

Interview with Devin Dausin

For HUM 2504: Introduction to American Studies, Prof. Emily Satterwhite, Spring 2010

Occupation: Complex Director, Lee Hall, Virginia Tech

Time and Place: March 25, 2010, 9a.m.-9:45a.m.

MB=Madison Benner

DD=Devin Dausin

MB: So, just some basic information, your name?

DD: Devin Dausin

MB: And your job title?

DD: Complex director

MB: And name of organization, would that be residence life?

DD: Yes

MB: How long have you actually worked for residence life?

DD: It will be my full second year in July. July 10<sup>th</sup>, I think.

MB: Wow. Um, could you give me a little information about your family, your parents' jobs or...

DD: Uh, my dad is a nuclear engineer.

MB: Oh, really wow!

DD: He graduated from Tech in '84, he lived in Vawter Hall. He actually did his master's in nuclear engineering, I believe his bachelor's in, I want to say electrical. I'm 95% sure it was in electrical but sometimes I want to say chemical but I'm pretty sure it's electrical. My mom has her undergrad I think in some sort of arts degree, she almost got her masters in art but she didn't turn in her final project because, uh my little sister was getting ready to be born. Things were just kinda crazy so she ended up not finishing it. But that is what they did. And she went to the University of California at Cheko State

MB: Cool. Um, how many siblings do you have?

DD: Three. Kyle is an RA over in Slusher. Um, Rachel lives in A.J., she's a freshman. And Kyle's major is Computer Engineering and Rachel is kinda Undecided right now, I think she wants to lean towards marketing, but Rachel has really never kinda known exactly what she wanted to do so he's defiantly exploring it. Um, and I have a brother named Matt, I think he just

turned nine. He lives in California with my stepmom. My parents are divorced and both remarried, so I kinda have two separate families.

MB: Okay, that's really interesting how everyone is kinda here at Tech

DD: Yeah, my parents, my mom and my dad actually live on Draper Street

MB: Oh, wow.

DD: So they just kinda retired here

MB: Okay and that's your...

DD: My mom and stepdad, but when I say dad I usually mean my stepdad

MB: I'm kinda legacy child; uh my parents both went here.

DD: Oh did they get married at the chapel?

MB: Oh, no nothing like that, but um they definitely met in classes together.

So are you married or have any kids?

DD: I do not

MB: I didn't think so. If you don't mind me asking, how old are you?

DD: I'm 27

MB: 27?

DD: Mhm

MB: Okay. And uh, let's see. So did you attend Tech?

DD: I did not. I did my undergrad at Eastern Illinois University. Um, in Biological Sciences with a minor in Chemistry. And I got my masters from Clemson University and its in the capital of student affairs.

MB: Okay, wow. I'm actually a Biological Sciences major here.

DD: Oh, neat!

MB: Do you like it? Er, did you... (laughs)

DD: Did I like it? (laughs) Uh, yeah I enjoyed it I always wanted to be a doctor.

MB: Oh, really?

DD: I was so sure I wanted to be a doctor, since like age 5. I knew that's what I wanted to be and that I would never change my mind. But then I got to Eastern, and I had to pay through my own college, my own way through, um, and so I got a job as an RA to kinda help out and really liked it.

MB: Really?

DD: And my boss was like well have you thought of doing a job with student affairs. And I thought oh, you can get paid to be here? That's so cool. So I ended up kind of changing my mind at the last second and doing that instead

MB: Wow, that's interesting. Um, so, um as a complex director how would you explain your job to someone like me who doesn't really know what that is?

DD: (sighs) Well my mom would say I'm a dorm mom or a dorm mother. I don't think my parents quite understand what I do. Um, but it's definitely a lot more than that. I do live in this building. Um, and my cat lives in the building with me. You can see a picture of him out there.

MB: I've seen that picture!

