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Factors Residence Life Professionals Consider When Selecting Teams of Resident Assistants

SIGNIFICANT LITERATURE exists exploring interview and selection processes broadly, but little research specific to Resident Assistant (RA) interviews is available. Studies on RA interview processes include quantitative studies connecting interview scores to job performance or discussions of bias within processes. The purpose of this qualitative study is to interview residence life professionals (RLPs) who interview, select, and place RAs on teams to understand what criteria they consider throughout the RA hiring process. This study explores the thought process of RLPs to understand the qualities they seek in RA candidates on an individual basis as well as when building teams. We will specifically discuss the factors and findings related to placing a team in this article. Through generic qualitative interviews, fifteen RLPs share their experiences and criteria. When building teams of RAs, RLPs are interested in teams being representative of the student population in demographics and identity, having versatile teams with a variety of skills and personalities, and teams that can work well together. Implications for practice are discussed in an effort to reduce bias in the interview process and ensure that RLPs are measuring the skills and qualities they are looking for in an RA within interview processes. We then share recommendations for future research to increase the body of literature on RA interviews and selection.

Resident Assistants (RAs) serve a crucial function and fulfill many roles in supporting students on college campuses (Blimling, 2010; Blimling & Miltenberger, 1990; Boyer, 1987; Murray et al., 1999). RAs are representatives of the institution and help keep campus safe for students (Letarte, 2013). With such a high level of responsibility, residence life professionals (RLPs) invest a significant amount of time and resources

on RA recruitment and selection each year to hire the best candidates (Berg & Stoner, 2016; Jaeger & Caison, 2006; Smailagic & Wiggan, 2014). Students selected as RAs need to be well-equipped to be successful in the role after training (Jaeger & Caison, 2006).

However, little research exists regarding what qualities make a successful RA and RA team. The available research in this area is quantitative, primarily focusing on how can-

didate interview scores relate to job performance. The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand what qualities, skills, and attributes RLPs consider when interviewing, selecting, and placing RAs. In the interviews for this study, RLPs share what they look for in RA candidates individually and what factors they consider when placing RA teams. For the purposes of this article, we focus on factors RLPs consider when building an RA team from a pool of candidates. That is, the RAs have already been hired and the consideration is on forming staff teams. This study sought to answer the following research question: What qualities, skills, or attributes do RLPs consider when placing RAs on staff teams?

OVERVIEW OF PERSONNEL SELECTION

Many of the studies that offer an overview of the RA selection process are dated. Upcraft and Pilato (1982) described a process including applications, individual interviews, and group interviews to identify the strongest RA candidates, some combination of which many institutions still use today. Ostroth (1981) offered a review of the literature on RAs and the selection process, but this resource is almost 40 years old. More recent literature on best practices in RA selection are typically quantitative studies that examine how candidate scores relate to RA job performance (Berg & Stoner, 2016; Denzine & Anderson, 1999; Jaeger & Caison, 2006; Wu & Stemler, 2008) or interview bias and diversity in the RA role (Bliekamp et al., 2015; Healea & Hale, 2016; Stoner, 2019).

Interview Scores Related to RA Job Performance

Using multiple regression, Berg and Stoner (2016) found that selection process scores did not accurately predict RA performance.

However, among selection process component scores, individual interview scores were the most accurate predictor of performance. Additional interviews did not increase the ability of the process to accurately predict how an RA would perform in the role, including the addition of group interviews. Berg and Stoner (2016) recommended that a more comprehensive application and additional documentation is needed during the RA interview process to better estimate future performance.

Several studies explored factors potentially influencing RA job performance by examining desirable traits to consider when selecting RAs (Berg & Stoner, 2016; Jaeger & Caison, 2006). In studies exploring factors predicting job performance, emotional intelligence emerged as a predictor across multiple disciplines in a meta-analysis (O'Boyle et al., 2011) and specifically among RAs (Jaeger & Caison, 2006; Wu & Stemler, 2008). In their sample, Wu and Stemler (2008) found emotional intelligence was statistically significant in predicting success as an RA until they controlled for general intelligence and personality factors. When adding these controls, several other factors became predictive: confidence in the RA role, conscientiousness, and emotional stability. These findings aligned with Denzine and Anderson (1999) who found RAs with high self-efficacy perform better. The research discussed here regarding interview scores and RA job performance suggests there are identifiable factors that help determine if an RA will be effective.

