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Evaluating the Assessment of Resident Assistant Training

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Abstract

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to all the Resident Assistants that I have had the pleasure of getting to know and work with during my time as a Resident Assistant and as a Resident Director.

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I would like to thank all the people in my academic career that have taught me and believed in me to grow as a student and as an individual. I would not be here without your guidance and wisdom. Next, I would like to pay respects to all the people who have played a part in my journey and words cannot describe how much I appreciate for all you do, but I shall do my best.

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Chapter I

Introduction

According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023), there were 86,770 resident assistants (commonly referred to as RAs) employed at higher education institutions across the United States in 2022. RAs are traditionally undergraduate students who supervise and build an on-campus community and serve as role models and confidants to their residents, while also working as administrators, crisis responders, and supporting student retention efforts (Koch, 2016; McConnell, 2018). However, RAs do not usually start with all these skills in hand and need to be trained.

RA training is usually provided at the beginning of the academic year and administered by full-time housing and residence life (HRL) staff members or resident directors, commonly referred to as RDs (Koch, 2016). The role of the RA requires many competencies, so effective training is imperative. RAs have reported that they felt less stress in their roles when receiving training at the beginning of the year compared to RAs who received less traditional training such as mid-year hires (, 2011). Most undergraduate RAs hold the position for one or two academic years, with three or more years being rare. Thombs et al. (2015) recommended that RA training and supervision should be an ongoing task due to the annual turnover of RAs.

It is important to recognize that RA training is different at every institution. Therefore, depending on what is being taught, some RAs will have skills that RAs, at different institutions, may not possess. This could indicate that at some institutions, their strategies used to prepare RAs during their training could be more effective than at some

other institutions. Gathering feedback from RA training can help evaluate what went well and what could be improved upon for future trainings.

Once these RAs are trained and go on to start the school year with their residents, they'll need to apply the skills taught to them during training. For some, they may realize that they need more training in a certain area compared to another. Giving the RAs the opportunity to give their evaluation of the training provided can help HRL by utilizing the feedback to evaluate what parts of training were effective and ineffective. Having an effective training is critical for the RAs success in their roles (Roussel & Elleven, 2009). This study will examine how Housing and Residence Life offices evaluate the effectiveness of their Resident Assistant Training.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study is to gain an understanding of how professional residence life staff perceive the effectiveness of RA training and integrate their assessment to improve future RA trainings. The design of the study was selected due to how different HRL departments conduct their own training and have similar but different approaches to the training design. Four midwestern institutions in the United States of America were selected to participate in this study. This study will attempt to highlight the challenges that come with evaluating the effectiveness of the RA training.

Research Questions

This study will look to answer the following research questions:

1. How do Housing and Residence Life Offices identify the subjects that will be addressed by their centralized training efforts?

2. How do Housing and Residence Life Offices select the training methodologies used in their centralized training efforts?
3. How do Housing and Residence Life Offices evaluate the effectiveness of the training that their RAs receive?
4. How do professional residence life staff use their evaluation of the effectiveness of training to improve training for RAs?

Significance of the Study

College can be difficult and college students often experience a wide range of highs and lows as they encounter successes and setbacks and various factors contribute to a student's outcome such as school, mental health, and other life factors (Bowman et al., 2019). RAs are provided with the skills to help students who live on campus with their success and setbacks. RAs are often seen in the university's residence halls and build friendships with their residents and form a community in their respective areas (Koch, 2016).

Bowman et al. (2019) looked at how students' attitudes and mental well-being can affect more of a positive outcome. They found that students who have positive mental well-being and an increased sense of belonging felt successful in class; felt more productive academically and have a positive interpersonal satisfaction when it comes to their roommates, RAs, parents, and friends from back home. RAs can be an effective resource on campus, and they have the potential to impact one of their students' lives in a positive way, but it is important to keep in mind that RAs are also students themselves. They will have their own success and setbacks as they are in college and these

experiences can be critical for their overall experience in college. Having this in mind, RA training should also be providing the skills to be successful to the RA themselves.

This study is significant as RAs continue to serve an important role in higher education institutions across U.S. colleges and universities. They are critical to the overall experience of the residents that they serve. RAs can provide their students with support and resources offered at their institution and aid in their student development (Taub & Servaty-Seib, 2011). It is imperative that housing and residence life professionals at institutions provide educational training to help foster their RAs for their role and interactions with their residents. Housing professionals can plan and train RAs with the skills and information needed and if Housing provide an assessment that captures the input of the RAs, the data can provide a clearer lens into the effectiveness of the training provided This can help HRL when they begin to plan RA training for the next academic year.

Limitations

There are several potential limitations that may impact this study and must be acknowledged. First, participants will come from different institutions and their training designs may be similar but not identical. While this will give a broad point of view on how the RA training design is set up, it will highlight the similarities and differences between each institution, and it may show how a training strategy may be more effective than another. It also attempted to recruit participants who have two or more years of experience with direct involvement in the planning of training. This is to ensure consistency with individuals' experiences.

Second, undergraduate students who are staff members of HRL can be referred to as RAs. However, that position can be referred to as something different and the responsibilities can also be different or similar at different institutions. The environment for the RA can also be drastically different because there can be a RA who works at a residence hall, or a RA who works primarily in an apartment complex at the institution. Every institution will have similar responsibilities for a RA, and this study will seek to understand what similarities and differences each institution has for their staff. While RA training cannot cover every situation that may occur on campus or provide all the skills required for the RAs to be successful, centralized training efforts may leave some aspects of staff training to the RA's supervisor to fill in the gaps of training and assist with developing their RA's skill. This study will not focus on the potential ongoing training by supervisors, but rather the centralized training coordinated by the department as a whole.

Definitions of Terms

Centralized Training. A series of training programs, constructed and led by housing and residence life office, that Resident Assistants must undergo prior to pre-term, prior to the fall semester of the academic year, and provides the students with the information necessary to perform their duties (Koch, 2016; McConnell, 2018).

Resident Assistants. Undergraduate students, who are typically hired when they are sophomore status or higher, whose position includes connecting residents with campus resources, enforcing university policies, forming a community in their area, and planning student events (Berg & Brown, 2019). Can also be referred to by a number of different titles including Resident Advisor and Community Assistant.

Resident Directors. An employee of a housing and residence life that directly supervises a residential area on campus, supervises and mentors a RA staff, provides students with campus resources, helps foster a community, enforces university policies, and provides on-call rotations (Berg & Brown, 2019). Can also be referred to by a number of different titles including Hall Director and Complex Director.

Summary

RAs are a fundamental part of the residence life community at any higher education institution that houses students on campus (Koch, 2016). They supervise and build an on-campus community, serve as positive role models for their campus, are student confidants, housing administrators, they respond to crises, and support student retention, under the supervision of a Resident Director and with the training by the institution (Harmon, 2020; McConnell, 2018). Training is critical to their success, but that training needs to be evaluated for its effectiveness in preparing them for the responsibilities they will have in such a critical campus leadership role. This study will look at how different housing and residence life offices evaluate the effectiveness of the formal training that their RAs receive.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

In the United States, many public colleges and universities allow students to live in on -campus housing which provides a number of social benefits. These include social interactions, being close to academic buildings, and engaging with other diverse students (Graham et al., 2018). Many of these institutions have a housing and residence life (HRL) department that manages the on-campus living experiences. Students who choose to live on-campus are typically provided with a resident assistant (commonly referred to as RA) in their respective communities. RAs are asked to be positive role models, confidants, mandatory reporters, programmers, administrators, conflict mediators, and a friend to their community (Koch, 2016).

RAs are usually found in a residence hall that is either supervised by a graduate student or a full-time housing professional commonly referred to as resident director (RD), Hall Director (HD), Complex Director (CD), or something similar. The professional supervises the RAs in their role and handles more of the administrative side of their community. Full-time HRL staff members will design the training for the RAs and get them prepared for their roles. This literature review describes the RA position, the history behind it, the history of assessment and evaluations of training efforts that are used to improve future RA trainings, RA training, the professional HRL staff's role in the RA training design, and the potential struggles these HRL staff face.

History

To understand housing and residence life at colleges and universities and how the resident assistant (RA) role came about, it is important to look at the historical and

cultural contexts for the foundation of on-campus housing in the United States to understand the core principles of the RA role. This section will look at the history of Housing as well as the creation and evolution of the Resident Assistant (RA) position.

Housing and Residence Life's History

Housing for students has been a concern for universities since the Middle Ages when students came to various educational centers such as Bologna, Paris, and Oxford, to study (Boone et al., 2016). Incoming students were young, some were poor, and universities saw there was a need for a housing plan to be implemented for them. Hostels, a non-affiliated group that offered housing that was not run by colleges or universities, were used for a time until the off-campus behavior of students became problematic for educational organizations (Boone et al., 2016). Colleges and universities began to take charge and appointed faculty members to live in the residential facilities with students to provide oversight and control as well as to continue the learning outside of the classrooms. However, this new system came with some issues between the students' behavior and faculty members overseeing them.

The system in place caused a very disruptive dynamic relationship to exist between students and faculty (Crandall, 2004). In 1833, two students at South Carolina College participated in a duel to the death when both of them grabbed a plate of trout at the same time (Blimling, 2003). Blimling (2003) described that, in this era, there were multiple instances of violent and disruptive actions involving students living on campus which resulted in students and faculty getting irritated, injured, or killed. Crandall (2004) described more disruptive actions such as students blowing tin horns outside of their

faculty rooms late at night and a faculty member, at Harvard, losing their eye while attempting to break up a fight. Due to these ongoing issues, many leaders in higher education became critical towards the idea of residence halls (Crandall, 2004) In 1852, Henry Tappan, President of the University of Michigan, had enough of the violent actions occurring on campus. He viewed university's residence halls as unpleasant environments for young men and wanted them to be engaged in domestic circles and in the community. In order to discourage violent actions that were occurring in the residence halls, he converted one of the residence halls into classrooms to move the students further away from the academic efforts of the institution (Blimling, 2003; Crandall, 2004).

Other universities, such as Brown University and Columbia University, shared similar sentiments and determined that education should be the main focus of the university, so they decided that housing and the social life was beyond the concern of the university (Blimling, 2003). Additionally, faculty had become more interested in their own academic pursuits including research and teaching, and less interested in supervising students as they considered students to be adults who should be able to resolve their own personal problems (Blimling, 2015). After the American Civil War, there was an increase in the number of young men seeking higher education (Crandall, 2004). However, colleges and universities used the funding available to them towards the construction of classrooms instead of housing for students due to the past actions of students in residence halls (Crandall, 2004). Although there were less residence halls after the Civil War, they continued to exist, even at institutions that were stepping back from oversight, due to the simple fact that many students needed housing to attend (Blimling, 2015).

Although universities were often willing to let male students fend for themselves in finding housing in the community, this was not the same case for women in unsupervised environments (Crandall, 2004; Blimling, 2015). Marion Talbot, dean of women at the University of Chicago, believed that residence halls should be available for women because it was an environment where women could learn to experience the power of expression, social intercourse, and able to meet unusual or unexpected situations (Blimling, 2015). Although there were some hostilities between faculty supervising students in the residence hall, many educators supported the idea of educating the whole student and a commitment to do so began in the late 19th century. This decision led to many colleges and universities developing a "renewed commitment to student housing" and a revamped relationship where instead of faculty supervising students, new staff could fill those roles, which led to the newly emerging profession of student affairs (Blimling, 2015)

In 1937, 19 educators, appointed by the American Council on Education (ACE), met to discuss the philosophy and development of student personnel work in colleges and universities. They wrote and published a report called *The Student Personnel Point of View*, which called for colleges and universities to focus on the education of the whole student and not just in the classroom (Blimling, 2015; Crandall, 2004). However, neither the document nor the educators were able to bring faculty out of their research and classrooms to engage with students to aid with their personal growth and development. Blimling (2015) noted that there were still faculty who had no interest in leaving their academic priorities to focus on supervising students in a residence hall and instead left that responsibility up to student affairs professionals.

Although *The Student Personnel Point of View* called for the education and development of the whole student, faculty who performed student affair functions had no guide on how to achieve this mission (Blimling, 2015; Crandall, 2004). Blimling (2015) described that these educators relied on what they knew from their own college experience and what the rules and regulations were present at their individual institutions (Blimling, 2015). These rules and regulations covered issues including curfew, dress codes, campus activities, and punishment for violating campus rules and policies (Blimling, 2015). Many institutions, such as Michigan State University, began implementing students to assist the faculty in enforcing rules and regulations (Crandall, 2004). Blimling (2015) noted that these faculty were operating with the philosophy of developing the whole student in mind, however, they were assuming a paternalistic responsibility by controlling the students' behavior.

Prior to the 1960s, many college campuses had followed the doctrine of *In Loco Parentis*, a belief that the institution stood in place of the parent in the management and control of students (Blimling, 2015; Lake, 2013). This era of time placed little to no emphasis on protecting the college student. Instead, colleges and universities utilized this doctrine to disciple students and protect the institution from any legal scrutiny (Lake, 2013). Lake described that while students did have Constitutional rights, many institutions did not necessarily provide students with them, such as their due process rights, when students faced any disciplinary actions.

Blimling (2015) described that students did not enjoy the fact that institutions had so much power over them and began to rebel against the policies and regulations governing student behavior. It was not until 1961 in a court case, *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of*

Education, where the U.S. Supreme Court decision began the process that would lead to the end of the *In Loco Parentis* doctrine for colleges and universities when they ruled that students had a right to due process when facing action by a public institution (*Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education*, 1961). This recognition of students as adults with constitutional rights meant that colleges and universities were no longer insulated from legal disputes common under *In Loco Parentis*. As a result of students' dissatisfaction between 1960s-1970s, college administrators and student affairs professionals began to rethink their duties and search for a more coherent educational mission (Blimling, 2015). By the 1980s, students continued asserting a greater demand for greater autonomy, which lead to the creation of more thought-out residential programs and more responsibilities for the resident assistant (RA) position. (McConnell, 2018).

History of the RA Role

Utilizing students to provide services and assistance to the institution has been a practice for colleges and universities as early as colonial times (Crandall, 2004). During the late 19th century and early twentieth century, students were used to assist faculty with enforcing policies and regulations during the era of *In Loco Parentis* (Crandall, 2004). But after World War II, administrators in higher education realized that students being peer leaders to assist other students in community building, leadership, and personal development, would be an invaluable asset (Crandall, 2004). Additionally, as the *In Loco Parentis* era was ending, there was a need to provide both assistance and management of students in the residence halls (McConnell, 2018). Student Affairs professionals at the time thought that student peer leaders, such as the RA, would assist in the students' greater need of autonomy. Undergraduate students serving in peer leader or peer educator

roles were first recorded in 1959 but the roles and responsibilities greatly expanded by the 1980s and have continued to evolve (Ganser & Kennedy, 2012).

The RA position has been present since the mid- twentieth century and has been filled by undergraduate students who lived in the residence hall and had a group of students who the RA would help guide (Crandall, 2004; Ganser & Kennedy, 2012). In 1967, the National Association of Women Deans and Counselors (NAWDAC) advocated for five roles for RAs: (1) assisting to establish the environment within the residence hall; (2) assisting their community and the individual student; (3) advising student activities; (4) enforced rules and regulations; (5) and assisted with administrative responsibilities (Boone et al., 2016). By the 1970s, research looked into what was the role of the RA. Greenleaf (1970) outlined three ideas that the residence hall staff should function as: (1) providing an academic environment to challenge students; (2) acting in a counseling role; (3) offering social and cultural activities to their students. Ganser and Kennedy (2012) noted that students responded positively to their RAs due to their vast knowledge of campus resources, availability, approachability, and how they were perceived to be less judgmental than authority figures. Based on the similar expectations described by NAWDAC and Greenleaf, the RA role shifted from being primarily a disciplinarian towards being an individual who acted as a counselor and adviser in addition to being a disciplinarian (Boone et al., 2016).

