What is the role and purpose of a Resident Assistant, specifically in Dunn-Barton Halls at Illinois State University?

Jennifer Blanchard

EVOKE

About the Ethnographer
I am a senior anthropology student at Illinois State University. Who I am directly contributes to my ethnographic research as I am also a Resident Assistant. In this project I plan to do participant observation as I evaluate the roles of Residential Assistants on campus specifically in Dunn-Barton Halls. Doing this participant observation will allow me to get an inside look on the interactions between residents and their RA's and the interactions amongst RA's themselves. Adversely being that I am in fact an RA, the responses to any surveys or interviews might result in response error if the person being interviewed feels that answering correctly may directly effect them. This can be a challenge to my closing analysis, however likely that this may happen it is also likely that it will not. So my challenge to my participants would be to make them feel completely anonymous at which they are.

EXPLORE

Question
What questions is your inquiry contingent upon?
Preliminary question: created on September 28, 2005. My question is to be aimed at both residents and resident assistants living in university housing. Specifically to the RA's, I will be asking whether they fulfill their duties as prescribed and whether they believe themselves to be strict or lenient and what is their reasoning for being so. Specifically to the residents, I will be asking what they think their RA is there for and if they feel they fulfill their duties and in what ways. The general purpose question will then be: What is an RA really here for and do they meet that/those goal(s)? (Is an RA really present for personal gain or for the community on campus?)

Final question: What is the specific roles of a Resident Assistant specifically in Dunn-Barton Halls? at Illinois State University?

University Document
The documents I read can be found on the university housing services home page. Since I plan to conduct my study about my current RA position I decided to read what University Housing describes this position as being. To put it plainly I was actually surprised at how well detailed the description was. Being an RA is very time consuming and for people like me who do not have good time management skills at times it can be very difficult but in all very rewarding. The document also stresses that we as RA’s are here to help students in several aspects including encouragement. In my opinion there are RA’s who care about the personal developments of each person on their floor individually and those that care about the development of their floor as a whole. For example if I catch someone breaking a rule I tell them what they are doing is wrong and to stop because I don’t want them to get fines or even ultimately kicked out. Then you have RA’s that give no second chances they write up anything they find to keep the nonsense on the floor out, there is no concern for what the individual has to go through.

Plan
How will you go about answering your inquiry?
September 25. I am going to investigate the roles of the RA’s on campus. Aside from my journal i plan to interview about 6 RA’s, several residents and the RA’s direct supervisor. All interviews will be recorded.

**OBSERVE**

**What observations, or findings are you encountering in your research?**
November 14, 2005 "Observation Methods" So far i have used several methods of observation. The first and most important is keeping a journal of important instances that have happened to me in this position. The second is taking pictures of message boards bulletin boards and destruction of the floor. The following is another excerpt from my journal and attached are a few message board pictures to convey my methods of observance more clearly. "October 27" After the game shit hit the fan when the sox scored I was outside and you can hear everyone in the dorms all around campus including neighboring apartment rattle. I did not have to be watching tv to know that the sox just scored it was quite obvious. When the game was over I had came outside to meet a friend who was picking me up. It was as though I was in the night of the living dead and the fresh blood was on the quad drunk students were coming from all directions beer in hand yelling and screaming. I followed the crowd into the quad where a riot formed. With the ethnography at heart I ran and got my camera I noticed when I ran inside to get my camera that all of my fellow RA’s were down satiars, in a rush I quickly grabbed my camera and ran back towards the mob hoping that I hadn’t missed it. Sadly, I had missed it for the most part the rush, I would later come to find out that my fellow RA’s were having an emergency meeting and were baffled when they seen me leave –oops- That ended up being the second emergency meeting that I missed that day. The first one I missed was the result of the missing girl whose body had been recovered in Mississippi in an apparently burned down chicken shac outside of Jackson Mississippi. Aparently we need to know these things on the spot to handle concerned students. (attached are a few riot pictures and floor pics) There ended up being 12 broken windows in dunn barton alone from the riot all broken from the outside.