Interview Bias

When conducting interviews, RLPs must consider possible bias, both at the structural and individual levels, to facilitate a fair and equitable process. Research across multiple fields suggested interviewer bias influences

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candidate selection, specifically regarding weight and physical attractiveness (de Kock & Hauptfleisch, 2018; Gilmore et al., 1986; Lundmann, 2018; Pingitore et al., 1994). In one sample, applicant ethnicity influenced what questions the candidates were asked by interviewers (Wolgast et al., 2018).

One bias-reduction strategy described in the literature was to use highly structured interviews in the selection process. Aamodt et al. (2006) conducted a meta-analysis on bias in job interviews and found bias in both structured and unstructured interviews, but a higher level of bias within unstructured interviews. Lievens and De Paepe (2003) found three factors among interviewers that led them to be less inclined to conduct a structured interview: concern about having discretion over questions or scoring, a desire to establish a relationship with the interviewee, and the importance of ease of preparation.

There is little research specifically on bias in RA interviews, but Stoner (2019) recommended institutions review their raw RA interview scores for structural bias to ensure scores are in alignment with departments' hiring philosophies. Hiring diverse teams of RAs is reliant on diverse applicant pools. Healea and Hale (2016) found three key elements to encourage diverse RAs to apply for the position: a departmental focus on diversity; increasing the number of underrepresented students on campus and providing adequate support while at the institution; and the influence of professional staff in conversations on diversity including recommending to individuals that they apply to be an RA. Bleikamp et al. (2015) explored

perceptions of the RA selection process of students of color who had applied to be RAs. Focus groups reported the selection process as fair, and how they were treated fairly by those in positions of power.

Working as a Team

Although aspects of the RA role are completed individually, RAs are almost always part of larger teams. How well teams work together contributes to the overall residential experience for students. Meta-analyses by Horwitz and Horwitz (2007) and Jackson et al. (2003) found demographic diversity within teams was inconclusive in how it may impact team performance and outcomes in business settings. More research is needed in this area as both meta-analyses cited studies yielding different results on whether demographic diversity increased or decreased team performance. Functional or occupational diversity, which is expertise in different tasks or areas of a business, was shown to improve team performance in some areas (Jackson et al., 2003).

In regard to conflict within teams, a study by Tekleab et al. (2009) discovered the ability for a team to positively manage conflict increased team cohesion and mitigated the negative effects that relationship conflict and task conflict have on team cohesion. If conflict is addressed successfully by a team, it results in higher levels of team cohesion than if conflict were completely avoided. In this sample, Tekleab et al. (2009) found team cohesion levels were related to perceived performance, satisfaction of team members, and the overall viability of the team.

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RA teams are uniquely comprised entirely of college students. Varvel et al. (2004) studied team performance in engineering students who were in senior design projects that lasted one or two semesters. They found that training on their teammates' personality types, measured by the Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory, improved communication and trust. Team members' personality types did not predict successful team performance, which suggests understanding how a team works together is more important than attempting to select for certain personality traits.

A review of existing research provides the opportunity for higher education professionals to rethink and evolve how RA candidates are evaluated and selected. Extant literature focused on factors relating to job performance, but there are no current studies demonstrating the thought process RLPs employ when selecting RAs or what qualities, skills, and attributes they consider. To fill this gap in the literature, we interviewed RLPs who hire and place RAs onto staff teams to understand what factors are considered when constructing teams of RAs from available candidate pools.

METHOD

To explore the research question, we interviewed fifteen RLPs at different institutions who share responsibility for interviewing, evaluating, and selecting RA candidates. We recruited professionals for this current study by sending a message over an RLPs Facebook group. Criteria for participation included experience interviewing RAs and selecting RAs onto teams. Participants in the study includ-

ed two graduate students and thirteen full-time staff; nine of the full-time staff were in mid-level positions at their institution. Participants worked at departments of varying size, so in some cases, mid-level professionals also managed halls and supervised RA teams in addition to their other responsibilities. All participants had interviewed and hired RA teams during their careers.

