



Measuring the Leadership Effectiveness of Resident Assistants

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RESIDENT ASSISTANTS WHO SERVE AS PEER LEADERS to other students are consistently considered crucial in creating a positive on-campus experience. Despite the demonstrated benefits these peer leaders bring to their communities and the significant monetary resources invested in them, there is a significant lack of research about their selection, training, and evaluation. This study sought to develop an instrument founded in theory and refined through statistical analysis that measures resident assistant effectiveness based upon Bolman and Deal's four-frame model of leadership. The strongest implications from this study involve the high statistical reliability and validity in the instrument. The study also found that resident assistant effectiveness in three of the four frames—human resource, symbolic, and political leadership—has a meaningful impact on student involvement in residential communities.

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Colleges and universities across the United States utilize student leaders to serve in influential roles across the functional areas of student affairs. These students play a significant role in the educational experience of other students by acting as mentors, role models, peer leaders, part-time administrators, disciplinary mediators, first-line crisis responders, and student success agents (Blimling, 2003, 2015). Student leaders serving in these roles enhance the educational experience for other students as well as benefiting from opportunities for their own personal growth and development.

Resident assistants (RAs) are peer leaders who live within campus residence halls to both represent the institution in an official capacity and provide front-line support to residents (Blimling, 2003, 2015; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). Because of the importance of these live-in student leadership roles, institutions allocate considerable resources in the form of time, training, payment, and benefits to support resident assistants. According to one estimate by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023), colleges and universities employ approximately 9,930 residential student staff in the form of resident advisors or resident assistants. Depending on the individual campus, these students can earn wages in the form of housing costs, meal plans, stipends, scholarships, professional development, or other benefits. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, institutions of higher education across the U.S. spend more than \$400 million on residential professional staff each year, with an unknown additional cost for the residential student staff who support them.

Resident assistants serve to represent the institution when no professional staff are present. These student leaders must be unsupervised for much of their time and must be autonomous in fulfilling their job requirements because part of their role includes serving on the front lines in ways that full-time professional staff cannot. The evaluation of resident assistant performance is challenging, however, because professional

staff cannot be on all the floors observing the work of all their resident assistants. Although professional staff insights into the performance of their student leaders is critical to any evaluation process, residence life departments may use additional means of evaluation that incorporate the voices of student residents. Such evaluation should be based upon validated research methods in order to gather data that allow professionals to celebrate excellent student performance, offer developmental feedback to improve student leadership, and make decisions about rehiring or terminating.

The purpose of the current study was to develop a valid and reliable instrument to aid student affairs professionals in evaluating the performance of residential student staff using the feedback gained from residents. Although residence life departments accept the significant impact these student leaders have on the development and experiences of their peers, few studies are broadly available to help housing professionals inform their decisions about the effective evaluation of resident assistants. Directly connecting measurement tools to theory can provide a framework for developing student leadership. The present study offers Bolman and Deal's (2021) four-frame model as a way to both measure resident assistant performance and link theory to practice for student leadership development. By creating avenues through which residents' voices can be heard regarding the effectiveness of residential student staff performance, this study hopes to supplement the self-reported evaluation and professional insight currently present in housing and residence life departments.

THE FOUR-FRAME MODEL AS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR RESIDENT ASSISTANT LEADERSHIP

Bolman and Deal's (2021) four-frame model is an effective framework for connecting theory to practice in higher education leadership. The four frames—structural, human resource, political, and symbolic—represent theories that individuals use to understand and lead organizations. These four frames are grounded in organizational theory and psychology and are best used in concert with one another through a reframing process. The *structural frame* emphasizes how social architecture, hierarchy, rules, and distribution of roles and responsibilities play a part in how organizations function, while the *human resource frame* focuses on care and concern for the people who make up organizations and tries to align individual and institutional goals. The *political frame* acknowledges that resources are often scarce and people within organizations have conflicting goals, leading to coalitions, struggles for power, and the need to negotiate and compromise. Finally, the *symbolic frame* pays tribute to the importance of vision, stories, traditions, and ceremonies that shape organizational culture and influence behavior and a sense of belonging.

