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Introduction to the 2021 *Special Issue of* The Journal of College and University Student Housing: *Resident Assistant Hiring Practices*

RECOGNIZED AS THE "heart of any residence life program" (Fotis, 2013, p. 43), the paraprofessional Resident Assistant (RA) job is nearly synonymous with college housing (Bailey & Grandpre, 1997; Blimling, 2010; Bowman & Bowman, 1995). The importance of the RA position is underscored by its inclusion in the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (2015) for Housing and Residential Life Programs. RAs encompass a large percentage of housing operations' organizational structures (Horvath & Stack, 2013). Thus, housing programs execute comprehensive processes to identify and hire the most qualified candidates for these essential roles (Jaeger & Caison, 2006).

Many processes and philosophies exist for hiring student staff (Ostroth, 1981); yet years of practice have not yielded a consensus best practice. Since Ostroth's (1981) landmark literature review there has been limited scholarship about hiring RAs. In fact, much of the literature suggests recommendations for improving hiring practices (e.g., Deluga & Masson, 2000; Evans et al., 2001; Jaeger & Caison, 2006; Wu & Stemler, 2008) with limited—if any—follow up scholarship addressing those recommendations (Stoner,

2019). Although two recent studies explored the utility of the hiring process as a predictor of future job performance (Berg & Stoner, 2016; Stoner, 2019), there remains a large gap in understanding RA selection processes and their components.

To remedy this, and on behalf of *The Journal of College and University Student Housing* Editorial Board and the ACUHO–I Executive Board, we are pleased to submit to the readership this themed issue dedicated to advancing our collective understanding of RA hiring practices. This issue serves as a strong companion to the 2019 theme issue on training and development in housing and residence life programs (Kniess et al., 2019), recognizing the best training and selection efforts succeed in tandem. The breadth of articles presented here covers a wide range of focal areas including detailed looks at specific components, staff decision-making, and even resource allocations.

Despite its prevalence as a tool within many RA hiring processes, group process has long been overlooked in housing literature. Denise Davidson and Mark Bauman begin the issue filling this gap by exploring the history, utility, effectiveness, and ethics of group process. The authors pose many

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questions practitioners must consider when employing group process as an evaluative component within their hiring processes.

Structured interviews are a hallmark of hiring processes regardless of industry or profession. Presumably the questions asked in interviews should adequately allow housing supervisors to assess the skills necessary to perform the RA job. Stephen Berg, Alexis Curiel, Kara Lesniak, Sara Frick, and Mari Duncan present a content analysis of regional interview questions posed of RA candidates exploring this assumption. Among their findings, critical analysis of the interview question artifacts revealed competency areas espoused as important by the housing industry but neglect focus when interviewing candidates.

Supervisors consider many factors when making their hiring decisions, some of which extend beyond the objective evaluation metrics collected throughout the interview process. Craig Seager and Thomas Bruick employed statistical analysis to understand the most influential factors both graduate-level and full-time supervisors incorporate when deciding which candidates to hire. The authors not only articulate existing differences between positional levels but also reveal structural components providing elevated value for hiring managers.

Typically evaluating RA candidates for hiring considerations is a systematically designed department-wide process. However, the act of placing RAs into their specific communities involves more personal choice by each supervisor. By conducting qualitative interviews with hiring managers, Erik Sorensen and Evan Keil illuminate import-

ant determinations and parameters housing professionals use to make their placement decisions, and reveal strategic opportunities to form teams in a way that will serve the department, RAs, and residents.

Facilitating traditional multi-component hiring processes requires substantial resources, often displacing regular job duties to afterhours. Beginning the conversation surrounding the time economy of hiring RAs, Apefa Cooper and James Stoner provide an analysis of the human capital and opportunity costs associated with facilitating RA hiring processes, demonstrating how even slight intentional modifications to staffing patterns and infrastructure configurations releases personnel time and their associated wages in meaningful amounts.

We close out our introduction to the theme issue on a personal note. We are pleased with the variety of articles presented, both in terms of unique focus areas within RA hiring and the different approaches employed. Furthermore, we believe there are direct and actionable takeaways including, but not limited to, the ability for practitioners to replicate study techniques on a localized departmental scale for critical understanding of their own processes. We hope the articles collected here will serve as a springboard for further research endeavors on the recruitment, evaluation, and selection of RAs.

The quality of this issue, however, extends far beyond our curation and editorial skills. Any chef will say it helps to cook with good ingredients; or in our case, the authors. We are particularly proud of each and every author featured in this issue considering how

this past year was beyond challenging on the easiest of days; yet somehow the authors endured and found it within themselves to contribute to the body of housing scholarship. Of the thirteen contributing authors in this issue, ten were full-time housing practitioners. For six of them, this was their first publication. ■

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