RESIDENCE LIFE

RESIDENT ASSISTANT PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The residence hall environment provides opportunities for students to enhance their academic and personal growth. The Resident Assistant Program expands the opportunities possible by providing competent peer assistance in the living unit. Resident Assistants, or RAs, are undergraduate students who reside in the “house” and as such have the most frequent and direct communication with resident students. They, therefore, can and do have a great influence on the development and education of those individuals. Resident Assistants are the core of our efforts in the residence halls and as such are appointed to fulfill responsibilities to individuals, student groups, and the University.

Resident Assistants, as students and representatives of Residence Life, stand in special relation to both. They must integrate their role as University representative and disciplinarian at the residence hall level with their role as advisor, community builder, and student advocate. It is our expectation that the Resident Assistant is genuinely interested in the welfare of students and is constructively supportive of both the students and the institution by active involvement in the total residence hall program.

There are several basic expectations of Resident Assistants. These expectations are essential to their fostering of individual and group development for the students to and for whom they are responsible. Resident Assistants must present themselves as positive role models since their own behavior often influences the behavior of students. They must be knowledgeable about, help enforce, and personally abide by all University rules and regulations as well as state and federal laws. They must have a working knowledge of all aspects of the University so that they can appropriately mediate for, assist, advise, and be a liaison between students and other members of the University community. They must have the emotional maturity necessary to cope with the daily decisions involved in working with their living units and promoting satisfactory living conditions within the units. They must have sensitivity and concern for others as individuals and a personal commitment that may extend beyond specific RA responsibilities and demonstrate a professional attitude. Finally, they must be committed to their own personal growth, taking care to budget time for study, work, and relaxation.

I. QUALIFICATIONS FOR SELECTION

A. Leadership potential as evidenced by previous leadership experiences, recommendations, staff evaluations and potential as perceived by the observers in the selection process.

B. High level of maturity exhibited in sound judgment, emotional stability, flexibility, and willingness to accept responsibility.

C. Strong interpersonal skills through proven ability to interact effectively with others and as perceived through the selection process.

D. Awareness of and sensitivity to various social justice issues as evidenced by behavior in the hall and interactions with others and as perceived through the selection process.

E. Good conduct standing with the University (not currently on disciplinary probation). (It should also be noted that good conduct standing is required prior to assuming the RA role.)

F. A 2.40 cumulative grade point average is required. A minimum of 12 credits must be earned prior to application. (It should also be noted that a 2.40 cumulative grade point average is required prior to
assuming the Resident Assistant role and must be maintained in order to continue involvement in the program. An RA must demonstrate adequate academic progress).

G. Satisfactory completion of a three (3) credit Counselor Education course and the recommendation of the instructor are required.

H. Preference is given to applicants who WILL be enrolled full-time at University Park BOTH semesters and who will make a commitment to Residence Life for an entire academic year.

I. Preference is given to applicants who have lived in a residence hall for at least one semester, or who have had comparable experience.

II. EXPECTATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

It is assumed that each Resident Assistant will be responsive to the goals and objectives of Residence Life. Our primary focus is the development of an environment conducive to the educational and personal growth of students living in the residence halls. The following is a summary of the significant expectations and responsibilities to which Resident Assistants will be held accountable.

A. STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS:

Resident Assistants strive to help each student develop his/her full potential as a person, a student, and a member of his/her house, hall, and University communities. In their multiple roles as peer, facilitator, administrator and disciplinarian, Resident Assistants model appropriate respect for the health, safety, welfare and rights of all students living in the residence halls.

Each Resident Assistant is expected to:

1. Learn names and background information of all residents in his/her assigned house.
2. Develop the helping skills necessary to assist students in the resolution of their concerns.
3. Assist students with personal vocational, social, academic and general concerns within one’s ability, and consult with, or refer students to other campus agencies and resources when appropriate.
4. Assist in planning the initial welcome and in the orientation of students to residential living.
5. Be sensitive to individual adjustment problems and concerns and make referrals when appropriate.
6. Become aware of student attitudes, academic achievements and difficulties, and health concerns.
7. Help students recognize long-range implications of present decisions and behaviors for themselves and for future residence hall students.
8. Spend sufficient time in one's house to assess student programming and environmental improvement needs and ensure that the information is accurately transmitted to the immediate supervisor in a timely manner.
9. Continually model appropriate behavior.

B. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

A sense of community refers to that feeling of cooperation, of commitment to the group welfare, of willingness to communicate openly, and of responsibility to and for others as well as oneself. Resident Assistants are responsible for structuring the house environment so that these attitudes are nurtured and rewarded.
Specifically, each Resident Assistant is expected to:

1. Be regularly available and visible to students in the living unit especially during evening hours.
2. Become well acquainted with students in the house and in the hall.
3. Encourage resident interaction and provide opportunities for this to happen in a non-threatening way.
4. Work effectively with groups of students and encourage student responsibility for productive group tasks.
5. Promote a positive living environment in the house, in the hall, and in the area.
6. Plan and implement formal and informal programs in conjunction with students and other staff that promote a sense of community, consideration for one’s neighbor, responsible freedom, etc.
7. Develop programs and activities that promote group identity.
8. Encourage students to take responsibility for their actions and to accept the consequences of their behavior.

C. PROGRAMMING

Because a balance of activities and self-governance in the residence hall contributes to a feeling of community, Resident Assistants are responsible for actively assisting individuals, floor groups, special interest groups, the area government, other staff members and the coordinating staff with the continual assessment of programming needs and the successful execution of activities.

Specifically, each Resident Assistant is expected to:

1. Identify potential student leaders and encourage their involvement at the house, hall and area levels.
2. Encourage the active involvement of residents in planning and executing house, hall and area activities.
3. Assist the coordinating staff in the assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation of a balance of developmental activities.
4. Encourage and assist in the implementation of social programming efforts in the living unit.
5. Promote activities which contribute to a beneficial living–learning atmosphere in the house.
7. Attend area government meetings, when appropriate, to demonstrate support and offer assistance.
8. Work cooperatively and supportively with house officers.

D. STUDENT CONDUCT

Resident Assistants are responsible for responding to student behavior so that an atmosphere conducive to study is maintained and the physical facilities are protected for student use in the future. Resident Assistants are responsible for maintaining consistent policies throughout the residence hall and for impressing upon residents that they are responsible for their own actions. Resident Assistants should not tolerate immature behavior or inappropriate conduct.
Each Resident Assistant is expected to:

1. Uphold and enforce all University and housing regulations.

2. Familiarize residents with University and housing regulations, the Judicial Affairs and community standards system, and the Resident Assistant’s role in enforcing policies.

3. Help students understand the realistic consequences of their behaviors.

4. Personally abide by all University regulations recognizing that failure to do so is considered a serious breach of Resident Assistant responsibilities and could result in termination. Resident Assistants should not ignore the violation of a regulation or policy by a resident nor should they violate regulations or policies that residents are expected to follow.

5. Respond to behavioral problems calmly and reasonably and maintain an accurate record of problems.

6. Help develop an atmosphere in the living unit in which students have concern and respect for the rights of others. Help students themselves develop methods for effective enforcement of rules regarding behavior necessary for an atmosphere conducive to study and community living.

7. Assist Housing Services in the communication and enforcement of housing regulations. Foster an understanding of maintenance limitations and the need to preserve the facilities over the long term.

8. Assist Food Services in the communication of food service policies. Assist with conduct situations in the dining hall as defined by the coordinating staff in consultation with Food Services.

9. Discuss all behavioral problems and concerns with the coordinating staff on a regular and timely basis.

E. COMMUNICATIONS

Resident Assistants play a crucial role in setting the tone for how the University and Residence Life are perceived by students. Resident Assistants should strive to represent the University and Residence Life positively to students, parents, and the general public.

A Resident Assistant is expected to:

1. Meet regularly with individual residents and groups to explain and promote policies and programs, assess needs and community goals, and learn of ideas or concerns.

2. Post University and residence hall information in designated areas. Bulletin boards should be maintained in a current and attractive manner. Disseminate necessary information promptly to students in living units.

3. Use the appropriate chain of communication (immediate supervisor, Assistant Director, Central Office) when transmitting ideas, needs, or concerns about residence hall living.

4. Maintain daily contact with the immediate supervisor.

5. Be knowledgeable about services for students in need of specialized help.

6. Plan, schedule, and conduct house meetings as the need arises. A minimum of two informational meetings should be held each semester, one during arrival week and the other prior to finals week.

7. Attempt to personalize and streamline the bureaucracy by channeling students with concerns directly to appropriate University offices and agencies.
8. Advocate for students by recognizing the problems, concerns, and opinions of individuals and groups and presenting their viewpoints to appropriate University staff and/or advising or assisting students in their own effort to present their views.

