RESIDENT ASSISTANT PEER TRAINING: PERCEPTIONS SURROUNDING THE
USE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF EXPERIENCED STUDENT LEADERS
AS TRAINERS AT ONE SMALL PRIVATE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

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A Dissertation

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By

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined dissertation entitled

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presented by Tina F. Sheppard

a candidate for the degree doctor of education

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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Professor Tyler Page

DEDICATION

As I sit in my office writing this dedication, my husband is once again home alone with our son. In the final weeks of writing my dissertation, I lost count of the number of times he managed dinner, bath, and bedtime by himself. Eric, I could not have done this without you. Thank you for being in my corner.

I also need to thank our young son who does not understand this process, but has been so patient with "momma doing her works." Liam, momma is coming home soon. And yes, we can go on an adventure. With slides.

To my amazing, supportive, and loving parents, Gary and Derinda, thank you for instilling a love of education and knowledge within me. Thank you for teaching me the value of hard work. Thank you for getting a stubborn 18 year-old to college that first time. I did not understand then how life changing a college education would be.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study of one small private Catholic university in the northeast examines the perceptions of experienced (i.e. second to third year staff) and inexperienced (i.e. newly hired staff) student resident assistants. Specifically, this study focuses on the observations and insights of experienced and inexperienced staff as it relates to peer presented training and the overall training curriculum.

The university employees a traditional training timeline with large-scale trainings occurring immediately prior to the opening of fall and spring semesters and smaller one-hour trainings occurring throughout each semester. The resident assistant staff likewise follows a common model employing a number of new, first year resident assistants as well as a smaller number of second and third year resident assistants called senior residents assistants (the word "senior" implies the student staff member has at least one year of experience; it does not reference the student's academic year). The student to resident assistant ratio is a comfortable 30:1 with students living in traditional and suite style residence halls as well as apartments for upper-division students and graduates. Overall, the residential program studied is very similar to any number of other residential programs across the country.

The one possible exception is the use of experienced student staff (senior resident assistants) to train inexperienced student staff (resident assistants). While this training model is not unique to the university of study, there are data to determine how common this model is, nor has there been any research related to the student staff perceptions of the effectiveness of such a model.

The results of this qualitative case study reveal the training impressions of nine resident and senior resident assistants with the aim of understanding how they experienced training, their thoughts related to the use of peer presented trainers, and how they saw peer presented trainers influencing the overall staff experience. Three themes emerged: the use of experienced student staff as teachers, mentors, and supervisors. In this study I conclude the use of experienced student staff as teachers and mentors is both appropriate in this setting and desired by both experienced and inexperienced staff. However, the use of the experienced student staff position as supervisors is not viewed as appropriate by either experienced or inexperienced student staff and is cautioned against.

CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW

The influence of campus residency on college student success is an extensively researched topic. Studies consistently demonstrate significant positive correlations between residency in on-campus housing and student retention, maturation to graduation, grade point average, and overall satisfaction with the collegiate experience (Arboleda, Wang, Shelley, & Whalen, 2003; Astin, 1997; Blimling, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Schroeder & Mable, 1994; Tinto, 2011). Many of these same authors further postulate about the positive influence that professional and student residence hall staff have on the success and experience of on-campus residents (Astin, 1997; Blimling, 2011; Greenleaf, 1974; Kuh, 2005; Powell, 1974; Schroeder & Mable, 1994; Tinto, 2011).

Answering the question of why residential staff members are so important to the student experience, Boyer (1987) noted the large majority of an undergraduate's career is spent outside the classroom and those with whom undergraduate students associate will influence their overall educational experience. Resident assistants, who are trained and positioned to be leaders in the residence halls, have a great likelihood of impacting the collegiate experience of a residential student (Schroeder & Mable, 1994).

If residence hall student leaders contribute to college student success, it is important to understand the student leadership training curriculum and methods. While recommendations in training best practices exist (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2009), Koch (2012) found these recommendations are based on research more than a decade old. Considering the impact student residential staff have, it is surprising so little research has been done on effective training practices. An area particularly research deficient is peer presented teaching. In my professional

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experience, peer presented training is common at both small public and private institutions. However, I was unable to find any literature related to its prevalence or effectiveness as a training medium.

A secondary purpose for conducting this study involves considerations of monetary and human capital. The cost of higher education has increased over 500 percent in the last 28 years while state subsidies have decreased (Jamrisko & Kolet, 2013; Trombley, 2003). Between 2001 and 2003 alone, the percentage increase in public 4 year tuition and fees was between 2% and 24% (depending on the reporting state) with the highest increasing occurring in the Midwest and select east coast states (Trombley, 2003). The need for higher tuition and the loss of state appropriations have resulted in cutbacks on college campuses, some of which are crippling to departments or operating units. Cutbacks are in various forms including reducing the number of admitted students; encouraging retirement of experienced, and more well-paid faculty and staff; reducing student financial aid packages; elimination of raises; elimination of sports teams; and inability to fill vacated positions (Trombley, 2003).

Student affairs professionals have not been exempt from these cutbacks. Raines (2000) tells us, "The effect of financial constraints on higher education from the 1980s to the present has been extensive. University administrators have had to modify their institutions' academic programs, administrative services, and student affairs operations to contain costs and increase revenue" (p.34). In light of this statement, it is particularly concerning when critics such as Lennington (1996) suggest student affairs organizations do not represent essential functions but add to the cost of education while Balderson (2001) states student affairs units ought to exist only if they are able to be financially self-

sufficient. These critiques highlight the need for student affairs professionals to demonstrate the worth of their offices and program if they are to continue to secure monetary support from their institutions (Woodard, Love, & Komives, 2000).

The monetary capital concerns demonstrated above are inextricably tied to issues of human capital. As noted previously, declining financial support often results in the inability to fill vacated positions. However, fewer staffing resources have not lessened the expectations of student affairs professionals. All previously expected duties and services must continue to be rendered; for some institutions, there may be additional pressures to demonstrate assessment and learning outcomes (Woodard et al., 2000). Flexibility in how student affairs practitioners deliver their services has become key, with rarely considered solutions and partnerships now viewed not only as acceptable, but critical (Varlotta, 2010; Varlotta & Jones, 2010).

> Bottom line, to maintain state-of-the-art practices within the student affairs
> professional curve while coping with the new normal of less funding, smaller
> institutions' student affairs staff must do everything they can to fulfill and even
> survive their missions on these campuses. (Ardaiolo & Callahan, 2012, p. 32)

Utilizing experienced student peers as training educators is a creative approach providing unique leadership opportunities to experienced student leaders while offering relief to overtaxed professional staff. From an economic standpoint, it is also a strategic management tool leveraging "...the individual's knowledge, experiences, capabilities, skills, creativity, and innovativeness" (Hussi, 2004, p. 39).

Problem Statement

The contributions of residence halls to university retention and overall student success are well-researched (Arboleda et al., 2003; Astin, 1997; Blimling, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Schroeder & Mable, 1994; Tinto, 2011). Literature also suggests the staff within the residence halls is one of the most significant contributors to the positive outcomes seen of students in residence (Astin, 1997; Blimling, 2011; Kuh, 2005; Schroeder & Mable, 1994; Tinto, 2011). It is therefore surprising how little research has been conducted into residential staff training programs (Koch, 2012).

In my professional experience, peer presented training is common at both small public and private institutions. With the increasing cuts to higher education funding, utilizing experienced student trainers is likely to become more prevalent. This creative approach provides unique leadership opportunities to the experienced student leaders while offering relief to overtaxed professional staff. However, the use of peer to peer training programs has yet to be assessed.

Purpose of the Study

The intent of this research project is to expand the body of knowledge around peer presented training programs, or training curriculum presented by experienced student employees to less experienced student employees. I seek to understand how the peer to peer training practice is perceived by experienced student staff (staff with at one to two full years of direct positional experience) and inexperienced student staff (staff with no years of direct positional experience). My goal is to inform my profession and evolve training curricula in an effort to positively influence the general student experience.

My research focused on understanding the perceptions of those involved in the study; the research was not intended to measure actual learning but rather the perceptions of learning by study participants. For this research, I will use the near peer model as my theoretical framework (alternately known as near peer role modeling or NPRM). Whitman (1988) introduced the phrase "near-peer teaching" to refer to "senior" students with one or two years of experience in the same or similar curriculum teaming "junior" students with little to no experience.

Research Questions

While the value of residential programs and staffing is well established, I have been unable to locate literature focused on utilizing peer to peer trainers. I wish to understand how the peer to peer training is perceived by experienced and inexperienced student staff. This study will address the following research questions:

1. How is peer to peer training perceived?

    a. Do perceptions vary by subpopulation (RA or inexperienced student staff and SRA or experienced student staff)?

    b. If yes, what thematic variances can be identified?

2. Who do the SRAs (experienced staff) look to, if anyone, for guidance or models as they attempt the role of peer trainer?

3. To what extent are the three roles of information provider, role model, and facilitator utilized by the experienced student staff?

The Research Site

Founded in 1950 by the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Marymount University is a 4-year Catholic in Arlington, Virginia. Initially conceived as a 2-year

women's college, Marymount now offers bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees to over 3,600 students on three campuses.

Accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commissions on Colleges, in addition to traditional college degrees, Marymount offers several graduate and undergraduate certifications and programs. The university is most known for its degrees in nursing, physical therapy, and fashion design. Due to its membership in the Consortium of Universities of the Washington Metropolitan Area, Marymount students are able to take courses at any of the 13 member schools and to make use of the libraries of those schools.

One of the hallmarks of Marymount is its internship program. All students, regardless of degree program, must participate in an internship prior to graduation. The intent of this program is to ensure students have hands on, experiential learning opportunities before beginning work in their chosen profession. However, a recent National Survey of Student Engagement found Marymount seniors were significantly less likely than peers at other Catholic colleges to report strong interactions with fellow students or to feel that they have learned to work effectively with others (M. Schuchert, personal communication, February 17, 2015).

Residential Program

Marymount houses 950 students in university owned or leased apartments, suites, and traditional double loaded corridor facilities. These programs are served by 28 paraprofessional staff and 7 professional staff. The paraprofessional staff is comprised of 5 male Senior Resident Assistants (SRA), 7 female SRAs, 5 male Resident Assistants (RA), and 11 female RAs. The professional staff includes four residence hall coordinators

(Bachelor's degree staff; some who are actively enrolled in Master's degree courses), two area coordinators (Master's degree staff), and one assistant director (Master's degree staff with prior professional experience).

The residential paraprofessional training program is a year round process comprised of an initial kick-off event (hosted in April shortly after hiring decisions for the upcoming year are released), two major training sessions, and eight one hour in-services throughout the year. The initial kick-off event is intended to welcome new student staff, introduce returning student and professional staff, and set the tone for the upcoming year. While some job duties are discussed, specifically those related to return to work dates, the event is primarily intended to acculturate the new staff to the team.

The major training sessions occur immediately prior to the commencement of fall and spring semesters and last for 10 days in the fall and three days in spring. During the fall event, the SRA staff train for 3 to 5 days prior to the arrival of the RA staff. SRA training focuses on enhancing skills developed as an RA (e.g. confrontation, programming, and conflict mediation) as well as mentorship skills (e.g. mentoring basics, how mentorship and supervision differ, and active listening). The SRAs also use their training time to prepare learning presentations for the RA staff. Examples of these presentations include how to program, roommate mediation, and case study reviews. During the spring training event, the SRA staff returns approximately one day early to prepare for the RA arrival. Spring training in devoted to team building and retraining critical skill sets. The SRAs play a similar role in spring training by presenting learning sessions and hosting mentor group meetings.

While the purposes of these trainings vary depending on time of year, all are related to providing job knowledge, developing basic and enhanced skills, and evolving personal leadership qualities. SRA staff plays a teaching role in each of these events; sometimes as the sole or primary learning instructor and sometimes partnered with professional staff.

In my 19 years of professional experience across four higher education institutions, every residential training program I have witnessed has been has been consistent with the aforementioned model in terms of its content (number and types of training), purposes, and the presentation team. This qualitative case study is likely similar to other residential training curricula and therefore the results might have transferability to other campuses.

Theoretical Framework

For this research, I will use the near peer model as my theoretical framework (alternately known as near peer role modeling or NPRM). Whitman (1988) introduced the phrase "near-peer teaching" to refer to "senior" students with one or two years of experience in the same or similar curriculum teaming "junior" students with little to no experience.

Drawing from Bandura's (1963, 1977) social learning theory, the near peer model states we are most impacted by those with whom we identify (Murphey, 1998). In social learning theory, Bandura (1963, 1977) notes we learn from others through observation, imitation, modeling, and vicarious reinforcement. Bandura (1977) explains "seeing or visualizing people similar to oneself perform successfully typically raises efficacy beliefs

in observers that they themselves possess the capabilities to master comparable activities"

(p. 87).

Similar to Bandura (1963, 1977), near peer theory states the characteristics of

those we observe matter; specifically those who are close to us in age, interest, and social

proximity are more likely to exert influence on our behaviors and choices and therefore

more likely to be seen as a role model (Murphey, 1998) or similar other (Brown &

Inouye, 1978; Faraji-Radm, Samuelsen, & Warlop, 2015; Shteynberg & Galinsky, 2011)

who offer the strongest comparison to ourselves and are more likely to be imitated.

Murphey (1998) notes near peers are more likely to impact our learning than someone

who has greater experience but who appears less like us.

Research Design

This research was a qualitative case study and examined participants' perceptions

of student-led learning within the confines of training sessions conducted by experienced

student leaders. Qualitative research is appropriate for this study as it occurs in a natural

setting, the inquiry is likely to be emergent, and the course of the study will involve

participants in (Creswell, 2007). I am investigating a "bounded system" making the case

study method the most appropriate means to investigating a specific group within this

system (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995).

Merriam (2009) states case studies are particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic;

below I discuss each of these features in turn and how they are likely to apply to my

study. Particularistic is defined as giving focus to a specific event or situation; this focus

helps us view people, situations, or problems with intensity (Merriam, 2009). The intent

of my study is to gain knowledge in a previously unresearched arena; the intensive focus

offered by a case study will assist in these efforts. The second feature, descriptive, refers to final written product as having "thick, rich" descriptions throughout (Merriam, 2009). The descriptions can be of people, events, and conversations and should be a detailed account of the researcher's experiences (Merriam, 2009). The final quality, heuristic is used to express the reader's understanding of the research (Merriam, 2009). The study might provide new knowledge or confirm existing knowledge (Merriam, 2009). As creating a new knowledge base or confirming anecdotal knowledge is central to this project, using a qualitative case study is the best research choice.

In the course of this study, I conducted interviews with both the presenters (experienced student staff) and the learners (inexperienced or first year student staff) to gauge their perceptions regarding the benefits and challenges of a peer to peer training model. Both the interviews took roughly 1.5 hours to complete. Because there was no existing research on this topic, I began each interview with general questions and allow the conversation to dictate the additional questions.

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Summary

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In this chapter I have provided a statement of problem, purpose of study, theoretical framework, background information on both the department and university being studied (as is relevant to this research), and introduced the research design. In chapter two, I will examine literature relevant to my research. As little research exists around peer teaching models I will present research related to peer mentoring models.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I reviewed literature relevant to this study. As research around the factors influencing the successful provision of training curriculums to student staff is limited, I included peer teaching literature from corporate and academic realms. I began this chapter with a brief history into resident assistant training research including a discussion of the importance of the Resident Assistant position to general student success. I then reviewed literature around peer mentorship, peer teaching, and peer teaching models. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the near peer role modeling.

A Brief History of Resident Assistant Training Research and the Importance of the Resident Assistant to Residential Students

The contribution of on-campus residence to student success has been a much researched topic (Arboleda et al., 2003; Astin, 1997; Blimling, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Schroeder & Mable, 1994; Tinto, 2011). As early as 1938, authors Lloyd-Jones and Smith discussed methods to educate "students through the housing environment" (p. 195). This is significant because prior to 1900, student affairs professionals did not exist on college campuses (Bok, 1982). Rather, campuses were governed by faculty whose primary focus was to provide an education while adhering to strict governance of student conduct (Bok, 1982). The student affairs profession developed slowly after 1900 with Rudy (1976) pointing to the time after 1918 as the development of the profession and 1925 as the year discrete student affairs duties developed (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976). It is impressive to note that in just 20 years from the development of the profession, college residences were seen to be impactful to the student experience.

Since that time, decades of research regarding students residing in campus housing consistently indicate a positive correlation between student residence and student success (Astin, 1997; Blimling, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Schroeder & Mable, 1994; Tinto, 2011). The thoroughness with which this connection has been examined has led to a general acceptance of residence hall contributions being considered as a "given" or truism (Astin, 1997; Blimling, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Schroeder & Mable, 1994; Tinto, 2011). Schroder and Mable (1994) summarize and highlight the importance of this truism by noting:

> Group living influences maturation by exposing students to a variety of experiences and community-building activities. What distinguishes group living in campus residence from most other forms of housing is the involvement of both professional and paraprofessional staff members in providing intentional, as opposed to random, educational experiences for students. Students living in residence halls participate in more extracurricular, social, and cultural events are more likely to graduate, and exhibit greater positive gains in psychosocial development, intellectual orientation, and self-concept than students living at home or commuting. (p. 34)

Schroder and Mable's (1994) assessment of the positive correlation between campus residency, the impact of residential staff, and student success is supported by vast amounts of research (Arboleda et al., 2003; Astin, 1997; Blimling, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 2011). If we know residence halls are seen as generally positive to the student experience, and the residential staff have been determined to be a significant influencing factor to the residential experience (Arboleda et al., 2003; Astin,

1997; Blimling, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 2011), it seems reasonable to more closely examine the training these student staff receive since they appear to play a key role in student success. Unfortunately, research into the formal instruction of residential staffs is limited and outdated (Bowman & Bowman, 1995, 1998; Koch, 2012, Wesolowski, Bowman, & Adams, 1996).

Some recommendations for practice do exist. The first written "best practice" source came from the National Association of Women Deans and Counselors (NAWDAC) in 1967, almost 30 years after the first recognition of the impact of student residency (Greenleaf, 1967). Until this publication, the bulk of training resources were developed in-house at individual institutions without the benefit of research (Koch, 2012).

Two years later, Powell, Plyler, Dickenson, and McClennan (1969) published *The Personnel Assistant in College Residence Halls.* In her dissertation about Resident Assistant (RA) training, Koch (2012) states these "authors recommended a year-long approach including a pre-service spring orientation for new RAs to meet with experienced staff; a summer reading program; and a pre-fall opening training to review content of the staff training manual" as well as continual inservices and weekly staff meetings as the basis of the training structure (p. 32). A widely used resource, *The Resident Assistant* by Blimling and Miltenberger (2010), is a textbook to teach resident assistant academic courses and continues to be commonly used by student affairs practitioners today.

These academic courses designed specifically to train resident assistants, while common on college campuses, are not universally used by all institutions due in large

part to cost and concerns over effectiveness (Eichenfield, Graves, Slief, & Haslund, 1988). The question of effectiveness or impact of the courses on RA preparedness has been addressed by only two studies. The first by Peterman, Pilato, and Upcraft (1979) found a positive correlation between job performance among those RAs who had taken the course as compared to RAs who had not participated in the course. Bowman and Bowman (1995) completed the second study in their research of 369 university RA preparedness programs and concluded residential life offices needed to develop empirically driven outcomes based assessments of employee training. However, Healea, Chapman and Hickman-Maynard (2013) conducted a literature review of student leader training and concluded Bowman and Bowman's advice had not been followed.

