

Chapter One Introduction

As a new century approaches, colleges and universities prepare to educate a more diverse student body than ever before. With this new focus, the role of the college and university administrator has become more complex. In this dynamic environment, even students can take on the role of de-facto administrators, as they assist in the operation of the university, serving in a variety of roles (Gaff, 1997). One of these roles is as paraprofessional residence hall staff members. As the number of college-bound students increases, the number of resident students is likely to rise and Resident Advisers (RAs) will be required to do more for these residents. RAs will have a larger role to play in the ongoing education of the student and the development of the residence hall community.

Students as staff member have become an important and integral component of the residence education team. Many colleges and universities currently ask their RAs to play the role of university liaison, resident manager, counselor, and friend to the students who live in resident halls (Carns, Carns, & Wright, 1993) and large sums of money and resources are spent to train and educate these paraprofessionals. Shipton and Schuh (1982) state that it is the presence of staff training programs that has fostered the ability of RAs to respond successfully to resident student problems. With the acknowledged importance of student staff, the quality and success of RA training programs has come into question. Various unique programs have been implemented at colleges and universities across the country with mixed results (Quirk, 1976; Eichenfield, Graves, Slief, & Haslund, 1988; Schinke, Smith, Meyers, & Altman, 1979). Grisanti and Blimling (1993) found that current training methods including role playing, computer based simulations, and peer-mentoring programs did not adequately answer residence life staff questions about what topics were necessary for successful RA training.

Research has shown that RAs recognize the importance of training programs that help them to work and live with students living in residence halls. RAs also realize that strong skills in crisis intervention, program development, and stress management, are usually learned in RA training programs. However, the same research also shows that RAs place as much faith in their own capabilities and approaches to problem solving as they do in formal training (Twale & Muse, 1996). RAs seem to believe that success in the RA role comes from experiential learning and ‘on-the-job-training.’ To that end, experiential learning techniques have become an important part of RA training.

Organizational psychology describes several training methods that utilize experiential learning. One of the most respected of these methods is the Critical Incident Technique (CIT). The CIT as developed by Flannagan (1954) seeks to understand the crucial events and occurrences that shape an individual’s experience and knowledge. Information is gathered from individuals as self-reported anecdotes, and then correlated with existing theory-and-practice models to produce a widely accepted view of the current state of the discipline. In this study, such a technique was used to survey the experiences of RAs as a source of data to be used in the creation of training modules.

Examining the real-world experiences reported by RAs while on the job could lead to a better understanding of RA training needs. Such an analysis may also allow professionals to determine how institutional environment, department philosophy and individual bias effect RAs reporting. The implications and suggestions of such a study could be of real value to student affairs professionals.

Purpose of the Study

This study was designed to examine the ability of the Critical Incident Technique to help student affairs professionals and residence hall administrators improve training options for Resident Advisers by understanding the kinds of incidents RAs experience and choose to report on the job. By looking at the most important issues that RAs report experiencing on the job (critical incidents) and weighing these issues against the institutional environment, department philosophy and individual bias of RAs and institutions, it may be possible to design more effective RA training. The variation in reported incidents frequencies will allow for an understanding of how these factors influence RAs and may suggest how future training programs can compensate for them. Such training techniques may be more effective than current methods because they seek to incorporate a living-learning model based on actual, real-world experiences that RAs experience, rather than relying on historical models or the preference of trainers.

Research Questions

Five research questions were formulated. The questions were:

1. What are the critical incidents RAs experience most often on the job?
2. Is there a difference between the critical incident types reported in residence halls by institutional type?
3. Is there a difference between the critical incident types reported by hall types?
4. Is there a difference between the critical incident types reported by gender?
5. What implications do the findings have for future RA training?

Significance of the Study

The results of this study may help residence life staff to plan, implement, and improve RA training programs in the future. Determining if the college or university environment influences how RAs interact with residents is a valuable study. The implications this question has for RA training are vast. Also, understanding if experiential learning programs are valuable for RA learning is important. This study may suggest possible new directions for training residence hall staff members by illustrating what types of issues RAs report as most important while on the job and what types of skills might be of value in dealing with these experiences. It may also succeed in helping supervisors and training staff to prioritize and focus the training of RAs on real needs as opposed to likes, dislikes and skills of the trainers.

Residence hall directors and graduates students who are responsible for supervising and assisting RAs in their job may benefit from the results of this research project. Due to the timing of the beginning of employment, new RA staff members are thrust into the position without completion of established RA training classes. Hall directors may benefit from this study if it suggests ways that the lessons and realities of the RA job can be of benefit to the training and preparation of paraprofessionals. This study also suggests ways in which training programs can be improved by examining the values and themes that RA are learning on the job. Finally, if supervisors can adapt existing training programs to further educate and inspire their staffs while taking these issues into account, then they study's value will be realized.

The findings in this story will continue to add to the tradition of research in student affairs by furthering the body of knowledge and raising additional questions. If

improvements are to be made, continued examinations and studies must probe the ever-changing landscape of student affairs. This study hopes to make a contribution.

General Limitations.

As in all research, there were realities that limited this study. The study examined groups of RAs at just three institutions in one general region: the southwestern Virginia/Piedmont North Carolina area. If the study had been expanded to other institutions and other RA populations, broader conclusions may have been possible and the study may be more readily generalized to wider and more diverse populations.

Secondly, the methodology of this study utilized an examination of RA reports to determine the most frequently reported incidents. While it is the belief of the researcher that it is possible to gather the information needed to make this determination from these incident reports, it is possible that this information may be collected with equal success from other sources. Judicial referrals and work orders filed by RAs may more accurately reflect the occurrences of behavioral incidents and facilities incidents in the residence halls (see “Categorizing the Critical Incident” p. 25).

Perhaps the single most important limitation of this study is that it does not explore the motivation of RAs. Motivation and personal ethic may have a strong influence on how RAs confront critical incidents. Without this information, to be used in conjunction with this study, the clearest picture of the RA experience is not yet achieved. While examining major trends and making recommendations about RA training is important and worth exploring, studying the motivation and personal experience of RAs by way of a focus group or interview-style methodology may serve to enhance the value of this study (see Chapter Five: Areas for Future Research). These and other limitations are elaborated on in some detail in ‘Chapter Five: Limitations’, as well.

Despite these limitations, this study provided some interesting insights into the experiences of RAs on the job and training courses for RAs.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One introduces the research questions and the purpose of the study. Chapter Two contains a review of the existing and relevant literature about the critical incident technique, RA reflection, and training needs of RAs. Chapter Three describes the methodology employed in the study, including sampling techniques and procedures to collect and analyze data. The results of the study are reported in chapter four and chapter five discusses the results and their implications for future practice and research.

Chapter Two Literature Review

A thorough review of the existing literature and research was undertaken to examine the ways in which RA training might be improved using the Critical Incident Technique. This process provided a framework structure for the study and yielded a number of bodies of literature related to the topics under examination.

The first part of this review examines the history and application of the Critical Incident Technique. This portion of the literature focuses on the theoretical underpinnings of both organizational psychology and the critical incident technique as well as past applications of this technique and what has been learned from it.

The second part of this literature review first looks the training of RAs, and how successful training techniques can arise from a variety of points of view. It also examines some of the current models for improving RA training. Finally, the literature review focuses on the some of the philosophies of RA training, and some of the current research in the field.

Organizational Psychology: The Critical Incident Technique

Resident Advisers (RAs) face a number of issues while on the job that influences their successes and failure. Despite the training that they receive either prior to or during their tenure as residence hall staff members, there are occurrences on the job that shape the ways that RAs learn, understand, and act.

This fact demonstrates the importance of on-the-job (OTJ) training. OTJ training courses can be created to take advantage of the skills and lessons that RAs learn while living and working in the residence halls with undergraduate students. Twale and Muse (1996) noted in a recent study, that in as many as one in three RAs relied somewhat or strongly on the skills they learned when facing problems and dealing with the concerns of

students. This fact seem to suggest, however, that the use of OTJ or experiential training systems do require a structure to ensure that RAs are making solid connections between their job experiences and values/ skills development.

Incorporating psychology models in to OJT training can insure the success of experiential RA training courses. There are several techniques that have been described in the literature in the last 50 years. All these techniques have a common focus on attempting to bridge the gap between leadership and team membership. Such a gap often exists in strongly diverse groups of individuals who are working towards a common goal (Cohen & Smith, 1976). Traditional classroom-based RA training has failed to take into account the importance of experiential learning. Many scholars in the student affairs field (Winston, Ullom, & Werring, 1984; Blimming & Miltenberger, 1990) utilize primarily a the traditional, didactic, classroom based format. It has been suggested that RA training methods could be made more effective by adapting training courses to cover more of what is important to RAs and rather than the personal biases perceived by trainers and supervisors (Burrell & Twale, 1995).

It is important to define a structure for designing training programs that take into account OJT learning experiences. Since this method of training relies heavily on the events in RAs' lives, it is necessary to identify a unit of measure or occurrence. These occurrences might be called incidents. Incidents are important events that RAs face on the job such as roommate conflicts, disorderly behavior, or program planning. Incidents may also be events or important happenings in their personal or scholarly lives, but this study will not examine those incidents. Events that force RAs to confront time-management, study skills, or social needs issues may be as important to their staff members' development as other aspects of the RA job (Flannagan, 1959).

A way to examine the experiences of RAs such they it can be incorporated into a training program, involves the use of a technique of case study found in Industrial/Organizational Psychology, hereon referred to as organizational psychology. The technique that may be of significant value in RA training is called the Critical Incident Technique (CIT). Flannagan (1954) originally developed the CIT with an eye towards applications in military psychology and, eventually, business and industry. The process was designed to identify factors involved in the success or failure of leadership styles in aircraft pilots and business managers, respectively (Schmelzer, Schmelzer, Figler, & Brozo, 1987; Cohen & Smith, 1976). The goal of the technique, at the time of its first trials, was to measure the leadership ability of the pilots involved in the project. Flannagan sought to understand what factors influenced their leadership style.

Flannagan (1951) described the ‘incident’ as, “any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predications to be made about the person performing the act (p. 327)”. This definition of ‘the incident’ as a unit, allowed research work to be quantified and individual experiences to be tabulated. It was crucial for Flannagan and his fellow researchers to be able to have a small discrete unit with which to work. Furthermore, Flannagan defined the ‘critical incident’ as “[occurring] in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where its consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects” (p. 327).

The CIT consists of a set of procedures designed to collect data on human behavior in such a way that it could be useful for realistic problems and developing psychological principles (Flannagan, 1951). Generally, it is used to get a picture of an event that actually affected or that realistically could affect an individual. As a method of

investigation, the CIT tends to be a portrayal of a single event or incident and leaves out much of the background and long-term information. Its goal is to study on-going processes by selecting a representative event, evaluating the component parts, and the prescription of alternative responses (Cohen & Smith, 1976). The CIT attempts to identify a significant issue or theme in the incident together with the identification of additional information needed for successful analysis (Murry & Von der Embse, 1973). Miner (1969) describes the major advantages of the CIT as its ability to establish comprehensive definitions of role requirements, especially if these descriptions are not available from other sources. Also of benefit is the CIT's ability to provide information to the researcher without the personal bias and beliefs of the participant. Interestingly enough, Miner also notes that the CIT's major drawback is in its tendency to foster excessively close staff supervision and blame finding (1969).

For researchers to utilize the CIT, they must be able to identify additional information that is necessary to complement the small amount of data provided by the participant. To that end, the researcher is required to identify additional theories and other applicable concepts, which will support and justify his or her conclusions (Murry & Von der Embse, 1973). It is in this system of theoretical justification of pertinent experiences that the CIT becomes such a powerful tool. A useful example of the application of the CIT can be found in some of the writings of Miner.

Miner (1969) describes a project undertaken by Flannagan at the Minnesota Mining and Minerals Corporation (3M) in the mid-1950s. The project goal was to evaluate the success of salesmen in the company. Flannagan began by asking the various sales managers of the different divisions of the company to submit short stories or anecdotes (Flannagan uses the term 'critical incidents') that illustrated what they

considered effective or ineffective salesman behavior. In the first trial, there were 61 instances of effective or successful behavior and 35 examples of ineffective or poor behavior reported by the sales managers. After analyzing the 96 responses, Flannegan and his team were able to divide the responses into 15 general categories of behavior. Some of these categories were labeled, 'following-up', 'carrying out promises', and 'communicating all necessary information to sales managers'.