Student affairs work is inherently interdisciplinary, combining elements of education, psychology, management, and statistics (Sriram & Farley, 2014). Residential student staff fill roles that are complex, incredibly important for the success of housing and residence life programs, and generally categorizable into four areas: administrative

duties, individual resident care, environment mediation, and university representation (Blimling, 2003; Jaeger & Caison, 2006; Manata et al., 2017). Theoretically, these four categories overlap with Bolman and Deal's (2021) structural, human resource, political, and symbolic frames. Residential student staff, like professional student affairs leaders, who embody characteristics of all four frames may be the most effective at understanding the differing perspectives and needs of a given individual or situation (Gallos & Bolman, 2021).

The four-frame conceptual framework is helpful because of its sophistication in preventing a narrowed view of leadership by capturing unique and sometimes conflicting leadership components, and, because of its simple and parsimonious presentation of leadership theories, the model is not overwhelming to learn, use, and communicate. The four-frame model can help student leaders in their professional development by showing them the power that theory has for improving practice and understanding the complexities and uniqueness of their roles. Because the model was originally applied to business and then adapted to higher education (Birnbaum, 1988; Gallos & Bolman, 2021; Sriram & Farley, 2014), it stands to reason that this conceptual framework can also help resident assistants in their future careers by helping them determine which skills are transferable to post-college endeavors (Soria & Roberts, 2023).

This study examines how Bolman and Deal's (2021) framework can provide a key for linking theory and practice for college and university student leaders. Specifically, this study sought to answer two research questions.

1. *To what extent is an instrument for evaluating the effectiveness of resident assistants from the perspective of their student residents using Bolman and Deal's four frames as the theoretical framework statistically valid and reliable?*
2. *To what extent can the four-frame model of resident assistant leadership effectiveness predict student residents' self-rating of their participation in residential programs and activities?*

UNDERSTANDING RESIDENTIAL STUDENT STAFF AND EVALUATION THROUGH RESEARCH

For more than 50 years, colleges and universities have employed, trained, and evaluated undergraduate student resident assistants yet struggled to find a comprehensive means of evaluating them. As early as 1965, Shaffer and Greenleaf noted that institutions encountered "difficulty in maintaining their staffing patterns," forcing them to "seek more effective ways of securing staff and using their skills" (p. 25). The answer

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came from select undergraduate students who would augment the current services offered by full-time professional staff and would, in return, gain benefits such as leadership experience, professional development, and compensation in the form of housing, meals, and stipends (Shaffer & Greenleaf, 1965). This was accompanied by, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, effective methods to hire, train, and understand undergraduate residential student staff positions. Wotruba (1969) concluded that “student helpers can be useful in obtaining the goals of higher education . . . If educators are to maximize the potential of college residence halls, they must select effective RAs” (p. 111).

Almost as soon as the utilization of undergraduate students in paraprofessional roles became the norm on college and university campuses, researchers became interested in evaluating resident assistant performance. Wotruba (1969) used a mix of inventories and instruments in a study of resident assistant effectiveness, revealing that, in general, they strove higher for achievement, sought out friendships, and were receptive to leadership opportunities. They were less inclined to allow others to make decisions for them and were less interested in being the center of attention. However, this work was conducted more than 50 years ago on a single campus, examined only men, and did not analyze the reliability or construct validity of the instruments utilized.

Several studies attempted to present workable models for evaluating RAs and their work. Atkinson and colleagues (1973) examined the usefulness of the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) in evaluating resident assistants and attempted to correlate personality traits from the inventory with RA performance. Residents were asked to rate their RA across six responsibilities: promoting self-responsibility with residents, providing social and educational growth experiences, encouraging a community spirit, role modeling for residents, referring students to appropriate resources, and providing interpersonal counseling. The same inventory was also completed by the resident assistants’ supervisors. However, results from the study, “contrary to findings in earlier studies, do not support use of the POI as an instrument for selecting effective resident assistants” (Atkinson et al., 1973, p. 330). This study helped to end speculation that only particular personality traits can result in effectiveness as a resident assistant.