*Files:*
- riot bridge (1).JPG (Mon 11/14/2005 12:58)
- novembre en nueve york (125).JPG (Mon 11/14/2005 13:00)

Ethnography: October 22, 2005 (journal excerpts)
Okay, turns out that everything was in fact a rumor!! By the next day I heard several more stories “she was found by the railroad tracks”, “she was found in a dumpster rapped in a comforter” “they only found a body part” None of these statements turned out to be true. What the police did find however is an article that in some way seems to tie back to the missing girl. The next day after the shake-up, Thursday, 10-20 RA’s were informed at their weekly meeting (which occurs every Tuesday & Wednesday from 3:30 to 5:00) that we would be expecting the police to come and knock on every single door on campus questioning all residents whether anyone had any information about the missing girl. I overheard one female officer say, “please if you guys have any information, I know according to popular belief she has supposedly been found, but it is not true we need any information you can give” (something like that). As for my students they were not concerned about giving information. I had about six of my guys and one girl come knocking on my door “Jen! Are the police going to search our room? Like are they going to bust people if they have like beer or ya know stuff?” All of them said basically the same thing. Apparently a lot of my residents have beer and marijuana in their room and that was their prime concern was getting busted. My reply “they are not here for you they
are here for her but it doesn’t matter because you don’t have anything that you could get busted for anyways, right?” “uh, right Jen, so they aren’t searching?” They were not concerned about searching rooms it was enough just knocking on doors searching would have been a ridiculous task. That night the police also put up hundreds of flyers for the young lady and there was also a candle light vigil held on the quad for her. Bowmen was present at this vigil and said “[Olamide] has touched us all she has reminded us that despite the size of our campus we are all family”.

October 19-2005 (journal excerpts) Hot topic: A girl has been missing five days and I am not sure if this is rumor but several girls heard that her body was found on Adelaide right off campus. The whole building is buzzing and freaking out over what may or may not be a rumor. Girls are crying and wondering if they are safe here and I don’t know what to say. I called the police and they said they couldn’t deny or confirm anything than “they” cleared their throat and said, “I will say this, that people are quick to jump to conclusions. The news said they only found a piece of the girl’s clothing on Adelaide my friend that works at the hotel where her parents are staying said he just seen them and they seemed pretty calm and if she was found dead surely they wouldn’t seem so calm. I am the RA on duty tonight and I have had several people come to me for answers that I do not have. I was told by my boss that as an RA I am the glue stick that hold’s this community together. Right now I feel like some pretty generic glue. I wanted to leave this here before I find out what is really going on, because if it is found that the girl has not actually been found then there is an entire community, my community that is, that bred off a rumor making it their own scary wrong reality, however if it is true, where did this information come from and how did it spread like fire? Does it show that everyone on campus is directly connected, giver’s and receiver’s of expedient information whether true or false? Is this a good thing or bad thing? If it is a rumor I would say bad because so many people are worked up over nothing if it is true I would say good because perhaps this information is saving somebody tonight. I will update this info tomorrow.

October 19,2005 "University and Community" -University Housing as a Community-
The community I am talking about belongs to the people who have a passion for living here. Whether they are staff or resident, the people who have attempted to make this their home and the people who strive to make university housing a safe and comfortable place to live create the community here. On the other hand, those who have not made this their home and care more to destroy it than preserve it corrupt this community, however if they did not exist the job of an RA would not be what it is. So I guess with that said, trouble makers in the residence halls are like job security for us resident assistants. My role in this ethnography is important because through participant observation I can see both sides of what it is like to live in the residence halls not only as a resident and RA but also as Housing staff, as I am also a front desk and mail attendant. I think without holding all these positions it may be harder to really get inside of UHS as a system.