In the 1980s and 1990s, there were increases in student services support and evidence supporting the effectiveness of peer leaders in the residence halls (Ganser & Kennedy, 2012). As this evidence was presented, the RAs' responsibilities on many campuses expanded. The responsibilities from that were set by NAWDAC and Greenleaf

remained, but now RAs were expected to develop and maintain relationships with their students, be a peer helper, a cheerleader, a conflict mediator, be first contact for students and report emergency situations, and to be safety and crisis managers (Boone et al., 2016; Crandall, 2004; Ganser & Kennedy, 2012). Entering into the twenty first century, Koch (2016) states that the responsibility of the RA includes the following: “asked to be informed counselors, friends, confidants, role models, programmers, administrators, rule enforcers, and conflict mediators”. While the role of the RA has changed significantly since the 1960s, there are common and necessary core responsibilities that are still present to this day across institutional type and housing program needs (Ganser & Kennedy, 2012).

Assessment and Evaluation

How housing and residence life professionals conduct assessment and evaluation of the training program of the RA begins with an examination of assessment in higher education in general. This section will examine the historical and cultural context of assessment and evaluation in the student affairs profession, including the history of program evaluation and research on modern evaluation techniques.

Historical Overview of Program Evaluations

In the United States, it was 1845 where the first formal attempt to evaluate the performance of a school happened (Madaus et al., 1987). Madaus et al. (1987) described that the evaluation was significant due to it beginning the tradition of using pupil test scores as the primary data source to evaluate the effectiveness of a school or an instructional program. During the time between 1887 and 1898, Joseph Rice conducted a study on the value of drill instruction in spelling across multiple school districts that was

described as the first formal educational-program evaluation in America (Madaus et al., 1987). In the early twentieth century, surveys were used at a number of large school systems in order to obtain data on school and/or teacher efficiency. These surveys incorporated a newly developed objective test that tested writing, spelling, and English composition (Madaus et al., 1987). Madaus et al. (1987) noted that there was a problem with the objective test, the data that was presented was used defensively to justify educational practices against public criticism instead of using the data to advance the educational field. To mitigate the use of data this way, researchers recognized that surveys could and should avoid censoring data and that the public should use the data in a constructive manner with local advisors (Madaus et al., 1987).

By the 1930s, Ralph W. Tyler, a researcher, influenced educational evaluation by assessing the valued objective, the educational question being looked at, and if they have been achieved by the instructional program (Madaus et al., 1987). Schools and other public educational institutions experienced a severe lack of resources as a consequence of the economic hardships of the Great Depression. With the assistance from President Roosevelt's New Deal, there was a call to reflect and a push for a renewal in education (Madaus et al., 1987). This movement was known as the Progressive Education Movement, and it reflected the philosophy of pragmatism and implemented tools of from behavioristic psychology (Madaus et al., 1987).

Tyler was called upon and led this movement by being involved in the Eight Year Study, whose goal, was to change the concepts of educational evaluation, and came about due to questions being raised about whether the experiences of students in progressive secondary schools was equivalent to the traditional high school experience in preparing

students for college (Madaus et al., 1987). In 1932, Tyler's team proposed an experiment where 300 colleges agreed to waive their traditional entrance requirements for graduates from 30 progressive secondary schools (Madaus et al., 1987). Tyler's team then assessed and evaluated the students' experiences from high school and college performance to students in traditional secondary schools (Madaus et al., 1987). Madaus et al. explained that Tyler introduced educators to a new and broader view of educational evaluation with his study that had advantage to previous evaluation techniques.

After the end of World War II, not much progress had been made in the area of educational evaluation due to the back-to-back events of the 1930s and early-1940s but now there was a time to enjoy the "good life" (Madaus et al., 1987). With this era of peace, higher education institutions saw an increase in enrollment with almost no accountability for educators to demonstrate their efficiency or effectiveness in any development efforts (Madaus et al., 1987). That changed by the late 1950s and early 1960s with a call for evaluations of large-scale curriculum development projects that were funded by the US federal government (Madaus et al., 1987). Madaus et al. described that researchers were relying heavily on four approaches during this period of time: (1) Tyler's approach – which defined objectives for the new curriculum and assess whether the objectives were realized; (2) Newly developed standardized tests in order to reflect the objectives and content of the new curriculum; (3) Professional Judgment was utilized to rate proposals and to periodically check on the efforts of contractors; and (4) Evaluation of curriculum development efforts through the use of field experiments by evaluators.

Madaus et al. (1987) described that there were issues with this push of evaluations. Cronbach (1980) argued that the guiding evaluations of data being collected had no relevance or utility because it was not capturing accurate data. Instead, Cronbach suggested that there should not be a race with educators competing with one another and instead there should be a thought-out process of gathering and reporting information that can guide future curriculum developments (Cronbach et al., 1980; Madaus et al., 1987). In 1971, the professional honorary fraternity Phi Delta Kappa (PDK) set up a National Study Committee on Evaluation as a result of the dissatisfying evaluation efforts (Madaus et al., 1987). The committee concluded the study by calling for new development theories, methods of evaluation, and new training for evaluators (Madaus et al., 1987).

In 1973, there was another shift in the field of evaluation. Evaluators were unsure whether they should try to be researchers, testers, administrators, teachers, or philosophers and there was no guide regarding the qualifications for the individual (Madaus et al., 1987). There was no professional organization that was solely dedicated to evaluations as a field and as a result, many evaluations were conducted by untrained personnel (Madaus et al., 1987). However, another push was made to make progress in professionalizing the field of evaluation by creating scholarly journals in the field, supported from universities, and the development of workshops in the workplace (Madaus et al., 1987). Many Colleges and universities began offering at least one course in evaluation methodology and several institutions developed graduate programs in evaluations, and in the workforce, some employers provided in-service workshops in evaluation (Madaus et al., 1987). By the 1980s, evaluators realized that the techniques of evaluation must have a strong foundation of achieving results previously seen as

peripheral to serious research, serve the information needs of the clients of evaluation, address the central value issues, deal with situational reality, meet the requirements of probity, and satisfy needs for accuracy (Madaus et al., 1987).

National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) released *A Perspective on Student Affairs* in the late 1980s and it provided expectations about how student affairs professionals should be involved in institutions of higher education and what type or programs and services they should provide to students (Shutt et al., 2012). By the late 1990s, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and NASPA published *Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs*. The document advocated that student affair practitioners should engage in good practices such as engaging students in active learning, helping student develop coherent values and ethical standards, communication skills, improvement for the student and institution performances, build and support inclusive communities, and using resources effectively to achieve the institutions' mission and goals (Shutt et al., 2012). Shutt et al., (2012) recognized that the document did not provide for a framework or a process on how to develop and assess these practices for improvement and growth of the professionals for which they were developed. Currently, there is now a push forward for assessment and creating a culture of assessment in student affairs (Shutt et al., 2012).

Instruments for Assessment in Residence Life

Training RAs for their position is very important for housing programs and understanding that their learning must take account of the various ways that students learn (Baeten et al., 2016). Baeten et al. (2016) recommended that educational professionals should keep this in mind in order to train them for their position. York and

Ertmer (2016) proposed a tool called instructional design (also referred to as instructional development.

Gustafson (1981) formed a committee to define instructional development (ID) as: “a systematic approach to the design, production, evaluation, and utilization of complete systems of instruction, including all appropriate components and management pattern for using them; instructional development, which is concerned with only isolated products, and is larger than instructional design, which is one phase of instructional development.” Gustafson (1981) acknowledged the vast confusion and differing perspectives of the ID process and defined three possible perspectives. The first perspective has the ID process derived from general systems theory and the ID process is viewed as an integrated system with multiple elements interacting with one another (Gustafson, 1981). The second perspective is labeled as a systematic development in which the ID process must be described carefully, and the models attempt to list all the necessary development tasks to be performed by the developer (Braden, 2022; Gustafson, 1981). Gustafson (1981) defined the third perspective as a prescriptive view in which the ID process requires a precise series of statements on designing specific learning activities (i.e., if/then statements).

Gustafson (1981) described the DeCecco model which is not an ID model but a teaching tool that utilizes four concepts and is easy to understand for teachers and developers to use. The four concepts are: (1) Analyzing what is to be taught/learned, (2) Determining how it is to be taught/learned, (3) Conducting tryout and revision, and (4) Assessing whether learners do learn (Gustafson 1981; Isman, 2011).

York and Ertmer (2016) recommended contextualizing ID with the following three methods: engaging with students in real-world design situations, teaching problem-solving strategies for students to solve real-world design problems, and providing case-based instruction to engage with the students with different scenarios of practice. Housing professionals can use instructional design (ID) as a way to capture assessment and evaluation of the training provided to the RAs. York and Ertmer (2016) looked at ways to improve instructional design to novice designers. They said that the use of ID models has been recommended and supported by a number of textbooks, personnel in the military, and in the work force (York & Ertmer, 2016). Yet it was noted that having a model with step-by step elements does not always provide learners with either complete mental models of ID principles or sets of heuristics.

York and Ertmer (2016) designed a study to examine the ID principles used by experienced instructional designers during the design process. York and Ertmer (2016) recruited 31 participants to complete in three rounds of the Delphi Process, a series of questionnaires that allows participants to develop ideas for future developments around an issue, in order to identify guiding principles that they use in developing problem-solving ideas. York and Ertmer (2016) reported that the participants had a consensus on identifying 61/75 instructional design principles. Out of the 61, 32 principles related to a general ID model and had four main ideas: (1) Determining whether instruction is the solution to the problem, (2) Examining the project's constraints, (3) Understanding the learner or audience and their prerequisite knowledge, and (4) Determining the objectives or goals of the project.

York and Ertmer (2016) also found that two principles, identified by the participants, were important for evaluating the design solution. They were: (1) having always conducted a pilot test, and (2) having both a subject matter expert and a non-subject matter expert review the final project. This study was conducted under the assumption that there needs to be more learning and teaching for instructional design principles. York and Ertmer (2016) recommended that future research on the best methods for sharing the use of the principles with novice designers and whether it affects their experience as instructional designers.

Struyven et al. (2005) reviewed various empirical studies about the students' perceptions about evaluation and assessment in higher education. They noted that as educators, they should be actively involved in evaluation practices and that assessment has an important influence on students' learning. Struyven et al. (2005) found that students prefer the multiple-choice format over an essay type of examination when asked about evaluation. This is due to students' belief that it's easier to prepare for, questions and answers tend to be less complex, and has a higher success rate (Struyven et al., 2005) However, multiple-choice format lacks the ability for students to make in-depth contributions to study, and another study found that students thought the essay exams were more appropriate to represent one's knowledge in the subject matter (Struyven et al., 2005). The study highlighted that students prefer an assessment method that actively stimulates a real-life context and would allow students to think and apply the concepts in an out of classroom environment. This was described to be an effective strategy and students valued this authentic way in learning (Struyven et al., 2005).

Current Practices for Assessment in HRL

A few studies have looked at current practices in assessing RA training. Thombs et al. (2014) examined effects of an investigational first-aid program designed for RAs. They utilized an online Peer Hero Training program, an interactive video dramatization of incidents involving substance-using or distressed residents and compared training to RAs utilizing the online program for RAs who received "training-as usual" (Thombs et al., 2014). They found that the RAs who utilized RAs the Peer Hero Training program would engage in greater first-aid efforts in substance-using compared to "training-as usual" RAs. Thombs e al. (2014) recommended that an expanded trial should be conducted, and assessments should be made on the RAs' personal alcohol use, drug use, and history of mental health concerns. Additionally, they also suggest that this initial evaluation could potentially be utilized as a standardized RA training tool that many college and university campuses can use.

Manata et al. (2017) researched and evaluated the RA role in order to design a measurable tool to capture the competencies of the RA role. Manata et al. (2017) narrowed the responsibilities of a RA into 11 competency domains: Managing Conflict, Maintaining Physical Safety, Connecting with Residents, Forming Relationships and Peer Groups, Connecting Residents to University Resources, Encouraging Involvement, Counseling, Providing Academic Encouragement and Support, Role Modeling, Managing Time, and Fostering Psychological safety. Afterwards, they turned the competencies into a survey format in order to measure the accuracy and competence of each element of the role. The survey was sent out to the RAs at a large Midwestern University to participate. The study had two rounds; one during the prescheduled Spring

semester meetings for newly hired RAs, and the second took place in August during the prescheduled RA meetings in the first week of the fall semester. They had 138 students participate in both rounds of the survey. Manata et al. (2017) conducted the survey as a tool to assess RA's competencies and suggests that additional assessments paired with the survey could assess their survey's validity. The goal was to reveal whether or not the current model of RA assessments needed to be modified or supplemented with additional items (Manata et al., 2017). They suggested that HRL professionals can use their instrument to assess RAs' role knowledge and could correlate with the RAs' performance evaluations. Manata et al. (2017) warned that the lack of comprehensive measurement tools can prevent HRL professionals' ability to critically assess components of the RA role and their performance.

Finally, Koch (2016) contacted 338 housing professionals and asked to participate in a survey that asked about academic courses to train RAs, in-service training, and a retreat-based training. Based on the responses, Koch (2016) saw that housing professionals did train and teach RAs on how to be successful in their profession, but there was no clear assessment that what they taught was effective.

RA Training

Students who wish to become RAs traditionally go through a selection process and hiring. If selected to be RAs, as with new hires in any field, there is usually training involved (Koch, 2016; Seager & Bruick, 2021). At the beginning of the fall semester, students will typically participate in a formalized RA training experience, which provides opportunities not available for those in unique situations such as students who are hired mid-year (Seagar & Bruick, 2021). However, fall training is not the only training RAs

may receive and various institutions offer a class as a pre-requisite for hiring or during the RA selection process, winter or mid-term training, or continuous year-long training with their individual staff (Rishe, 2006; Whitney et al., 2016). While students who apply may have an idea of the RA role that Koch (2016) touched on regarding the responsibilities of the position, these new RAs will have to undergo formal RA training in order to be fully prepared for their new role and responsibilities and to learn skills to help them be successful. Some of the responsibilities and duties that RAs are trained for include being an administrator, informed counselors, friend, confidants, role models, programmers, conflict mediators and policy upholder (Koch, 2016; Whitney et al., 2016). Whitney (2016) highlighted the importance of having adequate training and a delivery system to address the RA's responsibilities, job's stress, wellness, and reducing the role ambiguity, and doing so can assist the RAs in avoiding burnout.

Benjamin and Davis (2016) looked at the skills that RAs learn during training. The researchers examined whether RAs learned valuable skills while they were a RA and whether those skills were beneficial to them after college. Their study had 78 participants who answered a survey of open-ended questions and focused choice questions, around five learning skills: interpersonal skills, helping skills, problem-solving, teamwork, and self-efficacy. While Benjamin and Davis (2016) found that RAs learned at least one of the five skills listed, the researchers did not assess whether the former RAs were actually using those skills as opposed to simply knowing them.

RAs can be taught skills to help them both in their role and which will be valuable after college in their careers. However, these is a lack of research as to whether RAs know the skill and can apply it. Benjamin and Davis (2016) recommended that the

housing and residential department asks, “are the RAs learning what the department intends for them to learn?” (p. 22). Asking that question can highlight gaps in the training that were not necessarily present at first glance. Once those gaps are highlighted, the HRL professionals who design the RA training can address them for the next training.

Issues with RA Training

Many institutions’ HRL offices provide training for their RAs before students arrive for the fall semester (Whitney et al., 2016). There is a need to address the concerns that are present in RA training that can affect the performance of the RAs and HRL as a whole (Whitney et al., 2016). This section will examine the concerns regarding the RAs’ mental health in their position and housing professionals’ competencies in developing training the RAs.

RA’s Mental Health

As with any job, it is important to properly balance out time for one’s mental health. College students tend to face mental health issues that can affect their motivation, social interaction, and concentration (Son et al., 2020). This is especially true for RAs since they are students too and live where they work and being in the front and center of all the activities can lead to burnout (Whitney et al., 2016). Montero-Marin et al. (2011) defined *Burnout syndrome* as “a uniform condition with relatively consistent etiology and symptoms resulting from prolonged exposure to chronic stressors in the workplace” (p. 2). Depending on how involved RAs are, without proper self-care, they can likely succumb to burnout. However, McLaughlin (2018) noted that RAs who consistently practice self-care and initiate healthy habits tend to not experience a significant amount

of burnout and psychological distress. Yet sometimes it is events outside the campus that can impact RA's and their state of mind.

