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AM I THE LEADER?
RESIDENT ASSISTANT'S ASSESSMENT OF ROLES AND TRAINING

by

Renee J. Bourdeaux
Bachelor of Arts, University of North Dakota, 1997

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

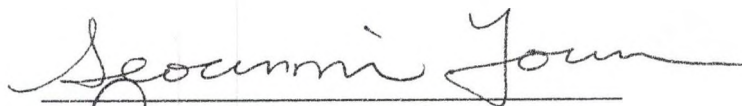in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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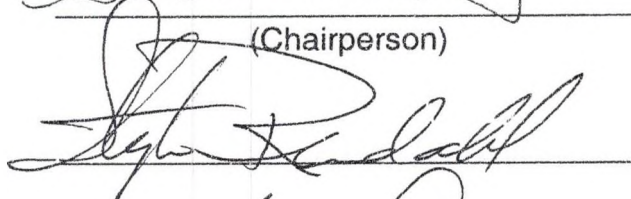
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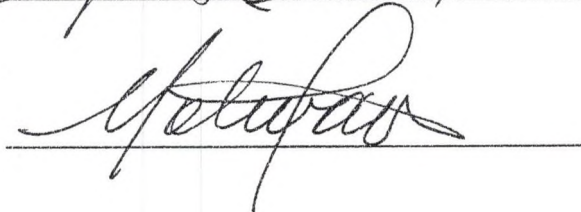
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This thesis, submitted by Renee J. Bourdeaux in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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This thesis meets the standards for appearance, conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

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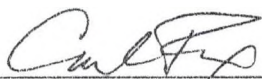   Roles and Training

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

ABSTRACT

Students attend colleges and universities across the nation in the hopes of receiving an education. Campus culture not only educates students academically, but socially as well. One area that focuses on developing community skills is the residential life department. A Resident Assistant (RA) is a student who works in the residence halls. RAs must understand four skill areas in order to be effective in their job performance: leadership, communication, administrative, and problem solving. The questions that this thesis will address by surveying RAs are: How do RAs perceive their roles and training?", "How can training be improved?", and "Is there a gap between what skills RAs utilize and what skills RAs learn in training?"

Two key trends can be identified from the survey data. First, certain skills showed noteworthy differences between the amount of utilization and the amount of preparation in training. The second trend identified in the data is the overall similarity between utilization and the amount of preparation in training for skill areas.

Looking at these gaps and similarities and restructuring the training program to meet the needs of the RA staff can improve training. This would help alleviate the current gap between what skills RAs utilize and what skills RAs learn in training.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Students attend colleges and universities across the nation in the hopes of receiving an education. By becoming a part of the university community, students not only receive an academic education, but they also learn the skills relevant to thrive in a community. One of the parts of the academic environment that focuses on developing community skills is the residential life department. One of the purposes of the residence life department is to oversee the residence halls. To help facilitate a community in the residence halls, the residence life department hires Residence Hall Directors (RHDs) and Resident Assistants (RAs). The RHDs perform many tasks including overseeing the dynamics of the RA staff and giving feedback to the residents and staff who reside in the hall. The RA resides on a specific floor or wing, and is responsible for facilitating a sense of community among the residents in that area. Problems arise when the RAs do not understand the importance of communication and leadership skills in the job of the resident assistant. Residents look to the RAs for guidance, leadership, and role modeling.

RAs must understand several different skills in order to most effectively perform their job. The four main skill areas that RAs must understand are administrative, communication, leadership, and analytical skills. By looking at

1

these four skill areas, this thesis will answer the following questions: "How do RAs perceive their roles and training?", "How can training be improved?", and "Is there a gap between what skills RAs utilize ⁀nd what skills RAs learn in training?" It is expected that the training that RAs currently receive will emphasize many of the skills that RAs utilize the most often because the training staff understands the importance of building a competent leader. However, any gaps identified between current training on specific skills and RA's perceptions of usage of those skills will enable a new training program to be developed to better meet the needs of the RA staff.

This thesis comprises four chapters. The first chapter, Assumptions and Literature Review, focuses on information in the literature relating to the four main skill areas and presents the research that has been conducted involving the skill areas. In the Methods chapter, the strategy for distribution of the surveys is discussed, along with information relating to the population sample used in this thesis. The Findings chapter presents the raw data collected from the survey, and discusses the results of the survey. The thesis wraps up with the Discussion and Conclusion chapter that offers a summary, as well as limitations of this study, suggestions for further research, and contributions to residence life.

CHAPTER II

ASSUMPTIONS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand the responsibilities of the RA, one must first look at the current literature. As stated earlier, the Assumptions section focuses on information as it relates to the previously identified four skill areas: administrative, communication, leadership, and analytical.

Assumptions

Literature pertaining to the job of a resident assistant can be found in many different areas, including communication, the educational leadership aspect of the student development theory, and management theory. The literature discusses everything from the leadership styles of RAs to how residents perceive the RA's job performance. Jablin (1987) discussed the phases in the process of organizational socialization: organizational entry, organizational assimilation, and organizational exit. For the purposes of the present study, the first and last stages are most relevant. In anticipatory socialization, Jablin points out that many people have notions about how people communicate within an organization before they are even a part of it. Residents who may be thinking about becoming an RA may think that they understand the roles and stresses of the position, and the communication involved.

3

However, the high rate of burnout for RAs may suggest that most students do not fully understand the stresses of the position until fully immersed in it. This relates to the final phase of socialization: the organizational exit. Ideally, during an organizational exit, an RA should be performing as well at the end of his or her tenure as during it, but some RAs experience burnout. Too much responsibility, coupled with too little understanding of how to help themselves and others, can lead RAs to become extremely stressed. This stress, on top of academic pressure, can lead an RA to exit the organization and pursue life as just a student again. Since the RA position has so much responsibility, it is important to break down the responsibilities into four main skill areas: administrative, communication, leadership, and analytical.

Administrative Skills

Administrative skills are basic to the RA position. Once an RA understands how to perform administrative skills well, then he or she can perform better in other facets of his or her job. Administrative skills incorporate the ability to handle administrative tasks, manage time, be available to residents, set personal limits, program, deal with disciplinary matters involving residents, and manage stress. These skills comprise the administrative skill area because they are the skills utilized in the day-to-day administration of the RA job.

The first item that an RA must understand is how to handle administrative tasks. Vetter (1993) states, "High-arranger RAs like to plan, schedule, and organize events" (p. 45). The RA that works with events must also be proficient

in the paperwork that accompanies the events. Vetter goes on to describe the high-arranger RA as someone who is an excellent planner and who can manage many tasks at once. The RA must complete tasks relating to residents, staff, and job responsibilities; therefore it is very important that an RA also has good time management skills.

"Time management is a system by which you determine your priorities and plan the allocation of units of time to accomplish what you believe is important" (Blimling, 1995, p. 488). The RA must be conscious of academic responsibilities to succeed as a student, but he or she must also be aware of the demands that are a part of his or her RA responsibilities. Ehasz-Sanz (1993) reports that "balancing the demands of life as a student and life as an RA requires a plan" (p. 153). The plan should be able to assign time for academic commitments and studying. Once academic-related spaces are filled in, the RA should then concentrate on job-related responsibilities. If the RA utilizes a plan, and avoids procrastination, then he or she should have ample time to commit to his or her personal life. Once the RA understands the importance of time management, he or she can set aside time in his or her schedule to be available to residents.

It is important for an RA to be available to residents. Blimling (1993) reports:

>...You must begin to establish a positive, friendly relationship with every
>
>person in your living unit -- not selectively with only those you like, but an

open, understanding, and warm relationship with each person in the unit.

You must be accessible to everyone. (p. 11)

The RA lives and works in the same environment, so the RA must make sure that he or she always presents himself or herself as an accepting person. The RA must appear to be consistent with the way he or she treats all of the residents. This consistency helps the residents to trust the RA, and it allows the residents to trust the RA enough to share personal information with them. The RA must work to achieve that trust, while also keeping personal and academic concerns in mind. The RA must be conscious of setting limits in order to stick to a time management plan.

While the RA does need to be available to residents to be effective, setting limits is also very crucial to the RA's success. "At the same time, you (RA) should take the point that you, too, are a student who needs to study. Close your door when you are studying and leave it open when you are not" (Blimling, 1995, p. 13). The RA must address the fact that he or she lives and works in the same environment. The RA has recognized the need for time management skills, and has made sure that he or she is available for residents, but the key to being successful at both tasks is setting limits. The RA has the opportunity to set limits relating to both academics and job responsibilities. Sometimes an RA is more focused academically. If this occurs, then the RA is not successful at the RA responsibilities. On the other hand, if an RA is more focused on being an RA, then grades suffer. An RA must find the balance by

setting limits to be successful in all facets of his or her life. If an RA is successful at setting limits, then he or she can focus on other administrative tasks, such as programming.

Programming is a tool that the RAs use to disseminate educational information to their residents. "Programming is a learning tool. Students are exposed to new ideas and new ways of thinking as well as to new perspectives on traditional issues through programming" (Keller, 1993, p. 165). The RA must be very meaningful with programming. The RA must find out what his or her residents would like to learn, plan for it, and then utilize creative advertising to get all of the residents to attend. If the RA is successful at programming, he or she will be able to make connections with each of the residents. Although the RA will know residents better if he or she makes connections with residents through being available and presenting good programs, confronting disciplinary matters can become a challenge.

