a process.

Stage Five: Generativity
In stage five, students showed an ability to look beyond themselves and express a passion for their commitments and care for the welfare of others (Erickson, 1968)…Further, they were concerned for the sustainability of their groups. They were particularly interested in teaching and developing younger peers who need their support, affirmation, and mentoring to develop their leadership capacity.

Stage Six: Integration and Synthesis
Those students in stage six integrated their view of themselves as effective in working with others and had confidence that they could do that in almost any context. They did not need to hold positional leadership roles to know they were engaging in leadership. (2005, p. 404)

Each of these perspectives on leadership share common elements: relationships are the foundation for leadership, and an understanding of self is critical to said relationships. Successful student leaders and Resident Assistants in particular, rely on their ability to influence others and communicate that they are willing to be influenced. Without this, they are only able to react to problems in the community (vandalism, personal conflicts, and policy violations). Their ability to shape and develop the residential community is diminished, and their own learning is compromised. These skill areas relate directly to communication and citizenship outcomes from Bok (2006), AAC&U (2002), and CAS (2008). A student engaging in leadership based on relationships and shared purpose should have an increased ability to develop in each of these outcomes.

Leadership and Learning

While considering what students should be learning from their experiences on college campuses, it is equally vital to consider how they learn. In 2000, the National Research Council published *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School*. In this book, three key learning principles were described:

1. Students come to the classroom with preconceptions about how the world works. If their initial understanding is not engaged, they may fail to grasp the new concepts and information that are taught, or they may learn them for purposes of a test but revert to their preconceptions outside of the classroom.

2. To develop competence in an area of inquiry, students must have a deep foundation of factual knowledge, understand facts and ideas in the context of a conceptual framework, and organize knowledge in ways that facilitate retrieval and application.

3. A metacognitive approach to instruction can help students learn to take control of their own learning by defining learning goals and monitoring their progress in achieving them. (pp. 14-18)

Each of these principles is important to remember when working with student leaders and their ability to approach educational experiences, take in requisite knowledge, and reflect on the effectiveness of their actions and decisions. The publication also details the differences between experts and novices in an attempt to examine traits of someone who has learned effectively:

> Experts' abilities to reason and solve problems depend on well-organized knowledge that affects what they notice and how they represent problems. Experts are not simply 'general problem solvers' who have learned a set of strategies that operate across all domains. The fact that experts are more likely than novices to recognize meaningful patterns of information applies in all domains, whether chess, electronics, mathematics, or classroom teaching. (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000, p. 48)

This observation supports the idea that the ability to reflect on experiences is vital to the learning process. Structured reflection over time can assist with recognizing patterns over time, which, in turn, should allow for better transfer from one problem to another.

> It is important to be realistic about the amount of time it takes to learn complex subject matter…Much of this time involves the development of pattern recognition skills that support the fluent identification of meaningful patterns of information plus knowledge of their implications for future outcomes. (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000, p. 56)

The authors continue:

> Transfer can be improved by helping students become more aware of themselves as learners who actively monitor their learning strategies and resources and assess their readiness for particular tests and performances…Metacognitive approaches to instruction have been shown to increase the degree to which students will transfer to new situations without the need for explicit prompting. (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000, p. 67)

It is also important to recognize that traditionally aged student leaders are in the beginning stages of their adult lives. Their learning styles will begin to shift and will require different teaching strategies than they experienced in high school.

In *Delivering Instruction to Adult Learners* (2001), Jeffrey Cantor puts forth ten principles for instructing adults effectively. Included in this list are:

- Recognize the individuality of the learner.
- Assist your learners to set and understand goals.
- Use effective questioning.
- Be experience-centered.
- Reinforce learning through self-evaluation. (p. 13)

Each student leader comes to their position with unique living experiences and perspectives that will impact their approach to working with other students. Helping each student examine what he or she brings to the position is crucial to determine what they can take away from the experience. Both students and educators greatly benefit from understanding what is expected of the learner. Clear instructional objectives should be discussed and agreed upon at the onset of any educational endeavor.

> An instructional objective is a statement of exactly who the learner is, what the learner must perform, under what circumstances or conditions, and to what degree or standard of proficiency. The best indication of a useful instructional objective is the learner's performance after instruction. (Cantor, 2001, p. 64)

Often, the student leadership experience happens in two educational phases: performing the duties of the position held and discussing the performance of these duties with a professional advisor or student mentor. If used appropriately, these individual meetings provide advisors and mentors with time for structured reflection with their students. It is important for advisors to

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develop questions that prompt thoughts about the success or failure or the tasks at hand, how the

student went about their duties, and what they learned from the process.

> Effective questioning is a key instructional skill. Questions are used in training for a variety of reasons, such as arousing curiosity and interest, stimulating discussion, channeling thinking, assisting in determining how well your learners understand the material and encouraging your timid learners to express themselves. (Cantor, 2001 p. 31)

Self-Authorship

In *The Leadership Challenge*, Kouzes and Posner state that the first step to becoming an

authentic leader is to clarify your values. They go on to say that "to become a credible leader,

first you have to comprehend fully the values, beliefs, and assumptions that drive you. You have

to freely and honestly choose the principles you will use to guide your actions" (2002, pp. 44-

45). Bennis and Goldsmith also put forth:

> Developing one's self as a leader is a day-to-day, lifelong process that is built on continued self-examination, introspection, and soul-searching honesty. As we pursue our goal of becoming a leader, we learn from failures, acknowledge wrong turns, and make amends when necessary. It is an ambiguous process that begins and ends with oneself. Becoming a leader is a process of self-invention, based on imagining and expressing your authenticity. To be "authentic" is literally to be your own "author," to discover your native energies and desires, and to find your own way of acting on them…As the author of your own life, you have kept covenant with your own promise. (pp. 24-25)

Marcia B. Baxter Magolda defines self-authorship as "the ability to collect, interpret, and

analyze information and reflect on one's own beliefs in order to form judgments" (Magolda,

1998, p. 143).

The theory of self-authorship is a holistic approach to education that includes every

individual's ability to learn within the context of one's own value system and takes into

consideration each component of self. In 2004, Magolda and King put forth three developmental

dimensions that are key components to enabling effective citizenship while exploring self-authorship: cognitive maturity, integrated identity, and mature relationships.

- *Cognitive maturity*, characterized by intellectual power, reflective judgment, mature decision-making, and problem solving in the context of multiplicity
- *Integrated identity*, characterized by understanding one's own particular history, confidence, the capacity for autonomy, and connection and integrity
- *Mature relationships*, characterized by respect for both one's own and others' particular identities and cultures and by productive collaboration to integrate multiple perspectives (p. 6)

Self-authorship can be used as the framework for student leaders' exploration of self. While students will not become experts in self-authorship as a topic, they will move towards being self-authored themselves by exploring its key components.

To facilitate growth in each of these areas, an individual must fully balance his or her engagement in personally meaningful activities and active ongoing self-reflection. Students who are continually engaged and prompted to reflect upon their own decisions will have a greater understanding of their own value system and how it connects with the society at large. John Dewey (1916) conceptualized education as the "reorganization and reconstruction of experience" (p. 154). Dewey said that "the first approach to any subject in school, if thought is to be aroused and not words acquired should be as unscholastic as possible" (p. 154). Dewey knew that reflection was the key to true development of thought.

The Reflective Judgment Model (King and Kitchener, 2002) offers the following seven suggestions to educators for promoting self-reflection in college students:

1. Respect students' epistemological assumptions.
2. Engage students in exploring ill-structured problems.
3. Provide opportunities to study lines of reasoning, analyze others' views, and defend their own views.
4. Teach students how to gather, evaluate, and interpret data.
5. Give frequent feedback.
6. Encourage practice of reasoning skills in multiple settings.
7. Help students reflect on their assumptions about knowledge. (p.31)

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In 2005, Jane Pizzolato explored self-authorship to determine what moments take place in a college student's life that progress them towards leading a self-authored life. She refers to these as "provocative moments." She goes on to cite her own 2003 article on the subject when defining self-authorship as "a relatively enduring way of orienting oneself toward provocative situations that includes recognizing the contextual nature of knowledge and balancing one's own internally defined beliefs, goals, and sense of self" (Pizzolato, 2005 p. 624). Magolda labeled "the realization that external sources of belief and definition were insufficient for happiness brought acute awareness that internal sources of belief and definition were necessary" *The Crossroads* (2001, p. 93). Pizzolato points out that:

> because *The Crossroads* are characterized by the intense discontent and dissonance arising from dissatisfaction with formula following, it makes sense that students may need more than one dissonant experience to move them from feeling dissatisfied with external definition to experiencing a provocative moment that leads them to search for internal definition. (2005, p. 630)

The college experience has within it the opportunity to engage students on an almost minute-by-minute basis. Students who choose to engage in formal leadership roles increase their opportunities exponentially. By providing each student with the ability to make community-oriented decisions and then prompting reflection on the results of their decisions, learning can take place in each of the three developmental dimensions previously discussed. Self-authorship can begin to take shape, and leadership of self and others can begin to form.

Residence Life professionals must know what they want their Resident Assistants to learn if they are to develop the kinds of questions and reflective experiences that will prompt thought in chosen areas. In absense of shared learning outcomes, supervisors are either developing an

individual educational agenda or simply checking boxes when Resident Assistants accomplish assigned tasks. The former option allows for some success but without consistency or accountability. The latter option ignores the learning opportunites and underserves the student. To develop learning outcomes for the Resident Assistant position at Towson University, the perspective of the professional staff must be established and analyzed for congruence with what the literature suggests as outcomes. Once these have been established, further development of a self-reflective model can be undertaken.

There is clear support and encouragement for the use of learning outcomes in student affairs. The literature suggests communication, diversity, citizenship, managing relationships, and understandings of self are all areas that can and should be developed through the college experience. With over one hundred Resident Assistants at Towson University and thousands in the United States, learning outcomes developed specifically for their experience is a good place to start identifying what should be specifically learned from the position, and how student affairs professionals can go about strategizing to support that learning.

Chapter 2

EXAMINATION OF THE RESIDENT ASSISTANT POSITION

What Are the Key Elements of the Resident Assistant Position?

Methodology: Documents and Artifact Review

There are many documents related to the Resident Assistant position at Towson

University that can inform us about what the job entails and what we would expect a student to

learn from the position. In the following section, eleven key documents from the 2012–2013

academic year will be analyzed: The Resident Assistant contract, supervisory evaluation form,

peer evaluation form, rehire form, the Resident Assistant Resource Guide, job description,

Resident Assistant Course syllabus, in-service agendas, residential engagement manual, HRL

mission statement, and the Student Affairs divisional learning outcomes.

When reviewing these documents, the following questions are being considered:

- What does the document communicate about the responsibilities of a Resident Assistant?
- What does the document communicate about what Resident Assistants will be expected to learn, and how congruent is this with the outcomes identified in the literature?
- What consistencies and inconsistencies exist within the documents?
- What consistencies and inconsistencies exist as a part of the Resident Assistant position?

Analysis: Document and Artifact Review

Student Affairs Learning Outcomes

Updated in March of 2007, the following learning outcomes serve as a guiding document

for all staff in the Student Affairs division at Towson University:

Through participation in co-curricular learning opportunities, students will…

1) Develop compassion, integrity, and social responsibility, fostering a commitment to community and the common good.

2) Perceive themselves as contributing members of their communities and understand their roles as citizens and leaders.

3) Increase their self-awareness, appreciation of others, and diverse interactions, resulting in mutually beneficial outcomes and relationships.

4) Develop competencies and practice ethical decision-making in their career and personal endeavors leading to a productive, successful, and fulfilling life.

5) Acquire, integrate, and apply knowledge; enhancing their capabilities to synthesize, evaluate, and contextualize information.

6) Develop cognitive complexity leading to deeper thinking and more reasoned actions.

7) Develop an enhanced commitment to their academic pursuits and integrate curricular learning with out-of-class experiences, resulting in goal attainment and graduation.

8) Leave Towson University with shared memories, school pride, connection to campus, and life-long relationships.

In 2009, Housing and Residence Life (HRL) selected three Division of Student Affairs

learning outcomes to become the focus of programmatic efforts. Outcomes one, three, and eight

were chosen. In an effort to provide greater focus, elements of each outcome were chosen to

develop further: compassion, social responsibility, appreciation of others, and diverse

interactions. "Appreciation of others" was renamed "valuing others" in 2012. Learning

outcomes specific to programming in these areas can be found in the Residential Engagement manual.

There are more than 15 broad concepts that can be derived from these learning outcomes. While HRL has chosen areas to deliver to residents through programming, there are additional learning areas that could result from performing Resident Assistant job responsibilities: perceiving themselves as contributing members of the community, developing cognitive complexity, and the practice of ethical decision making.

The stated learning outcomes do not provide significant direction for the development of Resident Assistant learning outcomes, but it will be important to know how HRL's focused outcomes contribute to the overall divisional outcomes.

Housing & Residence Life Mission Statement

The Housing & Residence Life Mission Statement states: The Department of Housing and Residence Life is committed to maximizing the potential of each individual resident. We will work to develop residential environments that foster academic and personal growth in diverse living communities. We shall:

1. Provide learning environments and related academic educational programs that support the educational goals of students and the University.
2. Provide growth and development opportunities to gain knowledge and life skills essential to be contributing members of society.
3. Provide reasonably priced housing that is clean, attractive, well-maintained, appropriately furnished, and that promotes residents' safety.
4. Provide a cooperative relationship with other university departments, service that is responsive to students' needs, questions, and concerns.

While not specific to the Resident Assistant position, this mission statement does provide a broad direction for the responsibilities of HRL staff in relation to student learning, creating a safe learning environment and providing programming that helps students see themselves as

contributing members of society. The knowledge and life skills mentioned in this statement have

been expanded upon in the Residential Engagement Manual.

Resident Assistant Job Description

The Resident Assistant job description (appendix A) can be found in the Resident

Assistant Resource Guide and is provided to Resident Assistants before they apply for the

position as well as at the beginning of Resident Assistant training. The job expectations are

broken down into six sections:

- Community Development
- Programming/Engagement
- Administrative Tasks
- Role Model
- Policy Implementation
- Security

There are 18 job expectations that fall under these six sections.

While the job description is divided into six sections, there seem to be three areas

emphasized within the 18 job expectations: positive interactions with residents, policy

enforcement, and administrative duties. Fifty-six percent of the individual expectations are

related to policy enforcement, 28% are related to positive interactions with residents, 17% are

related to administrative duties, and one is to perform all other duties as assigned by the

supervisor.

Policy Enforcement:

- Encourage the community to address and resolve problems on their own. In situations where intervention is necessary, serve as mediator.
- Obey all federal, state, and local laws, the Towson University Code of Student Conduct, and all Department of Housing and Residence Life policies.
- Promote full cooperation with all departments within the University, and make all appropriate referrals.
- Bear in mind that as a staff member, Resident Assistant behavior on or off campus will influence how the residents perceive him or her.
- Fully understand, explain, and enforce the Housing policies and the University's Code of Student Conduct.
- Address all inappropriate behavior and policy violations. Submit Incident Reports in a timely manner, as instructed.
- Support the policies concerning building entrance at all times by checking the identification cards of all residents entering the building and signing in the guests of those residents' while working at the community center.
- Resident Assistants display their own identification card anytime they enter the buildings and to always sign in any guests that are accompanying them into the building.
- Address residents who are propping exit doors or entering through exit doors whenever this behavior is witnessed.
- Support and promote all policies, procedures, and programs initiated by the Department of Housing and Residence Life while actively supporting and appreciating diversity.

Positive Interactions with Residents:

- Develop and maintain relationships with the residents on his or her floors.
- Promote and encourage an appreciation of diversity among residents and encourage interaction among residents on their floors and within the campus community.
- Assess the social and educational needs and interests of their residents, and present quality programs that meet those needs.
- Effectively plan, advertise, and implement his/her programs in a timely manner.
- Be accessible and approachable; project a demeanor that is kind, caring, and friendly.

Administrative Duties

- Submit all paperwork in a timely manner. This includes, but is not limited to, opening and closing forms, programming forms, Incident Reports, room condition reports, work order requests, and other paperwork as assigned.
- Completely walk through his/her floors on a daily basis and report any concerns in the areas of housekeeping, maintenance, and vending areas. This walk-through should include maintaining bulletin boards and removing outdated materials.

If one were to interpret the Resident Assistants position solely based on this document, an assumption could easily be made that policy enforcement plays a very heavy role in the staff member's regular responsibilities. Second to this would be providing residents with programs and opportunities that enhance the knowledge and life skills mentioned in the HRL mission statement with a focus on diversity. Administrative duties focus on paperwork and processes that support the other two areas as well as the physical environment in the residence hall.