In March of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic began, and colleges and students are dealing with its effects in 2022. The pandemic has caused thousands of deaths worldwide and has caused stress and anxiety among people (Ciotti et al., 2020; Kujawa et al., 2020). Nicholl (2021) conducted a study on RAs and their stress levels during the 2020-2021 academic year and looked at different responsibilities of RAs such as conduct, program planning, desk shift, and the covid-19 pandemic and suggested that these new pressures caused moderate stress on the RAs. In addition, Harper (2020) found that universities that were reopening during the pandemic caused stress among the university staff members due to trying to reopen safely as possible during the pandemic.

RAs may face other factors that negatively impact their mental health. RAs tend to be the first contact when it comes to mental health issues like student suicide and suicidal ideation (Swanbrow & Drum, 2015). Serious mental health issues and situations can be very intense for an individual to handle, especially for a student with limited training and preparation on the topic, such as an RA. These situations can become very overwhelming very quickly.

The RA position is a social job, and their work involves the ability to help others, especially their students, experience success (Whitney et al., 2016). RAs can accomplish this by developing their relationship with their residents by setting up programs, floor meetings, eating with them at the dining hall, playing video games, and many different activities (Whitney et al., 2016). The RAs develop compassion for their residents, and

although it means they are being successful, it also can lead to the development of experiencing compassion fatigue (Maten, 2020; Whitney et al., 2016).

Yaseen (1995) defined *Compassion Fatigue*, in the field of residence life, as occurring when the RA cares for residents adjusting to college or experiencing trauma and that trauma can impacted the RA cognitively, socially, emotionally, and physically (as cited by Maten, 2020). RAs are drawn towards their work by their ability to help others experience success and accomplishing this can also lead the RAs to developing compassion for their residents (Hodge, 2016; Maten, 2020). Programming efforts such as educational programs, floor meetings, eating with their residents in the dining hall, or playing video games develops the bond of compassion between the RA and the residents (Hodge, 2016; Maten, 2020). Maten (2020) describes that while it is satisfying for the RAs to develop bonds with their residents, the RAs can also experience compassion fatigue through secondary traumatic stress from the same relationships that they have developed.

Yorgason et al. (2008) looked at mental health resources on campus and asked why students did not take better advantage of the presence of these resources. They found that students felt like they did not have enough time and reported feelings of embarrassment for utilizing on-campus resources, in addition to feeling like the services would not help them (Yorgason et al., 2008). Housing staff should take special attention to inform student staff that the on-campus resources, such as counseling and support services, are available for the students as well as the RAs and normalize RAs seeking support in order to engage with their own trauma that they may endure in their work (Lynch, 2019). In addition, departments need to encourage the RAs to seek out these services if they require

help. RAs are just as vulnerable to stress just like any other student and it will show in their job and academics (Swanbrow & Drum, 2015).

Learning how to create a boundary could be necessary in order to separate the work-life and their personal life of RAs. Rankin and Gulley (2018) looked at the challenges of setting up boundaries between live-in professionals such as RAs and resident directors. They interviewed 12 professional staff members who are a part of the housing and residence life field over the course of a few months about their work-life balance. The housing professionals reported their job did not prepare them for setting boundaries in their work and home life (Rankin & Gulley, 2018). The researchers recommended that residence life staff that live where they work should create intentional opportunities to get away from campus and that further research is required to conduct how the environment contributes to burnout (Rankin and Gulley, 2018).

Competency in Knowing How to Train

RAs are not alone in handling the responsibilities for the residential community and are supervised by either a full-time HRL staff member or a part-time graduate assistant (Koch, 2016). These more senior staff members typically supervise the RAs in their role, helps with the development of the RAs, and handles more of the administrative side of their residential community. Koch (2016) noted that full-time HRL staff are usually the ones who design the RA training, and select the skills, topics, and training of the RAs in the pre-term of the fall semester. The skills that they teach the RAs can develop their talents, interpersonal connections, their self-confidence, and improve in their decision-making (Koch, 2016).

In the 2010-2011 academic year, Koch (2016) conducted a study of 338 HRL professionals who were responsible for the design of their institution's RA training and were from universities that are a part of The Association of College and University Housing Officers (ACUHO-I). Participants answered 52 questions that focused on having them recall the planning and implementation of their respective RA training. The study found that RA training focused heavily on safety and security and not as much on issues of multiculturalism and diversity (Koch, 2016). Koch agreed that while safety and security should be essential components of the training of the RAs, it should not be at the expense of important topics such as multicultural understanding, communication, white privilege, or social justice. Thus, he recommended that RA educators, must carefully consider how to teach and include these topics for future trainings. Koch (2016) reported that in their sample of RA educators, 279 held a master's degree and 93 of the 279 had indicated that they completed coursework in curriculum development. This indicated that many HRL staff did not have formal training in curricular design and many of them developed their RA training based on what was done from the previous trainings (Koch, 2016).

Koch (2016) recommended that senior student affairs officers should provide on-campus curricular design workshops for staff to develop their training programs for RAs. Additional workshops should be available that focus on building and acquiring new skills throughout the academic year. For RA Training, the use of student development theory should be implemented more during training because the RAs are students too and such training can guide them to be successful in both their position and after college.

Another way to evaluate RAs' performance is to ask for their input on the elements of training. HRL staff may design RA training plans and then use RA feedback and evaluations as tool to improve the training design for the following year. Ellet et al. (2020) noted that diversity and inclusion training and skill development are becoming more prominent and feedback on the presentation or skill developments is vital for improvements for the next presentation. This supports the findings of Koch (2016) on recommendations for diversity and inclusion improvements presented at RA training. HRL staff being able to answer the motives and approaches of the RA training design can highlight their philosophies, theories, or mottos behind the training.

Kortegast and Croom (2019) investigated the meaning of critical professional praxis and individually defined professionalism and praxis in the residence life field and how the two work with one another. They defined *praxis* as a combination of both theory and practice and defined *professionalism*, in student affairs and in HRL, as making commitments to particular knowledge bases, values, and skills (Kortegast & Croom, 2019). Being a housing professional requires each professional to understand the student affairs profession's philosophies as well as their own institution's' philosophies and how it matters in the work context such as being present in the work office, engaging with students, or training staff. Kortegast and Croom (2019) noted that being a professional in student affairs means engaging with theory that works towards the goals that the professionals are trying to achieve. In order to support students, this requires professionals to understand theories and practice it in their community.

Koretgast & Croom (2019) said that utilizing critical professional praxis can give HRL staff a better understanding on administrative tasks, differences in class, race,

gender, sexual orientation, the RA's experience, and the students' experience. Koretgast and Croom (2019) recommended that housing departments consider how policies and practices can be revised and redeveloped to engage with a broader diverse student population.

Conceptual Framework

The RA position is essential for universities that have residence hall communities, and it comes with a lot of responsibility. However, there is a need to understand what goes into the training design for the RAs. Understanding the purpose of the RA training design can help prepare RAs for their roles throughout the academic year. The RA position and the training should also be adapted to the present and future events since different generations of RAs come and go. This study will use a conceptual framework focused on goal-orientation theory and expectancy-value theory and how they can be used to understand the RA training design.

Goal Orientation Theory

RAs are undergraduate students who are seen as leaders among their peers (Koch, 2016). Yet they are still undergraduate students and require development in their skills in order to perform their job. Goal-orientation theory primarily looks at how and why individuals try to achieve their various objectives instead of focusing on the content they are learning, Kalpen and Maehr (2007) described that goal-orientation theory puts more emphasis in what the individual is attempting to achieve. Elliott and Dweck (1988) first developed the theory and proposed two major goals that individuals pursue in their achievement route, performance and learning goals. In *performance goals*, individuals focus on maintaining a positive view of their abilities and tend to avoid a negative

perspective (Elliott & Dweck, 1988). To do this, the individual will seek to prove, validate, or document their ability.

In *learning goals*, the individual seeks to increase their skills and/or master new tasks (Elliot & Dweck, 1988). Expanding on the learning goals, the mastery-oriented theory focuses on individuals that focus on increasing their abilities over time and this will promote a mastery-oriented approach towards obstacles, such as forming strategies and a positive outlook (Kalpen & Maehr, 2007). Elliot & Dweck found that if performance goals were highlighted and their participants believed that their skills were adequate, then they would respond in a mastery-oriented manner. In addition, they were persistent in their attempts to find solutions and did not make attributions for a negative outlook or failure. In *mastery goals*, the individual exhibits a solution-oriented purpose of self-instruction that promotes an increase of learning, understanding, developing, and mastering skills (Elliot & Dweck, 1988; Kalpen & Maehr, 2007). The individual is in a mastery goal orientation when they are focusing on mastery of a skill for their personal development and growth that guides them towards an achievement-related behavior and engagement with the task (Kalpen & Maehr, 2007).

Overall goal orientation theory focuses on the learning, performance, and mastery -oriented goals that focus on how an individual can improve their skills (Elliot & Dweck, 1988; Kalpen & Maehr, 2007). This theory can be utilized by HRL professionals who coordinate RA training by identifying program topics and different aspects of training and applying goal-orientation theory to it. For example, first-year RAs participate in a program that focuses on *performance goals* and learning the skills they need to be successful in their position. At the same time, second-year RAs could be practicing their

learning goals and working toward improving their skills during training, and this can lead RAs to practice the mastery-oriented theory. This study will utilize goal-orientation theory to understand how housing and residence life professionals assess the pedagogy used to train RAs for their role by looking at which training components and programs utilizes the three different approaches in goal-orientation theory.

Expectancy-Value Theory

RAs who value what they are learning in their position will better retain that information. Expectancy-value theory is an educational concept in which an individual's expectancies for success, subjective task values, and other achievement beliefs will motivate them to put more effort into their achievement or task at hand (Wigfield, 1994; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Applying it to students, the student's success is related to two factors: expectancies for success and the value they place on their tasks (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Wigfield (1994) mentions that expectancy-value theory has four major components of subjective values: attainment value (importance), intrinsic value, utility value (usefulness), and cost. Wigfield (1994) defined attainment value as the importance of doing the given task well. Intrinsic value is the enjoyment an individual gains from doing the task. Utility value refers to how the task can fit into an individual's future plans, and cost refers to what the individual needs to give up completing the task and how much effort needs to go into the task. Depending on how the individual does in their tasks, they will gain value out of the experience and gain motivation to pursue upcoming challenges or tasks. This in turn can be beneficial for students and RAs as both roles require experience to motivate them to gain more value out of their role.

Cooper et al. (2017) used expectancy-value theory in their study to explore its connection with students who experience active learning. Cooper et al. (2017) defined active learning as an instructional practice that is student-centered, and the students are actively engaged in learning the material. The study focused on three concepts of expectancy value theory: (1) expectation of success in active learning, (2) perceived value of participating in active learning, and (3) perceived cost of participating in active learning (Cooper et a., (2017). They found that students showed a positive outlook on their goals in their classroom and reported having high levels of engagement and less resistance towards active learning (Cooper et al., 2017). In this study, expectancy value theory will be utilized to understand how housing and residence life professionals assess their teaching and programs to train RAs for their role by looking how they believe RAs are using the four components of expectancy value theory. Doing so can promote housing and residence life professionals to engage and provide a setting for their RAs to actively learn in their position. Thereby allowing RAs to hold value in their skills and with proper motivation, show that they are improving their skills towards mastery.

Summary

Resident assistants provide a sense of community, safety, and a positive role model to their institution. However, the position can be taxing on their mental health and their work-life balance. It is important that the housing and residence life department emphasizes the importance of self-care to the RAs during RA training and to have them engage in proper professional developments throughout the academic year. Also having a clear understanding of the intention behind the training design presented by HRL full-time staff can lead to having more meaningful intentions for how the RAs are trained and

prepared for their role. Implementing the use of Elliot and Dweck (1988) goal-orientation theory can teach RAs the ability to want to achieve mastery over their skills that can benefit in the future. In addition, Wigfield and Eccles (2000) expectancy-value theory teaches RAs the importance of preparing for an upcoming task and learning the value of the experience that came with the task. The implementation of proper training, self-care, positive motivation, and the two theories can potentially benefit students who look to become future RAs.

Chapter III

Methods

This qualitative study was conducted in order to investigate how professional housing and residence life (HRL) offices evaluate and perceive the effectiveness of their resident assistant (commonly referred to as RA) training at four mid-sized institutions in the Midwest. Participants were professional residence life staff from institutions who are the primary supervisor for the RA training design. They were interviewed on how their institution evaluates the effectiveness of RA training and how they integrate their assessment to improve future RA trainings. This chapter includes a detailed description of the methodology that includes the design of the study, sample size, instruments, research site, data collection, analysis processes, and treatment of data.

Design of the Study

A phenomenological qualitative study was utilized for this study. This type of study was selected because the goal of this study is to have a better understanding of the RA training design and how residence life professionals from different institutions design their training. With this approach in mind, it is hoped that the expected results will show the similarities and differences between different institutions' RA training. A qualitative approach was appropriate because participants will explain their experiences overseeing RA training (Creswell, 2014). The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the four participants. The interviews were completed virtually using Zoom. Participants responded to demographic questions as well as open-ended questions regarding their experience in what RA training consists of.

Participants

This study consists of four participants from three public and one private four-year institutions in the Midwest. Their demographics are presented in Table 1, All the participants identified as Caucasian and three identified as female and one identified as male. All participants identified as professional residence life staff members with two participants holding an Assistant Director of Housing and Residence Life and the other two holding a Director of Housing and Residence Life position. All participants oversee and assist with the training design at their institution. Each participant and their institution were from one of the four states (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio) that are members of the Great Lakes Association of College and University Housing Officers (GLACUHO). Participants were recruited by meeting three criteria: (1) identified working at a mid-sized four-year institution (between 5,000-15,000 students), (2) oversaw the implementation of RA training, and (3) their institution is a member of GLACUHO. An email invitation was sent to the Chief Housing Officers (CHO) and will include a request to share the invitation with the professional staff member who could best talk about RA training at their institution over the last few years. Once the CHO forwarded the invitation to their staff member, an email invitation (see APPENDIX A) was sent asking to participate in the study. Eligible participants were asked to participate in a one-on-one interview over Zoom that is scheduled at the participant's convenience.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

	Gender	Trainings Overseen as Training Coordinator	Current Position	Type of Institution	Location of Institution (State)
1	Female	2 Trainings	Assistant Director of Residence Life	Public	Illinois
2	Female	5 Trainings	Assistant Director of Supervision	Public	Ohio
3	Female	10 Trainings	Director of Residence Life	Public	Michigan
4	Male	10 Trainings	Director of Residence Life	Private	Indiana

Research Site

This study recruited participants from four different institutions that are similar to University A. University A is a four-year public mid-sized university located in the Midwest. According to data from the spring of 2022, there are 8,500 students enrolled at University A. Of these students, 59% identified as female, and 41% identified as male (University A, 2022). The most recent data, regarding race and ethnicity (University A, 2020) stated that 60.62% of the student population were White, 13.47% were Hispanic, 13.12% were Black or African Americans, 4.32% reported unclassified, 3.18% were Asian, 3.05% were international students, 2.01% identified with two or more races, 0.16% were American Indian/Alaskan Native, and 0.07% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander.

Instrument

Semi-structured Interviews.

