CLARK, DAVID E., Ph.D. Resident Assistant Performance: an Analysis of Relevant Factors as Determined by their Residents. (2008)
Directed by Dr. Deborah Taub. 85 pp.

There are volumes of research examining the intricacies of higher education, many of which explore the area of residential life on college and university campuses. Despite this wealth of literature, however, there is very little that directly examines the various factors which influence resident assistant performance as evaluated by their residents. This study explores this area through six basic research questions designed to identify the most significant predictors of resident assistant performance. The data for this study were collected at a single, private institution in the southeast over the course of three years. Within each year, the resident assessments of resident assistants were compared to factors such as grade point average, ethnicity, and number of residents to determine which, if any, of the predictors accounted for a statistically significant portion of the evaluations scores.

According to the results of this study, none of the six factors examined were found statistically significant across all three years. The ethnicity, grade point average, side of campus on which the resident assistant worked all proved to be statistically significant predictors of performance in two of the three years. Two of the remaining factors, the number of residents and level of experiences, were statistically significant in only one of three years in which data were collected. The gender of the resident assistant was not found to predict performance in any of the three data sets.

RESIDENT ASSISTANT PEFORMANCE: AN ANALYSIS OF RELEVANT

FACTORS AS DETERMINED BY THEIR RESIDENTS

by

David E. Clark

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro
2008

Approved by

_____

Committee Char

To my wife, Kimber: thank you for your unwavering support of this endeavor. Without

you, this would not have been possible.

To my parents, sister, family, and friends: thank you for the years of patience and

encouragement.

To Nana Chappell: thank you for inspiring me at an early age to become an educator.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of

The Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair: _____

Deborah Taub

Committee Members: _____

Don Reichard

_____

Jen Day Shaw

_____

Cherry Callahan

03/19/2008_____

Date of Acceptance by Committee

03/19/2008_____

Date of Final Oral Examination

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Through the years it has taken to complete this study, numerous members of my committee at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and staff at Wake Forest University have offered countless hours of their time. Dr. Deborah Taub joined my committee as chair halfway through my process and offered invaluable support and insight. Dr. Don Reichard served as my committee chair for the first half of my experience and then as a general member following his geographic relocation. For the duration of his service, Dr. Reichard provided exceptional leadership. Dr. Jen Day Shaw served as a faculty member during one of my first courses in the program. Through her course and her substantive practical experience, I gained valuable insight into the field of higher education in general and my topic in particular. Dr. Cherry Callahan, despite having never worked with me in class or otherwise, took a chance and elected to serve on my committee. Without her graciousness in this capacity, and the subsequent insights and leadership she offered, this final piece may never have been realized.

My colleagues and supervisors at Wake Forest University were also extremely important in the completion of this study. Countless undergraduate, graduate, and professional staff served as sounding boards and offered their time and ideas to help me in the process. Specifically, Connie Carson, as the director of my department when I started this dissertation, colleague, and friend, offered not only financial support, but encouraged my professional development through the pursuit of this degree by offering whatever resources she could without me even having to ask. Dr. Donna McGalliard, as my supervisor, colleague, and friend, not only supported the professional support, but filled in for me at work when I was in class, offered insights into improving my study,

and provided a reassuring voice when the doctoral program reached its most difficult

moments.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Residential living, in some capacity, has been part of the culture of higher education for hundreds of years. Blimling (1998), in his exploration of the history of residence halls, described bands of students living together in make-shift outdoor dwellings, in rented rooms from townspeople, and in hostels as early as the thirteenth century. Blimling described how, throughout the next few centuries, these early arrangements formalized into "dormitory" options, which were offered by the institutions of higher education. Originating from the French word *dormir* (meaning "to sleep"), the first "dorms" were designed as nothing more than places for students to sleep. According to Blimling, very little substance was offered that would complement the learning taking place inside the classroom. Study space, programmatic offerings, and student development opportunities were entirely absent from these initial options. Because of these realities, early residential living choices for students, outside of the requisite bed space, were incredibly dissimilar from the opportunities offered later.

A glimpse into the higher education landscape of the 19th and early 20th centuries reveals an image largely unfamiliar to modern students, faculty, and staff. During these years, American college and university administrative oversight, for instance, was starkly different from contemporary higher education (Blimling, 1998). Rather than the current,

predominant model of specially trained administrators managing residential facilities, faculty instead served in this role. As a result, faculty existed not only as educators, but as enforcers of residential discipline as well. This, coupled with the deficiencies described above, often created a contentious living and learning atmosphere. Students during this period not only lacked opportunities to develop outside the classroom, but, because of the environment described above, they also were forced to see faculty in the dual role of both student advocate and of disciplinarian.

The path chosen by the United States was not the only model of higher education in the world. This model of faculty serving dual roles, for instance, existed in stark contrast to Europe, where proctors, deans, and other college and university officials fulfilled these responsibilities. In addition to residing in this adversarial environment with their faculty, students in the United States were also faced with extremely poor living conditions. Blimling (1998, p. 26) declared that "rat-infested," "dilapidated," and "disheveled" would all be appropriate words to describe student housing in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As the last century progressed, however, student housing experienced a profound change. The advent of women's colleges, which demanded higher housing standards than those of men, a nostalgia for the perceived residential glory days of the middle of the 19th century, and a need to house the nation's poor students, who could not afford private options, all precipitated the increase in standards (Blimling). These changes to the physical structures occurred simultaneously with significant changes in management philosophies for residential spaces in higher education.

The 1950s was the genesis of contemporary residence halls (Blimling, 1998). With populations swelling with GI Bill recipients, colleges and universities were forced

to construct countless residential spaces. Consequently, institutions were forced to staff the newly constructed residence halls, as the previous model of using faculty was insufficient. General administrators and newly minted specialists, as well as some faculty members, all served in leadership capacities in the residence halls during this time. As the years progressed, the role of the specialists increased. In an effort to come to terms with their new responsibilities, the first organization of professionals in the field was started. This organization would ultimately become the Association of College and University Housing Officers—International (ACUHO-I), which includes hundreds of institutions and thousands of professionals among its membership. It was these professionals who substantively changed the staffing models within the residence halls. They hired paraprofessional student staff who would eventually become the resident assistants (RAs) found in the American residence halls of today. As a result of this professionalizing of the field, which included conferences and other educational opportunities for these specialists, it became far more responsive to the cultural changes that occurred on the national landscape during the 1960s and 1970s. Institutions were no longer required to adhere to *in loco parentis*, or in place of the parents, as fervently as in decades prior. Consequently, the rules and regulations that had governed student life were lessened considerably during these decades. The following years, according to Blimling, marked a manifestation of residence life into the general concept with which we are familiar today. It is this period of residential living that served as the focal point of the study.

　　Although the RA position has become commonplace within higher education, there are many different perspectives about its fundamental role. Some researchers base

the need for RAs on the demand of housing departments to provide personal, social and

academic development opportunities to the students in their charge (Bierman &

Carpenter, 1994). Similarly, Blimling (1998) contended that five primary responsibilities

of RAs are role model, administrator, counselor, teacher, and student. Other scholars,

however, believe that these staff members are the front lines for disseminating the overall

value structure of the institution (Johnson & Kang, 2006). Rather than limiting the

importance of RAs to a few different categorical responsibilities, researchers such as

Bowman and Bowman (1995) believe the significance of the position lies in its influence

in all of the aforementioned areas. According to this perspective, RAs serve students in

countless capacities, some of which are enumerated in their job description and others

that are harder to define. Although much more vague, this last perspective is probably

the most comprehensive description of the countless roles and responsibilities that RAs

must manage. The common message that can be drawn from these scholars is clear:

because of their undeniable impact on student life, it is paramount that researchers and

practitioners alike understand the RA position if they hope to effectively serve the

students on their campuses.

Research Problem

Student affairs professionals working in the area of residence life have a daunting

task. They share at least partial responsibility for such disparate facets as building

design, staffing structures, programming models, and countless other needs for the

students in their charge. Yet, all of these responsibilities notwithstanding, many of their

courses of action are based on anecdotal or incomplete information. Although some

research has explored the impact of items such as training initiatives on RA performance

(Elleven, Allen, & Wircenski, 2001; Komives, 1991; Murray, Snider, & Midkiff, 1990), the scholarly portfolio on other, more basic factors, is largely nonexistent. In the vast and complex arena of RAs for instance, professionals in the field must make hiring, placement, and evaluation decisions for their student staff. While the micro portions of each of these areas are informed by scholarly research, at the macro level there is a significant research void. In other words, the absence of a comprehensive body of literature on the topics suggests that the choices made in these capacities by professionals are based largely on conjecture. This approach is not entirely without its merits, however. Student affairs professionals at most colleges and universities have decades of experience, degrees specific to higher education, and professional development opportunities through which they acquire information that aids their decision making processes. Still, because the decisions have not been supported by the research, whether or not these are "best-practices" on the part of practitioners has yet to be determined. Rather than relying solely on the anecdotal experiences of both themselves and others, administrators in the field of residence life should have research to depend on as well.

Although RAs are a critical component of contemporary residence life programs, relatively little empirical research has addressed this integral facet of student affairs. To this day, a number of specific questions remain unanswered. What influence, for example, does grade point average have, if any, on the success or failure of an RA? Similarly, what role does the architecture of a building have on staff performance? Do RAs who are assigned to traditional style floors perform better than those who are selected to serve residents who reside in suites? In regard to number of residents, do RAs who have fewer residents generally perform better than those who have more? Does

gender influence the reported performance of RAs? Does ethnicity? Understanding the factors that affect RA performance will better equip scholars to conduct further research and practitioners to do their jobs. Although RAs are often evaluated by their supervisors, peers, and themselves, this study focused on the evaluation of RA performance by those students whom they serve in the residence halls.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the various factors that influence resident assistant performance at one private institution of higher education. As opposed to previous research (Beebe & Malouff, 1994; Murray, Snider, & Midkiff, 1999), this study did not focus on factors such as training, academic classes created to supplement the position, or similar initiatives designed to improve performance. Instead, this study examined RA evaluation scores as reported by their residents. These evaluation scores then were compared and contrasted to demographic data collected by the department regarding the RAs, including their gender, ethnicity, and years of experience. The scores also were compared to Grade Point Average (GPA), number of residents served, and classification of students on the hall (first-year versus upper-class). Ultimately, the researcher attempted to account for portions of the variance in the reported RA evaluation scores.

Significance of the Study

As described in the Research Problem section above, there is a significant void in the body of literature relating to RAs. Because of this deficiency in the research, this study was important for informing both professionals and scholars as to the various factors which influence RA performance. Although the results of this study are not

comprehensive or applicable to all institutions, numerous aspects of residential life stand

to gain. By fully understanding which factors influence performance, for instance,

facility and housing managers in the field of residence life will better understand where to

place RA rooms within new or renovated buildings. Similarly, individuals who select

RAs will have a more thorough understanding of what characteristics they should be

searching for in prospective candidates. If it is determined, for instance, that students

with higher GPAs do not have a significant performance advantage over those with lower

academic standing, then professionals may decide that this is not an appropriate hiring

criterion. The same types of situations are also true for training and evaluation of RAs.