A later study used a 13-item Performance Evaluation Form (PEF) developed by a residence life department (Eichenfield et al., 1988) for residents to evaluate their RA using a 7-point Likert scale across several variables, such as being available, informed, and concerned; setting a good example; and motivating students. Though the instrument did not prove significant in determining effectiveness, Eichenfield and colleagues (1988) emphasized that “the selection and training of residence hall staff may be the single most important function housing officers undertake” (p. 34). More recently, Blimling (2015) asserted that “the selection and training of these students are no less important than finding the right residence life professionals to lead student learning in the residence halls” (p. 178). Moreover, as part of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education guidelines (CAS, 2017) for housing and

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residential life programs, there is an expectation that campus residents anonymously evaluate the performance of their resident assistants at least once a year.

Because of the increased resources and complexity of the role, it is surprising that research on the evaluation of resident assistant performance has decreased rather than increased. This lack of knowledge inhibits the abilities of residence life professionals to understand the impact of these crucial student leaders (Manata et al., 2017). The available measures of resident assistant effectiveness are outdated, known to be ineffective, or are not psychometrically valid and reliable. Although it may be common practice for individual residence life departments to develop their own systems of evaluation or to outsource to for-profit companies, there is a need for more valid and reliable instruments that are based on appropriate theoretical models that residence life professionals can utilize for evaluating resident assistant performance and developing student leadership skills.

METHODS

This study utilized a post-positivist epistemology, which is concerned with the discovery of truth through testing, experimentation, and examination of cause-and-effect relationships; broadly stated, post-positivism is the belief that “truth is already out there, in existence, without our meaning-making” (Sriram, 2017, p. 23). The goal of the study was to develop and validate a survey instrument for evaluating the effectiveness of resident assistants from the perspective of their residents. The study used a nonexperimental research design focused on survey research.

Population, Sample, and Participants

The study’s population comprises on-campus residents at 4-year research universities who live in a residence hall staffed by undergraduate student staff, commonly referred to as resident assistants or RAs. To study this population, samples were collected by partnering with the housing and residence life offices of two large universities in the Southwest—one private research university and one public research university—that administered the instrument to student residents. The instrument was issued to residents in a selection of halls at the two institutions provided by the respective housing departments as representative of their on-campus populations. The survey was sent to a total population of 2,774 students. Of the total, 651 participants responded to the survey, yielding a response rate of 23.5%. The response sample represents a wide variety of student demographics across year, race/ethnicity, gender, international student status, transfer student status, time spent living on campus, and community type. A summary of these demographic results can be found in Table 1 (*see page 44*).

TABLE 1**Demographics of Respondents to Resident Assistant Evaluation Instrument**

Characteristic	N	%
Total responses	651	
Gender		
Male	218	33.49
Female	417	64.06
Race/ethnicity		
American Indian/Alaska Native/First Nation	7	1.08
Asian	48	7.37
Black or African American	29	4.45
Hispanic, Latino/Latina	69	10.60
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	3	0.46
White/Caucasian/European American	406	62.37
Multiracial	25	3.84
Other	7	1.08
Academic standing		
First-year/freshman	391	60.06
Sophomore	123	18.89
Junior	52	7.99
Senior	36	5.53
Time living on campus		
Less than 1 year	420	64.52
1 to less than 2 years	120	18.43
2 to less than 3 years	35	5.38
3 to less than 4 years	23	3.53
4 or more years	6	0.92
Transfer status		
Transfer	20	3.07
Non-transfer	585	89.86
International status		
International	10	1.54
Non-international	626	96.16

Data Collection Instrument

The latent variable for this study was the effectiveness of resident assistants, a choice informed by the review of relevant literature, common job descriptions for residential student staff, and the conceptual framework. Specifically, effectiveness was hypothesized as being represented by the latent factors of structural leadership, human resource leadership, political leadership, and symbolic leadership, which correspond to Bolman and Deal's (2021) leadership framework as applied to colleges and universities (Birnbaum, 1988; Gallos & Bolman, 2021; Sriram & Farley, 2014).