We conducted a semi-structured interview with each participant for approximately one hour virtually through Google Meet. Interviews lasted between 42 and 80 minutes, with an average time of 55 minutes. We used a generic qualitative interview approach, which provided an opportunity for participants to discuss their ideas about things outside of themselves (Percy et al., 2015). This approach relies on semi-structured or structured interviews and focuses on the external process and ideas, including attitudes and opinions, which makes generic qualitative interviews well-suited to study RA interview and selection processes. We asked participants about their involvement and evaluative approach in RA selection, qualities they considered as positive in candidates, and what criteria they considered when making hiring decisions. We then asked our participants about how they selected and built their RA teams from candidate pools, including any additional factors influencing their decisions.

We audio-recorded the interviews, transcribed interviews through Descript, made manual revisions for accuracy, and employed memoing to take notes after each interview. When possible, both researchers interviewed the candidates and discussed the interviews immediately afterwards. In five of the inter-

views, the audio recording from the virtual interview had some level of distortion that made it possible to hear much of the content but difficult to transcribe. In these five instances, we transcribed as much as possible and relied on our notes from the interviews when analyzing the data.

To analyze the data, we utilized Inductive Analysis. Inductive Analysis involves analyzing the data from each participant individually, highlighting notable statements, connecting each statement to the research questions, coding the data, arranging the data in a matrix, and then looking through patterns in the data for themes to emerge (Percy et al., 2015).

Positionality

We understand that personal identities and experiences impact how we as researchers interact with, understand, and analyze the data. We each had our own thoughts, feelings, and assumptions going into the study including our personal opinions of what makes strong RA candidates and RA teams, the belief that hiring processes always possess some bias, and the belief that being as objective as possible results in consistent hiring decisions. Between us, we have 15 and six years of experience interviewing RAs and have hired a total of ten RA teams. Additionally, we are both White males and acknowledge that our privilege influences how we interact with others and our perceptions of higher education.

FINDINGS

After analyzing the data, we identified several themes. In addition to the research question, we were interested in how RLPs managed their interview and selection processes. We begin by sharing the context of the interview process which includes themes of group interview processes, trusting recommendations from colleagues, and “draft days.” Analyzing data relevant to the research question, we explored what factors RLPs consider when building RA teams. RLPs consider these factors: the RA teams being representative of the student population, having a variety of personalities and skills to enhance versatility, and having the ability to work well as a team. We decided to not use specific names as pseudonyms and instead to refer to participants as RLPs. We took this approach to avoid any assumptions that may be made with any names that we or our participants selected. Since we have reported our results without name identification, it is important to take each quote and point shared by RLPs as individual comments in isolation and not look for connections between them throughout different sections of this article.

Context for the RA Interview Process

Through our interviews, we learned a lot about the RA interview and selection processes at various institutions which included some key factors influencing how RAs are selected. Factors included discussing group interviews

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as part of the process and exploring bias in the RA interview and selection process.

Group Interview Process

In our first few interviews, RLPs mentioned they either recently removed group activities from the RA interview process or employed a group process component but did not like it. With this information, our interviews evolved to ask RLPs their opinions on group interviews in the RA hiring process. We received a variety of responses, but the majority of RLPs in our sample did not currently use a group interview process. Several RLPs valued group process as a tool to see how candidates may work together while others found group interview scores did not help predict who got hired. One RLP stated, “Personally, I have always really enjoyed group process, not in regard to selecting people to hire, but to show candidates what to expect in the job.” Challenges of group process include the significant time commitment, and almost all RLPs agreed that group process needs to be planned carefully and intentionally to be useful. As one RLP put it:

People design group process poorly. I count myself as one of them, and I am trying to be better at it. Sometimes I think people think, “Oh, that’s a cute activity, let’s do it,” but what I am committed to doing is...thinking of, “What is the skill I am trying to evaluate and then let me build an activity backwards from that.”