By fundamentally understanding the students employed as RAs and the factors which

influence their perceived success by the residents in their charge, researchers and

professionals will be able to more adeptly construct positive residential living and

learning environments.

Definitions

Although the researcher has tried to remove as much jargon from this study as

possible, there are still a few terms that merit explanation to the casual reader.

Student affairs is a general term on college and university campuses used to describe the

work of professional and paraprofessional staff members who serve as support personnel

to the academic greater mission of the institution, including the augmentation of student

learning by creating educational opportunities outside the classroom. Although they are

not typically faculty members, they serve the students through offices such as career

services, judicial affairs, residence life and housing, counseling services, and student

development. The reporting structure for RAs is generally included within the
framework of divisions of student affairs.

Residence life -- For the purpose of this study, residence life is a phrase used to describe
the department within student affairs that manages student housing on college and
university campuses. At some institutions, residence life includes only the
administrative, assignments, student staffing, and/or programmatic functions of the
department. Although often included in the same department, there may be a separate
"housing" office that includes oversight of the physical facilities, such as construction,
renovations, and maintenance. When referring to this area, the terms "facilities" or
"housing" will be used.

Facilities – the administrative unit that includes oversight of the physical facilities.

Housing – another term used for "facilities."

Resident assistant/resident advisor/RA -- Although these terms can mean a variety of
different things depending on the campus in question, in this study the phrase will
describe a very specific population. Undergraduate students employed by an institution
of higher education to serve students who reside in campus housing constitute the
functional definition of RAs. In other words, for the scope of this study, RAs are
undergraduate students who live and work in the residence halls and whose primary
responsibility on campus is serving the other students on their floors.

Administrators/practitioners -- As discussed in the preceding paragraph, this study
focused on the undergraduate staff in the residence halls. Because of this, the specific
professional and administrative positions in the department will not be explained.
Instead, the expressions "administrators" and "practitioners" will be used interchangeably

throughout this study. The terms will refer to professional staff members within student affairs who serve at or above the management level and have significant decision-making power. Generally, but not always, these individuals will have advanced degrees in higher education or a closely related field.

In addition to staff, there are also facilities-related terms that warrant clarification. Specifically, there are three different residence hall types that will be referenced in this study. It is important to remember these distinctions in living arrangements throughout this study.

Traditional style residence halls are the most common residence hall type. They are generally comprised of numerous rooms that are served by a common bathroom. In traditional style residence halls, 20-50 students usually share a bathroom.

Suite style residence halls -- In this semi-private configuration, approximately 4-10 students share a bathroom. Occasionally, the students also share a common living room and/or kitchen.

Apartment living -- Generally, 1-4 students share at least one bathroom in this setting. The students also usually have some type of living and kitchen space that they share.

 "Best practices" refers to procedures that have been identified as exemplary in the field. Although this expression can be used in a variety of ways, in this study it will refer to practices that have been proven as stellar in both research and in actual application. Best-practice approaches, because of their support in the literature and proven track record in the field, are the ideal courses of action for the situations.

Research Questions

Although this study will inform scholars and practitioners on a variety of levels, there are a few fundamental research questions that are its focus. Specifically:

1)   What impact does the number of residents on the floor of an RA have on his or her performance?

2)   What impact does the gender of an RA have on his or her performance?

3)   What impact does academic classification (i.e. first year, second year, etc.) of residents on the floor of an RA have on his or her performance?

4)   What impact does the ethnicity of an RA have on his or her performance?

5)   What impact does the grade point average of an RA have on his or her performance?

6)   What impact does the level of experience of an RA have on his or her performance?

By answering these questions, the researcher provided scholars and practitioners alike with ample relevant information. For practitioners, this study offered insights into hiring practices, staffing models, and building design. If it was found, for instance, that grade point average had no bearing on performance, then practitioners may want to consider the rationale for placing such great emphasis on minimum academic standards for RAs. Similarly, if it was found that as the number of residents on an RA's floor increases, their performance decreases, then administrators could examine the placement and prominence of RA rooms in buildings. For researchers, the findings of each of these research questions would represent only initial findings. Therefore, subsequent efforts

would certainly be merited on a larger scope to determine the broad applicability of the

findings.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Context

The study of student life within residence halls as a component of higher

education is not a new phenomenon. For decades, researchers have explored the

perceived need for these professional and paraprofessional staffs in augmenting the

development of undergraduate students. Blimling (1998), Kohlberg and Hersh (1977),

Murphy and Gilligan (1980), and Thomas and Chickering (1984), for instance, all

suggested that the growth and development of undergraduate students in colleges and

universities is positively correlated with a competent residence life staff. While

numerous studies have illustrated the fundamental importance of residence life staffs in

general and resident advisors/assistants (RAs) in particular, few have substantively

explored the aggregated characteristics that influence their successes or failures. In other

words, many scholars have examined specific aspects of the RA position, but there has

been little research that has assessed which factors are the most influential in their job

performance. This chasm in the literature prohibits administrators in the field of higher

education from creating the most effective staffing models on their campuses. Through a

review of the relevant literature related to this topic, this paper will provide a foundation

for a subsequent study of the items that influence RA effectiveness. Specifically, this

literature review will examine the internal factors of RA performance, including

motivation, role ambiguity and burnout, self-efficacy, burnout, leadership ability, and other personality traits. Furthermore, the literature review will also explore factors which influence RA performance, such as training, supervision, evaluations, and the menagerie of issues related to race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation of residents.

<div align="center">*Internal Factors of Resident Assistant Performance*</div>

RA Motivation

In order to fully appreciate the factors that influence the performance of RAs, it is important to understand their motivations for assuming the position. Bierman and Carpenter (1994) studied 327 resident assistants at 46 colleges and universities in the Southwest, in an exploration of the motivation of resident assistants. Utilizing a satisfaction survey designed specifically for educational settings (Miskel & Heller, 1973), Bierman and Carpenter assessed six basic characteristics found to influence motivation in the workplace: potential for personal challenge and development, desire for a competitive work environment, tolerance for job-related pressure, need for a safe and secure job routine, willingness to perform well even if the position is not career track, and a concern for environmental aspects of the position (i.e. availability of air conditioning). Bierman and Carpenter found a number of significant distinctions between various demographic groups of RAs. New RAs, for instance, assigned much more value to comfortable surroundings and relevant training than did their peers who were returning to the position for a second or third year.

Similarly, female RAs also attributed more importance to comfort and training than their male counterparts. The gender differences were not limited to these components of the study. Male RAs also derived more work satisfaction out of

competition within the workplace and, unlike their female colleagues, more commonly felt that pay increases should reflect performance rather than simply duration of service. This myriad of motivational differences is extremely enlightening, as it demonstrates the variety of reasons RAs may be personally inclined to excel, simply meet expectations, or not reach their performance potential. The results of Bierman's and Carpenter's study are extremely important not only for the research considered in this paper, but for practitioners and administrators in higher education as well. By understanding the factors that influence resident assistant motivations, college and university administrators can develop better staff training programs, consider adjusting position responsibilities so that RAs have more opportunity to engage in job functions which they enjoy, and modify evaluation methods to offer the feedback most appreciated by the students in this position.

Role Ambiguity and Conflict

Deluga and Winters (1990) found a series of stressors that actually negatively impact their performance. Specifically, Deluga and Winters explored the effect of role ambiguity and role conflict on RAs while employed in the position. A total of 42 RAs at a single private institution in the Northeast were sampled as part of this study through a series of questionnaires designed to measure ambiguity and conflict. Deluga and Winters also studied RA performance, which was assessed through 1300 surveys distributed to their residents and an evaluation completed by their immediate supervisors. The authors defined role ambiguity as confusion in regard to job expectations. Similarly, role conflict was described as the internal job-related struggle experienced by many RAs. The challenge of confronting a group of peers engaged in underage drinking, for instance,

may cause profound role conflict for RAs, as they must balance the need to be accepted by their peers with the incumbent job responsibilities. Although the sample size and scope of the study precluded the authors from making broad generalizations, their results were nonetheless enlightening. Resident assistants who experienced heightened role ambiguity or conflict indicated that they experienced increased stress while employed. More importantly, they also found that, as the stress of conflict and ambiguity increased among RAs, their job performance as determined by the immediate supervisor declined precipitously. As with motivation, the correlation that ambiguity and conflict have with the ultimate successes or failures of resident assistants are performance-related factors that must be considered by both researchers and administrators.

Self-Efficacy

In an effort to further discern the internal factors that influence an individual's level of accomplishment as an RA, Denzine and Anderson (1999) examined the role played by self-efficacy. Although self-efficacy is a broad term that could be explored in a variety of ways, the authors chose to investigate the concept as it specifically relates to an RA's perception of his or her ability to fulfill the responsibilities of the job. The sample included 111 RAs at three doctorate granting public institutions in different geographic areas. Resident assistants were mailed a survey with 22 questions designed to measure their self-efficacy in the position. Although a majority of the participants identified themselves as female (57%) and Caucasian (70%), there was still significant diversity in the study among school classification, status as a new or returning RA, and the type of building in which the RAs worked.

The results of the study by Denzine and Anderson (1999) are telling. RAs, in general, had a very positive perception of their ability to successfully foster the development of their residents. Interestingly, unlike previous studies such as Bierman and Carpenter (1994), the researchers found no difference between genders. Not all of their findings were contrary to previous research efforts, however. As with Deluga and Winters (1990), for example, who found that a positive perspective on role clarity and conflict increased perceived performance, Denzine and Anderson discovered that RAs who had high self-efficacy felt that they were doing better in the position than those staff members who had low self-efficacy. The significance of this trend cannot be overstated. These studies, while markedly different, both demonstrate the importance of perception in the RA position. According to the findings of Denzine and Anderson, institutions that cultivate a positive workplace have increased performance among their staff members. Although they only used self-evaluation from the RAs to measure performance, this finding is still extremely important. The researchers have suggested that self-efficacy, a component of the RA position that is generally not buttressed with training or considered residence life programs, influences the performance of the staff members.

Burnout

In addition to the numerous factors described above affecting resident assistant performance, researchers have found still other components of the position that may influence the success or failure experienced. In particular, burnout among RA has been a subject of research.

Hardy and Dodd (1998) examined the role played by burnout in the career of an RA. As with Deluga and Winters (1990), Hardy and Dodd focused their research on a

relatively small sample. A total of 57 RAs were sampled at a private, midsized

Midwestern university. Hardy and Dodd gauged burnout as it related to

depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and personal accomplishment using the

Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS; Maslach & Jackson,

1986). Each of these individual characteristics assisted the researchers in obtaining an

overall perspective of the level of burnout among the sampled RAs. Not surprisingly, the

researchers discovered that RAs with only first year students had a much different

experience than those with a mixed group or only upper-class men and women. The

researchers found, for instance, that RAs of first year students suffered from much greater

burnout than did their peers. This heightened stress level can most likely be attributed to

the increased need for academic assistance and the help required making the transition to

college by first year students. Female and male RAs had the same frequency of burnout.