When these categories had been identified, the researchers created a rating sheet, which covered all 15 of these behaviors. The researchers then spoke with each of the sales managers about specific salesmen and asked them to assign a level of agreement to a statement that corresponded to each individual salesman. Some of the statements were:

- Follows up quickly on requests from customers.
- Promises too much to customers.
- Writes poor sales reports. (Miner, 1969, p.115)

With this technique, the administrators were better able to design training programs for salesmen. With this success Flannagan had demonstrated the feasibility of using actual real-world situations (the anecdotes or critical incidents) to develop ways to improve performance.

The Critical Incident Technique has also been used in professions closer to residence education with similar results. Schmeizer, Schmeizer, Figler, & Brozo (1987) conducted an examination of university students using the CIT. Their goal was to determine what reason(s) students had for their success or failure in college. The authors determined that they would need to collect reports of 'critical behaviors'. For the purposes of the study, the authors defined critical as, "making a difference in the success or failure of a particular work situation (p, 262)."

The study consisted of 50 undeclared freshmen students who were enrolled in study skills courses, and 67 junior and senior business majors. All the participants were students at a public regional university in the mid-South. As a portion of their class work, the participants were given the following written directions:

Describe a specific situation when you were especially successful (productive) and a situation where you were especially unsuccessful (unproductive) in a course. Explain why you think you succeed or failed (i.e., what factors were most influential in your success and failure?). Additionally, describe who was primarily responsible for your success and lack of success. Please be specific.

(Schmeizer, Schmeizer, Figler, & Brozo, 1987)

The students were given 30 minutes to complete the task. Afterwards, raters were chosen from the student participants, and they were instructed to read their assigned portion of the responses and, when sufficiently prompted with phrases such as, “I failed because...”, or, “I attribute my success to...” place them into categories. When complete, the responses were exchanged among groups to insure interrater reliability. The authors noted that the raters agreed on classifications 94 percent of the time.

At the completion of the exercise, the researchers were able to draw some conclusions about the situations students felt were the easiest and most difficult to handle. They were also able to determine what common skills were utilized and learned when dealing with these critical incidents.

Studies such as the two presented here demonstrate the versatility and power of the Critical Incident Technique. From its use in the literature, it appears that the CIT is able to quickly illustrate basic structures and mechanisms of the individuals in question. Information gained from these studies and others like them have furthered the body of knowledge of not only student affairs and education, but the entire realm of

organizational psychology and interpersonal relations. Its use as a tool in the betterment of RA training is a logical progression and natural evolution of the technique.

Cohen and Smith (1976) note that in a teaching and training role, the CIT can be used to analyze a series of events that are deemed important by the practitioner. There are various means by which this technique could be translated into successful training options, which may include worksheets and role-playing. If used properly the CIT can actually help the various typologies of individuals to understand and appreciate the personalities of others encountered on a daily basis. If structured properly, the applications of the CIT are virtually limitless.

Looking at Training RAs.

Winston, Ullom, and Werring (1984) point out that the college residence hall system was probably one of the first campus agencies to use undergraduate students extensively as paraprofessionals in organized and ongoing programs. They also point out that the training of the RAs is second in importance only to recruitment and selection.

Training for the RA has taken many forms in the time students have served as RAs. Typically, a major aspect of the training is some form of class or for-credit opportunity. RA training courses usually incorporate some content about the various roles that RAs play in the residence halls. These roles can range from administrator, to role model, to policy enforcer. RAs are also often asked to play the role of community spirit booster, counselor and university liaison (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1990; Weslowski, Bowman, & Adams, 1996). All these various roles must be address by training if RAs are to be successful in the residence halls.

One way to educate RAs about their role in working with residents involves instruction in the basics of student development theory. Theories of student and

psychological development are often taught to RAs, and usually include Erikson, Chickering, Piaget, Kohlberg, Perry (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1990) and other researchers and psychologists. Schuh, Stage and Westfall (1991) believe that RAs can benefit from an education in student development theory, such as Chickering's Seven Vectors concept. From these basic discussions of human behavior and the needs of students during the traditional college ages of 18 and 22, RAs began to develop an internal model of the prototypical college student and the issues she or he may face.

Some experts have questioned the value of teaching paraprofessionals in student development theory. Schuh, Stage and Westfall note that such student affairs pioneers as Bioland, Plato, and Stamatakos (1991) have questioned the use of theory in the classroom. They argue such lessons may ultimately confuse RAs (Bioland, 1986). However, most practitioners today accept that RAs need to have a basic understanding of student development theory. Their frequent contact with students and residence hall issues demonstrates a need for a working knowledge of the interactions between college students and the environment (Heineman & Strange, 1984; Strange & Contomanolis, 1983). Because of this need, it therefore seems logical to ensure that RAs receive professional and proper training in these student development theories (Winston, Ullom, & Werring, 1984).

However, developmental theory is only one component of RA training. Other investigators suggest that there are further topics that RA training courses should address. RAs also learn other lessons that are not as directly tied to developmental theory. The term 'lessons' here refers to information and procedures needed by RAs to facilitate the living and learning needs of the residents. Often this includes summaries of reports, community logs, and other administrivia required by the institution and resident life

program director. RAs may also learn about human relations' skills, goal setting strategies, assessment and counseling, and referral skills (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1990; Firgault, Maloney, & Trevino, 1986).

Some findings suggest that the most important information that RAs receive is not theory but other lessons (Knouse & Rodgers, 1981). A 1995 study by Bowman and Bowman found that both public and private institutional RAs reported that the most important lesson that they learned in their RA training class was developing interpersonal skills.

Training RAs via Experiential Learning.

Because RAs are typically required to participate in the training courses during or before in their first semester of employment (Eichenfield, Graves, Slief, & Haslund, 1988), such courses represent the majority of the RA training process. This being said, it is important to note that other kinds of on-going training opportunities exist for RAs. Many residence education training programs provide in-service sessions for RAs periodically throughout the year. Furthermore, it can be said that the supervision that RAs receive from supervisors on a daily basis is a form of on-going training. Supervision, such as that provided by graduate or professional hall directors or area coordinators may involve conversations or learning exercises which prompt RAs to understand some new aspect of their job, or refine their performance as staff members. This study will not focus on these two aspects of RA training, but their existence and value may be examined in a future study. Schuh, Stage and Westfall (1995) report that RAs who have been on the job for at least one semester are able to recognize relationships between the theories and lessons taught in their training classes and the

situations that occur in their halls. For RAs, understanding that relationship is the most important factor in determining what actions they will take.

However, RAs on the job continue to gain and learn valuable skills and lessons that will help them in their RA role. Once RAs are working, they typically have a relatively high degree of independence in terms of their dealings with residents. Though a senior RA, graduate, or professional hall director may supervise them, their initial actions are based on their own instincts and their training (Blimming & Miltenberger 1990).

Most residence education programs employ a system to guide and direct hall staff interactions with students (Winder & Moss-Davies, 1971). RAs are expected to meet certain job requirements (Blimling, 1995). They approach these requirements in different ways. Bertschy (1980) suggests that there is a four-step process towards meeting job requirements: analyze the environment, define the objectives behaviorally, devise means for reaching the objectives, and devise evaluative techniques for ascertaining when objectives have been reached. Often times these aspects of successful RAs come from the goal setting of the Hall Director as well as the experiential learning RAs gain while on the job.

Some research has been done on the value of experiential versus classroom training. Weslowski, Bowman, and Adams (1996) attempted to determine if there was a difference in the ways that RAs learn to function in their role. Using 44 participants, the researchers exposed these RAs to three modalities of learning: a cognitive model, a vicarious model, and an experiential model. The cognitive model consisted of a lecture type format in which RAs were presented information on a blackboard, overhead projector, and flip chart. The presenter engaged the RAs with questions and solicited responses. The vicarious model incorporated the content into videotapes that were

designed to illicit responses and discussions among RA participants. The experiential model involved asking RAs to role-play various parts in a mock simulation, which strove to address the same issues as the cognitive and vicarious models.

Based on the responses of the RA participants, the researchers were able to make determinations about the relative levels of success in each modality. They found that there were in fact few differences among the three models. However, based on some of the scores of the participants in the three areas, the authors of the study suggest that “a lecture-based format is a less effective way for RAs to gain skills and abilities” (Weslowski, Bowman, & Adams, 1996).

Rand and Carew (1970) had undertaken a similar study years earlier. They looked at two distinct groups of RAs in two different training settings: an experientially focused encounter group and an instructor-presented (or didactic) lecture-format group. The study looked at topics that RAs experienced such as self-awareness, impact on others, and ways to deal with the feelings of others. Their findings showed that there was a significant difference between the two groups. Individuals in the encounter group were more focused on relaying their experiences on the job in the residence halls, while, conversely, the didactic group tended to rely on the topics and systems they had learned about in a lecture class. The data in this study indicated that there was a significant difference in the success of the experientially based group as compared to a control group. There was no appreciable difference in the didactic group and a similar control group.

These studies seem to suggest that resident advisers benefit primarily from skills and knowledge that they discover on their own. Either through a self-directed vicarious method of learning, or through a more general experiential on-the-job style of learning,

resident advisers seem to become more proficient at a faster rate when training primarily focuses on role-playing and processing of experiences seen on the job.

As the literature has shown, some precedent exists for the use of The Critical Incident Technique in evaluating RA experiences. These experiences may have the ability to mold and shape the individual and his or her style of leadership and conflict resolution. The Critical Incident Technique also provides a strong foundation for designing and improving training for these individuals.

The literature has also shown that RAs face many different kinds of situations while working in the residence halls of college campuses. Many different kinds of training systems have been designed over the years; some more cognitive than others. Recently, there has been much focus on the experiential learning opportunities in RA training. Much research has been conducted on this topic, and many scholars point out that experiential training techniques are, in many ways, more successful than classroom or lecture based training techniques.

Despite the differences between these two schools of thought, one point seems clear: experiential learning by RAs is crucial to their overall success as paraprofessional staff members. It also appears that the Critical Incident Technique, which has had a distinguished, if small, role in the development of organizational psychology, may be a valuable tool for developing RA training programs.

Chapter Three Methodology

This study sought to examine the possibility that the CIT may be used as a tool for improving RA training programs. Using a frequency count of reported incidents in residence halls, it may be possible to determine which incidents occur most often. For the purposes of this study, a system was designed that allowed incident reports generated by RAs on the job to be analyzed. These reports were utilized as source material for collecting four kinds of data: RA gender, hall type, institution type, critical incident type. Specifically, this study was designed to explore these research questions:

1. What are the critical incidents RAs experience most often on the job?
2. Is there a difference between the critical incident types reported in residence halls by institutional type?
3. Is there a difference between the critical incident types reported by hall types?
4. Is there a difference between the critical incident types reported by gender?
5. What implications do the finding have for future RA training?

Sample Selection and Research Method

Sample Selection

In collecting information from RAs in residence halls, it was necessary to determine a definition of the term 'RA.' For the purposes of this study, 'RA' was defined as any resident student staff member currently employed at an institution of higher education, working in a residence hall, whose primary responsibility is to work with and for resident students. This broad definition was chosen such that the widely varied description of the RA, which may be defined differently from institution to institution, would not hinder the study.

Three college types were selected for this study including the researcher's home institution and two other. Each of these three institutions was located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States and was chosen to represent three distinctly different college or university types. The choices were also based on the researcher's ability to obtain information and cooperation.

Sub-samples of the RA population were also identified. To answer the questions posed by this research project, it was necessary to define these sub-samples as 'institution type' (large public, midsize public, small private), 'hall type' (single sex male, single sex female, and coeducational), 'gender of the RA' (male and female) and 'incident type'.

Research Method

A two step approach was chosen to examine the critical incidents RAs face on the job. This approach was chosen due to the availability of a specific type of data, and the ease in which that data could be collected and analyzed.

The first step involved collecting RA incident data. The base unit for such a collection was the Incident Report (sometimes known as Situational Reports, Action Reports or Summary Reports). These documents are standard institutional forms completed by RAs that record events or incidents that vary from the normal settings in a residence hall. RAs may write incident reports both while on call, and while off official duty. Traditionally, incident reports include a narrative of the situation in question, contact information for the parties involved, location and other logistical data, and a discussion of the follow-up activities that the staff member suggests or plans to implement.

