1-1-2017

Resident Assistant Perceptions of Motivations and Demotivations to Return to Their Position

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Resident Assistant Perceptions of Motivations and Demotivations to Return to their Position

(TITLE)

BY

Carrie Gochnauer

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF Masters of Science in College Student Affairs

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2017

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

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ABSTRACT

Utilizing qualitative methodology, participants' perceptions were examined to better understand Resident Assistants' expectations of their role and how those relate to their motivations and demotivations to return to their position. Through conducting one-on-one semi-structured interviews with six Resident Assistants, it was found that community development, staff dynamic, and learned skills were perceived as motivations to return, while work/life balance, staff dynamic, and awareness of role were perceived as demotivations. It was also found that overstimulation during training, role conflict, need for personal/professional growth, need for purpose, and practicality of position were perceived expectations of the Resident Assistant role. Recommendations for Student Affairs Professionals were provided to gain insight into the Resident Assistant position through the lived experienced and first-hand perceptions of the participants; as well as to help increase motivations and decrease demotivations.

Keywords: resident assistants, motivations, demotivations, expectations, retention
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all current and future Resident Assistants and Student Affairs Professionals that feel overwhelmed, demotivated, or that the negatives outweigh the positives. There is always someone listening with a want to help. This research was conducted with the intention of providing real-life experiences in the world of Student Affairs, with the hopes that myself and others can continue to learn from each other, have each others’ backs, and retain the best and brightest among us.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This process has been an amazing and challenging experience that has demanded more of me than I knew I could give. I would like to thank everyone who supported me, gave me advice/criticism when I needed it, and never let me quit.

To my thesis advisor, Dr. Roberts: thank you for consistently pushing me to work harder, encouraging me when I felt lost, and helping me create research I am incredibly proud of. I also want to thank Jody Stone and Lynette Drake for supporting me with your input and transparency as members of my thesis committee.

Matthew Boyer, my supervisor: thank you for always having my back through everything and pointing me in the right direction when I let my worry and stress get the best of me.

To my friends, even without personal knowledge of the research, you always let me geek out about all the new things I learned throughout the process. To my parents, Cheryl and Terry and my sister, Karen: thank you for always encouraging me to do more and reach farther. Through every visit and phone call, you have given me more love and support than I could ever ask for.

To all the individuals who participated in my study, thank you for sharing your time and experiences to help not only my research, but also all Student Affairs Professionals looking to improve the experiences of Resident Assistants.
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CHAPTER I
Introduction

Professionals have stated that there are many factors affecting the retention of quality employees today, including unmet job expectations, lack of proper preparation, shortage of quality applicants, and turnover (Maden, Ozcelik, & Karacay, 2016; Qazi, Khalid, & Shafique, 2015; Balakrishnan, & M, 2014; DeAngelo, 2014). Research has shown that variables such as burnout and work-life balance also have a direct affect on an individual’s persistence in a position (Greenhaus et al., 2003; Deery, 2008; Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). A company initially invests time, money, and materials into hiring a new employee and is negatively impacted if the employee prematurely vacates the position (Balakrishnan & M, 2014). There is a need for companies to retain their employees, because if they are not retained, an organization is not only monetarily hurt, but also loses out on its most important resource, quality workers (Qazi, Khalid, & Shafique, 2015). Employee retention is thought to be about a nurturing environment, mutual trust, challenging career opportunities, respect, and appreciation; When these are not met, lower retention rates seem to follow (Balakrishnan & M, 2014). Retention has also been researched in the area of higher education, reflecting similar problems with retaining students.

Students and student employees are also met by negative influences on recruitment and retention (Elliot & Healy, 2001). The lack of retention often seems to occur in the first to second year of college (DeAngelo, 2014). In her study, DeAngelo (2014) pointed out the lack of use of first year initiatives put in place for first year students, the unmet need for proactive thinking by higher education officials, and lack of
direct interaction in students’ lives as having a direct effect on first year student retention. Universities are increasingly expected to identify the most important needs of students, organize programs to meet these needs, and deliver what they promise. Unfortunately, it is hard to do so (Elliot & Healy, 2001). Campus Housing administrators are concerned with the retention of residence hall students as higher occupancy leads to financial stability (Li, Sheely, & Whalen, 2005). In their research fueled by the decline in enrollment and residence hall occupancy, Li, Sheely, & Whalen (2005) identified factors such as, access to a dining plan, leadership opportunities, and academic support that directly contribute to the residence hall retention level.

Young student leaders often take on employment as a Resident Assistant (RA), not comprehending the near 24-hour availability needed for the position (Paladino et al., 2005). Resident Assistants are found to be particularly prone to developing burnout because of the responsibilities and stressors placed on them in addition to their already rigorous academic schedule, financial pressures, and interpersonal issues (Deluga & Winters, 1991). Because Resident Assistants live and work within a residential community, their position encompasses multiple different roles and demands (Elleven, Allen, & Wircenski, 2001). If Resident Assistants are not properly prepared and trained or struggle with poor boundary skills, they can become overly involved and emotionally exhausted (Elleven, Allen, & Wircenski, 2001).

Studying the factors related to retention levels of student employees, namely Resident Assistants, can help researchers and student affairs professionals understand how to effectively educate and retain this targeted population for multiple years. It is increasingly important to understand and help this population not just to train and retain
the best student employees, but to also provide good experiences for these student leaders. In order to accurately provide feedback, criticism, and growth on how to decrease the loss of Resident Assistants from his or her first to second year, it is important to understand the demand, stress, and responsibility of the Resident Assistant role and how this could lead to decreased retention levels.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the current study is to analyze the perceptions of Resident Assistants at a mid-sized public Midwestern University, as to what factors motivate and demotivate them to return to the Resident Assistant position each academic year. The findings of this study could help the University Housing and Dining department to better benefit Resident Assistants in understanding their role and the many responsibilities they take on. By identifying variables that Resident Assistants feel may directly affect retention, this study could help student affairs professionals target when a student is struggling with these variables and formulate a plan to help Resident Assistants keep interest in the position. The current study along with prior research of Resident Assistant stress and burnout could provide faculty and staff with a better understanding of the direct effects of the Resident Assistant position on student leaders’ college experience.

**Research Questions**

To further understand Resident Assistant persistence in the position and ways to retain effective student leaders from year to year, the research will focus on the following questions to guide the study:
1. What are Resident Assistants’ perceptions of motivations to return to the position from the first to second year? (Balakrishnan & M, 2014; Deery, 2008; Elliott & Healy, 2001)

2. What are Resident Assistants’ perceptions of demotivations to return to the position from the first to second year? (Maden, Ozcelik, & Karacay, 2016; Qazi, Khalid, & Shafique, 2015)

3. What expectations do Resident Assistants have when starting the position and are these expectations met? (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Eccles, 2009)

**Significance of the Study**

Resident Assistants are vital to the fostering of community, enforcement of a safe living environment, and personal growth of college students living in the residence halls (Paladino, Murray Jr., Newgent, & Gohn, 2005). If Resident Assistant turnover increases from year to year, students may begin to feel they aren’t important or lasting relationships may not be created. Students may start to believe that Resident Assistants only serve one-year terms, and therefore students should only spend one year on campus before deciding to move off campus. The goal of this qualitative research is to identify factors that motivate or demotivate the Resident Assistant’s continuity in the position. Furthermore, this study is meant to provide a basis for further training to prepare Resident Assistants to effectively identify destructive variables and pinpoint positive variables in relation to retention.

Although quantitative research has been conducted on the factors that impacted depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and personal accomplishment (Paladino et al., 2005), there seems to be room for further qualitative research to gather specific
perceptions tied to the retention levels of first year Resident Assistants. Therefore, further steps can be taken to understand Resident Assistants’ perceptions of variables affecting his or her retention and ways to train Resident Assistants to interact with these variables with a positive outcome.

Limitations of the Study

There are a few limitations to the current study. One limitation is that of the specifications of the interviewees. All participants were selected from the same mid-sized, public Midwestern University, decreasing the ability for transferability, as students from a different region or sized institution may hold different perceptions. The Resident Assistants were also purposely selected to insure three returning first year Resident Assistants and three non-returning (not fired) Resident Assistants were interviewed. If more time could be given to the study, more Resident Assistants covering larger categories could have been interviewed.

Resident Assistants were asked for his or her perceptions of the position and his or her motivations or demotivations for returning or leaving the position, again decreasing the ability to accurately generalize the research for other populations. All resident assistants asked to participate did not hold positions directly connected with the researcher to increase the likelihood of non-biased answers. Another limitation of the study was the time of year the study was conducted. Research was conducted within the first month of the school year; therefore, returning and non-returning RAs did not have fully formed opinions or perceptions on their choice to return or not return to the position.
Definition of Terms

The following are definitions of terms that benefit the understanding of this study.

**Burnout.** “A symptom of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment at work due to work activity” (Beheshtifar & Omidvar, 2013, p. 2).

**Employee Retention.** “The various policies and practices which let the employees stick to an organization for a longer period of time” (Employee Retention, n.d.).

**Resident Assistant.** “Position on college campuses that requires undergraduate students to be available nearly 24 hours a day, be the frontline worker in university housing programs when responding to and managing a multitude of diverse issues in residence halls, and are required to develop a living and learning community conducive to the intellectual and personal growth of students living in the residence halls” (Paladino, Murracy, & Newgent, 2005, p.1).

**Work-Life Balance.** “A comfortable state of equilibrium achieved between an employee's primary priorities of their employment position and their private lifestyle” (Work-life balance, n.d.)

Summary

This study utilizes a qualitative method to further understand resident assistants’ perceptions of variables affecting retention levels from the first to second year. This topic is important because it may provide ways to better understand and retain Resident Assistants. The data gathered might also help student affairs professionals learn what warning signs to look for in order to increase Resident Assistant well-being and retention.
CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

In order to explore the relationship between retention, Resident Assistant roles, burnout, and work-life balance, a review of literature was conducted. The topics explored are as follows and are presented here in chapter II: retention, Resident Assistants at the research site, burnout, work-life balance, and theoretical framework.