A gap in research is peer-led training. Based on my career observations, communication with colleagues, and reviews of residential life staff websites, I can attest the use of peers in training is commonplace within my profession; however, I am unable to find any studies examining the prevalence or effectiveness of peer presented trainings within residential life programs. It is possible that this is due to the lack of uniformity in the degree and manner in which peers are utilized in training programs.

The intent of my research is to understand how the peer to peer training practice is perceived by experienced and inexperienced student staff. I am specifically interested in learning if peer trainers are perceived as effective teachers. Next, I will discuss peer mentorship, peer teaching, and knowledge creation in an attempt to understand the factors influencing learning participants.

Peer Mentorship and Teaching

In this section I will examine the impact and influence of peers, peer mentorship, and peer teaching on the collegiate experience. In my research, I found several authors who tended to use peer mentorship and peer teaching interchangeably (Ender & Newton, 2000; Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2000; Stoltz, 2005; Tien, Roth, & Kampmeier, 2002). I will attempt to distinguish the two by defining peer mentorship as programs or events where a formal mentor to mentee relationship is used for the purposes of collegiate acclimation, and social or academic guidance. Peer teachers will be used to define situations whereby peers are used in formal teaching settings, whether that be in the classroom or within job training.

Peer mentors and the influence of peers in the collegiate setting

There is no shortage of literature regaling the influence peers have on the university experience; peers have been credited with being the most significant factor impacting on one another's growth and development during the collegiate years (Astin 1997; Kuh, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Nora, & Terenzini, 1999). One's collegiate peers are even credited with a positive correlation between the quality of interaction and student persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 2011). Formal peer mentoring has been attributed to helping students adjust more quickly to new academic and social environments by providing a sense of connection to a larger community (Stoltz, 2005). These "larger communities" can range from the university at large, to small study groups within a class, to the living community that exists within residential floors (Stoltz, 2005).

Typically, peer mentors are selected based in part on their demonstrated leadership abilities, record of academic success, and knowledge of the institution or program represented (Cohen & Sampson, 2001). These selection criteria are used in the hopes that mentors will leverage these aforementioned skills to serve as positive role models for younger students and provide the less experienced student with a framework for success; in this instance, *success* can be defined in terms of social, academic, engagement, or other needs typically expressed by incoming students (Cohen & Sampson, 2001).

Collegiate peer mentoring initially became popular for two reasons. The first was the belief that peer mentors could connect with and communicate to other students on a level that faculty and staff administrators could not (Gould & Lomax, 1993). Conversations regarding potentially delicate topics such as drug experimentation, alcohol use, and sexuality were thought to be easier to broach with those closer in age and life experience than with an older university administrator (Sawyer, Pinciaro, & Bedwell 1997). Therefore, the gap between student need and the willingness to seek assistance was filled by the use of trained, experienced, and knowledgeable peer mentors (Gould & Lomax, 1993).

Multiple examples of peer mentors used in the aforementioned capacity are seen throughout today's college campuses including resident assistants, peer health and wellness educators, student orientation leaders, and peer tutors (Ender & Newton, 2000). Under the supervision of professional faculty and/or staff, these students present a multitude of different learning experiences and opportunities to their peers. While some programs are social in nature, many more are aimed at educating around hot topics such

as sexuality and safe expression of sexuality; tolerance for other beliefs, cultures, religions, and ethnicities; and use of drugs and/or alcohol (Ender & Newton, 2000).

The second reason peer mentoring became popular was one of capital (Nicholas & Lumley, 1999). In this instance, capital is defined as available work hours of professional faculty and staff or the money spent to hire staff specifically to fill the roles being occupied by peer mentors. Comparatively, peer mentor programs are an economical means to respond to student need (Nicholas & Lumley, 1999). That peer education programs also create student leadership positions is an added bonus to universities.

Since its rise in popularity, there has been some research on peer mentoring and peer educators. Much research has supported the effectiveness of these programs on those students who seek peer support (Ender & Newton, 2000; Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2000; Lassner, Isaacson, & Harrington, 1995; Tien et al., 2002) while other research criticizes such endeavors. Merriam (1983) draws our attention to the formal training and professional supervision peer mentors may not receive. Without such training and supervision, Merriam suggests peer mentors are unable to provide trustworthy guidance to impressionable younger students. Additionally, Merriam questions if peer mentor programs unintentionally encourage professional faculty and staff to ignore their responsibility to engage and assist new students by relegating these duties to less experienced student peer mentors.

Considering Sawyer, Pinciaro, and Bedwell (1997) have found college students rely on peer information sources more than any other available campus resource, peer mentoring will likely continue to be an entity utilized by college campuses. It therefore

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becomes imperative for supervisors of peer mentor to provide appropriate training, support, and resources to the student peer leader. It is worth noting the readiness of said supervisors to provide training and education to peer mentors has been called into question; specifically when the peer mentors are resident assistants (Benjamin, 2004; Blanton & Husmann, 2006; Kuh, 1996.) As resident assistants are trained and most often supervised by graduate students or newly graduated masters degreed professionals, Kuh (1996) aimed his criticism at student affairs graduate preparatory programs noting a dearth of education in the areas of "pedagogy and learning, motivation, environmental design, and assessment" (p.144).

Peer teaching models

While significant research and models are available for peer mentorship, I was unable to find substantial research regarding peer teaching within higher education other than what occurs in either the classroom setting or within some medical field practical experiences. Within corporations, peer teaching models are available, one of which is discussed here. The SECI Model (Nonaka & Takeuch, 1995), discussed in more depth below, was selected because it has been used in multiple applications, is an often cited model of peer learning mediums in the corporate world (Ichijo & Nonaka, 2007; Nonaka & Nishiguchi, 2000; Rice & Rice, 2005; Von Krogh, Nonaka, & Nishiguchi, 2000). The SECI Model is a model for knowledge creation and acronym refers to the four stages of the model; socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization (Nonaka & Takeuchi). Additionally, higher education has begun using the SECI Model in discussions of faculty interaction (Sohail & Daud, 2009), how knowledge is managed (Laal, 2011; Rowley, 2000), and experiential learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). I will also

discuss a secondary learning model initially created for teacher to student interaction that has recently been applied to student to student teaching.

The first model selected for discussion is Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) SECI Model. I selected this model as it is focused on knowledge transfer and conversion, or teaching, among experienced to less experienced peer learners (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). The SECI Model focuses on the intersect of tacit and explicit knowledge and is about the continual transfer and conversation of knowledge as learners learn, try out new skills, and engage one another (Nonaka &Takeuchi).

Considering the definitions of tacit and explicit knowledge, it is difficult to see how such an intersection between the two could reasonably exist. Explicit knowledge is knowledge generally easy to articulate, organize, and transfer to others. Standard operating procedure documents, training manuals, and textbooks are common examples of explicit knowledge. Conversely, tacit knowledge is generally considered difficult to articulate and share between individuals. First suggested by Michael Polanyi (1966), he summarized his thoughts on tacit knowledge by stating, "…. we know more than we can tell." (p. 4). Nonaka (1991) expanded on this by stating, "tacit knowledge consists partly of technical skills [and partly] of mental models, beliefs and perspectives so ingrained that we take them for granted and cannot easily articulate them." (p. 98).

While the concepts of tacit and explicit knowledge seem directly opposed to one another, Nonaka (1991) suggested they were almost intimately related. He theorized these concepts interact with one another when human beings engaged in knowledge creation and defined this interaction as the knowledge conversion process. Knowledge conversion consists of four stages. The first is socialization or tacit to tacit knowledge

(Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Socialization is typically face to face knowledge sharing or transfer; brainstorming meetings are an example of socialization (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Knowledge is commonly transferred through observation and imitation, not unlike the master and apprentice relationship (Nonaka & Takeuchi) or in the case of this study, knowledge transfer would occur between an experienced student leader and an inexperienced student leader.

The second stage is externalization, or tacit to explicit knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi. 1995). This stage is can be very difficult as it requires the codification of tacit knowledge to be written or otherwise documented (Nonaka & Takeuchi). Externalization is also incredibly important to knowledge conversion and transfer as without the ability to transform what you know to what you can document and share, an organization is limited in its ability to widely distribute knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi). Within the context of this study, externalization occurs when experienced student leaders are able to create written guidelines or procedures for inexperienced staff. This could be as simple as helping the inexperienced leader draft a floor meeting agenda or write a proposal for an educational program.

The third stage is combination or explicit to explicit knowledge and often described as the most simplistic of the stages (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). In combination, existing data sources from within and outside of the organization (e.g., documents, manuals, websites, etc.) are combined to create new knowledge that is then disseminated to learners (Nonaka & Takeuchi). The final stage is internalization, or explicit to tacit knowledge, completes the learning cycle (Nonaka &Takeuchi, 1995). In this stage, an employee takes in all they have learned and internalizes it into his

knowledge base (Nonaka & Takeuchi). This process allows the learner to modify their

tacit knowledge; by completing this modification, the learner restarts the learning cycle

(Nonaka & Takeuchi). Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) call this cyclical learning the "Spiral

of Knowledge" and postulate knowledge creation is the result of the continuous repetition

of this cycle. The concept of knowledge transference as a continuous spiral is intriguing

in the context of residential student staff training. The training design assumes the senior

student staff member will transfer knowledge to the junior student staff member. As the

junior student staff member becomes more adept, they must learn even more challenging

aspects of their position which are predicated on an understanding of the initial learning

cycle. Nonaka and Takeuchi provide a model demonstrating why such learning is

effective means of teaching.
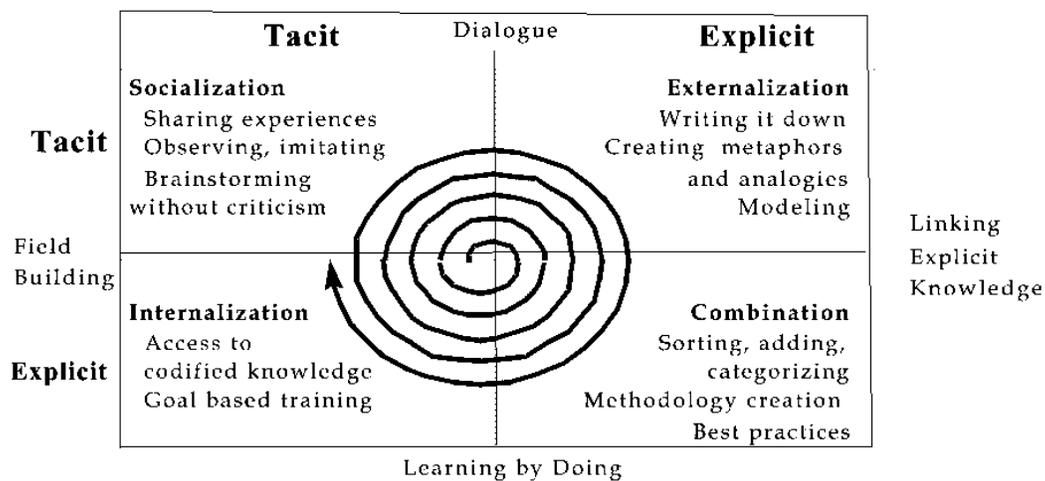
Figure 1.

Nonaka and Takeuchi's SECI Model and Spiral of Knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).
Obtained online at http://www.informationr.net/ir/8-1/paper142.html

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The second model of learning is one proposed by Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist best known for his work in developmental psychology (Tudge & Rogoff, 1989). A fellow of Piaget, both Vygotsky and Piaget studied how children learned, with Vygotsky focusing on a child's background as an influencing factor on learning (Tudge & Rogoff, 1989). Vygotsky's (1978) statement, "Cognitive processes are the result of social and cultural interactions" (p. 84) was driven by his belief all learning is social in origin and one cannot disconnect the learner from his experiences.

Key in his theory is his proposal of the Zone of Proximal Development, or ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky (1978) defined ZPD as the difference or distance between what one can achieve independently and what one can achieve in collaboration with a "more knowledgeable other" (p. 86).
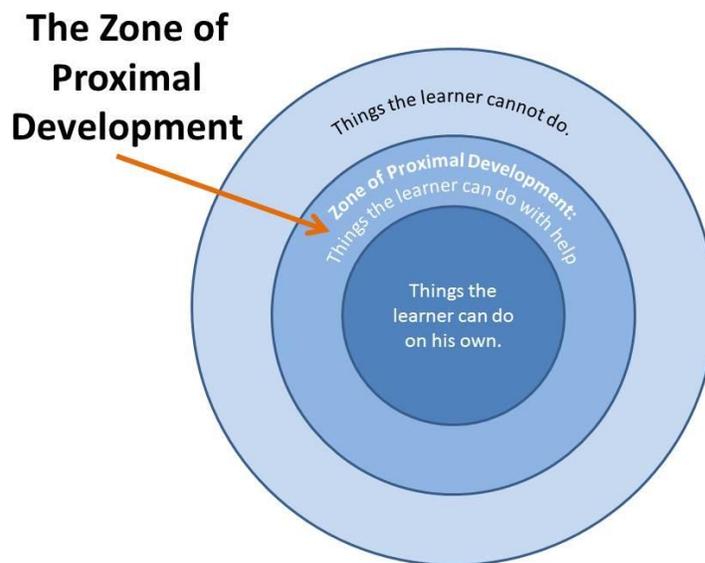
Figure 2. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). Obtained online at http://parklandplayers.com/vygotskys-zone-of-proximal-development-in-early-childhood-education/

Vygotsky (1978) stated we achieve collaboration through the process of scaffolding. The intent of scaffolding is to create a supportive framework for the leaner to gain knowledge that would have otherwise been out of the learner's reach; as the learner is educated, the scaffolding falls away until the learner no longer needs it (Soloway, Guzdial, & Hay, 1994).

Vygotsky's (1978) more knowledgeable other refers to someone with a better understanding or greater experience with a specific task or concept than the learner possesses. While Vygotsky limited more knowledgeable others to those in formal teaching or parental roles, his theories are now being applied to a variety of more knowledgeable others including computers, literary resources, and most commonly, peer teachers (Adams & Mabusela, 2014). It is the concept of a more knowledgeable other providing a support network to an inexperienced learner so the learner may achieve more than he could alone that aligns with peer teaching models and forms the basis for why this theory was included in my study.

<center>**Theoretical Framework**</center>

A theoretical framework provides a lens for viewing the problem or research and provides us context for understanding what we observe (Borage, 2009). While this lens provides a means of highlighting or shining light on a given situation, in the process of focusing our attention other areas may fall to the shadows (Borage, 2009).

In the previous section I discussed peer teaching models and the social influence of learning, giving particular attention to Vygotsky (1978), Nonaka, and Takeuchi's (1995) models. While these models demonstrate peer learning is possible and potentially

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even preferred, they did not provide a means by which to measure impact. For this reason, they inform the study but are not part of the theoretical framework.

For this research, I will use the near peer model as my theoretical framework (alternately known as near peer role modeling or NPRM). Whitman (1988) introduced the phrase "near-peer teaching" to refer to "senior" students with one or two years of experience in the same or similar curriculum teaming "junior" students with little to no experience. Drawing from Bandura's (1963, 1977) social learning theory, the near peer model states we are most impacted by those with whom we identify (Murphey, 1998). In social learning theory, Bandura (1997) notes we learn from others through observation, imitation, modeling, and vicarious reinforcement. Bandura explains "seeing or visualizing people similar to oneself perform successfully typically raises efficacy beliefs in observers that they themselves possess the capabilities to master comparable activities." (p. 87)

Similar to Bandura (1963, 1977) near peer theory states the characteristics of those we observe matter; specifically those who are close to us in age, interest, and social proximity are more likely to exert influence on our behaviors and choices and therefore more likely to be seen as a role model (Murphey, 1998) or similar other (Brown & Inouye, 1978; Faraji-Radm et al., 2015; Shteynberg & Galinsky, 2011) who offer the strongest comparison to ourselves and are more likely to be imitated. Murphey (1998) notes near peers are more likely to impact our learning than someone who has greater experience but who appears less like us.

While the bulk of near peer research has been within the medical field (Buckley & Zamora, 2007; Burgess, McGregor, & Mellis, 2014; Field, Burke, McAllister, & Lloyd,

2007; Harvey, Higenbottam, Owen, Hulme, & Bion, 2012; Nelson et al., 2013; Qureshi et al., 2013; Silbert & Lake, 2012; Stone, Cooper, & Cant, 2013; Ten Cate & Durning, 2007; Woods, Ramasubbu, Donohoe, & Hennessy, 2014), other disciplines are beginning to use this model for instruction and to create opportunities for career experience specifically using "senior" or experienced students to train "junior" or less experienced students (Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, 2000; Khan, Nasti, Evans, & Chapman-Novakofski, 2009; Prince, 2004; Wood & Tanner, 2012). Bulte, Betts, Garner, and Durning (2007) have identified three roles as the most appropriate for the near peer teacher to play; information provider, role model, and facilitator. I will discuss each of these in turn.

Information Provider

Bulte et al. (2007) define information provider as a lecturer or skills trainer. The information provider offers direct skills specific to one's employment or knowledge base; with resident assistants this manifests as experiential duty round training, writing room inventories, completing program proposals, and a variety of other tasks. Near peer student teachers have less experience and knowledge than a professional staff member, as such the role of information provider may seem counterintuitive. However, subject matter experts are not always adept in sharing their expertise (Zijdenbos et al., 2010). In their study of roughly 10,000 student learners, Zijidenbos et al. (2010) found students taught by peers had higher test scores than those taught by faculty. Bene and Bergus (2014) postulate the effectiveness of near peer teachers is related to their "cognitive and social congruence with learners" (p. 785). Cognitive congruence occurs when the near peer teacher is able to demonstrate an understanding of material to be learned and the

challenges with learning and applying said material (Bene & Bergus, 2014). Near peer teachers are more adept at remembering and sharing tangible tips to overcome any noted challenges (Bene & Bergus, 2014; Zijdenbos et al., 2010). Among 111 first year medical students taught by near peer teachers, Lockspeiser et al. (2008) reported the student teachers were able to predict which concepts learners would find difficult and provide methods to learn these concepts, which suggested a greater understanding of the learners' level of knowledge than was demonstrated by faculty.

Role Model

Bulte et al. (2007) define role model as a demonstration by the near peer teacher of how the student learner should behave. In order for the role model function to be successful, the student learner must identify with and aspire to the near peer teacher and the near peer teacher must create a welcoming atmosphere (Bulte et al., 2007). Bandura's (1963, 1977) social learning theory suggests the near peer teacher will be someone with whom the learner identifies. Research has shown learners found near peer teachers to be more approachable than their faculty or professional staff counterparts and more adept at creating nonjudgmental environments for asking difficult questions (Bene & Bergus, 2014; McLelland, McKenna, & French, 2013; Ten Cate & Durning, 2007). Lastly, several authors note unintentional outcomes of the near peer teacher created environment to include increased confidence and motivation on behalf of the learner, perceived additional emotional support from the near peer teacher, and the opportunity to gain knowledge of the course or employment 'unwritten rules' (McKenna & French, 2011; Secomb, 2008; Ten Cate & Durning, 2007; Yu et al., 2011).

Role modeling is a common duty in resident assistant and senior resident assistant job descriptions. They are differentiated in that senior resident assistants are expected to role model to both resident students and resident assistants. Although I was unable to find research regarding this topic, in my experience resident assistants attend to and model the comportment of senior resident assistant. This modeling behavior is so strong, it overrides what is spoken by either professional or senior resident assistant staff.