To collect incident report (IR) data, each of the three institutions was contacted. When possible, the Director of Residence Life or Vice President for Student Affairs was

consulted about what kind of incident data were typically available and if this data could be accessed for the type of research desired for this report. These conversations often included discussions about which pieces of information would be collected, how the data would be organized, and how the confidentiality of students named in the reports would be maintained (see Appendices A and B).

Procedures

Categorizing the Critical Incident

The second portion of the research procedure involved categorizing the incident. It was necessary to adopt a scheme to define what kinds of incidents were being collected from RA reports. Not all reports would deal with just one type of incident, so it was necessary to find some schema by which the various incidents could be classified.

Three basic structures exist which could help to provide the classifications for RA incident reports. The first tool utilized was the Resident Assistant Stress Indicator (RASI). The RASI (Dickson, 1981) is a tool that was developed to help determine the types of stress RAs face while serving in the residence halls. The instrument divides stressors into six groups. The first, **Emotional Resiliency**, refers to feelings of being let down or alone, that the RA may derive from everyday relationships with students or staff on his or her floor. **Facilitative Leadership** is characterized by feelings of fear that arise from situations where the RA may have to provide strong leadership to residents. **Counseling Skills**, the third factor, involves requests or situations where the RA has to demonstrate perception, articulation or persuasion in sensitive or mediation settings. **Environmental Adjustment** concerns the RAs ability to adapt to rapidly changing situations. **Confrontive Skills** are important to staff members particularly when a challenge or threat is made to the RA's authority role. This factor is similar to

Facilitative Leadership, but usually has a less positive tone to it. **Values Development**, the final factor, “is characterized by internal or external conflicts arising from situations where personal values and priorities interact with the values of residents, staff, or the system (Dickson, Ritter, McCary & Kunch, 1977).” Each of these six factors in Dickson’s survey is related to a kind of stress that RAs may face on the job (p. 23-24).

It is easy to see how a stress indicator instrument could provide some basis for a classification of stress. The author of the RASI has described a methodical approach to understanding an aspect of the RA experience by creating defined categories. Though this study is not directly concerned with the study of stressors, it seems logical that Dickson’s RASI could serve as the guiding basis for categorizing the types of critical incidents reported by RAs.

A second method that could be used to define a schema to classify RA incident reports would involve looking to the literature to determine what roles scholars in the field believe RAs play. From this investigation, this researcher turned to the work of Gregory Blimling (1995) whose writings on the RA experience are extensive and well researched. Over many years of studying and writing about RAs, Blimling has determined that the RA role requires several distinct skill roles. Each of these skill roles requires different training content, though they may be used hand in hand while the RA serves on the job. The first of Blimling’s skill groups, **Conceptual Application**, deals with the RA’s skills in understanding human development and progress towards adulthood. **Counseling Skills** involves helping others solve problems via listening, referring, and emphasizing with others. **Basic Information**, the third skill group, concerns knowledge of rules, policies, and services on the campus in question. Fourth, **Administrative** skill deals with the RAs ability to organize, manage time, and follow

through on projects or assignments. Blimling also believes that **Teaching** skills are one of the basic functions of the RA role. He discusses two types of teaching: educational programming and role modeling, which are important to resident students. **Leadership**, the sixth skill group, comprises the RAs capacity to set objectives, motivate others, and support leadership development. The seventh skill group, **Crisis Management** requires RAs to use self-confidence, human relation skills, adaptive skills, procedure policy and good judgement to take control and resolve potentially disastrous conditions. Finally, Blimling finds that **Human Relationship** skills, those skills that assist RAs in dealing with all of the above skill groups as they relate to people, are perhaps most important (p. 5).

Blimling suggests that these eight skill groups are the primary areas within which RAs function. Furthermore, it can be inferred that he also believes that these eight groups are the skills that RAs most often need to use on the job. It seems reasonable to assume that these skills are likely to involve instances where RAs are experiencing critical incidents. It may then be feasible to use Blimling's eight skill groups as a schema for characterizing the critical incidents this study was designed to examine.

There is a third method that may be used to classify critical incidents. Job descriptions of the RA position have been created at each of the three host institutions. These job descriptions include the goals of the RA role, the requirements for the job, and the major functional areas of the RA archetype. For example, the RA job description at one of the institutions involved in this study describes six major functional areas of responsibility. The first is **Peer Helping** and this requirements speaks to the RAs maintenance and development of relationships such that personal help and services can be provided. Other functional areas are **Community Development, University Liaison,**

Student Conduct, Facilities Management, and Administration (see Appendix C).

These are very similar to the skill groups that Blimling describes.

However, other institutions, without relying on an established theoretical framework to structure or drive their RA job roles, have very similar categories. A second institution involved in this research divides their RA job requirements into three basic groups (see Appendix D). The first **General Expectations**, discusses RA policy knowledge, referral agent status, and liaison between students and the University. The second is **Management/Administrative**, and covers duties that deal with duty nights, maintenance and facilities management, clerical and record-keeping tasks, and behavioral concerns. The final job requirement listed is **Staff and Hall Community Development**. This last area concerns the RAs responsibility to be a visible and constructive force on the floor, addressing the needs of students and dealing with concerns that they may have.

Residence education supervisors and hall directors use RA job descriptions to instruct, educate, and design the training RAs rely on successfully accomplish their jobs. To this end, these job descriptions play an important part in the activities and events that make up the RA experience. Therefore, these job descriptions may represent a reasonable way to deal with the problem of classifying critical incidents.

These three very different schemes might allow for several different classifications for critical incidents. Each method presents strengths and weaknesses as well different levels of complexity. For the purposes of this study, it seems reasonable to fuse all three concepts into one simple schema, which will categorize incidents at the three host institutions regardless of the differences in administrative structure and institutional philosophy.

Among the three systems described previously, several common threads exist. In each group, RAs are understood to confront **crisis situations**, which may involve the injury of a student or a crucial failure of some facility such that harm could come to students. These kinds of situations usually do not result in judicial action or the enforcement of a policy by the RA. In the crisis situation, RAs simply act to solve the problem and tend to the safety and health of the residents and upkeep of the facilities. Some examples of a crisis situation might be the transport of a student from the residence hall for an emergency medical reason, an explosion, a fight or other assault, or a sexual assault. The behavior and conflicts of residents may similarly require RA to take specific actions that may not necessarily occur in a crisis situation. **Policy enforcement** appears to be an incident type that could have a profound effect on the RA experience. Typically, RAs may face policy enforcement issues when they confront alcohol use by underage students, or any kind of drug use. RAs may also act to enforce policy when dealing with vandalism, theft, or other violations of rules set forth in a student handbook. The mitigating factor that differentiates policy enforcement issues from crisis situations is the lessened immediacy of the situation. An RA may be able to walk away from a policy enforcement situation, only to revisit it again at a later time.

Facilities issues require RAs to implement a system by which they can receive the help they need to repair damaged furniture or clean a selected area of the residence hall. Facilities management issues can be immediate when they concern the safety of residents, such as damaged fire alarm equipment or other external door locks. They may also be long-term projects, which require the follow-up of other staff members, such as painting over graffiti or replacing missing lounge furniture. **Administrative concerns** involve an RA's response to a university request for completing paperwork, engaging in

required meetings with residents (such as floor meetings), or performing a collateral duty prescribed in the position description, such as a weekly report. Typically, these procedures do not require quick action, and may be assigned many weeks in advance of their due date. A final incident type, **peer advising** usually involves RAs providing information, mentoring, and suggestions to students living in the residence halls. RAs may consult with students concerning academics, social needs, and career desires. RAs often can rely on personal experiences in dealing with these issues, as well as training programs that instruct in successful advising.

Any one of these five incident types has the potential to be very important in the lives of RAs. Furthermore, they seem to be generalizable to RAs from many institutions and many different hall types. For these reasons, this scheme of five incident types will be used in this study.

Organizing the Data

Once access to incident reports was obtained at each institution, a system to collect data was devised. All available IRs were numbered and coded to identify the institution from which they came. The text and narrative of each IR was then read. A Data Collection Matrix was created (see Appendix E) for each institution. The matrix contained series rows, each with four columns titled: 'incident type', 'institution type', 'gender', and 'hall type'. In each cell a numerical value was entered for each of the three kinds of information required. For example, if a male RA wrote a report, a '1' was entered into the column titled 'RA Gender'. For statistical accuracy, each incident was entered twice if male and female RAs were involved: one entry reflecting the male's participation and one reflecting the female's involvement. Once information for the RA gender and hall types was entered into a row, the IR was then reread to determine what

incident types were present. The five incident types described in the previous section of this report were numbered '1' through '5' and were entered in a cell, which corresponded, to 'incident types'. In situations where multiple incident types could be recognized from a single RA report, each incident occurrence was treated as an individual entry in the data collection matrix.

Residence education staff members at each institutional were requested to provide clarification if the determination of the RA gender was not or the hall type of a specific building or floor readily apparent.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis process was designed to answer the research questions posed in this study. Information, which was collected in the data collection matrix, was systematically organized and reviewed using both qualitative and quantitative techniques.

Once data collection matrices had been completed for each of the three institutional types, data analysis tables were constructed (pages 39-58). These tables were generated by a spreadsheet software package and designed to illustrate the results of the statistical test. Because the focal variable of the research design, the critical incident type (see page 29-30), is an ordinal data type, it was necessary to employ a test which would be able to illustrate significance in a statistically sound manner. Such a test is the chi-squared test that attempts to determine if significance exists in an observed data by comparing it to expected values. Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) describe the chi-squared test, saying, "[It] is a nonparametric statistical test to determine whether research data in the form of frequency counts are distributed differently for different samples" (p. 400). By comparing the occurrence frequency of a specific response in one category against the other responses in the same category, it is possible to determine if statistical significance

exists within a category: this is the chi-squared statistic. A computer software package was used to determine the chi (X^2) statistic.

The first research question posed in this study asked which critical incidents RAs most often experienced. It was answered by determining a total number for each of the five incident types used in this study. The data collection matrix allowed for observations of each of the cells containing critical incident-type information and a determination of the total number of crisis situations (type 1), policy enforcement (type 2), facilities management issues (type 3), administrative procedures (type 4) and advising issues (type 5) reported by RAs.

Determining if there was a statistically significant difference between the Critical Incidents reported by male and female RAs, required that the total number of male and female RAs be known, as well as the frequency of each of the five incidents types among each gender. The chi-squared test was used to make this determination. The test statistic and all other pertinent data were collected and presented in the data analysis table (see pages 39-58).

A similar technique was used to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the critical incidents reported by RAs and the type of hall as well as a statistically significance between critical incidents reported and institution type.

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

This study hopes to ensure authenticity and trustworthiness in its design such that the conclusions might be of use to other researchers and interested parties. Every effort was made to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. For example, the data collection methodology and forms, which were designed to organize the data collected from participants, was offered for review to the respective Directors of Residence Life at the

three participant institutions, as well as a Professor in Educational Leadership. This step was undertaken in the hopes that any errors or structural issues might be realized, and that the design reflected the current state of residence education. In addition, residence education staff members were routinely called upon to help clarify the information on the IR forms when data were in question. Finally, other experts in student affairs and residence education were employed to offer suggestions about the rating of data in the hopes that a more universal acceptance of these responses could be developed.

An attempt to determine the authenticity of this study was made by way of a small pilot study of the data analysis technique. RA reports were taken from a controlled environment at the largest of the host institutions. These reports were analyzed as if they were to be used in the study. A complete set of statistical tests were made using this sample data. The trial analysis was also reviewed in the presence of experts in student affairs and residence education in the hopes that the technique's authenticity could be verified before actual data collection began. Additionally, when data collection had been completed, a professor in educational research was consulted to verify that the statistical methods chosen were appropriate and correct for the goals.

It is believed that these measures will help to ensure the value of this study. It was only with the cooperation of professionals and experts in the student affairs, residence life and educational research that the results of this study could be verified.

This study was designed to examine ways in which resident adviser training might be improved with the help of the Critical Incident Technique. The methods discussed in this chapter were developed specifically with the goals of this project in mind. It is hoped that this method of data collection is appropriate to determine answers to the research questions. It is believed that this design was adequately researched, refined, and

verified with professionals in the field. Their validity can be trusted and used as a basis for further investigations into this and other related topics.

