

Students Helping Students: A guide to developing student leaders

SIA Final Report

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Rationale of Project

Over time residence halls have developed from a place where students just sleep, to a place that fosters community and develops lifelong skills. Students who are connected and engaged within the university community are more likely to have positive views about their institution, education, and are more motivated to learn and perform better, as well as being more motivated to remain at their institution (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Astin's theory of involvement argues that students learn best by becoming involved in co-curricular activities; such as residence halls, student organizations, and other leadership positions within the university community. Part of a student's holistic educational experience is the student's residence hall experience, which is dependent on the quality of the interactions from their floor and/or building community. Resident Assistants (RAs), due to the unique nature of their position, play a key factor in fostering community development by having quality interactions with students on their floor and within the building. RAs help students feel like they matter to peers, staff, faculty, and family, by encouraging students to become involved with the university community.

Each RA, once hired is required to take a resident assistant development course. EL 301 is designed for first year RAs and EL 302 is designed for returning RAs. The EL 301 is designed to challenge the RAs to understand the foundation of basic student development theory, fundamentals of their new position and the functions of the Department of Residence Life. The course is an opportunity to cover topics that require more in-depth discussions such as mental health, high school to college transitions, psychosocial development and addictions. During fall training there is limited time to engage in reflection and discussion about serious topics. Fall training is designed to expand their knowledge base started during EL 301 and give the RAs an opportunity to use skills learned in sessions such as emergency response, conflict resolution, and scenario based situations.

After the RA development course and fall training, each hall director uses a variety of tools to continue the development of the RAs on their team. These tools assist the hall director in helping ensure each RA is creating a meaningful floor community, building connections with their residents, and balancing the position with being a student. The resident assistant workbook would be an extension of the resident assistant development courses. It would bring the variety of tools used into a cohesive holistic RA workbook every hall director would use throughout the year. This would allow the RAs to individually work on specific topics at key times of the year to continue development and give the hall directors intentional check-in points with new staff members.

The goal of this project is to create a workbook designed to help RAs develop more meaningful intentional interactions with students in their communities. The workbook will include activities designed to challenge the RAs to develop a community of learners “...to serve generously, lead responsibly and respond imaginatively and creatively to the challenges of their work, their lives and their communities (Winona State University, 2016).

Learning Outcomes of Project

- Student staff members will demonstrate an understanding of their floor and the students who live in their communities by being more proactive with community development.
- Student staff will intentionally foster relationships amongst the students on their floors to better develop connections to enhance the sense of belonging and increase retention of those students.
- Student staff will demonstrate an understanding of self-care and balance.

Proposed Timeline

January 2017

- Housing & Residence Life professional staff roundtable to identify methods of community development currently utilized by department and discuss department trends of 2016-2017 RAs new to their position
- Review past floor evaluations to identify resident feedback on community development

February 2017

- Continue review of past department tools to identify areas important for community development
- Identify Fall 2016 training evaluation information that may be helpful in chapter development

March 2017

- Workbook chapters identified
- Create book chapters and edit format of workbook

April 2017

- Continue chapter work on workbook

May 2017

- Finalize chapter work and workbook format
- Train the Residence Life staff on the workbook and implementation plan for Fall 2017

June 2017

- Present completed workbook and intended fall semester use to ASF

November 2017

- Review floor evaluations to identify changes associated with workbook implementation for first year RAs community development

Actual Timeline

January / February 2017

- Reviewed previous departmental tools
- Review past floor evaluations to identify resident feedback on community development
- Talk to current staff members

March 2017

- Housing & Residence Life professional staff roundtable to identify methods of community development currently utilized by department and discuss department trends of 2016-2017 RAs new to their position
- Identify chapters
- Research different tools

April 2017

- Work on book chapters

May 2017

- Finalize chapter work and workbook format
- Outside review of book

June 2017

- Present completed workbook and intended fall semester use to ASF

July 2017

- Train the Residence Life staff on the workbook and implementation plan for Fall 2017

November 2017

- Review floor evaluations to identify changes associated with workbook implementation for first year RAs community development

Data Collection

Several tools were used to gather information on the needs of RAs and students throughout the academic year. First, a meeting was held with the Hall Director professional staff to gather training tools currently in use, discuss staff challenges and tools for topics they would like to have for the future. Previous departmental documents were reviewed for departmental history and needs from many years prior. Then a discussion was held with Sarah Olcott, Associate Director for Residential Education and Training about tools staff needed throughout the year and topics for staff training. We then reached out to counseling services and the Inclusion and Diversity office for feedback on topics. Finally, we informally talked with student's one on one as well as in small groups about their experience throughout the year, in addition to topics they feel would be beneficial in their position. Through data collection three overarching themes emerged personal development, community development and resources.