The RA is responsible for confronting disciplinary matters on the floor. Smith (1993) reports, "The responsibility to enforce college rules and regulations and residence hall policies is a challenging and often difficult aspect of the resident assistant's responsibility" (p. 185). The RA is required to confront any disciplinary matter or policy violation that he or she encounters. The difficulty is that, if the RA has developed good relationships with his or her residents as a result of being available and providing successful programming, then it becomes difficult for the RA to confront someone whom he or she considers a friend. The

RA must, however, make the policies known and consistently enforce them. "Failure to set and enforce limits creates an environment that may be chaotic and certainly may create an environment that does not support the development and maturation of the residents on that floor or in that building" (Smith, p. 185). Therefore, the RA must be familiar with policies and procedures that must be followed at the university, and he or she must make sure that policies are consistently enforced with all of the residents. If the RA is to then be an effective RA, he or she must constantly pay attention to residents, and confront a disciplinary matter whenever it arises. So, with all of this responsibility, on top of all of the other responsibilities the RA has in his or her life, it is important that the RA learns how to manage stress.

College is very hectic for most students, but add RA responsibilities onto the already hectic role of a student, and it becomes imperative that an RA learns how to manage stress. Blimling (1995) writes:

> You must not only contend with the day-to-day pressures of academic work but also with stress associated with the intensity of personal relations strained by your job responsibilities and magnified by living with students that you are trained to assist. (p. 532)

Stress can affect anyone, so the RA needs to be able to manage stress in his or her own life as well as helping others manage their stress. Stress can come from both personal and environmental sources. In order to manage the stress, a person must find ways to best help them cope with it. Better time management,

more sleep, relaxation techniques, less partying, and more personal time are just a few of the ways that individuals may reduce their stress level. "An important stress-management skill is the ability to specify what triggers your stress so that your coping efforts are focused on the appropriate targets" (Gintner, 1993, p. 248). The RA becomes much more focused on being a student and being an RA when he or she is not stressed out about all of his or her responsibilities.

Administrative skills establish the basic principles that an RA needs to know to begin to understand the position. The RA must comprehend the need to handle administrative tasks, manage time, be available to residents, set personal limits, program, deal with disciplinary matters involving residents, and manage stress. Just as the RA must have a good grasp on the administrative skill area, it is crucial that the RA must understand how to communicate well with residents.

Communication Skill Area

The communication skills are those skills that enable the RA to make connections with the residents. The communication skill area comprises interpersonal skills, listening skills, the understanding of personality types, and the ability to work in groups. Once an RA understands how to communicate effectively, he or she can work better with the residents.

"Interpersonal communication deals with communication between people, usually face-to-face, private settings" (Littlejohn, 1999, p. 17). The RA's role is such that he or she has the opportunity to communicate interpersonally on a daily basis. If the RA is not comfortable talking one-on-one with residents, then it

is possible that residents will not be as willing to share personal anecdotes with the RA. Therefore, the RA must be very intentional about communicating with others. RAs must also be able to help residents sort through their thoughts and feelings so that the resident has a clear understanding of his or her thoughts. Hosie (1993) reports, "Having individuals perceive accurately by thinking clearly and understanding why they have the thoughts they do will enable them to make wise decisions and act in a successful manner" (p. 120). Interpersonal communication takes time, which is why an RA should understand how to do it effectively the first time. If the RA is effective during the first episode of interpersonal communication, then he or she does not have to expend extra energy to attempt it several times before connecting with a resident. One skill that can help an RA to be more effective at communicating interpersonally is listening.

It is essential for an RA to understand how to listen. The human ear has the capacity to hear sounds, but listening entails hearing what a person says and applying meaning to it. Goss (1995) describes listening as "a creative act in which the listener brings to bear all relevant inputs and personal knowledge to make sense out of the message" (p. 126). The RA must be immersed in a conversation with a resident to listen to what the resident has to say. Once the RA hears the information, he or she can apply meaning to it, and help the resident sort out his or her problem or concern. If the RA does not listen

effectively, then he or she risks hearing only partial information, and giving the resident useless advice. Blimling (1995) states:

> If you are acknowledging the receipt of information and asking questions of clarification, you become an active participant in the listening process. As a participant, you contribute as well as receive by confirming the information that is given. This interchange is essential to effective listening. (p. 198)

Therefore, an RA must be an active participant in conversations with residents in order to be effective. Yet, understanding people goes beyond just listening to them. An RA must understand the different personality types that residents may have in order to most effectively communicate with them.

People display many different personality traits. Goss (1995) states, "In sizing up people, ...we use stereotypes and ...we look for central personality traits in others to help us predict how they will behave" (p. 40). Yet, stereotyping can be dangerous, because every person is unique, and what may be true of one person with a specific personality trait may not necessarily be true of another person with that same personality trait. The RA must be very conscious of how he or she treats residents, and he or she must be careful not to alienate a resident by stereotyping that resident. "By knowing how people define themselves, you learn not only how they feel about themselves but how they view the world as well" (Goss, p. 92). The RA must make an attempt to get to know the residents in order to understand the individual personalities of the

residents. By understanding different personality traits, the RA becomes better at communicating and listening to each of the residents. Once the RA understands how to best communicate with each resident individually, it becomes imperative that the RA learns how to work with his or her residents in a group.

Group communication is the only way that the RA can address all of the residents at once. The RA must be familiar with how to communicate in front of a group, and how to encourage others to speak up in the group. The RA must also have the ability to help all of the residents feel comfortable with their residential group. "In groups, cohesion is the mutual attraction that holds the members of a group together. Groups that are cohesive feel committed and unified; members develop a sense of teamwork and pride in the group" (Engleberg & Wynn, 1997, p. 178). If the RA achieves cohesion, then the residents are more likely to respect each other, and contribute to the community. If the RA has not taken the time to get to know the residents, then the residents may be apprehensive to participate in group functions. Engleberg & Wynn also report, "Regardless of what you know, think, experience, or need, your level of confidence has a direct effect on the amount of talking you do in a group as well as the usefulness of that talk" (p. 102). This statement emphasizes the importance of the RA understanding each of the residents. If the RA effectively uses interpersonal communication, is an active listener, and takes the time to understand the different personality types of his or her residents, then the RA

can more effectively encourage individual residents to get involved in his or her community group.

Communication skills are very important for an RA to utilize to effectively manage residents. The RA must understand interpersonal skills, listening skills, the understanding of personality types, and the ability to work in groups. After the RA has developed personal relationships with each of the residents by utilizing communication skills, he or she must develop knowledge of leadership skills.

Leadership Skill Area

The leadership skills are those skills that enable the RA to effectively develop good community skills, such as respect and teamwork, in the residents. The leadership skill area encompasses the ability to motivate others, role modeling, abiding by policies, and community building. If the RA displays successful leadership skills, the residents will be more likely to follow the RA's example.

To begin, an RA must understand that motivating residents is the key to getting them involved in a community. The RA must utilize communication skills to get to know residents better, and then explore how to motivate the residents to participate in the community. Vetter (1993) reports, "Encourager RAs ...have a keen sense of humor and are usually the ones responsible for facilitating fun activities. These RAs are like the coach who motivates his or her players to perform well" (p. 45). If the RA knows the resident well, then he or she can

encourage the resident to experience ideals outside of the norm. For instance, an RA may encourage a resident to take a class outside of his or her major, or join a campus organization that he or she is interested in. By motivating a resident to get more involved, the RA also gains the camaraderie of that resident. This camaraderie gives the resident a sense of connection to the community, and that connection encourages the resident's participation in the residential community. Thus, the community can benefit when the RA motivates others. It can also benefit when the RA is a good role model.

The role modeling of the RA has a large impact on what the residents perceive as acceptable behavior in a community. "As an RA, you model behavior that others will come to assume as appropriate behavior for students in college" (Blimling, 1995, p. 9). Many students may be new to the university setting and will assume that since the RA is more experienced than they are, they should do whatever the RA does. Residents pay attention to and model nearly everything an RA does; not only study habits and social skills, but also communication skills such as learning to listen effectively, and administrative skills such as time management. RAs must remember that, "Actions speak louder than words" (Vetter, 1993, p. 50). If the RA instructs the residents to communicate with someone whenever they have a problem, and then avoids all confrontations, the residents are less likely to communicate their concerns to others. Since role modeling is so important in shaping a community, the RA must also be very cautious to abide by policies.

The RA position requires enforcement of all of the policies set forth by the university. "Once you have explained the policies, the rationale behind them, and the institution's instructions to you on their enforcement, you have taken the first step in establishing the expectations for enforcement of these policies" (Blimling, 1995, p. 188). If the RA does not follow the policies, then the RA loses credibility in the eyes of the residents. The RA must represent himself or herself and his or her institution well by following and enforcing the policies. Blimling also states, "Do not do yourself, the institution, and your residents a disservice by not enforcing the rules or by pretending that the policies and regulations do not exist" (p. 9). Policies and regulations are created for the safety of all involved, and the RA has the responsibility of making sure that all of his or her residents are safe. Abiding by policies, just like role modeling and motivating others, is crucial to earning the respect of the community. With that respect, the RA can focus on building a strong community.