Chapter Four Results

This chapter discusses the result of the data analysis procedure described in Chapter Three. This section is divided into two major sections: a description of the sample followed by illustrations of the data analysis and findings. The sample description section examines the procedure and outcomes of the data collection process, looking at expected and unexpected occurrences. The data analysis and findings sections offers a brief look at some of the raw data along with the statistical tests used to make meaning. Finally, tables of the key statistics and finding are also presented.

Sample

The data analysis procedure occurred as described in Chapter Three. To summarize, two regional and one local university (the researcher's home institution) were contacted, and presented with the project concept. Once approval had been granted, a visit was made to each campus. Incident Reports (called Situational Reports at the small private university identified in analysis tables as 'institution three') were collected and data were taken in the four categories described earlier: institution type, hall type, RA gender, and incident type. A portable computer and spreadsheet software were used to organize and store the data prior to analysis. The collection process confirmed some generalizations and supported some decisions made earlier in the methodology. However, there were also some unexpected occurrences, which required minor changes in the research design. Both these expected and unexpected occurrences are described below.

Expected Occurrences.

Many of the choices made in the research design described in Chapter Three were proven valuable during the data collection phase. A typical data collection trip typically

involved driving to one of the participating institutions in the area. Typically, on these trips a portable computer running a spreadsheet program was employed to collect the data. The spreadsheet was an exact copy of the data collection matrix illustrated in Appendix E. As was described in the previous chapter, all of the incident reports made available to the researcher were read and summarized into this data collection matrix.

The data collection process proceeded as envisioned, and in the course of three weeks, almost 3600 incident reports were read and reviewed at the three participant institutions. Three spreadsheet files, one for each institution, were maintained in order to assist in organizing the data. It was determined during the collection process that the five categories created for this study would be appropriate for cataloguing all the data observed. Several unique situations were discovered regarding the description of some types of incidents, and those situations are discussed in the following section.

When data collection had been completed, all records were combined into a single data collection matrix and imported from the spreadsheet program into the statistical analysis software. The statistical software package examined all 3592 records and was then able to calculate expected values (based on the reported value, 'Observed N' in the tables), and a residual value which was necessary to determine the significance of the results. The software was also able to calculate the chi-squared statistic, the degrees of freedom, and the significance (the p value). These values are reported below in the 'Data Summaries' section.

Unexpected Occurrences.

While it is believed that the basic structure of this study is sound, there were several realizations made during the data collection process which could change or impact the direction of the study. One of these areas of the research design was

determined to be the depth of the categories of incident types and several assumptions and decisions had to be made to insure that this data could be of value to the study.

Some IRs observed during data collection were seen to contain two distinct incidents. For example and RA may confront a misbehaving student, issue a judicial sanction as well as a long conversation with the student about his behavior or what led to that behavior. In this case, two separate entries were entered into the data collection matrix each showing institution type, hall type, and RA gender and then either *policy enforcement* or *advising* under 'incident type'.

A second unforeseen occurrence concerned categorizing unforeseen incidents. For example, numerous IRs describing RAs dealing with room changes, security issues, and information referrals were placed in the '*administrative procedures*' incident type, because it was deemed to be simply the reporting of an incident dealing with students needs. '*Administrative procedures*' also was chosen as appropriate for incidents, which involved RAs simply reporting concerns that about which other residents or staff informed them, such as a death in the family, and concerns about missing students and non-serious injuries.

Reports of bodily spills and vandalism were considered '*facilities management*' issues, as they usually require the RA to call for help and enact some clean-up system. They may also involve other incident types. Finally the '*policy enforcement*' type was often used when RAs reported dealing with reports of harassing phone calls and thefts, as the RA must rely on some of the same skills he does as these occurrences typically are violations of college or university policy.

Lastly, due to an inability to collect sufficient data from all-male residence halls, the hall types of 'Male' and 'Female' were collapsed into a new hall type category:

‘Single Sex halls’. While this change does slightly alter one aspect of this study, there were no significant effects on the results or implications. It will still be possible to discuss the training needs of RAs work on floors where only one gender lives. Only questions, which pertain to the differences in reporting between RAs on male floors and RAs on female floors, will be effected.

Data Summaries

The following tables represent a summation of the data collected in the field. The meanings and implications of this information will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Five.

The first six tables represent a comparison of the three types of institutions to the five incident types examined in this study. Table 1 illustrates a rank order of all incidents at the three institutions and Table 2 demonstrates the frequencies at which RAs at the three institution types report dealing with crisis situations. As can be seen in the table, RAs at midsize public institutions report a significantly larger number of crisis situations than do RAs at either of the other two school types. RAs at small private institutions, report fewer crisis situations than would be expected.

In table 3, RAs at large public institutions report dealing with more policy enforcement issues (type 2) than would be expected, while the other two institution types show no significant findings. Table 4 suggests that while RAs at large public institutions do report a significant number of facilities issues, RAs at small private schools report significantly fewer than expected.

Table 1.

Rank Order of Incident Types by Institution Type.

<u>Large Public</u>	<u>Midsized Public</u>	<u>Small Private</u>	<u>All</u>
1. Facilities Concerns	1. Policy Violations	1. Policy Violations	1. Policy Violations
2. Policy Violations	2. Facilities Concerns	2. Advising Issues	2. Facilities Concerns
3. Advising Issues	3. Advising Issues	3. Administrative	3. Advising Issues
4. Administrative	4. Administrative	4. Facilities Concerns	4. Administrative
5. Crisis Situation	5. Crisis Situation	5. Crisis Situation	5. Crisis Situation

Table 2: Institution Type vs. Incident Type 1 (Crisis Situation):

Institution Type	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Large Public	81	86.7	-5.7
Midsized Public	57	42.8	14.2
Small Private	20	28.5	-8.5
Total	158		

Chi Square: 7.655
 Degrees of Freedom: 2
 Asymp. Sig. p <.022

Table 3: Institution Type vs. Incident Type 2 (Policy Enforcement):

Institution Type	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Large Public	478	712.3	-234.3
Midsized Public	431	351.0	83.0
Small Private	381	229.7	151.3
Total	1293		

Chi Square:	196.425
Degrees of Freedom:	2
Asymp. Sig.	p <.000

Table 4 Institution Type vs. Incident Type 3 (Facilities Issues):

Institution Type	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Large Public	594	498.6	95.4
Midsized Public	257	245.7	11.3
Small Private	54	160.7	-106.7
Total	905		

Chi Square:	89.619
Degrees of Freedom:	2
Asymp. Sig.	p <.000

In Table 5, resident advisers at large public institutions also report more administrative concerns than expected, while RAs at other institutions do not report any significant difference in the number of administrative concerns they encounter when compared to the expected numbers. Lastly, Table 6 illustrates RAs at large public institutions reporting encounters with many more peer advising situations than expected. RAs at midsize public schools report many fewer peer advising incidents than expected.

Tables 7 through 12 present information about the relationships between the five incident types and the hall types in question. Table 7 ranks the number of incidents versus the two hall types while Table 8 demonstrates the frequencies at which RAs in the two hall types report dealing with crisis situations. As can be seen in the table, RAs in coed halls report crisis situations about as often as RAs in single halls. In Table 9, RAs in coed residence halls report dealing with a significantly larger numbers of policy enforcement issues (type 2) than would be expected, with the RAs in single sex halls reported many fewer policy enforcement issues than would be expected. Table 10 suggests that RAs on single sex halls report experiencing fewer facilities issues than do RAs on coed floors. In Table 11, RAs on coed floors report dealing with about the same number of administrative concerns as RAs on single sex floors. Finally, in Table 12, RAs working in both hall types reported encountering peer-advising issues at expected frequencies.

Finally, the question of RA gender and incident type is address in tables 13 through 18. This section of the data analysis may be most useful to building staff and professional student affairs administrators. The data suggests that female RAs (gender type 2) may be dealing with as many or more crisis incidents than male RAs. Male RAs are shown to report a greater number of policy enforcement and facilities incidents than

female RAs. Conversely, female RAs report a larger number of incident types 4 and 5 (administrative concerns and peer advising issues) in tables 17 and 18.

With the completion of the data analysis portion of this study, it is now possible to address the research questions. It is necessary to set this analysis in some context, particularly how it can influence the training of RAs. It will also be necessary to offer some suggestions as to how these analyses may have been effected by the environment of institutions. The final chapter will examine these and other questions posed in this study.

Table 5: Institution Type vs. Incident Type 4 (Administrative Concerns):

Institution Type	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Large Public	420	324	96
Midsized Public	94	159.6	-65.6
Small Private	74	104.4	-30.4
Total	588		

Chi Square:	64.260
Degrees of Freedom:	2
Asymp. Sig.	p <.000

Table 6: Institution Type vs. Incident Type 5(Peer Advising):

Institution Type	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Large Public	406	356.5	49.5
Midsized Public	132	175.6	-43.6
Small Private	109	114.9	-5.9
Total	647		

Chi Square:	18.002
Degrees of Freedom:	2
Asymp. Sig.	p <.000

Table 7

Rank Order of Incident Types by Hall Type

<u>Single Sex</u>	<u>Coed</u>	<u>All</u>
1. Facilities Concerns	1. Policy Violations	1. Policy Violations
2. Advising Issues	2. Facilities Concerns	2. Facilities Concerns
3. Policy Violations	3. Administrative	3. Advising Issues
4. Administrative	4. Advising Issues	4. Administrative
5. Crisis Situation	5. Crisis Situation	5. Crisis Situation

Table 8: Hall Type vs. Incident Type 1 (Crisis Situation):

Hall Type	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Coed	126	125.6	0.8
Single Sex	32	32.8	-0.8
Total	158		

Chi Square: 0.024
 Degrees of Freedom: 1
 Asymp. Sig. p <.876

Table 9: Hall Type vs. Incident Type 2 (Policy Enforcement)

Hall Type	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Coed	1116	1024.6	91.4
Single Sex	117	268.4	-91.4
Total	1293		

Chi Square: 39.276
 Degrees of Freedom: 1
 Asymp. Sig. p <.000

Table 10: Hall Type vs. Incident Type 3 (Facilities Issues):

Hall Type	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Coed	696	717	-21.0
Single Sex	209	188.0	21.0
Total	905		

Chi Square: 2.961
 Degrees of Freedom: 1
 Asymp. Sig. p <.085

Table 11: Hall Type vs. Incident Type 4 (Administrative Concerns):

Hall Type	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Coed	466	465.9	0.01
Single Sex	122	122.1	-0.01
Total	588		

Chi Square: .000
 Degrees of Freedom: 1
 Asymp. Sig. p <.992

Table 12: Hall Type vs. Incident Type 5 (Peer Advising):

Hall Type	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Coed	442	512.8	-70.6
Single Sex	205	134.4	70.6
Total	647		

Chi Square: 46.810
 Degrees of Freedom: 1
 Asymp. Sig. p <.000

Table 13

Rank Order of Incident Types by RA Gender

Male RAs	Female RAs	All
1. Policy Violations	1. Policy Violations	1. Policy Violations
2. Advising Issues	2. Facilities Concerns	2. Facilities Concerns
3. Facilities Concerns	3. Advising Issues	3. Advising Issues
4. Administrative	4. Administrative	4. Administrative
5. Crisis Situation	5. Crisis Situation	5. Crisis Situation

Table 14: Gender vs. Incident Type 1 (Crisis Situation):

Gender Type	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Male RAs	55	63.7	-8.7
Female RAs	103	94.3	8.7
Total	158		

Chi Square: 1.989
 Degrees of Freedom: 1
 Asymp. Sig. p <.158

Table 15: Gender vs. Incident Type 2 (Policy Enforcement):

Gender Type	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Male RAs	609	521.2	87.8
Female RAs	684	771.8	-87.8
Total	1293		

Chi Square:	24.779
Degrees of Freedom:	1
Asymp. Sig.	p <.000

Table 16: Gender vs. Incident Type 3 (Facilities Issues):

Gender Type	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Male RAs	415	364.8	50.2
Female RAs	490	540.2	-50.2
Total	905		

Chi Square: 11.573
 Degrees of Freedom: 1
 Asymp. Sig. p <.001

Table 17: Gender vs. Incident Type 4 (Administrative Concerns):

Gender Type	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Male RAs	224	237.0	-13.0
Female RAs	364	351.0	13.0
Total	588		

Chi Square: 1.195
 Degrees of Freedom: 1
 Asymp. Sig. p <.274

Table 18: Gender vs. Incident Type 5 (Peer Advising):

Gender Type	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Male RAs	145	260.8	-115.8
Female RAs	502	356.2	115.8
Total	647		

Chi Square: 86.139
 Degrees of Freedom: 1
 Asymp. Sig. p <.000

Chapter Five Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine RA training needs by using the Critical Incident Technique. Data were collected from the incident reports generated by RAs. Five general categories of incidents were identified to facilitate data collection. After collection, data were examined using a chi-squared statistical test. This statistical test produced numerical values, which could be used to address the research questions. The frequencies of the incidents reported by RAs suggest possible new directions and implications for RA training. It is now possible to answer the five research questions, which make up the backbone of this study.