This lack of difference between the genders was not entirely surprising, as the other

research described above (Bierman & Carpenter, 1994; Denzine & Anderson, 1999) with

resident advisors has also reported mixed results in this arena. As with Deluga and

Winters (1990), the study by Hardy and Dodd, because of its scope, has limited potential

for generalization. Despite this weakness, however, the research still provides valuable

insight into yet another facet of the position which may influence RA job performance.

Paladino, Murray, Newgent, and Gohn (2005) assessed the role that burnout plays

in the effectiveness of RAs. Unlike the previous research on the topic, however, the work

by Paladino et al. included a much larger sample size of nearly 200 RAs and covered two

institutions. There were 150 RAs employed at the large, public university in the

southeast, while the remaining 40 RAs were from a midsized university in the southeast.

This research breadth adds significantly to the validity of this more recent study. To assess burnout the researchers chose the MBI-HSS (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). The MBI-HSS measures three factors: depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and personal accomplishment. The instrument was adjusted slightly to more accurately reflect the collegiate population. Specifically, some generic questions such as "I feel emotionally drained from my work" were adjusted for the audience to read "I feel emotionally drained from my work as an RA." The researchers found that RAs at the midsized university in the study experienced much more depersonalization than their peers at the larger institution. While this may seem counterintuitive, the authors attributed the greater depersonalization at the smaller university to the different departmental structure. In other words, because there were fewer professional staff members at the midsized institution, the RAs may have been asked to take on more responsibility and thus have to neglect some of the needs of their residents. In addition to its relationship with institutional size, Paladino et al. found a significant relationship between depersonalization and gender. According to their findings, male RAs experienced much greater depersonalization than their female counterparts. The study also found that non-Caucasians encountered increased depersonalization. These findings demonstrate that the demographic composition of RAs may influence their responses to the stresses of the position. Although this study explored only two universities, it provided valuable data regarding RA burnout. As future researchers consider the factors that influence RA performance, this study suggests that burnout should be among the areas examined.

RA Leadership Practices

Effectively measuring the factors that influence the job performance of resident assistants requires an understanding of what permits the best staff members to excel. Posner and Brodsky (1993) attempted to add to this body of literature by examining the leadership practices of the most effective RAs. Their comprehensive study included not only 333 RAs, but more than 1300 of their residents and five of their supervisors as well. This type of study permitted Posner and Brodsky to explore the trait of leadership from three divergent perspectives. The study was also geographically diverse, as six public colleges and universities from across the United States were included. The researchers provided the supervisors, resident assistants, and residents with an instrument that gauged the leadership practices of the respective RA in question. Items such as the RA's ability to develop community on his or her floor, serve as a positive role model, and effectively hold floor meetings were included in the instrument. By exploring leadership from so many different perspectives and from a geographically diverse area, Posner and Brodsky were able to develop an inclusive and easily transferable knowledge base on effective RA leadership. The RAs who considered themselves highly effective leaders were also thought by their residents to be high achieving. Conversely, RAs who believed themselves to be less effective leaders were viewed as performing less satisfactorily by their constituents. The same pattern was also demonstrated, although not as strongly, by the supervisors of the RAs. The researchers concluded that the leadership ability of an RA is directly related to his or her effectiveness in the position. Because of this finding, an appreciation of the traits of a successful RA leader is paramount for practitioners and scholars as they endeavor to understand the job performance of these staff members.

Specifically, practitioners can place more emphasis on leadership activities when selecting RAs and researchers can further examine the impact that related leadership initiatives have on job performance.

Other Personality Traits and Their Relationship to Performance

Although Posner and Brodsky (1993) found the leadership trait to be directly related to resident assistant job performance, it is not the only personality characteristic that is associated with the success or failure of students in the position. Deluga and Mason (2000) explored the bearing that conscientiousness, extraversion, and positive affect had on the performance of RAs. Conscientiousness was defined by the researchers as the dependability, responsibility, and perseverance of an individual. Extraversion was described as a person's general sociability and interpersonal skills. The final element of their study, positive affect, was characterized as the ability of an individual to have predominantly positive emotions and a healthy sense of personal well-being. To assess the multiple factors described above, the researchers used abbreviated versions of much larger instruments. The study sample by Deluga and Mason included 99 RAs, as well as 372 of their residents, at a large, private university in the Northeastern United States

Foremost among the findings by Deluga and Mason (2000) was that the traits of extraversion and positive affect were correlated with the job performance of the resident assistants. The job performance of each RA was measured by a 19 item evaluation survey completed by the residents of each staff member. The survey was developed by a small college in the Northeast to assess their staff performance. Contrary to their hypothesis, however, conscientiousness was not connected with high RA evaluation ratings. Interestingly, the researchers suggested that having lower conscientiousness

tendencies in some RAs might be desired by institutions, as the quick decision making required in so many of the situations faced by these staff members would be stymied by high levels of the trait.

External Factors of Resident Assistant Performance

The Impact of New Training Measures

Resident assistants, as part of their preparation for the serving of students, generally receive substantial training from the college or university by which they are employed. Murray, Snider, and Midkiff (1999) examined the role that training had on the ultimate job performance of 64 RAs at a mid-Atlantic university. Their study was comprised predominantly of first-time staff members (73%) and female (60%) respondents. Based on a needs-assessment conducted previously on the campus, the researchers had determined that the RAs needed guidance on the topic of conflict resolution, as it was previously not included in the training regimen. As a result of this finding, the 64 RAs received supplemental instruction during the fall training period on conflict resolution. The training was conducted by an assistant director within the department in three different sessions containing the exact same information and delivery method. Designed to improve the responsiveness of the RAs to situations involving conflict, the researchers hoped to discern whether or not the formalized training significantly impacted the job performance of the staff members.

In order to gauge the performance change of the RAs, a pretest, developed at the university, was given regarding the topic of conflict resolution. The researchers then conducted a second application of the same test four weeks after the training. Murray and colleagues found that even instructional initiatives as brief as the single effort conducted

during the RAs' fall training can have a profound impact on performance. After the training, RAs were found to have significantly higher scores than they did on the pretest. RAs also demonstrated more positive than negative conflict resolution behaviors by a factor of more than two to one in the semester immediately after the training. The authors suggested, however, that despite the results of their study, training alone may not be enough to improve performance and that, in addition to single training efforts, RA job performance should be continually monitored and honed by their supervisor. Failure to do so, the researchers contended, will result in the techniques learned in training being forsaken for easier or less stressful responses on the part of the RAs. Thus, improved RA job performance cannot necessarily be attributed to a single improvement strategy; rather, progress is contingent upon both initial training and continued vigilance on the part of the supervisor.

Supervision

The role of the direct supervisor

The vast majority of research on resident assistants has concentrated on their internal influences. Motivation, self-efficacy, and burnout, for instance, have all been explored by researchers. Komives (1991), however, undertook a profoundly different approach to the study of RAs. In her research, Komives investigated the part that the RA's supervisor plays in the RA's overall performance. The examination of more than 600 RAs and 70 supervisors or hall directors (HD) at seven public institutions across the Midwest, Northeast, and Southeast by Komives utilized a variety of instruments. Komives found that, although RAs demonstrated an average propensity to do extra work voluntarily, external factors accounted for the majority of this tendency. Specifically, the

quality of the HD accounted for two thirds of the variance RAs displayed regarding additional effort. In other words, Komives found that the more effective the HD, the more likely the RA was to complete the extra work on his or her own volition. Komives also found gender differences in both the leadership styles of the HDs and the receptiveness of the RAs to varying approaches.

In addition to exploring HD leadership in general, Komives (1991) also explored the impact that different styles of supervision had on RA performance. Specifically, the study compared transactional to transformational leadership. Defined as a supervisory style that exchanges pay, praise, and reproach for work, transactional leadership is the traditional model of the employer-employee relationship. Transformational leadership, conversely, encourages managers to inspire vision, endorse exceptional production, and stimulate their supervisees intellectually. According to the results of the Komives study, HDs who employed more of a transformational leadership style enjoyed far greater supervisory success than did those that utilized the transactional approach. For instance, in an analysis of "extra effort" exerted by RAs on specific tasks, Komives found that 66% of the motivation was predicted by the leadership style of the hall director. The importance of this finding cannot be overstressed, as it affirms that the experience of resident assistants is not influenced solely by internal factors. Rather, the supervisory strategies of HDs have a significant impact on the job performance of RAs.

Evaluations

In an effort to further understand the role of the direct supervisor in the job performance of RAs, Malouff and Beebe (1994) examined the function and effectiveness of formal evaluation measures. A total of 21 resident assistants served as participants in

the study at a mid-sized university in Florida. Because the researchers felt that RAs often

misperceived the formal evaluation process, their study involved dividing the staff into

halves. Prior to their meeting with their supervisor, the experimental group received

extensive training on topics such as the purpose, relevant research, and the appropriate

response strategies for formalized evaluations. The control group, conversely, simply

met with their supervisor to receive their evaluation and did not receive the supplemental

training. By dividing the RAs into these two groups, the researchers were able to

determine the effectiveness of prefacing evaluation meetings with deliberate training

efforts.

The results of the study by Beebe and Malouff (1994) highlighted yet another

series of important factors influencing resident assistant job performance. The

researchers found that RAs who received the supplemental training were more receptive

to not only the positive feedback, but constructive criticisms from their supervisor as

well. In addition, the RAs who were in the experimental group took more notes and were

less prone to demonstrating negative behaviors such as being argumentative. These

behavioral improvements suggest that RA job performance can be enhanced through

improvements to the traditional formal evaluation structure. As with some of the other

research initiatives discussed in this literature review, however, the work by Malouff and

Beebe was limited by its sample size and scope. Because only 21 RAs from a single

institution served as the sample size, the ability of scholars and practitioners to generalize

their findings in other environments is limited. This limitation aside, the study still

provides valuable evidence that the productivity of resident assistants can be further

increased by introducing explanatory training measures to the formal evaluation process.

Diversity and RAs

   Responding to diversity-related issues

   Although many situations cause anxiety in the daily lives of resident assistants, few are as stressful as diversity-related issues. Interested in the responses of RAs to issues of diversity, Johnson and Kang (2003) analyzed the confidence of RAs at addressing these types of issues at three predominantly White universities of different sizes and geographic locations. The instrument used in the study was developed by Johnson and Kang. By including a varied collection of settings, the researchers felt as though they would obtain a more accurate representation of the phenomenon in question. A total of 364 RAs served as the sample for the Johnson and Kang study. The instrument employed in the study was designed to measure the confidence of staff members in responding to situations involving cultural diversity in the residence halls. The researchers uncovered many interesting themes in their study on cultural diversity.