"Developing community is one of the most crucial aspects of a resident assistant's work" (Schuh, 1993, p. 3). By developing a community environment, the RA helps residents forge bonds with one another that provide them with a family-type atmosphere. In order to establish these bonds, the RA utilizes all of the skills previously discussed. Leadership skills, such as abiding by policies, role modeling, and motivating others, enable the RA to evolve as the leader of his or her floor. The RA also uses communication skills to create connections with each of the residents. For example, the RA's interpersonal and group

communication skills teach the residents how to interact with each other in a positive manner. Programming, an administrative skill, also fosters relationships by allowing the residents an opportunity to interact with the RA and each other in an educational and social setting.

Once these bonds are created, the RA can work on creating a community where all of the residents feel comfortable. Vetter (1993) reports, "A fundamental responsibility of most RA positions is establishing an environment on the floor of cooperation, mutual respect, support, and an overall concern for one another" (p. 49). If the RA is successful in creating a community, then residents will feel comfortable going to one another for support, and the burden on the RA will be lessened. If the RA is not successful in creating a community, more residents will rely solely on the RA for support, and the RA will have less time for personal and academic commitments. So, a successful community benefits everyone, including the RA.

While building a successful community, an RA uses the leadership skills discussed to encourage residents to be active in their community. The RA must comprehend the ability to motivate others, role modeling, abiding by policies, and community building. Once the RA develops a community, even though it may be effective, it may still have some problems. The RA must utilize analytical skills to help residents solve problems.

Analytical Skills

The last skill area that this thesis will examine is the analytical skill area. This skill area involves ethical decision-making, counseling skills, problem-solving skills, conflict resolution, and crisis intervention. Analytical skills enable the RA to efficiently work with any problems that a resident may encounter.

Problems often occur when a poor decision is made. The best way to avoid this situation is through ethical decision-making. The RA will not only have to deal with ethical decision-making on a personal level, but he or she will have to help residents with it, as well. An example of an ethical decision that an RA may encounter involves his or her responsibility as an employee of the institution to uphold policies. Whenever an RA makes a decision to disobey a policy, he or she has made a poor ethical decision because as discussed earlier, its consequences can cause the RA to lose credibility with his or her residents. By making a good ethical decision and abiding by institutional policies, the RA will earn the trust and respect of the residents. An RA also must encourage residents to make ethical decisions. "Good RAs understand the importance of impartiality and equality" (Vetter, 1993, p. 48). When aiding residents in decision making, it is very important for an RA to give residents many choices, not just the choices he or she supports. When a resident comes to an RA with a dilemma, the RA has the option of counseling the resident himself or herself, or he or she can refer the student to an outside agency.

Because the RA has the option of counseling the resident, counseling is another important area in which the RA must be skilled. Blimling (1995) states, "...a counseling encounter is an act of helping another person cope with an emotion, a personal problem, stress, or a crisis by assisting the student in decision making and helping to return the person to an improved emotional state" (p. 181). Counseling, then, goes one step beyond decision-making. The RA helps the resident become emotionally stronger than he or she was before the incident occurred.

> It is easy for an inexperienced RA to confuse the role of counselor with that of problem solver. However, this is not a useful method of helping students. They are left with the solution to a particular problem and not the skills to resolve similar problems in the future. (Blimling, p. 185)

If an RA is properly trained how and when to counsel a resident, the RA will understand when it is appropriate to counsel, and when it is appropriate to help a resident problem solve. Although at times, an RA can effectively spend time counseling a resident, sometimes the situation is too time consuming for the RA. When this happens, the RA can refer the resident to an outside agency such as the campus counseling center. The freedom to choose an option will enable the resident to identify the reason for the outcome to the problem, and to remember it in the future. For day-to-day problems that do not require counseling, the student may choose to utilize the RA to help him or her solve a problem. Therefore, the RA must possess problem-solving skills to do so effectively.

The RA may utilize problem-solving skills more on a day-to-day basis than counseling skills. Residents can have problems relating to topics such as studying, relationships, the community, or roommates. The RA must analyze the problem, and help the resident come up with a solution. "Brainstorming is a technique for generating as many ideas as possible in a short period of time" (Engleberg & Wynn, 1997, p. 228). Brainstorming allows the RA and the resident to consider several different options. The RA must make use of interpersonal and listening skills discussed earlier to ascertain the problem from the residents. Mistakes can occur if the RA is not proficient with either of these skills. Engleberg & Wynn state, "The first error is a failure to recognize or accurately define the problem. The second is a failure to identify the causes of the problem" (pp. 226-227). By identifying the cause, an RA can begin to offer solutions for a resident. One such predicament could involve a resident who has a problem with another resident. For instance, one roommate may be borrowing the other's possessions without permission. The RA could identify the "unauthorized borrower" roommate as the cause and begin to use conflict resolution skills to help the resident resolve the situation.

Conflict resolution skills are helpful in mediating conflicts between residents. Since many students who live in the residence hall environment have roommates, roommate conflicts are common occurrences. "Properly trained RAs can effectively act as mediators and conflict managers in situations involving their residents" (Johnson, 1993, p. 137). When an RA utilizes conflict

resolution, it is helpful if both parties involved in the conflict are present to discuss the problem. Blimling (1995) states, "When possible, employ a strategy of win-win to resolve conflicts" (p. 262). By presenting both sides involved in a conflict with a compromise, the RA will most likely satisfy both parties and thus repair the community bond between them. The RA can utilize conflict resolution for most problems, but when the problems are more severe, the RA may have to utilize crisis intervention skills.

Although encountering a crisis is not very common, it is still important for an RA to possess crisis intervention skills. RAs may encounter crises such as rape, domestic violence, drug overdose, acute alcohol intoxication, suicide, or death. The RA must be able to respond quickly and effectively to these problems. Blimling (1995) reports, "In your discussion with the student, focus on coping mechanisms the student has available to assist with the problem" (p. 279). The RA should make the student aware of any counseling, medical, or legal services on campus or in the surrounding community. The best thing an RA can do for a student in a crisis is to refer the student to a trained professional.

This section defined the administrative, communication, leadership, and analytical skills that an RA must perform. Literature demonstrates that every skill identified is equally important in the role of the RA. The RA must be proficient in all of these areas in order to meet the needs of a diverse population of students, therefore it is vital to consider all of these skill areas when analyzing the role of

the RA. Once these areas are defined, it is important to acquire research in support of the skills discussed in the Assumptions section. The Literature Review will present research related to each of the skill areas.

Literature Review

Although studies are available for most of the skill areas discussed in the Assumptions section, some skill areas are lacking in applicable research. The four specific skills that lack research are time management, interpersonal communication, ethical decision-making, and conflict resolution. The remaining skill areas that have available research are grouped in the same format in which they were presented in the Assumptions section. These four areas are administrative skills, communication skills, leadership skills, and analytical skills, and each will be discussed in turn.

Administrative Skills

The first skill area discussed in this section is administrative skills. As stated earlier, administrative skills incorporate the ability to handle administrative tasks, be available to residents, set personal limits, program, deal with disciplinary matters involving residents, and manage stress. Time management is the only administrative skill that does not have ample research to report. There are, however, plenty of studies relating to the remaining skills.

The Eichenfield, Graves, Slief & Haslund (1988) study presents handling administrative tasks and availability to residents. The study focuses on the selection and training of resident assistants (RAs) based on feedback received

from residents. Eichenfield, Graves, Slief, and Haslund had residents rate their RAs in 13 different characteristic categories: availability, informed, concerned, counseling, personality, discipline, responsible, sets good example, motivates students, handles administrative tasks, encourages self development, relations with students, and awareness. The results were used to determine if training RAs before the beginning of the academic year increased the satisfaction of the residents concerning their RAs. Availability scored a mean of 1.935 on a 7-point Likert scale, with a standard deviation of 0.575. The low mean score means that most residents ranked their RAs high on availability. Therefore, being available is a very important aspect of an RA's responsibility. The study also surveyed residents concerning how their RAs handled administrative tasks. Administrative tasks scored a mean of 1.601 on the 7-point Likert scale, with a 0.436 standard deviation. The 1.601 administrative mean being lower than the 1.935 availability mean implies that the residents believed their RAs were comparatively more proficient with handling administrative tasks than availability. RAs, however, need to have excellent exposure to their residents in order for their residents to effectively evaluate their performance on such skills. An RA cannot be available all of the time, so he or she must learn to set limits.

Ballou & Brown (1987) discuss setting personal limits and explore the relationship between RA temperament and burnout. Many RAs do not know how to balance all of their responsibilities, and therefore may become frustrated with their position. Burnout is very often a problem with RAs as the year progresses.

Ballou and Brown distributed a Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to 52 RAs during the first week of the fall term. Then, during the late winter term, the 52 RAs completed the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). "The MBI is a 22-item, self-report measure that assesses a helping professional's level of burnout along three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment" (Ballou & Brown, p. 21). Ballou and Brown conclude that if RAs have an understanding of themselves, they are able to set limits and avoid the burnout syndrome. The RA is more effective when he or she is not affected by burnout. RAs are more likely to excel with tasks such as programming if they are effectively performing their job responsibilities.