Recommendations from Colleagues

We specifically asked RLPs if they were more likely to place someone on their RA teams who they either knew before the interviews

or had interviewed themselves. Such feelings were not universal, but many RLPs believed their colleagues as well as themselves were more likely to hire someone they interviewed, assuming similar interview scores. All other things being equal, RLPs having additional knowledge of an RA candidate did influence the RA’s likelihood of getting placed on a team. At larger schools, RLPs would not have seen every candidate and may need to rely on colleagues’ recommendations. We asked if there were certain factors leading to interview notes being more compelling to RLPs. Responses on this varied, but some RLPs did look at notes from peer supervisors and looked more favorably at notes from colleagues who were perceived to be good supervisors. If an RLP knew a colleague had a similar opinion on what makes a strong RA, the RLP was more likely to look closely at that recommendation. In some cases, RLPs saw positional authority as a factor in considering a recommendation, knowing the interviewer had more professional experience than the RLP. When external partners were involved in interviewing, their notes were regarded as helpful but often not given the same level of consideration as notes from residence life colleagues. Colleague trust seemed to be the most important factor in how seriously RLPs considered an evaluation or recommendation. One RLP who supervised staff who hired and placed RA teams stated, “So this year [colleagues] trusted each other strongly. I saw them [placing RA candidates on their teams] that they wouldn’t have traditionally, but that’s because there was a built trust [among colleagues].”

Team members’ personality types did not predict successful team performance, which suggests understanding how a team works together is more important than attempting to select for certain personality traits.

"Draft Day"

Several RLPs discussed placing RAs within draft systems where RLPs rotate placing RA candidates in a predetermined order, similar to a professional sports draft. For the RLPs we interviewed, this made sense to them at larger schools for efficiency, but the majority of RLPs in this current study had negative perceptions of the "draft" approach. "Draft" placement was regarded as stressful, combative, and tense. Some institutions have moved to a more collaborative model where they place RAs together as a professional staff, but this was time-consuming, making this a significant barrier. One RLP shared an example relating to trust and the draft process, "Hesitation about trust is a huge thing...feeling like [placement] is a draft is something I am against." That is, if colleagues do not trust each other, the draft is less likely to go smoothly, and may even become competitive. Previous, negative experiences with a draft day placement process was mentioned by several RLPs who reported hesitation in using a draft approach in the future.

Team Dynamics

The research question in this study focused on the factors RLPs consider when selecting teams of RAs. We were interested to learn if RLPs would want to select the RAs with the highest interview scores, or if there were other factors they considered when building teams. We identified three common themes in the data: how well the RA team represented the student population, having a variety of skills and styles on the team, and how well the team worked together.

Representation

RLPs were interested in RA teams that were representative of the student population, both demographically and in personal identity.

For some RLPs, their institutions have gender-specific or sex-specific RA positions that they need to consider when placing RAs. One RLP stated, "I have to have men in certain areas because of our...building breakdown." Another RLP said, "We have to have men; we have to have women," emphasizing the need to hire both qualified men and women. In these systems, an RLP would hire a candidate identifying as a man who scored lower than a candidate identifying as a woman if they only had spaces left on their team for male RAs based on the floor designation. Several RLPs mentioned fewer men applied to their RA positions and, as a group, scored lower than women. It is important to note that RLPs at institutions where placement is influenced by gender also discussed their approach to support RAs who do not identify as either a man or a woman, which varied by institution.

RLPs also considered demographic factors and identity, most commonly gender and race, to ensure diversity among their RA teams. Considering diversity was most prevalent when placing RAs into teams as opposed to making hiring offers to ensure that hiring practices were not discriminatory based on identity. The primary intention of having diversity within the RA team was to ensure the RAs were representative of the overall student or building population. Diverse teams allowed for students to be more likely to find an RA who shared some identities with them, and the hired RAs being representative of the population suggested just hiring practices. In one RLP's words, "There is a push to ensure that [RA] staffs are representative of our community." Another RLP highlighted this same idea, sharing, "It was a value of the department, and that the RA team should be representative of the on-campus population and the students they serve." Succinctly, "The staff should match the students."

Most RLPs shared that they did not have specific requirements from their departments mandating placing RAs by identity, but the value to have representative teams was widely shared. Diversity on RA teams was interpreted broadly with RLPs citing race, national origin, gender, academic major, class standing, ability, socioeconomic status, and first-generation college students as examples they consider. As one RLP said, “We also want to make sure we have a diverse candidate pool in every sense of the word.” Some RLPs shared that they were comfortable hiring RA teams more diverse than the overall student population if it provided an advantage to historically marginalized populations, “I would say most staffs can actually be more diverse than their communities are, but...some [RA staffs] are way less diverse than others.”