9. Develop and maintain an effective working relationship with the immediate supervisor for the purpose of communicating house and individual student needs, problems, concerns, and personal issues.

F. ADMINISTRATIVE AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

The smooth operation of residence halls is dependent upon the cooperative efforts of all staff members. Resident Assistants are called upon to provide administrative support, which is important to the operation of the hall.

A Resident Assistant is expected to:

1. Complete all assigned administrative tasks thoroughly, accurately, and on time.

2. Assist in gathering data about the student population in order to facilitate developmental programming and staff evaluation and other efforts of Residence Life.

3. Assist with necessary record forms and reports such as unit rosters, room change forms, unit condition reports and incident reports.

4. Ensure student awareness of fire and safety precautions and regulations. Assist with safety measures.

5. Attend and participate in staff meetings, supervisory group meetings, and one-on-one supervision meetings.

6. Be available for duty coverage which includes rounds within the area as determined by the coordinating staff.

7. Utilize and cooperate with Police Services, Maintenance and Operations, Emergency Services and other University agencies as appropriate.

8. Develop and maintain working relationships with Housing and Food Services personnel.

9. Develop and maintain an effective working relationship with the supervisor for the purpose of sharing continuous communication regarding all aspects of the RA Program.

G. MISCELLANEOUS

Each Resident Assistant is expected to:

1. Participate in the recruitment and selection process for all levels of staff. The input from Resident Assistants is a valued source of information in the selection of staff.

2. Participate in staff training as defined by the director of Residence Life and the coordinating staff.

3. Regularly discuss with the supervisor performance as well as personal concerns relative to that performance.

4. Be evaluated formally by the supervisor with continued involvement in the program based upon positive evaluation.

5. Be evaluated by residents of his/her house.

An Equal Opportunity University
6. Assist in office coverage when requested.

7. Perform other duties as assigned.

III. CONDITIONS OF APPOINTMENT

The following information outlines the conditions of the Resident Assistant appointment. For additional expectations, guidelines, and conditions, please refer to Section 1.07 in RAGTIME.

Under normal circumstances, the appointment of a Resident Assistant is announced by the Director of Residence Life and is for the entire academic year. Reappointment to the RA Program for the following year depends upon successful completion of tasks, positive evaluation by the supervisor, and demonstration of growth in and continued enthusiasm for the Resident Assistant role. RAs may not serve more than a calendar two year term. (Please see section E on Reappointment for more information)

If an RA resigns his/her position at any point and later wishes to return, no guarantees can be made that he/she will be able to rejoin the program, especially for that particular semester. Obviously, the number of vacancies that exist and the number of people wanting to be placed play a major role in this situation. For more information, please refer to Section E. (Reappointment) in this document and Section 2.022 in RAGTIME.

All Resident Assistants are required to assist in the opening and closing of the halls for each academic semester and for vacation periods. This requires returning to campus approximately one week before the residents return for Fall Semester and remaining until the day after final exams. Spring Semester, RAs will not be permitted to leave prior to the closing of the halls at the end of the semester. For information regarding coverage during Thanksgiving Break, Semester Break, and Spring Break, please refer to RAGTIME, Section 1.07. Please be aware that the halls will be open for residency during many, if not all, of these break periods (e.g., Thanksgiving Break, Semester Break, Spring Break, etc). Staff will be expected to work when the halls are open for residents.

A. TIME OFF

All scheduling of leave time must be made through the coordinating staff and arranged in advance. Generally, RAs are permitted to leave campus five weekends per semester. Restrictions may be made on special weekends as deemed appropriate by the assistant director and/or director or Residence Life. The number of RAs required to cover the area on weekends and to assist in opening and closing the halls for vacation periods is determined by the assistant director. Generally, no more than half of the staff in any area will be permitted to leave on any given weekend.

B. TIME COMMITMENTS

1. Work load: It is recognized that being a Resident Assistant requires a great deal of time. Due to the special nature of the role, no minimum or maximum number of hours can be designated. He/she will be expected to devote the time necessary to fulfill his/her obligation. This includes specific staff duty assignments, weekly staff meetings, in-service training, and significant time in his/her house.

2. Course load: Resident Assistants must be full-time undergraduate students.

3. Additional Work and Extracurricular Activities: It is important that Resident Assistants remember that their role is demanding and other activities will have to be limited. Being a Resident Assistant is considered the principal out-of-class activity. Extracurricular involvement that does not interfere with the RA’s performance is permissible. Competing interests, activities, or undertakings, that would keep the RA out of the unit on a regular basis, must be approved by the RA’s coordinator.
RAs may not serve as the president/chair of any “governing/decision-making” student group such as ARHS, area government, or UPUA.