Retention

Retention has been researched in areas from employee to student, and all reflect similar needs that are defined different ways. Current research indicated that variables such as unmet job expectations, job embeddedness, shortage of quality applicants, and lack of proper preparation negatively affects retention (Maden, Ozcelik, & Karacay, 2016; Qazi, Khalid, & Shafique, 2015; Balakrishnan, & M, 2014; DeAngelo, 2014). Likewise, diverse and trusting work environments, challenging projects and opportunities, and respectful, appreciative treatment were found to encourage retention among employees (Balakrishnan & M, 2014).

In a literature review conducted by Deery (2008), four key themes were suspected to increase retention of good employees: job attitudes, personal employee dimensions, work-life balance, and organizational strategies to assist employee retention. In regards to job attitudes, job satisfaction and organizational commitment were examined. It was highlighted that organizations can become too standardized, expecting the same output from each employee that it discourages excelling employees and lessens their drive and satisfaction (Deery, 2008). Personal employee dimensions were stated as having to do with the employee’s attitudes toward their position that either positively or negatively
contributes to their desire to leave. Theme three, work-life balance, discussed the negative impacts of an imbalance between both aspects (Deery, 2008). Lastly, organizational strategies to assist employee retention were heavily researched as it outlined multiple articles of recruitment, training, and retention strategies (Deery, 2008).

In regards to retention among students, Elliott and Healy (2001) looked for factors influencing satisfaction in relation to student recruitment and retention. It was found that a student-centered environment, a positive and diverse campus climate, and effectiveness of instructional methods increase student satisfaction and therefore retention. DeAngelo (2014) studied specifically the academic retention of students from their first to second years of college. DeAngelo (2014) came to three main conclusions. First, there has been an increasingly large amount of curricular initiatives created to enhance the first-year experience, yet they are optional and often difficult to take part in. DeAngelo (2014) stressed the need for proactive thinking in instigating initiatives that directly interact with the students’ lives. Second, the importance of engaging in meaningful academic conversations and activities outside of the classroom is increasingly important to keep from establishing a mindset of classroom is for work, outside of classroom is not for work. Third, a push for professionals, including Resident Assistants, to facilitate and be aware of those that are and aren’t engaging outside of the classroom is needed. Li, Sheely, and Whalen (2005) took an even different view of student retention and focused on residence halls. It was found that factors like access to a dining plan, leadership opportunities, and academic support were the top contributors to retention levels in residence halls.
There seems to be continual research provided for retention of both corporate employees and higher education students seeking to establish retention strategies for keeping the best of the best (Maden, Ozcelik, & Karacay, 2016; Qazi, Khalid, & Shafique, 2015; Balakrishnan, & M, 2014; DeAngelo, 2014). Although there is a wealth of knowledge on this topic, there is a lack of research conducted on Resident Assistant retention, including Resident Assistants from their first to second years. Also, most of the research conducted has been on the literature review level with little to no active quantitative or qualitative research aspects. In order to fully engage in the retention conversation, greater in-depth research needs to be conducted.

**Resident Assistants at the Research Site**

Although the term ‘Resident Assistant’ is used liberally across the nation, the terms of the position vary from institution to institution. A selection of midsized, public Midwestern universities stated Resident Assistants as being a vital part of the University Housing and Dining Services (EIU, 2012; SIUE, 2011; UCM, 2015; UNI, 2016; UWW, 2016; WIU, 2015). “Their primary responsibility is to act as a facilitator for the residence hall community and to enhance the social, educational, spiritual, intellectual, physical, vocational, cultural, and environmental development of each of their students” (EIU, 2012, p. 1). There are many guidelines and conditions of employment listed for Resident Assistants as they approach the position. Certain guidelines appear to be in place to try to prevent some of the most common factors that contribute to burnout such as heavy course load and over commitment with extracurricular activities; for example, “a Resident Assistant must seek prior approval from the Associate Director of Housing if he/she plans to drop below 12 credit hours for the semester or exceed 18 credit hours”
Along with institutional-placed guidelines, Resident Assistants are also subject to legal guidelines such as mandatory reporting of instances falling under Title IX or other legal issues (EIU, 2012). Collected from the cross-selection of universities, it was found that Resident Assistants fill six basic roles: community facilitator, educator/academic role model, team member, administrator, university representative, and referral agent.

Roles

**Community facilitator.** Community Facilitator is one of the largest responsibilities of the Resident Assistant position. Resident Assistants are asked to foster a community focused on values such as academic achievement, respect, personal responsibility, residence hall and institution participation, diversity, and safety. Resident Assistants are responsible for assisting residents in appreciating these values through programming, educationally supportive living environments and supporting, recruiting, and encouraging active involvement in the institution. Standards are also set by the Resident Assistant to interact with diversity in dignified and respectful manners (EIU, 2012). Much of the Resident Assistant position is time sensitive in the sense that the first six weeks are the ‘formative’ weeks in the residential community. Resident Assistants are expected to know their residents by name and have interacted with them on a deeper level (UCM, 2015). It is vital for the Resident Assistant to establish standards for his/her living community in these early weeks, as they will set the precedent for behavior for the remainder of the semester/year. This includes establishing and upholding policies throughout their community and the rest of the building both on and off duty (SIUE, 2011). Resident Assistants are also asked to attend, participate in, and recruit for all
governing board meetings (UCM, 2015). Resident Assistants are often required to recruit floor representatives to participate as active members in their building’s governing body. In order for the Resident Assistants to be effective community facilitators, they must also abide by FERPA laws in maintaining staff/student confidentiality (WIU, 2016).

**Educator/academic role model.** These midsize, public Midwestern universities ask Resident Assistants to model and promote academic and personal success using academic initiatives. Specific to one university, a system entitled Panther Success Initiative (PSI) was created to provide students with successful contact with campus resources and specific help based on the information the Resident Assistants gather from intentional interactions with the residents. Resident Assistants are asked to meet with each resident a minimum of one time monthly to assess needs, concerns, or questions the resident may have acquired and to gather helpful information about the resident as a person (EIU, 2012). Resident Assistants are also asked to promote healthy academic standards such as effective study habits and active class participation. Resident Assistants are also asked to model active involvement and support of campus and departmental programming efforts (EIU, 2012). Another institution asked its Resident Assistants to promote the Residence Education Mission through assessment and address of the developmental needs of individual residents (UNI, 2016). While other institutions seem to have less structured initiatives, their message is still the same: assist students in their ability to tackle academic concerns and missteps (UCM, 2015; UWW, 2015).

**Team member.** Resident Assistants usually work on a staff of 4-10 Resident Assistants, supervised by some variation of Resident Director. Just as the Resident Assistant lives in the same community as their residents, they are also required to live and
work closely with their staff members. This type of position calls for a Resident Assistant to be an exceptional team player. Resident Assistants are required to attend and actively contribute to multiple meetings including weekly staff meetings, one-on-one meetings with their supervisor, workshops, and any supplemental meetings as seen fit. Resident Assistants are also asked to foster positive and supportive relationships between the Resident Assistant staff and the campus community, including building service workers and student staff members (EIU, 2012; UWW, 2015; UNI, 2016). In order for Resident Assistants to be effective team members, they are also asked to understand and carry out the responsibilities of their position to their utmost ability (UNI, 2016).

**Administrator.** Along with all other responsibilities, Resident Assistants are tasked with multiple administrative duties. These include opening and closing their particular residence hall during all dates specified by the institution, as well as assisting with closing at the end of the academic year. Resident Assistants are also required to be available for certain ‘high traffic’ weekends such as Homecoming and Finals Weekend. Resident Assistants are asked to report and check back on work orders and other maintenance problems that may come up (SIUE, 2011). Resident Assistants are responsible for participating in a weekly duty rotation, including weekends, and staying inside of their particular building for the duration of their duty hours. Some Resident Assistants are asked to take an active role in the selection and training of new Resident Assistants (UNI, 2016). Resident Assistants are required to also complete other administrative tasks including, but not limited to: check in/out, room condition reports, surveys, and weekly reports (EIU, 2012).
**University representative.** In this sense, Resident Assistants are asked to be the eyes and ears of the institution. They are responsible for upholding university policies by explaining and enforcing, as well as confronting and documenting all incidents (EIU, 2012; UNI, 2016; SIUE, 2011; UCM, 2015). Resident Assistants are also held responsible for providing truthful and accurate information in a timely manner about any disturbances in their community. They are asked to be a role model by setting positive behavioral examples while striving to improve the overall Resident Assistant position and growing in themselves (UNI, 2016; WIU, 2016). Resident Assistants must hold themselves to a higher standard in all presentations of their behavior (EIU, 2012).

**Referral agent.** In this capacity, Resident Assistants are required to report all emergency and otherwise serious situations to their supervisor and/or police services (EIU, 2012; UCM, 2015). This requirement to report is active both while on-call and during their ‘personal time’. Resident Assistants are also required to be knowledgeable of all institutional resources in place to assist residents including, but not limited to: tutoring center, counseling center, or academic advising offices (EIU, 2012; UNI, 2016; WIU, 2016; UCM, 2015). Resident Assistants are also asked to act as referral agents to these aforementioned resources.

**Burnout**

Starting in the late sixties, burnout was beginning to be recognized in the United States by several different professions as an explanation for decreased energy and motivation (Cripe, 2013). Angerer (2003) found that early on, burnout was viewed as an individualistic problem pertaining to a person’s character, behavior, or drive, while later research shows burnout is actually rooted in the individual’s working environment.
Arman, Hammarqvist, and Rehnsfeldt (2010) classified burnout as a psychological term depicting experiences of long-term exhaustion and diminished interest caused by a heavy workload. There have been multiple developmental models created to assess burnout, the most widely utilized being Maslach’s (Angerer, 2003).

The understanding of burnout, as researched in Maslach’s Burnout Inventory (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996), is most commonly identified as being made of three components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Cordes and Dougherty (1993) characterized emotional exhaustion as “a lack of energy and a feeling that one’s emotional resources are used up” (p. 623). Paladino et al. (2005) suggested that the further emotional resources are expended, the fewer individuals can stretch themselves in terms of their psychological capacity.

Cordes and Dougherty (1993) defined depersonalization as “the treatment of workers as objects rather than people” (p. 623). Depersonalization seems to occur when a person shifts from a primarily professional relationship with staff members or employees to that of friendship or more. They are asked to be both the disciplinarian as well as the caregiver in the same span of time often testing their administrative strength (Cousineau & Chambers, 2015). When this occurs, it can increase the level of difficulty when confronting policy violations or other incidents with an unbiased view.