October 12-2005 "Interview" I interviewed a twenty two year old male student from Chicago. I chose this person because I am aware that he used to live in the dorms and I wanted to see what his opinions were now that he is no longer in the dorms, for instance I wanted to know if his RA had any impact on him or does he even remember the experience (i.e. do we as RA’s make the impression we are told we make?) Here is the raw interview. Jen: Why did you choose to come to ISU? M: Northern had too many people I knew going there; U of I was too expensive. I liked that ISU wasn’t too far and wasn’t too close. Jen: What did you like about the dorms? M: Dorms were cool because of the convenience of the weight room and the food. I didn’t like that I had no privacy though. Jen: What did you think about the RA’s? M: RAs never did anything for me but I would remember their face if I seen them. Jen: What is one thing you like above all else at ISU? M: The quad you don’t have to walk that far for classes. Jen: If you could take it
back would you still come to ISU? M: Yes Jen: If there is one thing you can change at ISU what would that be? M: I would change what they spend their money on. Instead of refurbishing Schroeder and Wilkins they should have torn it down and rebuilt there going to have to tear it down in twenty years anyways. –End of interview

October 12 2005.
"Summary" I am evaluating the role of resident assistants in the dorms, whether they are lenient or strict and what are the reasons for being either way. I personally am one of the more lenient RA’s in housing. I would rather be somebody’s friend as opposed to somebody’s mother. I believe in policy but I also believe that there is a certain way to go about doing things. I have observed some of the other RA’s as pen happy. They seem not to care about the resident but more so about the rules, cut throat so to speak. I have been called by other RA’s to smell alcohol outside of doors, whether the students are really being destructive or even loud the RA simply wanted another bust under his/her belt.
As for the description, I will state what the office of Residential life (ORL) describes RA’s as. Then I will describe what requirements I have had so far this semester all incidents I have faced will be tagged with a month and # for order and an m or an f stating gender as I do reside on a coed floor here are a few examples;
(April#1/f) I am on duty and I get a call at about 3a.m Friday morning, night managers tell me that there is a report of a female student on floor two getting raped. I run down to the desk to get the spare key to the room, I run to the room and there was about seven students of mixed gender sitting outside the door where the incident is taking place, one female asks if I am the ra, I replied that I was and she responded that she was the roommate I then asked her to open the door, male was standing by the bunked beds fully clothed female appeared to be unclothed on the top bunk underneath
(Aug. #2/m) Boy knocks on door with about three other male students asking me where he can get the staples taken out of his head. Then he ducks down to show me the staples. I direct him to Browman.
Files:
homecoming lobby desk[1].JPG (Wed 10/19/2005 12:31)
birthdaypics-11.jpg (Wed 10/19/2005 12:32)
birthdaypics-06.jpg (Wed 10/19/2005 12:32)
pictures 10-23.doc (Wed 10/26/2005 12:41)

DISCUSS

Discuss your inquiry, taking care to separate speculation from fact or data
Final Project Report

What is the role and purpose of a Resident Assistant, specifically in Dunn-Barton Halls at Illinois State University?

Universities all over the country have invested time and money into training and employing RA’s (Residents Assistants). RA’s are a key part in creating campus community and exemplifying a positive peer structure with in the residence halls. Of the 21,000 students at ISU, 7,400 live in residence halls. The University employs 151 RA’s at Illinois State University. The University requires all incoming freshman as well as any transfer students with under sixty credit hours to live on campus for a minimum of two years, thus requiring them to have an RA for at least four semesters of their college career (many end up having them for much more than four semesters).
The university pamphlet given to all residents defines Ra’s as “undergraduate students who live on the same floor and provide a source of basic information, referral help, and a model of successful adjustment to college living.” RA’s take on many roles within the
residence halls. However, the most important role they are supposed to manage is that of the student. Although one’s studies are supposed to be the first priority often they become the last. The responsibility to ones studies is repeated in documents by the university as well as outside sources, thus becomes the popular phrase “we are students first”. The demands placed on an RA at times are often unreasonable and those RA’s striving to help with others’ problems ultimately result to neglecting their own studies. It is common for an RA to have to cancel study groups and other academic appointments because of roommate conflicts on their floor along with any number of spontaneous duties that arise. For example if I an RA is studying in their room and a resident comes to talk to them about a problem he or she is having, the RA Is obligated to respond promptly, putting the task at hand to the side.