Before the interview began, participants were given an informed consent document. An interview protocol (see Appendix B) was used to guide the interview process. This was based on a similar study by McConnel (2018). During the interview, the researcher asked follow-up questions as needed. The questionnaire was designed to gain a better understanding of the design of Resident Assistant training and some of the challenges and future directions. The protocol consisted of two sections: a demographic questionnaire, and questions that focus on Resident Assistant training. The demographic section consisted of the participant being given a pseudonym and closed-ended questions about gender, race/ethnicity, length of time in the Housing and Residence Life field, their current position, and if being the Resident Assistant training coordinator is an additional job requirement. The second part of the interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions that focus on understanding the design, evaluation, and future direction of Resident Assistant training. This structure provided participants with a way to provide open and honest answers about their personal experiences.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. Institutions that have HRL departments, that are part of GLACUHO were contacted through an email with an explanation of the study and the researcher requested the contact information of any professional housing staff that oversee and design RA training. Upon receiving contact information, professional housing staff were contacted through an email to invite them to participate in the study. Once a participant was invited to participate in the study,

interviews were scheduled at a time that fits best in their schedule. Before the interview began, participants were emailed the informed consent document (Appendix B). Follow up emails were sent out to participants reminding them of the study and the deadline to participate in the study as needed. Interviews were conducted virtually and recorded on the online platform, Zoom.

Data Analysis

The responses collected from the interviews were transcribed and put into a Microsoft Word document. This was done so that the data could be organized and can be analyzed more clearly by the researcher. Descriptive coding was utilized to code the participants' responses (Saldaña, 2014) and was done by analyzing each response and taking keywords from them and then placing them in a second column on the spreadsheet. After keywords have been determined for each response, a third column was created to gather the themes related to each of the questions. The themes and the general response from the participants were analyzed and interpreted further in chapter four.

Treatment of Data

All data responses collected were kept on a password-protected computer. In addition, all contact information will be kept in a password-protected flash drive. This is done so that the contact information and data cannot be traced back to the participants' responses. Pseudonyms will be asked, before the interview starts, and used for both participants and institutions to maintain confidentiality. Once the study has been completed, all data will be stored on a flash drive and be kept for three years per IRB policy. Once the three years have passed, all data will be erased from the flash drive.

Chapter IV

Results

The purpose of this study was to see how Housing and Residence Life (HRL) offices evaluated their assessment of their Resident Assistant (RA) training. This chapter reports on the themes that emerged through the qualitative analysis of four semi-structured interviews. Several themes are identified, and they are organized by research questions.

Research Question #1: How do Housing and Residence Life Offices identify the subjects that will be addressed by their centralized training efforts?

Each participant was asked questions relating to how their HRL office identifies the subjects that would be addressed by their centralized training efforts. Three themes were identified from the participants answers: Reviewing past trainings, communication with staff and students, and campus and national trends.

Reviewing Past Trainings

When participants were asked what subjects or topics are going to be presented during their RA training. Participants mentioned reviewing previous RA trainings and what the RA needs to know to be successful. Participant 1 shared that it, “all comes back to that student feedback. What do they have? What do they miss? What do they need? What do they not need?” Participant 4 expanded on the important of feedback,

> It starts honestly with looking at previous years’ work and seeing what areas did the student staff do really well in? And then what area they not necessarily meet the mark. And we look for patterns. We don’t have to look for individuals, like “this person doesn’t know how to write an incident report” or whatever might be.

When it came to administrative items, Participant 2 mentioned that they take into account any mandatory compliances,

> Any sort of compliance requirements or non-negotiables like I said anything that is Title IX related, or safety related. So, like facilities, issues of that nature. Student conduct, student support, conflict, mediation, really all of those kind of higher level items that RAs would need to know".

Participant 2 also stated that they implement feedback from their student staff to improve training,

> So, actually something that we implemented this year. Sometimes the RA staff is funny. Sometimes they want to get in. They want to train, they want to learn, and they want to get out. This past year, part of the feedback that we got from last year's training was, "we really want to get to know each other a lot more". Perfect, so, we implemented this year what we called spirit crew.

Participant 3 mentioned that they review past trainings and determine what is still relevant and what's not. All the participants mentioned that this is one of many conversations that takes place about subject matters and topics for RA training.

Communication

A majority of participants mentioned that there are communications from leadership team, training committee, and also from RAs to determine subject matters and topics for RA training. Participant 2 shared that she recognizes the value of communication with both her leadership team and with the student staff,

> I like to keep my leadership team in the loop. So, we have our Residential Education leadership team here in this office. We work very closely with our

> students in the hall or hall staff members, and I also ask them "anything that you're seeing in your areas that you think the larger collective needs to know, or any feedback that you are hearing. Anything that you would like to see or limits, or any ideas you have for training?"

Participant 3 discussed the informal conversations that show up with professional hall staff and their student staff,

> Normally in their staff meetings. They will meet and they'll discuss it. But really, it's a topic that I've seen come up any week. Any staff meeting based upon maybe what is going on in the hall at the time. You know we're seeing an intolerance of political discourse. We don't talk about this in training. Should this be something that we talk about is how to handle this kind of situation. And so then again, those notes are made, and it's brought to the staff development team.

Participant 1 also mentioned that they take input from their in-hall staff and have intentional conversations from each residence hall area to get their input about training.

Participant 4 stated that there are often conversations among their leadership team about RA training,

> I would say that the primary conversations are during our staff meetings, and we have those weekly and those conversations begin as a large group conversation, and we might split off into smaller groups to talk about specific elements of training.

Trends

Campus wide and national attention to issues were also mentioned as factors to consider when looking at presentation topics for RA training. Of the four participants,

two of them mentioned looking for trends among their staff. Participant 3 shared that they take notes on what type of climate is happening on their campus and country,

> When mental health started to ramp up pre-COVID. Probably in 2014, is when we really noticed that climb starting to happen, and then a real big shift in like 2016/2017. That's when we started spending more time on mental health topics. And now it's even more than that. So, it really has to do with where we're at as a country, or where we're at as an institution.

Participant 4 stated that they look at their student staff at what they are missing as a collective, to find direction they need to head towards,

> We look at patterns of the collective. We start there. We also gather information from our Associate Vice President, and they say that this sort of the directive that we want the division to go in, and we need our students to have to be good at X, Y, or Z.

Overall, each participant had a different approach to selecting their subject matter for training, but they did share the themes that guided their selection of what subject matters need to be addressed during their RA training.

Research Question #2: How do Housing and Residence Life Offices select the training methodologies used in their centralized trainings?

Participants shared information relating to how they selected their training methodologies used in their centralized trainings. Three themes were identified: *Learning Outcomes*, *Group Engagement*, and *COVID Impact*.

Learning Outcomes

Two of the four participants discussed how they utilized learning outcomes to guide their RA training. Participant 1 stated that they use developmental theories,

> I learned how to write learning outcomes based on Bloom's Taxonomy. And we all know Bloom is an old white dude who wrote how to learn for old white dudes. We know it. We're here because he wrote it back in 1956. And so, while yes, they're effective, and they help you write these learning outcomes. Bloom's Taxonomy insinuates that learning is a linear process and for those in student affairs. We know that learning is not linear.

Participant 1 also talked about two additional learning outcome approaches,

> I went to a conference, and they talked about how to make those equitable learning outcomes. And so, I looked at two other systems for creating learning outcomes. One would be the Medicine Wheel, which comes from a Native American line of thinking and more about spiritual well-being. And a lot of our students are spiritual and also flow in a circle, because it's a wheel of how your learning works, and how you can empower yourself to move through the wheel. And then the other one is Significant Learning Outcomes. That one insinuates that in order for you to truly learn and experience, and move forward with learning, you need to meet six other aspects. So, there's learning how to learn, how to care, the human dimension, integration, application, and foundational knowledge. And some you have to go back and ask yourself questions in order to make sure that students have the space to actually learn.

When asked if learning outcomes were in every training session, Participant 1 said, “Each training session. No but we try to bring them back to the general overall training learning outcomes”.

For Participant 2, they took a different approach to how they create learning outcomes,

> So instead of using training session titles as kind of like the formula. We really started from scratch. We scrapped everything we knew about training, and we started with the job description, “what do our RAs need to know? What do they do?” and we pulled out every single little task that we could possibly think of and we really pulled out every single thing we can think of from that job description, and then every other duties as assigned. Then we group together tasks that were very similar tasks into one learning outcome. For example, instead of understanding crisis response. There are so many things that can go under understanding crisis response. So, we broke that down into “how to assist with alcohol situations, drug situations, medical situations” and we broke it down super far.

Participant 2 went on to describe how they planned on presenting their learning outcomes, “Once we broke down all of our learning outcomes, we grouped together them together into categories. So, one category again could be crisis response. One category could be community building. Another category can be administrative tasks.” After organizing their objectives, participant 2 explained how they share those with others.

> The committee reviewed those learning outcomes, and then once those learning outcomes were reviewed. We went through and built a session with those learning outcomes. So, instead of starting with a title. We started with those learning

> outcomes. So, we went through them one by one. I think our first year we did this. We had about 120 learning outcomes overall. We grouped those into no more than like four or five learning outcomes per session because we wanted to be realistic, and how much we were cramming into a session.

Participant 2 acknowledge that they did not have formal learning outcomes for every part of training,

> There are some sessions that we don't give learning outcomes for, and I think it has changed over the last couple of years. So, in the beginning we did give learning outcomes for like Title IX response or higher-level things of that nature, but also, I understand that in residence life. We are not the expert in Title IX response. So, we really started leaving anything that was super specific or like a contact expert. Like you need to come train us on. There are also some other smaller sessions like we do a welcome from our Director of Residence Life, and there's no learning outcomes for that.

Participants 3 & 4 also utilized learning outcomes though they did not mention any particular theory that guided their creation or focus. Participant 4 shared that, "there's not learning outcomes for every session, because some sessions are pure entertainment or fun related. So, we don't typically have outcomes for those." They went on to state that they did provide something for their campus partners, "We have loose outcomes for any guest presenters or campus presenters like we want to give them a framework". Participant 3 expressed a similar approach where they utilized learning outcomes for their training sessions and prepared them for themselves as well as creating ones for the sessions presented by their campus partners.

Group Engagement

A majority of the participants talked about that having group interactions among their RAs was an important method for collecting feedback. Participant 4 discussed the opportunity for staffs to interact with other building staffs,

> This year we had a focus on getting the staff to not only having opportunities for their individual staff to bond, but for them to engage with other folks from other staffs. That is the feedback we have received from students on our training committee. They're basically like, "we know our people in our building, but we don't know anybody in the building right next to us or across the way from us."

Participant 4 went on to discuss how they utilized group interactions during their RA training,

> We took the approach of having some low-level opportunities, as well as some medium level opportunities for folks to engage with one another. What we wanted to do is both small pockets of time. So, you know 15 minute to 20 minute activities, as well as some one hour, two hour, or three hour long opportunities and those could range from anything like playing beast master or for a 20 minute gap in a training session, we're going to play this sort of game together, or it could be like a movie night or some sort of structured and planned external bonding experience.

Participants 1 discussed multiple ways of how they have their staff interact,

> We're focused on community building, we built [it] in whenever we had a break, we would give them time to "go to the bathroom, go grab a snack, do what you need to do. But then we would say, be back in ten minutes", and we would run a

> small icebreaker so that way they could start to see some of those ways they could interact.

In addition to doing activities with individual hall staff groups, Participant 1 shared that they also took time to try and establish a sense of community among the entire RA staff,

> We also built in some whole team bonding by strategically placing people in different groups. So, when we did behind closed doors, or we actually did a mock floor meeting for about an hour this year. We didn't put them with their usual building staff. We broke them up by "blank" many returners in each group, "blank" many new people in each group, and "blank" many people from each different building. So, that way they got to meet somebody else."

Participant 1's reasoning to do this was so they can build in connections with other student staff both as bonding and to create avenues of peer support,

> It seems like a really small thing to do. But it was creating those intentional interactions with someone that they weren't going to hang out with all year. Someone that maybe they could meet right now. Talk a lot and then, later in the year, they could reach out to someone in another building.

Participant 2 discussed their RA staff leading some of the social interactions during RA training, "This past year, part of the feedback that we got from last year's training was, 'we really want to get to know each other a lot more'. Perfect. So, we implemented this year what we called spirit crew." The goal of this effort was to not only connect the staff members from across campus, but to increase motivation and energy during the long training days,

> Our full-time hall directors and graduate hall directors nominated one staff member from each of our nine residence halls to participate in this spirit crew, totally optional. They could participate if they wanted to. If not, they didn't have to, but we really tried to have representations from every single staff and that spirit crew was responsible for creating and implementing either large group or small group team builders or energizers throughout training.

Once the crew was created, the training scheduled accommodated the efforts of the spirit team,

> We would have designated time each day for a team builder or energizer. Then we would also use the spirit crew to have a super quick five-minute activity in their back pocket, if a session ended really early, or if a presenter was running late.

Participant 2 also shared that the department encouraged the professional staff in the halls to support the efforts of the spirit crew,

> We also always ask individual hall directors to make sure that they're planning a team builder every day for their individual staff teams. Just to make sure that they're continuing to get to know one another.

The spirit crew took their role very seriously and went beyond the original goal of providing motivation and team building during the training,

> At the end of training, did a kind of like training support lives. So, every staff won some sort of award whether it was most spirited or most engaged, or whatever the category was.

The crew expanded on the activities they did to create an overall experience of enthusiasm throughout the training,

> On top of that, we try to do theme days every day to try to make it a little bit more fun. So maybe one day every staff is a designated color of the rainbow, and their staff wears that color, or the next day is superhero day and you get to dress up in a superhero costume. We got a lot of really great feedback about it. Everyone was really engaged.

After training had completed, Participant 2 shared that they wanted to make sure that their staff felt the efforts of the spirit crew was valuable to their students and included it on the feedback they collected,

> The assessment that we did at the end of training asked "what was your favorite part. Is there anything you want to see different? An overwhelming majority of the feedback was like we love spirit crew. Let's bring this back every year.

Each participant discussed how they use their RAs feedback in unique ways to improve RA training elements, both on the information they provided and the creation of connections and community as a team and each of the participants shared their own success in their own methodologies and assessments.

Online Training – COVID Impact

The Covid-19 pandemic affected the world, institutions, and RA training as well. When the participants were asked what parts of RA training could work in an online format in a post Covid-19 pandemic. The participants shared both negative and positive considerations of what they had learned from COVID-19 and how to manage RA training.

Negative Perceptions. Participant 1 mentioned that they utilized online training formats before the pandemic and utilize them all the way through the pandemic,

> During the budget impasse of 2016/2017, our institution got hit pretty hard and bad. So, there were a few years between 2018 and 2020, before the pandemic, that we said "we got to move to online training. We got to save some hours from them actually being physically here on campus and eating meals. Additionally, they can do the training time at home.

This prior knowledge and experience helped them shift to fully training online when COVID-19 required them to make changes, "So, our institution was doing online modules long before the pandemic and when the pandemic hit, they continue to do it". However, they did not find it to be effective and once they were no longer required to train online, they changed, "So, when we came out of the pandemic for the training in 2021 of the fall, they cut them out completely because it wasn't effective anymore. The students did not enjoy it. They were not learning anything from it." It was after COVID that they decided that online training did not meet their needs,

> It just did not go well whatsoever, and so our institution at this point will never go back because they don't work, because they tried it for so long. They tried all these different topics, but it just wasn't successful, and it took more time on staff to create and manage the modules that it just didn't work.

Participant 3 also did not believe that online training was particularly effective with the RA position,

> I'm not a fan of the online. I think I was before COVID. I think that I felt like there were some modules that we could be doing. I would say an overview of what the job is and setting our expectations. I think that can be done as a module.

However, Participant 3 realized that there were many aspects of training that did not translate well to an online learning environment,

> But when it comes to theory, when it comes to dealing with conduct, with all of that mental health training. There are just conversations that I think need to happen where it's not an online format. We did an online format in 2020 training, and I think we did well for what we had, and where we were at. But I really saw [a difference] up in the office when we receive reports. I saw how the training was lacking and that judgement was just not really there for many folks, for our new folks.

Positive Perceptions. Participant 4 shared how the methodologies for RA training needed to be intentional if it's an online training,

> I think designed deliberately. We have designed on purpose, and with the participant in mind for most of the sessions. That we may do specifically the educational sessions like Title IX, Maxient, or a conduct related session. I think those in terms of training them on how to do the job. Well, many of those can occur in an online format.

