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## ***Hiring Decisions of Graduate Assistant and Full-time Hall Directors on Resident Assistant Recruitment***

RESIDENT ASSISTANT HIRING DECISIONS are critical to the residential student experience and ultimately to the success of housing and residence life departments. The purpose of this study is to explore the influences existing in the hiring decision-making process for housing and residence life staff. We also compare the influences of hiring decisions across various participant characteristics including professional status, master's degree focus area, race, gender, institution type, and prior hiring experience for 138 participants. Staff diversity, group process scores, and observations are the most influential components in hiring decisions. Additionally, we found graduate assistants rely less on the metric-based aspects of the selection process, which could be a result of low levels of involvement in planning and facilitating selection processes within the department. Additional results as well as implications for practice and future research are also discussed.

Ultimately, the goal of hiring decisions is to accurately predict staff members' future performance (Kuncel et al., 2013). This difficult task must consider organizational context as well as candidates' individual attributes. Therefore, it is common for organizations to collect a wide range of information from and about candidates which creates "the ultimate issue of how to best make use of it all" (Kuncel et al., 2013, p. 1060).

Kuncel et al.'s (2013) meta-analysis of employee selection and academic admission decisions compared two common approaches to utilizing candidate information: mechanical and holistic. The mechanical approach includes use of algorithms or formulas ranging from weighting data points to decision trees. The holistic approach relies

on intuition or insight and includes "both individual judgements of data and group consensus meetings" (p. 1060). Despite the holistic approach being more common, Kuncel et al. (2013) found the mechanical approach provided substantial improvement for future predictions, especially concerning job performance. Consistent with Kuncel et al.'s (2013) discussion, many residence life departments gather multiple data points during the Resident Assistant (RA) selection process (Ostroth, 1981).

However, despite multifaceted evaluation methods being preferred by candidates (Stone & Hanson, 2002), there is very little research exploring the efficacy of current selection processes in identifying high-quality RA staff members. Sadouskas' (2011) disser-

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tation found only grade point average, class rank, and number of residents were related to RA performance while Berg and Stoner (2016) discovered “traditional multiple-component selection processes fail to adequately predict future job performance in new resident assistants” (p. 27). Beyond the efficacy of processes, we know very little about how hiring professionals process, rank, and use the information gathered from the process in their decision making.

### IMPORTANCE OF RA ROLE

RAs are considered the backbone of nearly every residence life program across the nation (Bailey & Grandpre, 1997; Blimling, 2010; Bowman & Bowman, 1995; Carns et al., 1993). Their paraprofessional roles as policy enforcers, conflict mediators, referral agents, and programmers are integral to their residents' personal growth and development. Blimling (2010) outlined 10 major roles of RAs: student, role model, problem solver, conflict mediator, campus resource, trained observer, community builder, group facilitator, counselor, and administrator (p. 33). The current college student population has grown more diverse in the past ten years with postsecondary institutions enrolling more African-American, Hispanic, Asian, and Nonresident alien students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020). Veteran students represented four percent of all undergraduates enrolled in postsecondary institutions in 2007-08 (Radford, 2009), with their enrollment increasing to six percent in 2015-16 (Holian & Adam, 2020). Many students entering college cope with concerns of mental health (Hefner &

Eisenberg, 2009; Kisch, Leino, & Silverman, 2005). As a result, the complexity of the RA position has increased (Taub & Servaty-Seib, 2011) along with its importance. RAs serve as a specialized peer group on the frontline of students' college experiences (Denzine & Anderson, 1999), and Astin (1993) asserted that a student's peer group is the source of the single greatest impact on a person during their undergraduate years. New students come to comprehend the university and engage in campus activities outside of the classroom through their peer environment (Blimling, 2014). There is no doubt that the RA position is crucial to ensure success for every residence life program, which in turn, makes RA hiring critically important.

### PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AND EDUCATION

ACPA and NASPA's (2015) competencies for student affairs educators identified two foundational competencies concerning hiring: “Describe ethical hiring techniques and institutional hiring policies, procedures, and processes” and “Advocate for ethical hiring practices” (p. 24). However, as with many competencies, there can be a lack of congruence between graduate preparation program faculty and graduate assistant supervisors concerning where and how these hiring competencies should be developed (Cooper et al., 2016; Kuk et al., 2007; Torres et al., 2019). Cooper et al.'s (2016) content analysis of 136 program curricula found only nine percent of programs included curriculum focused on supervision, which is surprising as supervisors typically have critical hiring responsibilities for their organizations.