Every RA on ISU’s campus is an undergraduate student while their supervisors are graduate students. RA’s were not always undergraduate students though. Until 1962 only graduate students were chosen to be RA’s for the undergraduate halls. Older students were thought to be more capable of exerting control and counseling the younger students. Later, however administrators decided that the best role models are ones that the students can identify with, thus if the role model is too far removed from what the student is doing the role model has less influence, [so like many things in the sixties, this changed as well (Blemling pg8).]

In this study I examine the roles of RA’s in Dunn-Barton Halls. This particular residence hall was built in 1955 and was named after Richard Dunn and Olive Barton, two former alumni Of the University. With eight floors total, the building is split in half with a lounge to separate the two (one RA on each floor). Dunn is made up of mostly upper classman and allows for students of the legal drinking age to consume alcohol in the building. Barton is mostly freshman and sophomores and prohibits the consumption of alcohol no matter the age. Both sections are co-ed with about 55 or plus students on each floor. In all, the building accommodates about 400 students with 8 RA’s.

Methods
Several different methods were used to gain insight on the Residential Assistant’s position including participant observation and interviews with students, RA’s and supervisors. I kept a personal detailed journal and collected a series of found data, such as notes and photos. I conducted interviews with six RA’s in both Dunn and Barton halls, one professional staff member and seven current residents and two former residents, all interviews were tape-recorded. I also examined University documents and additional outside sources pertaining to RA’s. Through my own participant observation I was able to scope in on the RA position with first hand experience. I am currently an RA on the third floor of Barton Hall and through out my time there I have been able to keep a detailed journal of incidences and activities that an RA deals with on a daily basis.

Student’s First?
To start with, all RA’s are required to return to campus two weeks early for an intense training that lasts until the halls open. For the most part training involves a series of workshops on diversity, how to approach it and how to manage a diverse floor. Only for about two of these training days do we actually go over policy and procedure. Though it would appear that the University Housing (UHS) uses this time to equip us with the training necessary to handle expectancies on our floors, this is often not the case, the position seems to be either under or over estimated. UHS takes their RA’s in depth with diversity workshops with issues that are seldom even seen at Illinois State. 

In Dunn-Barton alone, RA’s have several responsibilities. We are at the heart of management inside the resident halls. We check people in at the beginning of the year and at the end we check people out. RA’s are generally the first face that the students become familiar with they arrive on campus. They have to put together a complete agenda of floor meetings, dinners and campus activities that they are to take the new floor too at the beginning of fall semester. Further on through out the year RA’s are expected
to be reliable in submitting accurate and prompt reports on student interactions, whether they are of the negative or positive nature. Such reports are to be submitted into an online database called SID (student interaction database). This can be rather complicated at times, and reports are to be submitted immediately upon the incident even if it is 3 am on a school night. The reports are to be grammatically correct and professional at all times otherwise RA’s are subject to penalty. These reports are submitted to the direct supervisor the following morning and he then submits them to his boss and on up the chain if necessary.

The general reason most students apply to become Resident Assistants is for financial ease. University Housing offers free room and board for all of their RA’s. Upon the third semester RA’s are credited a monthly stipend of 62$. I am among the general population that applied for these reasons. Though finance is the primary reason for application it is certainly not the thing that keeps people in the position. What most RA’s along with myself would come to find out is a lesson often learned, and that is that nothing in life is free!!

As mentioned before our summers are cut off two weeks early. Then the first week of school while most students are getting comfortable learning where their classes are and making sure their schedule is suitable, RA’s are holding meetings and dinners and answering questions all while still checking people in up until the third week of classes. The chaos never seems to subside. RA’s have to attend three mandatory meetings a week with their supervisors. The first meeting is on Tuesday’s from 3:30 to 5:00, this is the “business meeting” in which all Dunn-Barton staff meets to talk about events for the week with the two immediate bosses of the RA staff; the RHC and ARHC (resident hall coordinator and assistant resident hall coordinator). The second meeting is dubbed “in-service”, which takes place on Thursday, also from 3:30 to 5:00. This meeting is campus wide in which all RA’s are required to meet at any given place on campus (always subject to change). Usually these meetings are workshops that involve topics like diversity or self-development, these meetings are random and the topic is always subject to change. The third meeting is a “one on one” with the RHC. These meetings are meant for the RA to discuss any issues about the floor or upcoming program proposals. I usually end up talking about music or video games during these meetings which take place for me every Thursday from 2:30-3:00.