Chapter Five is divided into three sections. The first section examines the results of the data analysis procedure discussed in Chapter Four by answering the five research questions. It also offers opinions about and implications of the results focusing RA training as a framework. The second section revisits the possibility of limitations in the study as first discussed in Chapter One. The final section concludes the study and offers suggestions for future research.

Answering the Research Questions: The Implications for RA Training.

Question One

What are the types of critical incidents RAs report experiencing most often on the job? Answering this question requires only that one look at the rank order of reported incident types in Tables 1, 7, and 13. Regardless of institution type, hall type, or RA gender, resident advisers at the three institutions examined in this study report policy enforcement issues more often than any other incident type. The numerical frequency of policy enforcement- type IRs is reported in Table 3. Of the 3592 incident reports collected, 1293, or nearly 36 percent concerned policy enforcement issues. To

paraphrase, one third of all incidents that RAs report as critical to them concern addressing policy violations on residence hall floors. Policy violations (as described in Chapter Three) come in many forms, but the data collected in this study suggests that more than 70 percent were related to the use or abuse of alcohol in residence halls. This means that 27 percent of all incident reports concern alcohol use and the consequences of alcohol use in residence halls. A small number of IRs concern drug use or violence. A surprising number of IRs dealt with RAs responding to reports of thefts from residents students, though RA often are unable to provide much more than condolences and advise for these students. Perhaps as a result of the traditional view of the RA as a monitor or rule enforcer, RAs are drawn to seek out and report on policy violations.

Tables 1, 7, and 13 illustrate the rank order frequencies of incidents reported by all RAs. While policy enforcement issues are first with 1293 total reports, facilities concerns are a close second with 905 total reports. After collecting 3592 incident reports one can see that RAs in this study report that almost two thirds of all incidents they respond to are facilities or policy enforcement issues. The remaining three incident types in rank order are peer advising concerns, administrative concerns, and crisis situations. While these three incident types are reported by RAs only one out of every three incidents, this should not diminish their importance. RAs reported encountering crisis situations in only 4 percent of all incidents. These incidents, though infrequent, may be one of the best opportunities for on-the-job training. Crisis situations present the opportunity for RAs to build interpersonal, communication, and administrative skills. If an RA responds to a situation that requires medical attention for a student, the RA must learn to take control of the situation, provide directions and suggestions to residents, and contact the proper officials. These are not skills easily taught in the classroom. Working

with a mentor RA could provide the opportunity for trainees to observe these processes, and gain the necessary understanding to succeed if called upon to do so.

Question Two

Is there a difference between the critical incident types reported in residence halls by institutional type? Table 2 demonstrates that there is a statistically significant number of crisis situations reported by RAs employed at midsize public colleges. The residual indicates that RAs at these institutions report encountering crisis situations at a rate of almost twice that of RAs at small private institutions and nearly three times that of RAs at large public institutions. Neither other institution type (large public or small private) showed reports of incidents that were of statistical interest.

RA reports of policy enforcement issues are tabulated in Table 3. RAs at the large public institution reported a greater number of these types of incidents than RAs at either of the other two types of institutions. This revelation may not be surprising. An institution with a larger number of students is logically going to generate a larger number of policy enforcement incidents. And because RAs typically report this type of issue more than any other type of incident (see ‘Question One’) it is logical to deduce that large student populations would generate the larger numbers of policy enforcement issues reported by student staff members.

Results from the examination of reports on facilities issues are addressed in Table 4. In this study the ‘facilities issues’ category concerned mostly vandalism (by unknown perpetrators) and wear and tear of hall fixtures and furniture. However, a small, but important portion of the reports also dealt with reports of fire alarms and drills. Table 4 illustrates that RAs at large public institutions report a large number of facilities issues. This may be due to the large number of students and residence halls at a large campus. At an

institution where such a large number of students are served by RAs, facilities issues are the second most frequently reported incident type (one out of four reports in this study were facilities related). The low number of facilities issues that were reported by RAs at the small private institution was unexpected. There is a great difference in the number of facilities issues reported and expected at the small private institution in this study. Perhaps RAs at this institution are instructed not to use the Incident Report Form to respond to facilities issues. Or maybe the hall or floor communities at this institution are such that vandalism (accounting for half of all facilities reports) is not a concern. The implications of this finding will be examined in greater detail in the section titled 'Question Five: Implications and Institution Type.'

In Table 5, only RAs at the large public institution reported a large number of IRs dealing with administrative concerns. In this study, the majority of these types of IRs dealt with RAs reporting room changes, information about the state of the hall or floor community, programming notifications, and documentation concerning happenings on the floor. For example, there was a sizable number of administrative IRs that served to inform supervisors about the death of a family member of a floor resident, or the sickness of a floor resident.

There were relatively few administrative concerns reported. After crisis situations, administrative concerns were the smallest response group in the study. Only 588 administrative IRs were collected, which are just 15 percent of all IRs collected. Only RAs at the large public institution reported a large number of administrative concerns on their floors. This again is most likely due to the sheer size of the institution and the roles that RAs there are asked to play.

Table 6 offers statistics regarding peer-advising issues. Peer advising issues most often involve one-on-one conversations or group mediations that RAs conduct with residents their floors or halls. Typically these conversations deal with roommate or other personal conflicts. Also, this category was selected to represent the reports that RAs wrote when consoling individuals about personal crises. A few of the incidents in this study deal with RAs coping with threats of suicide. RAs at large public institutions reported a large number of peer advising incidents, and as was noted in the previous sections of this report, female RAs lead male RAs in the reporting of peer advising issues. RAs at midsize public institutions, conversely, reported a small number of peer advising issues on their halls. There was no significance noted in the occurrence of RAs at small private institutions reporting peer-advising issues. One possible reason for the dramatic number of peer advising issues at the large public institution in this study could come from the residence hall environment. This campus, which accommodates 8800 of the 25,000 students enrolled, houses more than one third in one of three extremely large buildings. As such, the ratio of students to RAs approaches 50:1 in many cases. The other institutions examined in this study have much smaller student to RA ratios. RAs in large buildings may be exposed to potentially many more peer-advising issues per capita. As such, the possibility for more serious (and therefore report-worthy) incidents only increases. One might expect a larger number of peer-advising issues at larger institutions. Conversely, a smaller institution should then experience fewer reports of RA peer advising. However, this hypothesis may not be supported. Only if a large public institution is able to offer an environment in which the RA to student ratio is lower could this hypothesis be confirmed. It seems logical to suspect that the RA to student ratio may play a large part in determining the number of peer-advising, and perhaps other kinds of issues.

Question Three

Is there a difference between the critical incident types reported by hall types? The results and rank order of incident types (Table 7) indicates that there are differences in the frequencies of incidents reported by hall type. RAs from single sex halls report facilities concerns as the most common incident type followed very closely by peer advising issues (209 facilities issues and 205 peer advising issues). While facilities concerns are heavily reported on coed halls (696 incidents) they are only a fraction of the total number of policy enforcement issues (1116 expected incidents) reported.

Policy enforcement issues were ranked third in frequency on single sex halls while administrative concerns and crisis situations were fourth and fifth respectively. Reports from RAs on coed halls place advising concerns as the third most reported incident type and advising issues and crisis situations as the fourth and fifth most common incident types.

Based on these data, there does seem to be a difference between the occurrence of certain incident types when there is a difference in hall type. There are many reasons that could explain these differences. If one incident type is reported more often on a given floor type, environmental and cultural stigmas could be developing that encourage other RAs to look specifically for these incident types. For example, if alcohol use becomes a problem on an underclass freshmen floor, RAs may focus on this issue at the expense of others. Social pressures and trends may also effect the reporting of incidents. Emotionally young RAs, for example, may feel uncomfortable discussing situations involving sexual preferences, even if a student has brought that issue to the attention of the RA. If RAs see these issues (or choose not to see them) and are uncomfortable reporting them, the frequency of reporting could be effected.

Questions Four:

Is there difference between the critical incident types reported by gender? Table 13 lists by rank order the most often and least often reported incidents by gender. Table 14 addresses the tabulation of gender and incident type 1: crisis situations. Looking at the table and the expected values, female RAs report dealing with more crisis situations than do male RAs. Most of these incidents involve the RAs responding to the needs of a student or group of students such that police, or more typically paramedics, must also become involved. Alcohol may play a large part in many of these situations though no specific policy violation is noted in the report. Cross-tabulations of gender and policy enforcement issues in Table 15 suggest that male RAs (521 expected responses versus 609 observed responses) report policy violations more often than female RAs (772 expected responses versus 684 observed responses, $\chi^2: 24.779, p < .001$). Additionally, Table 16 suggests that male RAs report dealing with facilities issues more often than female RAs. Conversely, female RAs report more often dealing with administrative and peer advising issues than male RAs in all hall types and all institution types. These two revelations do not come with much surprise, as many housing and residence life professionals note that this fact seems to be routine in many traditional residence halls. Could it be that males, who are entering a period of developing maturity (Waterman & Waterman, 1971) seek to challenge authority? Do female RAs, who resolve issues of intimacy and identity development differently than men (Hodgson & Fischer, 1979), prefer to respond to issues that allow them closer one on one and group advising and counseling time? While this study raises these questions, only future research can answer them. It is important to note that the majority of data concerning single sex hall comes from all-female halls. This information should be considered when interpreting the data.

Question Five:

Having used the CIT to identify differences in incidents as reported by RAs, it is now possible to look at the implications that these findings have for RA training programs. The fifth and final research question is: *What can be learned from the incident reporting process as it relates to RA training?* This section of the final chapter hopes to answer this question by looking at three areas in which the implications of this study will have the most impact.

1. Differences in reporting may be a function of the environment and staff should be trained to meet those challenges.
2. Differences in reporting may be a function of department philosophy, supervision, and training; frequencies should be used to confirm that staff members are attending to those priorities.
3. Differences in reporting may be a function of personal bias, if so training should attempt to make staff aware of such bias and incentives should be created to counter these tendencies.

Implications: Institution and Incident Type

There is little question that the environment of a large public institution is very different from the environment of a small private college. It is these differences that are important to consider when formulating training sessions for resident advisers and other student staff members. Environment can effect the ways in which RAs approach their jobs, as well as how they react to incidents on the job.

It has already been suggested that RAs at the three different institution types may report differences in the frequencies of incident types they experience. One of the first implications that this study raises concerns the RA's response to policy violations.

Because this incident type occurred most frequently in the data and with the emphasis now being placed nationally on alcohol and drug use on college campuses, it seems logical to address policy enforcement first. As Table 2 illustrates, RAs at two of the three institution types examined, reported a large numbers of policy enforcement issues in the residence halls.

A second area to consider when examining the relationship between institution type and incident type is training RAs to respond to crisis situations. Table 2 indicates that RAs at midsize public institutions report significantly more crises than do RAs at other institutions. Does this suggest that crisis situations occur more often at midsize public schools? This is not necessarily true. The data may simply suggest that RAs at small private schools do not feel as prepared to deal with these incidents simply because they occur less often than they do at other institution types. Therefore, when a medical transport or significant police activity occurs in the residence hall, those RA feel that those rare events are of unique importance.

The question arises as to how to better prepare RAs for dealing with crisis situations. One method in designing a training program to address this need is structuring on-the-job training activities. As Chapter Two discussed, OTJ training is a successful (and even preferred) method in which to instruct and teach RAs. Such a module might emphasis a shadowing experience with a senior RA (see page 71). It may also be possible to simulate the working environment through the use of role-playing. Role-playing allows RA trainees to emulate the role a more experienced RA while addressing prefabricated scenarios with other RAs and trainers in the roles of students. Role-playing allows RAs to fail, experience the unexpected, and receive feedback quickly all in a controlled environment.