Facilitator

Bulte et al. (2007) define the facilitator role as one of a mentor, moderator, or small group tutor. The experienced student's goal is to provide guidance, motivation, support, and to assist inexperienced students with seeking their own solutions. The facilitator role is used to encourage and moderate self or group learning without the provision of direct knowledge transfer from the near peer student teacher (Bulte et al., 2007). An example of the facilitator function is case study learning. During these learning sessions, a group of two to four resident assistants discuss and debate a case study relevant to their employment. The sessions are moderated by one to two senior resident assistants who ask probing questions intended to encourage the resident assistants to see the case study from differing perspectives without suggesting or providing solutions to the scenario.

As noted above, near peers are often seen as more approachable than a traditional teacher or trainer (Zijdenbos et al., 2010). In their study of problem based learning, Zijdenbos et al (2010) found this approachability influenced the outcomes of students who participated in near peer student moderated review sessions. Specifically, the authors notes the inexperienced learners reported receiving improved coaching and as a result,

were better able to focus on the instructional material (Zijdenbos et al, 2010.) This finding is supported by other research into the effectiveness of student led review sessions. In these review sessions, the role of the near peer leader is to encourage the junior student learner to find knowledge and assist in the interpretation of this knowledge; in these instances, the academic achievement outcome of the student led sessions were compariable to those sessions led by seasoned faculty (Kassab, Abu-Hijleh, Al-Shboul, & Hamdy, 2005; Nnodim 1997).

Summary

In this chapter I have reviewed literature relevant to this research. As research around the factors influencing the successful provision of training curriculums to student staff is limited, I have included peer teaching literature from corporate and academic realms. I began with a brief history into the research that has been conducted in resident assistant training, reviewed literature around peer mentorship, peer teaching, and peer teaching models. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of knowledge creation including building a learning organization and creating a culture of learning. In the next chapter, I will review the proposed research methods for this study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter described the methodology and procedures used in this research study. Included in this chapter is an overview of my research, the research questions, population utilized for this research, instrumentation and data collection procedures, data analysis, and limitations of this study.

Purpose and Overview

The purpose of this research project is to expand the body of knowledge around peer presented training programs, or training curriculum presented by experienced student employees to less experienced student employees. I wish to gain an understanding of how the practice of peer to peer training is perceived by experienced and inexperienced student staff. My goal is to inform my profession and evolve training curricula an effort to positively influence the general student experience.

A qualitative case study design was used (Merriam, 2009). Through analysis of rich description from documents, observation, individual interviews, I was able to gain insight and understanding of perceptions of learning and subsequent potential influence on training organization. This design allows me to understand staff perceptions of how learning is achieved. I compare and contrast the perceptions of two groups: the experienced student staff trainer and the inexperienced student staff trainee. By conducting interviews with the paraprofessional (or student) staff, I am able to take a narrow middle-up-down look at organizational learning (Nonaka, 1991). Middle-up-down is a management technique proposed by Nonaka (1991) to combine top-down vision with bottom-up front line realities. Middle-up-down places the middle managers at the center of knowledge creation and management (Nonaka, 1991). This case study

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narrows my focus to one institution at a moment in time; the student staff participants serve as the middle managers between top-down department administrators and the front-line student realities. Study participants are placed "…at the intersection of the vertical and horizontal flows of information within the company" (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1997, p. 125) making their perceptions key to understanding the greater impact of peer presented training.

By focusing on one organization, but multiple points of view, we allow for deeper understanding. Viewing the organization in a bi-directional manner allows depth in analyzing the data for common themes (Merriam, 2009). Document analysis and observation served as secondary data sources. Included in the document analysis were the resident assistant training schedule and manual, participant evaluations, and observer reports. I intended document review to serve as a point of reference for comparing perceptions to those voiced by the study's participants. Individual interviews served as the primary data source. Prior to entering the field to conduct interviews, I established a brief standardized set of interview questions with the intent of allowing the direction of the interview to guide additional questions. The individual interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

The nature of the document collection and varying interview schedules allow for continual data analysis. During open coding analysis, I examined interviews, and documents for emerging patterns and themes. While conducting this study, I served as a primary research instrument (Emerson, Fritz, & Shaw, 1995). This carries with it serious responsibilities. I took care to minimize influence, while at the same time interacting

enough to gather data. This requires what Merriam (2009) describes as a tolerance for ambiguity and sensitivity.

Research Questions

While the value of residential programs and the staff within residential programs is well established (Arboleda et al., 2003; Astin, 1997; Blimling, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Schroeder & Mable, 1994; Tinto, 2011), I have been unable to locate literature focused on the utilization of peer trainers within residential life training or any other student leadership preparation programs. I wished to understand how this the practice of peer to peer training is perceived by experienced and inexperienced student staff. My goal is to inform my profession and evolve training curricula in an effort to positively influence the general student experience. This study addressed the following research questions:

1. How is peer to peer training perceived?

   a. Do perceptions vary by subpopulation (RA or inexperienced student staff and SRA or experienced student staff)?

   b. If yes, what thematic variances can be identified?

2. Who do the SRAs (experienced staff) look to, if anyone, for guidance or models as they attempt the role of peer trainer?

3. To what extent are the three roles of information provider, role model, and facilitator utilized by the experienced student staff?

Methodology and Research Design

I sought to determine whether experienced student staff were seen as effective trainers and to what extent the roles of information provider, role model, and facilitator

were utilized by the experienced student staff. Within the umbrella of qualitative research, I chose a case study design to examine the perceptions of a moment in time at one small private Catholic institution. Because I was examining one moment in time, the case study design was appropriate as Merriam (1998) noted, "A qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit." (p. 21)

A qualitative case study also offers rich thick description that is appropriate and desirable for perception research (Neuman, 2006) and helps provide insight into staff perceptions of how learning is achieved (Creswell, 2007). The research occurred in a bounded system (Merriam, 2009). A bounded system means the study has boundaries; usually time, place, or a specific activity (Merriam, 2009). This research fits that definition as it focused on a moment in time within a specific training activity. The research also occurred in a natural setting as is desired in case studies (Merriam, 2009). The setting for this research was within an annual training program that would have occurred even if this research was not conducted.

In this case study, I compared and contrasted the perceptions of three groups: the observations of supervisory staff, the experienced student staff trainer, and the inexperienced student staff trainee. By collecting multiple sources of data, including interviews with the paraprofessional staff, I took a narrow, middle-up-down look at organizational learning (Nonaka, 1991). By focusing on one organization, but multiple points of view, I allowed for deeper understanding. Viewing the organization in a bi-directional manner allowed depth in analyzing the data for common themes.

Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedures

Five data sources aided in triangulation of this research. Triangulation is important in qualitative research as it utilized multiple modes of research to reach the same ends. If through using several methods the researcher arrives at the same conclusion, it adds validity to the research (Rothbauer, 2008). A brief description of each data source is described below.

Review of Printed Material

Document analysis occurred in the form of reviewing the resident assistant training schedule, the resident assistant training manual, the resident assistant and senior resident assistant job description, participant evaluations, and observer reports. Document analysis served as a point of reference for comparing perceptions to those voiced by the study's participants. It also informed the interview questions.

Observations and Observer Report

This research occurred during winter training 2016, immediately prior to the opening of spring semester. This period was selected because it is a naturally occurring training time and I sought to limit the artificial nature that can accompany research. The training, the types of presentations, and the experience level of the presenters progressed as typical with no input or restrictions on my behalf. During the 3 day training period, I observed the training sessions presented by the experienced student leaders. This is a typical occurrence and should not have appeared out of place to the students, nor did any student comment on my presence in the training sessions or in later interviews.

I also requested professional staff members to serve as observers in the training sessions. It is typical for professional staff to observe all training sessions presented by

experienced student staff. For the purposes of this research, I asked each professional

staff member to complete a paper observer report to be used during document analysis.

Typically, post training, a verbal debrief conversation of training is held among the

professional staff members. The observer report created was based on the type of

questions and data discussed in the debrief sessions. Two professional staff observers

were assigned to each presentation with each observer completing an observer report

(Appendix A). This report offered an in-the-moment record of the professional staff

observations to inform the interviews. Observer reports provided material that informed

interview question. I also reviewed the observer reports prior to each interview and

compared the participant responses to those of the observer.

RA Evaluations

At the conclusion of each presentation, every student learner completed an

anonymous evaluation form (Appendix B). This evaluation form is commonly completed

at the conclusion of training presentations and should have been in line with the learners'

expectations of event assessment. Ideally this form would measure perceptions of

learning; it is also possible the evaluation measured only satisfaction with the program

presentation (no data exists to support either hypothesis).

These forms provided useful information during the interviews as I was able to

remind the participants of the group perception of each presentation. This was especially

helpful when referencing comments learners made on the evaluation as contrasted to the

presenter's perception of others' experiences. A possible unintentional outcome of this

data collection method is it does not account for the learners' need to process new

information and put it into effect in the workplace. For this reason, interviews were

conducted four months post-training sessions to allow the learners to apply what they have learned. While I am not explicitly studying the learners' ability to apply what they have learned, the ease of application may influence the learners' perception of trainer effectiveness.

Interviews

The next several sections are dedicated to outlining information related to the primary data source, interviews. These sections explore population, access and sampling, and the interview process. Also included are limited demographic details of study participants.

Population. The participating population for this study was nine first year and senior resident assistants at a small private university in Northern Virginia. All 28 resident assistants employed by the university were eligible to participate in this study; participation was voluntary and outside the scope of job duties. Demographically, the resident assistant pool was roughly 53% first year and 47% second year and beyond. Approximately 60% of the pool was women, with the remaining 40% identifying as men (gender determinations were based upon each participant's expressed gender). Those participating in the study were four experienced student staff (one man and three women) and five inexperienced student staff (one man and four women). These participates comprised 20% of all male staff and 39% of all female staff. Participant age was 20 – 23 (inexperienced staff) and 21 – 23 (experienced staff).

Access and sampling procedure. After receiving approval from the institutional review boards (IRB) at both the institution of study and University of Missouri, I sent recruitment emails to 28 resident assistants and senior resident assistants (Appendix C)

inviting them to participate in this study. Reminder emails were sent roughly one week later restating the date and time of the interviews. As students were not required to RSVP and I was unaware who might attend prior to starting each interview.

The IRB at the institution of study required that I delay interview data collection until the end of the academic year. This was defined as the end of finals week. While the population of study remained on campus for an additional week post finals, it was a very busy week and attendance was low. I extended additional offers of participation through various mediums including google hangout and individual interviews, yielding another five individual interviews. Ultimately nine staff (five resident assistants and four senior resident assistants) participated in a focus group or interview. These nine staff equate to roughly 32% of the total available population.

Authors differ significantly in recommended sample sizes for qualitative research. Sargeant (2012) states samples size in qualitative research is generally not predetermined while other authors note one interview can be enough depending on the scope of research and type of inquiry (Back, 2012; Becker, 2012; Denzin, 2012).

Patton (1990) advises there are not specific rules when determining sample size and suggests the researcher instead consider the resources allotted, the objectives of the study, and the time available to complete the study. Focused on the study objectives and time available, I turned to Brannen (2012) and Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) who stated smaller sample sizes of as few as 1-12 are acceptable with a when considering the research scope and the participant level of knowledge specific to the inquiry. The scope of this project is focused on participant's perceptions keeping the frame of research

narrow; additionally all participants were selected due to their specific knowledge related to the area of inquiry.

Finally, I considered the concept of saturation. Qualitative samples must be large enough to ensure they are representative of a larger population and therefore reflective of most points of view. Saturation occurs when adding more participants does not yield new information (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). I noted participant response varied very little after interview five; the remaining four participants reinforced previous responses but provided very little new information. Saturation was achieved in this study as observed by repeated information from multiple participants.

Interview process. I conducted interviews (questions available at Appendix F) with both the presenters (experienced student staff) and the learners (inexperienced or first year student staff) to gauge their thoughts regarding the benefits and challenges of a peer training model. The interviews were initially conceived as focus groups. I hosted two focus groups for experienced staff and two for inexperienced staff. The first two focus groups were offered to the senior resident assistants, or experienced staff. The purpose of this focus group was to determine how the senior resident assistant staff view themselves as teachers, trainers, and mentors and to seek factors or characteristics influencing these perceptions. There was one attendee at each focus group for a total of two senior resident assistant participants.

The second two focus groups were offered to resident assistants, or inexperienced staff. This group was asked general questions including their perceptions of the training program and what sessions they preferred before being asked more probing questions regarding the presenters. The intent was to determine if the inexperienced staff found

experienced student staff to be effective teachers. There was one attendee at each focus

group for a total of two resident assistant participants.

Because the initial focus groups were not well attended, I offered additional

opportunities for staff participation. These opportunities manifested as individual

interviews and yielded five additional individual interviews. All interviews lasted an

average of 85 minutes. For simplicity, all focus group and interview sessions are referred

to as interviews for the remainder of this document. All participant names referenced in

later chapters are pseudonyms selected by each participant.

The interviews were conducted roughly four months post training sessions.

Because there is little to no existing research on my topic, I started each interview with

general questions and allowed the conversation to dictate additional questions. I also

utilized information from the participant evaluations, observer reports, and my field notes

to inform questioning. Interviews were conducted in a private conference room along a

corridor typically not frequented by students. This area was chosen to allow privacy to

participants. I purposely did not host any interviews in my office to limit perceptions of

power. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

Field Notes

Field notes were taken during the training presentations and interviews. These

were transcribed and used a secondary source in triangulation. I reviewed my field notes

prior to each interview and utilized this information to inform the interview process. At

times, this information was used to offer a counter perspective to interview participants

when my notes conflicted with their recollection. Utilizing field notes in this research is

appropriate as Emerson et al (1995) reminds us field notes serve as "accounts describing

experiences and observations the researcher has made while participating in an intense and involved manner" (p. 3).

Coding and Data Analysis

The nature of the document collection and varying interview schedules allowed for continual data analysis. During open coding analysis, I examined all interviews and documents for emerging patterns and themes. To track the emerging themes, I used a series of note cards and colored dots. Each potential theme was written on a note card with a colored dot to identify where the theme was seen (e.g., interview, field notes, observer report). The cards were visually examined; cards with more dots indicated the emergence of a theme in multiple areas of observation. I also placed "tic" marks within each dot noting the number of times a given theme was noted within a specific area. For example, one emerging theme was "similar others." This theme was noted within interviews and training evaluations. Each time this theme was mentioned within an interview, the red interview dot received one "tic" mark. This visual representation of frequency of themes across data points eased the identification of merging patterns.

Researcher Positionality

I have worked in higher education for over 20 years in a variety of offices and positions. The bulk of my experience is within housing and residential life where I have served in a roles ranging from graduate assistant to department director. Part of my career was spent directly supervising, hiring, or training resident assistant staff. During this time in my career, I conducted a number assessment surveys with various staffs at multiple institutions. In reviewing the assessment reports, I was surprised how similar the results were year after year. Repeatedly, students reported the number one motivating factor in

seeking employment as a resident assistant was to help others. Help was defined in various ways including assistance with transitions, academic expectations, personal challenges, role modeling.

I also had the benefit of advising two National Residence Hall Honorary (NRHH) chapters. Within those chapters, my role often revolved around alumni and alumnae connection and support. In speaking to alumni and alumnae, many shared that their time as residence hall leaders – often resident assistants – had influenced their career decisions and their perceptions of their own leadership ability.

While I have not been in the aforementioned positions in the last 10 years, I continued to be curious about the resident assistant student leader perceptions of learning, explorations of role modeling and how it impacts their daily lives, and how these factors influence their choices while an undergraduate student. When I moved to my new place of employment roughly two years ago, an opportunity to study these areas presented itself.

My current position places three distinct functional areas under my purview. These functional areas are campus parking operations, ID cards, and access services (ID swipe entry); commuter and graduate programming, graduate student council, and commuter activities board; and residential life, housing, and dining services (see Appendix I for organizational chart). While all study participants are employed residential life (one of the areas that ultimately reports to me), due to the vast nature of my duties my interaction with student employees in any of the three functional areas is limited to participation in training events. However, I believe all study participants knew my name, were aware of my position within the department, and might consider me a

distant supervisor; as such, they may perceived pressure to participate in this study. To help mitigate any perceived influence, invitations to interviews were extended without the requirement of an RSVP. The recruitment email clearly noted non-participation in no way influenced the student's position, and all interviews were intentionally scheduled after staff selection for the upcoming year was finalized.

Lastly, as I am an employee at my research site, it will be impossible to completely eliminate my personal knowledge and bias when completing this research. However, acknowledging such bias exists allows me to be mindful of it while analyzing the data collected. While conducting this study, I served as a primary research instrument (Emerson et al., 1995). This carries with it serious responsibilities. I took care to minimize influence, while at the same time interacting enough to gather data. This requires what Merriam (2009) describes as a tolerance for ambiguity and sensitivity.

Trustworthiness

Shenton (2004) states there are four criteria to trustworthiness in qualitative research. These are a) credibility, b) transferability, c) dependability, and d) confirmability. I will address each in turn in regards to this research. Credibility in qualitative research notes whether the researcher has measured what they intended to study (Shenton, 2004). For this study, I have ensured credibility by utilizing well established research methods; having an understanding of the culture being researched; and triangulating multiple data sources including review of printed material, observations and observer reports, resident assistant session evaluations, interviews, and field notes.

Transferability involves presenting enough descriptive data that a reader could choose to draw a comparison between the presented research and the reader's context

(Shenton, 2004). Toward this end, the unique qualities of my research site (small, Catholic, non-auxiliary funded) are provided as background data to establish context.

The third criterion, dependability, refers to the extent to which the study findings would be consistent should the research be duplicated (Shenton, 2004). To ensure dependability, I described in detail the final processes within the study as they play out. I included what Shenton (2004) refers to as a "reflective appraisal of the project" to evaluate how effective my study was in achieving my research ends (p. 42).

Lastly, my study must have confirmability, or freedom of bias (Shenton, 2004). To achieve confirmability, I used triangulation to help limit my personal bias, I noted my beliefs and assumptions regarding the research, and discussed the study's limitations. An unintentional outcome of this study was the interview participation of a mentor and mentee pairing. I was unaware of this pairing during the time of interview and discovered it later during additional document review. Upon discovery, I revisited the interview transcriptions of the participating mentor and mentee and found their responses to be exceedingly similar, particularly around the idea that SRA staff as supervisors would disrupt the friendship relationships SRAs and RAs currently enjoy. To my knowledge, neither respondent knew the other was participating in my study. Assuming they were unaware of the others participation, the similarity of their responses is important for two reasons. First it implies the study is trustworthy as I saw similar responses across multiple interviews. Secondly, it challenges the concept of social desirability bias.

Social desirability bias notes study participants have the tendency to respond to questions in way they believe is desirable to others (Fisher, 1993). This can take the form of inaccurately reporting on sensitive topics to present themselves in the best light or

providing a response the respondent believes is desirable to the researcher (Fisher, 1993). In my study, the woman SRA respondent mentioned above was exceedingly candid regarding elements of the department, her position, the RA position, and supervisor decisions she did not agree with. At one point in the interview, she acknowledged one of the reason she chose to participate was so she could share her concerns directly with me (as department director) and be assured of confidentiality. This SRA participant's responses could not be described as susceptible to social desirability bias. And yet her responses to the research questions and the general interview questions strongly aligned with responses from the majority of the other participants and were especially aligned with the responses of her mentee. This alignment implies if social desirability bias occurred in other respondents, it did not significantly skew the study results.