## INFLUENCES ON HIRING DECISIONS

Research across fields exposed racial bias, gender role stereotypes, physical appearance, and social media profile pictures influencing hiring decisions (Baert, 2018; Baert & Decuyper, 2014; Rice & Barth, 2017). Rice and Barth's (2017) study simulated hiring activities where participants were asked to make hiring decisions for traditionally masculine and feminine positions. Rice and Barth found hiring decisions more often reflected a match between the applicants' gender and the occupational stereotypes. Additionally, when aspects incongruent with traditional gender role stereotypes were intentionally introduced, Rice and Barth (2017) found these influenced how applicants were rated but failed to influence the hiring decision.

Baert and Decuyper's (2014) study placed 19 and 20-year-old students from Ghent University in the role of recruiting for an entry level job within a lab setting. The study found that "perceived attractiveness and conscientiousness [were] important drivers of a recruiter's decision to invite a candidate for a job interview" (p. 600). These findings carry specific interest given the age of the participants and the involvement of many current undergraduate staff in the RA candidate evaluation process. Baert's (2018) study of Facebook profile pictures resulted in similar findings. Specifically, fictitious candidates with more favorable (perceived attractiveness) Facebook pictures received approximately 38% more interview invitations than

candidates with identical credentials and less favorable pictures. Finally, Fulthrop and D'Eloia (2015) found hiring decisions were influenced by time in the field and educational background.

## IMPACT OF BAD HIRING DECISIONS

The RA selection process is a time and resource intensive process (Berg & Stoner, 2016). A bad hire can cost an organization up to sixteen percent of the annual salary for a high-turnover job earning under \$30,000 a year (Boushy & Glynn, 2012). However, there is little support in the literature that dedicating these precious resources results in improved hiring decisions. This study defines a bad hire as an RA that is either put on probation or terminated as a result of poor job performance. Bad hiring decisions may also result in negative ripple effects that could manifest prior to termination or negative effects after the termination of a bad hire. The effects of a bad hire are varied and can be displayed in different ways such as low staff morale, sub-par staff performance, poor staff cohesion, and staff burnout.

The length of time a bad hire is allowed to underperform in their role impacts the extent of damage to a staff team and residential community. Bad hires could immediately lower the expected performance standards. The lowest performing member of a team typically sets the bar for acceptable work, if allowed (Felps et al., 2006). Additionally, bad hires can not only affect morale among staff, but also the larger residential community to which they were assigned.

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The negative effects of a bad hiring decision may continue after the staff member departs the team, which could play out in multiple ways. The disruption of team workflow may be the first component to be affected. Duty and desk schedules may need revision, displacing extra work to team members. This can negatively affect team morale. The extra responsibilities requiring redistribution may increase the risk for staff burnout. Deciding to make an immediate hire from the residual RA candidate pool could pose its own challenges with the new staff member now requiring training while on the job. On-the-job training can be extremely time consuming and difficult for all team members. Additionally, a regression in the team's group dynamics with the loss or addition of team members may occur. A staff team that may have reached Tuckman's (1965) *performing* stage could revert to the *storming* stage, undoing previous team development and relationship building efforts. Lastly, the effect of the bad hire on the residential community may be apparent through increased community violations in the corresponding residence hall area.

Given the potential impact both positive and negative hiring decisions can have on RA staff teams, residential communities, and individual student experiences, these decisions are high stakes. This is compounded by the substantial resources dedicated to staff recruitment and training. There is a critical gap in the literature concerning how supervisors making hiring decision incorporate various aspects of the RA selection process in their decision making. This study explores

how residence life staff at various levels incorporate staff selection information in their hiring decisions. Specifically, this research study addresses the following research questions:

- *What components are used within RA selection processes across various institutions?*
- *What components of the RA selection process are most influential in hiring decisions?*
- *Is there a difference in hiring decision making by professional status, hiring experience, race, gender, institutional type, or master's degree concentration?*
- *Is there a difference in hiring decision confidence and candidate evaluation confidence by professional status, hiring experience, race, gender, institutional type, or master's degree concentration?*

## METHOD

A 19-item survey was uniquely designed to address the research questions and was distributed to all ACUHO-I members coded as hall directors via ACUHO-I's Endorsed Research program. The survey was also shared directly with institutions that responded to a post on ACUHO-I's online discussion forum indicating that they employed graduate assistants within their housing departments.