Likewise, a lack of appropriate encouragement or recognition can also result in the Resident Assistant feeling unappreciated and diminishes their feeling of personal accomplishment. Diminished personal accomplishment is defined as, “the tendency to evaluate oneself negatively, particularly with regard to one’s work with clients” (Maslach
et al. 1996, p. 4). As this lack of recognition continues, work ethic lessens and burnout can set in. Supervisors, advisors, peers, or even subordinates can perpetuate this lack of encouragement. As personal accomplishment diminishes, the person begins to believe the lack of approval comes from a poor work ethic. If the worker believes this, they can begin a self-fulfilling prophecy, as they move to performing in the way they believe they are viewed (Paladino et al., 2005).

Multiple research studies have been conducted to identify factors that foster burnout among Resident Assistants (Benedict & Mondloch, 1989; Paladino et al, 2005; Bierman & Carpenter, 1994). Benedict and Mondloch (1989) pointed to health habits and the style of residence hall as being factors related to burnout. Poor health habits can have an impact on the overall mood and disposition of the Resident Assistant as well as the “fit” of the style of residence hall. For example, a quiet, upper class Resident Assistant is placed in a predominately freshman residence hall with a track record of broken policies; they are less likely to feel they fit in that environment. These factors will be later explained in further detail.

In a study by Paladino et al. (2005), 193 undergraduate Resident Assistants were surveyed using the Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS). Three main areas were identified as primary burnout areas: personal factors, training, and work environment. Personal factors were described as being characteristics the Resident Assistant identified with, specifically in the Resident Assistant role. An example of this would be a Resident Assistant that strives for power in his or her community and the increase in levels of interpersonal stress (Deluga & Winters, 1991). Deluga and Winters (1991) also pointed out Resident Assistants that pursue the position for the wrong reasons
(monetary/place to live/etc.) tend to have a hard time attributing value to the position. Race also falls under the personal factors category and was researched as a burnout area by Harper et al. (2011). Harper et al. (2011) researched the Resident Assistant experience of Black males at predominately White universities. This article found that Black male Resident Assistants at predominately White universities struggled with depersonalization and loneliness when consistently interacting with students identifying differently than themselves. A disconnect appeared between the Black Resident Assistants and their White supervisors, especially when the Resident Assistants felt that they were under scrutiny, pressured, or had all eyes on them.

Resident Assistants that are not properly trained in areas they encounter can be met with a feeling of role ambiguity, or loss of position meaning (Deluga & Winters, 1990). Reingle, Thombs, Oscborn, Saffian, and Oltersdorf (2010) reviewed Resident Assistant knowledge and attitude toward referral practices. Reingle et al. (2010) found that although Resident Assistants generally displayed positive attitudes towards referral practices, they often felt the task was burdensome and many did not know how to accurately judge when problems were worth reporting. It was recommended that the training and knowledge of the continuum of care be enhanced to better prepare Resident Assistants for interacting with these students. Garey and Givhan (2010) highlighted the importance of “intentional and developmental” training of Resident Assistants, stating that, “Resident Assistants will benefit from comprehensive training that thoroughly explicates the characteristics of the environment” (p. 40).

Lastly, with regards to work environment, the more residents a Resident Assistant is responsible for, the higher the degree of stress (Bierman & Carpenter, 1994). This
stress buildup can lead to greater feelings of depersonalization and emotional exhaustion, putting the Resident Assistant at a greater risk of burnout. Fuehrer and McGonagle (1988) and Hardy and Dodd (1998) found that when Resident Assistants were put in charge of first-year only floors, the Resident Assistant reported higher levels of depersonalization and emotional exhaustion. Fuehrer and McGonagle’s (1988) study utilized the Maslach Burnout Inventory showing the type of residence hall and social climate of hall as direct predictors of stress and burnout. The current research conducted on burnout is rather lengthy and seems to cover a broad spectrum of factors and predictors which can come in handy when continuing research on this topic (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996; Fuehrer and McGonagle, 1988; Paladino et al., 2005). Although there has been a large amount of research collected pertaining to burnout, there seems to be a limited amount of articles directly relating to burnout’s effect on the retention of first year Resident Assistants.

**Work/Life Balance**

The term work/life, or work-family balance grew primarily as a positive alternative to widely used terms like “work/life conflict” or “work/life interference” (Guest, 2002). By stating it as a balance rather than a conflict or interference, it helps change the mindset from a problem to a solution or from a negative to a positive. However, this creates a challenge all on its own as balance signifies equal parts of both work and life, while that just is not the case for many healthily balanced professionals. Guest (2002) presented the idea that “balance” may be better viewed through the definition of “stability of body or mind” (p. 261). Guest (2002) also used balance as a verb to signify the human ability to change and manage balance. Greenhaus, Collins, and
Shaw (2003), on the other hand, felt that no current definition of work-family balance did it justice and therefore provided one of their own making: “the extent to which an individual is equally engaged in—and equally satisfied with—his or her work role and family role” (p. 513). It is believed that this definition is broad enough to include both positive and negative aspects of balance.

Professionals with the purpose of understanding the negative effects of improper work/life balance have heavily researched the topic. Research has shown that work-life imbalance can lead to job dissatisfaction and withdrawal, lessened quality of life, burnout and lowered retention, while work/life balance can lead to healthier life-styles, longer terms of employment and higher levels of job satisfaction (Hughes & Bozionelos, 2007; Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, 2003; Deery, 2008; Keeton et al., 2007; Smith & Gardner, 2007; Gropel & Kuhl, 2009). In an exploratory study conducted by Hughes and Bozionelos (2007), male workers in a male dominated occupation were researched in order to explore balance concerns of the individuals, the importance of these concerns within dissatisfaction, and the perceived connection between balance concerns and withdrawal, absenteeism, and turnover. This study is important to highlight, as much of the research on work-life/work-family balance has focused primarily on women. It was found that work/life imbalance not only caused concern for the participants, but it was also a leading factor in dissatisfaction, withdrawal behaviors, turnover, and non-genuine sick absences (Hughes & Bozionelos, 2007). This study also indicated that not only does work/life imbalance negatively affect the individual, but also negatively and monetarily affects the organization as they incur greater turnover and replacement costs.
As discussed before, Greenhaus, Collins, and Shaw (2003) created a definition specific to work/life balance. This definition was then further divided into three components: time balance, involvement balance, and satisfaction balance. These components were then empirically researched and examined in relation to quality of life. Six hypotheses were created pertaining to these three components, finding that those who prioritized family, or life, over work often had higher qualities of life. This seems to be a theme, as it also appeared in Guest’s (2003) writings.

Work/life balance is researched in many areas including businesses/organizations and working students. When it comes to work/life balance specific to sustaining employment and employees, Deery (2008) utilized the hotel management sphere to argue that work/life balance played a direct part in an employee’s decision to persist in a certain position. Deery (2008) discussed four particular themes in retention research, as these have been previously discussed in this literature review, the third theme will be highlighted. This is the theme of work/life balance. Deery (2008) utilized Mulvaney et al.’s (2006) “proposed model of work-family issues for hotel managers” (p. 797) to illustrate negative outcomes of work/life imbalance. This included, but was not limited to: absenteeism, turnover, mental and physical health issues, alcohol abuse, and family level repercussions. Although Deery (2008) focused on hotel managers in her research, there were clear parallels to the world of a Resident Assistant. Deery (2008) highlighted three rationales of why hotel managers (and in other cases Resident Assistants) found it difficult to sustain appropriate work/life balance: They felt they have a duty to be available and provide emotional and counseling support to their staff, they were seen as the face of the building and needed to be continually present, and it is the nature of the
industry to be up and running and available at all times, otherwise known as “presenteeism” (p. 797).

Shifting to working students, Lenaghan and Sengupta (2007) set their sights on researching role conflict, role balance, and affect on college students. This research was instigated out of a fear that while students engage in paid work on or off campus, their want or ability to engage academically would falter, therefore creating a sense of ‘work/life conflict’ between paid work and academics (life). In order to research student work/life conflict, a Conceptual Model of Well-being was determined by three variables: role balance, role conflict, and affect. Role balance was viewed as two separate components, role-overload (negative) and role-ease (positive), basically showing that balance equals ease between roles while imbalance equals overload. Role conflict is shown to be most often apparent when multiple roles are competing for an individual’s limited time. This was also highlighted in Greenhaus et al.’s (2003) research as time-balance. Affect, although harder to define, relates directly to the positive or negative attributes an individual relates to their role. Positive affect was characterized by excitement, engagement, energy, attention and an overall sense of well-being; while negative affect was characterized by a tendency encounter unpleasant feelings and experiences accompanied by distress, anger, and depression (Lenaghan & Sengupta, 2007). All three of these variables were argued to directly relate to a student’s well-being and work/life balance. Although there seems to be large quantities of research on work/life balance, the amount relating to students is slim and near impossible to find directly relating to Resident Assistants. There may be transferrable findings between
other similar experiences, but there is still a lack of qualitative research established on the work-life balance of student Resident Assistants.

**Theoretical Framework**

As with any job, there are expectations that accompany the Resident Assistant position. These are gathered both through verbalized and contractual expectations, as well as visually gathered expectations as the student observes the position prior to obtaining it. In order to understand the development and fluctuation of these expectations, theories must be involved. Theories are important in all aspects of research and especially within the realm of student development. Because students are the main focus of this research, it is imperative they are understood on some level. According to Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, and Renn (2010), student development can be defined in many different ways, and student development theory provides the basis and opportunity to encourage this development. Knowledge of these important theories allows student affairs professionals to “identify and address student needs, design programs, develop policies, and create healthy college environments that encourage positive growth in students” (p.7). These theories can provide the groundwork for understanding and providing for not only our residential students, but also our student workers or resident assistants. One theory specifically referenced for this research was Jacquelyn Eccles’ Expectancy-Value Theory (2009).