They went on to discuss how they had positive experiences with online training prior to their current position,

> In my pervious institution, we had sort of a flip learning model. Prior to Covid, we were engaging folks in an online and in person way. I think that's where I get

> my belief that it's possible, and you know many of the participants are already using online methods for their classes or extracurriculars that they were already using.

Finally, Participant 4 discussed that online training was something that could be used successfully for RA training,

> I don't look at it as a barrier. I look at it as an opportunity, and so I would say, especially for the educational sessions. There's plenty of ways we can pull from that method of learning and utilize it in today's training sessions.

Though optimistic, Participant 4 also acknowledged the potential difficulties with online training,

> There are barriers. For example, if a student needs a screen reader, there are sometimes barriers to get presenters to understand it. That's something that somebody might need. There are also barriers to, if we're doing the presentation, and it's virtual. How sure are we that everybody has access to the internet wherever they're at?

The uncertainty about access was only exacerbated by the difficulties that were presented when departments had staff impacted by COVID,

> During COVID, we had some students that had covid during RA training. They were not required to come but some of them were are like, "I still want to show up and be present". Some were on campus when they had covid and they were quarantine at a hotel, or they were at home. And it's hard to guarantee that they had internet at home and it's not in our control.

While Participant 4 discussed deliberately planning RA training online, Participant 2 shared how they utilized some of the lessons they learned from COVID and continues to have online elements part of their training, “We had to move everything to virtual training when the pandemic started, and it was very much like training in three days. No, we’re not going to be in person anymore. Everything has to be moved virtually.” But once COVID was over, they found that they liked their shift to virtual training,

> Something that we actually kept from that time is we started using Microsoft Teams for everything. So, we never really kept and shared all of our training materials with the RAs. But what we do now is because everything was online for two years. We have a designated Microsoft Teams page for training. So, every day of training, I let presenters know that I need your finalized presentations and any materials that you had, and any instructions for activities.

The benefit from this new system was it allowed their RAs to revisit the training materials whenever they needed a refresher thanks to the training team’s efforts, “I put all of those into a file for each day of training and then the RAs have access to that all year long.”

Participant 3 and 4 both discussed setting up the expectations they had for an online training session, and Participant 2 elaborated on the importance of this idea,

> There were also some lower-level sessions that we turned into a live online presentation. When we were online, we turned it into a pre-recorded session. So, like a 10-minute recording about expectations for door decorations and bulletin

> boards, super easy. We don't need to do that in person and we've kept a lot of those and turned them into pre-recorded sessions.

After creating these recorded training sessions, Participant 2 talked about how their department used them to shift some of their training to continue to use the online format,

> Actually, this year, we started something new with those pre-recorded sessions because we kind of just recorded them on our own and stuck it in the folder and expected everyone to watch them. We use now, it's called Bridge Training, and it's an online module type system where we can input all of our pre-recorded sessions into one big folder.

They also discussed how the new system they created provides the training team with the ability to assess how the students are learning the material,

> Every time a staff member watches it. They can answer assessment questions and then watch the next video and answer another set of assessments questions. So, it's not that we're only keeping track of who watches what videos, even though they're supposed to be watching all of them, but we can also use that as an assessment as well.

This interactive virtual training was useful to making improvements for the team because they could see things such as "This presentation didn't go well because it wasn't engaging, or the materials didn't make sense. Then we can go back and revisit them in future training session".

Research Question #3: How do Housing and Residence Life Offices evaluate the effectiveness of the training that their RAs receive?

Participants discussed how their HRL office evaluated the effectiveness of their training that the RAs receive. Two themes emerged from the interviews related to how the offices evaluated the effectiveness of the training they provide: the use of *Training Evaluations* and how they determined the *Weakness of a Training Session*.

Use of Training Evaluations

All four of the participants talked about the fact that they have an evaluation process for how they receive feedback on their training. Participants discussed the various efforts that they made to get feedback on the training put on by the department, and also discussed some of their evaluation efforts for presenters.

Formal Assessments. The participants talked about the formal assessment that they utilize to receive feedback. Participant 1 discussed what tools they use to evaluate their training,

> Google forms. We are a Google school and so we have a full Google form that analyzes each day and then an overall training review. So, it captures everything from "what did you learn, what do you wish you didn't learn today, what is still sticking with you. What do you have questions on?" And then we ask questions about their meals, their in-hall time, what are they still confused on in general as a RA?

But the online form as not the only way Participant 1's institution gathered information from their staff,

> And then we also will kind of do some one-on-one interviews. We usually pick out a few RAs every now and again, and then just ask them a few questions. And then, as I mentioned before, our Resident Assistant Council, we'll also spend their first two or three meetings, I think this year it was like three or four meetings, gathering more feedback for us, and then compile it into an Excel spreadsheet that we can read and then add into our future sessions.

Participant 2 also shared that they utilize a daily feedback form to assess training and file it away for them to use later, additionally they will address many of the questions the next day when she reviews the daily feedback. Participant 2 also stated that they conduct an evaluation process after RA training concludes,

> We will also in the post-test for August training, we ask, "what was the most beneficial session? What was the least beneficial session? What are some changes you would like to see for training? Any additional feedback that you would like to see?" I think those are the four questions that we ask folks to get that kind of feedback.

Participant 3 stated that they used evaluation forms in the past during RA training to gather feedback about it. While Participant 4 indicated that they used evaluation forms as well as a focus group,

> We do a number of things. The first thing that we do, at least this year, would be a daily assessment that we did through Qualtrics. It was developed by our training committee, and it basically was a survey that went over every single session that happened that day. We ask them to give their opinion on the training sessions. But

> then two, we ask them to highlight a couple of things that they're able to take away from it. So, those are the sort of the immediate daily things that we do.

Participant 4 also discussed using focus groups from the student staff to gather additional feedback,

> We also typically will put together like a small focus group. We try to get at least one person from every staff on campus, but oftentimes that can't work out for scheduling purposes. So, we get a mix of returners, new folks, and then try to get a big enough group such as six to eight people. We gather more qualitative data and try to get a big picture of 'how do you feel like the flow of training was? What parts of training went well? What parts of training did we drop the ball?' So those are the ways we engage with the student staff.

Informal Assessments. Three out of the four participants stated that they gather feedback informally through conversations from the student staff and in the training committee. Participant 2 discussed how she collected feedback through the student staff,

> I used to be a Hall Director here, so a lot of the RAs know me as the Hall Director and as the Assistant Director that oversees training. Most of them have gotten very comfortable, and would send me an email to me like, "Hey Assistant Director. Here's some feedback that I have for you for training. If you want to add it for next year." Which I always tell folks to send me whatever you have because I only have one way of thinking and if there's something you want to see, please let me know, and folks will.

Upon receiving emails from the student staff, Participant 2 began to encourage the professional staff to send feedback as well,

> Any kind of feedback they can give us. We're very intentional in the first couple of staff meetings. Making sure that there is designated time for Hall Directors and supervisors to sit down with their individual staff teams and everything is fair game,

Participant 2 was very clear that they wanted the in-hall professional staff members to be invested in the design of the training for the RAs telling them,

> Anything that you liked, anything that you didn't like, anything that you want to see. Please let us know so we can change it again. This training is not for me. I've done this. I know the job inside and out at this point. Let me know what you need from me, so I'm not just making assumptions about what you need to know for this training.

Participant 2 stated that they greatly value the input from the community of residence life at their institution, "We've built a really good community of open communication and open feedback. So, all of the assessments that we do, all of the feedback meetings that we do, we will do multiple of them."

Participant 3 shared that they have informal conversations about training and the professional staff gathers that feedback,

> They talk about training with their staffs. So normally, in their staff meeting, they should be having those discussions at the end of the day of a training day. We get feedback about maybe what was discussed earlier in the day, the day prior, or if the information landed flat, or if this training session wasn't good, or it was excellent.

Participant 4 elaborated on the conversations about training with the student staff and professional staff and how they use that information,

> The conversations happen in staff meetings as well as in any of the focus groups that we have for the student staff. Then we have regular conversations in our staff meeting with the professional staff. I don't have a set of very specifically designed questions that I'm asking to elicit responses. But there are a number of ways we sort of look at it. We will have conversations about each individual day of training, and we will also have conversations about the big picture. The philosophical approaches, the methodology approaches, and we do those separately, so that we can gather as much data as possible. We put it together and utilize that for the next training.

Evaluating Presenters. Participants were asked if they evaluate the presenters that give presentations during RA training and both internal and external presenters were discussed. Participant 2 shared their efforts on evaluating both internal and external presenters,

> That is actually something we don't really do much, which I think we should. The training committee doesn't do an evaluation of presenters. I think what we try to do is, with our internal presenters, who are residence life folks that are mainly Hall Directors and Graduate Hall Directors, I require them to send me their presentation ahead of time. Like a week or two ahead of time. So, I can review it just to ensure that nothing is missing from the learning outcomes. In a way, it's not necessarily an evaluation, but I'm kind of reviewing the information before it gets put out there again.

Participant 2 then went on to discuss their relationship with external presenters and how their evaluation process works with them,

> Some presenters will do their own presentation evaluation, so I know specifically some departments across campus, I'm thinking like the counseling center. They do a training session, regardless of who it is for on campus, and at the end of each session. They will do their own assessment of the presentation and the presenter. And then they'll always share it with us. Just so we have it for our records as well, but the Training committee specifically doesn't do an evaluation of those presenters.

Participant 3 stated that, in the past, they did in fact do some evaluations of the presenters but discontinued it,

> We used to do some evaluations. I know that was on there for a couple of years. I never really felt like we got good helpful feedback. I would see things like "too long or it was fine or funny". That's not helpful. So, nothing specific and perhaps that was our fault for not asking the right questions in a certain way. I think that's something that we can get better at.

Participant 3 also discussed their approach with handling evaluations for their external presenters,

> For outside presenters, I feel like we have a little bit less control over that. They can be evaluated. But I don't know what to do with all of that feedback. Do I give it to them? We have given it to them in the past kind of in a nice way and tweak it a little bit so that it's not off putting to them. Some of the folks, they're the only ones in their department that can give the presentation.

The concern for Participant 3 was avoiding creating hard feelings from their partners, especially those whose participant was a critical part of training for the RAs. Participant 4 stated that they have an evaluation on the effectiveness of a presenter, but not engagement,

> We don't a specific evaluation experience for the presenters. We have in the past had opportunities for this in daily assessments, the participant can give Likert-scale score [rating of] effectiveness. Not necessarily on engagement, but effectiveness of surveying the information, and then understanding the information. We went away from that because we felt like it was too critical, at least from the data we got. There were a number of things, let's say campus partners, that might not be as well received or as well liked by our student staff. For example, the dining director. A lot of people have lots of opinions on food, and that was the feedback from the presentation that we received which was not about the presentation. We found that it was critical in a way that wasn't helpful for the presenter. So, we went away from that for this year.

Participant 1 stated that they don't have any evaluation forms for their internal presenters but have conversations with them, "That is actually something that we don't really do much, which I think we should. But we'll usually handle it one on one to that person about 'hey, I think this went really well. This wasn't super great, etc.'" But if an opportunity presents itself to evaluate external presenters, Participant 1 utilizes it,

> We have one for our diversity presenter, it was an external presenter. They are called *Break This Cycle*. They're expensive, though. But they have their own external form that was more questions about them, and they were kind enough to

> share that feedback with us. And so, it assesses when they're learning, and how they felt before and after this session. But it also assessed how they felt about the presenters, what they said, and lots of topics they covered.

Determining the Weaknesses of RA Training

All of the participants detailed how they determined the weakness of a training session and ways to combat it in the future. Participant 1 described what she thought was an immediate sign of a training session's weakness, "Sleeping and phones! That's a real quick indicator, because then you lost your students' interest, and that's not successful." Participant 1 elaborated on the how a training session can also be a weak session,

> But even if let's say it seems perfect on the outside, right? Everybody leaves a smiley face. No one fell asleep and nobody was on their phones, but then they don't retain the information. That was a weak session because I think more so now than ever, our students are looking for a way to have that hands-on learning experience. To actually touch the buttons, fill out the paperwork themselves, and that's how they learn, and I think a lot of people still operate in their own sphere of learning of, "I don't learn hands on. Why would I teach hands on." That's not what our students need, and so I think it's just how they retain that information and how they use that information. How they interact with it is a real indicator of the session's success and weakness.

Similar to Participant 1, Participant 2 also discussed the idea of the hands-on learning experiences,

> I don't think it's a weakness, but room for improvement is incorporating some sort of engaging practice, activity ore hands-on activity or video or something

> discussion based so that the RAs engaged a little bit more. I know from experience, even just taking classes and just sitting in a class setting or a training setting, and just being talked at the whole time. It's so hard to comprehend all the information that's getting thrown at you. And then you have different neurodivergent folks in the room that may need some sort of engaging aspect to keep them paying attention, and it's no fault of their own. So, I think if an engagement piece isn't included, I think overall that's looked at as a little bit of a weakness and sometimes it's really hard to get our presenters to add those engaging pieces.

Participant 2 talked about the difficulty for presenters to modify their training presentation for the student staff,

> We have some presenters that have been doing this for a really long time, so they are kind of set their ways and they have their presentations from years past that they just recycle year after year. I think sometimes everyone's just busy all the time, so they don't have the time to include an engaging piece.

Participant 4 elaborated on the idea of student's being bored and attempting to hold their attention through the training,

> Immediately it's "are these people bored? Are they wondering why they're here? Did they get anything out of it?" I'm sensitive to blaming anybody for that. There's a number of factors that we know impact humans, right? There are 1,005 things happening in the world at any given moment, and people's attention spans are smaller. They get distracted, or they might have personal things happening.

Participant 4 also discussed the training presentations' engagement style and how that factor's into the RA's attention span,

> Somebody's not engaged in the content, and that's sort of how we initially look at that. We can be better. So, we saw for the last hour it was lecture style. There were five people sleeping, 10 people were texting, or whatever it might be. And what ways can we change the method in which we present the information, so that they are more engaged. I am again hesitant to say it's a weakness. But it is like, how can we even most readily see areas where we dropped the ball and can be better next time?

Participant 3 stated that they noticed weakness in their training sessions if they see a RA who focuses on themselves and not cooperating with their staff as a team, and not engaging with their students as much as they should during the August move-in week.

All of the participants shared their concerns that it was not enough to assess the information presented or how the students retained that information. Rather they were looking at multiple aspects of the training to make improvements: information, presenters, presentation styles, and whether the students were engaging with the material. And while all of them identified these issues, there was no consensus on the best way to use that information to use the information they collected to fix them.

Research Question #4: How do professional residence life staff use their evaluation of the effectiveness of training to improve training for RAs?

Once RA training has concluded, participants shared how they use the feedback gathered during the training, how they use it for continuous training, and how it is used

for the next year's fall RA training. Three themes emerged from the participants' responses on this topic: the *Assessment Cycle, Finding Solutions to Improve,* and *Anticipating Struggles*.

Assessment Cycle

Once the feedback has been gathered, communication then occurs among the professional staff to discuss how to use the information from their assessment. Participant 1 talked about the conversations that that they have that occur centered on improving RA training,

> It happens on multiple levels. They talk about it at RA Council, and give the training committee feedback, and then the training committee will go through all of the forms and have a discussion about that there. The feedback received from the RA council is edited by me before it makes it to the training committee because we have our graduate students and our full-time Complex Directors on this training committee. And sometimes, RAs have a lot of feelings about their in-hall time, and about the way that their Assistant Complex Directors and full time Complex Directors were trained and will give their full unfiltered thoughts in that feedback, and sometimes it's not helpful, and it's hurtful to our staff.

Participant 1 stated that even though they may edit some elements of the comments by the students, there were still conversations occurring with the general feedback towards the professional staff member,

> We still have follow-up conversations of like, "hey, some of your staff was frustrated about what you said on this day, or how this was covered. Can you talk

> to me a little bit more about it." And we have an actual development conversation, instead of saying, "insert ACD's name is so dumb. They should have been trained better. That doesn't help anyone, but clearly something happened on that day. So, how can we bridge the gap and bridge that knowledge gap.