Data analyses included descriptive statistics for all hiring decision influence variables. Mean scores of all influence and confidence variables were compared across all grouping

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variables through effect size calculations (Sriram, 2017). Independent sample *t*-tests and one-way ANOVAs were conducted to determine if there were any statistical differences between groups.

Sample

After removing incomplete survey responses, 138 responses were used for data analysis. The sample was predominantly White (74%) and roughly evenly distributed between male and female hiring managers. Approximately two percent of respondents self-described their gender identity. Graduate assistants made up 29% of the sample, and of the full-time professionals, 83% had completed a college student personnel focused master’s degree. A majority of participants worked at public institutions with 15,000 students or more, and 83% had prior supervisory experience. Table 1 details all demographic variables.

RESULTS

Application Components and Planning

Descriptive frequencies displayed how common specific application requirements and selection components were incorporated across the sample (See Table 2). It is important to note that survey participants did not identify their specific institutions; therefore, multiple responses from a single institution could be represented in the descriptive statistics. The most common application requirements were minimum GPA (95%) and conduct checks

TABLE 1  
Sociodemographic Characteristics of Survey Participants

| CHARACTERISTIC                       | <i>n</i> | %  |
|--------------------------------------|----------|----|
| <b>Professional status</b>           |          |    |
| Graduate assistant                   | 40       | 29 |
| Full-time professional               | 98       | 71 |
| <b>Race</b>                          |          |    |
| White                                | 102      | 74 |
| Black or African American            | 20       | 15 |
| American Indian or Alaska Native     | 1        | <1 |
| Asian                                | 3        | 2  |
| Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander  | 1        | <1 |
| Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin  | 5        | 4  |
| Other, prefer to self-identify       | 6        | 4  |
| <b>Gender</b>                        |          |    |
| Male                                 | 68       | 49 |
| Female                               | 67       | 49 |
| Prefer to self-describe              | 3        | 2  |
| <b>Master's degree focus</b>         |          |    |
| College student personnel            | 81       | 83 |
| Other                                | 17       | 17 |
| <b>Institution type<sup>a</sup></b>  |          |    |
| Large public                         | 81       | 59 |
| Small public                         | 24       | 17 |
| Large private                        | 3        | 2  |
| Small private                        | 29       | 21 |
| Other                                | 1        | <1 |
| <b>Resident Assistant staff size</b> |          |    |
| 0-50                                 | 19       | 14 |
| 51-100                               | 42       | 31 |
| 101-150                              | 25       | 19 |
| 151-200                              | 30       | 22 |
| More than 200                        | 19       | 14 |
| <b>Prior supervision</b>             |          |    |
| Yes                                  | 115      | 83 |
| No                                   | 23       | 17 |

<sup>a</sup> All participants were four-year institutions. Small institutions were classified as having enrollments below 15,000. Large institutions were classified as having enrollments of 15,000 or more.

(86%) followed by minimum academic classification (65%), resume (63%), requiring current staff to reapply (61%), references (54%), and essay (46%). Various components within the evaluation process had the following representation: application (99%), interviews (98%), group process (57%), and RA class (14%).

Participants reported that entry-level and mid-level professionals were most frequently involved in the RA selection planning process at 55.8% and 55.1%, respectively. Additionally, 58.7% of participants indicated a departmental committee was primarily responsible for planning RA selection. Participants reported low levels of involvement in planning hiring processes for graduate assistants (26.8%) and upper-level professionals (29.0%). Concerning implementation of RA selection, partic-

ipants identified entry-level staff and departmental committees as those most involved at 60.9% and 50.7%, respectively. Participants reported low levels of involvement for graduate assistants and upper-level professionals concerning facilitating RA selection at 31.9% and 22.5%, respectively.