Successful role-playing requires a realistic portrayal of the college environment. Any examination of the environment of an institution must place some emphasis on the RAs' role in the leadership and direction of the residence hall. If RAs are feeling overwhelmed by the number of residents they must work with, their training must address this need. The vast majority of policy enforcement incidents addressed by RAs concern alcohol and (occasionally) drug use. A possible reason that RAs at large public institutions report fewer incidents of policy enforcement may be due to the RA to student ratio. Because this ratio is smaller than at the other schools studied, RAs have more students to serve and therefore less time and fewer opportunities to encounter policy violations. The policy violations most likely continue to occur at a rate similar to that of other institution types, but the time that each RA has is spread more thinly. This suggests that the RA-student ratio is very important to fostering a successful responsible community, and one of the most important aspects of the environment. It also suggests that RAs at large public institutions may need training in how better to serve large diverse populations with fewer staff members to go around. This training would stress time management, communication skills, and punctuality. RAs would be encouraged to focus on the quality rather than the amount of the time they spend on their floor. RAs would also be encouraged to seek out opportunities for group and individual development and insure that they are not being missed because of an inability to commit sufficient time to the floor.

As the data in Tables 1, 7, and 13 suggest, policy violations are one of the primary incident types with which RAs must grapple. If a given institution determines that policy enforcement issues are a focal point for RA training, trainers and professional staff members should consider developing a program which teaches RA to foster strong

community standards and positive peer pressure. With the large number of policy violations occurring at these (and probably other) kinds of institutions, it may be advisable to strongly focus training efforts on RAs leadership role in the hall community. RAs should not be seen as the purveyor of standards but rather as a facilitator for the development of community standards. A portion of this training may be the expectation that RAs impress on resident students a strong commitment to policy. RAs should learn to encourage residents toward self-governance and self-regulation. Such a training program might require RAs to receive basic student development theory (see Chapter 2). Changing the culture of behavior address not only the recurring policy violations, but addresses the needs of personal and academic wellness, social development, and student ownership.

Not all colleges and universities that employ students as RAs have the same department philosophy or supervision system. The exact role that each student staff member plays on a given campus is dictated by the needs of the housing/ residence life department as well as the needs of that particular student population. Many forces, internal and external, effect the value system of a particular department, and problem-solving systems are as varied as the people who design and manage them are. A study like this one has implications for the various individuals who are tasked with directing residence life departments. Incident reports represent a valuable source of data, which can be utilized in solving problems. One has only to look at the differences in RA reporting. If RAs are required to attend to a set of tasks and priorities, which have been deemed important to the goals of the residence hall program, then incident report analysis may be very valuable. This data represents a good way to confirm that staff members are attending to their assigned tasks. For example, if professional staff members know that

alcohol use on small private campuses is a growing problem, then they might expect to see annual increases in the total number of IRs which detail policy violations involving alcohol. If they do not, and the trends are correct, changes in the training of RAs may be prudent. Such a technique suggests that critical incident analysis is a tool that can be used either independently, or with other programs to solve problems.

Implications: Hall and Incident Type

Looking at the relationship between hall type and policy enforcement, the data suggests that policy enforcement issues are most often reported in coed halls, where men and women live in close proximity (though rarely in the same room or suite). Male and female students aged 18-21 years old have very different, even divergent needs. During the traditional college period in the lives of students, women appear more interested in establishing a strong sense of community for themselves and their compatriots. Women discover their identity by relating to others and champion the virtues of mature intimacy. Males between the ages of 18 and 21 years are developing competence by focusing on career aspirations, testing their limits, and exploring their options (Hodgson and Fischer, 1979). For resident advisers to be trained to successfully respond to the dynamic needs of this environment, they must learn an appreciation for the needs of both men and women. It is also important to insure that RAs working in coed environments have the opportunity to work with both male and female RAs. Supervisors should strive to ensure that RAs are getting the experiences working with both genders while responding to the needs of the community.

If professionals suspect that resident advisers are failing to achieve a goal as a result of bias or a cultural stigma, the CIT or a related report analysis technique can be of value. An example of this situation might occur if RAs feel that the culture of their

environment (say alcohol use on large freshmen male hall) cannot be changed. Such a stereotype often handicaps RAs, especially new members of a staff. A pervasive cultural stereotype often encourages RAs to ignore a recurring problem because they feel that confronting a single incident will have no lasting impact. If this psychology becomes widespread among a small or loosely connected staff, enforcing policy and meeting department expectations becomes very difficult. Combating this problem may be possible with a revised training regimen, which offers incentives for successful and repeated interventions into recurring problems. If RAs feel that they have something to gain both personally and as a group, they may be more prone to confront each situation that they encounter. Such a program would have to be carefully constructed such that competition is not emphasized and customer service needs are not forgotten. A training program like this one may best be separated from traditional opening-semester training.

Implications: Gender and Incident Type

Female RAs report more crisis situations, administrative concerns, and peer-advising issues than male RAs. Conversely, male RAs report more policy enforcement incidents and facilities issues than female RAs. This information has several implications for RA training. Firstly, the question of training to strengths must be raised. If female RAs are finding themselves dealing with more peer-advising issues than male RAs, one line of thinking suggests that RA training programs should focus at least a portion of training specifically on building the skills of female RAs in the realm of peer-advising, administrative concerns, or crisis situations. Such training programs might focus on the personal and developmental needs of college students and some of the typical issues that students deal with during the college years. Furthermore, since female RAs almost

always serve female residents, it may be prudent to focus their training on the personal and developmental needs of female residents.

The data summarized in Table 15 suggests that male RAs do not report as many peer-advising incidents as female RAs. It could be that male residents are not prone to advising issues, or male RAs are not asked to intervene in as many peer advising incidents. It could be that male RAs tend to avoid peer-advising issues. Creating the opportunity for cognitive dissonance for male RAs by requiring them to participate in advanced discussions and preparations for peer-advising situations may be worthwhile. This is also another example of how on the job experiences can help to build the skills of resident advisers. The best teacher of peer advising skills may be the residents and resident students and their needs.

If a peer advising training session was designed for male RAs, and this study was redone to including a population of male RAs who had this advanced training, the number of incident reports concerning peer-advising issues written by male RAs may increase. RAs who are more comfortable dealing with these issues may be more prepared to report their success or failure.

A more successful method that addresses this concern may be to initiate individual gender-specific training sessions. Dividing RA trainees into two gender groups may allow female RAs to focus on improving skills they may already have and talking about issues that specifically address female residents. Trainers may wish to develop a session where male RAs can focus on peer advising for male students. These sessions might have male RAs role-play and talk about developing advising skills in a group where they do not feel pressure to succeed or compete. It would be unwise, however, to rely on gender-individual training to fulfill an RA training requirement. For

the sake of team building and building cross-gender communication skills, a good part of any training regimen must focus on coeducational RA education. But, it seems valid to suggest that single-gender-training modules could be successful in developing individual skills and communication abilities.

On the job training (OTJ) and learning is important in today's fast-paced society. This study suggests that RAs have significant opportunities to develop job and life related skills every time they cope with a critical incident. It should be possible to create a training system that seeks to expose RAs to the knowledge and skills they need to develop as they work in the residence halls. While there is value to classroom and individual learning experiences, real-world trials are more likely to cement lasting impressions in the minds of staff members. RA could be empowered to greater success on subsequent incidents when they remember how they felt and what they said to others while coping with an alcohol violation or a distraught student. A book or lecture can only tell an RA what he or she can expect to experience. Creating a training module for all RAs that encourages on-the-job learning would require a consistent learning environment that RAs can enter and leave safely. It also requires that supervisors develop a list of issues that RAs are likely to face in the environment and preparations for facilitating learning activities and revelation sessions after encounters are concluded. This environment might best be a small residence hall with a small RA-student ratio. An experienced supervisor-trainer who is able to observe the environment and evaluate the potential for RA learning quickly would also be required.

It is unethical to manipulate residents or other members of the hall community to allow for the building of RA experience. However, a knowledgeable trainer coupled with an environment where student developmental needs are well documented should be

effective. This environment must allow for natural situations to occur so that RAs can gain experience while supervisors encourage on-the-job learning.

Creating RA mentor teams would be a more simple solution to encouraging OTJ learning. Coupling an experienced, successful RA with a new trainee or candidate may allow for some of the same learning opportunities. A mentoring program would be much less expensive for the department, and potentially less invasive to the building residents. Trainees can learn from observation while asking questions and receiving immediate feedback. It also gives the trainee the opportunity to interact with residents at a pace set by the trainee or the mentor. There is no rush to complete an assignment so that another student will get the opportunity for an experience. A mentoring program could work interactively with a traditional classroom course. The length of time is also highly variable. The trainee could be assigned to spend a semester with the mentor, or just a few weeks. A mentoring program of this type also has potential to focus the trainee on the specific needs of various populations. With its ability to be infinitely customizable, RAs could even use a mentoring program to gain experience working in an environment outside their own. For example, an experienced male RA may have a chance to work with an experienced female RA in a women's building. This would allow for the continued training and development of senior staff. A side effect of such a program would be the development of a training class of staff members. It would be advisable to require that each staff member who reaches a certain point in their RA career go through the mentoring program, as it would help to eliminate bias among RA staff members, and would keep older staff attuned to the changing needs of residents.

It is the belief of this researcher that this technique will be of benefit in providing to the residence hall community strong RAs with a sense of duty and a broad base of

experiences to draw upon. Any college or university can set up this living-learning lab for student staff. It simply takes time, dedication, and creativity.

Limitations

While it is hoped that the findings and implications reported in this project will be of value to the tradition of research in student affairs, there are some limitations to this study. Some limitations were discovered in the data analysis process and others were realized at the study's conclusion.

This study was unable to examine the relationship between RAs' motivations and incident reports. Typically RA write IRs for valid reasons. However it is possible that some are written at the behest of supervisors or even residents. It is possible that an RAs might consider not writing an IR to document a situation. If instructed to complete one anyway, the questions of the importance of the IRs to the RA must be called into question. This is an example of a situation in which interviews and written surveys would be valuable. Furthermore, there is still the question of the variety in self-reporting of resident advisers. Some reports may not come in the form of a written form, but rather a telephone call or passing comment in a staff meeting. There is also the question of incidents that RAs do feel are important, but are simply not reported for one reason or another. This study did not examine these alternate sources of information, more resolution to this study may be possible with their inclusion.

The most important limitation of this study arose only after the data analysis tables had been completed and actual response numbers were visible. In the course of data collection no effort was made to ensure that equal numbers of reports were collected from each hall type. The number of incident reports received from all-male halls was very low. While the chi-square analysis takes unequal response rates into account, the

researcher is less confident in the conclusions that would have been drawn had 'male' and 'female' hall types been used.

Finally, while not a direct limitation of this study, it is important to note that some of the findings and suggestions of this study tend to run counter to the results of research studies. The field of Judicial Affairs, for example, reports that it is more common to find male freshmen and sophomores included in the judicial system than any other group. This study does not seek to undermine or discredit these works. Future research may enlighten facts the merge and complement both of these groups of research.

Conclusions and Areas for Further Research

As this report comes to a close there is one final area, which must be examined. This study suggests several possible courses for future research, which may build on and improve the value of the ideas presented herein.

Areas for Further Research

The Critical Incident Technique as created by Flannegan (1954) was designed as a survey tool in which participants were given freedom to describe the incidents they considered most important. This study chose to collect information from incident reports, written according to the requirements of the RA job. Future studies may wish to have RA participants complete a survey similar to the one used in Flannegan's 3M study. The results of a survey might help to reveal more individual aspects of the RA experience. An interview with structured questions may be even more successful. An interview may allow RA participants to elaborate on their experiences and offer the researcher a chance to delve deeper into specific areas of interest. Flannegan used such a technique when he examined the critical incidents reported by salesmen, and it seems logical to assume that the results of such a revised study would be even more. Such a study would allow for

virtually unlimited categories of incidents and would require much less interpretation by the researcher.

One additional area of research that this study suggests is one in which the motivations and rationales of RAs are studied. This research study has identified several kinds of incidents that RAs consider important. It has also examined how the frequencies of these incidents affect RAs. RAs then choose to respond to an incident and often discuss their responses in the text of their incident reports. What decision processes drive the choice of response? How has the training and developmental opportunities experienced by the RA led him or her to make that choice. Understanding the decision process used by RAs would allow professional staff members to more effectively educate RAs about crisis response and risk management. It would also help RA supervisors to identify problem areas in customer service and response. Such a worthy study would be an excellent compliment to this research study, and would begin to create a body of literature on the work habits and developmental needs of student staff.

