



The Resident Advisor Role at Cal Poly Pomona



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Abstract

Acquiring skills in leadership is imperative for young adults. While in college there is a plethora of opportunities to gain experience in working alone and on team settings. Student leader roles present the chance to grow in personal and professional areas of one's life. These positions of power present the possibility to expand leadership skills, build strong relationships beyond the workplace, and strengthen communication abilities, just to name a few. There is one student leader role offered on campus that is unlike any other and that is the Resident Advisor. Resident Advisors are full-time students that live in on-campus housing amongst students that live there as residents. They are trained for peer advising, policy enforcement, programming, and much more

Introduction

At Cal Poly Pomona there are two locations offered for student housing. They are University Housing Services (UHS) and the University Village. Both housings employ students to serve as Resident Advisors for their communities. The role requires its leaders to be knowledgeable about an array of topics as well as taking care of many responsibilities. RAs are required to attend a 2–3-week training in the summer before the academic year begins. Training days take place from Monday through Friday and can begin as early as 8 AM and end at 5 PM. Additional training is given halfway through the academic year right before the Spring semester begins. These sessions last roughly about a week and are refreshers on what has already been taught.

During these weeks the RAs are educated on a multitude of subjects. Sessions strive to create an environment to bond the members on a deeper level that goes beyond coworkers. They typically start out with icebreakers where students share basic information such as their chosen majors and fun facts. Teambuilders are soon implemented afterwards where they are challenged to complete tasks with the help of everyone else. Some examples are scavenger hunts, trivia games, and to communicate without vocalization.

Other areas of training equip the students with real world issues. Speakers from the CPP campus come to lecture for sessions. Examples include Counseling 101, Inclusive Communication, Survivor Advocacy, Title IX, Wellness Center, Healthy Relationships, and Exploring Your Social Identities. Some sessions train the students where they are given a plaque to show they are allies from the Disability Resource Center, Safe Zone, and Dreamers center.

This role demands the team to spend a fair amount of time together. Every week staff meetings are held that last about 2 hours. In addition, they have their work shifts, otherwise known as "Duty Days." When the RAs have Duty Days they are described as being "On Call." When On Call, student leaders are to be present on property from the start to end of their shift. These shifts are in 10–24-hour increments. They are working in pairs and sometimes in threes. During this time, RAs are expected to complete sets of community walks to ensure safety and maintenance of the property and its residents. Another responsibility is to confront and document residents that are in violation of the community standards, policies, or license agreement. They often manage crises or emergency responses as well. It is an expectation to serve as a role model for the community standards which means following the expectations and rules set in place by the University.

While RAs are trained and educated in various subjects, it is important to remember they are students first. Therefore, it is vital to emphasize the term "student leaders." They are not professional staff and can only do so much. So, in situations where further or professional assistance is needed, RAs are expected to act as a resource. They refer students to counseling resources, academic advising, or off campus resources depending on the scenario when needed. They do however have some skills in mediation and managing conflict between staff members and roommates. As listed in their title, these are students. Residents find it easier to relate to their RAs since they are both in college and at the same point in their lives. RAs act as a liaison between the residents and the department.

Discussion

While CPP houses a variety of students, each community has RAs to serve it. Their responsibilities and requirements can vary. In similarity, they welcome their residents from move-in. Bulletin boards are put up from the RAs to display a welcome message. In addition, each resident is given a name tag made by hand from their designated RA. These steps are taken from the beginning to start the year off strong and show the students that they belong here.

Through the year, it is asked that RAs connect with residents individually. This sometimes means submitting reports to their supervisor summarizing the conversations and connections made in a given week. This establishes good relationships and a positive environment with the members of the community. There is also programming that gives residents the opportunities to grow in their environments. RAs aim to focus on areas of growth that range from social experiences, social justice, or environmental concerns. RAs gauge what the community needs, and they plan and host a program to cater to it. With this responsibility it teaches the student leader how to best engage their audience as well as effectively budgeting funds through a semester.

To add on to building interpersonal relationships, bulletin boards, also known as passives, are done throughout the year, and posted around the property. Like programs, they focus on areas of improvement. They also serve as a resource to places on or off-campus that the students may not know exist. Usually, passives are completed once a month so they can continuously provide updated and relevant information, as necessary.

Administrative requirements are similar as well. At the beginning of their shift RAs sit at the front desk for roughly 4 hours. This desk duty gives students the chance to reach out in person during these set hours and ask general questions. RAs also may be asked to work in other offices as well. This includes the mail room, front office, and tech center assistance.

RAs in both UHS and the Village are asked to be in good conduct standing with Cal Poly Pomona Judicial Affairs. They also need to be taking 12 units per semester to remain full time students. In addition, they need to meet minimum GPA requirements. UHS asks students to have a minimum of 2.3 or higher where the Village asks for 2.5 or higher. If this standard is not met, they face termination of their license agreement. As for the workload, UHS demands 20 hours per week from their student leaders. The Village asks for between 15-25 hours a week dedicated to the role. However, if the student wishes to have another role, job, internship, or involvement outside of this one, they need approval from their supervisor. It may not exceed an additional 15 hours a week.

Unique to UHS is their College Themed Communities (CTC). There is a CTC for each of the colleges at CPP. These are made to create programs and events for the student's living experience. For the suites on campus, they have what is called Suites Themed Communities. Buildings have different focuses such as Academic Success, Transfer Students, Social Justice, and Service Learning. While the Village does not have areas for themed living, they allow non-CPP students to live as residents. Nearby colleges such as Mt. SAC, DeVry University, and Citrus College can live with other CPP students. Other unique qualifications are CPP students must be 21 years or older or have completed 24 semester units upon move-in. If they are non-CPP students, they must be 18 years or older with proof of full-time student status.

Though UHS and the Village ask for similar responsibilities, they are not compensated the same. RAs at UHS are given 220 swipes and 250 meal points a semester to be used on campus. A meal swipe is equivalent to \$7, and a meal point is \$1. UHS RAs are also given \$40 a semester to be used as a phone line credit. They each get their own room, and this turns out to be worth \$6,453 a semester. For the academic year, they are compensated about \$16,566 for a meal plan and boarding.

RAs at the Village receive 325 meal points a month. Unlike the UHS RAs, they have funds released once a month. While their rent is also taken care of, boarding at the Village is \$997 a month. Though Village RAs are not given a phone line credit, they have landline phones in their room. For the academic year they are compensated \$13,220 for a meal plan and boarding.

	UHS RAs	Village RAs
Meal Plans	\$3,580	\$3,250
Rent	\$12,906*	\$9,970
Other	\$80	-
Total	\$16,566	\$13,220

* Average cost of multiple floor plans



"The primary responsibility of the Resident Advisor is to provide safety and security while building community in each of the residential halls and suites." –Cal Poly Pomona



References

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Limitations

The resident advisor job has evolved over the years. The responsibilities as well as position description are revised as the organizations deem necessary. The limitation in this research reflects from only focusing on resident advisors from Cal Poly Pomona. With the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a fair amount of staff reduction. Their contracts were revised to ask their student leaders to possibly be asked to serve in alternative roles such as Event Leads, Conference Services Student Assistant, and CORE Student Assistants. RAs generally have the same responsibilities and training sessions but where they become more diverse is in how they are compensated. Unlike CPP, other universities sometimes pay their students. Other institutions do not give a meal plan and instead cover rent expenses and pay them hourly. For future research purposes, exploring other CSU's and Universities would be beneficial to compare task duties and pay.