### Decision Making

Table 3 details all descriptive statistics for the 14 decision-making influences: advice from peers, candidates' social media, current RA staff feedback, direct supervisor advice, essay, GPA, group process interactions, group process score, interview score, leadership experience, personal interactions, reference(s), resume, and staff diversity. Participants identified staff diversity ( $M = 4.44$ ), observed interactions at group

**TABLE 2**

### Frequency of Submission Materials and Evaluation Processes

| STAFF SELECTION COMPONENT       | <i>n</i> | %  |
|---------------------------------|----------|----|
| <b>Application requirements</b> |          |    |
| Minimum GPA                     | 131      | 95 |
| Conduct check                   | 119      | 86 |
| Minimum classification          | 89       | 65 |
| Resume                          | 87       | 63 |
| Current staff reapply           | 84       | 61 |
| References                      | 75       | 54 |
| Essay                           | 64       | 46 |
| <b>Evaluation processes</b>     |          |    |
| Application                     | 136      | 99 |
| Interview                       | 135      | 98 |
| Group process                   | 79       | 57 |
| Resident Assistant class        | 19       | 14 |

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process ( $M = 4.41$ ), and group process score ( $M = 4.21$ ) as the most important aspects within their hiring decision making. Candidate essays ( $M = 4.00$ ) and interview scores ( $M = 3.98$ ) were also highly influential while feedback from current supervisor ( $M = 3.31$ ) and current RA staff ( $M = 3.36$ ) were less influential. A candidate's social media was the least influential aspect ( $M = 2.69$ ). Notably, use of a candidate's essay and resume displayed a higher level of variance across the participants with a standard deviation of 1.54 and 1.61, respectively.

Additionally, participants were more confident in their own personal evaluation than their departments' selection processes. Participants were highly confident in what they were looking for in candidates ( $M = 4.47$ ) and knowing how to evaluate observed behaviors ( $M = 4.54$ ). When considering their departments' processes, participants were less confident that the process would allow them to identify important characteristics in candidates ( $M = 3.49$ ), and they had less confidence in the hiring decisions resulting from the departments' selection processes ( $M = 3.80$ ).

**TABLE 3**  
**Descriptive Statistics for Hiring Decision Influences**

| INFLUENCE                  | <i>n</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|----------------------------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Staff diversity            | 129      | 4.44     | 0.838     |
| Group process interactions | 131      | 4.41     | 1.329     |
| Group process score        | 131      | 4.21     | 1.368     |
| Essay                      | 131      | 4.00     | 1.544     |
| Interview score            | 131      | 3.98     | 0.996     |
| Leadership experience      | 130      | 3.86     | 0.963     |
| Personal interactions      | 131      | 3.82     | 1.026     |
| Advice from peers          | 131      | 3.80     | 1.003     |
| Reference(s)               | 90       | 3.66     | 1.072     |
| Grade-point-average        | 129      | 3.57     | 1.204     |
| Resume                     | 131      | 3.37     | 1.614     |
| Current RA staff feedback  | 131      | 3.36     | 1.082     |
| Direct supervisor advice   | 131      | 3.31     | 1.110     |
| Candidate's social media   | 111      | 2.69     | 1.320     |

**Note.** *Influence items were reported on a five-point Likert scale.*

### Difference in Decision-Making Influences

Independent sample *t*-tests were conducted to compare all fourteen influence aspects by professional status as a full-time professional or graduate assistant. Multiple differences in the mean score were observed across the two groups and as supported by Sriram (2017), effect size was examined first, followed by statistical significance. Full-time professionals reported a higher influence for interview score, resume, peer advice, and GPA. Effect size ranged from small,  $d = .15$  for GPA, to small to medium,  $d = .32$  for interview score; see Table 4 (Morgan et al., 2013). Graduate assistants reported a higher mean influence for direct supervisor advice, leadership experience, references, and candidates' social media. The difference between the influence of leadership experience was statistically significant with a small to medium effect size,  $t(89.158) = 2.354$ ,  $p = .021$ ,  $d = .44$ . Full-time professionals with a master's degree focus in college student personnel reported statistically significantly higher influence of the candidates' resume compared to those whose master's degree focused on other areas  $t(31.194) = 2.200$ ,  $p = .035$ . The difference represented a medium effect size ( $d = .53$ ).