The instrument consisted of 40 items that measured resident assistant effectiveness across the four leadership frames. The survey also captured the participants' demographic data and asked them to rate their involvement in the residential community (Arboleda et al., 2003) on a 6-point Likert-type scale (*strongly disagree, moderately disagree, slightly disagree, slightly agree, moderately agree, strongly agree*), with a *not applicable* option provided.

A pilot of the instrument was conducted using a sample of 10 undergraduate students for feedback on the wording of questions and their intended meaning. Three rounds of review were then conducted on the item list by senior housing and residence life officers at the two campuses that participated in the study to best capture their expectations of residential student staff.

To determine construct validity, we used principal components analysis, a type of exploratory factor analysis that takes individual survey items that theoretically measure aspects of the latent variables of RA effectiveness (the higher-order latent variable) and groups them into components representing the actual latent factors. In this case, the instrument's items, when analyzed with principal components analysis, were grouped into four theoretical factors that mirrored the conceptual framework. The results of this analysis revealed how much information and variance were captured by the latent factors and survey instrument as a whole.

LIMITATIONS

Results should be interpreted in the context of the limitations of this study. Although many responses were collected, more responses from diverse campuses of different types would improve the model and further ensure its validity and reliability. Though the samples were representative of the populations at the two universities, they may not be representative of those in other research universities. Additionally, there are several ways to judge job performance, including self-ratings and supervisor observations. This study limits itself to measuring performance based upon the students who are led and served by the resident assistants, as encouraged by CAS (2017) standards. Any method of measuring job performance will have advantages and drawbacks; this study highlights the student voice in determining how well resident assistants perform, but the student resident perspective should be part of a larger, holistic evaluation process. Moreover, student perspectives, gathered through qualitative means such as focus groups, should be included.

RESULTS

The guiding research question for this study asked whether a statistically valid and reliable instrument could be created for evaluating the effectiveness of resident assistants from the perspective of their student residents. We conducted all data analysis using IBM SPSS.

Principal Components Analysis

Though we initially received 651 participant responses, we had to filter out incomplete surveys in order to conduct a principal components analysis. This brought our completed survey total to 316 respondents.

The principal components analysis allows the researcher to examine the survey's reliability and validity and to examine any latent variables. In this form of analysis, variables that share correlation but are independent from other groups of variables sharing correlation are combined into factors. The principal components analysis with orthogonal rotation revealed four factors that were retained after examining eigenvalues (proportion of the total information each latent variable captures), scree plots (graphical representation of the latent variables), total variance explained of the latent variables, and factor loadings (correlations between items and their respective latent variable). These factors, each made up of a grouping of individual survey items, were the most effective at capturing measurements of the effectiveness of resident assistants. The four factors combined to account for 72% of the total variance in the dataset. Only items with factor loadings of at least .5 were considered acceptable.

The rotated components matrix (final result of the principal components analysis) was used to determine which specific items to retain within each factor. To achieve the shortest instrument that also captured most of the needed information, we evaluated each item within each factor based upon its squared multiple correlation (how much of the latent factor each item explains) and the item content. We aimed to keep only those items that had construct validity determined by high squared multiple correlations and content validity (how well the content of the item fit with the latent factor). For example, within the structural leadership scale, the item *My RA is good at communicating hall policies* had both a high squared multiple correlation (.781) and fit well content-wise with the latent factor of the structural frame. This method yielded four subscales with five items each that aligned well with each of the four leadership frames in our conceptual framework (Bolman & Deal, 2021).

The refined survey instrument consists of four subscales totaling 20 items measuring four latent factors. The internal reliability of each subscale was measured by analyzing Cronbach's alpha, with scores of 0.7 or higher being considered acceptable. All

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four subscales had excellent Cronbach's alpha reliability scores: structural leadership scale (5 items; $\alpha = .93$), human resource leadership scale (5 items; $\alpha = .94$), political leadership scale (5 items; $\alpha = .94$), and symbolic leadership scale (5 items; $\alpha = .95$). Table 2 displays the final valid and reliable instrument.