   Foremost among them, Johnson and Kang (2003) found that responding effectively to diversity issues varied significantly depending on the setting of an institution. Resident assistants enrolled in institutions set in rural areas, for example, were found to be much more confident in their responses. The researchers also found that the diversity of the staff on which the RA worked contributed to his or her reaction. According to the findings, RAs who served on more diverse staffs were significantly more effective at responding to the issues of cultural diversity than their peers who were on staffs of similar ethnicities and races. These findings should not be over-generalized, however. While this study was exceptional in that it had a large sample size and covered multiple institutions, it was not without its weaknesses. The work by Johnson and Kang

(2006), for instance, had great homogeneity in terms of the population diversity at an

institution. In other words, because all of the schools studied were predominantly White,

the ability of practitioners and researchers at schools with more balanced racial and

ethnic diversity to adapt the results is limited. The widespread applicability of the

findings is also restricted by the fact that all of the institutions examined were public.

Still, despite these weaknesses, the efforts of Johnson and Kang provide a wealth of

important and contemporary data on a topic that undoubtedly influences the job

performance of residence assistants.

GLBT students and the RA position

In addition to issues of race and ethnicity, the question of sexual orientation and

identity also plays a significant role in contemporary residence life. Evans, Reason, and

Broido (2001), in their qualitative analysis of students who self-identified as gay, lesbian,

bisexual, or transgender (GLBT), examined the relationship between students of these

populations and their resident assistants. The researchers conducted their study at a

Research I public institution in the northeastern United States with approximately 40,000

students. Through a series of two to two and half hour interviews with the 20 residents,

the authors assessed the experience that they had with their RAs. The results of this

qualitative research effort underscored the importance of RAs who are supportive of

students who identify themselves as members of the GLBT community. The relationship

between RAs and the GLBT population is significant to job performance because of the

stresses this highly sensitive topic places on the staff member. As described above by

Johnson and Kang (2006), diversity related issues place an incredible burden on RAs and

often precipitate feelings of inadequacy detract from success in the position.

Because this topic is so specific, very little research currently exists. As a result, the work of Evans, Reason, and Broido (2001) is particularly enlightening as it relates to resident assistant job performance. Although the authors uncovered a plethora of relevant information, a few of the findings were much more salient than others. The researchers found that students in the GLBT population not only assumed that all RAs were knowledgeable and open-minded in regard to diversity-related issues, but they also expected them to serve as role-models to the rest of the residential student population. GLBT students also indicated that they felt it was the responsibility of the RA to assist them with the extremely difficult "coming-out" process. Perhaps most importantly, the GLBT students stressed the importance of having students who identify as part of this group serve in the RA role. The inclusion of members of this marginalized population in the RA staffs, the participants felt, would both contribute to the atmosphere of openness and acceptance and improve their overall effectiveness. These findings are extremely important for residence life administrators and researchers in the field, as they illustrate what the constituents of RAs deem important as it relates to diversity.

Diversity specific positions

As with nearly every other facet of higher education, the concept of diversity is extremely important in residence life. In an effort to assess an initiative to improve diversity awareness at Ball State University (BSU), Lawrie and Wessel (2006) examined the effectiveness of a Multicultural [resident] Advisor Program. Because residence halls are a unique venue on college campus that permits the complete integration of divergent intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and cultural perspectives, BSU determined that creating a position specifically for fostering this endeavor could further improve student

development. Begun in 1997 as a pilot program in a single BSU residence hall, the

initiative originally had two Multicultural Advisors (MAs) selected to work with the HD

and the RAs in serving the students. The program was so successful, however, that

within a couple of years it was expanded to include all of the residential facilities at BSU.

In their study, Lawrie and Wessel uncovered some interesting trends regarding the

effectiveness of the MA program. Because it was new, for example, the MA Program

faced an identity and perception crisis on campus. The students, RAs, HDs, and MAs

each had a slightly different viewpoint of the purpose of the newly created position. This

shortcoming of the MA program aside, Lawrie and Wessel still found that the initiative

had a positive impact on the student culture at BSU. In fact, the results were compelling

enough for the researchers to call for BSU to increase the number of MAs serving the

students on campus. This increase, in conjunction with the staff members already in

place, would further improve diversity awareness and advance the overall student culture

at BSU.

In addition to fostering diversity on the BSU campus, the MA position was also

created to relieve RAs of the considerable pressure they often felt to single-handedly

accomplish this monumental task. The study conducted by Lawrie and Wessel (2006),

although important in its own regard for the valuable data it collected, thus reemphasizes

the significance of the RA position. On the vast majority of college and university

campuses in the United States, residence life programs do not have MA's to supplement

the work of resident assistants. As a result, at most institutions, RAs must complete the

daunting task of promoting diversity without assistance. Complex and often

overwhelming issues, including racial identity development, racial and ethnic tensions,

and cultural differences, are often central to the RA position. This incredible

responsibility undoubtedly adds to the stress of the RA position and, consequently,

impacts their job performance as well.

Training

     General training approaches

     There are numerous schools of thought regarding the most effective methods for

training resident assistants, but little in the way of a comprehensive paradigm. Elleven,

Allen, and Wircenski (2001) offered an analysis of the various approaches. To obtain

their data, the researchers surveyed a total of 45 Chief Housing Officers (CHO) at both

public and private institutions in the Southwestern portion of the United States. The

CHOs responded to a variety of questions, including what they felt were the most

important competencies for RAs and how their departments determined which topics

were important enough to be included in training. Although this study was focused on a

particular geographical area, the fact that more than 40 institutions offered their

perspective on RA training makes the data collected by the researchers extremely

relevant. The researchers found that public and private institutions take many similar

approaches to training their RAs. The researchers found only two significant distinctions

in the core training competencies of public and private schools. First, private school

CHOs believed that clerical and administrative tasks were more of a priority than their

public school counterparts. The CHOs at private schools also considered involvement in

cocurricular organizations of greater importance than did those public institutions.

According to the researchers, however, these differences in training priorities are

relatively minor and are a product of the specific cultural realities at the two types of

schools. In regard to how institutions delivered the training, the researchers found many

more discrepancies between the two types of higher learning centers. Upper-level

administrators in public schools, for instance, were found to be directly involved in RA

training only 74% of the time, which is much less than the 91% reported by private

institutions. Although this distinction can most likely be explained by the much smaller

size of most private institutions, it highlights the fact that public school training is most

often delivered by relatively new professionals with less experience. The RA staff at

public schools, therefore, may receive a significantly different delivery of training than

their peers enrolled at private colleges and universities. As researchers assess various

training models and RA job performance statistics in future research, therefore, it is

important that they consider these noteworthy differences in approaches between public

and private institutions.

Conclusion and Areas of Future Research

The current body of research regarding the factors that influence the job

performance of resident assistants is informative. Role ambiguity, conflict, motivation,

burnout, and a variety of other components of the position all were found to affect the

ultimate successes or failures of RAs. Interestingly, however, the research was not as

conclusive on the role gender plays in productivity. Some found a significant

relationship between gender and performance (Bierman & Carpenter, 1994; Paladino et

al., 2005), while others noted no differences whatsoever (Hardy & Dodd, 1998; Denzine

& Anderson, 1999). In addition to this gap in the literature, there was also little research

that explored which factors influenced RA job performance from a holistic perspective.

In other words, while nearly every study examined a compartmentalized aspect of

performance such as diversity, training, or leadership, none of the research efforts investigated the various factors in aggregate to determine which had the most substantial impact. This gap in the literature is significant, as researchers and practitioners are unable to determine which of the assortment of performance-related factors is the most influential, which is the least, and the continuum of factors in between. As a result of the research deficiency, student affairs scholars and administrators are missing the tools necessary to effectively prioritize, research, and respond to the needs of housing departments, RAs, and residents. Consequently, by closing or decreasing this void in the body of literature regarding resident assistant job performance, the field as whole will benefit.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

As indicated in the previous chapter, although the body of literature on RA

performance is significant, there are gaps in the research. To help remedy this deficit of

scholarship, this study addressed one of the fundamental shortcomings. Specifically, the

study examined which demographic characteristics of RAs account for the variance in

their performance. Additionally, the study explored the impact that position placement

may have on performance of the staff members. As opposed to supervisor or peer

evaluation, the performance in this instance was measured by their residents. Throughout

this chapter, in addition to the context of the study, the procedures for the selection of

participants, data collection, and data analysis are described. This information will both

assist subsequent researchers and practitioners in assessing the validity of the study and

also equip them with the tools necessary for replicating the efforts in different

environments.

The specific research questions for this study were:

1) What impact does the number of residents on the floor of an RA have

on his or her performance?

2) What impact does the gender of an RA have on his or her performance?

3)   What impact does academic classification (i.e. first year, second year,

etc.) of residents on the floor of an RA have on his or her performance?

4)   What impact does the ethnicity of an RA have on his or her

performance?

5)   What impact does the grade point average of an RA have on his or her

performance?

6)   What impact does the level of experience of an RA have on his or her

performance?

Context

The context of this study is extremely important to fully understanding not only

the results, but the methodology as well. The data for this study came from a single

private institution of higher education in the southeast. Highly selective with a liberal

arts focus, the institution has approximately 4,000 students in its undergraduate body,

3,100 of whom live on-campus. The institution is also marked by a generally affluent

student body, as well as relative racial homogeneity. In addition, the campus is also

generally divided into two geographic halves, with first year residents occupying one

portion and upperclass students comprising the other. On the half of campus with first

year students, the halls are generally corridor in style, have fewer students per resident

assistant and have many traditional programmatic spaces. The upperclass half of campus,

conversely, has suite and apartment style buildings, have more students per RA, and few

common spaces for programming. Because such a great portion of the undergraduate

population lives on campus, residential life is a significant part of the campus culture.

The researcher had an employment relationship with the institution at the time of data

collection. As will be described in detail later in this section, this had both positive and negative repercussions.

Procedures

It is important to note that the data analyzed by the researcher existed separate from this study. The residence life department collected data on the performance of RAs as part of the regular evaluation process for the RAs. This particular component of the RA evaluation process by the on-campus residents lasted approximately two weeks. During each of the three years of the study, the department contacted all on-campus residents through a variety of techniques. These various strategies, including mass-emails, individualized requests to comply, and door-to-door solicitations from the RAs, each encouraged the residents to take the time to evaluate their RAs. If residents completed the online instrument (Appendix A), their names were taken off the list of remaining respondents and they received no further requests to comply with the request. Once they completed the survey, the residents' names were disassociated with their responses and their responses were entered into a database managed by the institution's information services department. Following the two week collection period, the information services department turned the data over to the housing department.

Demographic and geographic information for the RAs was collected in a much different manner than the performance data. Because the researcher is employed at the institution that provided the sample during the data collection phase, this information was readily available. The researcher acquired all of this information in the departmental rosters and employment files. In collecting this data, the researcher ensured that particular building names, grade point averages, gender, and other such characteristics

were not associated with a particular staff member so as to protect anonymity. As with the data gathered from the residents, the information for the RAs was collected in this capacity for each of the three years of the study.

Participants

Participants in the study lived in twelve residential areas at a selective, private institution in the southeast. During each of the three years of the study, between 1,500 and 1,700 of the 3,100 residents completed the performance evaluation surveys for the RAs who managed their floors. The results of this survey of RAs are the primary component of this research endeavor. Over the three year period in which the data were collected, there were between 92 and 94 RAs employed each year by the housing department. The variation in the staff member numbers was accounted for by the change of a single building from mostly upperclassmen to predominantly freshmen residents. This change in resident demographics merited the addition of RAs to make the freshmen experience equal to other parts of campus. The demographic characteristics of the RAs within this study remained relatively consistent throughout the three years for which data were gathered.