Three and a half hours so far a week doesn’t sound too bad but that does not even cut it! There are what is called “on call” hours Monday through Friday 8-5. During these hours there always has to be an RA on call in case of emergency. Emergencies can range anywhere from fire or fire alarm to a desk attendant not showing up. So that’s 45 hours that has be to be covered between 18 people a week (Dunn-Barton shares daily on-call hours with Walker RA’s, however we have to handle problems in their building during these times). So half of these RA’s such as myself are stuck covering 3 on call hours a week. I have Tuesdays from 12-1 and Thursdays 12-2. That is now 6 and 1/2 hours many RA’s are obligated too, yet that still is not it!! There are in all is 8 staff total in Dunn-Barton and every night one of the 8 has to be on duty (duty consists of the task of actually patrolling both Dunn and Barton, making 2-3 rounds covering the entire building checking for and documenting damages). On weekdays you start at 5 pm and get off at 8 am the next day, on weekends it goes from 5 pm to 5 pm the next day. When on duty you are not allowed to leave the building for any reason, you are to be by your phone at all times. There are several tasks you have to do while on duty, including letting people in their rooms in the middle of the night when they are too drunk to find their keys. In sum that is another 15 to 24 hour shift. RA’s in Dunn-Barton generally get stuck with 17 to 20 duty nights a semester.

Still think the job is free room and board? Absolutely not! These hours listed above are the hours put in that are on ink. This doesn’t include the countless hours an RA spends doing door decorations (decs), bulletin boards, potty talk (flyers in the bathroom stalls), handling roommate disputes, planning meetings, dinners and socials and then actually
attending them. It also does not include all the time spent finding a floor president and faculty mentor and then getting them motivated. After all this, the free room and board hardly is a keeper. RA’s at ISU are not aloud to have a job of campus and are only permitted to work a maximum of 12 hours a week on an on campus job which generally only pays up to 6.50 an hour. That is a maximum of 78$ a week that has yet to be taxed. So although initial motives for becoming an RA may have been financial it certainly is not what convinces them to stay.

Clearly time management also plays a key part in the RA position. The main situations an RA handles are often spontaneous and cannot even be put on a schedule. I can exemplify this best by personal accounts. It was April spring semester of 2005 and I was on duty on a Thursday night and had class at 8 a.m. the following day in which I was to give a presentation. I received a call at about 3 a.m. it was a night manager telling me that there is a report of a female student on floor 2 that was currently being raped. It took a minute for it to register into my sleeping brain what was happening. I then got up and ran down to the desk to get the spare key to the room, I ran to the room and there was about seven students of mixed gender sitting outside the door where the incident was taking place, one female asked if I was the RA, I replied that I was and she responded that she was the roommate. I then asked her to open up the door; a male was standing by the bunked beds fully clothed while the female appeared to be unclothed on the top bunk underneath her sheets. I asked her if she was okay and she, clearly drunk, said yes. I then asked the male to let me escort him out of the building. The supposed victim had signed the male in as a guest clearly showing that he was welcomed there. It turned out that the roommate, also the best friend of the “victim” did not like the male guest and thought he was bad news for her, especially with her drunk. While the male guest may have been bad news, he certainly was not raping the girl and the roommate’s false cry for help could have landed the young man in jail had I called the police first, which I later found was what I should have done in this situation. Needless to say, it was hard to fall back asleep after this incident, leaving me tired and unmotivated when I had to give my presentation just a few short hours later.