Differences in mean score for decision-making influences were also present between White participants and participants of color. Specifically, White participants reported higher influence of candidates' GPAs compared to participants of color. This difference reflected a small effect size ( $d = .26$ ), but was not statistically significant ( $p = .20$ ). However, participants of color reported significantly higher influence compared to White participants on candidates' social media,  $t(54.488) = -3.324$ ,  $p = .002$ , and staff diversity,  $t(85.643) = -2.38$ ,  $p = .02$ . The difference in the influence of the candi-

dates' social media was a medium to large effect size ( $d = .71$ ), and the difference for staff diversity reflected a medium effect size ( $d = .44$ ). Additionally, participants of color reported higher mean influence on several other aspects compared to their White peers including feedback from current RA staff ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $3.27$ ,  $d = .31$ ), direct supervisor advice ( $M = 3.54$ ,  $3.23$ ,  $d = .28$ ), references ( $M = 3.85$ ,  $3.57$ ,  $d = .26$ ), and observed interactions at group process ( $M = 4.57$ ,  $4.35$ ,  $d = .18$ ). Though not statistically significant, these differences ranged from a small to medium effect size.

Differences in mean score for decision-making influences were present between male and female participants. Male participants ( $M = 3.54$ ) reported significantly higher mean influence for current RA staff feedback than their female counterparts ( $M = 3.14$ ),  $t(126) = 2.127$ ,  $p = .035$ , representing a small to medium effect size ( $d = .36$ ). Other observed differences were not statistically significant. Male participants ( $M = 3.65$ ) reported a higher influence of the resume within their hiring decision than female participants ( $M = 3.11$ ), with a small to medium effect size ( $d = .34$ ). Female participants reported a higher mean influence in interview score ( $M = 4.12$ ,  $3.81$ ), group process score ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $4.02$ ), observed interactions at group process ( $M = 4.52$ ,  $4.27$ ), direct supervisor feedback ( $M = 3.42$ ,  $3.21$ ), candidates' social media ( $M = 2.85$ ,  $2.59$ ), and references ( $M = 3.88$ ,  $3.43$ ) than male participants. The effect size for these differences ranged from a small effect for interactions at group process ( $d = .19$ ) to medium effect size for references ( $d = .43$ ).

Finally, one-way ANOVA indicated a statistically significant difference in the influence of interview score based on institutional type,  $F(3, 126) = 6.237$ ,  $MSE = 5.379$ ,  $p = .016$ ,

$\eta^2 = .129$ ). Post-hoc Games-Howell test was used over Tukey HSD due to violating the test for homogeneity of variances ( $p = .046$ ), resulting in the need to interpret Welch's test for unequal variances. Post-hoc Games-Howell indicated participants from small private institutions reported a statistically significantly higher influence of interview score

compared to both participants from small public institutions ( $p < .001$ ) and large public institutions ( $p = .028$ ). The difference between small private and large public was a medium to large effect size ( $d = .70$ ), and the difference between small private and small public represented a larger than typical effect size ( $d = 1.12$ ).

**TABLE 4**  
**Mean Comparison and t-test for Hiring Influences by Participant Characteristics**

| Hiring Influence           | PROFESSIONAL STATUS |        |      | RACE    |       |       | GENDER   |        |      |
|----------------------------|---------------------|--------|------|---------|-------|-------|----------|--------|------|
|                            | Pro M               | Grad M | d    | White M | POC M | d     | Female M | Male M | d    |
| Staff diversity            | 4.42                | 4.49   |      | 4.35    | 4.69  | .44*  | 4.48     | 4.37   |      |
| Group process interactions | 4.39                | 4.46   |      | 4.35    | 4.57  | .18   | 4.52     | 4.27   | .19  |
| Group process score        | 4.18                | 4.27   |      | 4.23    | 4.14  |       | 4.35     | 4.02   | .24  |
| Essay                      | 4.01                | 3.97   |      | 4.05    | 3.86  |       | 3.98     | 4.08   |      |
| Interview score            | 4.07                | 3.73   | .32  | 3.98    | 3.97  |       | 4.12     | 3.81   | .31  |
| Leadership experience      | 3.75                | 4.14   | .44* | 3.86    | 3.85  |       | 3.89     | 3.84   |      |
| Personal interactions      | 3.85                | 3.76   |      | 3.79    | 3.91  |       | 3.88     | 3.81   |      |
| Advice from peers          | 3.87                | 3.62   | .25  | 3.80    | 3.80  |       | 3.85     | 3.76   |      |
| Reference(s)               | 3.60                | 3.78   | .16  | 3.57    | 3.85  | .26   | 3.88     | 3.43   | .43  |
| Grade-point-average        | 3.62                | 3.43   | .15  | 3.65    | 3.34  | .26   | 3.52     | 3.59   |      |
| Resume                     | 3.47                | 3.14   | .21  | 3.41    | 3.29  |       | 3.11     | 3.65   | .34  |
| Current RA staff feedback  | 3.34                | 3.41   |      | 3.27    | 3.60  | .31   | 3.14     | 3.54   | .36* |
| Direct supervisor advice   | 3.22                | 3.54   | .29  | 3.23    | 3.54  | .28   | 3.42     | 3.21   | .19  |
| Candidate's social media   | 2.56                | 3.00   | .32  | 2.42    | 3.33  | .71** | 2.85     | 2.59   | .19  |