Instrument

Throughout each of the three years in which data were collected, the eight questions listed in Appendix A were asked of the residents. In addition, an introductory statement such as the one in Appendix A was also offered in each instance. These questions were also preceded by a series of demographic questions such as the building of residence, RA, and name of each respondent. The residents were advised that this information was only collected to assist the department of housing in tracking which

students had completed the survey and which had not. The name of the respondent and

the evaluation data were not associated in any way after this initial process. The basic

instrument to which they responded is included in Appendix A. This instrument is

known as the RA Evaluation by Resident (RAER).

This instrument, although simple, asks questions of great importance to the

university's residence life department. Accessibility, initiative, existence as a role model,

fairness in dealing with discipline, programmatic efforts, and dissemination of

information are among the most salient components of the RA job description. It is

important to recognize, however, that the individual staff member is being assessed by

his/her residents, as opposed to his/her supervisor, with this particular instrument. As a

result, questions such as the one regarding discipline may be skewed by perceived

negative interactions between the RA and the student, despite the fact that the staff

member may have performed his or her job perfectly. This limitation notwithstanding,

the instrument still provides the researcher a tool to find which factors may impact the

performance of the RAs on this campus.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed in a variety of ways that warrant explanation. First, it is

important to remember that there are two separate and distinct sets of data. The initial

series of data were the evaluation scores provided by the residents. These evaluation

results ultimately served as the dependent variable in the study. Although this portion of

the data set was not the focus of this research effort, it was important to assess some of its

basic characteristics. The scores for seven of the eight questions were combined to create

an overall evaluation score from each responding resident. Because question three

concerns actions taken by the residents, not by the RAs, it was excluded from the calculation of the evaluation score. Chronbach's alpha was calculated to provide an indication of reliability.

Following this reliability analysis, the researcher examined the various factors that influence the performance of the RAs. The evaluation scores for each RA were summed and averaged to create a mean overall evaluation score for each RA. This evaluation score was the dependent variable against which all of the various independent variables were correlated.

For the purpose of this study, the independent variables were the grade point average (GPA), status as a new or returning staff member, area of campus on which they were employed, number of residents managed, gender, and the ethnicity of each RA. As for the other demographic and geographic factors chosen, each of these were not only attainable for the researcher, but each also played a role in some capacity of the departmental selection, placement, training, evaluation, and rehiring of the RAs. The GPA, for instance, is included on the RA application and a minimum is required to both be hired and retained in the position. The number of residents, similarly, is intentionally less for the RAs of first year students than it is for those serving students who are returning to campus. The housing professionals at this institution, as well as many others, believe that first-year residents need the extra attention provided by a smaller student to RA ratio. As a result, it is important to know if this decision is impacting the experience of residents as reported through evaluation of their RA. The professionals in this housing department, as well as others, base decisions on the other factors as well. Because of potential impact of these choices, each of the factors was compared to the

total evaluation score. The half of campus was important because, at this institution, there are two distinct sides of the residential living experience and the researcher was interested on the performance impact of living on one side versus the other.

To assess the appropriateness of the approaches of this institution, the various data sets collected were analyzed using two different statistical tests. Each statistical test indicated was conducted three separate times, one for each year of data. The first test conducted for each set of data was a Bivariate Correlation test. This test revealed multiple characteristics and themes of the set of data, including the correlation of each factor not only with the dependent variable of total evaluation score, but the inter-item correlation as well. The inter-item correlation measure is extremely important, as a high relationship between the different items may indicate that they account for the same portion of the variance. Second, this test also revealed the significance of the relationship via the Pearson Correlation. The Pearson Correlation determines whether or not the relationship between all of the measured items is significant. This measure is extremely important, as it provides the researcher with strong statistical evidence either affirming or rejecting the hypothesis. Thus, for the research questions below, the first test determined the correlation that each factor has with evaluation score, as well as their interrelatedness of the items.

The second test conducted was a Linear Regression to measure the regression coefficient of various factors in relation to the dependent variable. Linear Regression standardized the coefficients and assessed the portion of the variance of the dependent variable for which each independent variable accounted (Howell, 2002). In addition to simply measuring the regression coefficient, the function also measured the significance

of this relationship. Finally, the test provided a model summary that indicated the

comprehensive relationship of the independent to the dependent variables through

adjusted R square. In other words, the model illustrated the degree to which the factors,

taken in aggregate, account for the variance of total evaluation score. The adjusted R

square provides a general indication of whether or not the dependent variables constitute

a robust portion of the variance. If the model indicates a strong relationship, then the

dependent variables chose account for a great percentage of the variance in the data. If,

however, the relationship is weak, there are likely more variables which may account for

the variance in the total evaluation score.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The data for this study were analyzed on multiple levels. First, the original

resident evaluations of their RAs were tested for reliability. The results of this analysis

are combined within a single section. Next, the descriptive statistics for the overall RA

evaluations are presented. These statistics offer basic information such as total number

RAs, mean evaluation scores, and standard deviations.

Next, the relationship between the RA evaluation scores and the independent

variables was examined. Because the data sets and related results are so large, it is

important to view them individually before analyzing them in aggregate. For each of the

six research questions, the linear regression and bivariate coefficient tests were conducted

on the collected data. A matrix outlining the specifics of these relationships is included

in Appendix B.

Reliability and Validity

Within each year, every RA was evaluated on seven different areas, including

their accessibility, initiative, role modeling, information dissemination, programming,

knowledge, and fairness, each represented by an item on the RAER. To assess reliability,

Chronbach's alpha was determined for each data set. This statistical test determines the

internal consistency of a scale. In other words, this analysis establishes the inter-item

correlation. Chronbach's alpha for the RAER for each of the three years ranged from .915

to .938. See Table 1, Reliability Statistics for a complete summary. These results

demonstrate that data has excellent internal consistency and thus helps affirm that this is

an acceptable set of records upon which to base the study.

Table 1

Reliability Statistics

Data Set	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Year One	.915	7
Year Two	.938	7
Year Three	.937	7

The validity of the RAER is supported by its basis in "best-practices" at other

institutions. The department has spent countless hours examining "best-practices" at

other institutions, attending conferences, and enrolling in benchmarking workshops to

ensure that the data collected is not only internally consistent and reliable, but is valid as

well.

Descriptive Statistics

The basic descriptive statistics for each of three years remain relatively consistent.

See the Descriptive Statistics tables for specifics regarding all three data sets. The items

in Table 2 are all continuous variables that provide information about the staff members.

The last four factors in table 3 are dichotomous variables that were coded either "1" or

"2," depending on the specific need. Within Tables 2 and 3, the descriptive statistics for

each of the three data sets are included for ease of viewing and comparison.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics Part I, Continuous Characteristics of Resident Assistants

	Year One			Year Two			Year Three		
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Evaluation Score	30.7266	2.82249	92	30.7285	3.16617	94	30.9301	2.55822	94
Grade Point Average	3.2603	.42460	92	3.2859	.36579	94	3.2762	.35819	94
Number of Residents	33.2174	11.73782	92	32.2128	11.62392	94	32.2447	11.72231	94

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics Part II, Dichotomous Characteristics of Resident Assistants

	Item 1		Item 2		Item 3		Item 4	
	Male N	Female N	White N	Non-White N	First-year N	Upper-class N	New N	Returner N
Year One	46	46	65	27	50	42	49	43
Year Two	50	44	76	18	52	42	44	50
Year Three	47	47	74	20	52	42	53	41

It is important to note that between years one and two, the department reorganized one of its buildings and added two new staff members. This accounts for the increase in total N from 92 to 94. The number of total campus residents did not increase; therefore, the number of residents per staff member declined by almost a full student. There were no other significant changes to either the department's staffing structure or student housing patterns during these three years.

Correlations

Table 4 presents correlations between each independent variable and evaluation score for every year using the Pearson Correlation framework. The significance for each correlation is also shown.

Table 4

Correlations Between Evaluation Score and Independent Variables

		Grade Point Average	Number of Residents	Gender	White or Non-White	Side of Campus	New or Returner
Year 1	Pearson Correlation	.157	-.179	-.161	-.291**	.181	-.148
Eval Score	Sig. (2-tailed)	.136	.087	.126	.005	.085	.160
Year 2	Pearson Correlation	.219*	-.269**	-.124	-.139	.439**	-.256*
Eval score	Sig. (2-tailed)	.034	.009	.235	.183	.000	.013
Year 3	Pearson Correlation	.267**	-.049	-.177	-.228*	.217*	.019
Eval Score	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.636	.088	.027	.036	.853

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

During the first year of the study, the only significant relationship between the six predictor variables and RA evaluation score is ethnicity. The relationship between evaluation score and ethnicity is strongly significant and the nature of the relationship is inverse. Within this analysis, a Pearson Correlation score of -1 means there is a perfectly negative relationship, while a score 1 indicates that there is a perfectly positive relationship. The correlation size in this instance is considered small because it is within the 0 to -.3 range. Thus, because White RAs were coded as "1" and non-White RAs were coded as a "2" in the original data, this table shows that non-White staff members generally received lower evaluation scores than their White peers. There were no other relationships within the first year that were statistically significant.

Unlike the first year, the second year had numerous significant correlations. GPA, status as a new or returning staff member, number of residents, and side of campus all were significantly correlated with evaluation score. GPA was correlated positively, which means that an increase in GPA is significantly associated with an increase in evaluation score. In other words, an RA with a high GPA is more likely to have a high evaluation score than an RA with a low GPA. With a score of .219, the correlation between GPA and evaluation score was small. Unlike GPA, the number of residents is negatively correlated with evaluation score. This indicates that, as the number of residents decreases for an RA, the evaluation score improves. With a score of -.269, this correlation was also small. The relationship between evaluation score and campus side, which is a dichotomous variable, demonstrates that RAs for freshman residents scored higher than those who served upperclassmen. Out of all three years of data analyzed, the .439 score in this instance was the only relationship to have a correlation level of at least medium. Similarly, the new staff members were found to score significantly higher than their more experienced peers on their evaluations by their residents. Also dissimilar from the first year, race was not found to have a significant relationship with the RAs evaluation score.

As with year two, an analysis of the third year's data demonstrated a significant relationship between the performance evaluation score and the GPA and the side of campus on which the RA worked. The only other significant relationship in the third data set was, as in year one, ethnicity. In each of these three instances, the correlation size was small, falling within the -.3 to .3 range.

Regression Models

In addition to examining correlations, a regression analysis on all three data sets was also completed. The results for all three data sets are included in Table 5. There was great disparity between the three data sets in the amount of variance for which the independent variables accounted. As evidenced by table, the performance factors assessed accounted for between 16% and 31% of the variance of the RA evaluation score, depending on the year. These findings reinforce the results of the correlation analyses, as they affirm that there are other factors not examined in this study which account for a large portion of the variance.