Programming is an aspect covered by Pratt, Hunter & Matthews (1993). The purpose of an RA is to create a community, and one way to enhance a community is to utilize programming to get residents together. Pratt, Hunter & Matthews discuss the perceptions of RA roles by residents. The study conducted an anonymous survey at the end of the first semester of the 1990-1991 academic year at the University of Maine. The survey collected data on the following five traits: counselor, disciplinarian, program planner, resource/referral person, and role model. The residents evaluated their RA by indicating first the role that the RA exhibited most, and second the role the resident believed the RA should exhibit most. "RA roles perceived as primarily cognitive (i.e. resource/referral person, activity programmir ....ere associated with moderate levels of satisfaction" (Pratt, Hunter, & Matthews, p. 33). The study

demonstrated that residents favored RAs who exhibit counselor and role model traits, but that the residents still placed an importance on programming. Of the 1,740 residents surveyed, 17% of them indicated that activity programmer should be emphasized more than the other four traits. If the RA can effectively program, then he or she can create bonds with residents that will make confronting disciplinary matters easier.

Twale and Burrell (1995) discuss dealing with disciplinary matters and the decision process that is involved with handling disciplinary matters. Twale and Burrell developed an open-ended questionnaire that questioned RAs about their job performance. The questionnaire asked what major problem was encountered during the year, how the RA responded, how the RA gained the knowledge to be able to respond appropriately, and what would be helpful to know beforehand. Twale and Burrell surveyed 104 RAs from 3 different campuses at the end of the academic year. According to the results, 44 of the RA's consulted someone else, while 34 of the RAs consulted no one and solved the problem on their own. The study found that RAs requested more information during training. "RAs asked for more resource information in dealing with academic areas, more specific training for handling personal, social, and interpersonal issues, and additional follow-up procedures for disciplinary matters" (Twale & Burrell, p. 16). Even though a significant amount of RAs consulted one else before solved a problem, a third of the RAs felt confident enough to solve the disciplinary problem on their own. Overall, RAs requested

more information to follow-up with disciplinary matters. If an RA is trained how to approach and follow-up disciplinary matters, then the RA will experience less stress in deciding upon an action. RAs function better if they are under less stress.

Stress management is discussed by Dickson, Ponikvar, Bertschy, & Tomlinson (1981). Two of the studies discussed are by Ponikvar (1978 & 1979). Ponikvar researched the relationship between sex and susceptibility to stress by using the Resident Assistant Stress Inventory (RASI) and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. The studies found that women expressed higher perceived stress than men. One of the conclusions that Ponikvar (1981) stated was that "In-service activity should also focus on helping RAs to develop a personal identity so that their need to play multiple roles does not lead to a feeling of fragmentation" (p. 9). While the Ponikvar studies looked at how stress affects job performance, Bertschy (1980) studied the effects of stress management training over a nine-month period. Bertschy used an outdoor weekend retreat as part of the training, and assessed the RA's job performance by surveying the residents. The results were drawn from comparing a trained versus untrained group of RAs. The study concluded that effective training for RAs could reduce perceived stress. The study also indicated that an RA experiences more stress by acting out several roles, so role clarification should be a part of any stress management training. Stress management is an important administrative skill, but just as administrative skills are important to the success of the RA, so are communication skills.

Communication Skills

The second skill area is communication skills. The communication skill area, as stated previously, comprises listening skills, the understanding of personality types, and the ability to work in groups. Although research relating to the communication skill area is abundant, no studies that adequately covered interpersonal skills related to the RA job could be found.

One skill that received sufficient attention is listening. Daily, RAs listen to the interpersonal issues that residents encounter while counseling or peer helping them. Residence life training programs need to help RAs acquire listening skills so that the RAs can utilize the listening skills with their residents. Schuh, Shipton, & Edman (1988) conducted a 15-year study that surveyed the types of counseling or peer helping encountered by RAs, and the importance of listening in helping others. They surveyed the staff members every three years, and compiled a list of the issues that students were encountering. The issues ranged from questions concerning vocation, to issues dealing with suicide. Schuh, Shipton, & Edman were looking specifically for counseling problems, changes that occurred with the problems over time, and how counseling problems on male floors compared to counseling problems on female floors. The survey was completed every three years because there was almost a 100% turnover in the RA staff every 3 years. Schuh, Shipton, & Edman found that although problems varied, for the most part, the general content area stayed the same. RAs listened to students discuss issues concerning academic problems,

roommate problems, self-reliance problems, or alcohol issues. Since problems are prevalent in the residence hall environment, it is important for an RA to have effective listening skills to help residents find ways to resolve problems. Just as important as listening skills are to the RA, so is the understanding of personality types.

Anchors and Hay (1990) conducted a study to establish what, if any, differences there are between students who became RAs and students who lived in the residential community. To do this, Anchors and Hay had 1,918 first-year male and female undergraduate students complete the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). The students completed the indicator prior to receiving housing assignments, and prior to summer orientation. Of the 1,918 students, 114 students were selected as RAs. The RA sample ended up being different than the other residents that completed the indicator. "The overrepresentation of individuals selected with Extraverted, Thinking, and Judging preferences is not surprising in light of other research, as well as the demands of the RA position" (Anchors & Hay, p. 19). Though it appears that individuals possessing these three traits would be awesome RA candidates, Anchors and Hay warn about selecting too many RAs with similar personalities. The phenomenon of hiring staff members with similar personality characteristics could result in "group think", which would take away from the creativity of the staff. In the same way, if too many residents who reside on a floor have similar personality characteristics, the RA would need to be able to help diversify their viewpoints. Knowledge of

how to work well in groups could aid the RA in working with his or her floor to make sure that the community evolves effectively.

It is important that the RA can work well in groups, because he or she oversees several residents on the floor. Czupryn and Donavan (1990) present research on group dynamics with RAs. "Staff who work in college and university residence halls encounter students in all aspects of their lives, and any tool that might enhance their understanding of the student experience would be valuable" (Stonewater, 1988, p. 267). Czupryn and Donovan researched utilizing peer support groups to enhance the RAs understanding of their position. Their goal was to improve RA satisfaction and to foster personal development. The study attempted to provide informal support groups (RA Exchange) that spanned the whole campus, not just individual staffs. The peer groups would problem solve, discuss updates, and debate on important issues. Once the RAs experienced how the support groups worked, they could utilize the same strategies in their floor group. The RA utilizes many of his or her interpersonal skills in group work, but just as important, RA must utilize leadership skills.

Leadership Skills

The third skill area is leadership skills. This skill area is the only area in which research was found for each component. The other three skill areas lack research in one or more element. The leadership skill area encompasses motivating others, role modeling, abiding by policies, and community building.

Motivating others is the key to getting residents involved in the community. The Eichenfield, Graves, Slief & Haslund (1988) study, previously discussed in this section, also addresses motivating students. The study focused on the selection and training of resident assistants (RAs) based on feedback received from residents. Motivating students received a mean score of 1.896 on a 7-point Likert scale, with a standard deviation of 0.473. The low mean score means that most residents ranked their RAs high on motivating others. Therefore, motivating others is a very important component in building community. RAs can effectively motivate their residents by being a good role model.

Pratt, Hunter & Matthews (1993) also impart information on role modeling. Along with the information discussed under administrative skills, Pratt, Hunter & Matthews discuss the perceptions of RA roles by residents. The study conducted an anonymous survey at the end of the first semester to collect data on the following five traits: counselor, disciplinarian, program planner, resource/referral person, and role model. The study demonstrated that residents favored RAs who exhibited counselor and role model traits. Of the 1,740 residents surveyed, 18% of them indicated that role modeling should be emphasized more than the other four traits. In order for the RA role model effectively for residents, he or she must also abide by policies.

Information on abiding by policies is communicated in Wesolowski, Bowman & Adams (1997). Information can be presented to RAs in many different ways during training. Wesolowski, Bowman, & Adams compare three

different modalities of imparting information to RAs during training. "The three

formats were: cognitive (lecture-based information), vicarious (information

through video demonstrations and observation), and experiential (activities

consisting of team building exercises and problem solving activities"

(Wesolowski, Bowman, & Adams, p. 31). The study consisted of 22 female and

22 male undergraduate students, from a medium sized Southern University. All

three training groups received the same cognitive information, and immediately

following their respective training sessions, the RAs completed a program

evaluation. The data collected showed that different modalities were more

effective for some subject matter than others. Therefore, individuals who impart

training need to present information such as how to abide by policies so that RAs

can understand how to implement it. Role modeling coupled with abiding by

policies is an important step to follow to build an effective community.

The study by Deluga (1989) reports some aspects of community building.