Consistency within diversity on teams was a common challenge, and many RLPs discussed that recruiting diverse candidate pools was critical to having a representative RA staff. One RLP, describing intentional approaches to recruiting a more diverse candidate pool, shared, “We want the RA position to be reflective of what...campus is, not just who may have been the most privileged to be in that position in the years prior.”

Team Versatility

Another important factor RLPs considered when building a diverse RA team was variety in working style, skill, and personality. RLPs in this study preferred a variety of personalities and skills on teams for two main reasons. The first was to maximize the likelihood residents in the community will find an RA to whom they can relate; the other reason was to make the team more effective at handling a wider range of situations. Different personalities influence how the team will work to-

gether, with one RLP saying, “I cannot have a staff of eight people that...always have to be the leader and [think] ‘I’m always right.’ I can’t have that; that doesn’t make for a great cohesive team. So, I try to balance that when I’m building a team.” One RLP shared several hypothetical archetypes that they might look for in a team including the extrovert, peacekeeper, or someone who works better in small groups saying, “That personality piece is something that I look for as I’m building a team.”

A variety of personalities on RA teams can also be helpful in meeting the needs of particular communities, including Living Learning Communities (LLC). An RA may have particular skills or experiences that will fit a specific community. This influenced placement of RAs in some instances. For example, an RLP shared an experience of placing an RA in an LLC they had been part of the previous year, saying, “We’re probably going to put that RA [in that LLC] because they will know what it’s going to take to make those residents successful.”

A variety of skills increases the likelihood that as teams, the RAs are well-equipped to deal with different challenges and help each other. Many RLPs alluded to the RAs’ skills as assets to the larger team. A variety of skills on an RA team allows for team members to teach each other skills. One RLP used a sports analogy of the quarterback (QB) position in football as an example, saying, “You want a good QB, but you don’t need seven QBs.” This suggests different team members can bring different skills and play different roles, theoretically enhancing the team’s versatility.

RLPs shared how interview questions helped them understand candidates’ skills, but the questions measured personality less

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concretely. Most RLPs reported they do not directly gather personality information aside from what they might glean from the interview questions; however, RLPs who used a personality measure most commonly used the True Colors personality assessment (Keirsey & Lowry, 1978). One RLP explored True Colors to understand RAs' strengths, recommending, "Looking at the true colors assessment to have a balance of all the colors...I think that can kind of get a sense from the True Colors, what people may be, in terms of strengths." Otherwise, personality was gauged based on the reactions and responses of the student throughout the interview process.

Teamwork

In addition to selecting diverse teams with a variety of personalities and skills, RLPs wanted to select teams of RAs that would work well together and minimize team conflicts. One RLP said, "I don't expect them to be all 100% buddies... [but they] have to be able to work together." While a desire for the team to work well together was universal among the RLPs we interviewed, there were varied opinions on whether different personalities would help or hinder the team dynamic. One RLP, who prioritized different personalities on their RA team, shared how they sought RAs with different interests, comfort levels in dealing with situations, and areas of expertise. Another RLP specifically said, "We obviously don't want to put all the extroverts together, or, for lack of a better term, all the Type A personalities together," acknowledging how an RA team with all of the same personalities may be less versatile.

Other RLPs provided another perspective, acknowledging how RAs with different personalities and working styles may make team cohesion more challenging. In the words of one RLP, "We can do all the development we want, but if you have people that have different—incredibly different—working styles or personality styles, they're just never going to get along." A few RLPs shared that team progress and growth may be impeded if they had RAs with irreconcilable differences or specific personality traits that made it difficult to get along with others.

RLPs reported three primary ways team dynamics were measured: interview questions, group process, and previous experience with RA candidates. Most RLPs have some version of an interview question that asks about how the candidate works on a team or the role that they take in teams. RLPs noted that a limitation of measuring teamwork in an interview question is that the response is self-reported, with accuracy relying, at least in part, on the candidate's self-awareness. As noted previously, many of the RLPs in this study were moving away from using group process interviews, but RLPs who had group process interviews took the opportunity to learn how candidates interacted with others. Watching candidates interact could also reveal concerning team behavior. In a hypothetical example, an RLP shared a possible interview note where the RA candidates in a group interview "were very, very stressed and bickering the whole time...that's not really something we want as a team."