Workbook Layout

While discussing the layout of the book we reviewed past staff meeting agendas and saw recurring themes from year to year between the staffs within specific months. From that information we decided to divide the workbook into sections by month. Within each of these month sections there are activities that cover all or some of the themes to help the RA's reflect, grow and develop as student leaders as well as help their students grow and develop throughout the year.

Throughout the book student staff will have activities that focus specifically on their personal development that will help them grown as a student leader. A few of the activities are designed to have the staff self-reflect, so they are able to become better leaders on their floors, within the community and team members. Some of the other activities are self-assessments (i.e.

True Colors, listening skills, conflict styles, skills assessment, etc...), goal setting and team development.

The foundation of all communities is the intentionality of how a community is developed; a specific plan to build relationships, being and using resources, floor/building programs, fostering an inclusive and academically success environment. Within the community development theme student staff have activities that help with development of intentional interactions, creating networks between the students and observing how the community is developing. Observing how the floor community is developing is important because the student staff will then be able to better meet the needs of their community.

The resources section includes activities that will help the staff grow and help students learn. Each month the staff will have a challenge that will focus on a specific topic, for example homesickness, alcohol and drug use, choosing a major, mental health, diversity and inclusion and money management. These topics will develop the student staff to serve as resources for their students. Each monthly challenge starts with the staff either watching a video, reading an article, exploring a website or completing an online module. After completing the activity the staff will then answer a few reflective questions. These activities then will be talked about and debriefed during a weekly staff meeting or one on one with their hall director. Other resources include time management, self-care, budgeting, marketing your RA experience on your resume, etc.

Workbook Reviewers

Three student affairs professionals were asked to review the workbook. All three professionals have experience working with student staff members in Housing and Residence Life and with students in a variety of other capacities. Within Winona State, Housing and Residence Life department we asked the Assistant Director of Residential Education and Training, Sarah

Olcott, to review the workbook and give feedback. Two external professionals we asked to review the workbook and give feedback. Dr. Gennie Lynn who is the Coordinator of Residence Education for the Department of Residence Life at Texas A&M University and Dr. Jodi Monerson who is an Academic Advisor/Recruitment & Retention Specialist for Inclusion & Diversity at Winona State University.

DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

Department of Residence Life
Office of Residence Education



June 1, 2017

To whom it may concern:

Re: Students Helping Students: A Guide to Developing Student Leaders

This letter is to confirm that I, Dr. Geneva "Gennie" Lynn, reviewed and submitted suggestions to the book in progress called *Students Helping Students: A Guide to Developing Student Leaders* to Erica Thomas of Winona State University. I believe this book to be an excellent tool and I look forward to seeing the final product. If I can provide you with any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at (979) 845-2235, or by email at gennie_lynn@housing.tamu.edu.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dr. Gennie Lynn". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Gennie Lynn
Coordinator of Residence Life, Residence Education
Residential Housing Association Advisor
Texas A&M University

Jodi L. Monerson, Ed.D.

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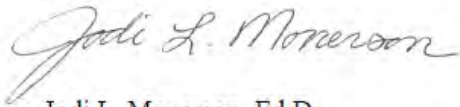
To Whom It May Concern:

It is with great honor that I write this letter to document my time spent as an external reviewer for the *Students Helping Students: A Guide to Developing Student Leaders* SIA project. The work that Emily Meyer and Erica Thomas did to create this booklet is abundant and impressive. I support their efforts in completing this project and implanting this initiative fully.

I enjoyed the opportunity to review this document and provide my feedback. It is a project that will be extremely beneficial to our students, both working and living in the residence halls. Please contact me if you have any further questions in regards to my role as an external reviewer.

Thank you!

Cordially,



Jodi L. Monerson, Ed.D.
Academic Advisor/Recruitment and Retention Specialist

Work Cited

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How College Affects Students: A Third Decade of Research. Volume 2.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition.* Second Edition

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