It is not only on duty nights or on-call hours that we can expect for spontaneous interaction. According to the ISU police docket Eye on Crime located in the University’s Daily Vidette October 24, 2005 “Saturday, October 15: A female called ISU police around 10:17 a.m. after having a conflict with her roommate. The roommate denies involvement and the case was referred to residential housing”. Roommate conflicts can be some of the most serious incidences RA’s deal with. I had two girls on my floor that were at each other’s throats for quite a few differences in their lifestyles. It is policy that before roommates are separated that we are to intervene and try to come up with roommate contracts in order to keep room assignments consistent and stable. Usually when I have to do this I also give the residents my cell phone number, as I am more often then not attending to other responsibilities off the floor. A few days after renewing their former roommate contract agreement I get a frantic call while at work from one of the girls, she is on the line bawling explaining to me how she could not take it anymore and that she needed something too be done immediately! She then stated that she would be at my door waiting until I returned, I knew I couldn’t keep her waiting long so I called for coverage which took about 15 minutes and ran to the floor. After about two hours of going back and forth between the two and my boss, I made an immediate separation and had them permanently separated by the end of the week. I later received an email from one of the girls after the separation, “….thank you for your help with everything, i really do appreciate it. Being here as a freshman is like being in a whole new world and it is nice to know that there are people like you to offer help and support in time of need. Hopefully I will soon be able to find my place here at ISU and I owe it to you. thank you for your help, your patience, and your kindness!-Thank You, [Resident “X”] Room 306.

There are more than just a few instances a month varying in seriousness. We had an
emergency meeting twice about the missing ISU student; Olamide Adeyooye (who was later found dead in Mississippi) and another for the student who committed suicide. As RA’s we were expected to be a peer counselor to those who may have been troubled by these deaths, this peer counseling may have been something we would have had in training other than diversity mumbo jumbo. Last, we had another meeting for the “riot” after the White Sox won the championship, Dunn-Barton alone suffered from 12 shattered windows. It would be no surprise if we have a few more for any reason before than end of the semester.

Student first hardly is an option, and though it is our first responsibility in theory it repeatedly becomes our last. Dunn-Barton RHC Phil Massie can confirm as he stated in an interview conducted on November 17, 2005:

“Really I think a lot of RA’s come in assuming that we will make acceptations for them to be students as well as our staff members but really we are hiring them to manage their time and not put me as supervisor in a position where I would have to make them choose between being a student and a resident assistant”.

Without making the position seem so glum and burdening it does have it’s brighter sides with resident/RA interactions. For instance I often manage to get a laugh out of a lot of things that happen on my floor. For example, the following is a note one of the female residents put under the neighboring residents door, also a female;

“To whom it may concern (even though we know who it is): Please refrain from pounding on your doors in the early hours of the morning. Believe it or not, people are still sleeping at this point and don’t appreciate being woken up. Also we can handle bed clanking but no one appreciates hearing screams and moans during your sexual encounters. We would all like [it] if you could keep that to yourselves. We feel that we have said enough and I think that you get the idea….keep it down”

Infuriated, the resident whom this was addressed to came to me thinking that I had written it (despite the we form). She explained she does not have sex in the room and in fact is barely even there. I asked her if I could keep the note and I would try to figure things out. Later her roommate came to me and admitted that she has sex in the room but she is not that loud later she laughed and said: “I knew you didn’t write that letter because you know how it is”. A bit shocked by this statement I had to reflect, how do I know how it is? Needles to say often residents think they know who a culprit is ("even though we know who it is") but often are wrong.

Creating Community

One of our prime responsibilities, other than that of a student, is the grand task of creating community. This task can be rather abstract ranging from generating “warm-fuzzies” to maintaining a consistent order in which we “police” our floors. This involves making sure that the floor we are designated on is a positive tightly knit community conducive for the development of the students as well as our own. Creating community is so essential that our boss has even created a weekly award called “The Glues-Stick Award”. We are to nominate this award between other RA’s for being the best community builders in that particular week. Though initially we are to be nominating one another for creating community, it more so becomes an award that is essentially only an award used for creating community amongst staff members inside the staff meetings.