Limitations

Multiple limitations are noted in this research. The first limitation is my perceived and actual connection to the participants and site of study. The site of the proposed research is my place of employment and participants might have felt a requirement to participate as they ultimately report to me. In reality, there are three supervisors between the participant's position and my own, and participants are aware it would be highly unusual for my position to become involved in the hiring or termination of a student position. However, in an effort to mitigate the potential impact, I limited my interaction with both the resident assistant and senior resident assistant staff to the extent that the resident assistant staff knows me in name only. Further, I removed myself from all hiring decisions for the next academic year. I played no role in the creation or execution of the hiring processes, I did not attend any of the processes or associated meetings, and I was

not aware of who would be offered or not offered a position. Finally, it is important to note the resident assistant and senior resident assistant staff work for Residential Life; it is one of three departments that report to me. My interaction with student staff in any of these three departments is exceedingly limited and almost exclusively occurs on an incidental basis.

It is also possible my employment connection to the site of study does not allow me to be truly open-minded to what was shared in the interviews or to all possible interpretations of the data. Acknowledging such bias exists allows me to be mindful of it while analyzing the data collected.

Another limitation revolves around the timing of my interviews used as part of the data collection. While helpful in the case study process, the 2-hour time frame does not always offer an in-depth look at individual experiences (Krueger & Casey, 2009). In contrast, it may have dissuaded some participants from volunteering. Additionally, participation was self-selected. It is possible those who volunteered are not a representative sample of all possible participants but rather fall within one very similar sub-group of staff member. Without requiring participation, it is impossible to know what other stories or information would have been shared. The training included in my study may also differ in content and quality from trainings at other times in the year.

The third possible limitation is participant recollection. The observed training event occurred in mid-January. During this event I took field notes and identified additional questions for interviews because I knew these items would be important to me for later analysis. Due to IRB requirements, the participant interviews did not occur until

mid-May. By this time, four months after the observed event, participant memory at times failed as evidenced by some participant response.

The limitation of memory is closely associated with the fourth possible limitation, terminology. During the course of interviews, participants would sometimes respond, "I do not remember" to my questions. When this occurred, I used the observer reports, my field notes, or the learner evaluations to jog their memory. In the course of offering these artifacts, I also often altered the terminology of my question. The combination of additional information and altered phrasing typically resulted in the participant remembering additional events or information. It is unclear whether terminology or the presentation of additional information most assisted in this recollection.

The final limitation is perceived versus actual effectiveness. This study was not intended to measure learning or actual outcomes of training interventions; the design was specific to assess participants' perceptions of the training, which may also be reflective of actual learning and training effectiveness. Responding to a question regarding what she learned from training, one RA participant discussed the SRA presented session on enriching program presentations. My field notes confirmed the accuracy of the RA's recall of the group activity, notes from the PowerPoint slide, and the content of the take-away hand out provided. Her recall was so specific and accurate, I asked her if she had recently reviewed this material. She stated she had not. I then asked if she could recall another training program. She again provided a detailed recollection of another SRA presented program this time referencing questions asked by audience members. When asked if she could provide similar details of a professional staff presentation, she stated if she could see the topic listing on the training schedule, she might be able to. I provided

her with three topics but she was unable to recall these programs with the level of detail previously demonstrated. While this occurred with only one participant, it implies that participant did learn and retain knowledge from peer presented programs.

Summary

In this chapter I described the methodology and procedures used in this research study. Included in this chapter is an overview of my research, the research questions, population utilized for this research, instrumentation and data collection procedures, how analyzed the data, and limitations of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This chapter provides an analysis of data gathered during this research study and presents three themes found through the research. These themes are experienced student staff as teachers, mentors, and supervisors. Before discussing the results, an understanding of the staffing structure will be helpful to the reader. All resident assistant staff, regardless of experience level, have up to three supervisors; two are graduate assistants and one is a professional staff area coordinator who minimally has a master's degree and two years of experience. The graduate assistants report to their assigned area coordinator; area coordinators report to the Assistant Director for Residential Education (see Appendix I for organizational chart).

Within the resident assistant staff, RAs are also assigned an SRA mentor. The term *SRA* is used to identify experienced student staff. The term *RA* is used for inexperienced student staff. The term *resident assistant* references all student staff regardless of experience level. The mentor's responsibilities include hosting bi-weekly meetings with their mentee(s) and submitting a report of these meetings (for full job descriptions see Appendix H). Each SRA will mentor to one to two RAs for the full academic year. Mentees are assigned to mentors based on professional staff observation of personality and perception of fit. Currently, neither mentees nor mentors are asked for preferences during this process. The results of each research question is provided below.

Research Question One: Perceptions of Peer to Peer Training

The method of assignment of SRAs mentors to RA mentees did not appear to negatively influence either group's perceptions of peer to peer training as all RA and SRA participants stated they enjoyed peer to peer training and believed it was an

effective teaching medium. All participants except one RA noted certain topics would have a more salient impact when taught by peers than professional staff. The most commonly identified topics they noted should be covered by peers included decorum (or appropriate role modeling), addressing concerns of staff gossip, how to manage supervisors, how to host a successful program, and how to build residential community.

Three of the SRA participants stated they believed the use of peer to peer training should be expanded and include greater roles for SRAs in planning the training curriculum as well as the addition of more peer to peer presented programs. Four of the five RA participants agreed more peer to peer programs should be presented. RA participants were not asked to discuss involving SRAs in the training curriculum as the RAs had little to no prior understanding of SRA involvement in the planning process.

No differences in the perception of peer to peer training were noted within the data based on participant interviews. All participants perceived this training model to be effective in communicating the intent of each educational session; RA participants stated they believed they had learned in these sessions at least as well as they had in sessions presented by professional staff. In discussing perceptions of peer to peer training, a number of themes emerged. These themes and subthemes comprise the bulk of this chapter and are reviewed in detail below; for this reason, these perceptions are not discussed in this section.

Research Question Two: SRA Guidance – Who Mentors the Mentors?

Student presenters were assigned program topics based on their supervisor's perception of their skill set. Student presenters were given autonomy with their presentation and were not required to review the content of their program prior to

presentation. Responses to the question, who do the SRAs (experienced staff) look to for guidance, were evenly divided. Two SRAs noted they did not seek guidance from anyone regarding the content of their presentation while two others noted they had reviewed their training plan with at least one other person. Upon further questioning all were able to recall a conversation with another person discussing their training presentation prior to the event. When asked if the aforementioned conversations influenced their execution of the training session, responses were again divided with two participants responding "yes" and two responding "no." Upon additional questioning, all were able to identify changes made to the presentations based on feedback from others. Primarily these changes were minor alterations to the existing training plan, but one SRA noted he added a group activity to his presentation based on a conversation with his supervisor.

To whom the SRAs looked for guidance varied. The two SRAs who immediately stated they had reviewed their training plan with at least one other person identified their supervisor (either graduate assistant or area coordinator) and fellow SRAs as resources. The two SRAs who did not initially recall reviewing their plan were later able to state they had spoken to other SRAs regarding their intentions. No SRA recalled speaking to an RA regarding the training session prior to the presentation. Nor were any other entities (such as friends or family) identified.

When asked why one entity might be sought out for advice over another, three of the four were unable to provide a rationale. The fourth (who contacted an SRA peer) noted it was a matter of convenience and who was around at the time of session planning (session planning was unstructured and unsupervised). I also asked if SRAs viewed their supervisors as knowledgeable resources. Responses initially varied significantly. Ron,

SRA, stated he trusted the opinion of all of his supervisors and was comfortable seeking advice from any of them. Susan, SRA, candidly noted she did not like her supervisors and would not seek advice from them. Susan clarified that while her supervisors were likely able to give her sound advice on teaching others, due to her personal interactions and feelings she was unlikely to seek such advice. The other two SRAs noted their supervisors could "probably" or "likely" be a resource.

In summary, SRAs struggled to identify who if anyone they sought as resources in the planning and preparation of their training presentation. In the next section, I discuss the three roles of peer trainers.

Research Question Three: Examination of the Roles of Peer Trainers

Three roles of peer trainers were examined in this study; information provider, role model, and facilitator. Bulte et al. (2007) provide the following definitions of the three roles. An information provider is a lecturer or skills trainer and offers direct skills specific to one's employment or knowledge base (Bulte et al, 2007). A role model is one who utilizes demonstration to teach of how the student learner should behave (Bulte et al, 2007). And finally, a facilitator serves as moderator, or small group tutor; the experienced student's facilitator goal is to provide guidance, motivation, support, and to assist inexperienced students with seeking their own solutions (Bulte et al, 2007). These definitions were provided to the participants in the interviews; participants were then asked to identify which roles (if any) they believed the SRA utilized.

All participants identified information provider as a key role of the SRA position. While the participants were able to identify instances of information provision during training sessions, the bulk of their comments focused on occurrences outside of the

confines of training. More specifically, RA participants discussed tangible assistance SRAs would provide with everyday duties. These duties included duty round training, writing room inventories, completing program proposals, and managing end of year checkouts.

Similarly, all participants agreed serving as a role model was an important function of the SRA position. Again, the participants focused the majority of their comments on role modeling occurring outside of training but were able to identify instances of expected role modeling occurring both in and out of training. These instances included presentation of self (being on time, being prepared for whatever event attended, speaking appropriately to others), demonstrating respect for self and others, being a good reflection on the residential life department.

The final role, facilitator, received dissenting perspectives. Two of the five RAs stated they did not think that was an appropriate role for SRAs to play, comparing a facilitator to a referee. The remaining three thought it was an appropriate role but were unable to identify instances of facilitation. All four SRAs noted it was an appropriate role for SRAs but only two of the four could identify instances when they had served in such a role. All such instances were outside of training sessions.

During Ron's, SRA, interview, I pointed out he facilitated a group discussion as part of his presentation and he seemed surprised "that would count as being a facilitator." When asked why it would not "count," he stated he viewed facilitation as a more formal event. As Ron's interview was the last one conducted, I was unable to query other participants if they also perceived facilitation as formal events.

In summary, RA and SRA participants expressed the roles information provider and role model were both important and "appropriate" functions of the SRA position. Participants were able to provide commentary specific to each of these roles demonstrating their appropriateness within SRA duties and elements of these roles are evident in the below themes; information provider is included in experienced student staff as teachers and role model is contained within experienced student staff as mentors. The final role, facilitator, received mixed reviews and is not contained within the below themes. However, participant response to this role was contradictory to other data points and is discussed further in chapter five.

Thematic Overview

The remainder of this chapter is devoted to exploring three emerging themes related to the experienced student staff, including their roles as teachers, mentors, and supervisors. In the first interview I noted the participant rarely distinguished between concepts of teaching and mentoring unless prompted to do so. While the lack of distinction offered insight into the participant's thought process, it was also problematic. I sought to understand participants' perceptions of peers as teachers and the extent to which the three near peer roles of information provision, role model, and facilitator were utilized. The discussion of teaching, information provision, and role modeling were muddled and intermixed. This lack of clarity made it difficult for me to understand the participant's responses.

To simplify terminology and encourage understanding I established definitions to distinguish between two keys areas, mentorship and teaching. Bulte et al. (2007) defined an information provider as a lecturer or skills trainer offering direct skills specific to

one's employment or knowledge base. Using this definition, I combined the roles of teacher and information provider into *teach* or *teacher*. Bulte's et al. (2007) definition of role model, one who utilizes demonstration to teach of how the student learner should behave, aligned with the description of mentor in relevant literature. *Mentor* is also the terminology used on Marymount's campus to describe duties associated with SRAs.

The following definitions were provided to participants during all other interviews. Within interviews, coding, and for the purposes of this written discussion, the words *teach* or *teacher* are used to reference formal educational sessions; specifically, the winter training educational session that was the focus of this study. My field notes state two SRA teachers presented these formal sessions to an audience of roughly 25 learners with each session lasting approximately 45 minutes. The word *mentor* is used to reference conversations, observed actions, or other events outside of formal training sessions. Participants reported mentor sessions were rarely formal occurrences with audiences ranging from one to four student staff members. Topics and discussion length varied greatly depending on participant desire and engagement.

Mentor and *teacher* were later identified as thematic areas. This was unintentional but not surprising. Concepts of mentorship and teaching were paramount in my research and it was probable these concepts would manifest as themes.

Finally, when creating the theme areas I considered titling them *Experienced Student Staff as Information Providers* and *Experienced Student Staff as Role Models*. These titles followed Bulte's et al. (2007) model and were consistent with the study outcomes. I opted to use *mentor* instead of *role model* because mentor is more consistent with literature. I also choose to utilize *teacher* instead of *information provider* because

information provider seemed narrowly defined and *teacher* was more inclusive of many topics and teaching methods.

Theme One: Experienced Student Staff as Teachers

If this study were condensed to one single question, that question would explore the concept of using experienced student staff to teach or train inexperienced student staff. In this section, the term teach is used interchangeably with the term train as participants intermixed the terms. Both terms are intended to convey the teaching of job duties, concepts, and expectations. Using this definition, all participants noted the desirability of having experienced student staff teach inexperienced student staff within training settings. When asked to discuss why this preference existed, respondents gave remarkably similar responses that have been coded into two subthemes: 1) proximity in time and 2) professional and student staff distinction. The remainder of this section will explore these two subthemes.

Proximity in Time

I coined the term *proximity in time* to encompass participant responses related to the amount of time elapsed since the teacher has completed the duty or act for which they are providing training. It assumes those who have more recently executed the duty or function will have greater recall for how the task was successfully completed. It also assumes the greater the distance between teacher's experience and time teaching, the more likely the teacher is to be unfamiliar with current challenges of a given task.

All five RA participants identified proximity in time as a reason they desired (and depending on the topic, preferred) a peer presenter. The RA participants shared they believed proximity in time allowed SRAs to better understand the day to day reality of

the RA position and challenges of their job duties. This perceived understanding

influenced the RA participants' opinion that SRA were more approachable and less

judgmental than a professional staff member might be. Cleo, RA, shared:

> In IR [incident report] writing training, my AC [supervisor] tried to explain how to write an IR. But she went so fast and I didn't know if I could ask questions and I don't think I really learned anything. I got frustrated and…I don't know….zoned out? Whatever. But anyway, [SRA] helped me later. She told me about learning to write IRs last year and tricks I could use so I didn't forget. I didn't feel dumb around her.

When asked which training topics or subject matter was most appropriate to be

presented by student staff, responses from RA and SRA participants were very similar.

All participants noted some form of programming education was best provided by SRA

staff. Specific examples included how to host a program, how to move beyond social to

educational programming, how to manage a campus wide program, and the ins and outs

of program paperwork and budgets. In addition to programming, RA participants

identified duties with tangible outcomes as topics they preferred to learn from SRAs.

These topics included how to create a bulletin board, how to make door decorations,

hosting the first community meeting, and how to complete various paperwork (similar

topics are also discussed within the theme of experienced student staff as mentors). Gail,

a first year RA, described this when she stated:

> It's helpful when the person teaching me has recently done my job. The job I do here [at a small Catholic, liberal arts, predominately female campus] might not be like the job my supervisor had when she was an RA. And I don't think my supervisor has gone on [duty] rounds here; how can she teach me to do something she hasn't done [at this institution]?"

The inherent understanding Gail referenced above was noted by four of the five

RA participants. These RA participants stated professional staff were likely capable of

teaching duty rounds but they believed SRAs were better able to explain challenges that

might occur in the execution of this task. When asked why, RA participants stated professional staff would not understand the potential pitfalls of the task because it is a task they have not completed recently. Three of the SRA participants agreed with the RA participant assessment. The fourth SRA disagreed with is colleagues by stating, "I don't they [RA participants] are giving our bosses enough credit."

In another example of proximity in time, two SRA staff presented time management training. The presentation emphasized balancing the duties of the resident assistant position with academic expectations, social engagements, and personal space needs. Across the board, RA participants noted they thought the SRA presenters were better able to realistically understand the time management challenges within the resident assistant position as they (the SRAs) where in similar positions making similar decisions regarding balance. RA participants noted the suggestions offered by the SRA presenters had more credibility than if a professional staff member had made similar recommendations due to proximity in time.

In a third example, two SRA staff presented a training session on staff gossip and the corrosive impact it could have on the staff team. This program was highlighted during interviews as it had a 4.93 average score on a five point scale. In discussing why this presentation was so well received, three of the four SRAs and three of the five RAs agreed the program's popularity was due to the program's presenters. When asked what characteristics of the presenters made the program so popular, the aforementioned staff referenced proximity in time. Sammy, RA, stated, "They [SRA presenters] get what it's like to be me. If they say I'm doing something that tears me down or my staff down, I'm gonna hear them." When asked if a professional staff member could have the same

impact, Sammy replied, "It's different. I respect my boss, but she doesn't always get what it's like for us [RA staff].

Engaging in difficult conversations was referenced by two other RA participants. These RAs stated their responses to difficult conversations varied depending on who is in the conversation. They noted they were more likely to listen if they identified in some way with their conversation partner. Within the context of these interviews, that identification focused on experienced staff working under similar expectations.

Professional and Student Staff Distinction

Professional and student staff distinction refers to the type of staff member, professional or student, RA staff seek training, guidance, or general information. With very little variation RA participants were able to distinguish between topics they sought professional or peer advice. One such topic was difficult questions. Participants defined difficult questions as questions that might be embarrassing to ask an employer and would more likely be addressed to a knowledgeable peer. Specific examples included sexual habits of students (including questions of when to engage in intercourse for the first time and birth control), legal marijuana usage (the university's geographical location means it is legal to purchase marijuana within 10 miles of campus; however, use and possession on campus are prohibited), and alcohol use.

Roughly half of the participants noted the university's faith based affiliation influenced their decision regarding to whom they should speak. When asked to elaborate Grace, RA, stated, "I can't talk to my boss about this stuff. I don't know what she would think of me. What if she told Father [campus priest]?"

Four of the five RA participants also identified age of the teacher as an influencing factor. These four RAs noted their supervisor's perceived age influenced participant belief that supervisors tended to have more technical knowledge than their peers. However, this perceived knowledge was not always considered valuable. Instead, study participants placed greater value on the understanding of unwritten rules. Both RA and SRA participants stated professional staff were unlikely to provide unwritten rule knowledge and they would seek out peers when they needed this understanding.

Three of the five RA participants identified potential criticism as an influencing factor in who they preferred as a teacher. Larry, RA, conveyed this when noting:

> My mentor [SRA] has more current knowledge, more recent knowledge, more hand on knowledge, more personalized knowledge. He isn't going to lecture me when he teaches. He's gonna tell me what is expected and how to make it happen. He's realistic. His structure and delivery might not be as tight as pro[fessional] staff but he's safer and there's less pressure.

When asked additional questions, Larry noted, "I don't feel unsafe. Maybe that word is too much. I just know I won't get in trouble if I ask [SRA] and I might if I ask my boss."

I asked the RAs if there were topics they would prefer to be taught by professional staff. These topics included managing students with emotional or psychological concerns; sexual assault; physical violence; and drug use, possession, or distribution. When asked why they preferred professionals to teach these topics, responses were similar and focused on the weighty nature of the subject matter. One RA noted, "This is big stuff and you shouldn't give that to students."

The SRA participant response varied substantially from the RA participants. Where RAs could easily distinguish between times they sought out peer versus professional advice, the SRAs had very few distinctions. Unfortunately, it was not until

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the last SRA interview that I noted this trend and was able to ask about it. Ron, SRA, stated, "I think we [SRA staff] are more comfortable with our supervisors [than RA staff is]. Mostly we don't need the advice. If we do, we are okay asking."

