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A Qualitative Study of Returning Resident Assistants Reflecting on Their First Year

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The First Year: A Qualitative Study of Returning Resident Assistants Reflecting on Their First Year

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Findings

Theme: The meaning making process is positively and negatively sensitive to supervision.

"...I talked to my RC which helped a lot. He said don't compare yourself to everyone else..."
-Sherry, RA

Theme: RAs make meaning of their leadership experiences in different ways.

"...the opportunity to be a leader when failure is a true, real and distinct possibility and failure could have very real consequences..."
-Griffin, RA

Theme: RA meaning making is affected by the year and developmental level of students they work with.

"...just the maturity level is so hard to get past ...to come back down to being 17 or 18..."
-Jane, RA

Theme: How much an RA feels listened to affects their experience positively and/or negatively.

"...I've been personally able to give feedback to the Dean of Students and the Vice President of Student Development..."
-Barney, RA

Theoretical Basis and Practical Significance

Theoretical Basis:

The study was informed by the literature on the RA experience in the areas of training, leadership development, peer mentorship, supervision and challenges of the position.

Practical Significance:

- The findings offer insight into the experiences RAs serving first year, sophomore, junior and senior residents.
- The findings stress the importance of developmental supervision.
- The findings point to the tremendous potential the position has in area of leadership development.

Recommendations

- Focus supervision training of on relationship building.
- Have different training tracks for RAs in first year, sophomore and upper division areas.
- Continue to foster undergraduate leadership on committees within Housing and Residence Life.



The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to investigate how Resident Assistants at the University of Dayton make meaning of their first year as a RA. The findings and recommendations can be used to:

- Gain a deeper understanding of how Resident Assistants in their first year of the position experience their world.
- Offer data for the Department of Housing and Residence Life to consider in planning the Resident Assistant experience.

Methodology

- Conducted personal interviews with 6 research participants.
- Participants represented four residential areas at the University of Dayton.
- Pseudonyms were used to protect confidentiality of the participants.
- RAs for first year, sophomore, junior and senior areas are represented in the study.
- Themes were deducted from coded interview data through responses to the prepared interview questions.