**Note.** Only Cohen's d values of .15 or greater are reported. Pro= full-time professional, Grad = graduate assistant, POC = participant of color. \*p < .05, \*\*p < .001.

### Confidence in Decision Making

Full-time professionals indicated higher levels of confidence than graduate assistants in knowing exactly what to look for in candidates ( $M = 4.51, 4.35$ ) and in their decision making based on departments' selection processes ( $M = 3.86, 3.65$ ); see Table 5 for further comparisons. The mean differences represented small to medium effect sizes, ranging from  $d = .23$  to  $d = .27$ , and were not statistically significant,  $p = .061$  and  $p = .231$ , respectively. Female participants ( $M = 3.98$ ) reported significantly higher confidence in their hiring decisions compared to male ( $M = 3.59$ ) participants,  $t(126) = -2.13$ ,  $p = .035$ , representing a small to medium effect size ( $d = .37$ ). Additionally, participants with prior hiring experience ( $M = 4.54$ ) had a significantly higher confidence in knowing exactly what to look for in

candidates than participants with no prior hiring experience ( $M = 4.05$ ),  $t(129) = 3.165$ ,  $p = .002$ , representing a medium to large effect size ( $d = .68$ ).

### DISCUSSION

Based on the results of this study, group process planning and implementation could serve as a critical component for RA selection processes, given the influence it had on participants' hiring decisions. Undoubtedly, group process allows for the observation of candidates in complex and active situations, which some claim more accurately reflect the nature of the RA role (Blimling, 2010; Taub & Servaty-Seib, 2011). However, placing candidates in complex situations also requires significant training for facilitators and evaluators overseeing the process. Interestingly,

**TABLE 5**

#### Difference in Confidence by Participant Characteristics

| Confidence                                            | PROFESSIONAL STATUS |                  |          | PRIOR HIRING EXP. |                |          | GENDER             |                  |          |
|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------|----------|--------------------|------------------|----------|
|                                                       | Pro<br><i>M</i>     | Grad<br><i>M</i> | <i>d</i> | Yes<br><i>M</i>   | No<br><i>M</i> | <i>d</i> | Female<br><i>M</i> | Male<br><i>M</i> | <i>d</i> |
| Know what to look for in candidate.                   | 4.51                | 4.35             | .23      | 4.54              | 4.05           | .68**    | 4.51               | 4.48             |          |
| Know how to evaluate actions.                         | 4.55                | 4.51             |          | 4.51              | 4.74           | .23      | 4.66               | 4.43             | .22      |
| Department process allows to evaluate key attributes. | 3.56                | 3.30             | .22      | 3.49              | 3.47           |          | 3.57               | 3.37             | .17      |
| In hiring decision based on process.                  | 3.86                | 3.65             | .27      | 3.83              | 3.63           | .19      | 3.98               | 3.59             | .37*     |

**Note.** Only Cohen's *d* values of .15 or greater are reported. Pro = full-time professional, Grad = graduate assistant.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

participants identified their own observations of candidates at group process as more influential than a candidate's group process score. This confidence in personal evaluation above the departmental process could be less harmful than one may think, given Berg and Stoner's (2016) findings of interview scores, including group process, not predicting future performance in the RA position. However, Berg and Stoner (2016) included the candidates' total scores across all selection processes and did not look specifically at group process scores only. One advantage of a well-planned and centralized process is the opportunity to minimize personal biases. However, when professionals question that process and rely more heavily on personal observations alone, problematic and unconscious biases could more readily influence their decision making (Baert, 2018; Baert & Decuypere, 2014; Rice & Barth, 2017).