The RA’s of Dunn-Barton vary in what they believe their job to be precisely, however one universal aspect that arose was their role as community builders. Though none of the RA’s mentioned they policed the halls per se, they did contend that their other primary role is enforcing policy. When RA’s were asked whether they were lenient or strict most claimed that they lay right in between leaning more towards lenient. Only one RA claimed to lean more towards strict. However even the ones who claimed to be lenient wrote up anywhere between 5 to 20 write-ups a semester which also coincides with the self claimed strict RA. So then becomes clear that leniency and strictness in itself is a view that can vary, meaning there is no concise scale. When it came to discussing the glue stick award, an award that is nominated to an RA every week for “holding the
community together” it appeared that this award is actually an abstract way of recognizing staff members and really has nothing to do with creating community on the floors, rather it is for creating community amongst staff. Every RA is a self-claimed good RA for several different reasons. Some say that they are a good RA because they follow policy where as others such as myself would say they are a good RA because they follow moral standards consistently. Meaning I may let someone get away with something because I do not want them to get into trouble, I simply take the time to talk to them what they are doing wrong where as others take the time to write it up. As a staff we all have our own attributes and differences to make up a complete staff of good RA’s. Each of us with our own definition of what those good attributes are. It is not only Dunn-Barton RA’s that share many differences it is RA’s across the nation that share differences making them a dynamic staff prepared to deal with dynamic residents. “This staff was put together for a reason. Each one of us brings something different. Along with what we bring, we have our weaknesses too. I have my weaknesses, and with my weaknesses being offset by your strengths we are an awesome staff” - Matt Gibson; RA (D’Angelo, Connolly, Oltersdorf).

The bottom line of resident hall living seems to be community and the RA is the community spokes person. However, there is more to creating community than an RA’s continuous contribution. Residence agreed that a community is when people get to know each other and can live together comfortably. When they were asked what they would change, five out of the six said air conditioning. Dunn-Barton is of course is a fossil with no air and is miserable with the summer heat. However uncomfortable, this heat factor may be one of nature’s clever contributions to community building in these particular halls. RHC Phil comments on residents sharing this as a common enemy “ Everybody hates the heat so they open the doors and the open doors leads to talking and talking leads to community”. This view is also shared with one of the RA’s “the schematics of the building itself condone a lot of community building, in the summer months it is very hot people need to keep their doors open fans on and circulation is a must, people meet each other immediately…” It appears that in the halls with air conditioning in the rooms people do not keep their doors open despite the RA’s requests to do so.

Further exploration could be done by continuous observation of the interactions between Residents assistants and the residents living in the hall. It is fair to say that the roles RA’s hold cannot be simply generalized. Every RA has different values and expectations of what an effective RA should do. Although RA’s may be initially lured in by financial means it is not this means that keeps them. Yet, what does keep them is the sense that they are a key part of creating an positive atmosphere for their peers and being a part of something much bigger than themselves and that is the part of role-model, problem solver and campus community builder, here for the greater purpose of the University!

Works Cited

D’angelo, Tony, Amy Connolly, and Dan Oltersdorf.(2000). Inspiration. Lambertville, NJ: Collegiate Empowerment Company
Massie, Phillip. (2005 November). [Interview with Phillip Massie Resdince Hall Coordinator; Dunn Barton Halls, Illinois State University]
(2005) [Residence Hall Information]. Normal Illinois: University Marketing And Communications
Appendix
Questions to Ra’s
What is the job of an RA specifically in Dunn-Barton Halls?
Do you consider yourself to be strict or lenient in your position?
On average how many people do you right up a semester?
What is the glue stick award? (explain)
What is the community to you?
What kind of community is apparent in this particular Dunn-Barton residence halls?
Why did you initially become an RA?
What makes a good RA?
If there is anything you could change what would that be?

Questions to the RHC
What makes a good RA?
Do you have a good Ra’s in this building?
Can you explain the glue stick award?
What is community?
Do you remember your RA?