4. T.A./G.A. Positions: While Residence Life fully supports the pursuit of academics, it is felt that, in most cases, an RA cannot perform as well as both an RA and a T.A./G.A. because of the time demands involved. It should also be recognized that an RA cannot receive a grant-in-aid from both Residence Life and the college/department sponsoring the T.A./G.A. position. If permission is given to perform both the RA and T.A./G.A. roles, grant-in-aid money will only be available from one source. Before accepting a T.A./G.A. position, the RA must discuss the possibility with his/her coordinator.

5. Student Teaching/Co-op/Internship Opportunities. It is expected that RAs will have sufficient time in their schedules to be available for their residents. Any time commitment that causes RAs to be away from their floors could negatively impact performance. Student teaching and co-ops/internships are examples of such activities. The following has been developed to serve as a guide for decision-making related to RA participation in student teaching and co-op/internship activities.

Students are not permitted to be placed as RAs if, during their first semester as an RA, they will be student teaching or participating in a co-op/internship.

RAs who need to student teach or want to participate in a co-op/internship must get permission from their Coordinator the semester before the student teaching assignment or co-op/internship is to begin. The Coordinator will base his/her decision upon the RA’s past performance, assessment of the RA’s time management skills, and the conditions of the assignment (how much time it will take, the location of the assignment, and other related factors). All student teaching and co-op/internship assignments must be approved academic assignments for credit.

If an RA is not satisfied with a decision of the Coordinator, s/he can appeal to the area Assistant Director.

C. ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND CONDUCT STANDING

Resident Assistants are expected to maintain a minimum of a 2.40 cumulative grade point average. At the end of each semester (to include that semester’s grades), all RAs will have their grade point average verified. Any RA not above the minimum 2.40 cumulative grade point average will not be permitted to continue in the Resident Assistant Program. Any and all exceptions to this policy must be approved by the assistant director in the area and the Director of Residence Life. Resident Assistants are expected to be in good conduct standing with the University. An RA who is referred and placed on probation will not be considered for continuation in the RA Program until his/her probationary period is completed.

D. EVALUATION

Evaluation is an on-going process. Resident Assistants are expected to continually evaluate their own performance and progress, consulting with their coordinator in order to determine how they can most effectively meet the expectations of the RA Program.

It is the responsibility of the coordinator to clarify evaluation criteria immediately at the beginning of the first semester each year. If a Resident Assistant’s performance does not meet the stated expectations of his/her coordinator as well as the additional conditions contained in the Conditions of Appointment, his/her appointment may be terminated. Adequate and appropriate notice will be given.

E. REAPPOINTMENT

RAs may not serve for more than two calendar years. RAs who begin the program in the spring...
A semester will be allowed to complete a fifth semester in Residence Life. Non-University Park RAs will also have a term limit which includes their experience at their respective campus location.

Within the two year term limit, Resident Assistants are NOT necessarily reappointed for the following academic year. Reappointments are contingent upon the Resident Assistant's performance during the previous year. Some of the factors taken into account are successful completion of tasks, positive evaluation by the Coordinator, demonstration of growth in and continued enthusiasm for the RA role, needs of the student population, etc.

If an RA resigns the position, for example in order to student teach, to complete an internship or co-op, or to study abroad, the semester/s away count towards the two-year limit. If the former RA wishes to return to a position, s/he will be placed on a waiting list with the approval of the past supervisor, providing there is time available in the term limit. Former RAs do not receive top priority, and there is no guarantee that they will be placed in a position.

Under RARE CIRCUMSTANCES, Residence Life may consider extending an RA's appointment beyond the two year limit. This would be done at the assistant director's initiative and include clear expectations about duties and performance.

*This program description is subject to change as processes, procedures, etc. are reviewed throughout the year.

**Vision**

Residence Life creates the highest quality living-learning environments, programs and services to challenge and support Penn State students as they become active and responsible members within their communities.

**Mission**

Residence Life provides a safe, comfortable, secure and nurturing living-learning environment that is conducive to the students’ academic pursuits and personal growth while fostering a sense of community, civic responsibility and an appreciation of diversity.

**Educational Priority**

Residence Life commits to educational priorities of respect and responsibility. All residents will explore, understand and demonstrate respect for self and others, and responsibility for self, community and the environment.

7/17/2013