Table 5

Regression Model Summary

	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
Year 1	.403(a)	.163	.104	2.67232
Year 2	.556(a)	.309	.262	2.72083
Year 3	.436(a)	.190	.134	2.38030

Because there are six independent variables in this study, the Adjusted R Square is significantly lower than the calculated R Square. If there had been fewer independent variables, the R Square would not have been adjusted so severely to account for the greater role chance plays with more factors. Thus, if the Adjusted R Square value is considered as the primary account of variance, as opposed to traditional R Square, then the six performance factors account for much less of the variation in RA evaluation score than previously reported. Because this study is relatively new and the other potential independent variables thus far undetermined, the role chance could play in the results is

high. Therefore, it is most sensible to use the Adjusted R Square when assessing the total variance for which the predictors account. Thus, between 10% and 26% of the variance in evaluation scores is accounted for by the predictor variables, depending on the year under consideration.

Returning to the Original Research Questions

The results of this study provide important information regarding some of the factors that may impact the performance of RAs. The determinations made below reflect the findings of this study only and do not indicate a universal application to other colleges and universities.

The first research question was: what impact does the number of residents on the floor of an RA have on his or her performance? In one of the three years under study, this factor had a significant inverse relationship with the evaluation score. In the other two years, the relationship was also of an inverse nature; however, the correlation was not statistically significant. Thus, according to the results of this research, there is an undetermined relationship between the number of residents on a floor and RA evaluation score.

The second research question was: What impact does the gender of an RA have on his or her performance? In all three of years of the study, gender did not have a statistically significant relationship with evaluation score. In each data set, females tended to score higher than males, yet the relationship never reached statistical significance. Gender, therefore, does not impact RA performance as measured by residents' evaluations. It is also important to note that the gender of the responding

residents was not captured during the data collection phase of this project, so its impact on the results is not measurable.

The third research question was: What impact does academic classification (i.e. freshman versus upperclassmen) of residents on the floor of an RA have on his or her performance? The academic classification of residents had a statistically significant relationship to RA performance, as measured by residents' evaluations, in two of the three years. In the remaining set, it was close to this threshold with a .085 significance level. For the sake of this research, this campus is divided into two halves, first year students versus upperclass students. Because of the statistically significant correlation in two of the three data years, it can be stated that RAs for first year students may score significantly higher on their performance evaluations than their peers who oversee upperclass residents.

The fourth research question was: What impact does the ethnicity of an RA have on his or her performance? As with academic classification, ethnicity was a statistically significant predictor of performance in two of the three years. The RAs in this study were classified as either White or as non-White. Because of the statistically significant correlation in two of the three data sets, it appears that White RAs may score significantly higher on their performance evaluations than their non-White peers. More research, however, is certainly need to confirm or refute this finding and provide more context for the results.

The fifth research question was: What impact does the grade point average of an RA have on his or her performance? Similar to academic classification of residents and ethnicity of RA, GPA was a statistically significant predictor of RA performance in two

of the three years. Because this was a continuous variable and not dichotomous, the

relationship between GPA and evaluation score is described as positive. In other words,

as performance evaluation score increased, GPA did as well. Because of the statistically

significant correlation in two of the three years, it may be that, as GPA improves, RAs

score significantly higher on their performance evaluations.

The sixth research question was: What impact does the level of experience of an

RA have on his or her performance? In one of the three years, level of experience had a

significant relationship to the evaluation score. In the other two years, the relationship

with this variable not only failed to approach statistical significance, but the direction of

the correlation changed. In one of the years, being a new RA correlated with a higher

evaluation score, while in another returning RAs' performance was rated as significantly

better. Thus, according to the results of this research, there is an undetermined

relationship between the experience level of RAs and their evaluation scores.

Overall, this study found three factors that were significantly related to

performance: RA's GPA, RA's ethnicity (White or non-White), and academic

classification of residents. In addition, the results demonstrate that the factors of number

of residents on a floor and experience level of RAs have an undetermined relationship to

performance. Finally, gender was found not to be related significantly to RA

performance.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The results of this study are illuminating. In two of the three years analyzed, for

instance, ethnicity was found to be a statistically significant predictor of RA performance,

as measured by residents' evaluations. It also was discovered that many other items were

statistically significant in at least one year, but gender was significant in none. In regard

to the regression modeling, it was found that the six independent variables analyzed

accounted for a relatively small percentage of evaluation score variance. All of these

findings merit discussion. In addition to what was found, it also is important to assess

what the data did not show, as this lack of results offers many insights into areas of

potential future research.

Correlations, What They Did and Did Not Show

GPA

The results of the Pearson Correlation show many interesting trends. The

appearance of GPA, ethnicity, and campus side as statistically significant in two of the

three years indicates that they may have a relationship to the performance ratings of RAs

on this campus. Grade point average has been debated as a predictor of achievement in

many areas (Gifford, Briceño-Perriott, & Mianzo, 2006; Waldman & Korbar, 2004), so it

is not really surprising that this was found to be statistically significant in this instance.

Practitioners across the field of residence life contend that RAs with higher GPAs tend to be better suited for the position than those with lower grades because of their ability to manage their school work with the added work responsibilities. Although it was not found significant across all three years, its appearance twice does lend credence to the decision of this institution, and many others, to include GPA in their hiring and retention criteria for RAs. The findings of this study reinforce the ideas that students who excel academically have the ability to manage multiple roles and serve as positive role models in the RA position. As part of its best practices, the institution examined in this study, as well as many others across the country, believe that students who fail to achieve academically generally should not be burdened with the extra responsibilities required of them as RAs. Similarly, students that succeed academically are believed by practitioners to thrive in the position because of their perceived ability to manage scholastics and cocurricular activities. The minimum GPA requirement, therefore, is maintained on this campus and others. Despite the finding of this study, however, it is important to recognize that GPA was not a predictor of RA performance during the first year of the study. It is unclear why GPA was not a predictor in all three years. Among all of the factors, there were no identifiable trends that would identify the reasons why items were significant in some years, but not in others. Thus, its significance should not be overstated.

Ethnicity

Similar to GPA, ethnicity also has been discussed at length in the literature as a predictor of success in various academic areas (Sulaiman & Mohezar, 2006; Strage, 2000). In these research efforts, classroom success and retention rates between various

ethnicities were explored. Strage found that white students tended to have a significantly

higher GPA than their Hispanic or Asian peers. Sulaiman and Mohezar, conversely,

found that ethnicity had no bearing on academic success. Thus, the previous explorations

on ethnicity and higher education are not only unrelated to the context of this study as it

relates to RA performance, but the research efforts have not reached a general consensus

on the impact of ethnicity either. The dynamics of race within the framework of this

situation are complex. Because this is a very predominantly White campus, with 84% of

the student body identified as such, the non-White RAs were evaluated by predominantly

White residents. The inverse relationship between ethnicity and evaluation score,

therefore, means that the majority White student-body rated the performance of White

RAs significantly higher than the performance of non-White RAs. This trend was present

during two of the three years that data were collected. These findings present many

interesting questions for administrators and researchers at not only this institution, but at

others across the country as well. Are the students of the minority groups really

performing at a lower level than their majority group peers? Are they receiving

inadequate training for their unique leadership role? As minorities, they are being placed

in a supervisory position over students from whom they have a different ethnic

background. On more ethnically diverse campuses, does this issue exist at the same

level, less, or not at all? These questions are extremely complex and require substantial

research before they can be answered by scholars and administrators. Practitioners, in the

interim, can begin exploring these topics both qualitatively and quantitatively on their

campuses. Interviews with residents of non-White RAs, further explorations of

institutional evaluation results, and continued application of best practices in residential

life can all serve to inform administrators of the role racial diversity plays in RA performance.

First Year versus Upperclass

While the previous two topics have at least been explored generally, there has been little or no discussion in the literature that relates to the remaining highly correlated variable: the type of students with whom the RA worked. The results demonstrated that RAs who worked with first-year students scored significantly higher on their performance evaluation than those who worked with upperclass students. There are many potential explanations for this, most of which are nested in the internal dynamics of the campus culture. First, there is a clear line of demarcation on this campus that separates it into two distinct halves: one for the first year residents and the other for the upperclass students. Within each half of campus, there are very distinct building infrastructure differences that have a perceived impact on the RA position. First year buildings, for instance, are predominantly corridor style, which necessitates high interaction between RAs and residents because of the common area bathrooms and study areas. Upperclass spaces, conversely, are almost exclusively suite or apartment style. The RAs in these spaces, therefore, have substantially fewer casual and informal interactions with their residents because of the limited contact in common spaces. These infrastructure differences could also magnify individual differences between RAs. Charismatic RAs who do an excellent job at visiting their residents would be more visible on the floors of first year residents than they would be on those of upperclassmen. Their evaluation scores would be inflated accordingly.

In addition to the infrastructure differences, there also are developmental differences between first year students and their upperclass peers. According to Blimling (1998), first year students have a much greater need and expectation for attention from their RA. This increased attention is necessary so that first year students can successfully transition into college, experience greater academic success, and gain the skills necessary to live autonomously. Upperclass students, on the other hand, have a much greater ability to exist without the support provided by RAs. By combining the infrastructure differences between the two halves of campus, therefore, with the different needs of the residents, it becomes clear that RAs in first year areas have both the opportunity and the need for more interaction with their residents. Although this has not been substantiated in the research, this dynamic does suggest that RA evaluation scores would more likely be positive for those staff members who served in first year areas. It also suggests that different rating criterion may be needed for the various sides of campus, as the residents on each half of campus have different expectations of their resident assistants. For practitioners, this is very important. At this institution, it is incumbent upon the residence life staff to ensure they are not directly comparing the evaluation results of first year RAs with those that serve upperclassmen. In addition, when making placement decisions for returning staff members, the residence life staff must remember that simply taking the evaluation scores as reported by residents is not necessarily an accurate representation of the quality of the job performance of RAs. As a result of this research, practitioners on this campus may consider creating unique evaluation methods for the different sides of campus to accommodate the distinctions between them. On other college and university campuses, it is important that administrators examine their own internal dynamics as it

relates to RAs that serve first year residents versus those that serve upperclassmen. Regardless of their institutional infrastructure, it is clear that the distinctions between the types of halls and the students served may have an impact on the performance of RAs as reported by their residents.

Number of Residents and Level of Experience

In addition to having three factors that appeared across multiple data sets, there also were two predictors that appeared as significant in one data set each: the number of residents for which an RA is responsible and the level of experience of the RA. In regard to number of residents, this correlation was inverse. As the number of residents decreased, therefore, the RA evaluation score increased. Although the correlation only reached the significance threshold one time, the general idea is consistent with the literature. According to Blimling (1998), high contact between RAs and residents is one of the most important functions of the position. By having fewer residents, this increased interaction is made much easier. Thus, RAs with 20 or fewer people in their charge would be able to spend more time with their residents and perform better in their eyes than those staff members who have two or three times that many students for which they are responsible. Thus, practitioners at not only this campus, but at other institutions of higher education across the country as well, may consider lowering the RA to student ratio to provide the best possible residential experience for their population.