Resident Assistant Contract

The Resident Assistant Contract (appendix B), which all student staff members sign when they accept the position, is divided into 12 sections:

1. Period of Employment

2. Terms of Employment

3. Training Sessions and Meetings

4. Openings and Closings

5. Academic Expectations

6. Internships, Fieldwork

7. Additional Employment and Extra Curricular Involvement

8. Programming Requirements

9. Compensation

10. Hall/Room Assignment

11. Retention and Reappointment

12. Resignation and Termination

Six of the 12 sections are dedicated to the time constraints of the Resident Assistant position (Period of Employment, Terms of Employment, Training Sessions and Meetings, Openings and Closings, and Internships, Fieldwork, Additional Employment and Extra Curricular Involvement). It is expected that Resident Assistants put their position second only to their academic success. Any other jobs or student leadership positions held are at the discretion of the Resident Assistant's supervisor and are limited to no more than 10 hours for first-year Resident Assistants and 15 hours for second- and third-year Resident Assistants. The other six give guidelines for program planning responsibilities, academic requirements, and logistical aspects of the position.

It is clear from this document that time-management is an important skill for each student staff member to have or to learn. The Resident Assistant job can be very time-consuming and an individual's level of presence in their residence hall can have a positive or negative effect on performance. Student leaders are often interested in multiple opportunities afforded to them, and their ability to balance any additional work or volunteer position will be crucial in their success. This also indicates the level of importance put on the learning that will occur in the Resident Assistant position. If students will be limited in other extracurricular roles, it is vital that they achieve significant amounts of learning from their Housing and Residence Life employment.

Resident Assistant Resource Guide

The Resident Assistant Resource Guide is provided to staff at the beginning of Resident

Assistant training. It is comprised of nine sections:

- Mission Statement
- Residence Life Staff
- Resident Assistant Contract
- Responsibilities and Job Description
- Thematic Community Descriptions
- Incident Reports
- Policies
- Emergency Procedures
- Campus Resource Roster

The Resident Assistant Resource Guide provides context for the position. It details the

professional staff members found in HRL, provides dates and times that staff members will need

to be available for various responsibilities, describes special living options that exist in the

residence halls at Towson, lists all policies that staff members will need to abide by and enforce

with other students, and includes a roster of contacts through the university community to be

used for referrals. There are select processes outlined in this resource guide, including what

steps to follow in case of an emergency, and how to enter information into the Towson

University online Incident Report database.

This document is a compilation of several documents, some of which have already been

discussed. It emphasizes the purpose of HRL and provides important knowledge needed for

fulfilling the responsibilities of being a first responder and referral agent.

Residential Engagement Manual

The Residential Engagement Manual (appendix C) is provided for Resident Assistants

during Resident Assistant training. It outlines the program planning responsibilities of the

Resident Assistants. It includes:

- Student Affairs Learning Outcomes
- Residential Engagement Model
- Learning outcomes for the following programming themes: compassion, social responsibility, valuing others, diverse interactions, and community development
- Residential Engagement Assessment Plan
- SharePoint database information

The Residential Engagement Model provides a framework for the programs that Resident

Assistants will need to develop, execute, and assess over the course of the academic year. They

plan programs in areas such as health and nutrition, professional skills, and stress management.

They also facilitate monthly social events on their individual floors designed to develop

community bonds. Teams of Resident Assistants in each building develop programming in the

areas of valuing others (fall 2012), diverse interactions (spring 2013), compassion (fall 2013) and

social responsibility (spring 2014). For each of these themes, staff members have been provided

with month-specific learning outcomes in knowledge and skill areas. Each program related to

these themes is evaluated using open-ended reflections written by program attendants.

Resident Assistants are responsible for providing educational programming in complex

subjects related to diversity and social responsibility. While this can provide deep learning

opportunities for the Resident Assistant, it also requires that they first master or, at a minimum,

understand the outcomes they are attempting to deliver. While other documents have focused on

the logistical responsibilities of the Resident Assistant position, this document provides the

context for the educational strategies used to "provide growth and development opportunities to

gain knowledge and life skills essential to be contributing members of society" (HRL Mission Statement).

Resident Assistant Training Schedule

The training schedule (appendix D) that was followed in fall 2012 Resident Assistant training is comprised of 52 sessions over a 10-day period (88 training hours). This excludes meals, which are required for all Resident Assistants during training.

Of the 88 total hours of training, approximately 36% of the time was spent instructing new and returning staff members on aspects of their job, 34% was spent in team-building activities, and 31% was spent preparing the residence halls for the university's opening. The time during training that was spent in instructional or hands-on training or team building can be divided into the following areas (taken from the supervisory evaluation form):

- Team building: 34%
- Community Development: 10%
- Policy Implementation: 10%
- Program Planning: 8%
- Diversity: 5%
- Administrative: 2%
- Role Modeling: 1%

The bulk of the time spent in Resident Assistant training is preparing the residence halls and bonding as a Resident Assistant staff. Teams do not develop in a matter of a few days, so time is built into each day to learn about one another, reflect on training experiences, and accomplish goals as a group. The residence halls also need significant attention to prepare them for the return of residents (room condition inspections, information posting, front desk operations setup, etc.). The time that is left is used to train the Resident Assistants on the aspects of their day-to-day responsibilities.

Considering the amount of learning that needs to take place in the areas of diversity to address divisional learning outcomes and prepare them to deliver program-related learning outcomes, 5% of the overall training seems to be low. While very specific training does need to occur related to administrative tasks and emergency procedures, it may be wise to combine team-building activities with other topics, such as diversity, community building, and role modeling. A more constructivist approach may provide for longer term learning gains as well as more efficient use of training time. Currently, only one online learning module is utilized. It may be worth exploring the further use of online tools to make training time more experiential and efficient.

Resident Assistant Course Syllabus

In the fall semester, new Resident Assistants are required to register for and successfully complete a Resident Assistant course. It is facilitated by an Assistant Director for Residence Life and co-facilitated by Residence Life Coordinators.

The Resident Assistant Course Syllabus (appendix E) includes the following areas:

- Course Outline
- Rubric/Grading
- Expected Course Outcomes
- Submitting Assignments
- Attendance and Class Participation
- University Academic Regulations

The expected course outcomes are as follows:

- Gain comprehension of basic student development theories to have a greater understanding of where students are in their personal growth.
- Learn the conceptual and practical aspects of communication, including peer-helping, mediation, confrontation, and public speaking skill sets.
- Understand and apply knowledge of trends in student behavior and working with students.
- Learn the importance of a balanced lifestyle and techniques to role model wellness in life.
- Learn methods for effective community building, group development, and programming.
- Gain a greater understanding of intercultural competencies to cultivate inclusive communities.
- Enhance leadership skills and develop strategies to engage students with the campus community.

Resident Assistants in the course attend six sessions as a full group (approximately 50 students) and three sessions in a small group for reflection and discussion. The course outline lists the following topics as covered in full group sessions:

- Course Overview
- Leadership Development
- Being an Ally
- Student Development
- Eating Disorders and Body Image
- Working With Students With Disabilities

Between sessions, students are asked to submit an online reflection, which are then discussed in small group sessions.

It seems as though there are more stated outcomes than what can be covered by the topics and number of instructional sessions offered. Having an academic course related to the Resident Assistant position provides enormous potential for maximizing learning. Developing this course with a similar structure to a service-learning course could provide a more focused experience. Resident Assistant learning outcomes based on transferable knowledge and skills could be used to give direction to this course.

All Department In-Service Agenda

Throughout the academic year, monthly in-service meetings are held with the entire Housing and Residence Life staff. This includes the Assistant Vice President, Director of Residence Life, Assistant Directors of Residence Life, Residence Life Coordinators, Graduate Assistants, and Resident Assistants.

Agendas from September of 2012 through May of 2013 are divided into three areas: guest speakers, HRL speakers, and written announcements. In 2012–2013, 87% of the time spent during in-service was dedicated to members of the university community informing the Resident Assistants about programs and events happening at Towson. Thirteen percent of the time during in-service was spent training Resident Assistants on a programmatic topic (privilege) or process (participating in staff interviews).

These documents reinforce the Resident Assistant's role as a referral agent and community builder. Convening almost 150 staff members in the same room once a month is not a small undertaking, and most of the time spent is dedicated to knowledge transfer. Moving more information to paper and dedicating that time to reflection in smaller groups may enhance the department's ability to reinforce learning in other ways.

Resident Assistant Supervisory Form

Their supervisor formally evaluates Resident Assistants at the end of each fall semester. The supervisory form (appendix F) is filled out by the Residence Life Coordinator and discussed with the individual Resident Assistant.

Each Resident Assistant is evaluated on competencies in seven areas of their position using a five-point Likert scale ranging from outstanding to unsatisfactory. The competencies are:

Community Development

- Develops and maintains relationships with residents on the floor(s)
- Promotes and empowers residents to become leaders in their community
- Helps residents to understand the implications of their behavior on the community
- Knowledge of residents: knows names and has developed relationships
- Maintains high profile on floor(s)
- Is available during evening hours and non-duty nights

Administrative:

- Demonstrates oral and written communication skills
- Has been timely and accurate in handing in appropriate forms and follow-up procedures
- Is punctual and reliable in assuming duty coverage
- Actively participates in the RA selection process and other staff selection processes
- Maintains bulletin boards and removes outdated material

Program Planning and Implementation:

- Assesses the social and educational needs and interests of residents.
- Programming is balanced with a variety of educational options.
- Coordinates advertising for programs that is creative, timely, and informative.
- Assists with the implementation of campus-wide Department of Housing and Residence Life programs.
- Programming efforts have been both formal and informal.
- Has conducted diverse programs (i.e., variety).
- Progress is being made toward fulfilling programming requirements.

Role Model:

- Role models appropriate behavior and decision-making skills
- Maintains appropriate confidentiality with student information
- Promotes full cooperation with departments of the University and makes appropriate referrals
- Follows the "Resident Assistant Commitment to Ethics" document when making both job-related and personal decisions

Team Player:

- Interacts and cooperates with RA staff to promote team unity
- Plays a positive role in staff relationships
- Provides support for staff members and staff decisions in a professional manner
- Seeks out and provides constructive feedback to other staff members
- Collaborates with fellow staff members in areas, including programming and administrative requirements
- Fully participates in all training sessions. Including, but not limited to, Fall and Pre-Service training
- Has fulfilled In-Service requirements as outlined by the department

Policy Implementation:

- Fully understands, explains, and enforces the Department of Housing and Residence Life policies and University's Code of Student Conduct
- Addresses all inappropriate behavior and policy violations
- Submits policy violations and staff reports in a timely manner
- Manages crisis situations calmly with sound judgment and rational behavior
- Empowers residents to confront one another
- Mediates conflict effectively
- Reports information to the professional staff member on-call as necessary

Appreciation of Diversity:

- Is sensitive to diverse cultures, lifestyles, orientations, and abilities
- Displays a commitment to diversity awareness
- Confronts inappropriate, insensitive, and intolerant behavior on the part of others
- Demonstrates a commitment to personal growth and self-challenge
- Expands self-knowledge about cultural groups, lifestyles, orientations, and abilities
- Treats all building residents with fairness, equality, and respect, regardless of personal perspectives

As illustrated in Table 2, there appear to be inconsistencies between the stated job responsibilities and the areas stressed during training.

Table 2: Inconsistencies Between Job Description, Supervisory Form, and Training

Job Description Areas	Supervisory Form Areas	Percentage Training Time
(Not represented)	Team Player	34 %
Community Development	Community Development	10 %
Policy Implementation	Policy Implementation	10 %
Programming/Engagement	Program Planning and Implementation	8 %
(Not represented)	Appreciation of Diversity	5 %
Administrative Tasks	Administrative	2 %
Role Model	Role Modeling	1 %
Security	(Not represented)	0 %
		Total: 70%

The Resident Assistants are evaluated by their supervisor in areas that are not prevalent in their job description or their formal training. An appreciation for diversity seems to be the largest discrepancy. It is mentioned in the job description once, "promote and encourage an appreciation of diversity among residents, and encourage interaction among residents on their floors and within the campus community," and is covered in one session during the formal training. Despite the lack of representation in these two areas, an appreciation of diversity is a major area on the supervisory evaluation form. Similarly, being a team player is not addressed in the job description but is a focus of training and the evaluation form. Security is represented in the job description but is not directly evaluated.

The various documents mentioned here should be aligned for the future. One could safely assume that the areas in which a Resident Assistant is being evaluated are the most important aspects of the job. If that is accurate, these areas should be represented in the job description with equal importance and consistent language. While some job responsibilities require more training time than others, it is also important that major responsibilities are given the time and attention they need to reinforce the importance during formal training time, the

Resident Assistant course, and in-services. Having specified learning outcomes for the Resident

Assistant position could help to provide consistency in language and focus.

Peer Evaluation for Resident Assistant Rehire

Each Resident Assistant who would like to return to the position for the following

academic year is evaluated by their peers. Resident Assistants from the building staff that the

individual is on complete a Peer Evaluation for RA Rehire form (appendix G).

Resident Assistants evaluate their peers with a five-point Likert scale in the following 12

areas:

- Teamwork
- Policies and Procedures
- Verbal Communication
- Leadership
- Innovation
- Dependability
- Cooperation
- Conflict Resolution
- Ethics and Integrity
- Availability
- Adaptability
- Programming

This document speaks of the importance of teamwork in the Resident Assistant role.

Many of the functions of a Resident Assistant are done collaboratively: duty coverage, program

planning, staff meetings, and behavioral confrontations. It is important for Resident Assistants to

have an established sense of trust with one another. Staff members are often asked to perform

responsibilities in scenarios that are uncomfortable. Knowing that your fellow staff members

have the knowledge and skills to perform the job in concert with their colleagues is a crucial

element in having a positive staff presence in the residence hall.

Nine of the areas that peers are evaluating are specific to working as a team: teamwork, verbal communication, dependability, cooperation, leadership, availability, innovation, ethics and integrity, and adaptability. Three of the areas relate to responsibilities that Resident Assistants work on collaboratively: policies and procedures, conflict resolution, and programming.

There is significant overlap among the nine areas related to teamwork. There is potential for eliminating a number of items listed, either by consolidation or by removing areas that peers are unlikely to witness first hand.

Resident Assistant Rehire Application

Resident Assistants who would like to return to the position for the following academic year are asked to submit a Rehire Application. The application asks rehire candidates to answer the following seven questions:

1. Personal Expression: Please prepare an item that describes something about you in your role as an RA. It can be a quotation, collage, photograph, painting, poem, or anything showing initiative and creativity that would help others to get to know you better as an RA.

2. Describe three strengths that you possess as a staff member.

3. Describe an area that you need to work on as an RA and your plan to address it in the future.

4. What role do you currently play on your staff? Do you see that changing in the coming year? Why or why not?

5. What are three goals you have should you be hired as a returning staff member? Provide an action plan to achieve these goals.

6. What community would most benefit from your skill set as an RA? (Community styles include: Apartment, Tower-suites, Tower-quad, Traditional/Corridor.)

7. Are you interested in a Residential Learning Community/Housing Option? If so, please indicate which option, and explain your interest in being an RA in that community.

The questions asked of the Resident Assistant rehire applicants are both broad in nature and specific to their role on their staff. They are asked to reflect on their own experiences and strengths as a staff member, but no rubric exists for what their answers may represent. Other than whether or not the applicant is able to reflect on their experiences and list some strengths they possess, it is unclear how these answers would be used in rehire decisions. The only specific question that can be related to an evaluation area is the question about the Resident Assistant's role on the staff. The last three questions asked are specific to what experience the applicant would be interested in for the following academic year.

It can be reported that most staff members that apply for rehire are rehired each year. Approximately 50% of the 123 Resident Assistants will apply to be rehired, and all but one or two are invited to return. More often than not, the reasons for not rehiring a Resident Assistant are documented in their supervisory form and are not impacted by the rehire process. If it can be assumed that the rehire process is mostly to provide an opportunity for reflection on the part of the staff member, the process could be improved by refocusing on a combination of specific learning outcomes and future goals.

Findings: Artifact and Document Review

There are five areas of the Resident Assistant position that stand out in reviewing HRL's documents: policy enforcement, community building, administrative duties, diversity, and team building. Table 3 shows where each of these areas is well represented.

Table 3: Artifact and Document Analysis

	Supervisory Forms	Job Description	Residential Engagement Manual	Training Documents	RA Contract	Peer Evaluations
Community Building	X	X	X	X		
Administrative Duties	X	X	X		X	
Policy Enforcement	X	X		X		
Teamwork	X			X		X
Diversity	X		X			

The Supervisory Forms provide the most well-defined areas of the job in which a Resident Assistant is expected to succeed, while several of the other documents provide either greater levels of specificity (Residential Engagement Manual, RA Contract) or broad overviews of the job (Job Description, Resource Guide). Each of these five areas has the potential to provide professional skills beyond the college environment, including an increased ability to work with others, especially those that are unlike one's self. A demonstrated ability to understand administrative duties, adhere to policies, and hold others accountable when appropriate are marketable skills for a former Resident Assistant.