DD: And probably wondered, "who is that random cat?" That's my cat. (laughs) Uh but what I do is a whole lot of things. Something that changes from day to day which I think is what drew me to it initially. I kinda wanted to do emergency medicine, cause I really like the idea of getting to do new things each day, meeting new people and having just like a collection of life experiences on a daily basis and that's kinda what my job offers in any one day. Like today, I have a one-on-one right after I meet with you, then I have a meeting with all the other complex directors, uh then I have another one-on-one with another RA and then I have a one-on-one with my hall director and then I have to do a phone interview, and that's my whole day. That's kind of a light day, like yesterday, I had a meeting with all my Galelio RAs, to talk about next year, and then I had a staff meeting, um last week I had a bunch of conduct referrals where I had to meet students to fill out papers. It changes really day to day. It's a lot about student learning, um helping students make those connections and that's definitely important in things like conduct hearings and my staff meetings and things like that. So it's a lot of stuff, and actually I'll go ahead while I'm thinking about it print you off a job description that's much more detailed about the nitty-gritty of what I do, that's actually just a broad overview (turns to computer to print job description)

A large chunk of my job is supervision. I supervise 20 RAs and one hall director who is really a graduate student um right now she's an undergraduate student who just graduated (Uh, I don't have any paper! Oh you know, I'll just email it to you)

MB: That'd be great. So essentially you are all the RAs' boss?

DD: Mhm, in Lee Hall. I supervise 11 of them directly and then my hall director supervises the other 9, I supervise them indirectly. So she kinda does the day-to-day stuff with them, but at the end of the day, I still kind of oversee that going on on the side as well.

MB: Where were you originally from?

DD: I was born in California, um, Paradise, California and then we moved to Manteca, California and then Idaho Falls Idaho, and then Ottawa, Illinois, and then I did an internship at the University of Alaska, so I went there for a little bit in Anchorage, and then I went down to Clemson, South Carolina for my masters and then I had an internship at the University of Chuckwood at Chuckwood, England. And then I went north to Berea, Ohio and now I'm here.

MB: Oh wow, and all the places you went for your education?

DD: Mhmm, there this cool thing called ACUHO-I, it's the Association of Colleges and Universities Housing Officers International. Um, but you can apply for internships every year and they have them all over the country, a bunch of the different universities. There is one in Alaska, but Alaska is an operations intern so for summer they turn all their residence halls into a hotel kinda of so I was in charge of the housekeeping staff for the summer which is students. So there was like 20 students I was in charge of. And I had to be on duty so I remember having to... And they have everyone stay there, the Navy stays there. Just, um if your camping you can stay there for like a night. Um, yeah you can work anywhere in the world with this degree.

MB: I actually applied to be an RA, but I didn't get.

DD: Oh neat, try again.

MB: I think I might, I'm not sure

DD: Some of my best RAs were alternates or people who didn't get it the first time, I have several RAs working for me now who either didn't make it the first time or they didn't get hired right away and were an alternate for a while, so you never know. If you don't succeed the first time, try, try again. It's a very competitive process, so just because you didn't get doesn't mean you're not qualified or not good. It just means there are a lot of people who were really great

MB: So um what year did you actually graduate from...I guess, when did you complete your undergraduate degree?

DD: 2006

MB: And then you went on to graduate school?

DD: In 2008

MB: Your graduate school, I'm sorry I think you may have already said this, but was that for the residence hall life thing...

DD: Kind of, it's a little more broad than that. It's called counselor education student affairs. Student affairs is sorta the umbrella that Residence life is under. And like office of student conduct would be under that, housing would be under that, dining would be under that, but like anything that serves the students in things that are non-academic. Like the counseling center would be under there.

MB: So basically you are the go-to person for anything with the students and the like organizations out here.

DD: Uh, anything for the Lee Hall students, so yeah exactly. If anyone is sick, we have a couple sick people in the building right now. I'll be the person who goes and checks on them and then I will report back to my boss or if you know a student, oh gosh what else... I hear all the conduct cases for Lee unless they have priors then the student conduct office needs to hear case, and I hear all those as well. If there are roommate conflicts, I mediate that, I'm sort of the 'jack of all trades, master of none' as far as what I do.

MB: My friend on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor had to go to the emergency room a couple nights ago, she said she was really sick., I guess you would know about that?

DD: I do

MB: (laughs) okay. Who is actually is your supervisor or boss?

DD: Trisha Smith. She works over in the Prairie Office; you know where you go to get your mail in Pritchard?

MB: Mhmm69 haha poop balls

DD: You know how there is a little office off to the side? There are people working there, 9 to 5 anyway. That's the Prairie Area Office. That's the office for Pritchard and Lee hall, we're kinda grouped together. She's in charge of both of those buildings

MB: Does she live in Pritchard?

DD: She lives in Christiansburg.

MB: Oh ok.

DD: The complex director of Pritchard lives in Pritchard.

MB: Oh okay, she is like what you are for Lee Hall?

