

Fully Staffed: Strategies for Recruiting and Retaining Staff

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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)



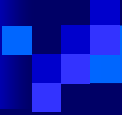
Entry-level, Live-in Professionals

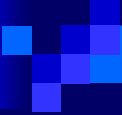
- Entry-level live-in professional residence life staff play a crucial role on campuses
- Increasing challenges in filling positions with well-qualified staff



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

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- 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

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- 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

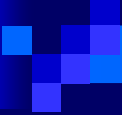
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- Recent research has focused on:
 - Senior housing officers' perceptions of problems (Belch & Mueller, 2003; St. Onge & Nestor, 2005)
 - Quality of life issues among live-in professionals (Belch, n.d.)

 - Despite the emerging body of research in this area, little if any research identified successful and innovative recruitment and retention activities

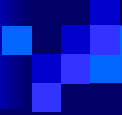


Current Study

- 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?

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- 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

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- 72 group and individual interviews conducted by 3 researchers on 11 campuses



Institutions

Retention

Western Illinois University
University of Georgia
Emerson College (MA)

Recruitment & Retention

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

Recruitment

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



**What matters in
recruitment and
retention?**



Recruitment and Retention Strategies

- Policies – domestic partners, pets, work hours contract length, professional development
- Processes – communication during recruitment, individual attention, involvement in decisions
- Perks – meal plans, laundry machines, tuition support, external entrances, plan for amenities
- Personalities - Strong supervisors who care *and* have vision, expect professional development



Today's Focus: Culture

- Leadership is strong and accessible
- Autonomy and ownership are promoted
- Staff feel valued
- Professional development expected and modeled



Leadership

- Reputation influenced staff's desire to work at the institution
- Accessibility to staff was important
- Staff expressed respect for and acknowledged the significance of the impact



Leadership

In their own words. . .

I was very excited about the opportunity to come and work with [him]. And it has been an amazing experience. . . . We don't always see eye-to-eye, but we've developed a degree of respect. And his style. . . challenges staff members and then trickles down through the organization and that's what creates a good organization. Where we're able . . . from the helm get that sort of support that allows me to do my job, and then hopefully allows me the autonomy and flexibility to challenge my staff to put themselves out there and take risks.

(Professional Staff)



Leadership

In their own words. . .

[The experience here] is a quality educational experience in terms of building your professional development. . . learning how to supervise people and managing appropriately. . . . Opportunities to be involved at all levels of the organization. . . . [When] we were building [a new hall] [the director] went to the owner's meeting, he always took somebody with him. . . . It's probably an experience that I wouldn't have had until I was a director somewhere trying to build a building and wondering, 'What are they talking about in this meeting?' (Professional Staff)



Autonomy and Ownership

- Treated as professionals
- Given broad range to run your own area
- Decision-making authority matches level of responsibility
- Responsibility and accountability were good things

Autonomy and Ownership

In their own words. . .

I feel like we have tried to give the live-in staff as much autonomy as possible. We want them to take ownership for the areas they are responsible for – whether it's an area coordinator in his/her community, whether it's an assistant area coordinator or residence hall director and their specific area. I think that we treat them as professionals. We tell them, 'This is your area, and you have to work within certain boundaries, but you are the decision maker. You need to use your skills to make the best decisions about working with these students that you can.' And, in many cases, that has worked without the interference of an assistant director, an associate director, or director.

(Professional Staff)



Value

- Candidates *recruited* and communicated with regularly
- RDs included in decisions
- RD input is genuinely considered



Value

In their own words. . .

Well I think our new director . . . has done some really great things. . .engaging all levels of staff more openly in departmental decision making. . . . [It] wasn't like she changed the world; it was just that she started to ask people their opinions, . . . and that she started getting out there as director and connecting with people on an individual level and really helping them to see that they really did matter and . . . that they really are valued and that their thoughts and ideas and things that they want to do are things that can be important to all of us and we can all work together to give the best to our students.

(Professional Staff)



Value

In their own words. . .

I meet with anyone who's been here ... along someone's first anniversary with us . . . an individual, intentional conversation relating to what their experience has been the first year. . . . And try to get a sense of, 'Do we need to do something different?' . . . I want to know how all staff feel about everything that they do. And it comes down to them feeling valued and appreciated and part of our mission and part of the department.

(Primary Recruiter)



Professional Development

- Professional development is encouraged and expected through words, actions, and resources
- On-campus: chairing committees, collateral assignments
- Off-campus: conferences, workshops, institutes (in and out of student affairs)



Professional Development

In their own words. . .

I think that more than anything . . . our staff pretty much has an open door to get involved in professional associations.. . in national and regional on all levels – not just residence life; our dining services people [and] our maintenance people are recognized all over country, and I want those people to feel like they are contributing professionally. When our entry-level people come and mix and mingle with those functional units, they realize that they are not the only ones that are doing professional development. . . We want you to be involved, we expect you to be involved, you don't have to and don't have to be involved in student personnel necessarily. . . As long as we understand that whatever you do, you are going to bring it back and you are going to apply it. (SHO)



Recruitment Strategies

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



Retention Strategies

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



Discussion

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