The other factor that appeared as statistically significant in only one year, level of experience, is perhaps the most interesting finding of all. In one of the three years, RAs who were first year staff members scored significantly better than those who were returning for a second or third year in the position. This finding runs counter to the

earlier findings of Murray, Snider, and Midkiff (1999), who found that training buttressed staff job skills and that improved performance. Although there is no concrete explanation for this finding, the researcher speculates that institutional dynamics played a large part in the result. For a variety of internal reasons, the residence life and housing department often assigns mostly new RAs to work in areas with first year residents, while upperclass students are served by returning RAs. As described previously, the campus is geographically divided between these two student groups, with first year residents in one half and upperclass students in the other. As a result of the significant position differences in these areas, it may be that new RAs are being rated higher not because of their performance. Instead, the new RAs who serve predominantly first year students may be in a position to experience higher evaluation scores from their residents because of their increased contact opportunities and greater need. There are a multitude of other potential reasons for this result as well. The ideas that new RAs take the position more seriously, are less burned out, or that they are more worried about the repercussions of not performing their duties than returning staff members could all significantly impact this result. These explanations, while logical, have not been validated by research. Subsequent research efforts, therefore, are needed to ascertain the causes and implications of this finding. Specifically, additional years of data at this institution should be gathered and analyzed, while other colleges and universities should conduct similar studies exploring the performance differences between new and returning staff members.

The Impact of Gender on Performance

While the aforementioned factors appeared either once or across multiple years, gender was the only one of the six factors that was not statistically significant in any year. These findings are congruent with those of Denzine and Anderson (1999), who found no significant differences in gender in their study of RAs; yet, the results run counter to the research of Bierman and Carpenter (1994), who did note a distinction between male and females staff members in their work. Throughout most, but not all, of this campus, female RAs are generally responsible for female residents, while male staff members usually have male students on their floors. Thus, understanding the difference in gender performance scores would also require an analysis of the students providing the evaluations. For example, if male evaluation patterns demonstrated that they generally rated their RAs higher than females rated their RAs, regardless of actual performance, then the difference in scores would not be the result of varying quality of work, but in the evaluation tendencies of the residents. Thus, although no significant relationship was found between the variables in this study, the intricacies of this dynamic suggest that subsequent researchers should certainly examine it with more detail before deciding conclusively that gender does not influence evaluation score. Clearly, more research is needed to explore the relationship between RA gender and performance and the potential confounding factors.

Item Interrelatedness

The interrelatedness of the various predictor variables, shown in Appendices C, D, and E, provide important supplementary information to this study. According to the results, there was a statistically significant relationship between ethnicity and GPA in

each of the three years. There was also a statistically significant relationship for all three

years between the number of residents served and the side of campus on which the RA

worked. The first relationship shows that non-White RAs have a lower GPA than non-

white RAs. In addition to the statistical significance, the correlation between the items

was very high. The two items, therefore, may be accounting for the same portion of the

evaluation score variance. The same is true for the relationship between the number of

residents and the side of campus on which a staff member was employed. RAs on the

part of campus with first year students were statistically more likely to have a lower

number of residents. Furthermore, because the correlation between those two items was

so high, it may be that these factors comprise the same part of the variance. Additional

quantitative and qualitative efforts need to be conducted at this institution to explore the

relationship between the items with high interrelatedness. If it is discovered that they are

in fact accounting for the same portions of the variance, then the factors could be

condensed into fewer items. Following this compression into fewer items, these same

tests could be repeated, with the hypothesis being that correlations between items and

evaluation scores would be clearer and that the regression analysis would show a greater

percentage of variance accounted for by the factors.   More research regarding the

interrelatedness of these predictors is necessary before any definitive conclusions can be

drawn.

Summary of Correlation Findings

The results related to the RA evaluation scores are undeniably important for

practitioners and researchers in the field. Perhaps most interesting, however, is the lack of

continuity for the various predictors of performance. While GPA, ethnicity, and

academic classification, for example, were identified as statistically significant predictors in two of the three years, not a single factor was found across all of the years. Thus, there were no factors that the researcher can comfortably say will most likely be a predictor of RA performance in other college and university residence halls. In addition to none of the predictors occurring in all three data sets, the factors which were highly correlated multiple times had varying levels of significance. Attempting to assign a magnitude or likelihood for replication to any of the predictors, therefore, becomes a virtually impossible task without considerably more research. The three years of data collected in this study were certainly valuable; however, comparing seven to ten years of results would provide even more beneficial information to practitioners and scholars alike. Furthermore, as described above, many additional colleges and universities need to replicate this research on their campuses. Once the knowledge base has been expanded, administrators and researchers can be much more prescriptive in their policies, practices, and approaches to RA selection, placement, and retention.

The correlation results were extremely telling, both for what they showed and what they did not show. Discovering that GPA is a likely predictor of performance, for instance, reinforces the decision of the department to use this information in hiring and retention decisions for the RA staff. The lack of continuity among the various predictors, however, limits the ability of the researcher to make sweeping generalizations or broad-based suggestions for residence life programs across the American higher education landscape. Furthermore, the nuances of the institutional population also make generalizing difficult without additional research. Although ethnicity appeared twice, for instance, the nature of the population severely restricted the extent of the analysis.

Because of the sample size of only 92-94 RAs, as well as the relatively homogeneous institutional ethnic composition, the researcher was forced to distinguish only between Caucasian and non-Caucasian staff members. With either a more diverse institutional student body or a larger sample size, the study could have explored whether or not individual ethnic groups were predictors of performance. Thus, while the results of the Pearson correlation are certainly informative as it relates to predictors of RA performance, much more research is required at both this campus and others before a true body of knowledge can be developed. These shortcomings notwithstanding, the research will provide this institution and others with a valuable baseline of knowledge. On this campus, the residence life staff, as well as other student life administrators, now has a wealth of thoroughly researched information with which they can help create and hone their hiring efforts, staffing models, and retention practices. While the information is not as directly informative for other colleges and universities, it does give them a starting point from which they can assess their department's policies and procedures, with the ultimate goal of creating an administrative unit that most effectively serves the students on their campuses.

The Regression Model

Similar to the Pearson correlation analysis described above, what is missing from the regression model is almost as illuminating as the explicit data trends that it does reveal. Specifically, at the *most*, the six performance factors analyzed accounted for only 30% of the total variance in RA evaluation scores by residents. Outside of the relatively higher percentage in the second year of the data set, the first and third years only had 16% and 19%, respectively, of the variance accounted for by these six job performance

factors. As described in the results section, if the Adjusted R Square is used instead of R Square, then the variation for which the independent variables account is even lower. It begs the question, therefore, of what other items are causing the variation in the RA evaluation scores? With between 70% and 84% of the variance in RA evaluation scores unaccounted for, there are many potential factors that may impact performance as measured by residents' evaluations. The 30% that is accounted for, however, is important for practitioners at this institution, as it represents a very large portion of the overall performance of a staff member in the eyes of residents. Failing to adjust hiring, placement, and retention policies to account for the six predictor variables assessed in this study places the campus at risk of severely curtailing the overall effectiveness of their RA staff.

Determining which other factors may or may not have influenced RA performance is a difficult task; yet, there are many obvious candidates. The tendency of RAs to enforce or not enforce policies, for instance, may impact how well residents perceive the staff members are doing their job. In other words, if an RA chooses not to enforce a noise policy with a resident who is playing music too loudly, this RA may be evaluated higher by this person. On the other hand, the neighbors of the resident may lower their rating of the RA because it interferes with their ability to study, sleep, or otherwise enjoy a peaceful residential environment. Other factors that may influence the way students rate the performance of their RAs are their broad levels of satisfaction with areas such as general campus culture, overall experiences in the residence halls, or relationships with roommates. If a student was having an overall negative experience at a college or university, for example, he or she may tend to associate these disapproving

emotions with the RA. The same is true for the overall residential experience, roommate

satisfaction, and a host of other related items. All of these ideas, however, are merely

speculative. To accurately assess what accounts for the remaining variance, a research

instrument needs to be developed that collects the required data. Next, the factors must

be analyzed in much the same way these six factors were to support or refute the notion

that they account for the remaining variance. Until these analyses have been conducted,

scholars and researchers alike will be left to continue speculating as to potential causes

for variance and adjusting their research and programs on partial or inaccurate

information.

Limitations

Although valuable in many respects, there are many limitations to this study.

Most notably, the research is limited to a single institution. This private, highly selective

institution in the southeast has a unique campus, students, and staff. Thus, applying these

results to other colleges and universities without first replicating the study on a variety of

other campuses should be done with this in mind.   Also limiting the study was the fact

that the researcher used data that were previously collected. Because of this constraint on

the study, the researcher was unable to adjust data collection methods to maximize the

effectiveness and applicability of the findings. Specifically, the researcher was unable to

determine the exact class year of respondents. The researcher could only identify if they

were first year or upperclass students. Additionally, the researcher could not identify the

ethnicity of respondents. This limitation prohibited the researcher from exploring how

particular ethnic groups evaluated resident assistants. Finally, this limitation also made it

impossible for the researcher to ask additional questions that might have provided important insight into performance of resident assistants.

Among the factors that could not be explored using this data set was other RA characteristics. Resident assistant personality, for instance, is a performance indicator that this study did not examine. While GPA and academic classification provided some insight into a staff member, traits such as extroverted versus introverted, personable versus detached, and trustworthy versus disloyal, were not measured. These characteristics, as well as countless other personality traits, may have a dramatic impact on the performance of RAs as perceived by residents.

The data were limited by the source of the data. Because this study focused on the evaluations provided by residents and not supervisors, there may have been a bias towards traits that are desired by students. In other words, some students may have evaluated their RA higher for not addressing noise issues, as they liked to play their music loud. The supervisor of this staff member, however, would have considered this a deficiency in performance because of the failure to address the issue. The evaluation scores of the RAs in this study, therefore, should only be considered as a partial record of their job performance, rather than a comprehensive review.

The study is also limited by the individuality of the RAs. Although characteristics such as GPA and classification as a sophomore, junior, or senior provide insight into attributes such as intelligence and maturity, for example, they are not direct corollaries. Further, there are additional factors, such as RAs' personality traits, including extroverted versus introverted, personable versus detached, and trustworthy versus disloyal, that were not measured. Consequently, although the study will provide valuable insight into the

variance of RA evaluation scores, a comprehensive explanation of the causes will not be possible within the scope of this research endeavor.

Implications

Although only an initial foray into this area, this study has many implications for the institution in which it was conducted, practitioners in general, and future researchers. At the particular institution in which this research was conducted, administrators can begin asking questions which were spawned as a result of the findings within the data. For instance, why was ethnicity featured so prominently as a predictor of performance in two of the three years data was collected, yet conspicuously absent in the other year? Or, why, despite significantly more training and at least a year of service in the department, were returning RAs being rated lower by their residents than new staff members? The answers to these may be as simple as one of the situations described in the discussion of the correlation results; or, the solution may be much more complex and require paradigmatic shift to accommodate its implications. Additionally, as described in the regression model discussion, there are still many unidentified factors that are causing variance in the RA evaluation scores. Without knowing for certain what is causing the changes in the resident perceptions of performance, the department cannot completely and effectively design, implement, and evaluate methods for improvement. Thus, until these factors are isolated, the department may experience some difficulty improving the overall satisfaction campus residents have for their RAs.