Several of these areas overlap with or contribute to the outcomes identified in the literature. While there is a direct connection between diversity as it is represented in the literature and the Residence Life documents, it would not be difficult to see how community building, policy enforcement, and teamwork all contribute to citizenship and managing relationships. Effective communication is almost entirely absent from these documents despite being a crucial skill for Resident Assistants. Each of these documents warrants significant updates based on learning outcomes identified in the literature and staff interviews.

What Do Residence Life Staff Members Believe Resident Assistants Should Be Learning From Their experience?

Methodology: Professional Staff Interviews

Interviews were conducted with seven members of the Residence Life professional staff, including the Director of Residence Life, two Assistant Directors of Residence Life, and four Residence Life Coordinators who served on the 2012–2013 Resident Assistant Committee.

Interview participants ranged in experience. Participants held their current positions between one and 14 years with overall Residential Life experience ranging from three to 26 years. All but one of the participants had been a Resident Assistant in the past. All participants have supervised Resident Assistants for at least three years.

According to the Assistant Director of Residence Life and chair of the Resident Assistant Committee, the committee "oversees the recruitment, selection, training, and development of the RAs" (Personal communication, July 26, 2013). As chair of the committee, one Assistant Director also oversees the Resident Assistant Class, job contract, and departmental communications to Resident Assistants.

A semi-standardized interview was designed to ask specific questions about the Resident Assistant experience, while allowing for relevant follow-up prompts and questions (Berg, 2007, p. 95). The following questions were a part of the scheduled interview:

1. What is your position in Housing and Residence Life?

2. How long have you been in your position?

3. What are your major responsibilities?

4. What are your responsibilities related to the Resident Assistant position?

5. How long have you worked with Resident Assistants at Towson University or other institutions?

6. Have you ever been a Resident Assistant at Towson University or other institutions?

7. What Resident Assistant responsibilities do you believe take up the most amount of time?

8. What Resident Assistant responsibilities do you believe are the most important?

9. What Resident Assistant responsibilities do you believe are the most challenging for a student in the position?

10. What are the most important skills a student needs to have to be successful in the Resident Assistant position?

11. What skills do you believe are a prerequisite for being successful in the Resident Assistant position (pre-training)?

12. What Resident Assistant responsibilities do you believe provide the most learning opportunities?

13. What knowledge do you believe a Resident Assistant should have gained after one year in the position?

14. What specific responsibilities do you believe lead to this knowledge acquisition?

15. Is there additional knowledge that you believe they should gain after two years in the position?

16. What transferable skills do you believe a Resident Assistant should have gained after one year in the position?

17. What specific responsibilities do you believe lead to skill development in these areas?

18. Are there additional skills that you believe they should gain after two years in the position?

19. Are there additional areas that you believe a student in the Resident Assistant position should develop?

20. What strategies do you believe Housing and Residence Life staff can institute or continue to facilitate learning on the part of the Resident Assistants?

Interviews were conducted in-person. They are audio-recorded and transscribed for future analysis. Transcriptions were then coded to identify prevalant themes and cohesiveness with identified learning outcomes from the literature.

Analysis: Professional Staff Interviews

In the first round of coding, key comments about RA responsibilties and potential learning outcomes were identified in each interview transcript. These comments included statements about an RA's abilities to present information, resolve conflict, communicate across cultures, compromise, and manage their time appropriately, among other things. From these statements, five themes were identified and comments in each theme were counted. Table 4 details the overall number of comments recorded for each theme. Diversity also emerged as a theme, but comments in this area often overlapped directly with communication and community.

Individual statements were then organized by interview question and ultimately grouped by Resident Assistant responsibilities, knowledge and skills, and development, as seen in Table 5. The interview participants are identified by the titles, Director of Residence Life, Assistant Director (AD1& AD2) and Residence Life Coordinators (RLC 1, 2, 3, and 4).

Table 4: Interview and Focus Group Comment Counts

Themes	Director	AD 1	AD 2	RLC 1	RLC 2	RLC 3	RLC 4	RAs	Total	%
Communication	8	7	11	10	4	3	14	6	63	26%
Crisis and Conflict	7	4	5	5	4	4	0	20	49	20%
Teamwork	4	9	1	8	6	4	1	6	39	16%
Community and Relationships	7	10	7	2	5	3	6	27	64	26%
Administration	5	2	4	6	4	2	3	4	30	12%

Table 5: Interview Comment Counts Organized by Question Type

Theme	RA Responsibilities	RA Knowledge and Skills	RA Development
Communication	14	31	5
Crisis and Conflict	10	13	2
Teamwork	7	18	6
Community and Relationships	20	16	3
Administration	10	13	3

Resident Assistant Responsibilities

Community building was mentioned more than any other responsibility when asked what responsibilities take up most of the Resident Assistant's time and which is the most important (Table 4). Community building would include hours spent in the residence hall with students, facilitating educational and social programs, and responding to student needs. When further asked to define community building, the Director of Residence Life put forth:

> I'd like for them [Resident Assistants] to know everyone on their floor, and I want everyone to know them. So I'd like them to be known and for them to know the students. I'd like them to facilitate a process where they're helping students get to know each other on their floor, so students on the floor know each other and know members of the floor. I'd like them to help establish a certain level of norms on the floor related to student behavior: quiet hours, sense of HRL policies, and trying to foster an atmosphere where students positively respond to expectations. (Personal communication, July 26, 2013)
> A Residence Life Coordinator (RLC3) provided the following definition of community

building:

> …connecting residents that are on their hall as well as within the building or the larger community to each other, to other resources, maybe to a student group if that's of interest, and being a general resource to these other kind of initiatives. Maybe the Resident Assistant through their training knows resources that might be on campus through the Center for Student Diversity, through the Counseling Center, and being a

referral there. I think another big piece when it comes to community building is being a role model in the community and demonstrating what inclusion means, demonstrating what integrity means, demonstrating all these different aspects that I think in residence life we expect, but it's not simply connecting people but it's also concepts and our values as an institution to the residents. (Personal communication, July 24, 2013)

When asked about the most important responsibilities a Resident Assistant has, Assistant Director (AD1) pointed to the following: "relationship building, community building, engagement". When asked to expand on relationship building, she said:

Relationship building takes time. It's more than an ice breaker, it's more than doing one activity at your floor meeting, and it requires mutual exchange of wanting to be in that relationship…and so what I mean is being able to talk to them [the residents], know them, know a bit about them – it doesn't have to be significantly intimate or time consuming – but I believe that they should feel that you know them, that you have a connection with them, and that they know you to a degree. (Personal communication, July 26, 2013)

Some participants did clarify that community building *should* be what takes up most of their time but were not convinced that it really does. RLC4 shared:

I think the one that eats up the most of their time is spending time with their students, or at least that's the one I think it should be. Whether it is [the most important] is another story for every RA. But I mean whole-heartedly that they are supposed to be around and available and engaging and interacting with their students…They are doing it every day even when they don't realize they are doing it. (Personal communication, July 26, 2013)

RLC2 echoed the concern that it is difficult to quantify the amount of time Resident Assistants are building community within the residence halls:

I think it is primarily, I would hope at least, it is community building. And that has a multitude; so that's having presence on the floor, doing programs on the floor or in the building, being present at the community center….I hope that is what they are primarily doing, is getting out there so residents know where to find them if they ever have concerns or questions…I would say that community building is their primary role. (Personal communication, July 26, 2013)

Assistant Director of Residence Life (AD2) provided a more administrative viewpoint on Resident Assistant responsibilities:

> I think that the administrative pieces that they are responsible for here at Towson take up the majority of their time. I think that when I say administrative responsibilities, I mean being on duty from a day-to-day basis, I think of the bulletin boards they are responsible for, the programming planning that they are responsible for, the door decorations they are responsible for, confronting and documenting situations that occur, and just the basic safety and maintenance of the building is probably what they spend the most of their time on. The reason that I think that is because it is the most tangible thing that we can hold them accountable to, so most Residence Life Coordinators latch on to the administrative pieces. (Personal communication, July 26, 2013)

When asked what he believes is the most important responsibility of a Resident Assistant, AD2 shared: "I think that community engagement is the most important piece of their job…being involved in helping students to learn about themselves and how they exist in the world is another really important piece of their job, and in my opinion, the most important" (personal communication, July 26, 2013).

It would seem that the least quantifiable responsibilities Resident Assistants have are the ones that the professional staff members believe should be taking up the greatest portion of their time and are the most valuable. AD2's statements are a direct result of this disconnect, stating that Resident Assistants will spend their time on items that can be checked on a list and are most easily held accountable for. It would seem a necessary step for Residence Life to define exactly what actions a Resident Assistant can take to build community and develop specific expectations related to these actions.

When asked what Resident Assistant responsibilities are the most challenging for a student in the position, responses were almost evenly split between relationship building and confronting policy violations or conflicts.

AD1 discussed the difficulty of student staff having authentic interactions:

> We do have some staff that walk in and have natural abilities and kind of the natural relationship-building skills or attributes of a person who is likeable…I guess the phrase would be to 'work a room,' but also have some genuine, authentic connections, not just car salesman, but to have authentic interactions…They're responsible for facilitating something that they themselves are struggling to learn. (Personal communication, July 26, 2013)

RLC4 had similar observations when asked about the most challenging aspects of the position:

> I think it is specifically interacting or engaging, whichever verb you want to use with students who are different from them [the Resident Assistant]. I don't mean just in terms of ethno-racial-cultural issues but in learning style, interactive style, the way people learn, the way people speak. I think that is a huge thing that you can't necessarily teach in a short amount of time. (Personal communication, July 26, 2013)

AD1 paraphrased a Resident Assistant going into his second year in the position, when asked by a new Resident Assistant, "when does the awkward end?" The Resident Assistant answered, "It doesn't. Just accept it. It's part of the job. It's one of the expectations. It's part of the job description. It's going to be awkward." (Personal communication, July 26, 2013)

While genuine relationship building with residents can be difficult, the Director, RLC2, and RLC3 believe that confronting violations and conflicts is the most challenging aspect of the position. When asked what the most challenging part of the position is, the Director said:

> …confronting residents that they [Resident Assistant] don't know in a conduct situation. So they're on a floor, they don't know those people on their floor, they're not known to them, and they're having to address their behavior in some way. I think that's probably the most challenging. Probably next is their ability to facilitate and work through conflict and their level of confidence and their ability to communicate in the midst of conflict. (Personal communication, July 26, 2013)

When asked specifically about addressing conflict, he continued, "disagreements between roommates in terms of what the living environment should be like or conflicts related to some of the behaviors. I think if they have a good relationship with students on their floor, they may not have the conflict related to behavior as much" (Personal communication, July 26, 2013). RLC2 believes that "policy documentation can be challenging, especially for first time staff members…it's difficult because they see the other members of the floor as members of their peer group...I think documentation, especially the first couple of times is difficult" (Personal communication, July 26, 2013). RLC1 agrees. "I think for them [new Resident Assistant], the most challenging is the first time they have to confront their peers because it is frightening and they are scared" (Personal communication, July 24, 2013).

The most challenging, time-consuming, and important aspects of the Resident Assistant position, according to the professional members of Residence Life, share one commonality: relationships between student staff and residents of the residence hall. It would seem that the Resident Assistants' ability to form, maintain, and utilize positive relationships with residents is critical to their success in the position. They must be comfortable approaching individuals they do not know to begin a relationship, continue to foster that relationship over time, and lean on said relationship while performing other duties, such as mediating conflict, assisting with resident's concerns, or connecting residents to each another as resources.

Teamwork was often mentioned as an integral part of Resident Assistants learning from their position. They perform many of their duties in small and large groups and are often asked to assist one another in day-to-day operations of the residence hall, collaborate, and, at times, compromise on programs they facilitate for residents, and provide support when addressing policy violations and conflicts that arise.

In addition to the building staff, of which each Resident Assistant is a member, student

staff has the opportunity to work with Residence Life staff members at all levels of the

organization. RLC2 shared:

> As an RA, especially at Towson, they get to interact with a wide breadth of people from peers as fellow RAs to the community center staff, to office assistants, all the way up to our AVP, Jerry. So that opportunity to see other people and how they operate is very helpful. (Personal communication, July 26, 2013)

As helpful as it is to be exposed to multiple levels of the organization, most of the

teamwork experience will take place with a group of six to 13 other Resident Assistants and a

Residence Life Coordinator.

> Working in a team environment requires humility, and requires a bit of sacrifice for the good of the whole and so [that] the relationship between an individual and a collective being that in an environment where you're working beyond just one's own desires, you have to give up something in the process, and sometimes that can be challenging. (RLC3, Personal communication, July 24, 2013)

The Director also discussed what can be learned as an individual from being a part of a

team:

> I think they learn to be a part of a team…team dynamics, supporting the team, getting support from the team…I think you learn some of your limits, and you learn areas that you may need to work on and that you may be strong at by being part of a team by being expected to take a leadership role in your community and on your floor. (Personal communication, July 26, 2013)

Comments about communication addressed interacting with fellow staff members as well

as residents. Responses ranged in topic from generally difficult conversations and electronic

communications to taking on cross-cultural boundaries.

> We all can talk about working with different people and working with a diverse group of people, but it's real stories and real time for a staff thrown together of 13 dynamic personalities, people of all races, cultures, ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identity.

It happens in real time…in a residence hall team, in ways that it doesn't happen in other places. (AD1, Personal communication, July 26, 2013)

AD1 does not know if Resident Assistants are truly prepared to have difficult discussions with residents regarding cultural differences when they begin their job.

It's hard stuff…talking to somebody about 'well I don't think she wants to live with me because I'm black, she keeps making these comments' and so an RA, as much as I want to say we get them ready for that conversation, are never ready for that conversation their first year…they're challenged by that…we all learn continuously. (AD1, Personal communication, July 26, 2013)

Constant exposure to team dynamics and individuals from diverse backgrounds and experiences can provide powerful learning opportunities for staff if they are properly trained and guided through the experience. While it may be difficult or near impossible to fully prepare Resident Assistants for the difficult conversations they will have as staff members, Residence Life professionals may be able to use past experience to develop an ongoing series of prompts and reflections to capitalize on learning opportunities. Fluency in the areas of diversity and teamwork can be invaluable in the professional work force and in meeting community needs.

In addition to cross-cultural communication, emerging technologies have offered new challenges to interpersonal communication.

Given now the fact that professionally…much more communication is taking place electronically and more phone calls are ending in voicemails, it's important that people have some sort of opportunity in their four or five years as an undergraduate that they have a dialogue and learn how to listen and speak. (RLC4, Personal communication, July 26, 2013)

In the past decade, texting, tweeting, instant messaging, emailing, and video conferencing have become a regular way of communicating between Resident Assistants and their students. With this, there is a fear that the effectiveness of face-to-face communication is declining. This is a legitimate concern considering the emphasis of relationship building and teamwork already

discussed. Given the amount of interactions and information Residents Assistants are asked to provide to residents, the Resident Assistant position could potentially provide learning opportunities for when individual methods of communication are the most appropriate and how to identify them.

While the focus of a Residence Assistant's efforts is often on relationships and the community, there are many administrative aspects of the position. These also offer opportunities to hone skills in the areas of paperwork, time management, and multi-tasking. There are a number of forms that a Resident Assistant fills out on a regular basis, including funding requests, program proposals, and duty logs. Schablik provided parallels between these processes and potential administrative responsibilities beyond their time at Towson.

> They have a bit of paperwork that they have to do, so that kind of prepares them for any future endeavors…you know if you go on a trip, you have to do expense reports, well if you want to plan a program, you have to submit a funding request and return your receipts, and if you didn't do your funding requests in time, you have to do a reimbursement, [and] there's a whole other process for that too, so I think that kind of mirrors some of the things that they'll experience working in the corporate world as well. (RLC2, Personal communication, July 26, 2013)

Resident Assistants are often leaders in other organizations on campus. Between their paid position in Residence Life, volunteer leadership opportunities, and academic demands, their time is often limited. Many Resident Assistants attempt to accomplish more than they have time to see through. "You learn how many commitments [that] can you truly make…they realize that they do have limits in terms of what they can take on" (Director of Residence Life, Personal communication, July 26, 2013).

> RLC2 also commented on this, based on experience as a Resident Assistant.

