

Kin 199  
Synthia Sydnor  
Due December 19, 2008

Illinois Resident Assistants 1990s and Now: How RAs Caretake Students  
Regarding Racism

At the beginning of the semester, I was really excited to do this research project because I thought that I was going to get to learn more about Diversity within the University of Illinois. Throughout the semester I learned how to be ethnographic researcher and decided that my topic would need to involve my goals of researching diversity and racism. What help me decide about my research was Ian Borden's article Skateboarding, Space and the City and Susan Brownell's article Training the Body for China; these authors gave me ideas for a new topic altogether and outlined a good plan to help me find my topic. So in the end I decided to research RA's and how they think about Racism and Diversity.

Residential Advisors try to promote a healthy living community for the students. They try to urge to the students respect such as community rules and respecting personal boundaries and personal belongings. As I went through the semester in my kinesiology 199 course I was trying to figure out a topic but it was very difficult. However, I found a specific question through EUI (Ethnography of the University Initiative) Ideals that builds upon my research from the archives; the title is " Cultural Mapping of Dorms". With my topic it brings up more questions of the Residential Advisors and how they promote diversity? Also, I wanted to explore if RA's understand subtle kinds of racism. As a discourse community residential advisors are trained, work, and share thoughts as a

group and try to find a balance with the students they take care of. I was able to relate this topic with Kyle Kusz about his topic of racism and group identity. With racism and diversity an issue as shown through my analysis of the documents I found in the archives, residential advisors and their superiors try to figure out how can they can improve themselves as caretakers of the students.

With my archival research of University of Illinois RA's in the 90's and interview of an RA I was able to come to the conclusion that we still have the same problems from the past of racism and diversity. The residential advisors, and directors all have common goals for each other and students, which is as one document describes that they promote a healthy living community is one in which all residents are treated fairly, respect, and hold their responsibilities as a community. The residential advisors want the students to be diverse and get to know new people and not to just to stick people they know from high school. From the past documents, I can see that the RA's still have the same common goals of present RA's, which is respect and diversity.

The RA's always will try to avoid any problems with the students, especially when they are in intoxicated, or when it is a racial problem. Also the Resident Director will try to guide the Residential Advisors from avoiding the problems of the students with alcohol, race and many other problems. On the resident director page one, the resident director pointed out that one RA "had trouble getting to know the students in his hall." With my own experience I have seen RA's struggle with students whenever they were doing something wrong weather being intoxicated, or making to much noise. Also, there are big differences between PAR/FAR fro the Six Pack and Race as said on the EUI website (<http://www.ideals.uiuc.edu>). In PAR/FAR you can see the minority difference

from all the Caucasians in the Six Pack. In my opinion University of Illinois refuses to see that this is a problem in the school, that they don't believe that they are not breaking any boundaries; in housing mostly minority students in the FAR/PAR as they are in the Six Pack in housing mostly Caucasians.

Through my interview of a Residential Advisor I was able to get the perspective of an RA and how they are supposed to deal with racism and diversity of today. The RA states how she is required to take courses on Racism and diversity, which are called Social Justice classes. The RA states that she must take two credit hour class eight week course called Socio Economic Class. Each week different social justice issues targeted to typical situations that would arise in the halls including racism. The RA states that a student wrote the N word on a Martin Luther King Jr. poster last year, heard racial slurs in her halls, and believes that's students have difficulties social identity vs. Personal Identity. The RA also states that People feel entitled being part of a group, so they will do things so they can be part of that group even if that means racism.

As a large group of university they should try promote a program for racism and diversity, because the problem is still out there. It seems in society and with the students of University of Illinois that racism isn't a problem anymore, but it still is because you can when you go out, in dormitories, in the Bars and organization and clubs and within most of the school. As for me, as a minority I always spot the things that can be considered racism and I don't think its right how the school is promoting diversity when they know racism is still big struggle within our society. A program in the University of Illinois only helps them help promote diversity as they try to reach that goal. The Residential advisors as group are trying to argue for programs that get the student body to

be more social and to notice the problems race and diversity. They try to persuade this argument with monthly reports and yearly-end reports and talk how to improve RA training a stated in one document “this impletion of the new programming model was frustrating. Again, it felt as though we didn’t have enough information to adequately train our staffs.” (Resident Staff Advisor, p 1) As I looked in the archives, I try to see if they have made improvements,, but they only small programs and the university hadn’t made any big improvements regarding race and diversity.

With all my research that I collected from the videos that’s we watched in class, the readings, interview of an RA, and my own research many examples of racism of the 90’s and now still occur on a daily basis. One good example is when a resident advisor brings up the struggles of training from the documents of the archives “ the most notable aspect of training that (RA’s) commented on was the time and attention given to issues of oppression and diversity.” (Resident Advisor staff, p 1)This was clearly lacking in last year’s schedule, and that RA stated that we should focus on the issues a little bit more. This group most resembles Victor Villanueva, a man that I have reading in another class that I take. Villanueva gives his examples of groups and racism when he states “ because we don’t know what racism is, we don’t know how to combat it. “ (p 648) with this analysis, I can see that residential advisors do not know how to combat racism because they state in all the documents that they struggle to communicate with students through the programs they have created. From my own experience I can see students are just not interested in any kind of social activities to meet new people and all the RA’s agree that this problem should be improved.

## Work Cited

Bender, Sharon. LAR Resident Advisor Year end- Floor Summary. May 1,1995. UIUC Archives.

Myers, Joshua; Urizar- Harrera; Pablo, Juan. Cultural Mapping of Dorms. Date issued Dec15, 2006. Date retrieved 11/19/08 .

<<http://www.ideals.uiuc.edu/handle/2142/1837>>

Resident Advisor Staff. LAR Residence Halls Monthly Reports. Circa 1994-1997. UIUC Archives.

Resident Director. LAR Residence halls. Monthly Report. 1995. UIUC Archives.

Rice, Cora. LAR Resident Advisor Year End Report. 1995. UIUC Archives.

Villanueva, Victor. “ College Composition and Communication”.

Villanueva/Rhetoric of Racism. Vol. 50, No. 4, A Usable Past: CCC at 50: Part 2 (Jun.,1999), pp. 645-661. National Council of Teachers of English. Date Accessed 15/10/08.<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/358485>>

Yates, Alana. Spring 1997 RA Training and Staff Development Needs and Feedback. Circa 1997. UIUC Archives.