Additional Multiple Regression Analysis

In addition to the 40 conceptual framework-related items and standard demographic questions, one additional Likert-type survey item measured the self-rating of participation in programs and activities in the residence hall (*I often participate in programs/activities sponsored by my residence hall*). We conducted a multiple regression with the

TABLE 2
Items of Four Scales Following Analysis

Frame	Structural	Human resource	Political	Symbolic
Cronbach's alpha	.93	.94	.94	.95
# of Items	5	5	5	5
Item 1	My RA is good at communicating hall policies.	My RA interacts with me regularly.	My RA helps me achieve my goals.	My RA models what it means to be a well-rounded student.
Item 2	My RA responds well to crisis situations.	My RA respects me.	My RA communicates a vision for this hall community.	My RA helps me feel like a part of the larger hall community.
Item 3	My RA responds to me in a timely manner.	My RA communicates that I matter.	My RA respects other people.	My RA is present.
Item 4	My RA seems organized.	My RA has gotten to know me.	My RA is enthusiastic about their job.	My RA makes me feel like I belong in this residence hall.
Item 5	My RA is consistent in enforcing rules.	My RA expresses care for me.	My RA is someone I can confide in.	My RA makes me feel like I belong at this institution.

new subscales as predictor variables (structural leadership, human resource leadership, political leadership, and symbolic leadership) and with self-reported participation in programs as the outcome variable. Of the 651 original responses, we used a sample of 529 participants in the multiple regression analysis based upon surveys complete enough to justify inclusion (pairwise deletion).

Several noteworthy findings were discovered from the multiple regression analysis (see Table 3). First, three of the four subscales were significant predictors of student participation: human resource leadership ($p = .023$), symbolic leadership ($p < .001$), and political leadership ($p < .001$). Structural leadership was not a significant predictor ($p = .705$). Both human resource leadership and symbolic leadership were positive predictors of student participation, but political leadership had a negative influence. Overall, the model predicted a student participation rate of 8.3% in residence hall programs.

TABLE 3

Results of Multiple Regression with Four Frames as Predictor Variables and Self-Rated Participation as the Outcome Variable

Model	Unstandardized coefficients (b)	Standard error	Standardized coefficients (β)	p
Constant	3.109	0.389		* < .001
Structural	.049	.129	.032	.705
Human resource	.316	.138	.243	.023
Political	-.644	.174	-.407	* < .001
Symbolic	.421	.121	.335	* < .001

$R^2 = .083$; * = statistical significance

In terms of effect size, human resource leadership had a large, standardized coefficient, or beta weight ($\beta = .243$). The standardized coefficient (β) represents the impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable in standard deviation units (while controlling for other predictor variables). Symbolic leadership had a large beta weight ($\beta = .335$). Political leadership, which had a negative influence, also had a large beta weight ($\beta = -.407$). This finding means that as the political leadership of resident assistants increased, student participation in hall programs decreased. In summary, both human resource leadership and symbolic leadership had large positive effects on student participation, but political leadership had a large negative effect.

Contemporary research on student success and development promotes the residential experience as a benefit to students, and this environment is created in large part by resident assistants who encourage the kind of involvement that ensures positive experiences for on-campus residents.

DISCUSSION

Colleges and universities nationwide utilize the talents and abilities of undergraduate students in peer leadership roles. These positions take many forms and serve a variety of functions. First among them in terms of responsibility, compensation, and developmental opportunities is the role of residential student staff. Often referred to as resident assistants or resident advisors, these students provide a wide variety of services to their resident peers, including administrative responsibilities, extracurricular programming, informal counseling, crisis management, and peer mentorship. These students are the “eyes and ears of the university, making sure residence hall students are given the support they need to succeed” (Blimling, 2015, p. 162). Contemporary research on student success and development promotes the residential experience as a benefit to students (Astin, 1999; Conroe, 1986; Flowers, 2004; Long, 2014; Schroeder & Jackson, 1987; Strange & Banning, 2015; Thompson et al., 1993), and this environment is created in large part by resident assistants who encourage the kind of involvement that ensures positive experiences for on-campus residents (Arboleda et al., 2003; Blimling, 2015).