> The focus that we provide on time management…I think that helps a lot of our students focus their energies. I know when I became an RA, it helped me a lot because I had to start to schedule things better. I wasn't planning out things that well until I became an RA. (Personal communication, July 26, 2013)

RLC4 points out that their administrative tasks offer Resident Assistants a chance to not only manage their time effectively, but also to reflect on their administrative strengths and weaknesses over time.

> The biggest thing is being more reflective on an administrative end, and I don't just mean time management. I think that is something most people know but don't execute well. I think it's more about being able to balance multiple responsibilities…Looking at how you actually improve upon yourself while doing the same thing from week to week. (Personal communication, July 26, 2013)

When discussing Resident Assistant responsibilities, the major theme that emerged was the importance of relationship building. With the exception of administrative duties, relationship building is at the core of succeeding in other aspects of the position: community engagement, conflict resolution, policy violation confrontations, educational programming, and staff dynamics.

Resident Assistant Knowledge and Skills

After establishing the broad responsibilities of the Resident Assistant position, professional staff members were asked about the knowledge and skills that a Resident Assistant must possess to be selected for the position as well as what knowledge and skills they should develop as a result of holding the Resident Assistant position.

To understand what students gain from the position, it is important to know what knowledge and skills they already possess. While every student is different, there are two generally agreed upon traits that are sought out in candidates: communication skills and a genuine desire to do the job.

> A willingness to learn is probably what I would focus on. There are so many facets of the RA position, and we could say 'we want them to have this skill or that skill.' I think

just the willingness and openness to learn and not just about themselves but about others staff members and the residents on their floor. (RLC2, Personal communication, July 26, 2013)

RLC4 believes that a positive attitude and flexibility are important to begin with. "There are attitudes. Someone needs to be positive and able to be adaptable and roll with what is coming at them, but that is not necessarily something that you teach like a skill. It's something that you just have" (Personal communication, July 26, 2013). On top of this, AD1 discussed the desire to do the work of a Resident Assistant. "We're looking for desire, interest; it's not a skill so much as interest and genuine desire to do the job and be part of things…what we can't train is interest and drive in the job and in the work that we do" (Personal communication, July 26, 2013). RLC1 agrees with AD1. "You have to want to do this job for the leadership that it is going to give you and for the advantages that it is going to give you" (Personal communication, July 25, 2013). She went on to talk about basic communication skills. "I think they have to come with a sense of self...they have to be personable. And personable doesn't always have to mean you are extroverted. It means that you communicate to people, you can talk to people, and you can have conversations."

AD2 takes the idea of communication as a pre-requisite one step further. "They need to be able to have conversations with people, but I think they also need to be able to express their ideas clearly and soundly, whether that is through written communication or verbal communication, those things need to be sound" (Personal communication, July 26, 2013). AD1 pointed out that once they are on the job, it is important for their basic communication skills to improve. "They have to be able to communicate. It doesn't have to be at an advanced level in

every way…I do believe they have to have some form of ability to communicate and it needs to be much more advanced when they're in the job" (Personal communication, July 26, 2013).

When asked about communication, RLC4 touched on a Resident Assistant's willingness to listen. "The ability to listen, and I think that's it…there are un-teachable things, and the ability to listen to others genuinely is more of an attitude than anything" (Personal communication, July 26, 2013). The abilities to communicate clearly and listen in a genuine way, combined with the desires to learn and fulfill the responsibilities of a Resident Assistant form the baseline expectations the professional Residence Life staff have for individuals entering the job. It is their general belief that all other skills can either be trained or learned on the job.

In terms of what learning should or will take place on the job, teamwork and communication were intertwined focus areas. While administrative soundness in a number of areas was mentioned, it was a Resident Assistant's ability to work successfully with others that was often put forth as the most significant skill acquired in the position. Many of the daily tasks of the position are accomplished in team settings, including educational programming facilitation, crisis response, and formal staff meetings.

AD2 points out that Resident Assistants are asked and expected to invest in one another and in the community at large.

> They exist on a team on a day-to-day basis, and so, at some point, they have a responsibility to recognize that they are on a team, and what the team's goals are, how they are influencing those team goals, and how they are working towards them as well. And for a first-year RA, that is very basic…they know they are on a team, this team has a mission, and I [Resident Assistant] play a role in helping to make sure this mission is ok. (AD2, personal communication, July 26th 2013)

Several Residence Life Coordinators spoke about the experience of being a team member contributing to success beyond college. "I don't know many who will graduate who will be self-employed. There may be a few…but largely, I would say that our Resident Assistant population

will work in an organization. So organizational behavior, politics, guiding change within that organization is another transferable skill" (RLC3, Personal communication, July 25, 2013).

RLC2 spoke about the efficiency of working in a team.

> In the corporate world, there's a lot of group activity and group team dynamics that are built into offices and corporations…helping them to understand that they're not by themselves, that they have seven other RAs on staff with them…helping them to understand delegation of duty…they don't need to do every role, they don't need to fill out the paperwork, get the money, go to the store, do the cleanup, do the setup, there are things that can be delegated to others…it's important. (Personal communication, July 26, 2013)

Each professional staff member interviewed highlighted the importance of the team environment in what can be learned from the Resident Assistant position. Teamwork was mentioned or discussed more than 30 times during the course of the interviews. When asked for more specifics on what can be learned from the team aspects of the job, communication between colleagues was often used as an example.

RLC1 tied the concept of teamwork together with communication, "I think they [Resident Assistants] learn from the experience of being on a team and working on team programs and working with each other…I think that is when the communication comes in. They learn that other people don't communicate the way that they communicate" (Personal communication, July 24, 2013). RLC4 took it one step further when it comes to communication within the team, "an aspect of leadership is followership…and knowing when to actively pay attention to your colleagues and when to ask appropriate follow-up questions and knowing how to deliver feedback" (Personal communication, July 26, 2013).

AD1 also commented on the importance of receiving feedback as a member of a team.

> When I think about some of the current RAs that have just finished their first year…what they've learned about working with one another, what they're still learning…about how they show up in a group…they're getting feedback from their peers saying, 'this is what

you just said, and this is how it shows up,' and so they learn about themselves and how they work in a group. (Personal communication, July 26, 2013)

Beyond basic communication skills, an ability to communicate with individuals that may not share one's race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender expression, socioeconomic background, or multitude of other traits is a key element in the Resident Assistant position whether working with colleagues or residents. It is a skill that can have wide ranging benefits beyond college as well.

AD1 points out that the percentage of students from traditionally underrepresented groups are much higher among Resident Assistants than the general Towson population.

> Take a look at our RA staff versus the University…we are far and above when it comes to ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, and gender identity…I think that in and of itself is the exposure to people different than you and the opportunity to work every day…to know their life, their struggle, have them know yours, gives you an opportunity to approach things differently. (Personal communication, July 26, 2013)

Holding this position can provide a structured and emotionally safe environment for students to interact with individuals that they may have not naturally gravitated toward due to social boundaries. Working as a Resident Assistant provides student leaders with the chance to make decisions alongside individuals with wholly different perspectives on life than they may be accustomed to, widening their own perspectives and problem-solving abilities in the process.

AD1 discussed a former Resident Assistant who told her how her experience in Residence Life continues to impact her.

> Recently, I had a former RA who works for the Social Security Administration, and she contacted me because something happened at work that really disturbed her, and she couldn't believe it happened at first, and it was played out with an issue of diversity between some employees, and how it was being handled above, and she said 'it was my

training as an RA that I knew what to do. I knew what I was seeing wasn't okay and I know how to speak up.' (Personal communication, July 26, 2013)

This example does speak to the transferrable skills a Resident Assistant can bring with them into their communities and workplaces. Had this former student not been a Resident Assistant, she may have recognized that there was a conflict in the workplace but not had the insight to know the cultural implications or ability to intervene.

While the interviews focused heavily on the experiences a Resident Assistant will have and the skills they will need and learn, there were very few specifics discussed related to knowledge. Most responses about the knowledge a Resident Assistant needs focused on the basic knowledge of procedures to be followed in a given situation or basic facts about the University. Though diversity and an understanding of other individual's cultures were briefly mentioned on a few occasions, almost no theories or content were mentioned as being important for a Resident Assistant to know.

Resident Assistant Development

Each academic year, approximately half of the Resident Assistants on campus return for a second or third year in the position. They may or may not return to a staff in the same building or with the same supervisor and colleagues. There are increased expectations for performance and peer leadership imposed on a returning Resident Assistant. Professional staff members were asked if they believed there were additional gains from the position in a second year.

RLCs 1 and 2 both talked about the increased expectations as a peer leader:

We expect our second-year staff to take more of a hands-on role within their building, with first-year RAs as well, because they ultimately have the ability both positively and negatively to affect the dynamics of the group for the year. And more so than an RLC, because as a peer, it is somebody that students look up to. (RLC2, Personal communication, July 26, 2013)

I think after two years in the position, they should be good leaders…it means they know when they need to be at the head and when they need to do the work, or when they need to pull a colleague to the side and give them some feedback…It's being secure in your position and knowing the position and being able to do it well. (RLC1, personal communication, July 26th 2013)

In addition to peer leadership, several comments from the professional staff focused on a second-year Resident Assistant's confidence and knowledge base to be greater. More specifically, they should know more about the University, the policies and procedures of Residence Life, and the various cultures of individuals they will be interacting with. Cross-cultural communication plays a more important role for returning staff members as the expectation from peers becomes greater.

I mentioned earlier about cultural competencies, and I do think along a spectrum for every element whether it's about race, sexuality, religion, abilities…I think that as a second-year RA, somebody needs to demonstrate that they have learned…not only learned the skills to maybe not say the wrong thing, but to also implement the right thing and to progress the organization, their staff, their floor, to be that much better and understand how to articulate why it is that this is what's necessary. (RLC3, Personal communication, July 24, 2013)

In addition to these increased expectations, RLC4 remarked on his belief that not enough Resident Assistants are able to articulate their role as an RA after they complete the job.

Articulating. Taking what they are saying and explaining it to people who have nothing to do with us. Being able to tell their aunt or uncle what an RA is and why it's beneficial. I think that is an incredibly important skill that more RAs need to have after year two…someone is going to ask why it was important to their academic and life goals. Saying what you got out of it is important but being able to tie it in to what they are doing and explaining why they are building or developing community is an important skill that not enough second-year RAs possess. (Personal communication, July 26, 2013)

If RLC4 is correct in this observation, this once again points out the need for articulated learning outcomes that can guide Resident Assistants' reflection during and after their work experiences.

Methodology: Resident Assistant Focus Group

A semi-structured focus group was designed to ask specific questions about the Resident Assistant experience, while allowing for relevant follow-up prompts and questions (Berg, 2007, p. 95). Six second-year Resident Assistants volunteered to participate in the focus group. They came from six different building staffs, each with a different supervisor. Four of the participants were men while two were women. One student of color participated. Each of the students participated anonymously and will be referred to as RA1, RA2, RA3, RA4, RA5, and RA6.

The following questions were a part of the scheduled interview:

1. What is your position in Housing and Residence Life?

2. How long have you been in your position?

3. What are the major responsibilities of being a Resident Assistant?

4. What Resident Assistant responsibilities do you believe take up the most amount of time?

5. What Resident Assistant responsibilities do you believe are the most important?

6. What Resident Assistant responsibilities do you believe are the most challenging for a student in the position?

7. What are the most important skills a student needs to have to be successful in the Resident Assistant position?

8. What skills do you believe are a pre-requisite for being successful in the Resident Assistant position (pre-training)?

9. What Resident Assistant responsibilities do you believe provide the most learning opportunities?

10. What knowledge do you believe a Resident Assistant should have gained after one year in the position?

11. What specific responsibilities do you believe lead to this knowledge acquisition?

12. Is there additional knowledge that you believe they should gain after two years in the position?

13. What transferable skills do you believe a Resident Assistant should have gained after one year in the position?

14. What specific responsibilities do you believe lead to skill development in these areas?

15. Are there additional skills that you believe they should gain after two years in the position?

16. Are there additional areas that you believe a student in the Resident Assistant position should develop?

17. What strategies do you believe Housing and Residence Life staff can institute or continue to facilitate learning on the part of the Resident Assistants?

The focus group was conducted in-person. It was audio-recorded and transcribed for future analysis. The transcription was then coded using the same methods and themes as the professional staff interview transcripts.

Analysis: Resident Assistant Focus Group

Table 4 (above, p. 45) details the overall number of comments recorded for each theme. Comments were also grouped by Resident Assistant responsibilities, knowledge and skills, and development, as seen in Table 6.

Table 6: Focus Group Comments Organized by Question Type

Theme	RA Responsibilities	RA Knowledge and Skills	RA Development
Communication	2	4	0
Crisis and Conflict	7	10	2
Teamwork	3	1	3
Community and Relationships	15	9	1
Administration	1	1	2

Resident Assistant Responsibilities

Overwhelmingly, all of the Resident Assistants who participated in the focus group

pointed to their relationship with residents as the most important responsibility that they have.

They discussed the importance of making their residents feel safe, comfortable, and cared for.

Specifically, RA1 said:

> The most important thing that I think we do is [make]people feel safe and comfortable in
> their environment. For first- and second-year students, they are living away from home
> and their parents…we kind of assume that parental role and it's our responsibility…to
> make them feel safe and welcome so that they can achieve their academic goals.
> (Personal communication, September 13, 2013)

RA3 agreed.

> Just being there as a friend is important. Coming in as a freshman, they don't know
> anyone…being around, being accessible, going into a room and hanging out with them so
> they aren't alone definitely makes them feel welcome and comfortable in housing.
> (Personal communication, September 13, 2013)

Similarly to the professional staff, when the Resident Assistants were asked about the

most challenging aspects of the position, they pointed to conflict resolution and policy

enforcement.

> I would say that enforcing policy is the most challenging aspect. When a lot of people
> are like 'oh my gosh I'm in so much trouble,' I feel like it's a conversation a lot of RAs
> don't really want to have to be having, but they are crucial to have. So it can just be
> uncomfortable for RAs and the residents they are speaking to but it's a necessity but still
> a challenging part. (RA2, Personal communication, September 13, 2013)

RA1 put forth:

> I think trying to accommodate…anywhere from 18 to 70 different lifestyles in a
> community. Each resident comes to you and is having an issue…there is no blanket
> statement that's like, 'this is exactly how you are going to deal with this,' because each
> person is different and has experienced different things. (Personal communication,
> September 13, 2013)

RA6 spoke about conflicts related to the staff team, "as weird as it is having resident

policies, dealing with staff conflicts is like an issue…I know not all staffs get together perfectly.

I know my staff in general may have had some issues that had to be addressed…It's weird"

(Personal communication, September 13, 2013). RA4 also spoke about the challenges of being

on a team.

> I feel like something that can be really challenging is understanding the lines. Like understanding the lines between your residents and you…the lines between other RAs and especially understanding the line between professional staff and where that line lies. (Personal communication, September 13, 2013)

The Resident Assistants spoke little to none about administrative responsibilities, duty

rotation, or program facilitation, but RA3 did mention time management as a challenge.

> Balancing your time is difficult for me, because I spend so much time in class and internships and just work. And trying to balance school work and being available, accessible, planning events and not feeling guilty for focusing on school work. (RA3, Personal communication, September 13, 2013)

Resident Assistant Knowledge and Skills

In terms of the important knowledge and skills a Resident Assistant must have to be

successful, the participating students pointed to communication, conflict resolution, and an

ability to work with residents. "This goes without saying, but tolerance; this is a people skills-

oriented job. So if you can't accept or can't embrace a certain aspect of a person or lifestyle, you

just aren't going to be a good RA. So I would just say tolerance and acceptance is a top skill"

(RA2, Personal communication, September 13, 2013). RA1 agreed, "Towson is a very diverse

college, so you deal with all sorts of walks of life…You learn about different cultures and how to

accept them if you didn't before, since the RA position is all about acceptance and understanding" (Personal communication, September 13, 2013).

RA 1 said, "I think you have to have a lot of patience, something can come up at any point during any given day. Four am, 2:00 in the afternoon, 8:00 am…dealing with those situations and making sure you don't jump to conclusions because you lost your patience" (Personal communication, September 13, 2013). RA2 continued this thought:

> Sometimes along with patience, being patient with your resident's growth, because you might tell them about a noise violation today, and the next night they have another one…so reminding them and letting them know because people don't change overnight…So you just need to be patient with your residents and keep going at it. (Personal communication, September 13, 2013)

RA3 added, "I think coming in with an open mind and being open to the experience of diversity and being ready for whatever is thrown at you" (Personal communication, September 13, 2013).