Besides the training committee, Participant 1 meets with their department's leadership to discuss the feedback given during RA training,

> After that, I'm the Assistant Director, my supervisor is the Director of Student Life, and then we have an Associate Vice President, and we three will come together to talk about the feedback we got from training, from the feedback that comes from the evaluative forms, and the feedback from the RA Council.

Participant 1 discussed how not all of the information they receive from the assessment assessments they do are valuable,

> We go through the feedback line by line. In our first again, two to three, or whenever we get the RA Council's feedback. There are obviously things like the one off where it's like, "I just wanted a break." You got five, I can't help you there. So, it's some things of "yes, we can't use that but, we'll save it for later and keep it in our minds."

But when they do get helpful information, they use that feedback to make improvements quickly and adopt the changes to benefit everyone,

> And then there's some really great feedback that comes through and we're like, "all right, we're applying this today. Let's put it here". We take the RA feedback and use those little bits of information, taking their general ideas, and then adding a little bit of expertise to make it work. And then, if it works, we keep going. If

> not, we go back to where we were, and kind of make shifts and changes. I think another good piece of advice that I was given once was, "you don't have to reinvent the wheel". Training is honestly a lot of copy and paste to schedule, copy and paste, and repeat. But then making those small little tweaks to see if it improves the days and lives of students and staff.

Participant 2 discussed how they utilized the feedback they received from their students to improve future RA trainings,

> There are so many different ways to give feedback but then we also ask full time Hall Directors, Graduate Hall Directors, and other folks that were in the room. And we really look at again those assessments of our RAs, learning what they should be learning based off of those knowledge assessments. So, what we do is we reevaluate our learning outcomes every single year, not only because things change, and there's new processes and procedures, but also looking at it in September. Our first committee meeting is always, "what went well and what didn't go well." And some of the student staff feedback is implemented into that.

Intentional purpose was one of the key factors that Participant 2 utilized for improvements on RA training,

> I will be very intentional with either who I assign to that topic for the next year, or if I'm reaching out to the same person, because it's from a specific department or something. I will be very intentional with that person of "you need to fill the whole time for your session, don't breeze through it in 15 minutes, and you also need to include X, Y, and Z activity or something." So, we become a little bit more prescriptive with those, and letting folks know what they have to do for us because

> really, it's only benefiting our student staff and our students, and then in turn our campus partners across campus, because often times, if an RA can't handle something, if often trickles out to other departments.

Three out of the four participants also described their assessment cycles' timeline beginning at the end of the fall/August RA training. Participant 3 described their timeline,

> So, staff development team would be looking at those in the fall. Then, after the fall training in August. They start meeting in September, they'll go through all of those evaluations, and then they start right there and then. They work on that all year for the winter training in January. They would also gather all that feedback and then that information is then passed on to the group that meets during the summer.

Participant 1 & 2 shared a timeline similar to Participant 3, but Participant 4 operated from the beginning of the year starting in January,

> Our training committee is the only committee that operates on a calendar year system and not an academic year system. For example, most of our committees may begin in the summer at the beginning of July. Our training committee will start after the winter training in January, so at the very beginning of their term. They start planning for the end of the year celebration and gather information on the previous training period to utilize that in informing our next steps and what our best approaches are moving forward. There's a committee of people that are looking at the next training, and that are focused and engaging with each other and the student staff as they plan training in a way to be the most beneficial for everyone.

Finding Solutions to Improve

Once the information from their assessments has been gathered and discussed. Participants discussed the various efforts made for improving their training with additional training, adjusting the training schedule, and evaluating presenters.

Additional Training. Participants were asked to describe their approaches with continuous RA training for their staff. Participant 1 stated that they had built in monthly trainings to continue the learning for the RAs,

> We hold a monthly in service during our RA staff meeting. It's about an hour every month where we touch on topics we want to cover, and then topics that our residential staff would like covered. We also host a winter refresher training when they return in January. It plays a massive role, and we bring in all of our staff, whether they are returners or new students, for about 10 days total for their training.

Participant 1 also discussed the various methods of addressing RAs that require more training outside the fall RA training sessions,

> If there's a training session that they get but it's impacting their job performance, a one on-one conversation with them [is had]. But if it's a miss across a bunch of staff and it's something that isn't working because we didn't cover it right. It comes up as a refresher either as an in-service or in our winter training.

Participant 2 addressed their methodologies in year-round continuous training once the fall RA training has concluded.

> So, it changes from year to year. It depends on what's happening, if we're closed for a global pandemic, or if there are other larger campus-wide initiatives that we

> are asked to go to throughout the semester. What we have tried to do the past couple of years is to do a continued training or an in-service once a month with our full staff, get our full staff back together as a group to either train on something we didn't have time to train on in August, or if something common that's happening across campus.

They explained how this is implemented by their department once the leadership has identified something that needs additional time to be spent preparing their RA staff,

> For example, this year we've seen a really big increase in mental health and the lack of coping skills for our students. So, we did a secondary trauma training for our RAs to talk them about what secondary trauma is, and how that can impact them. So, it depends on year to year, and we try to do something monthly with the group whether that's a large group or if it's a more sensitive topic for a smaller amount of staff. The training committee will train the full-time hall directors so that the hall directors will implement it during their weekly staff meeting once a month.

Participant 2 utilized their assessment cycle after their fall RA training in order to provide additional training at a later date,

> We also do a pre and post-test and a six-week assessment. The pre and post tests are anonymous to an extent. All we do is ask folks to select the staff that they're a part of, because sometimes a specific staff will be kind of gray area, or all of the staff will be kind of around the area. And if an overwhelming number of staff

> doesn't get it. We will go ahead and implement that into a full staff in-service continued training to revisit in a different way than what was presented in the fall.

Participant 2 described how they used the six-week plan as a way to gauge what the RAs are still needing more training on,

> The six-week survey, what we do is we'll pull some of those higher-level learning outcomes from the pre and post-test or some other learning outcomes and assessment questions that we didn't get to use. And at the sixth week into the semester, we ask them to take the survey and let us know, "what are you still confused about at this point in the semester? What do you still need help with? What do you have questions on?" We'll frame that in the same way, if it's a large-scale issue, we'll have an in-service training, or a full staff meeting. If it is individualized to a hall. We will send it to those supervisors. But those assessments help us create different templates, or flow charts or different process documents to be able to help our folks as well.

Participant 3 discussed different opportunities they had to do continuous trainings with their campus partners,

> As far as housing and residence life continuous training, it depends upon the staff development team. So sometimes they will have opportunities that we can do some training, whether that is on mental health or sexual misconduct, Title IX. If something is offered to the university, we'll try to piggyback on that and encourage staff to be a part of that.

Participant 3 stated that they don't make it mandatory for their staff to participate with continuous trainings, "very rarely do we make it mandatory for a mid-year, or the middle of the semester, or any of the continuous education." If a student staff member requires

more training, Participant 3 shared that they rely on the professional staff supervisor of that RA to provide the training,

> When we see that our RA needs some more training, we'll normally have their supervisors work with them. If it's in the area of, say Title IX. I would definitely get someone in those offices on-board as well. This way, the RA or the Community Advisor can hear directly from them. I will say that, sometimes, folks in those positions think extremely abstractly and are quoting different laws and whatnot, and that can be pretty confusing. So, I think that it's really important the resident director is there to try to help break that down a little bit for them as well.

Participant 4 described their fall training as a foundational learning space and how they use the continuous training to build upon the training,

> We really utilize the fall training as a foundational learning experience. Experience like this is what we hope that you leave this training essentially having the basic understanding of how to do your role really well. And what we really have been focusing on is two main areas of training for the fall: building competence and confidence for our student staff. We use that as sort of the foundational idea, and then what we do is we have sort of monthly meetings where everybody gets together.

They went on to explain how the department used the monthly meetings to extend the training that the RAs receive,

> We call them all-staff meetings. Everybody gets together for an hour in the evening time, and we do any sort of spot training that might need to happen. We

> see trends you know in terms of performance, or even in terms of student concerns that might come up. For example, this year we noticed that we did pretty extensive training on our conduct system, and how to log their reports and what not. But the problem was that there were several folks that didn't fully understand or didn't have all the tools available to them to write reports really well. So, we use one of our monthly trainings to get them sort of up to speed and do a bit of work shopping.

Participant 4 also mentioned that they have optional continuous trainings available for their student staff,

> We also, every now and again, have sort of like an in-service opportunity and those are typically optional. Unless we find that there's a glaring need, but they are typically optional. Those are just supplemental opportunities for those students to take part in. So, it could be anything from becoming a trauma informed person, or we had one that was all about time management. Winter training is meant to be one in-service training. It provides a condensed foundational experience for any new hires, as well as for all of the returners from the semester. We give them an opportunity to come back and get back to the swing of things and do some bonding experiences and then we also have supplemental training. That we give them that and it helps them build on their experiences as well.

Participant 4 elaborated on how they sometimes decide to provide individual training for a staff member as well,

> We've been approaching those [situations] in a one-on-one setting first. For example, we have training in the fall, in August, and then we noticed in the middle of late September that there is sort of a need to improve. We start with the supervisor, and we work with that staff to really create an outline of an action plan. "What are the ways that I'm going to be able to take steps for improving and who are my resources? What are my resources available to me?" We don't wait until the evaluation period to engage with them on that. We want them to have all the tools to succeed, and so that means for us that we need to work at least at the very beginning.

Participant 4 utilized the approach, along with Participants 1 & 2, of addressing campus-wide issues as a full staff,

> If we are noticing patterns like, if there's people from across campus that having the same issue, we start with the one-on-one still, but we may at times, and I can think of maybe two times that we've done this in my time here, but we may have sort of like a required in-service, so that we are working together as a group to all learn X, Y, or Z.

Adjusting the Schedule. The time frame of fall RA training is similar across all participants, and many highlighted concerns and the needs for improvements to the schedule. Participant 1 described their training schedule,

> I am a firm believer that training can be done within the hours of 9 AM to 5 PM, and that means going through different sessions, having lunch for an hour, and then having your in-hall time all within that time. Our students are so time

> limited, and it's a huge value for their time. Institution One actually pays the least for training in the state of Illinois., and by the least, I mean zero. So, we have to be very strategic about the time that we use.

Participant 1 also mentioned that they have to be intentional with their sessions during the time the student staff are together,

> We are also very strict followers of the law in Illinois, and so all RAs technically are supposed to go through mental health/first-aid training. And so, we have dedicated a full day, because that's what our local program that we use requires them to go through the mental health/first-aid training. And then from there after that day, it's all kind of broken up into different things. We have our counseling center come back in; we talk a lot about incident report writing. We focus this year a lot more on community building because we saw that need.

With the feedback provided, Participant 1 stated how they are working with their RAs in order to draft a training schedule that meets the needs of both professional and student staff,

> We also got a lot of feedback about time specifically this year, which baffles me, but here we are. We got feedback of how it was used, and what we did and so actually handed it back to our RAs and said, "here are the things we are legally required to do. Here are the things the institution requires us to do, and here are the things that you have specifically requested. Can you draft us a training schedule?" And the RAs said, "absolutely we can." And so, we took that feedback

> as well of okay, here's what they have for ideas of how we can build and block a schedule together.

Participant 2 discussed the changes that they made to their training schedule to meet the needs of the student staff,

> When I started in 2017, it was very much like 8 AM to 8 PM, for like two weeks straight training, and then like after that [at] 8 PM you're going back to your hall to learn your hall specific tasks. Once we move to the learning outcomes based approach, we really got to a point where it's training for about ten days, give or take, but we really try to do it in the morning. We're in-person, together, for the sessions as a large group, or in rotation settings. We break for lunch, and then in the afternoon it's building prep time with your individual teams, time for that closer group team building. So, they are still in training, but it gives them a little bit more of a relaxed break. They're not being talked at during sessions, things of that nature.

Participant 2 mentioned how they were changing the ways sessions were built originally into a new design,

> When I first got here, we had this thing called "diversity day", which was like all of our diversity session in one day. We do not do that anymore. We really scaffold our diversity sessions through training, so that they build upon each other, but also so that we're learning throughout it. Because I mean, learning about diversity, equity, and inclusion is not just a one day and you're done. You

> know everything there is to know. It's a continued learning like we had talked about earlier. So, we really scaffold that throughout training.

Using an approach that was similar to Participants 1 & 2's approach of splitting up training, Participant 4 discussed avoiding long training days with their training schedule,

> Since I've been in at my current institution, we've been really focusing on not having day-long trainings. If we can help it. The good news is that we can help it and we can design it. We are fully equipped to design a schedule that is not 12 hours long every day for ten days. We essentially have our student staff come in at the end of the first week of August, and then they engage in a total of ten days. But it does not include weekends. So, we have them basically during the workday, the business day that you would consider for a full-time professional. We have training sessions, we have bonding opportunities, etc., and typically between hours of 10 AM to 5PM. Sometimes, we'll end the day early, depending on the day. And then right after that, we go into move-in prep and moving in materials.

Participant 3 discussed their approach of the training schedule and it differed from the other participants,

> It's two weeks long, including the weekends. There are some staff bonding opportunities. Very rarely do we allow students or our staff to take time off to go away somewhere. We really try to encourage staff bonding, but during the week. It is your normal 8 AM to 5 PM. For two weeks long, they're getting ten full days, and after 5 PM there's usually a little bit of some time off, but then there's always the in-hall training as well. So, whether that's sitting down and discussing what

> happened in that day and answering questions, perhaps it's they're going over the expectations of one another, and what their supervisor is going to be, or it might be going out for ice cream or going for a walk. So, it really depends on that team and the resident director on how they're going to handle that time.

All of the participants discussed their training schedules and the different ways they are looking to adjust it to meet the needs of student staff and the professional staff. The training schedule and various issues present themselves as future concerns.

Anticipating Struggles

Participants were asked about the future changes that they foresaw coming into the RA training design. Participants discussed both the struggles that they currently face, such as relationships with campus partners, and upcoming issues that may arise such as time limitations and staff shortages.

Time Limitations. Participant 4 discussed the issues of how time is going to impact the training schedule,

> For me, it's gonna revolve around time. The time period, or should I say the timing of every day, any time that we can shorten or condense some days. Those are the things that I want to be focusing on. I really don't believe that we need to have trainings that are 12 hours long, seven days of the week.

In addition to the concerns about the amount of time, Participant 4 worried about the message that was being sent about how the students were being treated,

> Student staff, our workers, are just like us and for them to essentially not really be paid for training, at least where I'm at, and not really be paid at an hourly rate. It's

> just covered in their stipend, and they get the meal plan, and the room. So, for them to have that, is it's strange to me. And so, anyways that I cannot exploit them, right? Give them opportunities to be really good at their role, but also not ask them do all of the legwork, all the ground work. I would say that's going to impact the ways in which we train them. If we could start paying them more hourly, I would love that. Is that likely to happen? I don't know. A cynical part of me believes not in my time in higher education. We would have to really change the entire scope of the university.

Participant 3 also discussed time and a work life balance being an important factor for the future of RA training design,

> I can see there being a better balance. So, it's not just work, work, and work like it is now. I think that's something that can happen. I know some folks want to cut down on the amount of time that we're together. I would rather keep the amount of time that we're together but maybe a break. Have an afternoon break or something like that. But then there's the question of how do we fit it all in? So, something's gonna give, and I just don't know what can give especially in these days, where everything just seems so elevated and such a hot topic.

Staff Shortages. Participant 2 mentioned that in higher education, often someone is doing multiple jobs, "Everyone's always busy. Everyone is doing like three people's jobs at a time. It's higher education and that's kind of what we do at this point". Participant 1 also discussed the concern of having a shortage of staff and how that will impact the training design,

> I think there's gonna be a huge shake up among the staff structure that I think will fundamentally change the way that training works. I have heard a lot of institutions, due to staffing shortages, start to change the way their staff works, and it's completely separate. They have one group of student staff entirely focused on the community building, all of the fun stuff, and then they have one staff that's just there for duty. And I think that's going to be a huge shift for other institutions to move to that model, in my opinion. You have this "one happy, fun, let's connect training", and then you have a training like "there's a tornado, there's a fire, there's crisis, and policy violations."