In summary, all participants noted the desirability of having experienced student staff teach inexperienced student staff within training settings. Rationale for this perception was proximity in time and professional and student staff distinction. RA participants perceived proximity in time allowed SRAs to better understand the day to day reality of the RA position. RA participants were also able to clearly distinguish between topics they sought professional or peer advice. SRA participants made no distinctions and implied they enjoyed greater ease with professional staff.

Theme Two: Experienced Student Staff as Mentors

All study participants, regardless of gender or experience level, noted the importance and desirability of having SRAs serve as mentors to the RA staff. The rationale behind these responses focused on concepts of comfort and likeness. RA participants reported stated they felt more at ease in general with SRA staff than professional staff. Much of this comfort was attributed to what Shteynberg and Galinsky (2011) referred to as "similar others" and what RA members called likeness. From this general theme, three subthemes emerged; position mentors, academic mentors, and managing supervisors. Each of these themes is discussed more fully below.

Position Mentors

The most frequently mentioned area of mentorship was position mentors, or mentorship focused on the execution of the resident assistant positional duties. RAs reported seeking out an SRA for assistance on a variety of basic tasks including the

completion of room inventories, managing difficult students, and general day to day operations. The expressed rationale for this decision was largely one of two reasons; either the RAs preferred to speak to an SRA or RAs did not want to "bother" their professional staff with what they perceived to be minor questions.

When examining the preference of working with an SRA, RA participants repeatedly commented they were more comfortable approaching another student, particularly a student who was functioning in a very similar position. Gail, RA, stated, "I felt like my SRA wants me to succeed and do a good job. She was invested in my success. I think she even saw it [my success] as a reflection of how well she did her [SRA] job."

Other RA participants echoed Gail's sentiments of support and desire for success. Interestingly, while all RA participants noted feeling supported by one or more members of the SRA staff, they also clearly noted this support did not always come from their assigned staff mentor. Three of the five participating RAs stated they formed bonds with SRAs who were closer to them in some fashion than their assigned SRA. One RA defined *closer* by geographical distance while two others defined it as having more common interests with an SRA who was not their assigned mentor. All three noted these bonds developed naturally over time and they were not seeking direction outside of their assigned SRA mentor. Once these connections were developed, the RAs found themselves seeking guidance from their preferred SRA instead of their assigned SRA.

When queried if the relationships seemed more friendship than mentorship, responses varied greatly. Larry, the first year man RA who primarily sought out his assigned mentor for guidance, noted he liked his mentor, called him "a cool guy," and

stated he would be comfortable hanging out with his SRA mentor. But he did not define their relationship as a friendship beyond the extent of what he referred to as "work friends." Of the four women RAs, one primarily sought out her assigned SRA mentor and expressed similar sentiment as Larry. The remaining three, all who sought out alternate mentors, did define their relationship with their preferred SRA as a friendship. Of these three, two rated the friendship with the SRA as more important than the job. Cleo, the first year woman RA who utilized her assigned mentor, expressed a different opinion. She stated "I'm good friends with [my mentor]. I can't imagine not being friends with the person helping me out. But, I mean, that's [the friendship] not more important than my job."

When asked for the most important role an SRA played in their work life, the RA responses were focused on two areas: role modeling and providing tangible examples how to execute the basic duties of the RA position. The three most commonly noted examples of role modeling behavior included how to conduct one's self in situations requiring confrontation, the demeanor and presence desirable to display to one's residential community, and how to balance the demands of academics, employment, and social desires. The discussion of social desires was broad ranging but primarily focused on three areas. The first was how to be friends with students living on the floor you supervise while retaining the ability to confront people and behaviors when necessary. Closely related to the first area, participants questioned how to successfully date students they supervise without compromising their position. Finally, participants discussed how the use of alcohol and marijuana reflected on them. Specifically, participants of legal drinking age questioned if engaging in legal activities such as drinking alcohol or

smoking marijuana would be viewed negatively by supervisors, other RA or SRA staff, and students. Marijuana in particular was mentioned as an activity that was legal for them to participate in but they perceived would be viewed negatively.

When asked if the three aforementioned topics were ones the participants felt comfortable discussing with their supervisors, responses were divided along experience lines. SRAs noted they were, and at times had, comfortable discussing these topics or ones similar with their professional staff supervisors. These experienced staff members expressed a general appreciation of the different perspective their supervisors might have and described their conversations as intellectual discourse and not rules of behavior they were required to strictly adhere.

Conversely, the RA participants noted they listened to and appreciated direction from their supervisors regarding these three topics, but rarely sought out advice on these specific areas. Of the five RA participants, only one stated they were comfortable initiating conversation on these topics. Patricia, RA, summed up the rationale behind this choice stated, "I don't want my boss to think I don't know how to do my job. By second semester, I should know how to do my job."

Due to the timing of interviews, I was able to ask only two SRA participants for their perception of the RA participants response. Both SRAs affirmed RA staff sought them out for guidance on these issues. When asked to speculate why professional staff might not be utilized, the two SRAs noted this could be due to personality or other conflicts depending on the individuals involved. The SRAs also stated it this choice was likely the result of lack of positional experience. As Ron, SRA, stated:

> It doesn't seem like much, but the summer between first and second year in the job changes things. In first year if I had to ask my supervisor how to confront a

student, [to me] that meant I didn't know what I was doing. Or I thought I was doing it wrong. By second year I got it. I'm okay talking to supervisor about anything. They are here to help me. I'm not so black and white now.

The one exception to the responses noted above is discussion of marijuana use. All participants, regardless of experience level, stated they were uncomfortable speaking to their supervisors regarding this topic. Rationale for this discomfort was not forthcoming and participants were clearly uncomfortable with this question; as such, this line of questioning was not pursued.

As noted above, the other most important SRA mentoring role is providing tangible examples how to execute the basic duties of the RA position. One provided example was assistance in presenting an educational program to residents. Four of the five RA participants noted one or more SRAs assisted them with concept generation, a task list, completion of paperwork, and were present at said program. The fifth RA noted his SRA assisted in all areas noted above with the exception of presence at the actual program. Similar experiences were shared in regards to conducting a first community meeting, completing an incident report of violations of university conduct, and other typical duties. All five RA participants and three of the SRA participants shared this level of involvement typically occurred during the first event iteration (e.g., first program, first incident report.) with additional instances generally requiring little to no guidance.

When asked if professional staff could also serve as a resource for these types of events, RA participants shared professional staff were viewed as reliable resources but SRA staff were seen as more accessible. Sammy, RA, shared, "We all know [supervisors] are busy. They've got a lot going on. I don't always have time to wait so I ask [SRA mentor]."

I asked the RAs if there were times they would seek out professional supervisors outside the context of formal training sessions. RA responses aligned with illustrations previously listed. Specific examples included providing resources to students with emotional or psychological concerns; sexual assault; physical violence; when police, fire, or ambulance was present; when news media made contact; or when parents or others outside of the university became involved. In instances where clarification of university policy was required, RA participants noted who they contacted depended largely on what the policy was. Questions regarding minor policy violations were largely directed to an SRA mentor while questions related to more substantial violations were almost always directed to professional staff. Examples of substantial violations included drug use, possession, or distribution; large quantities of alcohol; and general questions regarding assault; the provision of alternative housing due to safety concerns; and student rights in the code of conduct. When asked to clarify when a larger violation question might be directed to an SRA instead of a professional staff member, RA participants were unable to think of specific examples.

Academic Mentors

Balancing academics with employment expectations was another common theme. All student participants commented the resident assistant position could easily interfere with academic pursuits. They attributed this to three reasons; rigor of the position, enjoyment of the position, and expectations of supervisors. Each of these is explained more fully below.

Four of the five RAs noted there were times when they were surprised and overwhelmed by the duties of the resident assistant position. The fifth noted she felt

somewhat prepared as she had a close relationship the previous year with a resident assistant and witnessed that person's experiences. The RA participants reported the overwhelming times occurring throughout the year with the most intense instances being at the start and close of each semester which align with training and closing the residence halls. In general, reporting participants felt unable to predict when their busy times would be and all five reported sacrificing sleep and personal pursuits in order to manage both academic and job requirements.

SRA participants similarly reported being overwhelmed at times, but noted they were better able to anticipate when their resident assistant position would be more demanding due to their previous experience. The SRA participants stated this knowledge often allowed them to work ahead in either academic or job duties so they were better able to manage competing expectations. When asked if a typical rhythm of the year was shared with the RA participants responses varied. Several SRAs noted they did so informally but no formal calendar or discussion was offered. Most RAs were unable to recall being prepared for busy times but also shared it might not have mattered. Sarah, RA, stated, "This job. It's just something you've gotta get through. They can train us but you don't understand until you do it." All participants agreed that SRAs helped RAs balance rigors of the position by tangibly assisting with job duties. One example manifested as an SRA putting up a bulletin board for an RA when said RA had a large test the next day.

Another academic challenged was enjoyment of the resident assistant position. All five RAs and two of the SRAs reporting utilizing resident assistant responsibilities as a means to procrastinate on academic duties at least three times a week. These

participants reported they found satisfaction in the resident assistant job, primarily in the duties that involved interaction with their residential students. Nini, SRA, stated, "I love my job. I get paid to hang out and have fun. Makes it hard, hard, hard to get my butt to class or do homework. I'd rather just chill."

SRA staff served as academic mentors by employee a number of helping strategies. These strategies included hosting study groups, sharing of notes and files, and encouraging academic focus during meetings. Three of the five RAs noted an SRA close to them would regularly inquire about their academics and the desire to please said SRA was a partial motivator in achieving academic success.

Expectations of supervisors was the final challenge noted. All five RA participants stated they felt their supervisors were invested in their academic achievement. However, four of the five went on to say their supervisors placed more emphasis on completing the duties of the resident assistant position than on achieving academic goals (the fifth RA believed academic and employment goals received equal emphasis). When asked to describe instances supporting these conclusions, RAs provided multiple illustrations related to the perceived focus of supervisors. When asked to expand on this statement, the RAs noted supervisors would ask a question or two about academics but spent the bulk of one on one meetings discussing the resident assistant responsibilities and occurrences. Larry, RA, stated:

> In our one on one, when we meet with our boss? Yeah, they ask me a little about classes. But if I say fine we move on. I wish they took more time to discuss classes. That's why I'm here [to get a degree].

Two of the four SRA participants agreed with this assessment. But these SRA participants interpreted the event differently noting they believed the aforementioned

format demonstrated an appropriate balance between academic and work requirements as the supervisor is charged with ensuring the duties of the resident assistant position are complete. Due to the timing of interviews, I was unable to ask this question to the other two SRA participants.

Both RAs and SRAs stated SRAs helped RAs manage the expectations of supervisors. RAs comments were similar to ones listed above and included SRAs assisting tangibly with resident assistant duties or hosting study sessions. SRAs noted they assisted in this area by reminding supervisors of the academic rhythm of the year including mid-terms and other common test weeks. SRAs also noted they were more attuned to the academic challenges of individual RAs and would share concerns with supervisors when appropriate.

Managing Supervisors

Across the board, all participants highlighted the role SRAs played in assisting RAs to manage supervisors. As noted previously, this management often came in the form of managing supervisor expectations during times of high academic requirements. Participants also noted utilizing SRAs to "talk out" difficult conversations with supervisors or as a sounding board when experiencing concerns with supervisors.

In one example, Cleo (RA) noted she had made an unintentional mistake on some paperwork and realized it after the paperwork was submitted. Due to the confidential nature of this paperwork, once it is submitted resident assistants are unable to access it for revisions or additions. Cleo stated she understood she needed to speak to her supervisor but was nervous and unsure how to best approach the situation. Cleo shared she spoke to

an SRA who advised her to talk to her supervisor soon, state what had occurred, and offer to resolve the situation. Cleo shared:

> So I did [what the SRA advised] and it wasn't bad. [My supervisor] understood and helped me make the changes. I mean, I would have told [my supervisor] eventually, but I would have stressed over it first and been even more nervous. I didn't even get in trouble!"

Similar stories were shared by two RAs and one SRA. These participants cited examples of SRAs helping RAs frame a difficult conversation prior to speaking to supervisors. Each story followed a comparable path. The RA needed to speak to a supervisor but for varying reasons was hesitant to do so. These reasons generally related to concerns of reprimand, disappointment of supervisors, and/or failure to accurately complete a job function. The RA would speak to an SRA who would advise how to approach the supervisor. The RA would then meet with the supervisor. Two participants (one RA, one SRA) described scenarios where the SRA accompanied the RA to the supervision meeting.

Confronting a supervisor was another difficult conversation. RA participants shared this conversation was more anxiety inducing as it required them to confront their supervisor with a personal or professional concern. Concerns included a supervisor's supervision style, receiving appropriate recognition for job efforts, and challenging a decision made by the supervisor. RA participants noted they felt more comfortable and confident after speaking to an SRA.

SRAs stated they informed their supervisor the upcoming confrontation conversation. The SRAs shared they believed doing so ultimately helped the RA as it ensured the supervisor was not caught off-guard and allowed the supervisor time to

consider what information or rationale to share with the RA. In at least one instance, the supervisor changed her decision based on the conversation with the RA and SRA.

Finally, three SRAs reported using their one on one meetings with supervisors to manage supervisor expectations of RA staff. Each resident assistant is required to meet weekly with at least one of their three supervisors. SRAs shared during their one on one, they would often speak of RA staff, how the staff was progressing, and any concerns the SRA or supervisor had noted. Three of four SRAs stated they had utilized this time to provide the supervisor with factors influencing RA staff beyond job duties and to suggest extensions to deadline or alterations to job assignments.

In summary, all study participants noted the importance and desirability of having SRAs serve as mentors to the RA staff. The most frequently mentioned area of mentorship was position mentors, or mentorship focused on the execution of the resident assistant positional duties. Academic mentors and managing supervisors were noted as two additional areas of mentorship.

Theme Three: Experienced Student Staff as Supervisors

Throughout the interviews, participant response was largely similar. The third theme, utilizing student staff as supervisors, is no exception. However, this theme differs in that participants consistently identified this as a role that should not be fulfilled by student staff. Participants were exceptionally emphatic on this point with much of the rationale surrounding themes of discomfort, the dissolution of friendships, and the use of SRAs as supervisors being more harmful than helpful. Because participants demonstrated such passion on this topic, rather than subdivide this area into sub-themes, I have included a brief presentation of each participant's primary point.

Ron, SRA, stated he did not see himself as a supervisor and acting as a supervisor would be "weird." Ron was unable to define *weird* or give examples of what weird looked like other than to say, "It's just weird. I don't want to supervise RAs. They don't want [SRAs] supervising them."

Ron went on to state SRAs are too close in age to RAs to be supervisors. When asked for a minimum age distance between supervisor and supervisee, Ron stated, "at least 5 years." When reminded he and his graduate assistant supervisors were within two years of age, Ron remarked, "that's different" but was unable to discern why it was different. Ron was the only SRA to mention age as a concerning factor in regards to supervision. It is possible Ron was referencing the perceived authority his supervisors had instead of their actual age. However, I was unable to ask Ron this question due to the timing of interview analysis.

Larry, a first year RA described at length the meaningful interactions he had with SRAs because "they have lived my reality and understand me." He went on to state he felt more comfortable with SRAs in general and felt he had to "behave and almost be stiff" with his professional staff. Larry noted the nature of his relationship with SRAs would change if he viewed them as supervisors; he went on to say this change would be to the detriment of the department as SRAs filled a "necessary gap" between professional staff and RAs.

Somewhat similar to Larry, Gail, an RA, noted having SRAs function as supervisors would take away from the teacher and mentor relationships between RAs and SRAs. She noted she sought mentorship from SRAs on matters she might not be comfortable speaking to supervisors about; she believed her willingness to approach

SRAs would change if they were formal supervisors. When asked if she saw her professional staff supervisors as teachers and mentors, Gail noted she viewed them primarily as supervisors and teachers.

Susan, SRA, Sammy and Grace, RAs, expressed concern that having SRAs serve as supervisors would mean SRAs and RAs could not be friends. In various manners, these three women commented on the desirability of maintaining friendships between RAs and SRAs and noted it placing SRAs in a supervisor role would cause the separation of friendship and other relationships an SRA might otherwise maintain. When asked why it was so desirable for RAs and SRAs to be friends, Grace stated, "Who else understands us?" Similarly, Sammy noted, "I need to be around mine. You know?"

Susan, referencing my role as department director, shared a reason I would desire SRAs and RAs to maintain friendships noting, "You want us to be friends. It means we will work harder for you because we are working with people we like."

Patricia and Nini, SRAs, were more simplistic in their rationale. Both noted they would not have applied to be an SRA if it meant they had to supervise RAs. In differing ways, Patricia and Nini stated the value of the position would decrease for them should supervision of other staff be a required component. For Nini, the value was monetary. In discussing her compensation packet, Nini noted supervising RAs "wasn't worth it." When asked to expand on this statement Nini shared she enjoyed being a resident assistant, liked having oversight of a floor, and had fun with other staff. However, she perceived formal supervision of another staff member's employment to be "a headache I'm not gonna deal with [at my age]." Nini went on to say she would need to be more

experienced and receive a greater salary before she would consider serving as a supervisor.

Patricia also believed the value of the position would decrease if she were required to supervise others. Patricia shared she became an RA (and later SRA) to be more popular and make friends. She expressed concern that RAs would not like her if she had to be their supervisor and hold them accountable for position expectations. When asked if she ever held her mentees accountable for failure to perform their duties, Patricia noted she "let those things slide."

The final participant, Cleo, RA, had a response unique of her peers. Cleo stated she believed SRAs were not ready to be supervisors and would perform poorly as supervisors. To support her rationale, Cleo noted SRAs had one to two years of experience as resident assistants but little to no experience supervising employment. Cleo stated, "It wouldn't be fair. To let them [SRAs] supervise us [RAs]. We are here to have an experience too and I don't think they are ready [to supervise and add to the experience]."

The role of Supervisor was perceived as a role that should not be fulfilled by student staff. Participants were exceptionally emphatic on this point with much of the rationale surrounding themes of discomfort, the dissolution of friendships, and the use of SRAs as supervisors being more harmful than helpful.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the findings from student staff participants gathered primarily through interviews. The goal of the interviews was to obtain the training impressions of nine resident and senior resident assistants with the aim of understanding

how they experienced training, their thoughts related to the use of peer presented trainers, and how they saw peer presented trainers impacting the overall staff experience. I also utilized a review of my field notes, the observer reports, and participant evaluations to inform the interview process.

Upon reviewing transcripts of the interviews three themes emerged: the use of experienced student staff as teachers, mentors, and supervisors. The participants concluded the use of experienced student staff as teachers and mentors is both appropriate in this setting and desired by both experienced and inexperienced staff. However, the use of the experienced student staff position as supervisors is not viewed as appropriate (by either experienced or inexperienced student staff) and cautioned against. In the next chapter I will discuss conclusions and implications for research and practice of the above data analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This qualitative case study examined experienced and inexperienced student leader perceptions of student lead training sessions at a small private Catholic university. Interviews were conducted with nine student staff with the aim of understanding how they experienced training, their thoughts related to the use of peer presented trainers, and how they saw peer presented trainers impacting the overall staff experience. A review of interviews transcripts yielded three themes: the use of experienced student staff as teachers, mentors, and supervisors. Participants shared the use of experienced student staff as teachers and mentors is both appropriate in this setting and desired by both experienced and inexperienced staff. However, all participants believed the use of the experienced student staff position as supervisors is not appropriate and was cautioned against.