Many RLPs gauged the ability for an RA to work as part of a team when previous knowledge or experiences with the student was available. Having worked with the students before, it is much easier to determine how returning RAs will work with one another. In the words of one RLP, “We look at how well some of [the returning RAs] did or did not work together...during the last academic year.” Several RLPs had very positive reactions to student athletes who engage in team sports, expecting that student-athletes would be able to translate their team experiences to the RA setting. Knowledge of students’ interactions on teams can also come from knowing them as residents. A candidate may have lived in the RLP’s building previously, but this is even more pronounced at small schools, where an RLP is more likely to know all of the students applying to be an RA.

Several RLPs acknowledged the challenge of knowing how well RAs will work together with the limited interaction of an interview. Unless the RLP knew the student previously, they would not necessarily know enough about the RA candidates from the interview to have much knowledge about how they will work with one another. With this limited knowledge, RLPs shared how building teams was not an exact science, but “you just hope this group works out.” RLPs knew that their supervision could help direct teams to be successful, but “sometimes it’s luck of the draw, too.”

LIMITATIONS

This study contributes to the larger body of research by directly asking RLPs what they seek when interviewing RAs, but it is not without limitations. Although we were able to talk with several RLPs at institutions

across the United States, different institutions and professionals might approach their RA interview and selection processes differently. The RLPs in this study also held numerous different roles at their institutions, including graduate-level to director-level titles. This provided a wider variety of perspectives, but did not focus the findings on a particular group. We found themes among the responses, but any individual practitioners may have a different perspective on the questions we asked. We also did not limit institution type in this study, which allowed us to learn about a wider variety of selection and interview processes, but did not directly help understand how a particular institution type approaches RA selection. While we posed specific questions, we did not restrict responses from participants to be immediate experience or philosophical approach. Being more specific in our request for the type of response and follow-up questions may have yielded more specific focus when we analyzed responses.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

This study has implications for professionals who select RAs and for those in leadership roles overseeing RA recruitment and selection processes. It is important to note that many of the recommendations and implications are interrelated and often interdependent. Therefore, changing one portion of the RA hiring process impacts other areas of the process and could be implemented differently by different institutions, departments, and RLPs.

The first recommendation is for each institution to have conversations among RLPs to determine what traits are desired on

teams. Once the desired qualities of RAs are identified, the next step would be to examine each portion of the process to ensure it is measuring the qualities the institution is looking for in RAs, including their role on teams. Our recommendation is to include a method to evaluate personality factors as part of the team placement because RLPs identified personality factors as important. To do this, some institutions used existing personality assessments. Some institutions had a course or seminar that was required before a candidate could apply to the RA position; others have a course after RAs are hired.

Our recommendation on whether to conduct a group interview process is complicated. Several RLPs who assessed their group processes found that group interview scores did not help predict who was hired, which is consistent with existing literature (Berg & Stoner, 2016). That said, measuring RAs' ability to work together is difficult without seeing them do so. Based on feedback from RLPs, an intentional group process interview may be able to assess RA candidates' work styles, personality traits, and teamwork skills. Depending on the context, group process may be a good tool to measure these RA qualities after the hireable pool of candidates has been determined. This way, RLPs who are placing RA teams have access to the information they desire for selecting RA teams without impacting hiring criteria. Given differing perspectives on the value of group interviews, there might be an opportunity to hire RAs solely through individual interviews with a follow up group interaction

experience with those hired to help inform placement. Such a process would still require an increased resource investment, but may be worth considering in a residence life department that highly values teamwork.

Another recommendation is that leadership teams or RLP supervisors build team trust over the course of the academic year so that it is more likely that RA recommendations from colleagues will be considered. Our interview questions in this current study did not elicit specific recommendations for building trust, but this could be a good opportunity for future research.