Full-time professionals placed higher value on more traditional and metric-based aspects of the process including interview score, resume, and grade-point average. This could speak directly to their experience in their roles as hiring professionals as well as their involvement in the planning and implementation of RA selection. Full-time professionals may have simply trusted the process they had developed and implemented. On the other hand, graduate assistants reported having much less involvement in the planning and implementation of RA selection, which could explain the heavier reliance on candidates' leadership experiences than met-

ric data such as GPA, interview scores, and essay scores. There also exists the possibility they are able to connect to candidates' experiences much easier, having most likely been in similar positions more recently. This dependence on less robust data could also be an indicator of hiring inexperience and possibly a lack of buy-in with the departments' selection processes due to their absence in planning and implementation. This assertion is also supported by the reported lower level of confidence in the departments' selection processes.

### Graduate Preparation Programs

ACPA and NASPA (2015) identified ethical and informed hiring techniques as a professional competency within the Organizational and Human Resources competence. Additionally, ACPA and NASPA (2015) identified the ability to "implement strategies, interview protocols, and decisions regarding staff selection" as intermediate level competencies (p. 25). Therefore, the limited involvement in planning and implementation of selection processes for graduate assistants could be a missed opportunity for valuable experience and skill development. Though the vast majority of participants had previous hiring experience, those who did not have previous hiring experience reported a significantly lower level of confidence in knowing exactly what they were looking for in a candidate with a medium to large effect size. Graduate preparation programs could play a valuable role for graduate assistants

*The most common application requirements were minimum GPA (95%) and conduct checks (86%) followed by minimum academic classification (65%), resume (63%), requiring current staff to reapply (61%), references (54%), and essay (46%).*

through structured mock hiring processes. This would allow graduate assistants to gain similar experiences and develop competencies within a lower risk context where actual staffing decisions are not being made. However, Cooper et al.'s (2016) analysis of program curricula would suggest opportunities of this nature are rarely present.

### Hiring Influences and Racial Identity

Staff diversity had a strong influence on hiring decisions between both full-time staff and graduate assistants, with reported means of 4.42 and 4.49. However, White respondents reported statistically significantly lower influence in regards to decision making based on staff diversity compared to participants of color,  $t(127) = -2.042$ ,  $p = .043$ ,  $d = .44$ . This difference represented a medium effect size. This may likely relate to the lived experiences of participants from marginalized backgrounds, within employment and job settings, and suggests that additional training on the role of diversity and inclusion within hiring practices could continue to positively impact White hiring officials. Additionally, these findings may also suggest that People of Color with hiring responsibilities have a firm belief that representation in campus leadership roles do matter, especially to other college students of color on campus. A 2016 report from the U. S. Department of Education supported this finding and asserted that a diverse representation of campus leadership across various levels at an institution helps achieve a diverse and inclusive campus climate (U. S. Department of Education, 2016).

White participants also reported statistically significantly lower influence by a candidate's social media activity compared to participants of color with a medium to large effect size,  $t(109) = -3.486$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $d = .71$ . This may be explained by a heightened awareness, in regards to potential issues of diversity, for a hiring supervisor of color and the perception that any biases or polarizing views a candidate possesses are easier to gauge on social media rather than in an interview setting or another part of the RA selection process. Social media grants people a voice and empowers them in their online interactions (Saxton & Waters, 2014). A person's engagement in activities on a social media platform involves emotional immersion (Smith & Taylor, 2017). Furthermore, hiring supervisors are increasingly using social media sites as screening tools for employment (Root & McKay, 2014). Root and McKay (2014) found that college students did not view their social media posts and photo tags by friends to be important to potential employers, a perception in stark contrast to what research suggests. Additionally, this study also revealed that college students perceived grammar, spelling, and overall communication skills to be unimportant to potential employers, contrasting research findings once again (Fischer, 2013). An interesting finding of the Root and McKay study (2014), however, was that a general awareness existed on the part of students that potential employers would consider posts dealing with negative comments, drugs, alcohol, sex, and profanity to be important information considered in

*Additionally, participants were more confident in their own personal evaluation than their departments' selection processes.*

*Full-time professionals reported a higher influence for interview score, resume, peer advice, and GPA . . . Graduate assistants reported a higher mean influence for direct supervisor advice, leadership experience, references, and candidates' social media.*

terms of candidacy for a position. It is also important to note one of the main items comprising the negative comments factor, excluding items about drugs, alcohol, and sexual inappropriateness, was “racial comments” (Root & McKay, 2014, p. 205).