In this final chapter, I discuss my results in greater detail and connections to previous literature, noting how this study expands the current body of literature. I also address recommendations for practice specific to the use of experienced student staff in training curricula. Finally, I outline suggestions for future research.

Discussion

The overarching question in this study is how student staff perceive and experience training sessions presented by peers with at least one year of job knowledge. In answering that question, I learned both RA and SRA participants perceived peer presented training to be positively influential. Participants were also able to identify two key roles appropriate for SRA peer trainers; these roles are experienced student staff as teachers and experienced student staff as mentors. A third theme, experienced student

staff as supervisors, emerged as a role study participants believed to be inappropriate for peer trainers.

In this section, I will not discuss the findings within each theme. Instead I will outline the cross coding that occurred between themes. I noted three common threads woven among the themes. These are near peer learning, the experience impact, and researcher observations. Each is discussed in detail below.

Near Peer Learning

My theoretical framework was the near peer model. This model promotes the utilization of students with one or two years of experience to teach students with little to no experience (Whitman, 1988). This framework was selected because it mirrors the SRA and RA teaching and mentor structure. Cognitive congruence is one hallmark of the model and occurs when the near peer teacher demonstrates an understanding of material as well as the challenges with learning and applying said material (Bene & Bergus, 2014). This congruence was clearly noted across multiple themes in this study.

All RA participants shared they believed the SRAs understood better than professional staff the day to day reality of the RA position and challenges of their job duties. Participants stated this perceived understanding influenced their desire to have SRAs present certain training topics. Research indicates the outcomes of student led learning were comparable to those sessions led by seasoned faculty (Nnodim 1997). In my study, participants reported similar perceptions noting they found peer presented sessions to be an effective teaching medium and (depending on the topic) believed their peers to be as knowledgeable as professional staff. The topics noted were all duties with tangible outcomes. These findings reinforce earlier studies noting near peer teachers are

more adept at remembering and sharing tangible tips to overcome any noted challenges (Bene & Bergus, 2014; Zijdenbos et al., 2010).

Research also indicates academic near peer teachers are seen as more approachable than a traditional teacher or trainer (Zijdenbos et al., 2010). Participants in my study expressed similar sentiment.. Participants in this study repeatedly referenced instances or situations they were more comfortable speaking to an SRA than a professional staff member. One such topic was difficult questions. RA participants defined these as questions too embarrassing to ask an employer or supervisor and would more likely be addressed by a knowledgeable peer. Specific examples included questions of sex or sexuality, alcohol and drug use, and questions related to mistakes in job performance. These examples are consistent with near peer research, which found near peer teachers to be more approachable than their professional staff counterparts and more adept at creating nonjudgmental environments for asking difficult questions (Bene & Bergus, 2014; McLelland, McKenna, & French, 2013; Ten Cate & Durning, 2007).

Participants also stated they considered the age of the teacher and proximity in time when considering who to approach with a problem. Participants noted they were more likely seek out those they identified with in some way or someone who had recently completed the duties of their position. This is consistent with near peer theory that notes near peers are more likely to impact our learning than someone who has greater experience but who appears less like us (Murphey, 1998; Nnodim, 1997).

Participants went on to state supervisors tended to have more technical knowledge than their peer teachers but this knowledge was not always considered valuable. Instead, study participants placed greater value on the understanding of what several participants

called *unwritten rules*. Participants stated professional staff were unlikely to provide unwritten rule knowledge and they would seek out peers when they needed this understanding. This is consistent with previous studies noting unintentional outcomes of near peer teachers was the opportunity to gain knowledge of the course or employment *unwritten rules* (McKenna & French, 2011; Secomb, 2008; Ten Cate & Durning, 2007; Yu et al., 2011).

A final area of alignment between this study and near peer research was the sentiments of support RAs perceived from SRA staff. RA participants reporting feeling SRAs were invested in their individual accomplishments, thereby boosting the RA confidence level and desire for success. These findings reinforce earlier studies noting near peer teachers created environments increasing confidence and motivation on behalf of the learner and learners perceived additional emotional support from the near peer teacher (McKenna & French, 2011; Secomb, 2008; Ten Cate & Durning, 2007; Yu et al., 2011).

Peer presented learning and curriculum influence. The key question in this study, how student staff perceive peer presented training, was answered with multiple of examples of why peer training is effective, important, and preferred. Study participants stated they believed the use of peer to peer training should be expanded and include greater roles for SRAs in planning the training curriculum as well as the addition of more peer to peer presented programs. This was an important finding, but it could simply mean student leaders enjoyed being taught by other students.

The significance of this research comes from the alignment of this study's findings with near peer model, and previous research supporting the positive outcomes of

utilizing this model. These outcomes include student led learning being comparable to those sessions led by seasoned faculty and the perceived approachability of peer teachers (Bene & Bergus, 2014; McLelland, McKenna, & French, 2013; Ten Cate & Durning, 2007; Zijdenbos et al., 2010). Further, this study marks the first time, to my knowledge, this model has been utilized in student affairs research; these findings suggest additional research is appropriate.

The findings support a greater role for SRAs in the training creation and execution process. Both near peer theory and this study demonstrated peer teachers created environments increasing confidence and motivation on behalf of the learner (McKenna & French, 2011; Secomb, 2008; Ten Cate & Durning, 2007; Yu et al., 2011)., were able to offer desired *unwritten rules* (McKenna & French; Secomb; Ten Cate & Durning; Yu et al.), and were more approachable than professional staff teachers (Zijdenbos et al., 2010). Perhaps the most important finding was inability for participants to distinguish between mentor and teacher functions (discussed in greater detail under mentor teacher distinction). This finding implies these concepts are tightly woven into how the participants understand and make meaning of their resident assistant experience.

Rather than struggle against this interconnectivity, I recommend we embrace it by expanding the role of the SRA peer teacher. The continuity between the roles of teacher and mentor implies the learning occurring during training would be carried throughout the academic year through continual interaction between RA learners and SRA teacher/mentors. Supplementary learning opportunities for staff, particularly those occurring in informal environments are desirable and likely to lead to increased learner satisfaction and application of knowledge (Zijdenbos et al., 2010). Finally, positioning

SRA staff as peer teachers extends an umbrella of credibility over their position and further encourages their role as an important resource for inexperienced staff. This topic is discussed in more detail later in this chapter under the heading recommendations for practice.

The Experience Impact

Another common thread among the emerging themes was the impact of experience on participants' perception. This impact was particularly notable in reference to interactions with supervisors. RA participants were consistently able to identify times they were greater at ease when speaking to SRAs than their professional staff supervisors. Conversely, SRA participants had very few such distinctions.

One such example was criticism. Several RA participants identified potential criticism as an influencing factor in who they sought for advice. However, with the one exception of a disputed performance evaluation, RA participants were unable to provide examples of times they felt unduly or unfairly criticized. Another example was difficult conversations. RA participants largely preferred to avoid difficult conversations with supervisors but respected and appreciated their supervisor's advice in such conversations.

SRA participants spoke of supervisors differently. SRAs noted they were comfortable discussing difficult topics with supervisors, were unafraid they might be met by criticism, and expressed a general appreciation of the different perspective their supervisors might have. These participants' description of intellectual discourse was significantly different than the RA perception of similar conversations.

Even the idea of contacting a supervisor was perceived differently by RA and SRA participants. Whereas RAs noted they did not wish to "bother" their supervisors,

SRAs spoke of their supervisors as knowledgeable resources. Consistently the topic of communication with supervisors was divided along experience lines. When presented with some of the aforementioned RA comments, SRAs suggested these responses were likely the result of lack of positional experience. SRAs were further able to identify differences in how they perceived their position, their duties, and their supervisors between their first and second years. Interestingly, the SRA participants shared they had not realized the shift in their perception until their participation in this study.

These results are not surprising. Literature tells us when employees have positive relationships with their supervisors, they will eventually develop sense of comfort and ease around their supervisor (Spector, 1997; Willemyns, Gallois, & Callan, 2010). Employees report being less concerned with making mistakes and are more willing to approach their supervisor for guidance and support (Spector). Employees also develop a deeper sense of trust with good supervisors (Willemyns, Gallois, & Callan). It is noted that these same results are not seen when employees have negative or "bad" supervisors (Spector; Willemyns, Gallois, & Callan).

Mentor Teacher Distinction

In my first interview, I noted the participant rarely distinguished between roles of teaching, information provision, and role modeling. These concepts were intermixed and the lack of distinction was problematic for me. Failing to separate these roles inhibited my ability to individually examine them and clearly understand the participant's perceptions and responses to my questions. The participant in the first interview expressed frustration with my requests to distinguish between concepts. She repeatedly noted serving as a mentor and teaching skills to less experienced staff were too similar to

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separate. While noting her concern, I established definitions to distinguish between two keys areas, mentorship and teaching.

As noted previously, I utilized Bulte et al.'s (2007) definitions of information provider and role model to inform my definitions of teacher and mentor. The definitions I crafted were provided to all other research participants to differentiate between *teacher* and *mentor*. Even with this distinction, participants continued to use teacher and mentor interchangeably. While vexing during the course of research, this is not a surprising outcome. I found several authors who tended to use peer mentorship and peer teaching interchangeably (Ender & Newton, 2000; Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2000; Stoltz, 2005; Tien et al, 2002).

Researcher Observations

As noted previously, the research site is also my place of employment. All study participants reported to the department I oversee, although they were least three levels of supervision removed from me. I largely attempted to distance myself from study participants in order to mitigate any undue influence upon participants or my interpretation of events. However, this dual role afforded me the opportunity to make observations regarding three instances where participant reflection was in conflict with the observations of others. These three instances are discussed below.

The first illustration occurred while attempting to answer the second research question: who do the SRAs (experienced staff) look to, if anyone, for guidance or models as they attempt the role of peer trainer? Responses to this question were evenly divided. Two SRAs noted they did not seek guidance from anyone while two others noted they had reviewed their training plan with at least one other person. When asked if the

aforementioned conversations influenced their execution of the training session, responses were again divided with most respondents indicating minimal alterations were made based on the input from others.

These statements are contrary to the observations of the professional staff supervisors. In meetings and conversations outside the context of this study, I was present while professional staff supervisors discussed their advisement role in SRA presentations. My own observations are also dissimilar to the SRA perceptions. During the course of training preparation, I witnessed SRA staff utilize their professional staff and one another for idea generation and general training session planning.

I do not believe the SRA staff were being dishonest when reporting their perceptions. Rather, I think it is most probable they simply forgot. Who, if anyone, they sought guidance from was likely insignificant to them and was not remembered after the passage of four months. As the researcher with the aforementioned research questions in mind, these events were important to me influencing my recall.

The second instance was in response to research question three: to what extent are the three roles of information provider, role model, and facilitator utilized by the experienced student staff? Participants responded SRA staff were both information providers and role models. But two of the five RAs stated they did not think facilitator was an appropriate role for SRAs to play (comparing a facilitator to a referee); the remaining three thought it was an appropriate role but were unable to identify instances of facilitation.

All four SRAs noted it was an appropriate role for SRAs but only two of the four could identify instances when they had served in such a role. All such instances were

outside of training sessions and were only recalled after I provided several possible examples of facilitation. These responses were surprising as I had witnessed all SRA staff serving as facilitators in the semester prior to my study and during the study. During one interview, when I pointed out the SRA interviewee had used group facilitation as part of his training presentation, the SRA noted he did not think that "counted" as it was not a formal event. While training is a formal event, formality is not a prerequisite of facilitation. I think it is more likely perception of self and influence on others is not well understood within the SRA team.

Finally, I asked the SRA participants questions about the experience of others during training. Specifically, I asked SRAs for their perception of the audience's experience during their training presentation. Two of the four participants gave responses aligning with their observer reports. The other two participants did not. In one interview, the SRA respondent stated the audience was attentive but did not speak much. When I shared that her observer reports indicated six participants had asked questions and three more had volunteered at her request, she seemed to be surprised and stated she did not remember that level of participation.

This misalignment between observer report and presenter recollection could be due to the passage of time. If the SRA did not consider her audience participation to be particularly important, it is unlikely she would recall the instance. As a trainer, I know garnering nine unique participants within a 30-minute training session is impressive. As a researcher, I question why the SRA staff member did not also recognize this feat and what implications this recognition failure has for the program of study.

Contribution to Current Literature

As noted in chapter two, I was unable to find any research directly related to my study topic. I was unable to determine the prevalence of the senior resident assistant position, how often this position exists formally (with a separate job description, expectations, and remuneration), and what role the position plays in the training curricular process. While this qualitative case study of a single university experience is also unable to answer these broad questions, it does inform literature in three ways.

First, this study informs the use of resident assistants as teachers. There is research regarding the use of, role of, and expectations of resident assistants to serve as teachers or educators to the general residential student population (Arvidson, 2003; Blimling, 2011; Sargent, 2010; Schaller & Wagner, 2007); however, I was unable to find research related to utilizing these same resident assistants to educate one another at any level. This study's review of participant training perceptions begins to fill this gap in the literature.

Participants in this study recommended the selective use of experienced student staff as training educators, focusing the student staff efforts in teaching day to day tasks and experiential components job duties (such as a practice incident report writing and duty or safety rounds). They also recommended the inclusion of experienced student staff in the training curriculum creation. Participants expressed a student voice would enrich the eventual execution of training and provide insight professional staff might not offer.

The second manner this study informs existing literature is around the topic of near peer teachers. While the bulk of near peer research has been within the medical field (Buckley & Zamora, 2007; Burgess et al.,2014; Field et al., 2007; Harvey et al.

2012; Nelson et al., 2013; Qureshi et al., 2013; Silbert & Lake, 2012; Stone et al., 2013; Ten Cate & Durning, 2007; Woods et al., 2014), other disciplines are beginning to use this model for instruction and to create opportunities for career experience specifically using "senior" or experienced students to train "junior" or less experienced students (Johnson et al., 2000; Khan et al., 2009; Prince, 2004; Wood & Tanner, 2012).

Prior to this study, this model had yet to be examined within student affairs. I believe this study is the first to apply near peer theory to the student affairs profession and the outcomes appear to support usage of the theory within student affairs. For example, research into academic peer teachers found student led session outcomes were comparable to those sessions led by seasoned faculty (Kassab et al., 2005; Nnodim, 1997). In my study, participants reported similar perceptions, noting they perceived peer presented sessions to be an effective teaching medium and (depending on the topic, see Chapter Four for topical lists) believed their peers to be as knowledgeable as professional staff. Research also indicates academic near peer teachers are seen as more approachable than a traditional teacher or trainer (Zijdenbos et al., 2010). Participants in my study expressed similar sentiment and highlighted topics they preferred to be presented by fellow student staff including any topics with tangible outcomes.

Finally, the concept of mentorship within the resident assistant position is not new. However, most previous applications of mentorship were specific to resident assistants mentoring residential students (Blimling, 2015; Woods, Burgess, & Heflin, 2010). An outcome of this study was the use of experienced resident assistants as position and academic mentors for inexperienced resident assistant staff. The concept of mentorship in its various forms was the topic most extensively discussed by study

participants. All study participants, regardless of gender or experience level, noted the importance and desirability of having SRAs serve as mentors to the RA staff. The rationale behind these responses largely focused on concepts of similar others (Brown & Inouye, 1978; Faraji-Radm, et al., 2015; Shteynberg & Galinsky, 2011).

From the general mentorship theme, three subthemes emerged: position mentors, academic mentors, and managing supervisors. The most frequently mentioned area was position mentorship, or the role modeling focused on the execution day to day resident assistant duties. Experienced staff serving as academic mentors and assisting inexperience staff to manage supervisor expectations was also a highlight of this study.

Recommendations for Practice

Examining how resident assistants perceive and understand their training is a step toward positively influencing the training curriculum and the overall resident assistant experience. In this section, I will discuss three recommendations for practice. The first is the revision of the training curriculum to be inclusive of student participation during planning, topic selection, and eventual execution. The second explores senior resident assistant scope and responsibility specifically related to staff mentorship. Finally, I discuss the formalization of the senior resident assistant experience.

Training Curriculum

A common conversation thread among the SRA participants was their lack of involvement in the planning stages of training. They were unable to articulate the goals of training, express rationale for topic selection or length of topic presentation. They were also unable to outline the learning outcomes for any program including the program they were responsible for presenting. All four SRA participants expressed desire for greater

involvement in the planning processes. While study participants did not utilize this language, they were discussing the need for student voices in curriculum design. SRA participants acknowledged being vaguely aware of what they referred to as "a larger plan" or "something bigger than the program I'm presenting," but stated they felt distant and removed from the creation process.

Strategic inclusion of experienced student staff in elements of training preparation including curriculum design, goal creation, writing learning outcomes, and execution of educational programming is recommended. Allowing student staff to actively engage in the preparation process encourages greater construction of content knowledge (Ueckert & Gess-Newsome, 2008). Participants in this study were eager to learn more about the training creation process and expressed unique ideas for educational topics.

This recommendation should not imply all suggestions made by resident assistants are to be strictly adhered to. Some of the participant proposals were either impractical (e.g., a 3 day treat at a spa to relax from the stress of training), made poor use of student money, or were uninformed by theory and experience. An example of the latter was a suggestion to move all training to online learning that could be done at the learner's pace in the comfort of their residential room. I find this suggestion intriguing and believe it likely has a limited place in the future of student leader training. However, moving all aspects of training to online learning significantly changes the training dynamic. Participants lose the value of discussion with peers, the general social norming experience, and the opportunity to naturally build teams, all of which are vital in the leadership learning process (Ostrom, 2014).

Greater utilization of SRA staff as peer teachers is also recommended. As noted previously, the interconnectivity between their roles of mentor and teacher is one to be embraced and leveraged by institutions. The tightly bond connection between these roles suggests SRAs are in a unique role to continue the training education to everyday interactions. This continuous learning cycle has been found to be impactful on employee satisfaction and the execution of duties (Mulholland, Zdrahal, & Domingue; 2005).

Further, should the expansion of SRA peer teaching duties continue to be an effective mechanism of instruction, there are implications for the inclusion of this model in the peer mentor responsibilities. Currently peer mentors at the research site are assigned to a freshmen seminar class and their duties range from assisting the faculty teacher to sitting as a class participant. The near peer model and the results of this study imply expanding their role to one of occasional peer teacher would be desirable by the learner without sacrificing the academic integrity of the class (Nnodim 1997).

In my experience, resident assistant training paradigms do not differ significantly between universities whether they be public, private, or state sponsored schools. Given this assumption, it is reasonable to suggest the inclusion of a near peer model for experienced student leaders at other institutions. It is also reasonable to suggest this model may have implication outside of formal training experiences.

As noted previously, I believe limited inclusion of online learning does have a place in leadership training. A close examination of the purpose and learning outcome of each educational session is likely to yield a range of topics lending themselves to video presentation and/or online discussion groups. For example, a common reading with discussion prompts could be utilized over the summer months in preparation for the 2

week fall training events. Experienced student staff could be involved in the section of the book, creation of prompts, and moderation of the discussion boards. Involvement with intentionality allows student staff to be more active in their learning process as well as immediately demonstrates their mentorship capabilities to newly hired staff.