Originally founded by Atkins in 1964, the Expectancy-Value Theory was later adapted by Eccles et al. (1983), Wigfield (1994), and Wigfield & Tonks (2002). These variations are depicted as the Modern Expectancy-Value Theories. These theories tie performance, persistence, and choice to students’ expectancy-value and task-value beliefs.
Eccles and Wigfield (2002). Specific to Eccles and colleagues’ model, it is assumed that students’ choices are affected by both positive and negative task characteristics. Positive characteristics could be high levels of familiarity with the task or proper training/preparation, while negative characteristics could be foreign tasks or little to no training/preparation. It is also assumed that all choices have costs associated with them, such as one choice could negate another. Because of this, the value the student gives the task and likelihood the student will succeed weighs into the choices they make (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).

Eccles and Wigfield (2002) assumed that the expectations a student has for a task and the value they give to that task can directly influence their performance, persistence, and choice of future tasks. These three factors (performance, persistence, and choice of future tasks) were also assumed to be influenced by the student’s beliefs specific to a certain task, how difficult the student believes the task to be, how competent the student believes themselves to be, and the student’s both short- and long-term goals. Eccles et al. (1983) defined beliefs as a student’s broad evaluation of their competence in a given area, rather than a specific task.

Also, these variables (belief, difficulty, competency, and goals) are influenced by the students’ perceptions of outside attitudes and expectations of themselves, by their memories associated to a similar situation, and by their own evaluation of previous outcomes in similar situations (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). All of this is concisely outlined in two points: First, the positive feelings a student has when a task is done well should become attached to successful activities (Eccles et al., 1983) and second, according to Eccles et al. (1998b) and Harter (1990) lowering the value placed on difficult activities
helps to effectively maintain a positive sense of self-worth and self-esteem (as cited in Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Taking these two previously stated points into account, Eccles and Wigfield (2002) predict that, at some point, the student’s belief of their competency in a task and the student’s values should positively relate to each other. Wigfield et al. (1997) then empirically demonstrated this hypothesis. Therefore, the Expectancy-Value Theory would be beneficial to utilize when researching first-year Resident Assistants, because most Resident Assistants transition into the role with multiple expectations both high and low, which shape their value of the position. It would be beneficial to use this theory to research the affect of met and unmet job expectations on Resident Assistants value of and motivation/demotivation in the position.

Summary

Although there have been countless quantitative studies on retention, the Resident Assistant role, burnout, and work/life balance, the effect on first-year Resident Assistant retention has not been studied in-depth, or really much at all. After reviewing the research conducted, it is shown that factors such as burnout, stress, and improper work/life balance can be correlated with a lack of retention in the Resident Assistant position. Therefore, by analyzing the Resident Assistant role through qualitative data collection, this research will gain first-hand insight into the Resident Assistant position, stressors and feelings of burnout, balances between the position and personal life, and recommendations participants have to better equip future Resident Assistants for the position in order to retain large volumes of student workers.
CHAPTER III

Methods

Design of the Study

The researcher studied Resident Assistants, their experiences during their first year of the position, and their perceptions on what motivated or demotivated them to return for a second year. Therefore, this was a phenomenological study providing the researcher with the personal perspectives and interpretations of the studied individuals (Lester, 1999). One on one interviews with the Resident Assistants were conducted utilizing guiding questions to open dialogues. To gain access to the targeted population of Resident Assistants, the University Housing and Dining department was contacted by the researcher and provided information pertaining to the study. The researcher asked the University Housing staff to provide contact information for any Resident Assistants meeting the criteria. The researcher then contacted the students via email and provided them with information about the study, allowing them to thoroughly understand the study. Resident Assistants that were interested in participating worked with the researcher to set up an interview time.

To ensure the validity of this study, several of Maxwell’s (2009) validity test strategies were utilized. Respondent validation was also utilized by soliciting feedback regarding interviews from the participants in order to ensure the information had been communicated as the participants intended (Maxwell, 2009). The researcher also collected rich data by thoroughly documenting and transcribing all interviews in order to come away with concert and specific observations and details (Maxwell, 2009).
Participants

Participants in this study consisted of three returning undergraduate Resident Assistants and three non-returning undergraduate Resident Assistants that chose not to return to the Resident Assistant position for reasons other than firing, graduation, grades, or internships. All participants had between 1-2 consecutive semesters of experience in the RA position. There was at least one female and one male represented in each group of three, between the ages of 18-24. Participants were selected from different types of residence halls (traditional, single-gendered, co-ed floors with single-gendered rooms).

Participant 1: Participant 1 was a 21 year old white male majoring in Pre-Medical/Exercise Science. Participant 1 had served in a traditional, community-style residence hall and chose not to return to the Resident Assistant position for a second year.

Participant 2: Participant 2 was a 20 year old white male double majoring in Theatre Arts and Business Management. Participant 2 had served in a co-ed residence hall with single-gendered rooms, and chose to return to the Resident Assistant position for a second year.

Participant 3: Participant 3 was a 20 year old African American female majoring in Management/Entrepreneurship. Participant 3 had served in a co-ed residence hall with single-gendered rooms, and chose not to return to the Resident Assistant position for a second year.

Participant 4: Participant 4 was a 22 year old white male majoring in Communication Studies. Participant 4 had served in a traditional, community-style residence hall, and chose to return to the Resident Assistant position for a second year.
**Participant 5:** Participant 5 was a 20 year old white female majoring in Public Relations. Participant 5 had served in a single-gendered, community-style residence hall, and chose to return to the Resident Assistant position for a second year.

**Participant 6:** Participant 6 was a 22 year old white male majoring in Kinesiology and Sports Studies. Participant 6 had served in a co-ed residence hall with single-gendered rooms, and chose not to return to the Resident Assistant position for a second year.

**Site**

This study was conducted at a midsized, public Midwestern University with a student body population of about 8,000. There were eleven on campus residence halls with approximately 4-8 resident assistants per hall with a total of 59 currently employed on campus. Of the eleven residence halls, seven were traditional with community-style bathrooms, three were co-ed floors and single-gendered rooms with pod-style bathrooms, and one was suite-style. Three were all female, one all male, and seven co-ed.

**Researcher as the Instrument**

Because the study was qualitative, the researcher served as the primary instrument. It was important that the researcher’s experiences, background, and characteristics be considered, as they may have affected the interpretation of the data. The researcher was a White, female graduate student who was a Resident Assistant for three years at her previous institution and was an Associate Resident Director. The researcher initially became interested in the topic of the research study by observing the retention efforts of the institution. Because the researcher was previously a Resident Assistant and supervised six Resident Assistants, she had utilized the research conducted
during the literature review to distance the researcher and develop a more neutral viewpoint.

**Data Collection**

Data was collected through hour long, individual, semi-structured interview sessions with each participant. Each participant was asked to fill out a consent form before participating and with the permission of the participant, each session was audio and video recorded and transcribed. An interview protocol, found in Appendix A, had been developed to guide the interview with open-ended questions meant to act as a mental framework rather than strict guidelines (Yin, 2011). This allowed the interview to be shaped and directed by the participant’s answers rather than the questions. After each interview session was complete, the researcher transcribed and coded the recordings into themed categories.

**Treatment of Data**

All interviews were audio and video-recorded, and all audio and video files were kept on CD-ROMs that were only accessible to the researcher and the thesis advisor. To maintain confidentiality, each participant was given the opportunity to pick their own pseudonym and all identifying information was kept with the CD-ROMs and removed from the transcriptions. Signed informed consent forms were kept separate from the recordings and transcriptions to maintain confidentiality as well. All data, audio, and video recordings were deleted after three years, in compliance with IRB policy.

**Data Analysis**

All interview audio and video-recordings were transcribed and utilized for data analysis. In order to code the transcriptions, Yin’s (2011) five-phased cycle of analyzing
qualitative data was referenced. First, all interview notes and transcriptions were compiled into a database. Secondly, the data was broken down, or disassembled, into labels or codes. Next, found themes were utilized to reassemble the codes or labels into groupings. Fourth, the groupings of data were interpreted and used to decide if further coding needed to take place or if the interpreted data could be utilized for a conclusion, the fifth and final phase (Yin, 2011).

Summary

The researcher sought to understand Resident Assistant motivations and demotivations for returning to the position for a second year through individual interviews. By researching students’ personal perceptions and expectations, the researcher was able to gain insight into the population of first year Resident Assistants and found themes within their shared experiences.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of the current study was to analyze the perceptions of Resident Assistants at a mid-sized public Midwestern University, as to what factors motivate and demotivate them to return to the Resident Assistant position each academic year. Through qualitative analysis of one-on-one interviews with the six participants of this study, several main themes emerged. These themes are presented throughout Chapter IV. Although multiple themes emerged, only the most prevalent are reported in this chapter. Several themes were chosen and explored from the various experiences that each of the six participants shared during their one-on-one interviews. All themes in this chapter are organized in accordance to each research question.

Research Question #1: What are Resident Assistants’ perceptions of motivations to return to the position from the first to second year?

The six participants were asked to speak on their first year Resident Assistant experience, as a whole, and then asked to give examples of what they perceive to be motivations to return to the position for a second year. Through this, three themes emerged. The three themes for the six participants included: community development, staff dynamic, and learned skills.

Community Development – “Making the Magic Happen”

Each of the six participants spoke about their community in some capacity, when asked about their perceived motivations. Two of the participants cited specific ongoing relationships with previous residents that developed while in the Resident Assistant position. Participant 1, a male, non-returner from a predominately first year, traditional-
style community, highlighted his ongoing interaction with previous residents via a group chat developed during his first year: “To this day I still talk to all of my residents. We still chat – I have class with some of them and it’s just a riot to see them all on campus.” Participant 6, a male, non-returner from an upper-class/transfer, pod-style community, stated that they felt they had made lasting friendships during their previous year.

All participants at some point mentioned a feeling of validation they received from their residents. Participant 1 quoted an interaction wherein a parent expressed, “You’ve changed my son’s life.” Participant 1 spoke of this as a touching moment during his year. Participant 2, a male, returner from a co-ed non-traditional community, stated his joy when residents, “Would always put, ‘my favorite RA,’ or make me random things just because they were like, ‘You’re doing such a good job!’” Participant 3, a female, non-returner from a co-ed non-traditional community, stated that her residents’ level of comfort in opening up their lives to her validated her position.