DD: Liz is, Trisha is an Assistant Director, so she's kinda both of our supervisors, and she does a bunch of other things, she coordinates RA selection. That is one of her huge main tasks and other committees she works on.

MB: That's a huge task, such a long process (RA selection) So you work here in lee, does that mean you have to pay board?

DD: Um, it's part of my benefits.

MB: That convenient considering like...

DD: It is, considering the commutes is about 10 seconds, so itsespecially nice whens its snowing outside, I get really excited, its like 'oh, I just have to walk downstairs!' um but it has its downsides too. It can be loud at times although my apartment is sort of removed a little bit from the students. But um I don't hear everything. It drives the cat crazy sometimes, people will walk past the door and he'll be like 'Oh' and go and sit in front of the door. Um but, firealarms although we haven't had that many (knocks on wood), those can be a little rough on me, with working 9 to 5, to have to get out of bed but its all worth it.

MB: Do you take your cat with you?

DD: No, he stays in the building. I took him the first time because I was nervous about how he would react, but he was fine. And now he just kinda looks at me, like 'well, see ya later' (laughs)

MB: That's a good cat. So you live on the first floor?

DD: I do.

MB: I guess it would be kinda loud. I live on the second floor, so I hope we are not too loud.  
(laughs)

DD: Uh, I can hear high heels from the ceiling, but that's about it

MB: (laughs) I don't wear high heels.

DD: Well that must not be you (laughs)

MB: Okay, well that takes care of a few questions. I was going to ask you about transportation, but obviously you walk to work.

DD: I do have a car here, but it pretty much hangs out in the parking lot. Unless I need to go the grocery store but I don't really use it around campus. I'll take it if I need to go to the Inn cause that's kinda far, but other than that I'll just walk.

MB: Do you actually have a meal plan here?

DD: Mhm.

MB: Have you finished paying for your...

DD: My loans? No, I have not. Um, my master's is paid for, my undergrad I'm still paying for. The degree I don't use, I'm still paying for. (laughs) Well, I use it from time to time, I mean it's interesting what bits of knowledge can be useful at times, but I definitely don't use it as much as I use my masters degree.

MB: I was going to ask you how did you come to have this job? But you kinda already answered that. Like with becoming an RA...

DD: I stumbled upon it (laughs)

MB: What do you enjoy most about your job?

DD: I really enjoy the opportunity to make a difference in people's lives. A lot of times you don't know that you're doing that, um but I get to have a lot of interactions with students and whether they may know it now or maybe they think about it later, hopefully I've made some sort of impact or lasting impression in people's you know, lives or career choices or the way in which they live here at Tech or any of those things. Obviously a majority of my contacts are with my RAs so it's the students who really want a leadership role and then I have to meet with students who may be in trouble academically or personally so I meet with a lot of those students, sometimes the ones in the middle I don't get to see as often, the ones just sorta doing their thing, getting by, are the ones I don't get to see quite as often. But hopefully, you know, I'm making a difference I think that is probably the part I like the best.

MB: Um, with that said, what do you like least about your job?

DD: Hmm, that's a tough one. Um, right now I'm a little sleepy. Sometimes the late night meetings can be tough. My job, it can be all hours so I'm kinda always on-call if my RAs need me. If the need me, I am there. I am out of bed and ready to help out. And sometimes that can be a little hard on me. Because I am definitely the type of person that needs 8 hours to be human and successful at my life

DD: Um so getting any less than that is just not, not good for me. And even though I'm 27 I can sleep in till noon. I don't know when I hit that point like our parents, they just pop out of bed at 7 and they're ready to hit the ground running. I've never been like that. (laughs) But I think the hours can be a little tough but I enjoy the feeling of successfully helping or getting things taken care of to sorta make up for having to get up sometimes or get up early.,

MB: I understand that. I never understood how my parents could wake up so early. If you could change one thing about your work, what would it be? And that could include wages benefits, healthcare coverage)

DD: Hmm, well, all those things are pretty okay actually. Being a state employee you get pretty sweet benefits. (looking around) I might change the construction of my office a little bit. It's so cold in here! I always have to wear a sweatshirt. My heating box right here, it's not always super-functional and when it gets turned off it gets kinda cold in here and then I have an air conditioning unit but it kinda leaks and so I don't have it on. (laughs) there is always a paper

towel underneath of it. Um so I might change that. I'm the type of person who can be distracted very easily. So having the door there, people walking in and out all the time, and talking on their cell phones. I can be like, 'Hmm...' and always looking out the window. And I'm like, 'Ahh what are you doing? Get back to your email'. Um, but I know this is a nice location because students can find the office easily. It's very easy for students to stop by on their way in and out of the building so there are pluses and minuses, but during the winter that's when I am not a fan of this office I'm very cold-natured anyway and so any additional cold and I'm just freezing. I need to invest in a little space heater or something.