Specifically, Deluga analyzes the relationship between resident assistants' (RA's)

characteristics and leadership style and the student's influencing behavior. The

study targeted a staff of 38 RA's and 675 randomly selected residents. The

Deluga study used the POIS-M Strategy (Form M of the Profile of Organizational

Influence Strategies) to interpret the results. The Deluga study looked for the

importance of developing rapport and how it affects all individuals involved in the

communication. "An RA's ability to analyze power and influencing dynamics is a

critical leadership component" (Deluga, p. 10). The better the leadership skills,

the more effectively an RA can help to develop a community. Yet, once the community is functioning, the RA has to utilize analytical skills to keep it running smoothly.

Analytical Skills

The final skill area is the analytical skill area. Analytical skills involve counseling skills, problem-solving skills, and crisis intervention. Two of the components of this area, ethical decision-making and conflict resolution, do not have relevant research available. The other three components, however, have ample research.

Schuh, Shipton, & Edman (1988) present information on counseling skills. Schuh, Shipton, & Edman conducted a 15-year study that surveyed the types of counseling or peer helping encountered by RAs. The issues ranged from questions concerning vocation, to issues dealing with suicide. The survey was completed every three years because there was almost a 100% turnover in the RA staff every 3 years. Schuh, Shipton, & Edman found that although problems varied, for the most part, the general content area stayed the same.
"...Counseling was defined as RAs helping students make choices, RAs helping students bring about changes in their lives, and RAs referring students to mental health professionals on campus for assistance" (Schuh, Shipton, & Edman, p. 21). RAs encounter many instances when they have to utilize their counseling skills. To be an effective counselor, however, the RA also must have a grasp of how to effectively problem solve.

Benshoff & Smith (1995) address problem-solving skills in their study. Training is very effective for RAs, and continued training and education can also be effective. Benshoff & Smith hypothesize that peer consultation may reduce stress and have a positive impact on motivation and job performance for RAs. Chickering and Reisser (1993) write, "a student's most important teacher is often another student" (p. 392), so peer consultation may be an effective form of continuing education for RAs. Benshoff and Smith studied forty-eight RAs who elected to participate in a one-semester study using the Structured Peer Consultation Model for Resident Assistants. The results were drawn from surveys that each of the participants repeatedly completed. The continued training helped RAs become more confident in their abilities. Problem- solving becomes easier with more guidance. Being proficient in problem-solving aids the RA in dealing with more serious problems or crises.

Twale and Burrell (1995) report information on crisis intervention. Twale and Burrell developed an open-ended questionnaire that questioned RAs about their job performance. The questionnaire asked what major problem was encountered during the year, how the RA responded, how the RA gained the knowledge to be able to respond appropriately, and what would be helpful to know beforehand. Twale and Burrell surveyed 104 RAs from 3 different campuses at the end of the academic year. According to the results, several RAs wanted additional training in crisis intervention, death, suicide, and even pregnancy. An RA may not encounter a crisis as often as a conflict, but the RA

should be equally prepared for either event. If an RA is trained how to handle a crisis, then the RA will be more confident in his or her decisions when faced with a crisis.

Similar to the findings in the Assumptions section, the Literature Review demonstrates the importance of understanding each skill area as an RA. The research identified many dimensions to the RA position by addressing duties such as role modeling, counseling, community building, and handling administrative tasks. Even though some areas lacked research, such as ethical decision-making and conflict resolution, the Assumptions section reveals that those skills are no less important. The literature and research identified in the Assumptions section and Literature Review form the basis for the survey distributed to the RAs at the University of North Dakota. The survey will be discussed in detail in the Methods chapter.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

What skill areas do RAs perceive to be important when performing RA duties? Do the RAs feel that these skill areas are presented well in training? Residence Hall Directors, residents, and the RAs themselves all conceive the skills differently, but the RA is the only individual who truly understands what his or her role is and what traits aid in success. So, it is most beneficial to get information from Resident Assistants currently employed in a university residence hall to answer these questions, and compare the results to the training program used to prepare the RAs for their job. The data collected helped to determine if the skills that RAs utilize most are indeed the ones that are emphasized in training.

The University of North Dakota is a liberal arts institution located in Grand Forks, North Dakota. The institution enrolls more than 10,000 students, with over 3,600 of those students living in the residence halls. There are 13 residence halls on campus, and 80 resident assistants that work within them. Every fall the UND Housing department puts together a training program for the RAs who return to campus about a week and a half before the residents for training. There is also a smaller training session in the spring that lasts 2 days for new RAs and one day for returning RAs.

There are several types of residence halls on the UND campus. There are all-female (suites) and all-female (community bathroom) along with all-male (suites) and all-male (community bathrooms). There are also upperclassmen halls where there is a co-ed population. The upperclassmen halls have credit and age restrictions so that only upperclassmen are allowed to live there. One RA usually resides on every floor or wing, but there are two halls where there is only one RA per building. There is an even split between male and female RAs on staff. There are 40 male RAs and 40 female RAs on campus. All of the RAs will be asked to complete the survey.

The survey is stratified since it takes into consideration different types of living environments, and gender implications. The information needed to answer the questions is information that the each resident assistant possesses as a result of performing regular RA duties. The survey asks questions formulated from the research on the four main skill areas: administrative, communication, leadership, and analytical. A high rate of return was expected from the RAs because the primary researcher is a member of the residence life staff, specifically an RHD. The RHD supervises a staff of RAs, so the RA would interpret the distribution of a survey created by an RHD as a chance to impact the residence life department locally. RAs would answer the questions truthfully in the hopes of effecting future training at UND.

The surveys and consent forms were handed out at the weekly Residence Hall Director (RHD) meeting. The RHDs received instructions, along with a

packet of consent forms, surveys, and appreciation notes to take back to each of their staffs. The instructions were for the RHD to read as follows: "Please take a consent form and read through it. If you decide you would like to participate, please sign the bottom and return it to me, and then I will give you a survey to complete. If you choose to refrain from completing the survey, simply turn your unsigned consent form back in to me, and wait patiently for the others to finish. Thank you." The participants then received a consent form. If the participant signed the consent form, he or she then received the survey (see Appendix). If an RA did not sign a consent form, then he or she was not allowed to complete a survey. Once the surveys were completed, the RHD collected them. The RHD announced the following: "If any of you have any questions or concerns about the survey, please feel free to contact either Renee Bourdeaux or myself." As a final gesture of appreciation, the RHDs handed out a small slip of paper to each RA as thanks for completing the survey. The piece of paper said, "Thank you for taking the time to help others down the road of life! Your time is greatly appreciated!" The RHDs then returned the completed surveys at the next week's RHD meeting.

In the RHD meeting where the materials were dispersed, the RHDs (who supervise the RAs) discussed the questions on the survey. They explored how an RA may react, and what type of strategies they, as supervisors, could use to constructively deal with each situation. For example, Section One on the survey asks the RAs to recall incidents on their floor where they utilized a number of

skills. If an RA has not done an adequate job thus far, analyzing what he or she has done may leave an RA feeling unsuccessful. The RHD would address this issue in a one-on-one meeting by working on goal setting with the staff member. Another question asks about the RA's skills in dealing with a crisis. If there has been a traumatic situation earlier in the semester that the RA has dealt with, then the RHD may refer them to the UND Counseling Center for a few sessions on grief management. A third question asks about role modeling. An RA may realize that he or she let a resident down by demonstrating poor role modeling. The RHD may need to work with that RA on building self-esteem.

Once the distribution of the surveys was complete, each RHD then followed up with each RA on his or her staff during the next one-on-one session (which occurs weekly). The RHDs specifically asked the RAs what they thought about the survey. If any RA was experiencing any sort of problems due to the survey, the RHD helped the RA work through the problem or referred them to the UND Counseling Center.

This study utilized surveys that ask the RAs questions formulated around the four areas of skills discussed previously. The analysis of the data enables the UND Housing Office to determine what skills the RAs utilize the most. In Section One the data identifies which skills are utilized more often versus those that are used on rare occasions. The information tells the staff which skills are dealt with most, and which need to be focused on more in training. Section Two analyzes the current training program. It gives feedback regarding which skills

RAs believe that they are being well prepared to utilize, and which skills could benefit from more information and knowledge. The survey also determines demographic information. Section Three asks questions regarding age, semesters of RA experience, year in studies, gender, and the type of residents overseen.

Confidentiality will be of utmost importance. The residence life staff abides by strict confidentiality guidelines; therefore whatever an RA discusses with his or her supervisor, stays with the supervisor unless it is deemed necessary by the RHD to notify the Complex Director of behavioral problems. The signed consent forms will be kept in a filing cabinet with a locking top drawer. The top drawer is always locked because other confidential papers relating to resident conduct are stored in that drawer. The signed consent forms will be kept on file in the filing cabinet for a total of three years. After the three years are up, the consent forms will be shredded in a cross-shred shredder.

By distributing, collecting, and storing the data as stated, it becomes possible to analyze the data to determine if the skills that RAs utilize most are indeed the ones that are emphasized in training. If the data suggests that training meets the needs of the RAs, then it proves that the training program is effective. However, any discrepancies in the training program are identified in the data analysis. The Findings chapter will break down the results from the survey into several tables, and relate the results to the effectiveness of the training program.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The Methods chapter presents information on the sample and the distribution of the survey. This chapter will present the data collected from the surveys. The first segment of the Findings section will present five tables regarding demographic information. The second segment will display the data collected from Section One of the survey, which covers how often RAs utilize a specific skill per week. Section Two of the survey covers how well RAs feel they are trained for each specific skill. This information is displayed in the third segment of the Findings section. The chapter will also discuss the implications of the results.