Colleges and universities invest significant amounts of monetary resources into the training and compensation of resident assistants. Despite the clearly established importance—both educationally and monetarily—of RAs, there is little research on their selection, training, and evaluation (Clark, 2008; Koch, 2012). Only loosely related (Jaeger & Caison, 2006; Wu & Stemler, 2008), statistically insignificant (Eichenfield et al., 1988), or outdated (Wotruba, 1969) examples of evaluation instruments exist in the extant student affairs literature. Given the extensive gaps in this literature, this study sought to develop a valid and reliable instrument to aid housing and residence life professionals in evaluating the performance of resident assistants from the perspective of their residents. The goal of this study was achieved by developing an instrument that has important implications for theory, current practice, and future research.

Implications for Theory

This study has worthwhile implications for student affairs theory in several ways. First, it provides an empirical application of Bolman and Deal’s (2021) four frames of leadership and Birnbaum’s (1988) and Gallos and Bolman’s (2021) application of the four frames to higher education leadership. The results of this survey indicate that there is practical evidence to support the use of this conceptual framework for understanding leadership in higher education institutions. It also expands Birnbaum’s model beyond the realm of college and university presidents or other upper-level leadership, allowing for the potential to better understand student leaders in educational institutions.

Second, this study represents a contemporary exploration into developing an evaluation instrument based on extensive literature review and statistical analysis. Statistically speaking, these four subscales were successful at representing the effectiveness of resident assistants. Content validity, construct validity, high internal reliability, and high total variance all indicated that the instrument is a valid and reliable measure of resident assistant leadership performance from the residents' perspective.

Implications for Current Practice

The four latent variables present in the revised version of the survey align closely with practical aspects of the resident assistant role. Structural leadership is understood as a resident assistant's ability to work with others as part of a larger organization to achieve goals and distribute work in an efficient manner. Leaders are most effective in this area when they work within the systems and structures around them and communicate relevant policies and procedures to their residents, team members, and supervisors (Birnbaum, 1988; Blimling, 2003; Bolman & Deal, 2021). Items in the structural leadership component centered on administrative aspects of the job (e.g., *My RA is consistent in enforcing rules*).

Human resource leadership emphasizes the importance of individuals through empowerment, support, and development of interpersonal relationships. Leaders are most effective in this area when they offer individualized assistance to those they serve by acting as informal counselors and friends (Birnbaum, 1988; Blimling, 2003; Bolman & Deal, 2021). Items in the human resource leadership component focused on validation and mattering (e.g., *My RA expresses care for me*).

In terms of symbolic leadership, resident assistants "are the face of housing and residence life programs" (Blimling, 2015, p. 162). They set the individual traditions and rituals of their floor and represent the department and university to their residents on a personal level. The RA is an important symbolic presence that shapes meaning-making for the students under their care. Resident assistants are also vital to the representation of the institution to students. Symbolic leadership captures aspects of role modeling and to what extent the RA helps residents feel connected to something larger than themselves (e.g., *My RA makes me feel like I belong at this institution*).

Political leadership involves managing the demands of competing interests when goals are unclear or immeasurable. Political leaders are most effective when they can build trust, honor differences, help others achieve goals, and demonstrate vision and enthusiasm for the hall. Resident assistants who exhibit political leadership must negotiate a balance between individual interests (e.g., *My RA helps me achieve my goals*) and communal interests (e.g., *My RA communicates a vision for this hall community*).

Recognizing that the intuition and expertise of full-time professional staff are invaluable aspects of the evaluation process for resident assistants, this study provides a statistically sound instrument that professional staff can use as an additional means of evaluation to better understand the effectiveness of their staff. Housing and residence life departments that seek to overhaul or improve their evaluation methods can use

the information from this study and adapt the instrument to their needs. Practically, student affairs professionals can incorporate this instrument into their own evaluation processes to better understand the effectiveness of their student staff from the perspective of student residents. Any form of evaluation will have its limits. Therefore, this instrument and the student resident perspective should be part of a holistic evaluation and professional development process.

