

Developing and Validating an Evaluation for Resident Assistants
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December 2024
For AABRI, 2025, San Antonio, TX

Background

RAs are vital in supporting student orientation, engagement, and retention through graduation. As students face increasing personal and emotional challenges, the RA role has grown more demanding and stressful (Boone, 2016; Brandt Brecheisen, 2015). The evolution of RA responsibilities from clerical duties to complex counseling and enforcement roles reflects broader changes in the higher education landscape, including increased stress and burnout among RAs (Arvidson, 2003; Harris, 2021; McKuskey, 2013).

Resident Assistants

The RA role has been recognized for its impact on student development since the 1970s (Astin, 1977, 1993). Serving as RAs has been linked to higher student retention and achievement (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), and significant identity shifts for graduates (Huffman, 2014). Despite this, RAs face significant challenges, including balancing rule enforcement with maintaining peer relationships (Everett & Loftus, 2011). Burnout is prevalent, especially among those assigned to first-year floors (Benedict & Mondloch, 1989; Fuehrer & McGonagle, 1988). Though RAs are evaluated at least once per year, there are no standard evaluation criteria for RAs (Severance, 2015).

Methods

Content analysis was employed to develop a performance evaluation instrument for resident assistants (RAs), addressing the absence of standardized criteria. Content analysis, as described by Saldaña (2015), involves examining documents to identify patterns and derive meaningful categories. Nine evaluation forms were gathered from first-year RA assessments provided by housing supervisors outside the Mid-Atlantic region, using network convenience sampling.

To analyze the evaluation forms, iterative emergent coding (Wienclaw, 2021) was used. This method involved categorizing and listing headings that appeared across multiple forms. Initially, this process identified 59 distinct categories of performance criteria. Through iterative refinement, categories were consolidated into five primary performance criteria presented in next Results section.

Results

1. **Relationships with Residents:** This construct encompasses:
 - Communication, counseling, and conflict resolution skills.
 - Engagement with and understanding of residents.
 - Accessibility, approachability, and availability.
 - Helping skills.

- Embracing diversity.
 - Listening skills and outreach.
 - Policy enforcement and adherence.
 - Being on-call, making duty rounds, and managing crises calmly.
2. **Community Development:** This includes:
- Serving as a role model.
 - Balancing RA responsibilities effectively.
 - Promoting academic development.
3. **Programming:** This category involves:
- Distributing information and maintaining bulletin boards.
 - Awareness of and referrals to campus resources.
 - Support for hall councils or activity boards.
 - Creating both active and passive programming.
4. **Administration:** This construct covers:
- Timeliness, punctuality, and effective time management.
 - Attendance at meetings.
 - Accuracy and follow-through with incident reporting and paperwork.
 - Adherence to check-in/check-out procedures and other front desk tasks.
5. **Relationships with Staff:** Attributes include:
- Keeping the supervisor informed.
 - Maintaining a positive attitude.
 - Supporting and mentoring other staff members.
 - Participation in meetings.
 - Accepting responsibility and supporting the departmental mission.
 - Responding to requests and demonstrating leadership.

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