A final area of inquiry that this study invites, is an examination of the effects of institutional culture and peer pressure on the choices made by RAs. There is some evidence that the decisions that RAs make when dealing with both residents and critical issues are influenced by the challenges and support structures that a given institution provides for RAs. It can also be speculated that peer pressure (which in many ways is an outgrowth of institutional cultural) affects the RA on the job as well. Since RAs are students themselves, they are not immune to some of the same developmental issues that affect other students. Substance use, intimacy pressures, socialization choices, and spiritual matters can all be influenced by the situations and incidents that shape an RA's career in the residence halls. Exploring this issue would result in a wealth of information

about RAs and could have real ramifications for the future of residence education and developmental psychology.

A Final Conclusion

This study has examined the needs of RA training through the Critical Incident Technique. The CIT has also been valuable in determining frequencies of the incidents that RAs report on the job. This study has used the results of the statistical analysis to comment on the implications of the RA experience. This study has shown that differences do exist in the frequency of incident types that RAs report, and that institution type, hall type, and gender play a role in determining what kind of experience RAs will have as they live and work in the residence hall setting.

The possible uses of the CIT extend far beyond the way it has been utilized in this study. A much broader context for the CIT offer uses as a common tool for assessment and evaluation, even on a daily basis. For example supervisors may use it as a weekly de-stressing opportunity for staff members. Senior administrators may use it to gage the needs of students that serve. The CIT may also be used as a training device for supervisors themselves. Successful implementation of this highly adaptable tool simply requires the ingenuity of creative individuals and a desire to serve students and administrators.

Studies such as this one are valuable to the field of student affairs. They question the established beliefs and long-held assumptions about students and developmental psychology. They challenge the notion that institutional and student needs are static. Finally, studies of this kind seek to understand aspects of life and times that have yet to be understood or even recognized. Specifically, this study seeks to question the way in which problems are solved. Residence Life offices collect forms and information of all

kinds from RAs and students. Incident reports, judicial referrals, community development reports, and program ideas are just a few of the pieces of data that are collected and stored at many institutions. This collection of data promises to be a storehouse of coded answers. As problems and trends arise in this new century, professionals in the field of residence life and housing may not need to look any further than their file cabinets. The answers sought might be right before them in neatly organized collections of data. All that is needed is for some one to design a method to extract and decode this data. The Critical Incident Technique is but one method.

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APPENDIX A

Proposal to Virginia Tech

**Implications for Resident Advisor Training Programs:
Using the Critical Incident Technique
to Evaluate the RA Experience**

A Proposal
By Drew Chadwick

Presented to

Dr. Gerard J. Kowalski

Director of Residence Education
Residential and Dining Programs

November 5, 1998

Implications for Resident Advisor Training Programs: Using the Critical Incident Technique to Evaluate the RA Experience

Introduction

Resident Advisors make up the largest and first level of operation in the residence halls at most colleges and universities in the United States. Blimling (1995) notes that RAs serve a number of roles, particularly those of Counselor, Informant, Administrator, Leader, Crisis Manager, and Teacher. Each of these roles requires specialized training structures, which can educate and inform RAs before or while they are serving in the residence halls.

The Critical Incident Technique (CIT), devised by Flannagan (1954) was developed as a tool in the field of organizational/ industrial psychology. Its goal is to analyze the success of individual team members by examining the aspects of their job, or the occurrence of incidents on the job, which are deemed critical either by the team members, or by an external set of evaluators. The Critical Incident Technique has been implemented with success in business and military settings. This powerful tool allows researchers to make valuable observations about the realities faced by individuals on the job. From these observations, it is possible to devise and improve existing training methods to capitalize on these realities.

This research project hopes to use the CIT to examine the realities of the RA job by looking at the incident types RAs report as critical to their job. By collecting RA incident reports (the paperwork generated by RAs, which summarizes the events and happenings that they react to and interact with), and analyzing them via various statistical tests, it will be possible to make some determinations about what the most important issues are in the lives of RAs. This project also hopes to offer some significant suggestions for Residence Life professionals to use in designing and improving RA training.

Research Questions

The research questions that this study hopes to answer are:

1. What are the Critical Incidents RA experience most often on the job?
2. Is there a statistically significance difference between the critical incident types reported by male and female RAs?
3. Is there a statistically significance difference between the critical incidents types reported in residence halls of different institutional types?
4. Is there a statistically significance difference between the critical incident types reported in different hall types?
5. What implications do the finding have for future RA training?

The Methodology

To answer the research questions posed in the study, it is necessary to collect RA reports from colleges and universities in the region. It is also necessary to utilize a variety of institutions to provide for the board base of RA and experience types that will make the

results of this study more universally acceptable. Three institutions were contact to take part in the study. Virginia Tech, the research's home institution, provides a look at a large public research university with a resident population of more than 8000. Radford University provides a midsized public masters institution with a resident population of 5000. Roanoke College provides a small private primarily baccalaureate college with a resident population of approximately 1000.

Once the cooperation of these three institutions has been obtained, collection of information can begin. A collection of RA reports, preferably from a single academic year, will need to be identified. Four pieces of information will need to be collected from each report:

- The institution type
- The gender of the RA
- The hall type
- The incident type

Five incident types were realized based on a survey of the literature surrounding the CIT and RA roles. The five incident types are:

1. Crisis situations
2. Policy enforcement issues
3. Facilities management issues
4. Administrative procedures
5. Advising issues

Once this data is collected, it will be analyzed using a chi-squared test for significance. From the findings of the analysis it should then be possible to make some determinations about trends in the RA job and the most important issues RAs feel they are facing.

The Needs of the Study

This study requires the cooperation of three institutions. In order to answer the questions posed, access to at least a semester's worth of RA reports will be needed. While there is no maximum number of reports dictated, at least 50 from each institution must be available. These reports or a summary of the information needed must be available to the researcher during the months of December 1998, and January 1999.

Protecting Confidentiality

The prospect of protecting the confidentiality of RAs and, in particular, of residents is of utmost importance in the design of this study. To alleviate any questions that may arise about the safety of the students and staff involved a plan for confidentiality has been designed.

1. Because the researcher is a current master's candidate at Virginia Tech, it is important to protect the welfare of the institution, the residents and the researcher. To that end, only Incident Reports (IRs) from the 1997-98 academic year (and earlier) will be used.
2. After conferring with the Director of Residence Education to obtain overall approval for the project, each of four individual Area Coordinators (AC) will be contacted. The Area Coordinators are responsible for the archiving and storage of IRs from the past year. The four ACs to be contacted will be:
 - The Area Coordinator for the Prairie Community
 - The Area Coordinator for the Summit Community
 - The Area Coordinator for the Central Drillfield Community
 - The Area Coordinator for the Presidents/ Upper Quad Community

Area Coordinators for Special Housing Programs and the Oak Lane Community will not be contacted because this study dictates that only IRs generated by RAs serving in traditional halls are to be used. Furthermore, IRs from the Corps of Cadets buildings, WING and the W.E.L.L (each in buildings supervised by one of the included ACs) will not be used. IRs from the WORLD, and Residential Leadership Community programs will not be selected because they would not fit the required time frame (1997-98 academic year).

3. The four ACs will be contacted, explained the research project, and asked to randomly choose between 10 and 20 IRs from each building in their community. Those that were selected will then been screened. IRs from the housing programs listed above will then be refused entry into the data pool.
4. Furthermore, ACs, or their designated staff (which may include Resident Directors, office staff, or other designated staff) will also screen the selected IRs for sensitive content. In situations which involve questions of sexual assault, rape, or other circumstances where the AC deems the information too sensitive for viewing, the researcher will provide the AC information for summarizing the IRs into a form which can be viewed (the AC or office staff will be provided a key to code the required information and a form on which to record it).
5. The researcher will then make collection appointments with the respective ACs. Other forms, which are safe for general viewing by the researcher, will be read and data collected using the following key. Only four types of information will be collected:
 - The institution type (large public, midsize public, or small private: categorized on the data collection form by a 1, 2, or 3 respectively).
 - The gender of the RA (1= male, 2= female).
 - The hall type (1=coed, 2= male, 3= female).
 - The incident type (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5; see **Methodology** for key values)

The IRs used in this study will not leave the protection of professional offices. Copies, at the expense of the researcher, will be made only if marking on them is necessary (for counting purposes or organization). Any copies made will be destroyed at the conclusion of the data collection process.

6. ACs will be asked to separate and keep the selected IRs in a folder or other secure place if more than one appointment is needed to complete the data collection.
7. A portable computer, containing the data collection tables will be used to store the data, such that no paper copies of the collected data will exist.
8. Other specific concerns that the respective ACs may have will be dealt with to their satisfaction before any data collection begins.

Conclusion

It is the hope of this researcher that this study and its potential implications will be of interest not only to professionals in the residence life and student affairs realms, but also to RAs and other resident staff. For it is these individuals who are, in some ways, the frontline soldiers of student affairs. It is the RA that has the first, and often most important effect on resident students' lives. This study hopes to offer these individuals suggestions for making their jobs and lives easier. As a contribution to the literature of this field, this study could be of much value. I hope you will consider taking part and assisting in its development and conclusion.

Thank you.

Works Cited

Blimming, G. S. (1995). The Resident Assistant: Working with College Students in Residence Halls, 4th Ed. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall-Hunt.

Flannegan, J. (1954). The critical incident technique. Psychological Bulletin, 51, 327-358.

APPENDIX B

Proposal to (Small Private University)*

*Name withheld by request

**Implications for Resident Advisor Training Programs:
Using the Critical Incident Technique
to Evaluate the RA Experience**

A Proposal
By Drew Chadwick

Presented to

Connie Carson

Director of Residence Life and Housing

And the Faculty and Staff of

(Small Private Institution)

December 1, 1998

Implications for Resident Advisor Training Programs: Using the Critical Incident Technique to Evaluate the RA Experience

Introduction

Resident Advisors make up the largest and first level of operation in the residence halls at most colleges and universities in the United States. Blimling (1995) notes that RAs serve a number of roles, particularly those of Counselor, Informant, Administrator, Leader, Crisis Manager, and Teacher. Each of these roles requires specialized training structures, to educate and inform RAs before or while they are serving in the residence halls.

The Critical Incident Technique (CIT), devised by Flannagan (1954) was developed as a tool in the field of organizational/ industrial psychology. Its goal is to analyze the success of individual team members by examining the aspects of their job, or the occurrence of incidents on the job, which are deemed critical either by the team members, or by an external set of evaluators. The Critical Incident Technique has been implemented with success in business and military settings. This powerful tool allows researchers to make valuable observations about the realities faced by individuals on the job. From these observations, it is possible to devise and improve existing training methods to capitalize on these realities.

This research project hopes to use the CIT to examine the realities of the RA job by looking at the incident types RAs report as critical to their job. By collecting RA incident reports (the paperwork generated by RAs, which summarizes the events and happenings that they react to and interact with), and analyzing them via various statistical tests, it will be possible to make some determinations about what the most important issues in the lives of RAs. This project also hopes to offer some significant suggestions for Residence Life professionals to use in designing and improving RA training.

Research Questions

The research questions that this study hopes to answer are:

1. What are the Critical Incidents RA experience most often on the job?
2. Is there a statistically significance difference between the critical incident types reported by male and female RAs?
3. Is there a statistically significance difference between the critical incidents types reported in residence halls of different institutional types?
4. Is there a statistically significance difference between the critical incident types reported in different hall types?
5. What can be learned from the incident reporting process as it relates to RA training?

The Methodology

To answer the research questions posed in the study, it is necessary to collect RA reports from colleges and universities in the region. It is also necessary to utilize a variety of institutions to provide a broad base of RAs and experiences that will make the results of this study more universal. Three institutions were contacted to take part in the study. Virginia Tech, the research's home institution, provides a look at a large public research university with a resident population of more than 8000. Radford University provides midsize public masters institution with a resident population of 5000. Wake Forest provides a midsize private university with a resident population of approximately 3000.

For this study, a collection of RA reports will need to be identified. Four pieces of information will need to be collected from each report:

- The institution type (large public, midsize public, midsize private)
- The gender of the RA (male or female)
- The hall type (coed, male, female)
- The incident type

Five incident types were realized based on a survey of the literature surrounding the CIT and RA roles. The five incident types are:

6. Crisis situations
7. Policy enforcement issues
8. Facilities management issues
9. Administrative procedures
10. Advising issues

Once this data is collected, it will be analyzed using a chi-squared test for significance. From the findings of the analysis it should then be possible to make some determinations about trends in the RA job and the most important issues RAs feel they are facing.