Additionally, we recommend training RLPs to consistently evaluate candidates as part of the preparation for the RA hiring process. If all RLPs evaluate from the same understanding, it is more likely that RLPs will trust the evaluations of RA candidates they did not interview. One way to do this is through the implementation of strong evaluation rubrics. Rubrics were common among many of the RLPs we interviewed, and almost all of them cited that they thought having a rubric was helpful. However, it is important to develop and implement rubrics properly. In order for a rubric to increase rating consistency across the large number of evaluators, adequate training on its use must occur. Training should include discussing specific examples of answers RAs could give for each question in each possible rating. That way, staff are clear as to what is an answer that would be rated as "unacceptable" versus an answer that would be rated as "exceeds expectations." It would also be worthwhile to

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If outside information regarding a candidate or personal experience with a candidate is going to assist in determining team placement decisions, it is important to identify a process by which that information can be included ethically.

discuss the rubric categories with teams to ensure that RLPs agree with the criteria of the rubric, which is likely to increase accurate use of the rubric.

If outside information regarding a candidate or personal experience with a candidate is going to assist in determining team placement decisions, it is important to identify a process by which that information can be included ethically. Our recommendation is simply to not ignore the fact that outside experiences impact the team placement process and have some expectations around how information is shared consistently throughout the process.

Lastly, many RLPs stated that they needed teams of RAs representative of the larger campus and sometimes had issues recruiting diverse RA candidates. Our recommendation is to consider and ask why diverse candidates are not applying to be RAs. Some RLPs had strategies where they would recruit through specific student organizations, use word of mouth from current RAs, or ask candidates of targeted groups why members were not applying to the RA position. When moving forward with these types of exercises, it is critical that departments be open and receptive to feedback about where RA hiring processes may have systemic bias. All institutions must recognize that systemic bias may be embedded within their RA hiring processes and that systemic bias may be leading diverse candidates to not apply, to not be scored in an unbiased manner, or to not be selected.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research study offers a new perspective to the topic of RA selection and recruitment by exploring the thought processes and practices of RLPs who place RAs onto teams. We are not aware of other qualitative studies on this topic, and there is great opportunity in the literature to investigate a wide variety of processes from the perspective of the decision-makers. There is ample opportunity to narrow the focus of this research to a specific institution type, demographic, or experiential factor.

Our study raises many other questions that could generate future research. RLPs were interested in finding the best practices for measuring team traits including work styles, personality types, and teamwork. With group processes receiving mostly negative feedback from the RLPs we interviewed, a research project studying what qualities group process interviews could effectively evaluate or measure would be of interest to our field. Lastly, a study examining the effect of trust between colleagues on the RA team selection process is needed.

CONCLUSION

In this qualitative study, we explored the process and criteria that RLPs employ when placing RAs on teams. Through generic qualitative interviews, we learned what factors and qualities RLPs considered through the RA

team placement process. We then analyzed the data using Inductive Analysis. As expected, each RLP had specific factors of interest which were often context and experience specific, but we were able to find commonalities. RLPs in our study came from a variety of institution types, professional roles, experiences, and across the United States, so finding commonalities with such different contexts is an important finding in itself. When placing RAs onto teams, RLPs wanted teams that were representative of the student popula-

tion at their institutions, were versatile with a variety of skills and personalities, and who worked well together. RLPs and institutions spend a lot of time and energy trying to hire candidates who will do well in the RA position; given the importance of the RA position on college campuses, this is time well spent. By reviewing the desirable traits of RAs on teams and then measuring those traits effectively through the interview process, institutions can build the strongest RA teams to best represent and serve their students. ■

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The RLPs interviewed sought to build teams representative of their student populations with a variety of personalities and with the ability to work well as teams. Do you and/or your department prioritize these qualities when building RA teams? If yes, why? If not, what qualities do you prioritize?
2. Some of the RLPs interviewed reported not having group processes at their institutions. What are the pros and cons of having a group process when placing candidates onto teams?
3. The authors recommend implementing training on how to use rubrics to help create consistent understanding among hiring staff. How could this training be implemented in your department?
4. A common theme discussed by RLPs was an interest in hiring diverse staff that are representative of the communities they serve. How does your department currently recruit diverse staff teams? Has your department found success in recruiting diverse staff teams?
5. This study reveals how important trust is for staff in considering recommendations and evaluations from peer RLPs. In what ways do you build trust within your department to set up the staff for success on selection day? In what areas could your department improve?

Discussion questions developed by Alli Coleman and Alysha Daley, Community Coordinators at Kansas State University.