Participant 4, a male, returner from a traditional-style community, spent a rather large amount of time discussing the inspiration that he shared with his residential community. In his statement, “Oh, I changed this person’s life,” he mentioned how it made the job feel worth it. Participant 5, a female, returner from an all-female community, also highlighted the feeling of positive impact shared between herself and her residents as instigating a feeling of thankfulness and a, “…want to come back for another year.” Lastly, Participant 6 shared an experience wherein a resident specifically named Participant 6 as his motivation to return to the building from the first semester to the second.
Further individual examples were given to highlight community development as a perceived motivational factor. Participant 1 spoke of his residents as being, “40 reasons that I love [my job].” Participant 2 expressed it as, “making the magic happen…” when he was able to make personal connections with his community. Although she struggled with obtaining the same feeling throughout her whole community, Participant 3 mentioned that she hosted a small group of about 6 or 7 of her residents that interacted like they were family. Participant 4 felt encouraged by the ability to create a second home for his students.

**Staff Dynamic – “In the Same Boat”**

As with community development, each of the six participants discussed staff dynamic during their recollection of perceived motivations of the previous year. There was a mixture of examples given that included fellow Resident Assistants, supervisors, experienced examples, and hypothetical examples.

Participant 1 discussed the hypothetical motivational factor of supervisors knowing which type of leadership they held, as well as which style they wanted to hold. This same participant discussed the motivation of flexible leadership and understanding supervisors. Participant 2 was among the few participants with experienced examples, and shared:

I am a very busy person, so sometimes I would need my duty night changed. Being able to ask someone else on the team, ‘Hey, I can’t do this night, can I trade this day for this day?’ And they would always answer with, ‘Yea that works for me.’
He also expressed the same feeling of camaraderie when staff mates would feel overwhelmed by programming or other departmental requirements. Participants 2 and 3 came from the same staff, and both expressed a mixture of ‘leader of the pack’ and ‘common ground’ feeling toward their supervisor. Both participants felt motivated by their supervisor’s willingness to be in the same boat as their supervisees.

Participant 4 highlighted the motivation of supervisors that have the, “professional courtesy of help and advice, but also people that you get to hang out and spend time with.” He, along with Participant 5, expressed the need for supervisors to reflect the values of their supervisees in order to have a successful staff dynamic. Participant 4 also discussed the motivation of having returning Resident Assistants act as “little supervisors” by taking new Resident Assistants under their wings. The bond established by the staff was mentioned multiple times as a motivating factor for Participant 4:

Having that universal bond, in a sense that you were with each other and you knew what to expect from one another. For example, you know who does best in each situation and who doesn’t and then working forward from that together.

Participant 5 gave insight into the motivating factors of an all-female staff dynamic:

I definitely felt like in the beginning of the year we were all super close, but in a group of girls, there’s always better friends and people who get along better than the others…But I make those connections with a handful, maybe three or four, and I got a lot of motivation from them.

This same participant talked on the need for accountability and support as motivational factors within a staff dynamic; As well as the motivation they felt through their
supervisor’s willingness to adapt with them and encourage them to operate above and beyond the reasonable expectations. Participant 6 had the least to say about staff dynamic, but added that he felt that fine lines and creative freedom were two supervisory areas that he felt were most motivating, adding a General Patton quote as his example:

“Tell them what to do and have them surprise you with how well they do it.”

**Learned Skills – “I Wanted to Inspire”**

In between the lines of a few of the participants’ answers, a theme of skills beneficial to future endeavors was noticed. Participant 4 spoke at length on the benefit of the Resident Assistant position in his future career aspirations. Participant 4 hopes to go into Human Resources and stated, “That’s mainly the reason why I wanted the job. It was because I wanted to inspire new students and be able to deal with conflict, because that’s where my career is going.” Other participants echoed participant 4’s want to learn conflict management skills, both between residents and co-workers or staff members.

Another skill learned through the Resident Assistant position a few participants found to be motivating was realizing the need to establish yourself early on as an authority figure to your community. Participant 5 mentioned:

I learned that I had to not be so laid back with them. I thought I could be, but I had to step up and put on my power pants to yell at them sometimes. I learned that you’ve got to find the balance, and you can’t just be like so chill all the time, because people won’t respond positively when you try to discipline them later on.

Participant 1 also spoke on the need to establish an appropriate balance of time spent with residents. He would tell his residents, “When you need me, I’ll be here, but like at the same time I’m a college kid, too.”
Research Question #2: What are Resident Assistants’ perceptions of demotivations to return to the position from the first to second year?

Again, the six participants were asked to speak on their first year Resident Assistant experience, as a whole, and then asked to give examples of what they perceive to be demotivations to return to the position for a second year. Through this, three themes emerged. The three themes for the six participants included: work/life balance, staff dynamic, and awareness of role.

Work/Life Balance – “Running Around With My Head Cut Off”

When focusing on demotivations, multiple participants brought up work/life balance in many different areas of their life during their first year as a Resident Assistant including: position versus extracurricular activities, position versus school work, and position versus personality.

Participant 1 recounted his difficulty balancing his time between being both a Resident Assistant and being in a fraternity. He specifically discussed an instance when a rush event for his fraternity and hall council fell on the same night. This clash of events also caused a miscommunication between himself and his supervisors, resulting in a lasting rift that lead to further clashes in the future. This same participant, because of the same commitments with his fraternity, had difficulty scheduling his duty days/weekend, eventually culminating with him taking eight duty weekends in one semester. These conflicts ended up negatively affecting his participation in the fraternity:

It was my first semester technically being like full swing in the fraternity, and I couldn’t get out and connect with a lot of the guys. Part of the reason I actually
dropped the fraternity was because I had no relationship with any of them.

Nothing that I would consider a close friendship.

Participant 1 later commented on his school load of 18 credit hours a semester, and his internal warring of personal time. Because Participant 1 was a junior when he started his first year as a Resident Assistant, he mentioned a feeling of independence that he had already developed, leading to a feeling of wanting to push away his residents when he wanted more time to himself, but knowing the position called for him to spend more time with them.

Participant 2 also struggled with balancing his commitment to the Resident Assistant position along with participating in multiple on campus theater productions. Unlike Participant 1, Participant 2 had the support of his staff mates and supervisors and was able to more easily manage his commitments. Although he had the help, Participant 2 shared that there were often last minute changes, leading him to feel like a burden on his fellow staff members.

Participant 3 found herself at a crossroads with all of her extracurricular and school related commitments, even after dropping a few at the beginning of the school year: “I took 15 credit hours…I was the president of TRIO Ambassadors, which is a student support center on campus, and I was a part of entrepreneurship club.” Because of her multiple commitments, she stated that she often found it difficult to keep up with deadlines associated with her Resident Assistant position: “I was doing other things and of course I did have the full course load and then my RA duties, the stuff you have to do, and then something else on top of that.” She also shared, “There were a lot of times during the year that I was overwhelmed, just running around with my head cut off.” Like
Participant 1, Participant 3 struggled with wanting her personal time and knowing the interactive requirements of her position:

A lot of times I wanted to just close my door. I want to be by myself or chill or take a nap. I feel like I had more of those moments than me leaving my door open. Because that’s the type of person I am. I like to kind of be by myself, but of course the position doesn’t entail that a lot.

Participant 3 also had a unique situation where she needed to make more money in order to get a car, but the Resident Assistant position was so time consuming, she did not have the time or authorization to obtain an additional position. This added extra pressure, as she described in this statement: “I had just enough money to pay my phone bill and that was it. Other than that, I just had to keep it and use it for groceries, if needed.”

Participant 4 echoed the thoughts of multiple other participants when discussing the clash between all of the different deadlines associated with the Resident Assistant position and schoolwork:

I had deadlines every month. Like, I had to put up new bulletin boards, new door decs, I had to make sure I maintained a list of programs every month and provided a mixture of educational, diversity, so and so programs…having to do all of that was new to me and I had to do that on top of a paper due tomorrow.

Participant 4 summarized the difficulty of being a student first, but still feeling the weight of being an employee of the university.

Participant 5 focused on the inconsistencies in her work/life balance when it came to friendships. She mentioned that schoolwork always came first, but often friends were put above other responsibilities, including her position: “I tried to be available, but my
friends didn’t really want me to be available, so that was kind of a bummer.” Again, Participant 5 struggled with the deadlines of the position, often completing items three or four days late: “When they would give me deadlines, I would be like, ‘Give me an extra three or four days and I’ve got you on that.’”

Like Participant 1, Participant 6 was a junior when he started the Resident Assistant position, and had also previously transferred to the university. Because of this, he echoed the same feeling of independence warring with the requirements of the position with which both Participants 1 and 3 struggled. Participant 6, although he had fewer commitments, was also met with the same scheduling difficulties as other participants, because of being involved in ROTC. This commitment required early mornings and weekends away, as well as summer-long trainings, often conflicting with duty responsibilities or interactions with residents.

**Staff Dynamic – “A Weird Disconnect”**

In the previous research question, it was specified that some of the participants spoke on hypothetical motivational experiences related to staff dynamic. A few of those same participants shared experienced examples of demotivations related to staff dynamic. Participants 1 and 4 came from the same staff and each discussed their shared interaction with a fellow Resident Assistant being fired early on in the school year. Participant 4 described being on duty rounds with Participant 1 when, “A fellow RA who was celebrating his 21st birthday...he was also celebrating with his residents in the floor lobby. We were shocked beyond belief.” Participant 1 described his reaction to the situation as, “He was a new RA just like me. The first duty situation being something so mind blowing...I don’t know what to do. You panic...like, you almost just walk away.
That really killed a lot of motivation.” Participant 1 also described the rift creating in the staff post the described incident:

I was expecting my staff to get close and I was expecting us to all be good friends.

But, there was this weird disconnect because there was half the staff that was like, ‘Why didn’t you keep it quiet? You got him fired from his job.’ And the other half was like, ‘You did the right thing. It does suck, but there’s nothing you really could have done there.’ It was a subtle split at first, but it became clearer as the year went on.

Participant 4 shared that neither himself nor Participant 1 felt confident to handle the situation the first night:

And then it happened again the next day and we were like, ‘we have to report it.’

And then we were put on probation because we didn’t report it correctly…so at the time I was bummed out…so I thought maybe this isn’t for me.