When asked about the specific things Resident Assistants need to know in their job, the discussion focused on the policies and their ability to be a resource for their residents. Regarding housing policies, RA1 responded, "you should know a lot more than you did as a resident because it is your responsibility to know specifics, like you can't hang things from a fire sprinkler. Things that you wouldn't necessarily know as a resident because you didn't sit down and look at the housing policy contract" (Personal communication, September 13, 2013). RA3 continued, "not just knowing the housing policies but also things on campus because you are a resource. So you should know…different hours or different resources that are available to your residents. So when they come to you, you can actually direct them" (Personal communication, September 13, 2013). RA5 talked about conflict.

> I think you should have some basic knowledge of conflict resolution. Everyone learns and approaches it differently, but I think you should have some basic understanding of how to approach conflict and kind of resolve it by either reaching out to another resource or resolving it yourself. (Personal communication, September 13, 2013)

Participating students were asked about what a second-year Resident Assistant should be learning from their experience. While these Resident Assistants acknowledged that they were at the beginning stages of their second year, they discussed what knowledge and skills they believe they should gain from the experience. The transfer of knowledge to newer staff members was mentioned as well as the general ability to improve upon performance from the previous year.

> For your second year, you should be able to learn things you weren't able to do your first year…I had some issues building community on my floor my first year, so this year, I have been trying to focus on better building my community. So by the end of my second year, I want to know how to create a good community because I already know how to do policy violations and things like that. (RA6, Personal communication, September 13, 2013)

RA3 made a similar point: "after two years, you should be able to refine your skills and be able to make them as effective as possible. Whereas your first year you were uncertain about how to approach things, you should be able to go in there with confidence" (Personal communication, September 13, 2013). RA2 also pointed out the need for understanding stress management by your second year. "Being an RA is a potentially very stressful position and as a second-year RA, I feel we should be more adapted to these kinds of situations and conflicts, and things we have to put up with…how to overcome those struggles and how not to let them get to us so much" (RA2, Personal communication, September 13, 2013). RA2 went on to mention the role of a returning Resident Assistant as a team member: "as a first year RA, I felt I was asking questions of the third-year RAs on my staff, and now that I'm a second-year RA, I expect our first-year RAs to come to me with questions and try to make myself available to them as much as I can" (Personal communication, September 13, 2013).

While the Resident Assistants did not share the level of detail that the professional staff did, they did focus their comments in the same general areas, centering on the ability to work with others, being open to diversity, and conflict resolution.

Findings: Interviews and Focus Group

While RAs are expected to come into the position with competent communication skills, it is the shared opinion of all participating professional staff that cross-cultural communication as well as within a team setting are important areas for growth throughout an individual's time in the position. By the time a Resident Assistant is completed with the position, they should be comfortable communicating with individuals and groups at multiple levels of an organization and varying in backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives. By the end of their experience, a Resident Assistant should also be able to identify the roles they play in a group and have an understanding of how they contribute to the overall mission of the group.

Five major focus areas stand out from the interviews and focus group:

- Communication with individuals and groups
- Community Building
- Ability to work in a team setting
- Crisis and conflict resolution
- Administrative soundness

Though every individual experience is different, the responsibilities of a Resident Assistant should provide almost daily opportunities to grow in each of these areas.

Suggested Learning Domains

After combining and analyzing the results from the literature, artifact review, interviews, and focus group, six skill areas can be put forth as major learning domains for Resident Assistants.

- Communication
- Teamwork
- Crisis and Conflict Resolution
- Community Building
- Administrative Skills
- Diversity

Communication is an area that is supported by the literature as well as the professional and student staff members. The ability to communicate effectively will impact every other aspect of the Resident Assistant position, particularly the other suggested learning outcomes. An ability to communicate clearly is one that each Resident Assistant must possess and develop over the course of time in the position. As one of the key outcomes to a college education, as stated in Bok (2006), AAC&U (2008) and CAS (2006), successful communication must be contributed to by holding the Resident Assistant position.

Teamwork is a unique aspect of the Resident Assistant position that should be capitalized on. The professional and student staff strongly supported an ability to be a contributing team member as a vital skill to have and learn. There are few leadership positions on a college campus where teamwork plays such an important role. Teamwork, while not emphasized across the literature, does appear within the Essential Learning Outcomes identified by AAC&U (2008).

Crisis and conflict resolution includes the policy enforcement that comes through the documentation with the responsibilities discussed by professional and student staff members. The Resident Assistant focus group results reflect this as one of the most important skills to have as a Resident Assistant and one in which the students felt they developed the most. Few student

leadership positions include the frequency of conflict resolution and policy enforcement that comes with the Resident Assistant position.

Community building encompasses a broad range of responsibilities, including group communication, advocacy, a sensitivity to diversity, and managing relationships. Though many of these elements also contribute to various definitions of citizenship, community building is a term Residence Life staff use often and are comfortable with. Though citizenship is clearly supported as an outcome of higher education and elements of the Resident Assistant position contribute to it as an overall goal, it is beyond the scope of these stated learning domains. It will need to be more clearly defined to develop learning outcomes in the area of community building.

Though not the focus of the Resident Assistant position, there are important administrative responsibilities that staff members must attend to. There is a level of independent work that pushes students to better manage their time and understand how administrative processes connect to overall departmental goals. When Resident Assistants are in danger of losing their position, it is more often because of administrative deficiencies than interpersonal ones. The administrative portions of the position support the overall development of students as responsible members of a work environment.

Diversity is likely the most complex of the suggested learning domains. To understand the dimensions of diversity is to understand concepts such as identity, privilege, inclusion, and cross-cultural communication. To be fully competent in any of the other five suggested learning domains, one must continually develop in the area of diversity. Resident Assistants not only work with students and staff that range in a multitude of backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences, but they are expected to educate their residents in the areas of compassion, diverse interactions, valuing others, and social responsibility. Each of the higher-education

organizations cited in the literature review put diversity-related knowledge and skills forward as a major outcome of a college education.

An understanding of self is discussed in the literature as a major component of leadership development. Each of the suggested learning domains contribute to the overall understanding of self. While self-authorship can provide a framework for reflection, it is not a learning domain in and of itself for the Resident Assistant position.

While there is overlap between many of these, each is distinct enough to warrant individual attention and consideration. Learning outcomes in each of these domains will be developed to provide greater focus on what knowledge and skills a Resident Assistant can gain from their experience.

Chapter 3

SUGGESTED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Framework for Learning Outcomes

Each of the six learning domains identified in the previous chapter can be mapped to

AAC&U, CAS, ACPA, and NASPA's learning outcomes to further define how they contribute

to the overall learning of students who participate in the Resident Assistant position. Once

learning outcomes for the Resident Assistant position have been developed, they can be mapped

specifically to the individual responsibilities associated with them, Towson University Student

Affairs learning outcomes, and ACPA and NASPA's learning outcomes. Professionals at the

University of Maryland College Park did this, as illustrated in *Learning Reconsidered 2* (2008).

> The Maryland Leadership Development Program (MLDP) at the University of Maryland,
> College Park used the Learning Reconsidered document as a springboard for clarifying
> and developing our own set of intended learning outcomes for students participating in
> our curricular and co-curricular programs…We realized the importance of intentionally
> communicating intended outcomes to students in advance of their participation in our
> programs and services. (p.33)

The framework developed by the University of Maryland team can be used to map

student experiences to broad learning domains and outcomes. Doing this helps to define exactly

what a student should be learning from particular responsibilities and how to best design

strategies and assessments for the learning.

Suggested Learning Outcomes

Each of the proposed learning outcomes will fall under one of the six learning domains identified in Chapter Two. Outcomes will be organized temporally, offering specific outcomes for both first-year and returning individuals. Students who maintain a Resident Assistant position for multiple years can be reasonably expected to achieve higher levels of learning in each of the domains. It is suggested that a deeper body of knowledge ultimately be collected by the Housing and Residence Life department about each of the domains to adequately deliver educational strategies and assess progress.

Communication

Communicating messages clearly is a vital skill in the workforce. A Resident Assistant is in constant communication with residents, colleagues, and supervisors. Resident Assistants are expected to communicate well verbally and in writing. They facilitate educational programs, host social events, mediate conflict, brainstorm with team members, and relay general information. They are provided with regular feedback from their supervisors regarding their ability to communicate with others.

One of the most important skills a Resident Assistant needs is the ability to comfortably hold a conversation. In her 2014 book, *Conversational Intelligence*, Judith Glaser describes conversations as:

> dynamic, interactive, and inclusive. They evolve and impact the way we connect, engage, interact, and influence others, enabling us to shape reality, mind-sets, events, and outcomes in a collaborative way. Conversations have the power to move us from 'power over' others to 'power with' others. (p. xiii)

Glaser discusses three levels of conversations:

- Level I: transactional (how to exchange data and information)
- Level II: positional (how to work with power and influence)
- Level III: transformational (how to co-create the future for mutual success) (p. xxiv)

Resident Assistants should strive to reach level-III conversations with residents, though it may take time to develop the kind of trusting relationship needed to achieve this. Level III conversations "promote a rich dialogue in which you ask questions for which you have no answers, share and discover what is on your mind, and encourage everyone to help shape mutual success" (Glaser, 2014. p. 140).

The importance of nonverbal communication cannot be overstated in a Resident Assistant's ability to convey messages to residents and peers.

> Nonverbal cues serve a number of communicatively significant functions (Burgoon, 1985; Harper, Wiens, & Matarazzo, 1978; Patterson, 1994). They not only function as powerful determinants of interpersonal perception, but they have a major impact on interpersonal relationships. Although nonverbal cues frequently reinforce or supplement information provided by the spoken word, they also provide specific kinds of information that cannot be obtained from speech communication. (Leathers, 1997, p. 17)

One particularly important trait that a Resident Assistant must possess is credibility. Nonverbal communication is often overlooked in the formation of credibility. Leathers describes three dimensions of credibility that can be positively or negatively affected by nonverbal cues: competence, trustworthiness, and dynamism (p. 228). Leathers points to four things an individual can work on to develop nonverbal credibility:

- Eye behavior (sustained eye contact while talking and while others talk to you)
- Gestures (should appear spontaneous and unrehearsed, hands and elbows away from the body)
- Postures (open and relaxed posture, leaning forward and smiling)
- Voice (speaking at a moderately fast rate will enhance perceived competence) (p. 246)

Every Resident Assistant, regardless of experience, should be comfortable initiating and sustaining conversations with individuals and groups. Over time, their ability to shape a

conversation in positive directions should develop. They should be aware of their nonverbal

tendencies and practice cues that put residents at ease.

<div align="center">Communication Learning Outcomes</div>

First-Year Resident Assistant:
- Students will learn how to initiate and sustain conversations with individuals and groups.
- Students will learn the impact of nonverbal communication on interpersonal interactions.
- Students will learn how to communicate clearly and succinctly in writing.

Second- or Third-Year Resident Assistant:
- Students will learn how to initiate and sustain conversations with individuals and groups that lead to shared goals and open dialogue.

<div align="center">**Teamwork**</div>

Very few of the responsibilities of a Resident Assistant are accomplished alone. They

design and facilitate programs, approach policy violations, provide on-call responsibilities, and

participate in staff meetings together. Building staffs are specifically designed to include

members of various student groups, perspectives, and personalities to ensure a balanced team

and a well-represented student body. Resident Assistants who attempt to succeed on their own

often fall short of expectations. Those that embrace working in teams, even when this creates

some discomfort, tend to learn from one another and understand how they can contribute to team

efforts.

Edward Kapp from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater addressed some of the

problems often faced by students during collaborations.

> One of the most commonly reported problems with collaborative learning is that of 'free-riding' in which one or more individual team members do not contribute their full potential, instead relying on the work of others to carry them through (Brooks and Ammons, 2003; Dyer, 1995; Joyce, 1999). Another difficulty encountered by student learning teams is that of an individual student 'hijacking,' a situation in which a member takes complete control of an assignment and aggressively directs the activities of the

other students while actively discouraging their participation in any form of decision making (Pfaff and Huddleston, 2003). (2009, p. 139)

Resident Assistant teams are not immune to these kinds of problems. While they have the additional guidance and supervision of a professional staff member, much of their work is independent of direct observation. The dysfunction that can exist on a Resident Assistant team can serve as an effective catalyst for learning important teamwork skills before graduating.

With the help of the director of the university's Leadership Development Center, Kapp designed a team-building intervention that could be used with students who were struggling to work together (p. 140). It consisted of three sections: examine differences in individual personalities and preferred work styles, identify the opportunities and obstacles that these individual differences pose for team performance, and explore ways to successfully work together to take advantage of the opportunities and avoid the obstacles to achieve successful team performance (p. 140).

As has been previously discussed, a significant amount of time during summer training is devoted to the building of Resident Assistant teams. Students participate in programs such as Strengths Quest (2006) and share their results with one another. Building staff also participate in multiple challenges and group projects throughout training, giving them the opportunity to learn about one another and test the group's dynamic.

In 1994, Michael J. Stevens and Michael A. Campion of the University of Texas at El Paso and Purdue University studied the knowledge, skills, and abilities that employers should look for in hiring team members. They posited that "all one frequently hears is simple generalized platitudes about the need for 'team players.' A goal of this study is to specify this domain of interpersonal team member capabilities in a way that will allow for pragmatic and

meaningful operationalizations" (p. 506). The authors separated knowledge, skills, and attitudes

into two categories – interpersonal and self-management – with five subcategories; conflict

resolution, collaborative problem solving, communication, goal setting and performance

management, and planning and task coordination.

Over the course of a student's time as a Resident Assistant, their role as a member of the

team can and should change. Several years of serving in this position can give them a greater

opportunity to observe and shape group behavior, take on different kinds of peer leadership roles,

and understand their own strengths as a member.

Teamwork Learning Outcomes

First-Year Resident Assistant:
- Students will learn how to effectively contribute to group discussion and decision-making.
- Students will learn how to appreciate what diverse perspectives add to group problem-solving.
- Students will learn how to balance individual workloads as a member of a team.
- Students will learn their strengths and weaknesses as a member of a team.

Second- or Third-Year Resident Assistant:
- Students will learn how to manage and resolve conflict among team members.
- Students will learn to determine the appropriate times to take a leadership role during collaborative projects.

Crisis and Conflict Resolution

An ability to mediate disputes, help others to solve problems, or provide stability during a

crisis are all extremely valuable skills. The Resident Assistant position calls for all of these

skills on a regular basis. They are often called upon by roommates who cannot come to an

agreement, students who do not understand what resources are available to them, and, at times,

by individuals in life-threatening situations. Resident Assistants regularly need to cite policy,

provide rationale, help others to compromise, and call upon professional resources in times of

crisis. Having the confidence to approach difficult situations in a calm and professional manner

is a skill that is difficult to develop without tangible experience. The Resident Assistant position

is one of the few college leadership positions that can provide this experience.

In *Campus Crisis Management: A Comprehensive Guide to Planning, Prevention,*

Response, and Recovery (Sherwood, G. & McKelfresh. D., 2007), a list of competencies and

skills are provided for members of a crisis response team:

- Availability
- Knowledge of resources
- Team-player mindset
- Trainability
- Diversity-communication skills (p. 59)

While the authors were referring to a team of high-level college professionals, the same skill set

and competencies could be applied to Resident Assistants responding to a crisis in the residence

hall. Resident Assistants are often the first responders to situations and are asked to play

supporting role in larger campus crisis.

Crisis and Conflict Resolution Learning Outcomes

First-Year Resident Assistant:
- Students will learn how to mediate non-threatening disagreements between students.
- Students will learn the resources to call upon in the event of a potentially harmful or life-threatening situation.
- Students will learn how to effectively communicate with stakeholders during a crisis.

Second- or Third-Year Resident Assistant:
- Students will learn to provide appropriate direction and leadership for a team responding to crisis.

Community Building

Resident Assistants are asked to shape their environment. Much of the success of the job is determined by their ability to help individuals help one another. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses within a community, whether it is a residence hall floor or an office setting, is a critical skill. Assisting those around you to communicate better, find common goals, and see the value in one another can make one an invaluable member of any population. Successful Resident Assistants facilitate this process over time, allowing for community members to form unique relationships with one another.

Community is a word often defined by the person using it. One might be referring to their location and the other individuals who reside there. They may be referring to their family, church, friends, or online acquaintances. Residence Life professionals often refer to the residence halls and their specific floor as communities. Some residents of these buildings may agree, and some may not. To determine how an individual would develop a sense of community, it must be defined.

In 1986, David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis George of Vanderbilt University proposed four criteria to define a sense of community.