Staff Mentorship

Another common discussion thread among participants was the extent to which SRA staff is utilized in formal mentorship capacities. The general consensus by SRA participants was the job description was insufficient, expectations were not clearly outlined or communicated (these two topics are discussed more in the next section), and SRA staff should be given more specific mentor tasks. Creating formal and specific learning outcomes for mentors and mentees will guide the intentional selection of tasks associated with the mentor experience (Suskie, 2009). The learning outcomes should identify what the learner will learn or be able to do at the conclusion of the academic year.

In addition to the tasks informed by the creation of learning outcomes, three other experiences are recommended. The first is the creation of a mentor group program. The goal of this task is to utilize experienced staff to teach inexperienced staff how to host a large-scale program. This experience would cover all aspects of program planning and execution including idea generation, budget creation, program proposal submission, management of details, program presentation, and evaluation. Mentor groups would be limited to four staff to ensure all members received an opportunity to have a significant learning experience.

The second experience involves revision of existing department committees to allow SRA staff the opportunity to co-chair with a professional staff member. Placing SRA staff in this role lends immediate credibility to the SRA staff and provides assistance to professional staff in managing the details of committee organization. This change would also provide an additional resource to the RA staff who serve on each committee. As RA participants in this study reported they were more likely reach out to SRAs and attempt to avoid "bothering" professional staff, the addition of an SRA co-chair is likely to be well-received.

Finally, SRA participants report seeking a more formal means to communicate with their supervisors regarding mentees. These participants recommended two courses of action. First, they suggested having an SRA staff meeting once a month for 30 minutes immediately prior to general staff meeting. The meeting would consist of the supervision staff and the SRAs and would focus on the RA staff. Topics of conversation would include overall staff morale, rhythm of the year or upcoming events, staff academics, and items of concern. The second recommendation is to add 15 minutes to the SRA meeting time with their direct supervisor for the express purpose of discussing said SRA's mentees. Topics of discussion would be similar to those listed for staff meeting with the private meeting allowing for deeper discussion of each mentee.

SRA participants also expressed concerns with the mentor/mentee assignment process. In the current process staff selection for the upcoming year occurs in March. Those staff selected for the next academic year then attend an all staff meeting in April. The staff are not together again until training in August. Mentor/mentee assignments are made over the summer months by the supervisory staff and are based on perceived

personality types. This process limits the amount of time supervisors have to observe staff dynamics. If mentor/mentee assignments occurred in the second week of training, supervisors would have additional time to observe their teams and make a more informed choice. This intentional and informed group assignment could positively impact the staff dynamic and create more effective learning environments.

Mentor assignments are also currently made across campus. This means mentors are geographically distant from their mentees. Both SRA and RA participants mentioned this as a concern and noted they were more likely to seek guidance from an SRA closer in physical proximity than to contact their assigned mentor. The rationale behind the cross campus assignments was to expose resident assistants to other staff members they might not normally contact. Based on feedback from participants, this goal was not realized and appears to hinder the mentor/mentee relationship. I recommend ensuring mentors and assigned mentees work within the same staff structure. Alternately, multiple mentors could be assigned to each mentee. Some research suggests having multiple mentors assigned to mentees positively correlates to enhanced learning (Baugh & Scandura, 1999).

RA participants expressed concerns associated with bothering supervisors, getting into trouble for making mistakes, or fear their supervisors believed they were incapable of doing their job. These concerns were limited to RA participants with SRA participants specifically nothing their positional experience eliminated similar concerns. Ensuring mentor parings were part of the same staffing structure would allow the SRA mentors to personally observe RA and supervisor interaction. Organizing the supervision and mentor

support in this manner might assist RAs in overcoming the previously mentioned concerns.

Formalization of Senior Resident Experience

The SRA experience was another area of concern for study participants. SRA participants noted the job description was insufficient, expectations were not clearly outlined or communicated, the SRA staff selection process was weak, and the training offered specific to SRA duties was inadequate. I recommend three responses to these concerns. The first is to research SRA job descriptions and best practice at other institutions. Use this research to revise the job description and clearly document duties and expectations. Involve the existing SRA staff in this procedure to encourage ownership of the process and outcomes and to engender loyalty to the department and their supervisors (Roehling, Roehling, & Moen, 2001).

Secondly, conduct a candid review of the current staff selection process. All four SRA participants and one RA participant criticized the very process by which they were hired noting the process was not selective and failed to "select the best of the best." The RA participant noted, "Not everyone deserved to be a senior RA but you guys (sic) hire everyone." The SRA selection process is the method used by the department to hire staff mentors. If this process is significantly flawed, the department risks employing unsuitable mentors and negatively influencing the resident assistant team. A thorough review, potentially conducted by a colleague outside of the department, is recommended to ensure selection process integrity.

The final concern is the quality and content of the SRA training specific to their mentorship duties. It was unclear if the content was truly lacking or if study participants

simply disliked the training they received. However, a review of the training schedule revealed training goals and learning outcomes were not established for SRA training. Creating training goals and outcomes is a necessary first step in the training process. Additionally, the goals would guide in the selection of training topics while the outcomes assist presenters in development of their training presentations.

Additional Recommendation

There is one other concern noted by study participants sizable enough to include in this discussion: the use of marijuana. As noted previously, while marijuana possession and use is a violation of the university's code of conduct, the university is within 10 miles of locations where marijuana may be legally consumed. The students participating in this research were uncomfortable discussing this topic but did share enough to note they had not received clear direction on this topic or the consequences to them should they return to campus after having used marijuana. Clarifying expectations and university policy is recommended.

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Recommendations for Future Research

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I began this study to understand student perceptions of peer presented training specifically within the confines of the resident assistant and senior resident assistant experience. My goal was to inform my profession around the topic of training curricula. During the course of completing this study, I found several other research paths that were unexplored or not fully explored. Below are three potential areas of future research.

Staffing Models

Throughout this study I was frustrated by the lack of research around the subject of resident assistant staffing models. In my career experience and through conversations with colleagues, my perception is many institutions employ very similar staffing models

consisting of resident assistants and a variation of a senior resident assistant. Although titles vary by institution (e.g., a resident assistant at one institution is a community assistant at another institution), I believe job expectations and duties are generally very similar. A quantitative survey focused on staffing models, what titles staff carry, and what duties or expectations are commonly in job descriptions would provide good general knowledge to the profession and would have informed this study.

As previously noted, in my experience most institutions have some variation of a senior resident assistant position. It is also my perception that the duties, expectations, remuneration, and titles of this type of position vary significantly. At some institutions all resident assistants, regardless of experience or expectation, carry the same title. At others, titles may vary but job descriptions and expectations of performance are the same. Even at institutions where titles, remuneration, and job descriptions are the same, there are increased expectations of student staff entering their second or third year of employment. A staffing model study focused on the level of employment and differences in title, job descriptions, remuneration, and expectation would inform the professional and institutions seeking to create to evaluate their staffing models.

Training Curricula

I was surprised to learn significant research in the area of resident assistant training and curricular design is not available. What little research has been done suggests curriculum coordinators are not prepared for their tasks, that training tends to focus on instruction instead of learning, and there is little evidence to show that student development theory or assessment is present in training curricula (Koch, 2012).

Additional research in overall curriculum design, those who coordinate training, and how training is executed is needed (Koch, 2012). Either within these proposed studies, or as standalone inquiries, I believe it would be informative to query if and how institutions utilize student staff. Are students part of the curricular design? Are they members of training committees? Are they responsible for drafting or assessing learning outcomes? Are they knowledgeable about student development theory? Are they expected to execute training functions? If so, are those functions transactional and logistical in nature or are they focused on teaching other student staff? If student staff are utilized, why? Are the primary motivators monetary constraints, mentorship based, or the desire to provide students with additional leadership opportunities? There are almost certainly other answers to the question of why students are utilized.

It might be just as informative to query if experienced student staff do not play a role in an organization's training structure why they were excluded. Do these answers vary based on an organization's biographic and demographic structure? Are small schools more likely to rely on models utilizing student staff? Are differences seen in public vs. private institutions? Are there relationships between types of institutions (e.g., research based, liberal arts focused, or technical schools) and the use of student staff? How does institutional and department funding influence these decisions? Are auxiliary based residential life programs more or less likely to utilize student staff trainers? A broad ranging quantitative study focused on the factors correlating to the types of utilization of student staff could be very informative to the profession.

Professional Staff Perspective

In this study's original design, I proposed conducting interviews with the professional staff responsible for direct supervision of the resident assistant and senior resident assistant student teams. I hypothesized the professional staff were best situated to observe long-term application of training sessions to actual employment situations; I hoped an interview with the professional staff could provide additional insight and commentary regarding how successfully (or not) these learning sessions were utilized in everyday duties. I also planned to ask professional staff if they were able to draw any conclusions regarding the training sessions that seemed more impactful to their teams. Were these sessions conducted by student or professional staff? Was there a particular presentation style the staff seemed to prefer? Did the personality or charisma of the presenter seem to influence which sessions student staff most preferred?

I also wanted to understand their perspective of utilizing student staff as presenters. Did they view student staff presenters as a necessary evil, a means to provide leadership opportunities to students, or something more middle ground? Do they see benefits and/or costs of utilizing student staff in this manner? Does the training experience of inexperience staff suffer if experienced student staff serve as trainers?

Lastly, I hoped to query the professional staff regarding their experience as an observer. My intention was to gain additional insight into team dynamics a casual observer might miss. While professional staff did serve as observers to the training sessions, I was unable to gain the depth of commentary on the observer report that might have come through in an interview. Unfortunately, the professional staff in this study did view me as an indirect (two levels removed) supervisor. Ultimately, this connection may

be perceived to be too close to reasonably ensure the staff did not feel coercion to participate. Should a similar study be conducted, involving the professional staff would likely highlight areas I was unable to review in this study.

Summary

This qualitative case study examined experienced and inexperienced student leader perceptions of student presented training sessions at a small private Catholic university. Examination and coding of participant responses determined training sessions presented by experienced student staff were perceived to be a successful teaching medium.   Experienced student staff were seen as knowledgeable, able to convey their knowledge effectively, and potentially more approachable than professional staff. These findings are similar to research regarding academic near peer educators. The significance of this research comes from the alignment of this study's findings with near peer model. Further, this study marks the first time this model has been utilized in student affairs research.

This research highlights the importance of the roles of experienced student staff as teachers, mentors, and supervisors. Participants believed the first two roles were appropriate for experienced staff to fulfill but expressed strong opposition to the use of experienced staff as supervisors. Study participants stated they believed the use of peer to peer training should be expanded and include greater roles for SRAs in planning the training curriculum as well as the addition of more peer to peer presented programs. This was an important finding, but it could simply mean student leaders enjoyed being taught by other students. Another interesting observation was the impact of experience. The years of positional experience appeared to impact participants' perception of trainers.

This impact was particularly notable in interactions with supervisors. I also noted

participant perceptions contradicted my observations in two areas. These were: 1) if

SRAs seek training presentation planning advice, and 2) SRAs facilitating conversations.

Recommendations for practice include a revision of the training curriculum to be

inclusive of student participation during planning, topic selection, and eventual

execution. The second recommendation explores senior resident assistant scope and

responsibility specifically related to staff mentorship. Finally, I recommend formalization

of the senior resident assistant experience including a review of job descriptions,

expectations, selection process, and training.

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APPENDIX A: OBSERVER REPORT

The following report will be used by professional staff members as they observe the training sessions. Two observers were assigned to each presentation room with each completing an observer report. The intention of this report is to have an in-the-moment record of the professional staff observations to inform the focus groups and individual interviews

Instructions: Answer the below questions based on your observation of the presentation. Observations are intended to be "in the moment" and therefore require a checklist for each program to be submitted immediately following the conclusion of the learning session.

1. Presentation Name:_____

2. The presentation style is best defined as (circle only one):

    Lecture style

    Limited interactive learning (some Q and A exists, but largely lecture format)

    Interactive learning (participants interact a great deal with presenter and other participants)

    Small group learning (participants primarily work in small groups)

    Other (define):_____

3. Important hallmarks of this program include:

4.   Please notate (by "tic" mark) the number of times participants:

Asked a question:_____

Provided comment to another's question:_____

Volunteered as requested by presenter:_____

Other participation:_____

5.   Did this program seem generally well received? _____

6.   Other Comments:

APPENDIX B: RESIDENT ASSISTANT TRAINING SESSION

EVALUATION

At the conclusion of each presentation, the student learner will complete an anonymous evaluation form. While ideally this form would measure perceptions of learning, I think it is most likely to measure satisfaction with the program presentation. However, these forms will provide useful information during the focus groups as I am able to remind the participants of the group perception of each presentation. These forms are internal to the department and not created or used specifically for the purposes of this dissertation research.

Resident Assistant Training Session Evaluations

Program Title: _____   Position Level: **RA   SRA**

Using the below scale, please answer questions 1-5:

1 Fair   2 Poor   3 Average   4 Very Good   5 Excellent

1. Your knowledge level prior to this program	1 2 3 4 5
2. Your knowledge level at the conclusion of this program	1 2 3 4 5
3. The presenter's preparedness	1 2 3 4 5
4. The presenter's knowledge in this subject area	1 2 3 4 5
5. The ability of the presenter to engage you	1 2 3 4 5

Using the below scale, answer questions 6-9:

1 Strongly Disagree   2 Disagree 3 Neutral   4 Agree   5 Strongly Agree

6. This program has prepared me for my position	1 2 3 4 5
7. I will use what I've learned here in my position	1 2 3 4 5
8. This program was beneficial to me	1 2 3 4 5
9. This program should be presented again	1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT EMAILS

Recruitment Email - Resident Assistant

During staff training you were informed Tina Sheppard was conducting research around peer presented training programs. This research will be used both as partial completion toward Sheppard's doctorate degree and by Marymount University as the Residential Life department examines the senior resident assistant position.

You are receiving this email to invite you to participate in a focus group. The focus group is expected to last1 to 1.5 hours. You are under no obligation to attend this focus group and participation or nonparticipation will in no way impact your current or future employment with Marymount University.

You have two opportunities for focus groups (listed below). To participate, you need only show up to your desired focus group. You must be 18 years of age to participate.

Date 1
Meeting Room Location 1
Time 1

Date 2
Meeting Room Location 2
Time 2

If you have any questions, you may contact Tina Sheppard through the below information.

Tina Sheppard
tfsd76@mail.missouri.edu (academic email address not associated with Marymount University)
573-XXX-XXXX (personal cell phone not associated with Marymount University)
[phone number redacted]

Recruitment Email - Senior Resident Assistant

During staff training you were informed Tina Sheppard was conducting research around peer presented training programs. This research will be used both as partial completion toward Sheppard's doctorate degree and by Marymount University as the Residential Life department examines the senior resident assistant position.

You are receiving this email to invite you to participate in a focus group. The focus group is expected to last1 to 1.5 hours. You are under no obligation to attend this focus group and participation or nonparticipation will in no way impact your current or future employment with Marymount University.

Your focus group time is listed below. To participate, you need only show up to your desired focus group. You must be 18 years of age to participate.

Date 1
Meeting Room Location 1
Time 1

If you have any questions, you may contact Tina Sheppard through the below information.

Tina Sheppard
tfsd76@mail.missouri.edu (academic email address not associated with Marymount University)
573-XXX-XXXX (personal cell phone not associated with Marymount University) [phone number redacted]

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Consent for Participation in Interview Research: Resident Assistant Peer Training:
Perceptions Surrounding the Use and Effectiveness of Experienced Student Leaders as
Trainers and Facilitators at One Small Private Catholic Institution

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Tina Sheppard as part her completion of her doctoral degree. I understand the intent of this research project is to expand the body of knowledge around peer presented training programs or training presented by experienced student employees to less experienced student employees. I will be one of up to 30 people participating in a focus group for this research.   I understand that:

1. The focus group is expected to last 1.5 hours.
2. The focus group will be hosted by Tina Sheppard using a guided interview format.
3. The questions asked will address my views on peer presented training programs at Marymount University. I understand that the primary purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of my perception of peer presented training.
4. My real name will not be used. I understand it will be necessary to identify participants in the dissertation by position (senior resident assistant, resident assistant) and possibly gender (determination made by the researcher based on presented gender; I will not be asked my gender). I understand I may be quoted using an alias name of my choosing.
5. The notes and records created during this research are kept solely with Tina Sheppard and raw data will not be made available to any other individual including other professionals at Marymount University. This data will be kept in either a locked file cabinet or in password protected files (depending on the item).
6. I may withdraw from part or all of this study at any time.
7. Results from the focus groups will be included in Tina Sheppard's doctoral dissertation and may also be included in manuscripts submitted to professional journals for publication.
8. Results from the focus groups will be used internally to review and revise (as needed) the duties of the senior resident assistant position.
9. Tina Sheppard has attempted to eliminate the perception of coercion to participate in this study in the following ways: she does not directly supervise any participants of this study, she was purposely removed from the hiring processes for the upcoming year, and she was purposely removed from staff evaluation oversight.
10. I am free to participate or not to participate without prejudice. My choice to participate or not will have no bearing on my current or future employment with Campus and Residential Services.
11. I must be 18 years of age to participate.
12. Because of the small number of participants, up to 30, I understand that there is some risk that I may be identified as a participant of this study. No other risks greater than those experienced in day to day life are foreseen.
13. There are not benefits to me participating in this study.
14. The focus group will be audio recorded; I understand these recordings will be transcribed. I also understand the audiotape and transcription must be kept for seven years. These records will be secured in a safe at the researcher's home. At all times, I will only be identified using the alias name of my choosing.
15. The study protocol was approved by Marymount IRB on April 21, 2016 and by University of Missouri IRB on April 28, 2016.
16. This consent form will be retained by Tina Sheppard for seven years after the conclusion of the study.

17. If I have questions regarding this study, I may contact Tina Sheppard; her dissertation advisor, Dr. Casandra Harper; the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board, or the Marymount University Institutional Review Board through the below information:

Tina Sheppard: tfsd76@mail.missouri.edu (academic email address not associated with Marymount University)
573-xxx-xxxx(personal cell phone not associated with Marymount University)
Dr. Casandra Harper: harpercas@missouri.edu ; 573-882-xxxx
University of Missouri Institutional Review Board: 489 McReynolds Hall, Columbia, Missouri; 573-882-xxxx
Marymount Institutional Review Board: irb@marymount.edu; 703-526-xxxx
[phone numbers redacted]

I understand the above statement and I hereby consent to participate in the research as it has been explained to me:

_____   _____

Participant's Signature   Date

_____   _____

Researcher's Signature   Date

APPENDIX E: DISCUSSION PROTOCOL

Discussion Protocol

I. Welcome

   a. Thank you for participating. Introduction of Researcher.

   b. Overview of study.

   c. Provide consent form. Discuss form line by line. Ask if there are any clarifying questions. Ask participants to sign consent form.

II. Guidelines

   a. There are no right or wrong answers as I am seeking your perception of events.

   b. You will be asked to provide an alias or pseudonym. During our interview/focus group and in any subsequent documentation, you will be referred to by your pseudonym.

   c. Please be respectful of others and allow them to finish their statements prior to providing your thoughts.

   d. Please turn off or silence your cell phone for the duration of our conversation.

   e. Please remember what is discussed here is confidential and should not be taken outside of this room.

   f. If you prefer not to answer a question, you can be silent or say "pass".

   g. I will be taking notes during our conversation.

   h. Do you have questions before we start?

III. Focus group/Interview

   a. Request permission to audio record.

   b. Turn on the recording.

   c.   Use established focus group questions; allow flexibility so the conversation may take a natural path leading to questions that might not be on the original question sheet.