Participant 1 also spent some time sharing his disconnect with his supervisors. He started with three supervisors, and one left during the school year. He described the supervisor that left as an authoritative figure, and the other two supervisors tried to fill that role.

Participant 1 reflected on his feelings with the change: “When somebody who has been acting like your friend for the first six months all of a sudden turns into cracking the whip…it’s kind of like, ‘Hey, what’s going on here?’ That tension just started to build up.” This tension culminated toward the end of the year when Participant 1 described his one on ones with the two supervisors: “Both [supervisors] were touchy feely, ‘Hey how are we feeling today? What’s going on?’ Those questions don’t happen in my family. You ask my grandpa how he’s feeling and he’ll just hand you a beer and just ignore it.”
Awareness of Role – “What Did I Sign Up For?”

This theme didn’t necessarily arise from the specific demotivations prompt, but rather appeared throughout many of the six participants’ general statements. Multiple participants credited their perception and awareness of the role through their interactions with their previous Resident Assistants or floor communities, often not matching their new role in the way they had hoped.

Participant 1 described his transition from his freshman year in a smaller, non-traditional, co-ed style floor to his larger, all male, community-style floor, “[My first hall] was a very low maintenance hall…Going to be an RA in [my second hall]…it woke me up pretty quick. I had 40 some kids that were really new to college and no idea what’s going on.” He also shared, “I think part of me was kind of ready for it and the other part wasn’t.”

Participant 3 called attention to the misconception of the extent of the Resident Assistant role in her statement:

It’s a lot of underground details that you wouldn’t really guess or wouldn’t really think about. A lot of times you are living in that kind of fantasy like, oh you get a single and you get to decorate and make stuff look cute, and you get to tell people what to do. But when you finally go in depth…it was a lot to learn.

Later, after being asked to describe her different expectations, she shared, “I really didn’t know deeply what the position entailed.” She also described her lack of understanding with how extensive the position actually was. “The job is taking care of everybody else. I just couldn’t – couldn’t really live like that. Being an RA, I feel like there are a lot of
things I just couldn’t control.” Participant 3 culminated these thoughts with the question of, “…what did I sign up for?”

Participant 5 also entered the position with the idea that, “It’s going to be fun, it’s going to be laid back, it’s not going to be that much work.” After moving a little further into her time as a Resident Assistant, she shared, “There’s more than just bulletin boards and door decs…I think in the back of my mind I knew that, I just didn’t want to – I wanted to focus on the good things.”

**Research Question #3: What expectations do Resident Assistants have when starting the position and are these expectations met?**

After speaking on both motivations and demotivations to return to the Resident Assistant position for a second year, the six participants were asked to speak on their specific expectations of different aspects of the Resident Assistant position (floor community, staff, supervisor, role, etc.). Through this discussion, five themes were found in relation to the six participants’ expectations. These five themes included: overstimulation during training, role conflict, personal-professional growth, purpose, and practicality.

**Training – “Something Bad is Always Going to Happen”**

When it came to expectations for training, there seemed to be a big consistency of negativity. It resonated through with Participant 2’s statement, “I was terrified when we went through RA training,” Participant 3’s elaboration, “I was scared. I was very, very scared, because training was a lot. It was very overwhelming,” and Participant 5 put it into her own words, “Training was awful. Training was fricking awful. Training definitely scared me.” Participant 5 went into further depth on her reasoning for this:
They started talking about heavy things right away like, ‘this is what you’ve got to expect and this is what you’ve got to do and this is how you react to it.’ I’m like…’what about fr-friends and bulletin boards and community…I don’t want to talk about suicide intervention.’

Participant 5 also described some specific parts of training that led to this feeling, including the PowerPoints with specific steps to handling a specific situation. Participant 5 described her unsure feelings, “What if a certain step is not going to apply to that resident? There are times when something happens and you can’t take that step because you have to figure other things out. I was worried about that.” These feelings directly related to crisis situations, which were echoed again by both Participants 2 and 3, albeit in a bit more dramatic ways. Participant 2 said, “As a new RA, you think the worst is going to happen on your duty night. Something bad is always going to happen on your duty night.” Participant 3 painted a vivid picture of her post-training fears by sharing, “Training gave me a perspective that I was going to go on rounds and someone would be laying on the floor. That’s actually how I felt for the first few weeks. Go on rounds and somebody’s behind a door in a pool of blood...”

These fears and questions led some of the participants to critically analyze their position. Participant 5 stated, “Am I really going to be able to meet them? Will I let people down?” Participant 3 again described her thought process as, “Oh my gosh...what did I sign up for?” Participant 1 stated, “I don’t really feel like training prepared me whatsoever for anything, you’ve just got to experience it.”
Role Conflict – “The Fine Line”

Role conflict appeared in a myriad of different ways during the six participants’ discussion on expectations of the Resident Assistant role. This conflict seemed to manifest most clearly in the community development area with conflict appearing between friend versus authority figure and “here to help” versus “here to get you in trouble.”

Participant 1 described his annoyance with the black and white nature of the Resident Assistant role when it came to being friends with residents: “We have the role of developing communities as RAs, but when you’re developing these communities, it’s only natural you’re going to make friendships.” He also added, “[The department] could put the label of ‘don’t be friends with your residents’ on the job description, but you’d probably have less than five applicants apply.” Participant 1 summarized the Resident Assistant position as being, “The weirdest combination of a dad, a police officer, and a friend. There’s a fine line and you’ve got to be careful about it, but that line is almost impossible not to cross.” He ended his interview with the advice to future Resident Assistants, “You need to be their friend first and their RA second.”

Participant 2 spent some time talking about the shift in his expectations of the Resident Assistant role from a feeling of needing to police and, “I’ve got to get this person in trouble,” to a feeling of open communication between Resident Assistant and resident, “Hey, this is what I’m doing.” Participant 3 struggled with her internal conflict between the position’s need to approach residents, and her want to not be overbearing: “It’s kind of hard for me as an RA to differentiate between, yes I do want [the resident] to come out of their room more so I can help get to know them, but at the same time I’m not
Going to push myself on people either.” She also spoke on the never-ending nature of the position, “I love talking to people. I love talking period, but in the job that never stops, it was just like, with my personality where do I draw that line?”

Although Participant 4 echoed the previously stated feelings in his statement, “That boundary between friend and administrator is a tough one to handle at the first year,” he also seemed to be the participant that had been most prepared for the position prior to beginning. He spoke about specific roles outlined in the Resident Assistant job description including role model and resource, even to the point where he mentioned that he assumed there would be a quiz during his interview process. Participant 4 also discussed his belief that the feeling of role conflict comes from “…the pressure of, ‘I hope they like me,’ while at the same time trying to make sure that you stay confident in your abilities.”

Participant 5 took the conflict of friend versus authority figure to another level, by beginning a relationship with a resident during her first year. This step from Resident Assistant to girlfriend created conflicts in her ability to be viewed as an authority figure on the floor, and ultimately resulted in another resident feeling unfairly treated and caused Participant 5 to be placed on probation. Participant 5 said, “[This conflict] made me realize, ‘Wow, this is something that can get you fired, you can lose [the position], and lose the respect of your supervisors.’” Participant 5 also discussed her upset between wanting to help certain residents make better decisions, while realizing the Resident Assistant role isn’t to act like a parent. She gave the following example: “Toward the end of the year, [a resident] started slipping, hanging out with people I didn’t approve of…but I’m not her mom, so I can’t say anything.”
Growth – “It’s an Experience”

An expectation of growth in the position showed through most of the participants’ expectations in one way or another. Participant 2 spent a rather large portion of the beginning of the interview discussing how the Resident Assistant position helped him find organization in his life. He discussed how he was, “…forced to write everything down and make sure that everything was in sync with one another. I still stayed pretty busy, but it was pretty organized and energetic at the same time.”

Participant 3 felt the Resident Assistant position helped her grow in maturity through her demotivating experiences. After realizing that only a small portion of her floor community wanted to have anything to do with her, she stated, “This is going to happen on their terms and I have to respect that. It’s not going to happen on my terms, everything’s not going to go my way.” She also described the importance of having the Resident Assistant experience at all. “It’s an experience that you won’t get back. If I was still a freshman applying and knew what I know now, I still would apply, because it’s an experience and you need to live it like you will never live it again.”

Like Participant 2, Participant 4 believed that the Resident Assistant position helped him in his organizational and preparatory skills. He spent some time describing how he learned to prioritize his Resident Assistant position and schoolwork:

I’m a student first, but also work at the university, so I need to make sure I’m able to balance those two. What I would do was, I would make it where one day I would do RA stuff that I needed to get done, and then I would focus on homework on another day. I would separate those days, that way I can get everything done without feeling overwhelmed about it.
He also felt he was able to learn how he best works, “I went in with high expectations and realized I can’t do that the entire year, so I want to make sure I keep it consistent. ‘Cause that’s the key word, consistency.”

Participant 5 shared that her biggest areas of growth were relatively introspective. Early on in her first year as a Resident Assistant, she internalized the issues she faced, describing it as, “I saw how much I sucked.” She discussed how she grew to realize that she was taking these things too seriously and would need to, “Take a step back and think, ‘Okay, you’re right. I understand.’” She also described her biggest growth area as being able to admit, “I’m not afraid to be myself.”

Purpose – “Meaningful Work”

Through many of the perspectives given by the six participants, a want for purpose was described. Quite a few of the participants came into the Resident Assistant position with the expectation that they would have some sort of positive, lasting impact on their residents during their first year.

Participant 1 came into the position with the want to see his residents “make college the best time of their life”, and ended up leaving with the notion that his residents gave his year purpose, instead of the other way around. Participant 1, after describing negative experiences of his first year, shared the statement, “Those 40 guys, that’s the reason that I would keep going everyday.”

Participant 2 described one of his main goals when entering the Resident Assistant position as a want to, “Find those passionate students and get them involved, keep them involved, and keep them on top of things. And find the not passionate – or the not as passionate students and push them to find their niche on campus.” He believed that
by being a Resident Assistant, he could use himself as an example to his residents: “I feel like if I can be passionate about something and show that to my residents, they can be passionate about something and then it keeps going.” Participant 2 even related the sense of purpose to his want to return: “Being able to see how people adapted and grew throughout my floor last year and how they might do it again this year, I think that is what really pushed me to continue.”