Questions to the students
What makes a good RA?
Do you have a good RA?
Have you had ant instances with your RA or any others in the buildings?

Questions to former Residents
How long did you live in the halls?
Do you remember your RA?
Do you remember having community on your floor and if so do you think that your RA put it there?
What makes a good RA?

REFLECT

Link
Connect with other resources and materials.
“Linking Up” October 26, 2005 I have found that there are over 400 people employed by university housing services. There are currently 151 residential assistants on campus of that 32 are in east campus 20 in west 45 in Watterson towers, 36 in south and 18 in central which is where I am currently. There are over 7,200 students currently residing in residence halls with numbers fluctuating all the time. All residents coming in as freshman have a 2 year mandated live-on agreement. 90% of all the residence halls on campus were built between 1960 and 1970.
The office of residential life has an abundance of videos and articles of which I will be referencing to. I have also managed to get three books; "Inspi"RA"tion" by Tony D'Angelo, Amy Connolly & Dan Oltersdorf this is a book that claims to give encouragement, humor and motivation, it is a book for RA's by RA's. I think this will be good because it will give me an idea of how other RA's from separate institutions feel.

"The Resident Assistant" by Gregory Blimling. This is a book that gives applications and strategies for working with college students in the residence halls. This will aid me as a concise guide of RA expectations. I will also view university documents on the housing web page as well as try to get statistics of how many RA's apply and what the turnover rate is. This will clearly be a resource as to what an RA is viewed as by the public. Also I have my own expectations to overview as given by my boss.

Implications

Could your findings have broader implications beyond this inquiry?

My main implication would be to University Housing who takes us through an intense two week training at the beginning of the year, teaching us how to deal with diversity. They teach us nothing about how to be a peer counselor. I have had two students on my floor that have had death in their families, in which I was called both times to respond to them immediately. Then with a suicide and a murder, RA's as a whole, were called to be made aware of this situation, so that we can help students cope. This was never covered in training!! Diversity is a great issue to know about, but I think the university wishes to be more diverse and blind sighted by it, neglects to prepare us for what we will actually need to know in order to truly be there for the residents.

OTHER

A space for other notes, findings, comments, etc.

PROJECT PROPOSAL December 9, 2005

Jennifer Blanchard

Paper proposal

I) Universities all over the country have invested time and money into training and employing RA's (Resident Assistants). Illinois state university alone employs 151 RA’s. In this study I plan to investigate what the roles and purposes are of these RA’s, specifically looking at one hall in particular, Dunn-Barton Hall. The most sufficient way to investigate this would be through participant observation, interviewing hall and staff members and the research of university documents.

II) The questions I am asking specifically are as follows:
- What is an RA and why does the University see such a need for them?
- What is the job of an RA specifically inside Dunn-Barton Hall?
- How do the students feel about the RA’s and what do they believe their job to be?
- What do RA’s feel their job is?
- Do the RA’s fulfill the roles that the University has set forth for them?

III) The questions will undoubtedly be answered through the three methods intended for this project. First, Participant observation is one of the most reliable ways to scope in on
the position. It is through this that any information left out of interviews or documents will be found. Participant observation is first hand experience that can't be summed up in a fifteen minute interview or even countless university documents. While doing this participant observation I plan to keep a journal and collect any found data useful for answering my research questions. The second important method, interviews is just as crucial as it gives a clear picture of others observations, and how they view the position through their own experience. The questions asked in the interviews would be general questions, about what RA’s think their job is, what their supervisors think their job is and then finally what students believe their job is. I will encourage the interviewees to elaborate perhaps with instances and examples relating to what they believe the role of an RA are. Of course research is a key part of any project, especially this one. It is my intention to see what the University is ultimately employing RA’s for. Thus it is through their own documents in comparison with the observations that the true roles will be deciphered.

VI) The benefit will be to the university as well as future researchers who may perhaps ask the same question years from now when things surely will have changed. I plan to archive this information, of course protecting the privacy and identities of anyone interviewed or observed.