> The first element is *membership*. Membership is the feeling of belonging or of sharing a sense of personal relatedness. The second element is *influence*, a sense of mattering, of making a difference to a group and of the group mattering to its members. The third element is *reinforcement*: integration and fulfillment of needs. This is the feeling that members' needs will be met by the resources received through their membership in the group. The last element is *shared emotional connection*, the commitment and belief that members have shared and will share history, common places, time together, and similar experiences. (p. 4)

By the end of Resident Assistants' first year, they should have learned how to provide residents with two of these elements: membership and reinforcement. At a minimum, residents

on a floor should know that they are a member of the floor and that a Resident Assistant can meet their needs, either directly or through a referral. While some Resident Assistants will quickly grasp an ability to provide the remaining elements – influence and shared emotional connection – it may take some staff members an additional year or more before they can fully realize these with their residents.

In 1999, Joseph McNeely of the Development Training Institute in Baltimore took the term "community building" and applied it to the alleviation of poverty in urban settings. While this does not directly apply to the typical environment of a residence hall, the concepts and skill sets he discusses do. It also illustrates how abilities learned from the Resident Assistant position can be applied to real-world problems beyond the college campus. McNeely defines community building as:

> A new approach that is emerging to help address the problems and opportunities of both impoverished inner-city neighborhoods and rural areas. It works by building community in individual neighborhoods: neighbors learning to rely on each other, working together on concrete tasks that take advantage of new self-awareness of their collective and individual assets and, in the process, creating human, family, and social capital… (p. 742)

While the every-day struggles of a residence hall floor community may not rise to the level of poverty, a Resident Assistant can approach the building of community in the same way. They must be able to find common ground among the members, help identify common goals, and connect individuals to one another as resources.

Community Building Learning Outcomes

First-Year Resident Assistant:
- Students will learn how to develop a sense of membership amongst individuals in the community.
- Students will learn when it is appropriate to act as a resource for community members and when to act as a referral agent.
- Students will learn how to connect individuals in the community with shared experiences.

Second- or Third-Year Resident Assistant:
- Students will learn how to identify the strengths and weaknesses of community members and utilize the knowledge to address individual and group needs.

Administrative Skills

While often not the focus of the Resident Assistant position, there are many administrative responsibilities that accompany the job. The position comes along with significant time-management challenges, a need for understanding multiple database- and report-writing software, and an ability to complete tasks independently. Even a student who is naturally gifted in the interpersonal areas of the Resident Assistant job can struggle to be effective if they fall behind in their administrative duties.

There are many opportunities inherent in the position to connect seemingly routine tasks and roles Resident Assistants play in developing successful communities and teams. For example, programmatic data is collected regularly. For a Resident Assistant, that means entering data such as event titles, dates, and attendance records into a database. It also means administering surveys at the end of events and turning in records. The Residential Engagement Committee in HRL formally assesses all data and then reports back to the Resident Assistants how the results will affect the programmatic structures they follow. In this way, Resident Assistants have the sense that their administrative efforts contribute directly toward the education of the community, above and beyond the simple collection of data.

Administrative Learning Outcomes

First-Year Resident Assistant:
- Students will learn to enter programmatic data into electronic databases.
- Students will learn to generate written reports based on direct observations.
- Students will learn to manage multiple competing priorities.
- Students will learn to independently manage a programmatic budget.

Second- or Third-Year Resident Assistant:
- Students will learn the connections between administrative duties and organizational progress.
- Students will learn the impact of administrative deficiencies on other members of an organization.

Diversity

In a 2012 Association for the Study of Higher Education Report on intercultural competence, it was written that:

> It is clear that no single course or experience can fully 'teach' students how to effectively communicate, relate, and work cooperatively with people of different backgrounds. To gain the necessary intercultural skills, students need ongoing practice and multiple opportunities to grow [that are] staged over time and in new and changing contexts. (p. 45)

Diversity is a complex and difficult topic to address. There are many important facets to consider, including privilege, identity, bias, and cross-cultural communication. It takes a significant amount of introspection and willingness to begin the process of understanding all that diversity entails. Resident Assistants are asked to challenge themselves almost daily in this area. Building staff are often far more diverse than the average student population, making team communication a definitive learning experience.

The origin of many roommate and community disagreements stem from a lack of cultural understanding and sensitivity. Aside from these challenges, Resident Assistants are also asked to

develop educational programs specifically designed to address diversity related topics. It is particularly challenging to understand this complex topic when students are in the process of learning this skill themselves. In an increasingly diverse workforce, articulating the importance of diversity-related skills and experiences can be a major asset that the Resident Assistant position can provide.

It is difficult to discuss diversity without first addressing the concept of privilege. In 2007, while introducing her Privilege Identity Exploration Model, Sherry K. Watt wrote, "in part, becoming culturally competent involves becoming aware of one's own privileged status in relation to racism, sexism, ableism, classism, etc. on a personal and political level. Most often, that awareness comes through having emotionally charged dialogue with others" (p. 116). Watt's model identifies eight defense modes that an individual can enter when faced with difficult dialogues about issues of diversity:

1. Denial: A denial defense can be identified by a person arguing against an anxiety-provoking stimulus by stating that it does not exist.

2. Deflection: A person employing a deflection defense may make a comment that avoids coming to terms with the realities of racism or heterosexism by deflecting the focus toward a less-threatening target, such as a parent or the school system.

3. Rationalization: A rationalization defense can be identified by behavior in which an individual supplies a logical response regarding why atrocities happen in the realm of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism.

4. Intellectualization: An intellectualization defense can be identified when a person avoids feeling dissonant by focusing on the intellectual aspects associated with the topics of social justice.

5. Principum: A principum defense can be identified by behaviors where one is avoiding exploration based on religious or personal principle.

6. False Envy: A false envy can be identified by behavior that displays affection for a person or a feature of a person in an effort to deny the complexity of the social and political context.

7. Benevolence: A benevolence defense is when one presents behavior that displays an overly sensitive attitude toward a social and political issue based on a charity act.

8. Minimization: A minimization defense can be identified by comments that reduce the magnitude of a social and political issue down to simple facts. (pp. 120-122)

It is important for a Resident Assistant to be able to recognize these defense modes, given the frequency that they will be discussing topics related to diversity.

In 2013, Janine M. Jones, Janay B. Sander, and Kimberly W. Booker investigated methods to train and evaluate multicultural competencies in students studying psychology.

> In a position paper for Division 17 of the American Psychological Association (APA), the Education and Training Committee described characteristics that are essential to the development of a culturally competent practitioner (Sue, 1982). These characteristics were divided into three main dimensions of multicultural competency: beliefs and attitudes, knowledge, and skills. (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992) (Jones, J.M., & Sander, J.B., & Booker, K.W. 2013, p. 12)

> Beliefs and Attitudes: This particular domain refers to the ability to recognize personal beliefs and attitudes about others who may be perceived as different, including race, culture, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, and other variations of diversity.

> Knowledge: The second dimension, knowledge, reflects the assumption that with good self-understanding and openness to different perspectives, practitioners can develop their knowledge and understanding of other cultural groups.

> Skills: Preparing future psychologists involves the complicated task of cultivating clinical professionals who are competent in implementing or providing culturally sensitive psychological assessment, counseling, interventions, and consultation. (p. 13-14)

While the skills dimension may be a far-reaching goal for a general student or Resident Assistant, the beliefs and attitudes and knowledge dimensions suggest a starting point for addressing multicultural competencies with any student.

Diversity Learning Outcomes

First-Year Resident Assistant:
- Students will learn the importance of exploring their own set of identities and privileges.
- Students will learn to value the perspectives and experiences of those with differing identities.

Second- or Third-Year Resident Assistant:
- Students will learn to utilize their knowledge of other cultures when problem solving.

Tables 7 and 8 illustrate which job responsibilites corespond to each learning outcome.

Table 7: Proposed Learning Outcomes for First-Year Resident Assistants*

Resident Assistant Responsibilities	Communication			Teamwork				Crisis and Conflict			Community Building			Administrative Skills				Diversity	
Learning outcomes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Conduct floor meetings	X	X		X	X						X		X						
Develop interpersonal relationships with residents	X	X									X		X					X	X
Provide referrals to university departments								X	X			X							
Respond to the personal and academic needs of residents	X	X						X	X		X	X	X			X		X	X
Assess the wellbeing of residents								X	X	X	X	X	X						
Mediate conflicts		X		X	X			X				X							X
Confront policy violations		X							X		X	X							
Document policy violations			X							X				X	X				
Plan and facilitate social events											X		X			X	X		
Contribute to the planning and facilitation of educational events in teams				X	X	X	X				X		X			X	X	X	X
Maintain programmatic budget														X			X		
Post information on floor			X								X		X						
Create and post door decorations and bulletin boards			X								X		X						
Conduct surveys											X								
Provide support during campus crisis		X					X		X	X		X							
Participate in bi-weekly supervisory meetings	X	X					X			X						X		X	
Participate in weekly staff meetings	X	X		X	X	X	X	X								X			X
Attend monthly in-service meetings					X											X			
Participate in 10-day summer training	X	X	X	X	X	X	X									X			X
Participate in 3-day winter training	X	X	X	X		X	X									X			
Serve in the "on-call" rotation					X	X			X	X						X			
Sign guests into residence hall														X					
Log programmatic data			X											X	X				
Attend and participate in the RA Course				X	X							X				X			

*First-Year Resident Assistant Learning Outcomes Key

Communication:
1. Students will learn how to initiate and sustain conversations with individuals and groups.
2. Students will learn the impact of nonverbal communication on interpersonal interactions.
3. Students will learn how to communicate clearly and succinctly in writing.

Teamwork:
4. Students will learn how to effectively contribute to group discussion and decision-making.
5. Students will learn how to appreciate what diverse perspectives add to group problem solving.
6. Students will learn how to balance individual workloads as a member of a team.
7. Students will learn their strengths and weaknesses as a member of a team.

Crisis and Conflict:
8. Students will learn how to mediate non-threatening disagreements between students.
9. Students will learn the resources to call upon in the event of a potentially harmful or life-threatening situation.
10. Students will learn how to effectively communicate with stakeholders during a crisis.

Community Building:
11. Students will learn how to develop a sense of membership amongst individuals in the community.
12. Students will learn when it is appropriate to act as a resource for community members and when to act as a referral agent.
13. Students will learn how to connect individuals in the community with shared experiences.

Administrative Skills:
14. Students will learn to enter programmatic data into electronic databases.
15. Students will learn to generate written reports based on direct observations.
16. Students will learn to manage multiple competing priorities.
17. Students will learn to independently manage a programmatic budget.

Diversity:
18. Students will learn the importance of exploring their own set of identities and privileges.
19. Students will learn to value the perspectives and experiences of those with differing identities.

Table 8: Proposed Learning Outcomes for Second- and Third-Year Resident Assistants*

Resident Assistant Responsibilities	Communication	Teamwork		Crisis and Conflict	Community Building	Administrative Skills		Diversity
Learning outcomes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Conduct floor meetings	X		X		X			
Develop interpersonal relationships with residents	X				X			X
Provide referrals to university departments								
Respond to the personal and academic needs of residents			X	X	X			
Assess the well being of residents	X			X	X			
Mediate conflicts	X	X			X			X
Confront policy violations				X	X			
Document policy violations						X	X	
Plan and facilitate social events					X			
Contribute to the planning and facilitation of educational events in teams	X	X	X		X		X	X
Maintain programmatic budget						X		
Post information on floor						X		
Create and post door decorations and bulletin boards						X		
Conduct surveys						X		
Provide support during campus crisis			X	X	X			
Participate in bi-weekly supervisory meetings	X					X	X	
Participate in weekly staff meetings	X	X	X			X	X	X
Attend monthly in-service meetings						X		
Participate in 10-day summer training	X	X	X			X		
Participate in 3-day winter training	X	X	X			X		
Serve in the "on-call" rotation			X	X		X	X	
Sign guests into residence hall						X	X	
Log programmatic data						X	X	

*Second- and Third-Year Resident Assistant Learning Outcomes Key

Communication:
1. Students will learn how to initiate and sustain conversations with individuals and groups that lead to shared goals and open dialogue.

Teamwork:
2. Students will learn how to manage and resolve conflict among team members.
3. Students will learn to determine the appropriate times to take a leadership role during collaborative projects.

Crisis and Conflict:
4. Students will learn to provide appropriate direction and leadership for a team responding to crisis.

Community Building:
5. Students will learn how to identify the strengths and weaknesses of community members and utilize the knowledge to address individual and group needs.

Administrative Skills:
6. Students will learn the connections between administrative duties and organizational progress.
7. Students will learn the impact of administrative deficiencies on other members of an organization.

Diversity:
8. Students will learn to utilize their knowledge of other cultures when problem solving.

Suggested Strategies for Learning Outcome Implementation

To provide student staff with optimal learning in the identified domains, three current strategies, Resident Assistant supervision, the Resident Assistant course, and Resident Assistant training, must be revised. While other aspects of the position can and should be further developed, these three are critical to help students to understand what they should be learning and giving them the structured time to do so. While each of these strategies will require attention that is beyond the scope of this EPP, a starting point is offered for each.

Resident Assistant Supervision

The job responsibilities of a Resident Assistant provide the tangible experiences needed for learning in each of the identified domains. Despite this, there lacks a cohesive, reflective process for students to capitalize on these learning opportunities. Fortunately for these students, they have professional supervisors with whom they meet on a regular basis. It is not uncommon for a supervisor to meet with a staff member, discuss topics that need to be immediately addressed, and not take the additional time to help the student to reflect on their experiences. It is crucial to address this missed opportunity and provide a structure that encourages not only the student but also the supervisor to engage in this process.

> Students need advisors and mentors to provide a safe place for them to reflect and make meaning of their experiences as they make this significant journey. These 'threshold people' (Daloz et al., 1997) are critical to affirmation and support needed to develop self-confidence and shape a leadership identity and are critical in the Kegan (1994) model of the subject-object shift. (Komives, 2005, p. 415)

If supervisors are to serve students to the best of their abilities, they must be knowledgeable in each of the identified learning domains and commit themselves to prompt, regular reflection on the part of their staff members.

Resident Assistant Course

Another educational strategy that could be updated to reflect the identified learning domains and outcomes is the Resident Assistant Course. The Resident Assistant course should provide support for the learning that takes place during the Resident Assistant experience. It is a one-credit course, which should focus on learning rather than ongoing training. Five of the six domains (communication, community building, crisis and conflict, diversity, and teamwork) lend themselves to the coursework supporting the position. By the end of the course, students should understand exactly what they are expected to learn from the job, heightening their ability to take advantage of educational opportunities and articulate their gains in the future.

Resident Assistant Training

Two weeks in August are dedicated to Resident Assistant training. During these two weeks, as much time is spent on preparing the buildings as preparing the staff members in any particular area of their job. In addition to checking the condition of the residence hall rooms, significant portions of time are also dedicated to presentations on policies, procedures, and upcoming university events. Prior to the training period, if student staff could perform room checks and select administrative presentations could be done online, several days could be dedicated to topics such as community building, communication, and diversity. Training in these areas could include more comprehensive discussions and hands-on simulations to better prepare staff members for the work they will be doing with residents.

Conclusion

If Towson University is to fulfill its mission to "provide a core quality environment for students to acquire the intellectual and social preparation to achieve their potential as contributing leaders and citizens of the workforce and a complex global society," it is imperative that comprehensive leadership opportunities, like the Resident Assistant position, provide as much learning as possible.

The learning outcomes outlined in this proposal have been developed based on current literature, professional and student staff observations, and HRL documents to provide direction for new educational strategies. It is suggested that these learning outcomes and strategies be adopted and further studies be conducted in each of the identified domains to best serve the needs of these important student leaders.

There are tens of thousands of Resident Assistants in the United States playing integral roles on their campuses. Very little research exists that discusses what student leaders in residence life positions should be learning. Considering the similarities in many Resident Assistant positions across the nation, the learning domains and outcomes written here could serve as a starting point for further study.

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Appendix A

RESIDENT ASSISTANT JOB DESCRIPTION

RESIDENT ASSISTANT JOB DESCRIPTION

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
The RA is expected to:
- Develop and maintain relationships with the residents on his /her floors.
- Promote and encourage an appreciation of diversity among residents and encourage   interaction among residents on their floors and within the campus community.
- Encourage the community to address and resolve problems on their own. In situations where intervention is necessary, serve as mediator.

PROGRAMMING/ENGAGEMENT
The RA is expected to:
- Assess the social and educational needs and interest of their residents and present quality programs that meet those needs.
- Effectively plan, advertise, and implement his/her programs in a timely manner.

ADMINISTRATIVE TASKS
The RA is expected to:
- Submit all paperwork in a timely manner. This includes, but is not limited to opening and closing forms, programming forms, Incident Reports, room condition reports, work order requests and other paperwork as assigned.
- Perform all other duties as assigned by the supervisor of the Department of Housing and Residence Life.
- Completely walk through his/her floors on a daily basis and report any concerns in the areas of housekeeping, maintenance, and vending areas. This walk-through should include maintaining bulletin boards and removing outdated materials.