Participant 3 spent some time talking about her want for her floor community to, “Come as strangers, leave as friends.” Later on in the interview, she discussed a goal of hers, “It was a personal goal of mine and it has been for maybe the past two or three years, to influence or touch somebody in some way. So when I applied, I felt like I would be able to do that, but on a larger scale.” Participant 3 shared a few examples of residents coming to her for different things including, “I had a little futon couch, they came crying to me on that couch. It really feels as though, yes, I did touch a couple people.”

Participant 4 talks at length on his expectation to inspire his residents during his first year, stating, “It’s very fulfilling.” He also had the unique experience of having some international residents on his floor and described, “When you get that kind of inspiration from them...especially at the international level...it makes the job worth it everyday.” Later, when discussing some of his most motivating parts of the position, he again described this expectation that as a Resident Assistant, “You inspire and change people’s lives, just based on your position.”

Participant 5’s hope for a purpose-driven experience was shaped through the lack of resident interest, reflecting the experience of Participant 1 closer than any others.
Participant 5 seemed to find her purpose through the downfalls of the year, carrying into a want to give her residents a purpose her second year as a Resident Assistant.

Practicality – “The Edge”

As previously highlighted, a few of the six participants expected the Resident Assistant position to help them in their future endeavors associated with their future career or aspirations. Participant 4 discussed his excitement for entering the work force with a Human Resource degree and discussed how being able to deal with conflict and help inspire students would be practical skills to help in his future career: “Later on when I graduate, in a business or working at a company, you’re going to want people that like each other. You can’t have people butting heads, so being able to handle that and establish a safe environment for all is important.” He also added, “I feel it is very important to know how to deal with people from different cultures and backgrounds, because that will help me toward my career path after I leave [this university].” He related this experience of having so many different residents on his floor as a direct positive impact on his major in communication.

Participants 2 and 4 both made a point of relating the need to connect with residents under the expectation that they can be valuable in networking later in life. Participant 2 stated it as, “It’s not being the person for the floor to look at, it’s making the connection with all of these people, because you’re going to know them after this. It’s connection building.” Participant 4 described the connection slightly differently, “When networking after [college], you never know when the person who was being a pain in the butt residents could be the person helping you out later in life.”
Summary

Eleven themes found during six individual one-on-one interviews concerning motivations, demotivations, and expectations of the Resident Assistant position were explored in Chapter IV. Different themes were explored under each of the three original research questions. Chapter V will include a summary of previous chapters, recommendations for current Resident Assistants and Student Affairs Professionals, as well as suggestions for future research on the topic of resident assistant retention from the first year to the second year.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

In chapter IV, the three original research questions were discussed and themes were identified through the comparison and contrast of information gathered via six individual one-on-one interviews. For the first research question (What are Resident Assistants’ perceptions of motivations to return to the position from the first to second year?) the three themes of community development, staff dynamic, and learned skills were identified. The second research question (What are Resident Assistants’ perceptions of demotivations to return to the position from the first to second year?) indicated work/life balance, staff dynamic, and awareness of role as themes. Lastly, the third research question (What expectations do Resident Assistants have when starting the position and are these expectations met?) identified five themes: Training, role conflict, growth, purpose and practicality.

This chapter will discuss how the results of the current qualitative study relate to prior literature collected about Resident Assistants, retention, and expectations. This chapter will also outline recommendations for student affairs professionals working directly with Resident Assistants and suggestions for future research.

Motivations

Community development, learned skills, and staff dynamic were seen as motivational factors among the six participants. The participants in this study identified a need for a strong connection to their community, a need to learn and be challenged, and a need for support and appreciation from staff members. Balakrishnan & M’s (2014) also identified similar factors such as diverse and trusting work environments, challenging
Balakrishnan & M (2014)’s findings that a trusting work environment was important was repeated by Participant 1 who expressed the pride it brought him to be respected and trusted by his residents enough that they kept him in their lives, even after he was no longer their Resident Assistant. Participant 1 seemed to gain strength in his position from interactions with his residents, even highlighting them as specific reasons he enjoyed the position. He stated: “To this day I still talk to all of my residents. We still chat – I have class with some of them and it’s just a riot to see all of them on campus,” and “[I have] 40 reasons that I love [my job]”. Both Participants 4 and 6 also discussed being motivated by the ability to interact and connect with residents of diverse backgrounds, including international students.

Balakrishnan & M’s (2014) also stated that challenging projects and opportunities motivate and encourage retention among Resident Assistants. Likewise, the participants supported this idea. Participant 4 described how his work ethic increased as a result of being a Resident Assistant, and has continued into his second year. Participant 2 shared that the opportunities provided to him through the Resident Assistant position, including leadership conferences, motivated him to return. This finding was important because, as found in previous research, Resident Assistants tend to hold a high risk for burnout due to the challenging and sometimes overwhelming nature if their work environment (Benedict & Mondloch, 1989; Paladino et al, 2005; Bierman & Carpenter, 1994). There seems to be a thin line between challenging work that will motivate a Resident Assistant to return, and overwhelming work resulting in demotivation to return.
Balakrishnan & M’s (2014) finding that respectful and appreciative treatment acts as an encourager of retention was supported by Participant 5. She described the motivation her staff members’ support and encouragement provided her, “They were there for me the entire time. They were super supportive”. Also, “I always try to be nice and respectful of them because they never showed me anything but respect either”.

Participant 2 shared this feeling of respectful and appreciative treatment within his staff dynamic when describing their ability to successfully collaborate on programming efforts and their efficient and understanding on-call scheduling.

**Demotivations**

Based on the interviews with the six participants there was a consensus of three themes relating to demotivational factors to return to the Resident Assistant position: work-life balance, staff dynamic, and awareness of role. Previous research stated the negative effects of work-life imbalance as: job dissatisfaction and withdrawal, lessened quality of life, burnout and lowered retention (Hughes & Boxionelos, 2007; Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, 2003; Deery, 2008; Keeton et al., 2007; Smith & Gardner, 2007; Gropel & Kuhl, 2009).

During her interview, when asked to discuss demotivations, Participant 3 expressed her work-life imbalance in terms of withdrawal from her residents:

I had those times where I would think, ‘Okay, I’ll just close my door. I want to be by myself of chill or take a nap or something like that.’ I feel like I had more of those moments than me leaving my door open. You can close your door when you need those moments, but not too much.
Participant 1 also stated that he sometimes feels the need to push his residents away in order to have time to himself.

The experiences described by Participants 3 and 1 are supported by Deery’s (2008) three rationales of difficulty sustaining appropriate work-life balance: The Resident Assistant feels they have a duty to be available and provide emotional and counseling support to their residents, they are seen as the face of the building and need to be continually present, and it is the nature of Housing and Dining Services to be up and running at all times. Participant 1, who was also active in a fraternity during his first year as a Resident Assistant, described a sense of lessened quality of life, as compared to the lives of his fellow fraternity men:

That was my first semester technically being full swing in [the fraternity] and I couldn’t get out and connect with a lot of the guys. Part of the reason I actually dropped was because I had no relationship with any of them. Nothing that I would consider a close friendship.

This loss of relationship with fraternity brothers impacted his satisfaction and balance in the Resident Assistant position. Participant 6 discussed the challenge of balancing the three main areas of his life: ROTC, girlfriend, and the Resident Assistant position. Through the clashing of all three areas, he eventually became dissatisfied with the Resident Assistant position, as compared to the other two areas.

The research conducted by Hughes & Boxionelos (2007), Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw (2003), Deery (2008), Keeton et al. (2007), Smith & Gardner (2007), and Gropel & Kuhl (2009) related to work-life balance supports the information found in the current study that participants’ job dissatisfaction, withdrawal, and lessened quality of life led to
their lowered retention. The current study showed a drastic need for proper work-life balance, as participants, 1, 3, and 6 chose not to return to the Resident Assistant position.

Although work-life imbalance was expressed as a retention issue among Resident Assistants, staff dynamic did not always play a role in the Resident Assistant’s choice to persist in the position. For example, Participant 3 chose not to return to the Resident Assistant position for a second year, but described her staff as very supportive, “[My supervisor] always asked about our day, our ups and downs... And my other coworkers—everybody was just supportive and upbeat.”

Research conducted by Maslach et. al (1996) stated that negative work environments factor into the burnout of Resident Assistants, eventually ending in a lack of retention. Participant 1’s one-on-one interview indicated there was a close relationship between his staff’s dynamic interactions and his persistence in the Resident Assistant position. Participant 1 felt there was tension within his staff, as well as a disconnect between himself and his supervisors: “When somebody who has been acting like your friend for the first six months all of a sudden starts cracking the whip, it’s like hey what’s going on here? That tension just starts to build up.”

The last theme identified as a demotivator was “awareness of role”. This factor has not seen much attention in prior Resident Assistant research. Most of the six participants spoke about their unawareness of the Resident Assistant role before beginning, yet it was clear that two of the three non-returning participants thoroughly underestimated the position. In his quote, “Well I guess this isn’t the happy-go-lucky role it was made out to be at the beginning during training,” Participant 1 brought to light his unawareness of the time consuming nature of the Resident Assistant position and the
amount of responsibilities that accompanied the role. Participant 3 expressed her feelings of being overwhelmed by what she learned about the position during training: “How do I put myself out there to get those residents to come to me? Where do I start getting that ideal community? Where do I start with everything? When a problem comes up, where do I start? It was very scary.” Although an unawareness of the role didn’t appear to be the sole reason for not returning to the Resident Assistant position for a second year, it appeared to influence the overall reason. Because of this, there is a need for Resident Assistants to be properly trained and made aware of the full responsibilities of the role, prior to beginning the position.