They felt that this potential change in staffing will bring a new set of questions for the professional staff in the departments,

> And I think it'll change professionals to "how do you train both? How do you bring the realness to both?" How do you let the community facilitator know that, even though they get the light and happy fun side of the RA job, things can still happen. Or when you have the duty, conduct, the doom and gloom policy violations, how do you encourage them to build those interactions? How do you encourage them to have positive relationships and I think that will change the way that people think about training.

Outside Presenters and Relationships. Participant 2 discussed the issues with their external presenters and the importance and difficulty of maintaining the relationships with campus partners while trying to improve the experience for the RAs during their training,

> When presentations get sent out to presenters to be like, “hey, would you mind presenting this for us?” Everyone is like, “yeah, I’m so excited, and I want to present in front of the RAs.” But then that session gets put on the back burner, and it kind of gets tossed together at the last minute. And it’s not with everyone, but honestly with a handful of folks.

But finding a solution to the issue was not easy for the participant, they explained that they considered a more structured plan, but struggled with what would be involved,

> So, my supervisor and I were actually talking about not only utilizing the learning outcomes, but creating a predetermined lesson plan that essentially is for each training session. But in my eyes, at that point, why not we just create all of the training sessions. Like that’s kind of not the point of training though. So, I’m really trying to avoid prescribing a full lesson plan for every single session because again, I am only one person and one, that’s a lot of work, and two, I only have one way of thinking. So, even with that feedback. I think it’s important to get different perspectives and different folks in front of the group, and no one wants to hear me talk for two weeks at a time. I don’t have to hear myself talk. It all comes back to, “are we providing the best training possible for our students?”. So, do we take those presentations way from folks that are just putting them on the back burner, semester after semester, or do we just take this over ourselves?

Participant 1 shared the struggles they face with their outside presenters and discussed how they approach it,

> We do our own internal of review of "what do we need and what do we wish we had?" My number one pet peeve about training is when someone's like, "we need to talk about diversity", and they just call an outside office. "We want to talk about some session", and then you call another external office. You don't do the time to research it yourself or give the housing perspective. If it's entirely guest presenters, and they never hear from your staff. Then that's a huge problem, because one, you're overworking other offices for something that your office is supposed to be doing, and two, you aren't giving any credibility to your graduate and your full-time staff.

Being an office that has high student touchpoints that can direct students to other campus resources, Participant 1 stated that maintaining campus relationships can be difficult,

> You're never going to make everybody happy and planning training is a real political game because you have offices that you have great friendships with, great relationships that you need to use. But do they have to come to training and take a whole hour? The answer is probably no. For example, our counseling center. Some of our RAs utilize their services. And so, when their counselor walks in to present to them, it makes them uncomfortable because some weird counselor/I'm your patient relationship makes them feel strange. "Please don't rat me out for my mental health, woes, and trials". And so, we try not to have them come in and do some big session. We have them come in smaller groups and interact with individuals, one on one, because that is more meaningful than a big giant session.

All of the participants shared the timeline of their assessment cycle and the various ways that their assessments and conversations happen afterwards. They discussed the various additional training they make available after the fall RA training, as well as multiple ideas for improvement such as expanding diversity training throughout the entirety of RA training and keep the training schedule within a 9 AM to 5 PM time frame. While most of the participants looked at solutions for improvements to their trainings, they also shared their concerns for the foreseeable future in the RA training design such as staff shortages, time limitations during the training schedule, and maintaining relationships with campus partners.

Chapter V

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how professional residence life staff members perceive the effectiveness of RA training and integrate their assessments to improve future RA trainings. Understanding the directions of how a few Housing and Residence Life (HRL) departments select their training subjects, methodologies, evaluate their assessment of training, and addressing improvements to the training design is crucial for the success of the RA's ability to support the students they oversee. This chapter begins with a discussion of the findings along with implications for the profession, followed by recommendations for future research.

Discussion

This discussion is broken up into three sections, with each section addressing the overall themes that were identified in the study; *Communication, Training Methodologies,* and *Solutions to Improve*. The conceptual framework utilizes two theories to interpret the findings from the participants of their assessment of RA training, Wigfield's (1994) Expectancy-Value Theory and Elliott's and Dweck's (1988) Goal Orientation Theory. The Expectancy-Value Theory has four major components for an individual's expectations for success, tasks, and other achievable beliefs that will motivate them to put effort into the task at hand: attainment value, intrinsic value, utility value, and cost. Wigfield (1994) defined the four values with the following: attainment value is the importance of doing the given task, intrinsic value refers to how an individual enjoys completing the given task, utility value refers to how the task can be utilized to fit into the individual's future plans, and the cost value refers to how much effort the individual needs to give into the task.

Goal Orientation Theory focuses on how and why individuals are attempting to achieve their objectives. Elliott and Dweck (1988) developed the theory with three goal-oriented goals that focuses on how the individual can improve their skills. The three goals are learning, performance, and mastery goals: Learning goals is where the individual seeks to increase their skills and/or master new tasks. Performance goals look at how the individual focuses on maintaining a positive view of their abilities and tends to avoid a negative perspective. Mastery goals is where an individual displays a solution-oriented purpose of self-instruction that promotes an increase of learning, understand, developing, and mastering skills (Elliott & Dweck, 1988, Kalpen & Maehr, 2007).

Communication

It was clear from the interviews with the participants that communication with RAs, individual building staffs, the training committee, and with the leadership team are important to the success of any training program. The values that were clear in the role communication played in creating effective RA training were attainment value, utility value, cost, performance goals, and learning goals (Elliot & Dweck, 1998; Wigfield, 1994). Participants utilized learning goals when discussing their training evaluations and measuring whether their RAs were learning from the training and addressing the topics that require more attention. Performance goals and utility value were imperative for the participants once the fall RA training has been completed. They gathered both formal and informal data of the RAs based on the RA performance evaluation, one-off situations that occur, and incident reports that provide feedback on how the RAs are performing after the training. Participants also discussed conversations among their leadership team about whether feedback to the presenter of a training session needs to occur. Collaborative

effort between campus partners and the housing offices occurs year-long and if a campus partner comes to present and the feedback that HRL collects is negative rather than positive or if the training session did not meet the intended needs that HRL was looking for, HRL staff may be less inclined to provide that feedback to the campus partner in order to maintain a positive relationship then to potentially provide the feedback and damage the relationship impacting future collaborations. Participants discussed the importance of communication about RA training and described where their values lie with the assessment and development of RA training. These ideas provide an effective conceptual framework for understanding the importance of communication across the entire department of HRL and individual stake holders at the institution with the RA training design.

Training Evaluations

Communication is an essential component to gathering feedback from the training itself, to the supplemental trainings throughout the academic year, and for the fall RA training. The RAs feedback is especially important because having an effective training and a delivery system to address the responsibilities can lessen the job's stress, improve staff wellness, and reduce role ambiguity (Whitney et al., 2016). All of the participants discussed utilizing some form of assessments to gather data about their RA training. Participants discussed two formal feedback efforts with all participants utilizing a feedback form as an assessment of the training sessions. The forms were given to RAs either at the end of a training session or at the end of the training day.

Not limited to written evaluations, less structured methods of assessment were also discussed by participants. One participant discussed utilizing a focus group and

attempted to recruit a member from each building staff to be a part of the focus group. Other participants encouraged their professional staff to have conversations with their RA staff to collect feedback for RA training. In addition, the professional staff would have conversations amongst their leadership team during their meetings. One participant discussed collecting informal feedback through email or word of mouth from student staff about their unique situations that they would recommend covering for RA training. All these less structured methods of assessment could have topics ranging from training sessions, or individual events occurring in the academic year that student staff would like covered at RA training. All of the feedback gathered was important data that the participants utilized in their discussions in the assessment cycle.

Assessment Cycle

Assessments are imperative to gather feedback for improvements to RA training, a vital part of the assessment cycle. Communication is emphasized during this cycle as multiple conversations occur on RA training and the directions it should go. The participants discussed how they utilized the feedback that they collected by having discussions with their professional staff members to address the utility of RA training. These topics could range from strengths of training sessions to weaknesses of training sessions, how well received were the presenters, and whether information needs to be readdressed in a future training session. Though participants discussed that they have evaluation forms, none of the participants went in-depth about what is being asked on the evaluative forms. As for tools of measurement, only one participant mentioned utilizing a formal measurement tool to evaluate an aspect of RA training which was that RAs would fill out the form and evaluate a presenter on a Likert-scale score. Other participants

utilized informal tools of measurement to measure the effectiveness of a training session such as if RAs were on their phones or if they were asleep.

With the feedback collected, participants mentioned that they review it with their training committee team and gather the impressions of the learning that was happening. This information would assess whether the majority of the RAs understood the learning or not. They would discuss an alternate way to present the information. This could range from addressing questions the following day, having the information come up at a future training session in the academic year, to having an alternate presenter who would present the information. Most of the participants also discussed that they utilize reports after the fall RA training to assess whether RAs are effectively utilizing the skills learned in RA training. When there is a RA who is struggling with their performance, they would ask the professional staff member who supervises them to assist them in their performance such as reexamining training materials. However, if multiple RAs were struggling with their performances in a certain subject matter or if there is a campus-wide trend (such as rise of mental health), a majority of participants would call for a mandatory in-service training during the academic year.

Besides the training committee, participants discussed their assessments with key stakeholders such as the Vice President of Student Affairs and their campus partners. These discussions could include the direction that the institution is heading towards and how the RAs are supporting that direction, campus-wide or national trends that are occurring, and as well as feedback. Interestingly, all the participants do not formally assess their presenters. There were internal dialogues with the HRL leadership team to discuss whether a presenter was effective or not.

One participant discussed how they would have a conversation with the staff member about the training session that they presented if there was negative feedback. Another participant stated that they would reconsider whether that presenter would present on the subject matter for the future. Two of the participants mentioned that they used to evaluate presenters in the past but found that the feedback being received by the RAs was too critical. The feedback gathered was either not related to the training session or was about the session not being engaging. One participant mentioned that they evaluate presenters not affiliated with the institution only if the presenter provides an evaluation form.

For the campus-partners who presented during RA training, a majority of participants mentioned that they would have an internal discussion amongst their HRL leadership team about the effectiveness of the training session. These could range from whether the objective of the training session was met, engagement from the RAs, or if the time was fully utilized. A majority of participants presented different ways to engage with their campus partners. One idea was that if the learning objectives were not being met or if the time was not being fully utilized, they would consider not bringing the campus partner back and take over the presentation internally. Another idea was to not bring campus partners at all and that HRL staff should be educated on the subject matter and should present the idea so that there is credibility to the staff and to avoid overworking other offices. The final idea discussed was to not give the feedback gathered to the campus-partners because if the office is the only one who could talk about the subject matter. The participant explained that they would rather maintain a positive

relationship with the office and provide a less effective training session for their student staff.

The assessment cycle occurs year-round and something that all of the participants worked through in order to improve their training and have intentional conversations within the training committees and professional staff to gather feedback. Overall, communication plays a critical role in the success of RA training as the through the assessment cycle, multiple conversations are happening within HRL and key stakeholders about the successes of the training as well as areas for improvements.

Training Methodologies

The interviews with the participants highlighted that there are multiple ways to train someone for a job. The participants discussed the various methods that they have utilized in training their RA staff, utilizing their RAs to lead training sessions, and acknowledging the limitations that they may face. It was clear in looking at the roles that training methodologies played in creating an effective RA training involved attainment values, intrinsic values, utility values, costs, and learning goals (Elliot & Dweck, 1998; Wigfield, 1994). Participants discussed utilizing a learning outcomes approach to guide their RA training and the creation of the learning outcomes required intentional, developmental theories, discarding the previous RA training guides and restarting it with the intent of using learning outcomes to guide the planning and execution of their training.

These approaches required a lot of time and effort; however, it was an effort that was well received by both the RAs and the HRL staff. Additionally, participants discussed utilizing their RAs in leading social and interactive sessions for their fellow

RAs as a way to utilize the time that they are all together and learn from one another. Participants highlighted how the evaluation their own assessment identified the weaknesses of the RA training on their campus even without utilizing training evaluations. These ideas provided an effective conceptual framework for understanding that how departments design their training methodologies plays an important role in the RA's development while they go through RA training.

All of the participants used learning outcomes as a tool to guide their RA training. Implementing a learning outcome approach was used to identify what the RAs need to know and how they can learn it. There was no single way that this was achieved, as institutions look for more equitable ways to educate their students. Using programmatic devices such as the Medicine Wheel or creating Significant Learning Outcomes allowed departments to consider a philosophical approach to spiritual well-being that originates from Native Americans culture and focuses on how one learns flows in a circle (the wheel) and the more the individual empowers themselves, they will learn and progress through the wheel. Another option used Significant Learning Outcomes as a learning method that if one is to truly learn and experience the learning, then the individual has to meet the six aspects of learning: how to learn, how to care, the human dimension, integration, application, and foundational knowledge. This more equitable way to help RAs learn the skills necessary to perform their responsibilities emphasized the need for equitable learning outcomes.

To identify the appropriate methodology, looking at the RA job description and asking, "what do our RAs need to know? What do they do?" allows those responsible for training to consider every possible task in the job description as well as other duties

assigned and once listed, grouping the similar tasks together and to create a learning outcome. It was also important to focus the learning outcomes on no more than four or five learning outcomes per training session so that they can be realistic on how much information can be learned and retained by RAs. Breaking down the RA job description can give training coordinators the fundamentals of what the RA needs to know, and design training sessions with the skills and learning outcomes necessary for the RA's success at the forefront of the planning process. Discovering innovative ways to learn and create a guide for RA training and the execution of these tasks requires assistance and input from the RAs as well as the professionals in the department.

RAs can be a vital part of training when they are able to be involved in the social aspect of training by leading the social activities during the breaks in between training sessions or the evening hours. This allows RAs to interact with one another once the training day has concluded. RAs leading these social activities was a response to feedback calling for more interaction with one another during training as RA training is often one of the very few times of the year where the entire RA staff is present. And the students wanted to have greater connections with each other than what normally occurs in the day-to-day performance of their jobs.

Encouraging interaction among all of the RA staff before they go back to their respective buildings, and before their residents arrive to campus, provides a way for the RAs to find support and motivation for the job. Professional staff support RAs as part of the work they do, but with RAs leading the activity, the students were able to step up and demonstrate their leadership and teamwork skills to provide opportunities for the RAs to take a break and interact with one another. Only one participant utilized their RAs in an

educational setting, the traditional role-playing activity known commonly as “Behind Closed Doors.” While this activity allows first year and returning RAs to support one another and offer advice from what they have learned in training, and from personal experiences provided by the returning RAs, they can be used to improve training in other formats and circumstances.

There are multiple training sessions incorporated in the RA training design and there are multiple ways to assess their effectiveness. While noticing whether RAs were on their phones or asleep may be an immediate sign that the training session is weak, there are a number of factors to consider about why RAs could be distracted, such as the training session not being interactive. RAs need to have elements in their training that engage them such as a hands-on activity, interactive discussions, or opportunities to practice the task for them to stay engaged in the training sessions. The consequences for the RAs not engaging with the training sessions can result in little to no retention of the information, impacted job performance, and a wasted opportunity for a useful training session. The various training methodologies discussed share an overall theme: learning. How departments select, use, and improve their training methodologies impact the learning of the RA which in turn impacts the RAs’ performance and success in their position as well as impacting the students that they oversee.