ROLE MODEL
The RA is expected to:
- Obey all federal, state, and local laws, the Towson University Code of Student Conduct, and all Department of Housing and Residence Life policies.
- Support and promote all policies, procedures, and programs initiated by the Department of Housing and Residence Life while actively supporting and appreciating diversity.
- Promote full cooperation with all departments within the University and make all appropriate referrals.
- Be accessible and approachable; project a demeanor that is kind, caring, and friendly.
- Bear in mind that as a staff member, his/her behavior on or off campus will influence how the residents perceive him/her.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION
The RA is expected to:
- Fully understand, explain, and enforce the Housing policies and the University's Code of Student Conduct.
- Address all inappropriate behavior and policy violations. Submit Incident Reports in a timely manner as instructed.

SECURITY
The RA is expected to:
- Support the policies concerning building entrance at all times by checking the identification cards of all residents entering the building and signing in the guests of those residents' while working at the community center.
- Display their own identification card anytime they enter the buildings and to always sign in any guests that are accompanying them into the building.
- Address residents who are propping exit doors, or entering through exit doors whenever this behavior is witnessed.

RESIDENT ASSISTANT PARTICIPATION **INCLUDE IN-SERVICES**
The RA is expected to be present at and participate in the following activities:

Fall
August/September: Early arrival, Pre-Service training, Opening of Residence Halls, Orientation & Welcome to Towson Activities,
November: Thanksgiving Break- Closing and Opening
December: End of the Semester Closing –Stay late

Spring
January: Pre-Service Training, Opening of Residence Halls
February: RA Interviews
March/Apri: Spring Break-Closing and Opening, RA Interviews
May: End of the Semester/Year Closing – Stay Late

8

Appendix B

RA CONTRACT

Towson University
Department of Housing & Residence Life
RESIDENT ASSISTANT EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT

Name: **Student I.D.:**

In signing the Resident Assistant Employment Contract, the Resident Assistant (RA) agrees to adhere to the responsibilities described in the Resident Assistant Position Description, RA Manual, and to the following:

1.   **Period of Employment**
The period of employment is for an academic year, beginning with the first day of RA Fall Pre-Service Training in August and concluding when the RA has fulfilled all job responsibilities at the end of the academic year which could be up to three days after the designated closing date. An RA hired after the beginning of Fall Training accepts the position for the remainder of the academic year.

2.   **Terms of Employment**
a.   Each RA needs to be familiar with this contract, the RA Position Description, and RA Manual which include a more complete listing of job duties and responsibilities. These documents may be revised from time to time. Any changes will be communicated to the RA.
b.   Official RA evening duty begins at 7:00 p.m. and continues until 7:00 a.m. the following day. RAs will make rounds and have desk duty during this time as assigned by their supervisor within departmental guidelines. At other times, the department may require RAs to be on-duty during emergencies.
c.   Overnight absences during the week and weekends off must be scheduled and approved by the Residence Life Coordinator in advance. RAs are permitted a maximum of twelve (12) nights away from the residence hall per semester other than University recesses. No more than ten (10) of these nights can be taken as weekend (Friday or Saturday) nights.
d.   The RA is expected to perform all duties and meet all expectations as requested by the Residence Life Coordinator, the area Assistant Director of Residence Life, Director of Residence Life, or Department of Housing & Residence Life (HRL) staff.
e.   RAs are expected to be available on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3:30 – 4:45 pm for departmental training and meetings during the academic year. RAs seeking an exception to this requirement due to academic conflicts will need approval in advance, and in writing from their supervisor and the area Assistant Director of Residence Life.

3.   **Training Sessions & Meetings**
The RA is required to fully participate in all training sessions. These include but are not limited to Fall & Spring Pre-Service training and meeting all in-service requirements. RAs must attend all training sessions as called by the Residence Life Coordinator or HRL. Training may be on a weekend, on a weekday, or in the evenings. If the RA has a potential conflict they must obtain permission in advance of the training from the Residence Life Coordinator. RAs are expected to participate in Fall and Spring staff selection processes.

4.   **Openings & Closings**
The RA must be available for all opening and closing activities. These include Thanksgiving and Spring Breaks, Fall and Spring Semester openings and end of the semester closings. RAs can expect to stay up to three days after the end of Spring Semester. HRL will notify staff members of the designated closing and opening dates, days, and times and associated job responsibilities. Your supervisor will assign opening and closing duties.

5.   **Academic Expectations**
First and foremost, RAs are full-time students and must be successful in their academic pursuits.
a.   Required Grade Point Average (GPA): Each RA is expected to maintain a cumulative GPA of at least 2.5. (1) If an RA's cumulative GPA falls below a 2.5, employment will be terminated. (2) An RA's semester GPA cannot be below 2.25 or employment will be terminated. If an RA's semester GPA is below 2.50 but at least a 2.25, they will receive a letter of warning notifying about improving academic performance.
b.   Credit Load: An RA must be enrolled as a full-time student and take at least 12 credit hours and no more than 18 each semester. RAs seeking an exception to the credit hour requirements will need approval in advance, and in writing from their supervisor and the area Assistant Director of Residence Life.

6.   **Student Teaching, Internships, Fieldwork, and Extracurricular Activities**
a.   Student teaching, many internships and other academic fieldwork demand a significant amount of time. Therefore, first year RAs are prohibited from full-time student teaching or internships. Returning RAs who intend to have a full-time internship or fieldwork, however, must receive permission from their current supervisor and area Assistant Director the year prior to returning. Prior to beginning an internship or other academic fieldwork the RA must seek permission from their supervisor.

(Continued on Back)

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b. Academics and HRL job responsibilities will take priority of an employed RA. Therefore, the burden is upon the RA to show his or her supervisor that he or she can manage involvement in extracurricular activities or additional leadership positions. Each RA will need to seek approval in advance and inform their supervisor of any possible extracurricular or leadership responsibilities in a timely manner. Even if further involvement is approved, it is important for a RA not to overextend themselves, as this may lead to conflicts which can impact job performance. When conflicts arise with approved additional involvement, RA responsibilities always take priority.

c. As a way to provide leadership opportunities for other students, Building Council elected positions may not be held by an RA.

d. During their first semester, first year RAs are prohibited from joining, pledging or entering into a membership process for any Greek lettered organization.

7. Additional Employment

The RA position is a significant time commitment above and beyond being a full-time student. With this in mind, RAs may not have other employment for more than ten hours per week. Extracurricular activities and student leadership positions that provide a student a stipend for their involvement are considered employment and count toward the ten-hour limit. The RA must submit to their supervisor a schedule of the hours of other employment. When conflicts arise, RA responsibilities take priority.

8. Programming Requirements

RAs are required to meet all program and resident education requirements in accordance with the guidelines specified by the department and their supervisor's expectations.

9. Compensation

RAs will receive room and meal plan for each semester of employment. Additionally, RAs will receive $25 per week paid in bi-weekly payments. If an RA either starts or leaves the position during the semester, room and board fees will be prorated accordingly. The only exception to proration will be the last two weeks of each semester, when $250 will be billed to an RA who either leaves the position or does not satisfactorily complete their duties.

10. Hall/Room Assignment

The RA staff will be placed by the Department with the purpose of creating the best possible environment for each residence hall. Each RA's capabilities, qualifications, and hall preferences will be considered when specific residence hall assignments are made. The RA's assignment is for the entire academic year, but is subject to change at the discretion of HRL. Resident Assistants are expected to accept any room or hall assignment.

11. Retention and Reappointment

RA retention and reappointment is contingent upon the evaluation by the supervisor and the HRL evaluation of the RA's overall job performance. The RAs performance will be reviewed periodically. At that time, their appointment may be terminated if performance is unsatisfactory, especially if improvement seems unlikely.

12. Resignation and Termination

a. If an RA considers leaving the position, they should discuss this with their supervisor. In the event the RA submits a resignation, it should be in writing to the Residence Life Coordinator with a copy to the area Assistant Director of Residence Life and Director of Residence Life. See paragraph #9 regarding compensation.

b. Failure to fulfill the responsibilities of the RA position can result in either probation or termination. Whenever an RA is placed on probation or is terminated, they will receive a written notification and explanation.

c. If an RA is involved in an alleged violation of the University Code of Conduct, they may be suspended from the RA position pending disposition of the case. If an RA is found to be responsible for a violation of the University Code of Conduct, or is placed on any type of judicial probation, employment will be terminated.

d. RAs are expected to represent the HRL department at all times. This includes their actions on and off campus and online social media. Any behavior or action that undermines the reputation, integrity, or authority of the RA position or HRL will be grounds for possible job action, including termination. Such behavior or actions are not limited to violations of the HRL housing policies or the University's Code of Conduct.

e. An RA is issued and/or responsible for several official keys. These keys must be used in accordance to established guidelines. If an RA loses a master key, they will be terminated from the position and may be held financially responsible.

f. Whenever a Resident Assistant leaves the position for any reason, they will be reassigned to a different residence hall. The reassignment will occur at the discretion of the area Assistant Director of Residence Life.

Having read the Resident Assistant Position Description and this Resident Assistant Employment contract, and understanding their content, and intend to meet expectations as described, I accept this appointment for the 2012-2013 academic year, or the balance thereof.

Resident Assistant: _____ Date: _____

Director, Residence Life: _____ Date: _____

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Appendix C

RESIDENTIAL ENGAGEMENT MANUAL

In 2007, the Division of Student Affairs updated their learning outcomes for Towson University students. The eight identified outcomes have been used to assess student development and the overall student experience at Towson University. In the summer of 2009, Housing and Residence Life developed an engagement model to provide programming to our residents that derived specifically from the divisional learning outcomes. This not only provided a more focused an intentional approach to our educational efforts, it assisted in pairing our assessment practices with our educational strategies.

While all eight Student Affairs learning outcomes are important parts of a student's overall development, three were identified as uniquely fitting the residence hall environment as areas that we could have a positive influence on our students. Those three were outcomes number one, three, and eight.

Student Affairs Learning Outcomes

Through participation in co-curricular learning opportunities, students will…

1) Develop compassion, integrity, and social responsibility, fostering a commitment to community and the common good.

2) Perceive themselves as contributing members of their communities and understand their roles as citizens and leaders.

3) Increase their self-awareness, appreciation of others, and diverse interactions, resulting in mutually beneficial outcomes and relationships.

4) Develop competencies and practice ethical decision-making in their career and personal endeavors leading to a productive, successful and fulfilling life.

5) Acquire, integrate, and apply knowledge; enhancing their capabilities to synthesize, evaluate, and contextualize information.

6) Develop cognitive complexity leading to deeper thinking and more reasoned actions.

7) Develop an enhanced commitment to their academic pursuits and integrate curricular learning with out-of-class experiences, resulting in goal attainment and graduation.

8) Leave Towson University with shared memories, school pride, connection to campus, and life long relationships.

Each of the chosen learning outcomes had within it, several components. These components were broken out into separate themes to be used to direct educational efforts in the hall. They were Social Responsibility, Compassion, Self Awareness, Integrity, Appreciation of Others, and Diverse Interactions.

During the summer of 2010, the Residential Engagement Committee, and several other professional staff members, researched each of the chosen educational themes with traditionally aged college students in mind. The focus of this research was on the following questions:

- What does the theme mean (i.e. What is compassion, social responsibility, etc.)
- How does this concept relate to the college experience?
- How can we assess whether or not students have achieved this outcome?

- What are key resources, journal articles, or readings on this topic?
- What areas will need further study?

Through research, writing, and discussion, several decisions were made about how to move forward with the current themes. It was determined that Self Awareness would serve as an umbrella topic and Integrity would serve as an anchoring topic; each to be included in each of the other four themes. Specific learning outcomes were developed for Social Responsibility, Compassion, Appreciation of Others, and Diverse Interactions. Appreciation of Others evolved into Valuing Others in 2012.

All of the papers are provided as a resource for Residence Life Coordinators to assist them in their staff leadership. They can be found on the J: drive at **J:\REC\Research Papers**

Residential Engagement Model

As previously stated, Self Awareness will function as the umbrella for all other themes in this year's educational strategies. Each of the four major themes (Social Responsibility, Compassion, Appreciation of Others, and Diverse Interactions) relies on a solid foundation of self-knowledge. In order to put any of these four topics into practice, one must not only understand what they mean, but they must understand what they are in the context of self and others.

Integrity is described within our research as consistency of thoughts, values, morals, and actions. In order for one to truly consider the topic of integrity, let alone their own personal levels integrity, an understanding of self is required to compare to one's choices and/or actions. There for, as we transition our efforts from awareness to action, we can begin to help students understand their own integrity.

Each semester for two academic years, one of the four educational themes will be addressed as well as several community development programs. In addition, these topics will also be covered in educational events:

- Health / Nutrition
- Academic / Study Skills
- Time Management / Budgeting
- Professional Skills
- Governance
- Stress Management
- Sustainability

The following learning outcomes were developed to provide RLCs and RAs more specific direction in the creation of in-hall programming:

COMPASSION

Knowledge - Students need to know:

- their current level of empathetic concern
- the meaning of compassion & self compassion
- what it means to be an informed citizen at local and global levels
- that we are interconnected

Skills - Students need to be able to:

- comfort and care for themselves and others

- consider multiple perspectives when facing challenges
- educate themselves about the world at large

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY
Knowledge - Students need to know:
- what social responsibility means to them within the context of society
- how their actions affect others
- have personal integrity i.e. know their morals and values
- about their community at local and global levels: people that are in the community; current events/issues; policies/rules; traditions
- how to practice self-compassion

Skills - Students need to be able to:
- communicate their morals & values: verbally; leading by example and with non-verbal communication
- take action based on their morals & values
- advocate for/ on the behalf of / in support of their community
- build relationships

VALUING OTHERS
Knowledge - Students need to know:
- the value in appreciating themselves
- that an understanding of self is fundamental in the appreciation of others
- the value of appreciating others
- who the people in the Towson community are and the impact that they have (i.e. what role they play & what they have to offer)

Skills – Students need to be able to:
- identify and respect unique characteristics of themselves and others
- recognize the role others play in their development
- reflect on how others impact self
- go through a process of change

DIVERSE INTERACTIONS
Knowledge - Students need to know:
- their level of privilege and where it comes from
- what their own biases are about multiple identities
- the power of language related to their peers.
- the benefits of living and/or working in a diverse society.

Skills –Students need to be able to:
- articulate their own multiple identities.
- dialogue about similarities & differences
- recognize the experiences of others with minimal personal bias

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
Knowledge - Students need to know:

- who is on their floor
- social norms of the community
- recreational/leisure/involvement opportunities at or around Towson

Skills –Students need to be able to:
- co-exist on their floors or communities
- use their RA as a resource
- get to know other people in their environment
- develop social skills

Each RLC will be responsible for dividing their RAs into an appropriate amount of teams to develop program series in the following areas (a detailed addendum will be provided for each individual building staff):

Fall 2012
- Valuing Others Series
- Professional Skills Series (focused on upper-division students)
- Life Skills Series (focused on first-year students)
- On and Off Campus Excursions

Spring 2013
- Diverse Interactions Series
- Professional Skills Series (focused on upper-division students)
- Life Skills Series (focused on first-year students)
- On and Off Campus Excursions

In addition to these educational events:
- Each individual RA is responsible for developing and facilitating one community building event for their floor each month. Each semester, one of these community builders must take place on a Thursday, Friday, or Saturday evening beginning at or after 10:00pm,
- Each individual RA is also responsible for creating bulletin boards for their floor twice a semester. Topics and Themes for bulletin boards are at the RLCs discretion.

Residential Engagement Assessment Plan
Throughout 2010-2011, we will be collecting qualitative and quantitative data in order to assess the student learning taking place in our halls specific to our educational strategies. The Residential Engagement Committee will provide staff members with any instruments they will need to facilitate the following assessment practices:

Assessment Strategy	Timeline	Facilitator
Student Self Assessment Pre-test / Post-test instrument	Opening floor meeting – August Closing floor meeting – May	Resident Assistants
Reflective Questions	Following each themed event	Resident Assistants
Focus Groups	December and May	Residence Life Coordinators
Programming Surveys	Fall Closing Spring Closing	Resident Assistants
Signature Event Surveys	Following each signature event	Residential Engagement Committee
Engagement Database Entry (SharePoint)	Ongoing	Resident Assistants

SharePoint Database:
For each program that a Resident Assistant does, they should first put in a program proposal in the SharePoint database. This can be found at:
https://sp.towson.edu/sites/hrl_ra_programming/default.aspx
After completing a program, a program evaluation should be completed in the same database within 24 hours. Any program that does not have an evaluation will not be counted towards the staff members requirements.
If a Resident Assistant needs monetary funding for a program, they would fill out a Funding Request in the SharePoint database. Once approved by the staff member's RLC and Assistant Director, it will be processed by HRL's financial staff.