MB: Can you think of a story or a memorable time involving your job? Maybe something that makes you think, "Wow my job is worth it." Something maybe that really touched your life...

DD: This one just came up in my mind. It's something, a memory just to hold on to. Just to...the good things don't happen very often sometimes. And it's important to kinda store those up, like a squirrel gathering nuts for winter. (laughs) Um, so that way you know you have those memories I remember actually back when I was an RA I remember I was having a really terrible day and I don't remember why it was such a terrible day but it was just a completely awful day. And I walked onto my floor and I made it halfway to my room and one of my residents stopped me, "I need to talk to you". Oh my gosh, one more thing! And she was like, 'Here.' And she handed me a card. And I was like what is this? It's not my birthday or anything. What is this? And she was like, "A year ago today, I met you. You were giving a tour of this school and while you were talking I decided right then and there that I wanted you to be my RA. And that I wanted to live on this floor. And I've never told you that but, Happy Anniversary!"

And I was like cool, that's really sweet! And then I made it just a little bit further to my room and another resident stops me. I'm just trying to make it to my room. And she was like "Oh hey Devin. I just wanted to give you a... I had taken her to the train station a couple of weeks ago. She could not get a ride, it was 4 a.m., some ridiculous time, but she really needed to get home and so I gave her a ride and she gave me a gift card to Urban Outfitters, which I my favorite store I the whole wide world. So it was just one of those moments where it was really nice to know that sometimes those things you do on a daily basis, that you just do cause it's part of your job sometimes they really don't get recognized. And it was really nice to know that although maybe I didn't think they noticed, they really did notice. Um and it was really cool to have them let me know that. So that really stuck with me through my whole career. And I had other moments like that since then, but that one definitely stand out in my head.

MB: Um, okay two more questions. Where do you see yourself in 5 to 10 years?

DD: I've been asking myself that question a lot lately. Well, I really like working at Tech. and my family is here now, which is something I haven't ever had before. I've always been such a traveler and a wanderer. And I've always been kind of far away from my family since I left their house. Something I realized is that living 14 hours away is not ideal. I remember calling my mom one time at thanksgiving just in tears and I was like 'I have to come home!' and she was like 'Oh my gosh, I'll get you a ticket, no worries, its okay. And I'm not a crier really at all. So figuring out that was something that was important to me I think was another thing that I learned. Yeah, job stuff is important but family stuff is important too, and I hadn't really realized it till

that point. So I think I would like to continue working at Tech or in this immediate area um, so that I have the ability to drive home and see my family. You know, go out to lunch with my mom if I want. Those are things that become much more important to me um but also my significant other lives in Blacksburg as well um so being close to that person and I just like working here in general.

If I could continue to work at Tech that would be great, I really enjoy Residence Life so if I could remain in that area that would be nice but there are other things I am interested in, I really enjoy student conduct. So I think that could be cool too. I also really enjoy working with like University Union stuff like concert-booking, movie-booking, that kind of stuff. I really enjoy that, so as to where I'll end up, I have no idea. In this economy it might just be about a job that opens and I'm ready and we'll just kinda go from there. So it will kinda be about what's most important when the time to search for a job comes up. So, as for where I will be, I have no idea but I'm sure I'll be somewhere.

MB: Hmm, just wondering, since you have a degree, an undergraduate degree in Biological Sciences, would you ever consider a job with that area?

DD: Uh, I mean yeah. If I got burned out or if I had some sort of crazy changing experience where I changed all of my life values. I wouldn't mind going back to maybe something like Nursing or Physician Assistant. I don't think I would ever go back to wanting to be a doctor. I really enjoy my free time with this job. When you're a physician or in those upper echelons of medicine you don't have as much time to yourself and that's something that I have really come to value. I really don't know how I would be able to give up being able to watch T.V. on the couch with my cat or going out to dinner when I want and things like that. So I'm not saying it's not a possibility but right now it's not a probability.

MB: Do you have anything else you would like to share?

DD: Not that I can think of off the top my head.

MB: Okay. Well, thank you so much for this!

DD: Oh, sure. I hope it was helpful.

MB: It definitely was.