Demographic Information

Section Three of the survey provides demographic information. A total of 80 surveys were distributed to the resident assistants at the University of North Dakota. Of the 80 surveys distributed, 78 (97.5%) of them were completed. Of the respondents, 39 (50%) were men and 39 (50%) were women. Thirty-one (39.7%) worked in an all-male environment, 31 (39.7%) worked in an all-female environment, and 16 (20.5%) worked in a co-educational environment. The years of academic study for the respondents were as follows: zero (0%) were freshman, 27 (34.6%) were sophomores, 29 (37.2%) were juniors, 21 (26.9%)

were seniors, and zero (0%) were graduate students. The RAs reported the following information relating to the semesters of RA experience that each respondent had: 20 (25.6%) had one semester of experience, 23 (29.5%) had two semesters of experience, seven (9.0%) had three semesters of experience, 21 (26.9%) had four semesters of experience, one (1.3%) had five semesters of experience, five (6.4%) had six semesters of experience, one (1.3%) had seven semesters of experience, and zero (0%) had 8 semesters of experience. The respondent's ages were reported as follows: 19 (24.4%) were 19 years old, 24 (30.8%) were 20 years old, 20 (25.6%) were 21 years old, ten (12.8%) were 22 years old, three (3.8%) were 23 years old, one (1.3%) was 24 years old, and one (1.3%) was 25 years old or older. These demographic statistics appear in tables 1-1 through 1-5. Missing data indicates that a question was not answered, or left blank, on the survey. Missing data is reported under the column block heading labeled "Missing".

Table 1-1 Participant's Age	FREQUENCY							
	19	20	21	22	23	24	25+	Missing
Participant's age	19	24	20	10	3	1	1	0

Table 1-2 RA Experience	FREQUENCY								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Missing
Semesters of RA experience	20	23	7	21	1	5	1	0	0

Table 1-3 Year in Studies	FREQUENCY					
	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Graduate	Missing
Year in academic study	0	27	29	21	0	1

Table 1-4 Participant's Gender	F R E Q U E N C Y		
	Male	Female	Missing
Participant's gender	39	39	0

Table 1-5 Type of Residents	F R E Q U E N C Y			
	All-male	All-female	Co-ed	Missing
Type of residents worked with	31	31	16	0

Demographics are discussed in Tables 1-1 through 1-5. Table 1-4 shows

the participant's gender. The gender breakdown for this study is even. There

were exactly 39 males and 39 females who completed this survey. In addition,

Table 1-5 shows that 31 of the participants work with an all-male environment,

31 of the participants work with an all-female environment, and 16 work in a co-

educational environment. RAs have to be the same gender as the rest of the

floor in gender exclusive environments at UND. Therefore, exactly 8 of the RAs

who completed the survey and work with a co-ed environment were female, and

exactly 8 of them were male. This information reduces the bias for gender-

based results among the data.

RA Assessment of Roles

The answers to the questions from Section One of the survey appear in

Table 2. The data is compiled into a frequency distribution. A value of one

through five was assigned to each response beginning with one for "0 times",

and the value increases in increments of one for each successive response

through "7 or more times". The frequency of each response given for each of the

20 questions is reported in the table. Missing data indicates that a question was

not answered, or left blank, on the survey. Missing data is reported under the column block heading labeled "Missing". No value was assigned to this variable. The table is in rank order by mean value, which is the average value chosen for each question based on the responses provided by the respondents. For example, the first row lists the frequency for "Personally abide by policies". The mean value is listed as 4.45, which means that of all of the responses reported, the average response was somewhere between "5-6 times" (value = 4) and "7 or more times" (value = 5). The final column lists the rank order of the mean value. The rank order is assigned beginning with one, and ending with the total number of questions. If any of the mean values are equal, then each mean value is given the average of the equal ranks. For example, "Personal stress management" and "Personal ethical decision making" were tied for the ranks of nine and ten because they both had a mean value of 3.41. Therefore, each one received a ranking of 9.5 because [(9+10)/2] = 9.5 (Pagano, 2001).

Table 2 – Results from Section One on the Survey

Section 1 Questions	FREQUENCY						Mean value	Rank order of mean values
	0 times value=1	1-2 times value=2	3-4 times value=3	5-6 times value=4	7 or more value=5	Missing no value		
Personally abide by policies	0	3	15	3	55	2	4.45	1
Personal time management	1	9	12	12	44	0	4.14	2
Role modeling for residents	0	10	12	17	39	0	4.09	3
Interpersonal skills with residents	0	8	17	18	35	0	4.03	4
Listening skills with residents	0	6	21	17	34	0	4.01	5

Table 2 cont.

Section 1 Questions	F R E Q U E N C Y						Mean value	Rank order of mean values
	0 times value=1	1-2 times value=2	3-4 times value=3	5-6 times value=4	7 or more value=5	Missing no value		
Understanding personality types of residents	1	14	14	17	32	0	3.83	6
Availability to residents with concerns	0	9	22	26	21	0	3.76	7
Setting personal limits	1	15	23	21	18	0	3.51	8
Personal stress management	2	15	27	17	17	0	3.41	9.5
Personal ethical decision making	1	13	33	15	16	0	3.41	9.5
Community building for residents	1	24	26	16	10	1	3.13	11
Problem-solving for residents	3	19	38	10	8	0	3.01	12
Handling administrative tasks	0	40	23	9	5	1	2.73	13
Motivating residents to participate in community	5	30	35	7	1	0	2.60	14
Working in groups with residents	10	37	14	10	5	2	2.51	15
Counseling skills with residents	8	40	18	8	3	1	2.45	16
Conflict resolution skills with residents	15	37	19	5	1	1	2.22	17.5
Dealing with disciplinary matters with residents	15	39	16	8	0	0	2.22	17.5
Programming for residents	3	66	8	0	0	1	2.06	19
Crisis intervention skills with residents	31	38	6	1	1	1	1.74	20

Table 2 presents the frequency, mean value, and rank order of the mean

values for the responses to Section One on the survey. Section One asks the

respondents to identify the number of times per week they utilized a specific skill.

One way to analyze this data would be to break the list down into the four skill

areas discussed in the Assumptions section and calculate the overall mean value of each specific area.

Table 3-1 Mean Values of Communication Skill Area

Communication Skill Area	Mean Value
Interpersonal skills with residents	4.03
Listening skills with residents	4.01
Understanding personality types of residents	3.83
Working in groups with residents	2.51
Overall Mean Value	**3.60**

The communication skill area has the highest overall mean value of the four skill areas. This implies that the skills that are part of the communication skill area are utilized the most by RAs at the University of North Dakota. Communication is imperative to making connections, and since one of the roles of the RA is to make connections with residents, it makes sense that this skill area would have the highest mean value. As stated earlier in the Assumptions section, the RA's role is such that he or she has the opportunity to communicate interpersonally on a daily basis. The Assumptions section also states that RAs have to understand how to listen in order to effectively communicate with residents. In the survey, the respondents ranked both listening and interpersonal skills high. Utilizing interpersonal skills ranked fourth, and utilizing listening skills ranked fifth overall. The survey results demonstrate that utilizing communication skills are an integral part of the RA position, as discussed in the Assumptions section.

Table 3-2 Mean Values of Leadership Skill Area

Leadership Skill Area	Mean Value
Personally abiding by policies	4.45
Role modeling for residents	4.09
Community building for residents	3.13
Motivating residents to participate in community	2.60
Overall Mean Value	**3.57**

The leadership skill area is a close second to the communication skill area according to the overall mean value. This implies that the skills that are part of the leadership skill area are also utilized a lot by RAs. RAs must teach residents how to function in a community, and the best way to demonstrate how to function in a community would be to role model behavior using leadership skills. The Assumptions section points out that abiding by policies, just like role modeling and motivating others, is crucial to earning the respect of the community. Once an RA gains respect, it is much easier to focus on building a strong community. In the survey, the respondents ranked personally abiding by policies number one overall, and role modeling for residents number three overall. The results of the survey illustrate that RAs utilize leadership skills daily in the quest to create a community.

Table 3-3 Mean Values of Administrative Skill Area

Administrative Skill Area	Mean Value
Personal time management	4.14
Availability to residents with concerns	3.76
Setting personal limits	3.51
Personal stress management	3.41
Handling administrative tasks	2.73
Dealing with disciplinary matters with residents	2.22

Table 3-3 cont.

Administrative Skill Area	Mean Value
Programming with residents	2.06
Overall Mean Value	3.12

The administrative skill area ranked third according to the overall mean value. This means that even though RAs may utilize administrative skills, they do not utilize them as often per week as communication or leadership skills. RAs have to fill out paperwork and present programs for the residents, but these tasks may only occur once a week, or even once a month. This partially explains why RAs report using administrative skills only a few times per week. The Assumptions section also points out that tasks such as time management and stress management are important for the RA to utilize to effectively carry out the RA roles. Yet, once an RA learns how to effectively develop a schedule for all of his or her responsibilities, this task becomes a subconscious effort, and he or she may not even realize that time management skills are being utilized. This could also help explain why the administrative skill area ranked below both communication and leadership skills.