### **Institution Type**

An interesting pattern emerged concerning the influence of interview score by institution type. Specifically, professionals at small private institutions placed higher value on the interview score compared to those at large public and small public institutions. However, the threshold of 15,000 students distinguishing between small and large institutions could be a contributing factor to these results. Specifically, 45% of the participants at small private institutions reported a total RA staff of 50 or less compared to only 12.5% of participants from small public institutions who reported a staff size of 50 or less. It is foreseeable that supervisors at smaller institutions have an increased likelihood of prior interactions with multiple applicants. Therefore, interviews could prove to be a distinguishing aspect among a group of familiar applicants. Additionally, smaller staffs would likely lead to higher levels of involvement in planning due to limited personnel resources, which also appeared to be a contributing factor for valuing a candidate's interview score.

### **LIMITATIONS**

There are several limitations to this study. Due to the limited literature, this study was exploratory in nature. The exploratory nature heavily influenced the instrument,

which was informed by professional experience due to a lack of an existing validated instrument. The variability of RA selection processes across different institutions is also a limitation. Some of the components of the selection process may be similar in nature, but implemented differently. This study did not consider staff members' belief in their ability to be good supervisors. Appropriate leadership style and supervision could positively impact a poor performing RA. Another limitation concerned the sample. The sample included a limited number of graduate assistants, which may be due to many graduate assistants not having hiring decision authority for RA positions. Additionally, the sample size and higher levels of variance for some variables limited the power of some of the inferential statistical analyses.

### **IMPLICATIONS**

Despite these limitations, the results of this study carry several potential implications for practice and future research. First, departments should consider prioritizing the planning and implementation of group process, given the influential role it plays in decision making. Second, the results suggest that graduate assistants would benefit from increased involvement in planning and facilitation of selection processes. Departments and graduate preparation programs should explore structured and collaborative opportunities to support competency development for graduate students in the areas of recruitment and selection. Finally, the results emphasize the importance of training on the value and role of various metrics within the selection

*Departments and graduate preparation programs should explore structured and collaborative opportunities to support competency development for graduate students in the areas of recruitment and selection.*

process. With increased understanding and clarity around what outcomes specific components are designed to evaluate, it could create increased influence for aspects that appeared to be underutilized by many, such as references.

Future research should build on the results of this study through the development and field-testing of an instrument designed to measure various hiring-decision constructs specific to RA hiring decisions. The phenomenon of male participants appearing to rely more on personal opinions while female participants reporting higher confidence in the process and their decisions warrants additional exploration, given the potential implications for training. Finally, future research should seek to better understand decision-making influences identified within this study such as social media, current staff feedback, and confidence in departmental processes, among others. Qualitative methods could prove most beneficial in better understanding the influential role of certain aspects for specific staff members.

## CONCLUSION

Housing and residence life professionals should consider how their staffs make hiring decisions and to what extent those decisions are influenced by aspects of departments' selection processes. These considerations should guide the department's development of selection processes, including procedural aspects such as who is involved in the planning and implementation of RA selection processes. Departments invest significant time and resources into RA selection; however, it remains unclear if departments are consistently seeing a return on that investment in the form of identifying and selecting high quality RAs. Given the importance of the RA position to the student experience and departmental success, professionals must continue to explore the congruence/incongruence of departments' selection processes and staff members' decision-making processes. ■

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. The authors admit the intensive process of RA selection is often susceptible to personal bias. What measures, if any, exist in your department to identify and eliminate bias within hiring decisions?
2. The goal of hiring decisions is to accurately predict future performance of the staff member. What are some elements of your department's hiring processes that might not play a role in this goal?
3. Does your department's hiring process rely more on a mechanical approach or a holistic approach when hiring candidates? What are the pros and cons of both approaches?
4. The authors contend that bad hiring decisions may result in negative ripple effects that could manifest. What are some ripple effects that you have observed because of a bad hiring decision, and what specific qualities led to that ripple effect?
5. Social media was mentioned as a minor factor in determining the decision made about a candidate. Do you believe social media should play a role in hiring decisions?
6. In what ways can a housing department increase involvement for graduate-level employees in order to increase their confidence in the hiring process?
7. Participants identified their own observations of candidates at group process as more influential than a candidate's group process score. Aside from group processes, what are some ways to increase observations of candidates?

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