Solutions to Improve

It was clear from the interviews that RA training is not perfect, and it requires continuous efforts to improve the work of the department for it to continue being successful at training RAs. The participants discussed some of the obstacles they faced with the RA training schedule and navigating RA training in a virtual environment during

the COVID-19 pandemic. Five values were clear in finding solutions to improve the RA training design: attainment value, utility value, cost, performance goals, and learning goals (Elliot & Dweck, 1998; Wigfield, 1994). Participants discussed how the online RA training demonstrated that RAs were not learning effectively, and it was demonstrated by their performances when the HRL leadership team received incident reports. This was a concern for many of the departments who used virtual training methods during the COVID-19 years. However, when the RAs were not learning the skills necessary to perform their duties adequately, this attempt at online RA training seemed to be a waste of time. However, this was not the case for everyone as it was discovered that online training can be beneficial if utilized for the appropriate kinds of learning and material that comes with being intentional with the design of an online RA training opportunity. Finding the right topics and learning that work in a virtual training format is the key.

Online RA Training

The start of the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the world by shutting nearly everything down and people going into quarantine. However, institutions were quick to make efforts to get students back on campus and this required that the RAs to return to campus as well (Harper, 2020). During the pandemic, all of the institutions in this study utilized an online RA training design and they all took something away from the experiences. One participant discussed how they were already utilizing an online RA training design before the pandemic and continue to utilize it until the Fall 2021 training. They stopped using this method because their training committee viewed the training as ineffective, students were not learning in the online setting, and their students did not enjoy the virtual environment. Another institution found that the virtual environment did

not provide the optimal learning environment so returning to an in-person learning environment was the priority. When online training fails to achieve the objectives of the department, this experiment may result in a strong rejection of the methodology rather than an analysis of how to make it effective.

There is however some optimism with online training as institutions did experience successful online training modules both before the pandemic and during. This success was based on the idea that an online RA training design needs to be intentionally designed with the purpose of being online. Online training needs to be thought of, and incorporated, when designing the training and determining the specific training sessions that can work online for an institution. Having RAs learn how to write incident reports, submit work orders, or how to complete the administrative tasks is an area that appeared to be successful for the participants in this study. As RAs are students as well, since they may have already taken online classes before, they are already experienced with online learning that can be applied to RA training. Academic professionals have found success in providing learning materials online and housing programs can learn from those efforts and experiences and apply it to improve their online training efforts.

The COVID-19 pandemic provided many lessons about online RA training and institutions need to incorporate them into their planning. When institutions returned to an in-person training environment, keeping some of the tools that have been successfully utilized, such as having the training materials in a Microsoft Teams folder shared with the RAs, can significantly improve the objectives of training. By providing the information in this format, it allows RAs to have access to the material whenever they want or need to look back to review policies, examples, or general learning. Additionally, lower-level

presentations can easily be converted into a pre-recorded online presentation for information that does not require the physical presence of the RAs to receive. Training on topics such as the expectations for door decorations and bulletin boards were examples of this kind of training utilized by the participants in this study. Online training can also be designed to include an assessment for the viewer to complete about the material that is viewed to measure understanding and effectiveness of the material. This can allow professional staff to hold their RAs accountable about participating with the training, as well as measuring the comprehension of their staff for the material and identify any areas where the RAs are struggling with understanding the material.

Training Schedule

The training schedules is also something that plays a role in the effectiveness of RA training. For a majority of participants, the RA training schedule is spread over many days, with some reporting 10 days, and using a full day (9 AM to 5 PM). RAs are often present for training in the mornings, lunch, and then continue to have more training sessions or spend time within their respective residence hall to focus on the in-hall tasks or any sessions their direct supervisor has in store.

Some of the participants described avoiding long training days in order to respect the time of the RAs. The RAs would have opportunities to learn, work, and relax before their residents arrive at campus at the end of RA training and so housing programs need to make the most with whatever time that they have for training. Whether the issues of concern are about financial limitations, wanting to utilizing the RAs time responsibly, recognizing that RAs are student workers, or simply not wanting to exploit their work, creating a good training schedule must balance the needs of the department with the

burden put on the student staff members. RAs feedback can also be a valuable source of ideas for departments to make adjustments to the training schedule. RAs often want to participate in designing the schedule of RA training and when both the training committee and RAs work together to draft a schedule that meets the needs of both, the institution benefits.

Training, to be effective, should be continuous learning that builds upon each interaction and time together. Elements of significant importance, like diversity, should not be concentrated in a single session or two, but rather should be incorporated throughout all training topics. Training also should not be a single experience for the students. Having additional training sessions throughout the academic year, either optional or required, as needed or regularly scheduled such as once per month, can be useful both in timing and in retention of information. Fall RA training could provide fundamentals and basics of performing the job adequately, with ongoing training designed to build upon the skills taught at initial RA training sessions.

Implications for the Profession

This study looked at how housing and residence life offices evaluate their assessment of RA training. The assessment cycle is a critical process to measure the success of a RA training. Typical assessment during RA training occurs once a training session ends and the RA is asked to give feedback. Unfortunately, the institutions in this study treated assessment as an afterthought to the training. To truly be effective, assessment planning needs to happen before designing the training sessions. Training coordinators need to ask, ‘what do the RAs need to be successful?’ and determine how they will measure whether or not their efforts met that goal. HRL offices can add a post-

test assessment towards the end of the spring semester for the current RAs. This assessment's focus should be to ask questions of whether the information taught during RA training was useful for the individual, developed confidence in their skills, if they utilized any particular skills more than others, and if there are any recommendations of topics to cover for the next fall training. This data could provide insights that the training committee or the leadership team may consider for future training. In addition, a pre-test assessment could also be given to new RAs before they attend the fall RA training using questions relating to their knowledge of the information that will be presented during the training. Providing the post-test at the end of the year would allow for the tracking of the strengths and limitations of the training received by the RAs.

Another question that must guide training programs is to ask, 'what are the responsibilities of the RA?' for the campus. This question is an important one because the RA role is less than a hundred years old and after each decade, the responsibilities of the RA has increased and in recent years, those responsibilities were further modified due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Boone et al., 2016; Crandall, 2004; Ganser & Kennedy, 2012; Koch, 2016). Identifying these responsibilities provides the opportunity to do away with outdated responsibilities which benefits the RAs by helping them focus on the responsibilities that pertain to the success in their position and as a student. This also provides training coordinators with a guiding tool to create learning outcomes or objectives to guide the creation of training sessions. Effective assessment needs to look at not only was the training effective in the moments during and immediately after training but should also be looking at the effectiveness at the end of the academic year. Annually reviewing the responsibilities of the RA and the assessment of RA training can require

significant time and work, but it may provide ideas that have not been considered or not yet implemented as well as opening doors to different opportunities.

Evaluations are necessary to measure whether any program or service is successful. The institutions that participated in this study discussed the fact that they do not make any real effort to formally evaluate their HRL presenters. This should change as presenters are a part of the RA training design and need to be included in the assessment process to measure the training session's effectiveness. In the feedback forms, utilizing Likert-scale measurements to gain a numerical value or utilizing a written response to get more detailed information. It's up to the training coordinators to deliberately design questions that measure the presenter's performance and inform the RAs to be meaningful with their comments and thoughts to identify what the presenter did well and what they need to do to improve the effectiveness of the session.

Relationships with campus partners as guest presenters for RA training were discussed among the participants. There was both concern and real tension in how to approach people from outside the department. These frustrations were due to a number of factors including not utilizing all the time allocated for them or not meeting the purpose of the training session. Campus partners often want to speak to RAs because they have an immediate connection to the residents who may utilize the services of the campus partners. However, if those same partners are not effectively using the time given to them, then it is necessary for the staff in the HRL offices responsible for training to have those discussions both internally and with the campus partner on their role in helping train the RAs.

Discussions need to happen between both offices so that there is a mutually beneficial collaboration happening where the HRL staff are providing the tools for success to the RAs and the campus partner is helping to provide those tools. If the campus partner is not meeting the needs of the HRL office, then alternative approaches need to be developed. While it is not ideal to have one of the HRL professionals becoming knowledgeable on the topic that the campus partner would be presenting, it may be a better option than an ineffective training session. Maintaining a relationship where the campus partner is not meeting the needs of HRL could prove to be burdensome because HRL office would be knowingly providing an inadequate session and the RAs time during training is valuable. HRL offices should become comfortable with providing constructive feedback to the campus partner on how they are meeting the needs of the office or if they have not, suggested improvements to improve their presentations.

RA training programs can be designed in a variety of ways, but most often a singular HRL professional staff member is either responsible for most of the work or, more commonly, leading a training committee comprised of other housing professionals, and may include graduate staff and even senior RAs. Returning RAs could be utilized to enhance training by leading sessions or activities as a component of RA training. Participants in this study discussed the value of utilizing RAs with great success in social activities, designing the training schedule, and leading “Behind Closed Doors”.

Returning RAs are often attending training sessions that they may have already experienced the year before and engagement for them may be difficult. But if HRL offices utilize these RAs to lead educational sessions, with the assistance of a professional staff member, they can teach the skills that they excel at. Elliot’s and

Dweck's (1988) Goal Orientation Theory's third value, Mastery goals, was not seen among the participants' training design. Mastery goals is where an individual focuses on refining their skills over time so that they could master the skill, and what better way to show that a RA has mastered the skill if they are able to teach it to another RA. Utilizing returning RAs as training presenters can provide opportunities for experienced students to learn and become involved in the RA training design and not be mentally disengaged from the training. This can also show other RAs that the skills that they are learning are important and can help them to be successful.

HRL offices should not, however, just expect an RA to be able to present right off the bat because they may be anxious to present in front of their colleagues. Professional housing staff should be guiding the RA by providing them with support in the training session and empowering their confidence in their knowledge of the topic they are presenting. RA training is meant for the RAs, and having RAs be presenters can give mastery value to the skill or topic they are presenting and providing them with opportunities to engage differently in RA training.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic was tough for many, it opened doors for different opportunities and training methodologies. All the participants discussed their positive and negative perceptions of online training design, and while online training design can prove to be difficult, it should not be dismissed as an educational tool. An online RA training needs to be designed intentionally for that purpose and while not all training sessions can work online, some can. Online training sessions such as writing incident reports, door decorations and bulletin board expectations, or daily debriefings could utilize that format and free up time for different sessions to take their place.

Some of these virtual sessions could be centered on tasks that RAs need to complete before starting RA training or items needed to be complete throughout training. Another way to utilize an online component for RA training is creating a database to store all the training materials presented during RA training. This tool can then provide RAs with easy access to training materials throughout the academic year. Allowing them to access the materials online could ease anxiety while giving them the information they need. While this is one approach that was explored by one of the participants in the study, there are multiple ways to educationally engage with individuals in a virtual format. At a higher education institution, classes are provided that effectively teach students the material needed to pass the class, and so HRL offices can also do the same thing for the RA to be successful in their job. It's imperative that HRL offices continue to explore online training designs that are intentionally designed to take advantage of the online format and provide effective learning opportunities for the RAs. With the advancement of technology, it does not look like online learning will leave anytime soon.

Recommendations for Future Research

Considering existing research and the results of this study there are several recommendations for additional research on the RA training design.

- This study interviewed four individuals from four institutions in the Great Lake Association of College and University Housing Officers (GLACUHO). If the study were to be replicated, interviewing institutions about their evaluation of the assessment of RA training design in different regions could provide insights of either similar or different practices and obstacles.

- This study did not collect data about how the participants evaluate their particular forms of assessment. A more detailed examination of how professionals are asking questions and measuring the assessment can provide guiding insights to have the best practice.
- Although in-person learning has resumed for a majority of institutions, a study looking at how institutions conducted their online RA training design could give insights to what worked and what obstacles did HRL offices face and identify some best practices in online training.
- A study into how RAs evaluate the training that they receive could provide valuable information directly from the trainee.

Conclusion

This study looked at how housing and residence life offices evaluate, assess, and improve centralized resident assistant training. Through four qualitative interviews with the participants from four different institutions, from each state in the Great Lakes Association of College and University of Housing Officers, they provided insights into how they RA training is design and assessed. While each participant had unique situations and perspectives on the training design, several themes emerged that were consistent with previous research.

Findings include several key results: reviewing past trainings and the feedback from their assessments will guide the next RA training design, the assessment cycle for training needs to be a year-round process, and online training opportunities have both positive and negative aspects that need to be further developed and improved. The assessment of RA training is a significant process that requires intentional purpose and

incorporation into the training design in order to create a successful experience. Reviewing the training that was done the year before cannot be the sole guide to designing a successful training design. It requires looking beyond what is known about the RA training design and going deeper by considering what the responsibilities of the RA position are for an individual campus and how the training can provide students with the necessary skills and competencies to perform them. Assessment of all elements of training, from the topics to the methodologies to the presenters, is necessary to effectively assess and improve RA training to provide the best education for this difficult, yet critically important student position.

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APPENDIX A

Invitation Email

Hello Chief Housing Officer,

My name is Diego Ulloa, and I am a graduate student in the Masters' in Student Affairs program at Eastern Illinois University and I am conducting research for my Thesis on how Housing and Residence Life offices use assessment/evaluation data that they collect on their resident assistant training under the direction of my faculty adviser, Dr. Jon Coleman. Your institution has been identified as being eligible for inclusion in this study based on your student population and location in the GLACUHO region.

If you are willing, I am asking that you forward this email with the person (or persons) in your department who could best talk about RA training at your department over the last few years. This study will consist of an approximately hour-long one-on-one interview over Zoom scheduled at the person's convenience.

If you have any questions or are interested in participating in this study, please feel free to contact me via email (djulloa@eiu.edu) or my office number (217) 581-5553.

Thank you,

Diego Ulloa

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol

Demographic Questionnaire

To keep your identity confidential, I will be assigning you an alias. You will be [Participant 1].

1. How do you define your ethnic identity?
2. How do you define your gender identity?
3. How many years have you worked in Housing and Residence Life?
4. What is your current position in Housing and Residence Life?
    a. Is being the Resident Assistant training coordinator an additional job requirement or part of your responsibilities?
    b. Do you oversee your own staff of Resident Assistants?
5. How long have you been in the role as the training coordinator?

Resident Assistant Training Questionnaire

We're going to move into some more in-depth interview questions now.

<u>Design and Development</u>

1. Can you explain your role with the centralized fall RA training at your institution? What are your responsibilities and duties?
2. In addition to the fall training, is there year-round continuous training throughout the academic year?
    a. If so, can you describe the role that the centralized fall training plays in the year-round training? Philosophically and practically?

3. Please describe the fall RA training schedule. How long/involved is it, days and hours, and a rough breakdown between the elements you work with compared to that of others (e.g. hall time).
4. Could you please walk me through the process of how you designed the social and educational preparation and focus of the resident assistant position in your most recent (Fall semester/pre-term) resident assistant training?
5. How does your department determine what subjects or topics are going to be presented during your resident assistant training?
6. Are there learning outcomes for each training session for the resident assistants?
    a. If so, what are the parameters?
7. Can you talk about how you consider the methodologies you use to present each subject matter during your training (i.e., is there an activity involved, power point presentation, practical experience, etc.)?
8. What is most important to you when you are designing the methodologies of resident assistant training?

Evaluation & Assessment

9. How do you determine the success of a training session?
10. How do you determine the weakness of a training session?
11. Once you have evaluated what training programs were effective during the training, how do you address resident assistants that require more training in certain subject matters?
12. What kind of efforts do you utilize to collect feedback from the resident assistants and professional staff members during resident assistant training?

13. In what ways do you evaluate the presenter of a training sessions?
14. How do you evaluate the outside presenters that present during resident assistant training?
15. How do you utilize training evaluations to improve future resident assistant trainings?
    a. Is there a training committee that begins to plan for the next year during the current year?

Future Concerns And Issues

16. Once resident assistant training has concluded, what kind of evaluative discussions occur about resident assistant training?
17. What conversations take place among professional residence life with the collected feedback about RA training?
18. Are there conversations about the evaluation of the professional residence life staff who presented a training subject matter?
19. The COVID-19 pandemic opened up doors to different opportunities to present resident assistant training, what parts of resident assistant training do you believe can work in an online format?
20. What future changes do you see coming in the resident assistant training design?