Despite being limited in its scope, this research still offers other campuses insight into improving their residential life programs. First, most other colleges and universities administrators should have at least anecdotal information regarding what they believe is

impacting RA performance at their institutions. With that information in mind, they can then use these results of this study to either support or refute their ideas of what is happening on their campuses. In addition, because most residence life programs have some sort of evaluative process in place with their undergraduate staff, they can use the basic data analysis framework created here to examine their own population. Once they have assessed the RAs on their campus, the residence life and housing administrators would then have two very valuable sets of results upon which to base any changes or improvements they would make to their program. Still, although this research offers numerous potential benefits to other colleges and universities, they should practice great deliberation before applying these results to their institutions. Without carefully conducting their own research and waiting for a more complete body of literature on the topic, administrators risk making a decision that could negatively impact the students on their campuses.

Future Research

Because this study was limited to a singular, rather homogenous campus, the ability to apply the results to the general body of RAs across institutions of higher education is limited. Using this study as a baseline, however, subsequent researchers can explore predictors for RA performance on other campuses. Specifically, more research is needed at institutions that differ from the one in this study. Larger private schools, public institutions of various sizes and types, and colleges and universities outside of the southeast all need similar analyses conducted. Adding institutions of varying profiles to the research portfolio on factors impacting RA performance will add immeasurably to the power of the findings. In addition, more institutions that share characteristics with the

one in this research effort need to be studied. Subsequent inquiries would serve to either

support or contest the findings in this study and offer guidance for additional research

endeavors. By expanding the very limited body of knowledge on this topic, scholars will,

in turn, allow administrators to make the most informed choices in their residential life

programs.

In addition to increasing the breadth of this study, future researchers can also

increase the depth. This research effort only accounted for one portion of RA

evaluations—the section completed by their residents. It does not consider how they

view their own performance or how their supervisor gauges their ability to carry out the

RA position. While the resident evaluations are certainly important, they are not the

panacea for staff assessment. Some residents, for instance, may consider the failure of an

RA to enforce policy as a positive. The institution and their supervisor, conversely,

would view this as a failure to perform the duties required of the position. Thus, the

performance factors not only need to be correlated with resident evaluations, but with the

assessments of the supervisors as well. Finally, the self-evaluation of RAs needs to be

considered when evaluating performance. Bierman and Carpenter (1994) have already

done some initial work into areas such as motivation, while Hardy and Dodd (1998) have

examined burnout amongst RAs. As described in the literature review, their work has

been extremely informative for administrators and researchers already. Expanding their

work, however, and conducting it in concert with supervisor evaluations and resident

evaluations of RAs, would provide an invaluable portfolio of information. With at least

70% of the variance unaccounted for in each of the three data sets analyzed in this study,

the significance of this subsequent research cannot be understated. By exploring and

combining these additional facets of the evaluative process, researchers and practitioners alike will have the opportunity to more fully understand the complexities which account for the wide spectrum of perceived success or failure as an RA in the contemporary college and university residence hall.

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APPENDIX A

RA Evaluation by Resident

"This section contains information regarding your Resident Adviser. Please complete all information. Please use the following scale when rating your RA: 1 – Unsatisfactory, 2 – Below Average, 3 – Average, 4 – Above Average, 5 – Excellent, N/A – Not Applicable."

1.   My RA is generally accessible and willing to help residents when needed.

2.   My RA takes initiative to get to know residents in my hall/suite/apartment.

3.   I have made an attempt to get to know my RA.

4.   My RA acts as a role model and sets a good example for residents to follow.

5.   My RA is fair and consistent in dealing with disciplinary situations.

6.   My RA is knowledgeable and resourceful when residents ask for information or need a referral.

7.   My RA plans and implements programs based on the needs and interests of the residents on my hall and in my building.

8.   My RA disseminates important information to me in a timely and appropriate manner.

APPENDIX B

Research Matrix

Research Question	Data Source	Statistical Analyses
What impact does the number of residents on the floor of an RA have on his or her performance?	RA Evaluations	Linear Regression and Bivariate Coefficient
What impact does the gender of an RA have on his or her performance?	RA Evaluations	Linear Regression and Bivariate Coefficient
What impact does academic classification of residents on the floor of an RA have on his or her performance?	RA Evaluations	Linear Regression and Bivariate Coefficient
What impact does the ethnicity of an RA have on his or her performance?	RA Evaluations	Linear Regression and Bivariate Coefficient
What impact does the grade point average of an RA have on his or her performance?	RA Evaluations	Linear Regression and Bivariate Coefficient
What impact does the level of experience of an RA have on his or her performance?	RA Evaluations	Linear Regression and Bivariate Coefficient

APPENDIX C

Year One Statistics

Table 6

Complete Year One Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Evaluation Score	30.7266	2.82249	92
Grade Point Average	3.2603	.42460	92
Number of Residents	33.2174	11.73782	92
Gender	1.5000	.50274	92
White or Non-White	1.2935	.45785	92
Side of Campus	1.5435	.50084	92
New or Returner	1.4674	.50167	92

Table 7

Complete Year One Correlation Table

		Evaluation Score	Grade Point Average	Number of Residents	Gender	White or Non-White	Side of Campus	New or Returner
Evaluation Score	Pearson Correlation	1	.157	-.179	-.161	-.291(**)	.181	-.148
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.136	.087	.126	.005	.085	.160
	N	92	92	92	92	92	92	92
Grade Point Average	Pearson Correlation	.157	1	-.189	.036	-.237(*)	.090	.131
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.136		.071	.735	.023	.393	.212
	N	92	92	92	92	92	92	92
Number or Residents	Pearson Correlation	-.179	-.189	1	.024	-.010	-.695(**)	.106
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.087	.071		.819	.925	.000	.316
	N	92	92	92	92	92	92	92
Gender	Pearson Correlation	-.161	.036	.024	1	.167	.000	-.022
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.126	.735	.819		.111	1.000	.837
	N	92	92	92	92	92	92	92
White or Non-White	Pearson Correlation	-.291(**)	-.237(*)	-.010	.167	1	-.032	-.030
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.023	.925	.111		.760	.779
	N	92	92	92	92	92	92	92
Side of Campus	Pearson Correlation	.181	.090	-.695(**)	.000	-.032	1	-.060
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.085	.393	.000	1.000	.760		.571
	N	92	92	92	92	92	92	92
New or Returner	Pearson Correlation	-.148	.131	.106	-.022	-.030	-.060	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.160	.212	.316	.837	.779	.571	
	N	92	92	92	92	92	92	92

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 8

Complete Year One Regression Model

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
					Change Statistics				
1	.403[a]	.163	.104	2.67232	.163	2.753	6	85	.017

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APPENDIX D

Year Two Statistics

Table 9

Complete Year Two Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Evaluation Score	30.7285	3.16617	94
Grade Point Average	3.2859	.36579	94
Number of Residents	32.2128	11.62392	94
Gender	1.4681	.50166	94
White or Non-White	1.1915	.39558	94
Side of Campus	1.5532	.49983	94
New or Returner	1.5319	.50166	94

Table 10

Complete Year Two Correlation Table

Correlations

		Evaluation Score	Grade Point Average	Number of Residents	Gender	White or Non-White	Side of Campus	New or Returner
Evaluation Score	Pearson Correlation	1	.219(*)	-.269(**)	-.124	-.139	.439(**)	-.256(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.034	.009	.235	.183	.000	.013
	N	94	94	94	94	94	94	94
Grade Point Average	Pearson Correlation	.219(*)	1	.007	.137	-.261(*)	.014	-.087
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.034		.950	.189	.011	.894	.405
	N	94	94	94	94	94	94	94
Number or Residents	Pearson Correlation	-.269(**)	.007	1	.031	-.046	-.631(**)	.082
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.950		.769	.657	.000	.433
	N	94	94	94	94	94	94	94
Gender	Pearson Correlation	-.124	.137	.031	1	.139	.028	-.017
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.235	.189	.769		.180	.787	.869
	N	94	94	94	94	94	94	94
White or Non-White	Pearson Correlation	-.139	-.261(*)	-.046	.139	1	.111	.131
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.183	.011	.657	.180		.286	.207
	N	94	94	94	94	94	94	94
Side of Campus	Pearson Correlation	.439(**)	.014	-.631(**)	.028	.111	1	-.114
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.894	.000	.787	.286		.274
	N	94	94	94	94	94	94	94
New or Returner	Pearson Correlation	-.256(*)	-.087	.082	-.017	.131	-.114	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.013	.405	.433	.869	.207	.274	
	N	94	94	94	94	94	94	94

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 11

Complete Year Two Regression Model

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.556a	.309	.262	2.72083	.309	6.489	6	87	.000

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APPENDIX E

Year Three Statistics

Table 12

Complete Year Three Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Evaluation Score	30.9301	2.55822	94
Grade Point Average	3.2762	.35819	94
Number of Residents	32.2447	11.72231	94
Gender	1.5000	.50268	94
White or Non-White	1.2128	.41146	94
Side of Campus	1.5532	.49983	94
New or Returner	1.4362	.49857	94

Table 13

Complete Year Three Correlation Table

		Evaluation Score	Grade Point Average	Number of Residents	Gender	White or Non-White	Side of Campus	New or Returner
Evaluation Score	Pearson Correlation	1	.267(**)	-.049	-.177	-.228(*)	.217(*)	.019
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.009	.636	.088	.027	.036	.853
	N	94	94	94	94	94	94	94
Grade Point Average	Pearson Correlation	.267(**)	1	-.087	-.011	-.227(*)	-.004	.186
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009		.406	.918	.028	.968	.073
	N	94	94	94	94	94	94	94
Number or Residents	Pearson Correlation	-.049	-.087	1	.127	.007	-.623(**)	.160
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.636	.406		.223	.947	.000	.123
	N	94	94	94	94	94	94	94
Gender	Pearson Correlation	-.177	-.011	.127	1	.104	-.043	-.064
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.088	.918	.223		.319	.682	.538
	N	94	94	94	94	94	94	94
White or Non-White	Pearson Correlation	-.228(*)	-.227(*)	.007	.104	1	-.056	-.038
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.027	.028	.947	.319		.594	.717
	N	94	94	94	94	94	94	94
Side of Campus	Pearson Correlation	.217(*)	-.004	-.623(**)	-.043	-.056	1	-.245(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.036	.968	.000	.682	.594		.017
	N	94	94	94	94	94	94	94
New or Returner	Pearson Correlation	.019	.186	.160	-.064	-.038	-.245(*)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.853	.073	.123	.538	.717	.017	
	N	94	94	94	94	94	94	94

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 14

Complete Year Three Regression Model

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.436ª	.190	.134	2.38030	.190	3.404	6	87	.005

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