The Needs of the Study

This study requires the cooperation of three institutions. In order to answer the questions posed, access to at least a semester's worth of RA reports will be needed. While there is no maximum number of reports dictated, at least 50 from each institution should be available. These reports or a summary of the information must be available to the researcher during the months of December 1998, and January 1999.

Protecting Confidentiality

The prospect of protecting the confidentiality of RAs and, in particular, of residents is of utmost importance in the design of this study. To alleviate any questions that may arise about the safety of the students and staff involved, a plan for confidentiality has been designed. There are several methods in which information can be collected while protecting the confidentiality of the RAs and residents who's names may appear in incident reports. The IRs used in this study will not leave the protection of professional

offices. Copies, at the expense of the researcher, will be made only if marking on them is necessary (for counting purposes or organization). Any copies made will be destroyed at the conclusion of the data collection process.

Perhaps the best option involves residence life staff allowing the researcher access to the actual reports or summaries of reports. Staff can remove all reports that may concern sensitive issues (such as sexual assault, drug use, etc.) and simply summarize these reports, allowing the researcher to collect data from the major body of the other less critical reports.

A second option involves members of the office staff generating copies of each of the reports and blacking out information that they deem irrelevant or sensitive. Because only quantitative data is needed, names of individuals, dates, and times of incidents are not necessary.

A third, but more work-intensive option, involves a member of the residence life office summarizing each report, using the notations listed above for RA gender and hall type. Information from each institution will be kept separate from other data, insuring that the 'institution type' category will always be known. However, the researcher will still need to read the incident summary to determine the incident type datum.

These are not the sole methods for insuring the confidentiality of involved parties. A compromise can be reached either combining some of the techniques described above, or generating new ideas. At any level, the most important goal is maintenance of the confidential nature of the institution/ resident relationship.

Conclusion

It is the hope of this researcher that this study and its potential implications will be of interest not only to professionals in the residence life and student affairs realms, but also to RAs and other resident staff. For it is these individuals who are, in some ways, the frontline soldiers of student affairs. It is the RA that has the first, and often most important effect on resident students' lives. This study hopes to offer these individuals suggestions for making their jobs and lives easier. As a contribution to the literature of this field, this study could be of much value. I hope you will consider taking part and assisting in its development and conclusion.

Thank you.

Works Cited

Blimming, G. S. (1995). The Resident Assistant: Working with College Students in Residence Halls, 4th Ed. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall-Hunt.

Flannegan, J. (1954). The critical incident technique. Psychological Bulletin, 51, 327-358.

APPENDIX C

Resident Adviser Position Description: Virginia Tech

Position Description

RESIDENT ADVISOR

Resident Advisors serve a strategic role in the delivery of residential services and in the development of a residential community that supports the academic learning and personal growth of residents. Through personal interactions, Resident Advisors identify interests and needs of individuals or resident groups, develop responsive action plans, and work with members of the floor community to maintain a dynamic living environment. The R.A. is also a member of a staff team, and is responsible for building-wide duties and collaborating with other staff members toward achieving common goals.

SPECIFIC DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Peer Helping

- 1.

University Liaison

1. Serve as a resource and referral agent for University and community services such as the Counseling Center, Health Services, Residential Programs, Culinary Services, Financial Aid and Scholarships Office, Placement Services, and others.
2. Serve as a knowledgeable consultant regarding academic processes and policies, and make appropriate referrals.
3. Convey, clarify, and maintain informational literature and postings in a timely manner.
4. Provide a channel for communication of concerns specifically related to the operations of residence halls and dining facilities.
5. Distribute authorized information surveys when requested by University agencies.

Student Conduct

1. As an employee of the University, utilize every possible opportunity to support its purposes, and communicate your views and recommendations to your immediate supervisors.
2. In positive, active terms, support, interpret and enforce community behavior standards and residence hall and University policies. Such policies are outlined in the University Policies for Student Life and incorporated by reference in Room and Board and So Much More.
3. Encourage and assist in the understanding and enforcement of University and residence hall rules and policies by the resident students.
4. Respond to problem conduct or behavior of individuals or groups using disciplinary counseling interventions and when necessary, refer violations through the appropriate judicial channels.
5. Maintain a working knowledge of adjudication processes and procedures for University policy violations.

Facilities Management

1. Assist resident students to occupy and vacate rooms by following established check-in and check-out procedures.
2. Investigate and follow-up on all damage to resident rooms, hallways, and public areas.
3. Conduct regular health and safety inspections of resident room and public residence hall areas as directed by supervisor.
4. Reconcile room assignment rosters with actual occupancy (roster verification).
5. Inform residents of fire evacuation procedures and general safety and security policies and practices. Conduct periodic reviews and enforce policies where appropriate.
6. Assist in the identification of persons making unauthorized use of residence hall facilities.
7. Complete clerical duties as directed by the supervisor, including maintenance requests, storage and common area inventory, and inspection reports.

Administration

1. Attend the Fall Resident Advisor Training workshop.
2. If required, enroll in “Introduction to Residence Education” to fulfill the academic training requirement.
3. Attend In-Service training programs as directed by the supervisor.
4. Attend staff meetings and take part in staff activities as directed by the supervisor.
5. Participate in scheduled duty rotation in the assigned residence hall according to established procedures, including weekday, weekend, and night monitor, as directed by the supervisor.
6. Participate in the recruitment and interviewing of new Resident Advisors.
7. Be willing to participate, as available, in committee work regarding residence hall programs, policies, and procedures.
8. Perform other duties as assigned by the supervisor(s).

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APPENDIX D

Resident Advisor Position Description: Radford University

OFFICE OF RESIDENTIAL LIFE Resident Assistant Position Description

Nature of Position

The Resident Assistant (R.A.) is responsible for a floor or wing of residents. He/she is there to help with the personal and academic concerns of the student and to help work out any group conflicts which may arise. The Resident Assistant also serves as a facilitator to encourage a cooperative and considerate group living environment. The R.A. is expected to help and build a feeling of togetherness and community by initiating and helping organize floor/wing/hall activities and programs. He/she serves as a source of information about the campus and residence hall. Most of all, the R.A. is expected to be a person who cares about people and attempts to make the residence hall a worthwhile place to live.

Resident Assistants who have the greatest success and who seem to enjoy the position the most, share common characteristics of personal warmth, social and emotional maturity, possess the ability to develop meaningful relationships with many types of people, are open to new experiences, have the capacity to deal with change, are able to evaluate a situation objectively and to deal with a wide range of human emotions and behavior, and have patience. An R.A. must have a good sense of humor as well as the ability to communicate and treat each person as a worthy human being.

The Resident Assistant position is a commitment of talent, time and effort. Therefore, he/she should have demonstrated strength in academic pursuits. The R.A. receives personal benefit from learning and improving human relations skills which will serve him/her well throughout life. Therefore, this position should be viewed as an educational opportunity as well as a means of financial assistance.

To deal effectively with these multifaceted responsibilities, the Resident Assistant must possess both time management and administrative skills.

Duties and Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the Resident Assistant are numerous and varied. The following is a representative, certainly not all inclusive, list of R.A. responsibilities. The Resident Assistant Employment Contract and Office of Residential Life Staff Manual augment R.A. responsibilities. The duties and responsibilities are divided into four broad categories: general expectations, hall management/administrative responsibilities, staff and hall community development expectations, and required participation.

General Expectations:

1. Must be a student who meets the grade requirements set by the Office of Residential Life.
2. Knows and understands the philosophy and operation of the Office of Residential Life.
3. Maintains a professional attitude and manner while serving as a Radford University employee and representative.
4. Sets an example (role model) for other students by adhering to all University and residence hall policies.
5. Must enroll in and successfully complete the Resident Assistant course during the first semester the course is offered after being appointed an R.A.
6. Knows and understands the rationale for University and residence hall policies and procedures and is able to explain, interpret, and enforce them effectively. Supports and participates in the evaluation and implementation of University and residence hall policies.
7. Knows and understands the operation of the University and its services such as the Admissions Office, Dean of Students Office, Center for Counseling and Student Development, Health Center, Financial Aid Office, Career Service Center, Student Life Office, and community resources.
8. Facilitates openness and honesty in the communication between students, Resident Assistants, Resident Directors, Residential Life Office staff members, Student Affairs staff members, and the entire University community.
9. Develops a positive working relationship with the Resident Director, the other R.A.s, and other members of the Residential Life staff.
10. Responsible for all expectations, responsibilities, and tasks as given by the Resident Director, Assistant Director/Area Coordinator, and/or the Office of Residential Life.

Hall Management/Administrative Responsibilities

11. Works with the other residence hall staff and University members to educate residents about the various aspects of Fire Safety. Monitors all fire safety equipment to ensure its proper usage and maintenance.
12. Provides an informational floor bulletin board for: academic information, social events, deadline dates, hall government, maintenance, policies, and procedures.

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13. Responsible for duty nights on weekdays and weekends as scheduled by the Resident Director. Duty hours are normally from 7 p.m. - 7 a.m. on weekdays with rounds of the hall lasting until 12 midnight. On weekends, duty hours are normally 8 p.m. - 7 a.m. with rounds of the hall lasting until 2 a.m.
14. Assists in maintaining order in all emergency situations.
15. Works with and supports the maintenance and housekeeping staff and explains their role to students.
16. Responds to administrative and clerical tasks assigned by the Resident Director and/or the Office of Residential Life.
 - a. Maintains records concerning room inventory and damages in student rooms.
 - b. Reports room/hall damages and assists in the billing process.
 - c. Assists in student room check-in and check-out procedures.
 - d. Assists in surveys and special projects as requested by the Resident Director and/or Office of Residential Life.
 - e. Assists in additional responsibilities concerning the hall's functioning.

Staff and Hall Community Development Expectations

17. Works with the Resident Director in advising the Hall Council, when necessary.
18. Supports and makes an effort to participate in University and residence hall special programs.
19. Supports and encourages students in their involvement in residence hall government, programming, and campus activities.
20. R.A.s must be seen regularly by their residents and be available so as to be able to meet student needs. R.A.s are expected to be in their respective halls at night. R.A.s are allowed ten nights away each semester, eight of which can be weekend nights.
21. Holds periodic meetings with living unit for general communication, sharing information, or generating enthusiasm.
22. Checks with the Resident Director and/or Assistant Director/Area Coordinator when controversial issues surface within the living community.
23. Facilitates programming individually and in cooperation with other R.A.s and residents within the living unit. Reports of the programs are prepared for the Office of Residential Life. Specific guidelines or directions concerning

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- programming are arranged with the Resident Director according to guidelines established by the Office of Residential Life.
24. Becomes acquainted with each resident in the living unit as soon as possible, as well as with other students living in the residence hall.
 25. Assists students with their personal and group concerns within the limits of his/her training and capability. Refers students in need of further assistance to the appropriate residence hall and/or University staff member.
 26. Helps students adjust to their roommates, suitemates, floor residents, residence hall community, and University community. Facilitates students getting to know each other.
 27. Informs the Resident Director of living unit situations (e.g. happenings, needs, behavioral changes, problems, etc.) through informal visits, conferences, and staff meetings.
 28. Supports and participates in the evaluation of residence hall staff personnel.
 29. Works cooperatively with students insuring the rights and privacy of all residents through:
 - a. Encouraging through the community development spirit, an appropriate academic environment in the living unit and in residence halls in general.
 - b. Teaching responsibility for one's own actions and consideration of others in the group living situation by abiding by the policies and procedures of the University as outlined in the Student Handbook.
 - c. Knowing and understanding the referral procedure for additional information as well as for assistance with problem situations.

Required Participation

30. Participates in all training, including R.A. spring training (for new R.A.s held in April), pre-opening R.A. training (held in mid-August), and pre-Spring Semester training (held in early January). Attends in-service training sessions per requirement set by Staff Development and Training Committee.
31. Attends and participates at all meetings called by the Resident Director and/or Office of Residential Life. Advanced notification to the person responsible for holding the meeting is required if the R.A. is unable to attend.
32. Participates in the interviewing and selection process for new staff members, as defined by the Resident Director or Assistant Director/Area Coordinator.
33. Participates in the Room Deposit and Sign-Up process.

APPENDIX E
Data Collection Matrix