IV.   Wrap up/Thank you

   a.   Thank participants.

   b.   Remind them if they have any other thoughts or comments after the focus/group or interview, they may contact me. Contact information is on their copy of the consent form or on recruitment emails.

APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Focus Group Questions - Resident Assistant (Inexperienced Staff)

1. Tell me your overall impressions of winter training?

    a. What did you like?

    b. What would you change?

2. What were your impressions of X program?

    a. What did you learn?

    b. Was it helpful?

    c. Do you believe these training sessions prepared you to complete the duties of

       your position?

3. What were your impressions of the presenters?

    a. Where they knowledgeable about the topic?

    b.   Could they convey their knowledge?

    c. Do you consider them to be effective teachers?

4. What are your thoughts regarding having student staff   presenters?

    a. What are the benefits of a student presenter?

    b. What are the challenges of a student presenter?

    c. Do these staff have a better understanding of your position/role than

       professional staff?

    d. Is the presenter a reliable information provider?

    e. Would you consider this staff member a role model? If yes, how so?

    f. Did this staff member facilitate conversation among audience members? If

       yes, what were perceptions of this interaction?

5. In general (including outside of training situations), who do you contact if you have questions regarding a situation or policy?

    a. Does it depend on the situation/policy?

    b. Are there ever instances when you are more comfortable speaking to a senior resident assistant than an RHC (residence hall coordinator) or AC (area coordinator)? If so, what are those times?

6. Do you have any other comments to share?

Focus Group Questions - Senior Resident Assistant (Experienced Staff)

1.   Tell me your overall impressions of winter training.

   a. What did you like?

   b. What would you change?

2.   Describe your experience as a training presenter.

   a. Where you comfortable?

   b. Did you enjoy presenting?

   c. Do you believe you taught others?

   d. Would you like to present again?

   e. What did you learn?

3.   You were given copies of your presentation evaluations. Tell me about those.

   a. Were you surprised or disappointed in the evaluations?

   b. Did the evaluations change your perception of how you performed?

4.   What are your thoughts regarding having student staff presenters?

   a. What are the benefits of a student presenter?

   b. What are the challenges of a student presenter?

   c. Do student staff have a better understanding of your position/role than

       professional staff?

   d. Did you seek assistance from anyone in planning your training session? If so,

       who?

5.   In general (including outside of training situations), do you find yourself as the

       first or primary contact if an RA has a questions about a situation or policy?

     a. Does it depend on the situation/policy?

b.   If so, in what ways?

c.   Do you believe there are times when an RA is more comfortable speaking to an

SRA than professional staff?

6.   Do you have any other comments to share?

APPENDIX G: RESIDENT ASSISTANT JOB DESCRIPTION

Resident Assistant Position Description
Marymount University 2016-2017
Office of Campus and Residential Services

The RA is an integral position in the Residential Life program. S/he is responsible for the successful provision of programs and services that contribute to student academic, personal, and professional success. S/he encourages student involvement and leadership in an assigned community in support of the university's academic mission. The Residence Life Department encourages all qualified residents to apply. The invitation to apply is inclusive and is not limited to ethnicity, age, gender, religious preference, sexual orientation, or physical ability.

Required Qualifications

To hold a Resident Assistant (RA) position, a student must fulfill the following academic criteria:
- RAs must be enrolled as a full-time Marymount student. RAs seeking more credits than the maximum must seek prior approval from the Assistant Director of Residential Education.
- Must maintain a minimum 2.5 cumulative GPA and a 2.5 semester GPA throughout employment.
- Resident Assistants must have reached sophomore standing by the start of employment.
- All RAs must successfully complete a background check before beginning their position.
- Resident Assistants must have lived in the residence halls for at least 1 full semester prior to employment. (exceptions must be reviewed and determined by the Assistant Director of Residence Education)

To hold a Resident Assistant (RA) position, a student must fulfill the following criteria:
- Ability to commit to the position for a full academic year.
- Must remain in good standing with the University and with the department.
- Must be eligible to live on the campus.
- Must not be on academic or disciplinary probation.
Failure to successfully meet any of these requirements will result in performance discipline and/or termination.

Preferred Qualifications
- 2.75 cumulative GPA prior to employment start.
- Lived in a residential community for a minimum of 1 year.

Job Expectations

The following job expectations are outlined to assist both RAs and residents in their endeavors to be academically, personally, and professionally successful.

Role Model/Student Leader

- The RA will abide by all University rules and regulations maintaining the highest level of academic and personal integrity.
- Encourage an academic environment in the residence hall complex
- Model behavior that emulates a Marymount University service-oriented student lifestyle.

Academic Support/Resident Involvement

- Serve as an educator, counselor, administrator and role model for approximately 20-50 residents living on a designated floor or wing within university sanctioned housing.
- Support the academic, personal, and professional growth of all residential students.
- Encourage and support residents with their involvement in hall governance, programming, and campus activities.
- Assist residents in organizing a variety of activities that will foster a sense of community and unity:
  - Help residents adjust to roommates, floormates, the residence halls, and the university.
  - Establish, develop, and maintain a healthy relationship with each member of your community.
  - Work cooperatively with residents to maintain the rights and privacy of all residents
  - Assist residents with their personal and group concerns.
- Maintain confidentiality except when doing so may endanger the well-being of an individual and/or the community or as prescribed by law.
- Carry out department guidelines for helping residents and dealing with emergencies.
- Interact with each resident on floor/wing

Programming/Community Development

- Provide educational and personal development opportunities to all residential students and to work proactively in support of the University community in its missions, goals, policies, and regulations.
- Provide the minimum required programs to build and enhance community as established by the Office of Campus and Residential Services.
- Support Department sponsored events such as maryTHON, Halloweenfest and Pink Dinner.
- Provide and maintain resource information on bulletin boards and other resources which contribute to student academic, personal, and professional success.
- Serve as a source of information and resource for students who need assistance from university support services.

- Maintain availability for 10 community hours per week posted on your door.

Policy Enforcement and Crisis Response
- The RA will take appropriate action and reinforce University policy towards individuals who do not abide by the university rules and regulations as defined in the Student Code of Conduct.
- The RA will participate in on-call, crisis response rotations and will respond to campus, community, and resident emergencies.

Recruitment and Selection
- RA will support and participate in RA recruitment and staff selection events.
- RA will support and participate in Housing Reapplication and selection events.

Training/Professional Development
Resident Assistants are expected to be active participants in their training and development.
- Attend (or host) at least two department-approved professional development sessions (seminars, webinars, and/or workshops) for fall semester.
- Attend (or host) at least two department-approved professional development sessions (seminars, webinars, and/or workshops) for spring semester.

Administrative Support and Responsibilities
- The RA will carry out, accurately and punctually, all assigned duties and responsibilities outlined in the Terms of Employment.
- The RA is responsible for communicating with their Residence Hall Coordinator as well as Area Coordinator through weekly reports, staff and one on one meetings
- Complete room inventories, damage reports, occupancy reports, work orders, and other reports as assigned.
- The RA will support and perform all opening and closing duties as designated by OCRS.
- Partners and works cooperatively with all staff members and campus/community partners of Marymount University.
- Act as a liaison between the students and professional staff, campus/community partners and OCRS.
- Additional duties may be assigned related to the resident assistant role based on department need.

Commitment
- At least 16 hours per week to the RA position, student interaction, and other related duties.
- Working four required desk hours.
- Written communication and approval from professional staff supervisors for weekday and weekend time away from campus.
- Participate in designated summer activities to prepare for RA training.

- Must be willing to commit to work with supervisor and the Office of Campus and Residential Services staff for the dates outlined below. Dates are subject to adjustment.* Verify with OCRS for specific dates.
    - Available <u>August 10-29, 2016</u> to participate in training and/or work related activities for approximately 40 hours per week.
    - Available to stay on campus until 6pm the day AFTER the last day of final exams to perform fall semester closing duties.
    - Available to return to campus as early as <u>January 4, 2017</u> to perform spring semester opening duties and participate in Spring training <u>January 4-8, 2017.</u>
    - Available to stay on campus through noon the day AFTER commencement to perform closing duties.

Remuneration
- Resident assistants receive a single bedroom (or double bedroom with compensation for the difference between a double and single at the department's discretion)
- Full meal plan of their choice
- $200.00 semester stipend.

PERIOD OF APPOINTMENT
The Resident Assistant (RA) position is a one year academic-year appointment, beginning on <u>August 10, 2016*</u> and concluding on the day AFTER commencement. <u>Please note that RAs are required to work during university break periods (Opening, Thanksgiving Break, Winter Break, Spring Break, Closing, and other times the University is closed for emergencies).</u>

Reappointment for continued employment is contingent upon performance during the entirety of the academic year and satisfactory completion of the reapplication process. Information about the re-application process will be provided late in fall semester.

*The Office of Campus and Residential Services reserves the right adjust dates based on changes in the academic calendar.

Senior Resident Assistant Position Description
Marymount University 2016-2017
Office of Campus and Residential Services

The SRA is an integral position in the Residential Life program. S/he is responsible for the successful provision of programs and services that contribute to student academic, personal, and professional success. The SRA is an educator, mentor and role model to RA staff and residents within the Marymount community. S/he encourages student involvement and leadership in an assigned community in support of the university's academic mission. The Residence Life Department encourages all qualified residents to apply. The invitation to apply is inclusive and is not limited to ethnicity, age, gender, religious preference, sexual orientation, or physical ability.

Required Qualifications

To hold a Senior Resident Assistant (SRA) position, a student must fulfill the following academic criteria:
- Must have full time student status at Marymount University in spring 2016 AND throughout time employed.
- Must maintain a minimum 2.5 semester and cumulative GPA from semester of hire and throughout time employed.
- Complete a housing application prior to accepting the SRA positions.
- Must not be on academic or disciplinary probation.
- Achieved Junior status, or the equivalence of four semesters of academic work
- Minimum of two full semesters of Resident Assistant experience not including summer semesters.
- Participation in an RA fall workshop training
- Full time student while employed.

Preferred Qualifications
- A preferred cumulative GPA to applicants that have a 2.75 or higher. The minimum must be maintained while employed as a SRA.

Job Expectations
The following job expectations are outlined to assist both SRAs and residents in their endeavors to be academically, personally, and professionally successful.

Role Model/Student Leader
- The SRA will abide by all University rules and regulations maintaining the highest level of academic and personal integrity.
- Encourage an academic environment in the residence hall complex
- Model behavior that emulates an Marymount University service-oriented student lifestyle

Staff Mentor
- Serves as a mentor to at least one new RA (mentee) on staff for a full academic year
- Meets bi-weekly with their mentee
- Submit a bi-weekly report on mentor/mentee meetings

Leadership Training
- Present at least one training/in-service session per semester
- Participate in a Senior RA fall training (prior to new RA training in August)
- Participate in a Senior RA spring training (prior to new RA training in January)
- Participate in feedback sessions as needed for additional staff development, department improvement or initiatives.
- Participate in one on one trainings with their mentees, including but not limited to, IR writing, duty rounds and other job functions.

Academic Support/Resident Involvement
- Serve as an educator, counselor, administrator and role model for approximately 20-50 residents who live on a designated floor or wing within university sanctioned housing.
- Supports the academic, personal, and professional growth of all residential students.
- Encourage and support residents with their involvement in hall governance, programming, and campus activities
- Assist residents in organizing a variety of activities that will foster a sense of community and unity:
  - Help residents adjust to roommates, floormates, the residence halls, and the university
  - Establish, develop, and maintain an open relationship with each member of your community
  - Work cooperatively with residents to maintain the rights and privacy of all residents
  - Assist residents with their personal and group concerns
- Maintain confidentiality except when doing so may endanger the well-being of an individual and/or the community
- Carry out department guidelines for helping residents and dealing with emergencies
- Interact with each resident on floor/wing

Programming/Community Development
- Provide educational and personal development opportunities to all residential students and to work proactively in support of the University community in its missions, goals, policies, and regulations.
- Provide the minimum required programs to build and enhance community as established by the Office of Campus and Residential Services.

- Support Department sponsored events such as maryTHON, Halloweenfest and Pink Dinner.
- Provide and maintain resource information on bulletin boards and using other resources which contribute to student academic, personal, and professional success.
- Serve as a source of information and resource for students who need assistance from university support services.
- Maintain availability for 10 community hours per week posted on your door.

Policy Enforcement and Crisis Response
- The SRA will take appropriate action and reinforce University policy towards individuals who do not abide by the university rules and regulations as defined in the Student Code of Conduct.
- The SRA will participate in on call, crisis response rotations and respond to campus, community, and resident emergencies.

Recruitment and Selection
- SRA will support and participate in RA recruitment and staff selection events.
- SRA will support and participate in Housing Reapplication and selection events.

Training/Professional Development
- SRAs are expected to be active participants in their training and development.
- Attend (or host) at least two department-approved professional development sessions (seminars, webinars, and/or workshops) for fall semester.
- Attend (or host) at least two department-approved professional development sessions (seminars, webinars, and/or workshops) for spring semester.

Administrative Support and Responsibilities
- The SRA will carry out, accurately and punctually, all assigned duties and responsibilities outlined in the Terms of Employment.
- The SRA is responsible for communicating with their Residence Hall Coordinator as well as Area Coordinator through weekly reports, staff meetings and one on one meetings
- Complete room inventories, damage reports, occupancy reports, work orders, and other reports as assigned
- The SRA will support and perform all opening and closing duties as designated by OCRS.
- Supports the overall functions of the Office of Campus and Residential Services
- Partners and works cooperatively with all staff members and campus/community partners of Marymount University.
- Act as a liaison between the students and professional staff, campus/community partners and OCRS.
- Additional duties may be assigned related to the resident assistant role based on department need.

Commitment

- Commitment of at least 16 hours per week to the SRA position, student interaction, and other related duties.
- Commitment to working four required desk hours.
- Written communication and approval from professional staff members for weekday and weekend time away from campus.
- Participate in designated summer activities to prepare for RA training.
- Must be willing to commit to work with supervisor and the Office of Campus and Residential Services staff for the dates outlined below: Dates are subject to adjustment. Verify with OCRS for specific dates.
    - Available August 8-29, 2016 to participate in training and/or work related activities for approximately 40 hours per week.
    - Available to stay on campus until 6pm the day AFTER the last day of final exams to perform fall semester closing duties.
    - Available to return to campus as early as January 4, 2017 to perform spring semester opening duties and participate in Spring training January 4-8, 2017.
    - Available to stay on campus through noon the day AFTER commencement to perform closing duties.

Remuneration

- Senior resident assistants receive a single bedroom (or double bedroom with compensation for the difference between a double and single at the department's discretion)
- Full meal plan of their choice
- $300.00 semester stipend.

PERIOD OF APPOINTMENT

The Senior Resident Assistant (SRA) position is a one year academic-year appointment, beginning on August 8, 2016* and concluding on the day AFTER commencement. Please note that RAs are required to work during university break periods (Opening, Thanksgiving Break, Winter Break Spring Break, Closing, and other times the University is closed for emergencies).

Reappointment for continued employment is contingent upon performance during the entirety of the 2016-2017 academic year and satisfactory completion of the re-appointment process. Information about the re-appointment process will be provided late in Fall 2016.

*The Office of Campus and Residential Services reserves the right adjust dates based on changes in the academic calendar.

APPENDIX I: DEPARTMENT ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

Director, Campus and Residential

- Assistant Director, Residential Education
  - Area Coordinators (2)
    - Residence Hall Coordinators (4)
      - Senrior Resident Assistants
        - Resident Assistant
- Assistant Director, Operations
  - Operations Coordinators (2)
    - Operations Graduate Assistant
      - Student Desk Staff
- Coordinator, Commuter & Graduate
  - Graduate Assistant
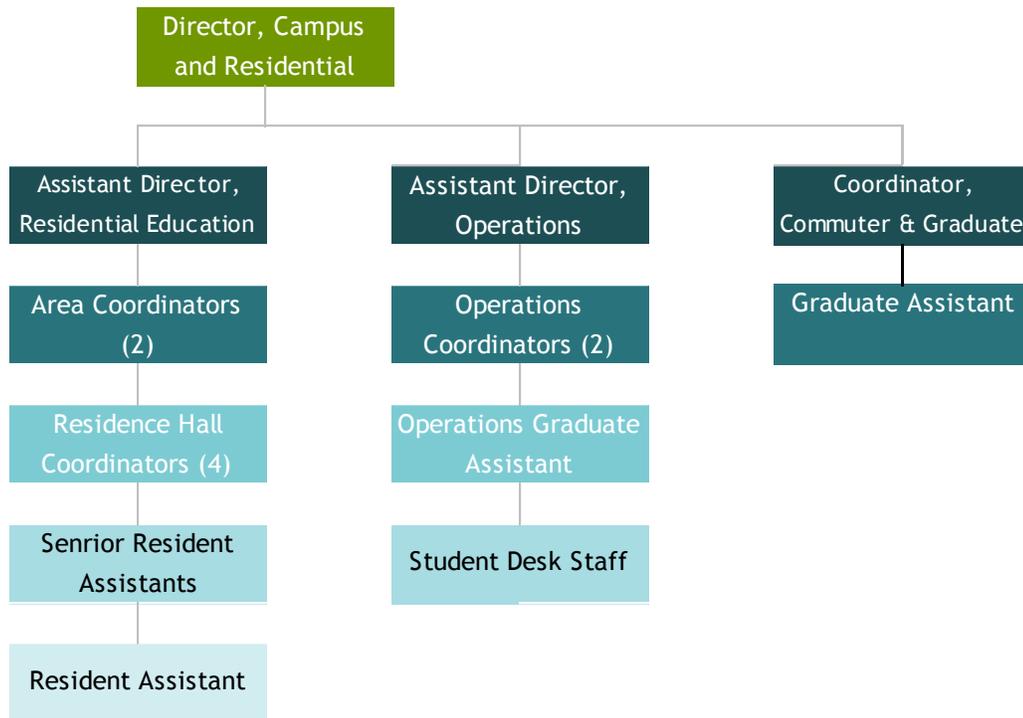
VITA

Tina Sheppard is a Missouri native and obtained her BS in Public Relations from Southeast Missouri State University. While at Southeast, Tina worked for two years as a resident assistant. This experience changed her career path. Tina went to on work at the University of Central Arkansas where she obtained a Master of Science in Community Counseling while working first as a graduate hall director and later as the assistant to the director of housing. During her time at UCA, Tina also served as co-host of the regional SWACUHO conference.

After leaving Arkansas, Tina returned to her home state of Missouri to work for Missouri University of Science and Technology. This provided to be a fortunate move as Tina was to spend almost 17 years at Missouri S&T in four positions including Resident Director, Residential Life Coordinator, Assistant Director of Residential Life, and Director of Residential Life and Housing. During her time as Assistant Director, Tina was responsible for hiring, training, and evaluating three levels of resident assistant; first year resident assistant, senior resident assistant, and head resident. This experience sparked her desire to gain understanding into the student and professional staff perceptions of peer presented training.

Upon becoming Director of Residential Life and Housing, Tina spent 10 years focused on the construction and renovation of existing and newly purchased university housing properties. While she found this work challenging, it limited her interaction with student staff and other student leaders. In 2014, Tina became the Director of Campus and Residential Programs at Marymount University in Arlington, Virginia and renewed her interest in student presented training. In her current position, Tina is responsible for the

oversight of campus parking, ID cards, card access, commuter and graduate programs, housing, and dining services. After the completion of her doctorate degree, Tina intends continue her work in Student Affairs.