Residence life professionals can use this instrument to measure student leadership effectiveness from multiple leadership theories and angles. The result could be a sophisticated professional development conversation about the strengths and weaknesses of the resident assistant. For example, a resident assistant who has human resource leadership scores that are lower than average or lower than those of other staff or their own previous scores could be coached in how to connect interpersonally with residents and care for them well. Likewise, a resident assistant with relatively lower structural leadership scores could receive needed feedback on how to better communicate and consistently enforce policies. Ultimately, this instrument should primarily be used for the growth and development of student staff, which will also contribute to the growth and development of the residents they serve.

Beyond these direct applications, residence life professionals should consider using this instrument to synergize their selection, hiring, training, and evaluation processes by applying the conceptual framework to interview procedures, training objectives, and student staff learning goals. Such synergy could prove useful in making the conversation consistent across departmental efforts and could provide developing student leaders with valuable training in effective leadership tied to practical opportunities for application. Gallos and Bolman (2021) provide an excellent and accessible resource on how to use the four frames for leadership development and practice in higher education.

Finally, through the inclusion of a multiple regression analysis on the question of self-rated resident participation, this study confirms previous research (Arboleda et al., 2003; Blimling, 2015) suggesting that RAs have a significant impact on residential student involvement and participation. The link between student involvement and student success in higher education is well established (Mayhew et al., 2016), and this study demonstrates how the leadership skills of resident assistants—particularly in terms of the human resource and symbolic leadership frames—can encourage community engagement.

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Implications for Future Research

This study provides a valid and reliable instrument for measuring resident assistant effectiveness from the viewpoint of student residents across four leadership theories (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Additional studies using this instrument can provide valuable knowledge on which leadership frames influence various outcomes of interest. For example, future studies can examine to what extent effectiveness in these four leadership frames influences sense of community, engagement, satisfaction, policy breaking, and even retention. Use of this instrument at other types of institutions with other student populations will provide further information about the validity and reliability of the instrument, as well as the generalizability of this study's findings.

Qualitative research can explore the depth and precision of the roles of resident assistants according to residents, the student staff themselves, and their supervisors. Although theory and statistical analysis support the classifications of job responsibilities according to the conceptual framework, perceptions of RA responsibilities may differ or be confirmed through in-depth interviews.

CONCLUSION

Resident assistants who serve as peer leaders to other students are consistently considered crucial in creating a positive on-campus experience for students. This role is well established but has lacked continued exploration in student affairs literature. Despite the demonstrated benefits these peer leaders bring to their communities and the significant temporal and monetary resources invested in them, there is little research focused on understanding their selection, training, and evaluation. This study sought to understand the resident assistant role and to develop an instrument founded in theory and refined through statistical analysis.

The strongest implications from this study involve the high statistical reliability and well-rounded validity present in the instrument. This instrument fills a void present in student affairs literature indicated by national standards calling for regular evaluation of student staff. It also provides a useful tool for practitioners in understanding their specific areas of practice based upon leadership theory. Finally, it creates a foundation for future research and practice in student staff evaluation for the benefit of both student leaders and the students whom they serve. ■

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the advantages and drawbacks of different methods for evaluating job performance, such as self-ratings and student feedback?
2. How does the application of leadership theory in this study provide a deeper understanding of resident assistant practices? How might you apply this to your campus?
3. Why do you think there is a lack of research on the selection, training, and evaluation of resident assistants despite their importance and recognition?
4. In what ways might the sample from the two universities (one private research institution and one public research institution) differ from those at other research universities, and how could this affect the study's findings?
5. In what ways might the sample from the two universities differ from those at other types of institutions, and how could these differences impact the study's findings based on the diverse student populations they serve?

Discussion questions developed by Catherine James, Virginia Tech