**Expectations**

To better understand the expectations Resident Assistants had for the position, Eccles’ Expectancy-Value Theory (2009) was utilized. This theoretical framework focused on the impact of met and unmet expectations on the value placed on a position. Although the theory’s interaction with the Resident Assistant role was relatively straightforward, the comments made by participants found mixed results. For example, Participant 4 explained that he had expectations of a close floor community, a helpful staff dynamic, and learning skills that would help his future career. He claimed these were met and influenced his desire to return for a second year. Participant 1 held expectations of a quiet and self-sufficient floor, hands-off, yet caring supervisors, and the ability to actively participate in extracurricular activities. These expectations were not met, leading to Participant 1’s desire not to return. Both of these examples support the theoretical framework.
However, although some participants’ perceived experiences supported Eccles’ Expectancy-Value Theory (2009), there were a couple of outliers. Participant 5 spent most of her time talking about unmet expectations within the realm of her Resident Assistant position, yet she was among the returners. She stated that her reasoning for returning to the position was, “I didn’t want to end the year on a sucky note. So I wanted to come back and prove to myself that I can do it.” On the other hand, Participant 6 spoke on his enjoyment of the position and very little hard feelings. He stressed the final decision that had to be made between his time commitments of girlfriend, ROTC and Resident Assistant, eventually deciding Resident Assistant was the only one that didn’t directly benefit him after college. He said, “If I could [be a Resident Assistant again] I would, but I just can’t.”

The final two participants demonstrated mixed support for the theoretical framework of this study. Participants 2 and 3 gave quite similar answers when asked to speak on their expectations: neither felt they had formed thorough expectations when entering the position, and instead let their expectations form as the year continued. Each of the two participants made their decision to return or not return based on their specific needs of the time. Although they both felt expectations had been met, Participant 2 made the choice to continue his time commitments in the Resident Assistant position, while Participant 3 ultimately decided to not return to the position based on monetary needs.

Although only two of the six participants directly supported the theoretical framework of this study, the experiences of the other four participants could be better understood through the framework. Because multiple expectations were discussed, the researcher was able to utilize the theoretical framework for individual expectations, as
well as overall experiences of the six participants. It is important to note that original expectations of each aspect of the Resident Assistant position (staff, role, community, etc.) were similar for most participants, yet not all participants perceived the aspects the same way. For example, Participants 1 and 4 worked under the same supervisory staff and both expected their supervisors to be supportive and flexible. Through their individual interactions, Participant 1 felt his supervisors did not meet with expectations, while Participant 4 felt they did.

**Recommendations for Student Affairs Professionals**

For all Student Affairs Professionals working within university housing, Resident Assistants are a vital component of the cohesive system working to, “Act as a facilitator for the residence hall community and to enhance the social, educational, spiritual, intellectual, physical, vocational, cultural, and environmental development of each of their students” (EIU, 2012, p. 1). Understanding the Resident Assistant position through the lived experienced and first-hand perceptions of these participants makes the research collected in this study essential for current and future university housing professionals.

With this in mind, the current research study provides important information for Student Affairs Professionals as they support and challenge Resident Assistants; ultimately working toward the retention of strong employees.

Most of the participants in this research study highlighted training, specifically emergency protocol, as being an area of major unmet expectations. From the participants’ answers, one suggestion is to structure training in a way that empowers the Residents Assistant to approach situations, rather than scaring them about what might happen. Although it is clear housing professionals want to make sure Resident Assistants are
prepared for any and every situation they could encounter, a culture of sharing horror story situations has developed. There seems to be less time spent preparing critical thinking skills in emergency situations and more memorization of the expected tasks to be completed. Participants shared that instead of critically thinking to solve the situation at hand; this type of training gave them a feeling of anxiety in emergency situations leading them to feel anxiety about missing a step in the established guidelines for this protocol. In the researcher’s opinion, one way to help this would be to split Resident Assistants into case study groups led by professional staff members. In these groups, Resident Assistants would draw on critical thinking skills to evaluate emergency situations with multiple outcomes and varying factors. By taking part in these case studies, more appropriate preparation could be established. This method would provide the necessary emergency protocol tools for new Resident Assistants, while limiting the feeling of one ‘right way’ to interact with a situation.

Resident Assistants could also benefit from training focused on team building and staff bonding. From information gathered in the six interviews, it appears that Resident Assistants enter the position thinking of their floor community as being the main and sometimes only area for bonding to take place. This can negatively impact staff dynamic, as each individual Resident Assistant will most likely look to their staff members for support and guidance as the year goes on. By incorporating intentional team building activities into training, Resident Assistants are trained to look to their staff members for help. These activities will help staffs learn the strengths and weaknesses of each member and where they can assist in these areas.
Another recommendation to Student Affairs Professionals would be to actively highlight transferrable skills within the Resident Assistant position. A few of the participants in the current research study mentioned how they felt the Resident Assistant position helped them when looking toward their future career, but the worth of the position can become lost in the “hustle and bustle” of each day. All Resident Assistants’ first priority is to finish their degree so they can start their career; demonstrating how the Resident Assistant position practically transfers skills into their future aspirations instills greater worth in the position. This could be accomplished by placing value on non-traditionally appreciated aspects of the position, i.e. conflict mediation, not just community building or programming with other departments on campus and not just socializing on the Resident Assistant’s specific floor. By praising these skills that can be utilized in future careers and calling attention to their varied worth, Resident Assistants may place more personal stock in the position and increase their persistence in the role from year to year.

Suggestions for Future Research

The current research study focused on six participants in the Resident Assistant position and their perceptions of motivations and demotivations to return to the position for a second year. The following bullets are recommendations for future research in this particular area of study:

- Interview a large pool of returning and non-returning Resident Assistants from a given year, instead of a calculated six participants.

- Interview Resident Assistants from multiple Public Universities to compare experiences from institution to institution.
• Conduct the one-on-one interviews at the end of the academic year, exactly one year after the decision to return or not has been made. The time of the academic year that the one-on-one interviews took place was seen as a limitation in the current study; In some cases, the participant did not feel enough time had passed in order to decide if the correct choice had been made in returning or not.

• Create a preliminary survey for participants to take before meeting for one-on-one interviews that would include a broader evaluation of expectations, as not all possible expectations could be discussed during the hour time period. This could also provide participants with more time to reflect on expectations and experiences before interviewing.

• Conduct a longitudinal study and interview the three returning participants at the end of their second year in the Resident Assistant position. This could be used to evaluate if motivations and demotivations change as participants mature in the position.

• Expand the participant pool to include more diversity. The current study included four males and two females, with only one non-white participant. Future research many benefit from evaluating the experiences of a more diverse population.

Conclusion

The current qualitative study was conducted to better understand the perceptions of motivations and demotivations to return to the Resident Assistant position from the first year to the second. Chapter V included a discussion of the results from the research study. Results found that participants perceived community development, learned skills, and staff dynamic to be motivations; work/life balance, staff dynamic, and awareness of
role were perceived to be demotivations. Jacquelynn Eccles’ Expectancy-Value Theory (2009) was found to be important when evaluating the worth Resident Assistants place on the role and how that can affect their retention in the position from the first year to the second; although all participants did not support the theory. Recommendations for Student Affairs Professionals were provided to highlight areas of support and challenge for Resident Assistants to help persistence in the role. Suggestions for future research were also discussed, to help further the collective knowledge of Student Affairs Professionals in order to retain the best and brightest Resident Assistants from year to year.
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Appendix A

Interview Protocol
Opening Question

1. Please tell me about your first year as an RA.
   a. Tell me about one of your most rewarding experiences.
   b. Tell me about one of your most challenging experiences.

2. Walk me through a typical day as an RA.

Research Question 1: What are Resident Assistants’ perceptions of motivations to return to the position from the first to second year?

1. What aspects of the RA position encouraged you to want to return for a second year?

2. What do you feel were some factors of motivation over the past year? Why?

Research Question 2: What are Resident Assistants’ perceptions of demotivations to return to the position from the first to second year?

1. What aspects of the RA position discouraged you to want to return for a second year?

2. What do you feel were some factors of demotivation over the past year? Why?

Research Question 3: What expectations do Resident Assistants have when starting the position and are those expectations met?

1. What expectations did you have about your staff before beginning the school year and do you feel that these expectations were met? Why or why not?

2. What expectations did you have about your supervisor before beginning the school year and do you feel that these expectations were met? Why or why not?

3. What expectations did you have about the RA role before you applied and do you feel that these expectations were met? Why or why not?
4. What expectations did you have for your first year as an RA after training and before the school year started and do you feel that these expectations were met? Why or why not?

5. What expectations did you have for your floor community and do you feel that these expectations were met? Why or why not?

Closing Questions

What piece of advice would you give a first year RA right now?

Now that you are a month into the year, do you feel like you made the right choice?

Demographic Questions

1. Age and year in school
2. Major/minor
3. Gender
4. Race/Ethnicity
5. Returning/not returning to RA position
6. Building of RA placement
Appendix B

Consent to Participate in Research
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

An Analysis of Motivational/Demotivational Factors Related to RA Retention

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Carrie Gochnauer and Dr. Richard Roberts (faculty sponsor) from the Counseling and Student Development department at Eastern Illinois University.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

You have been asked to participate in this study because you classify as a first year Resident Assistant that has self-elected to either return or not return to the RA position for a second year.

• PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the current study is to analyze the perceptions of resident assistants at a mid-sized public Midwestern University, as to what factors motivate and demotivate them to return to the RA position each academic year.

• PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

Participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher that will last approximately one hour. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your experience as a Resident Assistant and your perceptions of what motivates and demotivates Resident Assistants to return for a second year. Your interview will be audio recorded and stored on the researcher’s computer.

• POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts that will arise from participating in this study.

• POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

Participants may benefit from being able to reflect on their experiences as a Resident Assistant.

This study may also benefit universities and Housing and Dining departments; data collected from the study may give these institutions more insight on the experiences and motivations of Resident Assistants and how to retain these individuals.

• CONFIDENTIALITY
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by replacing any identifying information, particularly names, with a self-chosen pseudonym in the interview transcripts. Participant names will not be present on any transcript materials, nor will they be in the final research report. Only the researcher and faculty advisor will have access to transcripts and recorded interviews. The audio recording files of the interviews will be kept for 3 years and then destroyed, as required by the IRB.

• PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

• IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

Carrie Gochnauer, Principal Investigator
217-581-7698
cmgochnauer@eiu.edu

Dr. Richard Roberts, Faculty Advisor
217-581-2400
rlroberts@eiu.edu

• RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board
Eastern Illinois University
600 Lincoln Ave.
Charleston, IL 61920
Telephone: (217) 581-8576
E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.
I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant Date

I, the undersigned, have defined and fully explained the investigation to the above subject.

Signature of Investigator Date