Appendix D

RESIDENT ASSISTANT TRAINING SCHEDULE

RA Training

Fall 2012

Monday, August 13

3:00 pm	Returner Meeting	Tubman MPR
4:30 pm	In-Hall Meet & Greet	In-hall
6:00 pm	Dinner	Glen
7:00 pm	Team Building	In-hall

Tuesday, August 14

7:00 – 8:30 am	Breakfast	Glen Marketplace
9:00 am	Welcome, Introductions & Icebreakers	Ches 1 & 2
10:30 am	RCR Completion/Facilities Training	In-hall
12:00 – 1:00 pm	Lunch	Glen Marketplace
1:00 pm	RCR Completion/Facilities Training	In-hall
5:45 pm	Dinner	Glen Marketplace
6:45 – 7:45 pm	In-Hall / Supervisor Discretionary Time	In-hall
8:15 pm	Rita's Social	Potomac Lounge

Wednesday, August 15

7:00 – 8:30 am	Breakfast	Glen Marketplace
9:00 am	Ice breaker	Ches 1 & 2
9:30 am	Helping Skills (Group A)	Ches 1& 2
	Role Modeling (Group B)	Ches 3
	Ethical Leadership/Mentoring (returner+3yr)	UU314
10:15 am	Ethical Leadership/Mentoring (Group A)	Ches 1 & 2
	Helping Skills (Group B)	Ches 3
	Role Modeling (returner)	UU306
	First Six Weeks Prep (3ʳᵈ year)	UU314
11:00 am	Role Modeling (Group A)	Ches 1 & 2
	Ethical Leadership/Mentoring (Group B)	Ches 3
	Staying Motivated (returner)	UU306
	First Six Weeks Prep (3ʳᵈ year)	UU314
11:45 am	Lunch	Glen Marketplace
1:00 pm	Welcome from Vice President Moriarty	Ches 1 & 2

Wednesday, August 15 continued

1:15 pm	Roommate Relations	Ches 1 & 2
2:15 pm	Confrontation and Conflict	Ches 1 & 2
3:30 pm	Strengths Quest	Ches 1 & 2
5:45 pm	Dinner	Glen Marketplace
6:30 pm	Strengths Quest	In-Hall

Thursday, August 16

7:00 - 8:30 am	Breakfast	Glen Marketplace
9:00 am	Welcome from President Loeschke	Ches 1 & 2
9:30 am	Emergency Procedures	Ches 1 & 2
11:00 am	Break	
11:15 am	Sexual Assault - Glen Staff & T-Town Policies – West Village	Ches 1 Ches 2
12:15 pm	Lunch	Glen Marketplace
1:30 pm	Sexual Assault West Village Policies – Glen Staff & T-Town	Ches 1 Ches 2
2:30 pm	Advocate Training Returners BCD & First Six Weeks Prep	Ches 1 & 2
3:15 pm	In-Hall time	In-Hall
5:45 pm	Dinner	Glen Marketplace
6:30 pm	Building Prep – on your own	In-Hall

Friday, August 17

7:00 - 8:30 am	Breakfast	Glen Marketplace
9:00 am	Campus Connect Suicide Prevention (new) BCD/First 6 Weeks (returners)	Ches 1 & 2 TBD
12:00 pm	Lunch	Glen Marketplace
1:15 pm	Behind Closed Doors – Part I (Policies)	Tower C Lobby
3:30 pm	In-Hall Building Prep	In-Hall
5:45 pm	Dinner	Glen Marketplace
6:30 pm	T-shirt construction	In-Hall

Saturday, August 18

7:00 - 8:30 am	Breakfast	Glen Marketplace
9:00 am	Glen – Ropes Course WV - Area team building T-Town– Area team building	Glen Woods Tubman MPR TBA
12:00 pm	Lunch	Glen Marketplace
1:30 pm	WV & T-town- Ropes Course Glen – Area team building	Glen Woods West Village
5:45 pm	Dinner	Glen Marketplace
6:00 pm	Free time ☺	

Sunday, August 19

Day off ☺ (Follow meal times as listed at the end of schedule)

Monday, August 20

7:00 – 8:30 am	Breakfast	Glen Marketplace
9:00 am	REC Part 1	WC Ballroom A&B
11:45 pm	Lunch	Glen Marketplace
1:15 pm	REC Part 2	WC Ballroom A&B
5:45 pm	Dinner	Glen Marketplace
7:00 pm	Identity Sculpture Activity	In-Hall

Tuesday, August 21

7:00 – 8:30 am	Breakfast	Glen Marketplace
9:00 am	Behind Closed Doors Part II (Helping Skills)	Tower C Lobby
12:00 pm	Lunch RLCC Lunch with Campus Partners	Glen Marketplace
1:30 pm	Diversity	WC Ballroom A&B
2:45 pm	Speak Up Training (new) Check-in / Reflection on our community (returners)	WV MPR – see RLC
4:00 pm	In-Hall Reflection Time	In-Hall
5:45 pm	Dinner	Glen Marketplace
6:30 pm	Building Prep – on your own	In-Hall
8:00 pm	Social	West Village

Wednesday, August 22

7:00 - 8:30 am	Breakfast	Glen Marketplace
9:00 am	First 6 Weeks	WC Ballroom A&B
12:00 pm	Lunch	Glen Marketplace
1:15 pm	URG NRHH – OTM Training	WC Ballroom A&B
1:45 pm	University Protocol Updates	WC Ballroom A & B
2:15 pm	Departmental Updates	WC Ballroom A&B
3:15	Break	
3:30 pm	New RA Q & A	WC Ballroom A & B
4:15 pm	In-Hall / Supervisor Discretionary Time	In-hall
5:45 pm	Dinner	Glen Marketplace
6:30 pm	Building Prep – on your own	In-Hall

Thursday, August 23

7 - 8:30 am	Breakfast	Glen Marketplace
9:00 am	Building Prep Time	In-Hall
12:00 pm	Lunch	Glen Marketplace
1:00 pm	Building Prep for Opening	In-hall
5:15 pm	Staff Photos	Potomac Lounge
6:00 pm	HRL Dinner BIG Finish!	Potomac Lounge

Friday, August 24
Follow meal times as listed below.
Day Off! . . . . If all tasks are complete! ☺

Please Note:
Meal times for the Glen Marketplace Dining (you must eat during these hours, or otherwise specified in the training schedule)

Breakfast: 6- 8:45am		Lunch	11am – 2:00pm	Dinner	5:45 – 8:15pm

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Appendix E

RA COURSE SYLLABUS

Resident Assistant Class – Fall 2012

Course Outline

September 11 – Course Overview…………………

September 18 – Leadership Development………..

September 25 –Small Group Reading for discussion

October 2 – In-Service (No RA Class)………………

October 9– Being an Ally……………………………

October 16– Student Development…………………

October 23 – Small Group… Reading for discussion

October 30 - Eating Disorders/Body Image…………

November 6 – In-Service (No RA Class)……………

November 13– Working w/ Students with Disabilities

November 20– No class……………………………

November 27 – Small Group . Reading for discussion

December 4– In-Service (No RA Class)…………

December 11 – Course Wrap up and Review……

Course Assignments

September 11 - None

September 18 – None

September 25 – Leadership Reaction (10 pts)

October 2 - None

October 9 – Sociogram (20pts)

October 16 – Being an Ally Reaction (10pts)

October 23 - Student Development Reaction (10 pts)

October 30 – First 8 Weeks Reflection (10 pts)

November 6 – Eating Disorders Reaction (10 pts))

November 13 - None

November 20 –Students w/ Disabilities Reaction(10pts)

November 27 – None

December 4 – None

December 11 – End of Semester reflection of job/leadership and goals for next semester (20 pts)

100 Assignment Points Total
30 Attendance Points Total
30 Participation Points Total
160 Total Class Points

Rubric/Grading

Four Categories for each assignment

1. Timeliness (First day 2 pts & 1 point per day after)
2. Assignment complete as instructed (6pts)
3. Grammar/Spelling/Punctuation (2 pts)
   Note: 20 pts assignments will double above values

Expected Course Outcomes
- **Gain comprehension of basic student development theories in order to have a greater understanding of where students are in their personal growth.**
- **Learn the conceptual and practical aspects of communication, including peer-helping, mediation, confrontation, and public speaking skill sets.**
- **Understand and apply knowledge of trends in student behavior and working with students.**
- **Learn the importance of a balanced lifestyle and techniques to role model wellness in life.**
- **Learn methods for effective community building, group development, and programming.**
- **Gain a greater understanding of intercultural competencies in order to cultivate inclusive communities.**
- **Enhance leadership skills and develop strategies to engage students with the campus community.**

Course Structure
This class is a requirement for all first-year Resident Assistants at Towson University. Recognizing that one cannot learn everything you will need to know to be successful as a Resident Assistant during August training; this course is designed to further enhance your leadership knowledge and skills. Each week we will engage in topics that will not only increase your personal knowledge base but also assist you in your preparedness to help your residents. Using classroom tools like discussion, group projects, role playing, readings, personal reflection and other assignments, we will explore a wide variety of topics related to human development within the college setting.

Reactions

Each Reaction paper must be a minimum of 500– maximum 700 word reflection on the topic assigned.

Submitting assignments

Assignment is due at the beginning of class. A folder for each Small Group Instructor will be available.

Attendance and Class Participation
This class is a requirement for first-year Resident Assistants. Attendance is mandatory. You will learn a great deal in this course from the interaction with guests and your classmates. Come to all

classes on time prepared to be an active participant. If you are sick and will be missing class please contact the instructor in advance. Unexcused absences will lead to a reduction in your course grade. All assignments are due on the date indicated.

University Academic Regulations

All Towson University regulations noted in the catalog will be followed in this class. It is your responsibility to follow the regulations set forth in the catalog regarding: attendance; grading; disagreements related to grading; and academic dishonesty. Your right to express your views in this class will be protected by the Code of Conduct, also noted in the TU Catalog.

Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact Disability Support Services at 410-704-2638 (t/tdd) as soon as possible to better ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

Appendix F

SUPERVISORY FORM

Resident Assistant Supervisory Form

The following scale should be used in the evaluation process of Resident Assistants:

5 – Outstanding	Performance consistently exceeds expected standards for the position. A high degree of proficiency is shown in most aspects of performance.
4 – Exceeds Expectations	Performance frequently exceeds expected standards for the position. A high degree of proficiency is shown in certain aspects of performance.
3 – Meets Expectations	Performance is consistently at standards for the position. Meets job requirements and fulfills job duties.
2 – Improvement Needed	Some performance deficiencies exist. A plan for improvement is to be developed and adapted.
1 – Unsatisfactory	Performance is consistently below acceptable levels. A plan for improvement must be established and implemented immediately.
NA – Not Applicable	Employee is not expected to demonstrate this job behavior at present time.

Community Development	5	4	3	2	1	N/A
Develops & maintains relationships with residents on floor(s)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Promotes and empowers residents to become leaders in their community	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Helps residents to understand the implications of their behavior on the community	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Knowledge of residents: knows names and has developed relationships	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Maintains high profile on floor(s)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Is available during evening hours and non-duty nights	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Overall Community Development Assessment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Administrative	5	4	3	2	1	N/A
Demonstrates oral and written communication skills	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Has been timely and accurate in handing in appropriate forms and follow-up procedures	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Is punctual and reliable in assuming duty coverage	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Actively participates in the RA selection process and other staff selection processes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Maintains bulletin boards and removes outdated material	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Overall Administrative Assessment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Program Planning & Implementation	5	4	3	2	1	N/A
Assesses the social and educational needs and interests of residents	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Programming is balanced with a variety of educational options	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Coordinates advertising for programs that is creative, timely, and informative	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Assists with the implementation of campus-wide Department of Housing & Residence Life programs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Programming efforts have been both formal and informal	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Has conducted diverse programs (i.e. variety)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Progress is being made toward fulfilling programming requirements	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Overall Program Planning & Implementation Assessment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Role Model	5	4	3	2	1	N/A
Role models appropriate behavior and decision-making skills	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Maintains appropriate confidentiality with student information	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Promotes full cooperation with departments of the University and makes appropriate referrals	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Follows the "Resident Assistant Commitment to Ethics" document when making both job related and personal decisions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒
Overall Role Modeling Assessment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Team Player	5	4	3	2	1	N/A
Interacts and cooperates with RA staff to promote team unity	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Plays a positive role in staff relationships	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Provides support for staff members and staff decisions in a professional manner	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Seeks out and provides constructive feedback to other staff members	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Collaborates with fellow staff members in areas, including programming and administrative requirements	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fully participates in all training sessions.Including, but not limited to Fall & Spring Pre-Service training	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Has fulfilled In-Service requirements as outlined by the department	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Overall Team Player Assessment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Policy Implementation	5	4	3	2	1	N/A
Fully understands, explains, and enforces the Department of Housing & Residence Life policies and the University's Code of Student Conduct	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Addresses all inappropriate behavior and policy violations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Submits Policy violations and/or staff reports in a timely manner	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Manages crisis situations calmly with sound judgment and rational behavior	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Empowers residents to confront one another	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Mediates conflict effectively	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Reports information to the professional staff member on-call as necessary	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Overall Policy Implementation Assessment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Appreciation of Diversity	5	4	3	2	1	N/A
Is sensitive to diverse cultures, lifestyles, orientations and abilities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Displays a commitment to diversity awareness	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Confronts inappropriate, insensitive, and intolerant behavior on the part of others	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Demonstrates a commitment to personal growth and self challenge	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Expands self-knowledge about cultural groups, lifestyles, orientations, and abilities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Treats all building residents with fairness, equality, and respect, regardless of personal perspectives	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Overall Diversity Assessment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Supervisor Summary Comments

Appendix G

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

RESEARCH OFFICE

210 Hullihen Hall
University of Delaware
Newark, Delaware 19716-1551
Ph: 302/831-2136
Fax: 302/831-2828

DATE: July 22, 2013

TO: Michael Diesner, M.Ed.
FROM: University of Delaware IRB

STUDY TITLE: [481604-1] Developing Learning Outcomes for Resident Assistants

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: July 22, 2013
EXPIRATION DATE: July 21, 2014
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # 7

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. The University of Delaware IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

Please report all NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this study to this office.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.

Based on the risks, this project requires Continuing Review by this office on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate renewal forms for this procedure.

Appendix H

PEER EVALUATIONS

Peer Evaluation for RA Rehire
Re-hire Candidate: _____   Supervisor:_____
Completed By: _____   Date:_____

# RATING RANGES
5 = Outstanding
4 = Exceeds job requirements
3 = Meets job requirements
2 = Needs improvement
1 = Unsatisfactory
NA = Not applicable/observable

PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS

		Low	----------------		**High**
Teamwork	**NA 5**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

Balances team and individual responsibilities

Exhibits objectivity and openness to others' views

Gives and welcomes feedback

Contributes to building a positive team spirit

Puts the success of the team above own interests

Volunteers to help out when needed

Asks for assistance when needed

Policies and Procedures   **Low** ----------------**High**
Follows policies and procedures

Displays confidence in making decisions

Supports organization's goals and values

Exhibits sound and accurate judgment

Verbal Communications   **Low** ----------------**High**
Speaks clearly and persuasively

Responds well to questions

Demonstrates group/program presentation skills

Participates in meetings

Leadership   **Low ------------------High**
Exhibits confidence in self and others

Inspires respect and trust

Reacts well under pressure

Motivates others to perform well

Innovation   **Low ------------------High**

Displays original thinking and creativity

Generates suggestions for improving work

	NA 5	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

Dependability   **Low ------------------High**
Responds to requests for service and assistance

Takes responsibility for own actions

Commits to doing the best job possible

Keeps commitments

Cooperation   **Low ------------------High**

Works effectively with others

Displays positive outlook and pleasant manner

Offers assistance and support to co-workers

Works cooperatively in group situations

Works actively to resolve conflicts

Conflict Resolution   **Low ------------------High**

Confronts difficult situations

Maintains objectivity

Maintains composure during difficult situations

Ethics and Integrity   **Low ------------------High**

Treats people with respect

Is a positive role model for residents and staff

Upholds organizational values

Availability   **Low ------------------**
High
Keeps absences within guidelines

Arrives at meetings and appointments on time

Adaptability   **Low ------------------High**

Manages competing demands

Accepts criticism and feedback

Programming   **Low ------------------**
High
Supports others' programs

Committed to providing quality programming

Informs residents of programs

Advance planning and advertisement

OVERALL COMMENTS:

_____
_____

_____
Recommend for rehire

Recommend with reservation
Do not recommend for rehire