Table 3-4 Mean Values of Analytical Skill Area

Analytical Skill Area	Mean Value
Personal ethical decision making	3.41
Problem solving for residents	3.01
Counseling skills with residents	2.45
Conflict resolution skills with residents	2.22
Crisis intervention skills with residents	1.74
Overall Mean Value	2.57

The analytical skill area ranks last of the four skill areas. This implies that RAs use analytical skills the least in the day-to-day role of being an RA. During the course ⁞ the day, an RA may have to help a resident problem-solve, or an RA may have to counsel a resident who has a concern. Yet, individuals will not have problems every day, so an RA may only encounter a situation that requires analytical skills a limited amount of times each week. If the RA has done a good job utilizing leadership and communication skills, then the community will be stronger, thus reducing the number of conflicts an RA may encounter. Crisis intervention skills ranked last in the list of skills that an RA utilizes the most per week. This supports the Assumptions section, which notes that although encountering a crisis is not very common, it is still important for an RA to possess crisis intervention skills. The survey results reveal that analytical skills are not utilized very often when compared to the other skill areas.

RA Assessment of Training

Table 4 reports the answers to the questions from Section Two of the survey. The data is compiled into a frequency distribution, just like the responses from Section One. A value of one through five was assigned to each response beginning with one for "Strongly disagree", and the value increases in increments of one for each successive response through "Strongly agree". The frequency of each response given for each of the 20 questions is reported in the table. Missing data indicates that a question was not answered, or left blank, on the survey. Missing data is reported under the column block heading labeled

"Missing". No value was assigned to this variable. The table is in rank order by mean value, which is the average value chosen for each question based on the responses provided by the respondents. For example, the first row lists the frequency for "Dealing with disciplinary matters with residents". The mean value is listed as 4.33, which means that of all of the responses reported, the average response was somewhere between "Moderately agree" (value = 4) and "Strongly agree" (value = 5). The final column lists the rank order of the mean value. The rank order is assigned beginning with one, and ending with the total number of questions. For example, "Personal stress management" has the lowest mean value of all of the questions; therefore it receives a rank of 20 because it is the lowest ranking score of all of the mean values.

Table 4 – Results from Section Two on the Survey

Section 2 Questions	FREQUENCY						Mean value	Rank order of mean value
	Strongly disagree value=1	Mod. disagree value=2	Neutral value=3	Mod. agree value=4	Strongly agree value=5	Missing no value		
Dealing with disciplinary matters with residents	1	3	4	31	39	0	4.33	1
Conflict resolution skills with residents	2	2	9	39	26	0	4.09	2
Personally abide by policies	3	6	12	25	32	0	3.99	3
Availability to residents with concerns	2	4	15	33	22	2	3.91	4
Listening skills with residents	2	6	17	26	27	0	3.90	5
Handling administrative tasks	0	7	15	39	17	0	3.85	6
Understanding personality types of residents	2	8	12	34	21	1	3.83	7
Community building for residents	4	5	15	32	22	0	3.81	8
Working in groups with residents	2	7	14	39	16	0	3.77	9

Table 4 cont.

Section 2 Questions	FREQUENCY						Mean value	Rank order of mean value
	Strongly disagree value=1	Mod. disagree value=2	Neutral value=3	Mod. agree value=4	Strongly agree value=5	Missing no value		
Role modeling for residents	4	9	9	35	20	1	3.75	10
Interpersonal skills with residents	4	5	14	40	15	0	3.73	11
Crisis intervention skills with residents	2	11	13	34	18	0	3.71	12
Personal ethical decision making	7	6	19	28	18	0	3.56	13
Counseling skills with residents	5	11	13	38	11	0	3.50	14
Setting personal limits	6	9	20	30	12	1	3.43	15
Motivating residents to participate in community	8	10	17	32	11	0	3.36	16
Problem-solving for residents	6	14	13	38	7	0	3.33	17
Programming for residents	8	14	18	33	5	0	3.17	18
Personal time management	8	20	15	31	2	2	2.99	19
Personal stress management	12	18	26	21	1	0	2.76	20

Table 4 presents the frequency, mean value, and rank order of the mean values for the responses to Section Two on the survey. Section Two asks the respondents to identify how well they feel they were trained in the same twenty skills used in Section One. Once again, this data will be analyzed by breaking the list down into the four skill areas discussed in the Assumptions section, and calculating the overall mean value of each specific area.

Table 5-1 Mean Values of Communication Skill Area for Training

Communication Skill Area	Mean Value
Listening skills with residents	3.90
Understanding personality types of residents	3.83
Working in groups with residents	3.77

Table 5-1 cont.

Communication Skill Area	Mean Value
Interpersonal skills with residents	3.73
Overall Mean Value	3.81

The communication skill area ranked number one compared to the other three skill areas. This means that RAs feel the most prepared in the communication skill area. This implies that the staff that puts together the training realizes the importance of communication skills in creating a strong community. If the training emphasizes communication skills, it would make sense that RAs feel they are well trained in this area. For example, the statistics rank listening skills with residents fifth overall compared to the rest of the twenty skills. The results from Section One of the survey also rank listening skills fifth overall in the usage per week. This correlation demonstrates that RAs are trained well for communication skills, which they utilize several times per week.

Table 5-2 Mean Values of Leadership Skill Area for Training

Leadership Skill Area	Mean Value
Personally abiding by policies	3.99
Community building for residents	3.81
Role modeling for residents	3.75
Motivating residents to participate in community	3.36
Overall Mean Value	3.73

RAs also feel that they are well prepared for utilizing leadership skills. The leadership skill area is second in the ranking of overall mean values for the four skill areas. Leadership is an important aspect for RAs, because role modeling sets the tone for the community. This implies that the staff emphasizes leadership skills in training to help the RAs build a strong community. For

example, one of the skills an RA may role model is abiding by policies. The statistics ranked personally abiding by policies number three on the list, which means that RAs feel that they are well trained to abide by policies. The data from Section One of the survey positioned personally abiding by policies in the number one position, which means that RAs feel they utilize that skill more often than any other skill on a given week. This correlation shows that leadership skills are not only utilized often, but they are also presented clearly to RAs in training.

Table 5-3 Mean Values of Analytical Skill Area for Training

Analytical Skill Area	Mean Value
Conflict resolution skills with residents	4.09
Crisis intervention skills with residents	3.71
Personal ethical decision making	3.56
Counseling skills with residents	3.50
Problem-solving for residents	3.33
Overall Mean Value	**3.64**

Analytical skills ranked third overall compared to the other three skill areas. Analytical skills are the skills that an RA would utilize to confront a resident who has a concern. Most of the skills related to the analytical skill area fell in the bottom half of the ranking, which demonstrates that RAs feel that they are not well prepared for these skills. However, conflict resolution skills are an exception. Conflict resolution skills ranked number two overall when compared to the rest of the twenty skills. Interestingly enough, conflict resolution ranked 17.5 out of 20 from the statistics in Section One. This implies that training prepares RAs well for a skill that they do not often utilize. One reason for this inconsistency could be that the training staff feels that using conflict resolution

skills are a good way for an RA to make connections with residents. The training staff may emphasize analytical skills for this reason, even though RAs do not utilize them often.

Table 5-4 Mean Values of Administrative Skill Area for Training

Administrative Skill Area	Mean Value
Dealing with disciplinary matters with residents	4.33
Availability to residents with concerns	3.91
Handling administrative tasks	3.85
Setting personal limits	3.43
Programming for residents	3.17
Personal time management	2.99
Personal stress management	2.76
Overall Mean Value	**3.49**

The final skill area, administrative skills, ranks last when comparing the overall mean values of the four skill areas. Administrative skills encompass skills such as programming, time management, and setting personal limits. It is interesting to note that three of the administrative skills ranked very high in comparison to the other skills. Dealing with disciplinary matters ranked number one, with availability being ranked number four, and handling administrative tasks being ranked number six. This implies that RAs feel they are well prepared to utilize these three administrative tasks. On the other hand, setting personal limits ranked 15 out of 20, programming ranked 18 out of 20, personal time management ranked 19 out of 20, and personal stress management ranked 20 out of 20. This means that RAs do not feel as prepared for utilizing those four skills. When comparing the statistics from Section One and Section Two of the survey, one notes that personal time management ranks number two in the skills

utilized per week, while it ranks number 19 in being prepared to utilize the skill.

One would also note that dealing with disciplinary matters ranks number 17.5 in

the skills utilized per week, while ranking number one in preparation. These

differences show that the training staff puts a lot of emphasis on job related

responsibilities such as dealing with disciplinary matters, being available to

residents, and handling administrative tasks, while putting little emphasis on

skills to promote personal well being such as time management and stress

management.

Although some extreme and noteworthy values are present, when viewing

the data as a whole, no major relationships can be derived. The individual skills

emphasized in training are not always the skills utilized most often by RAs. For

example, as previously mentioned, RAs feel very prepared to deal with

disciplinary matters, yet dealing with disciplinary matters is something RAs do

not utilize often. One reason could be that the training staff places a high level of

importance on dealing with disciplinary matters, regardless of how often that skill

is used. This demonstrates that the training staff does not emphasize all of the

skills that can help develop the RA into a more competent leader, as expected in

the Introduction. Instead, the training staff puts emphasis primarily on job-

related skills.

