

Best Practices in Residence Life Staff Recruitment and Retention

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Framework

- Student learning is enhanced and programs benefit from contributions of experienced staff
- Recruitment activities are time consuming and costly
- Departures can be disruptive, drain resources, and affect morale (Buck & Watson, 2002)

Entry-level, Live-in Professionals

- Entry-level live-in professional residence life staff play a crucial role on campuses
- Increasing challenges in filling positions with well-qualified staff

Literature Review

- Having competent, knowledgeable, and skilled professional staff in residential facilities is essential to promoting student learning and development on campus (Belch & Kimble, 2006; Belch & Mueller, 2003)
- These professionals have substantive student contact and significant responsibilities for the learning and welfare of students
- Professional positions in residence life provide an outstanding training ground for student affairs practitioners
- Staff develop skills needed in a variety of mid- and senior-level positions in student affairs
- Several key factors have converged to create greater challenges for some institutions in their ability to hire and retain RDs
 - ♦ more options for entering student affairs field
 - ♦ quality of life associated with living in
 - ♦ complexity and severity of student issues
 - ♦ Many master's graduates declare no willingness to work in residence life
- Recent research has focused on:
 - ♦ Senior housing officers' perceptions of problems (Belch & Mueller, 2003; St. Onge & Nestor, 2005)
 - ♦ Quality of life issues among live-in professionals (Belch, 2005)
- Despite the emerging body of research in this area, little if any research identified successful and innovative recruitment and retention activities

Current Study

- National study to examine best practices in recruiting and retaining entry-level live-in professionals in housing and residence life
 - ♦ What attracts candidates to these positions?
 - ♦ Why do they stay?
- Campuses having best practices in recruiting and retaining entry-level live-in professional staff identified using Delphi technique
- Expert panel consisted of ACUHO-I Leadership Assembly members
 - ♦ 67/92 2004 Leadership Assembly members “eligible”
 - ♦ 30 (45%) returned consent form
 - ♦ 29 (43%) voted
 - ♦ 12 (18%/40%) voted in all 4 rounds
- 72 group and individual interviews conducted by 3 researchers on 11 campuses

Institutions

Recruitment

East Carolina University
Kansas State University
University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh
Seton Hall University (NJ)
Alfred University (NY)

Retention

Western Illinois University
University of Georgia
Emerson College (MA)

Recruitment & Retention

Ball State University (IN)
University of Florida
University of Maryland

Today's Focus – Recruitment and Retention Strategies

▪ Strategies: Policies

- ♦ Pets
- ♦ Domestic partners
- ♦ Respecting living space
- ♦ Collateral assignments
- ♦ Professional development support
- ♦ Flexible scheduling/work hours
- ♦ Contract length

▪ Strategies: Processes

- ♦ Ongoing communication during recruitment
- ♦ Attention to the individual
- ♦ Involvement in decisions
- ♦ Broad approach to professional development

▪ Strategies: Perks

- ♦ Making campus housing a home
- ♦ External entrance
- ♦ Washer & dryer
- ♦ Decent furniture
- ♦ Wooden kitchen cabinets
- ♦ Meal plan
- ♦ Access to degree programs
- ♦ Departmental plan to address amenities
- ♦ Amenities within department's scope and ability

▪ Strategies: Personalities

- ♦ Strong leaders and supervisors who care and have vision
- ♦ Exhibit a genuine enthusiasm for their work
- ♦ Are willing to change
- ♦ Encourage/expect professional development through words, actions, and resources
- ♦ Work deliberately to create staff ownership
- ♦ Acknowledge the importance of fit – for an RD and the department/institution

▪ Challenges

- ♦ Location as drawback or draw
- ♦ Resistance to change
- ♦ Fiscal Limitations

▪ Keys to Recruitment

- ♦ Dedicated person
- ♦ Attention to detail
- ♦ Interview schedule
- ♦ Access to decision maker
- ♦ Professional visibility and involvement
- ♦ Using “employee alumni” to recruit

▪ Keys to Retention

- ♦ Staff feel valued
- ♦ Attention to professional development
- ♦ Supervision
- ♦ Possibility for promotion
- ♦ Asked to stay

▪ Discussion

- ♦ Salary
- ♦ Competitive or in the ballpark
- ♦ If salary very low, ability to sell the experience
- ♦ Relationship between successful recruitment and successful retention

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