However, when viewing the skills grouped in their respective skill areas as

opposed to solely the individual skills, the data demonstrates that the

communication skill area is the most utilized skill area by RAs, as well as the

area that the RAs are the best prepared for in training. This implication

illustrates that the training staff understands the importance of communication in

the role of the RA. The data also shows that the administrative skill area and the

analytical skill area are the least utilized by the RAs, as well as the areas that the

RAs feel they are the least prepared for in training. This comparison

demonstrates that while the RA staff is not trained according to how often

specific skills are utilized, the staff is trained according to the importance of each

skill area. This supports the expectation stated in the Introduction. Because the

survey used did not collect data on how important RAs considered each of the

skills, one cannot imply whether or not the training staff placed the appropriate

importance on each skill. Further research will be required to analyze this area.

The Conclusion and Discussion chapter will discuss more of these limitations,

along with suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

As discussed in the Findings chapter, there are several instances when the RAs ranked a skill high in utilization, but low in training and vice-versa. This chapter will expand upon those issues as well as the instances when training and utilization were ranked similarly. This chapter will also discuss limitations that were present in the study, as well as the importance of further research in this area.

Contributions

Further training can benefit by taking into consideration the RAs assessment of training and utilization of skills. The following table (Table 6) presents a summary of each skill grouped in its respective skill area and the average value assigned by the RAs on the surveys.

Table 6 – Comparison of Rank Order for Individual Skills

	Utilized Rank Order	Trained Rank Order
Communication Skill Area:		
Listening skills with residents	5	5
Understanding personality types of residents	6	7
Working in groups with residents	15	9
Interpersonal skills with residents	4	11
Leadership Skill Area:		
Personally abiding by policies	1	3
Community building for residents	11	8
Role modeling for residents	3	10
Motivating residents to participate in community	14	16

Table 6 cont.

	Utilized Rank Order	Trained Rank Order
Administrative Skill Area:		
Personal time management	2	19
Availability to residents with concerns	7	4
Setting personal limits	8	15
Personal stress management	9.5	20
Handling administrative tasks	13	6
Dealing with disciplinary matters with residents	17.5	1
Programming with residents	19	18
Analytical Skill Area:		
Personal ethical decision-making	9.5	13
Problem-solving for residents	12	17
Counseling skills with residents	16	14
Conflict resolution skills with residents	17.5	2
Crisis intervention skills with residents	20	12

Two key trends can be identified in the data. First, certain skills showed noteworthy differences between the amount of utilization and the amount of preparation in training. For instance, this data demonstrates that the RAs feel they are not as prepared for skills that help personal well being as they are for skills directly related to job performance. By incorporating skills that help the RA's well being into training, the residence life program at UND will not only enhance the job performance of the RA, but the personal wellness of the RA, too. Similar conclusions can be drawn regarding conflict resolution and disciplinary issues. The training staff may need to evaluate the importance of training RAs for skills that are not utilized often.

The second trend identified in the data is the overall similarity between utilization and the amount of preparation in training for skill areas. The similarities suggest that the overall training RAs receive is effective in helping

prepare students for the RA role. For example, the data remained relatively constant for the communication skill area, further demonstrating the importance of communication in the role of the RA. The data reveals that the communication skill area is utilized more than any other skill area, and is subsequently given more attention in training.

The implications of the data will enable the residence life staff at UND to improve the training program to better meet the needs of the RA staff. The data from the survey will not, however, reveal exactly how the training could be improved or what the staff currently likes about the training. The staff will be able to alter the current training program to alleviate the gaps mentioned previously, but further studies would need to be developed to improve training further.

Limitations and Suggestions

As previously stated, one of the limitations of this survey is that there was no quantification of the importance of each skill by the RA. One suggestion would be to add a section onto the survey that would require the RAs to rate each of the 20 skills according to importance. This quantification would give the researcher an additional tool to evaluate the effectiveness of the training that the RA receives for the RA position.

Another limitation dealt with the demographics of the sample. The sample was small, and it was not culturally diverse, therefore it may not be a true representation of the population of RAs. Future research would benefit from

distributing the surveys to various schools around the United States to achieve a larger, more diverse sample pool.

Finally, the survey was distributed at the beginning of the second semester. The limitation of distributing the survey that late in the academic year presents two problems. The first problem is that RAs may have forgotten much of what they accomplished earlier in the year. The second problem is that the RAs may not remember everything they learned in training at the beginning of the year. One way to remedy this limitation would be to use a longitudinal study in which the survey is distributed several times throughout the academic year to the same RAs. This remedy would give more data to the researcher for comparison, as well as identify any changes in the RAs' viewpoints as the year progresses.

The suggestions may be applied separately or together to future research. The breadth of the data would be more representative of the larger population, as well as give residence life professionals important data to use in future training.

This thesis answered the three questions presented in the Introduction. RAs at the University of North Dakota feel that training prepares them well for their roles as RAs, with a few notable exceptions. Looking at these exceptions and restructuring the training program to meet the needs of the RA staff can improve training. This would help alleviate the current gap between what skills RAs utilize and what skills RAs learn in training.

Students attend colleges and universities across the nation in the hopes of receiving an education. By becoming a part of the university community, students not only receive an academic education, but they also learn the skills relevant to thrive in a community. Problems in this community arise when the RAs do not understand the importance of communication and leadership skills in the job of the resident assistant. If the RA is trained to utilize effective communication and leadership skills, then he or she will make a positive impact on not only the community, but more importantly, on the student.

APPENDIX

S   U   R   V   E   Y

Please complete the survey from beginning to end. There is no time limit, and there are no right or wrong answers. Please finish each section in its entirety, and proceed to the next section. Please DO NOT go back to previous sections that you have completed to make changes. Thank you.

SECTION ONE: How often do you utilize the following skills every week when dealing with residents? Please indicate your response by placing an "X" on the appropriate line for each item based on your experience.

	0 times	1-2 times	3-4 times	5-6 times	7 or more
Your availability to residents with concerns	____	____	____	____	____
Listening skills with residents	____	____	____	____	____
Counseling skills with residents	____	____	____	____	____
Ability to motivate residents to participate in the community	____	____	____	____	____
Handling administrative tasks (paperwork)	____	____	____	____	____
Working in groups with residents	____	____	____	____	____
Programming for residents	____	____	____	____	____
Role modeling for residents	____	____	____	____	____
Problem solving for residents	____	____	____	____	____
Personally abiding by policies	____	____	____	____	____
Personal time management	____	____	____	____	____
Conflict resolution skills with residents	____	____	____	____	____
Crisis intervention skills with residents	____	____	____	____	____
Interpersonal skills with residents	____	____	____	____	____
Understanding the different personality types of residents	____	____	____	____	____
Dealing with disciplinary matters with residents	____	____	____	____	____
Personal stress management	____	____	____	____	____
Personal ethical decision making	____	____	____	____	____
Setting your own personal limits	____	____	____	____	____
Community building for residents	____	____	____	____	____

SECTION TWO: In this section, I would like to know what you think about the training you received as a Resident Assistant. Please read each of the following statements and indicate how much you agree or disagree by marking an "X" on the appropriate line.

SA = Strongly Agree   MA = Moderately Agree   N = Neutral   MD = Moderately Disagree
SD = Strongly Disagree

	SA	MA	N	MD	SD
Training prepared me to program for residents.	___	___	___	___	___
Training prepared me to utilize time management.	___	___	___	___	___
I was prepared to set limits in my life during training.	___	___	___	___	___
Training prepared me to manage my stress.	___	___	___	___	___
Training prepared me to role model for residents.	___	___	___	___	___
Training prepared me to deal with disciplinary matters concerning residents.	___	___	___	___	___
I was prepared to be available to residents in training.	___	___	___	___	___
I was prepared to understand the different personality types of residents in training.	___	___	___	___	___
I was prepared to work in groups with residents during training.	___	___	___	___	___
Training prepared me to handle administrative tasks.	___	___	___	___	___
Training prepared me to abide by policies.	___	___	___	___	___
I was prepared to resolve conflicts with residents during training.	___	___	___	___	___
I was prepared to listen to residents in training.	___	___	___	___	___
Training prepared me to build community with my residents.	___	___	___	___	___
Training prepared me to counsel residents.	___	___	___	___	___
Training prepared me to make ethical decisions.	___	___	___	___	___
Training prepared me to intervene in a resident's crisis.	___	___	___	___	___
I was prepared to utilize interpersonal skills with residents during training.	___	___	___	___	___
I was prepared to motivate residents to participate in the community during training.	___	___	___	___	___
I was prepared to problem solve for residents in training.	___	___	___	___	___

SECTION THREE: Please answer the following questions about yourself by circling the appropriate answer.

Age:	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25 and up

Semesters of experience as an RA:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

Year in academic study:	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Graduate

Gender:	Male	Female

Type of residents you work with:	All-male	All-female	Co-ed

Thank you for your time and efforts in completing this survey!

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