

Making Meaning of Assessment:  
The Role and Usage of Assessment in Resident Assistant Training

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored how residence life and housing departments and programs assessed the resident assistant (RA) training programs that they held during the 2012-13 academic year. The purpose of this research was to understand the role that these assessments might play in the implementation and improvement of future RA training programs. Little research has yet been conducted in this area, or on the RA training process at higher education institutions more generally (Bowman & Bowman, 1985; Frame, 2009; Koch, 2011). The study investigated various aspects of how residence life departments assessed their training programs, including whether the assessments were formal or informal; how often the assessments occurred; the intended audiences for the assessments; the tools and processes utilized in the assessments; and the ways in which the collected data were used. The qualitative data for this study were collected from surveys, documents submitted by respondents, and individual interviews. The survey was distributed in fall 2013 via email to over 400 higher education institutions in the South Eastern Association of Housing Officers (SEAHO) region. The data yielded a number of major findings, including that RA training programs utilized assessment to measure effectiveness of the programs and preparedness of the RAs. It was found, that most programs created their assessments internally, with the primary assessment audience being RAs themselves, and that the program leaders used the assessment data to frame upcoming trainings for current and future academic years. Until this study, there has been little assessment of graduate staff or campus partners, and the assessment that has been conducted has not been shared beyond the residential programs.

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They said it couldn't be done.

## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

Residence life departments and programs in colleges and universities across the country face the ongoing, unique challenge of balancing the many needs of their organizations while providing the highest possible quality services and experiences to residential students. A functional area that began with the mission of supervising students *in loco parentis*, a Latin phrase meaning “in place of the parent” (Komives, 2003), has grown into a group of professionals that is responsible for the creation, support, and progression of students’ living and learning experiences, that are expected to be equal to the support and progress of the classroom. Residence life staffs have shifted from acting as behavioral managers or stewards, who focus on the student’s health, wellness, and connections within a social context, to acting as holistic educators who emphasize the overall development of the student (Johnson & Parker, 2008). The shift has had profound implications for university life. One is that residence life departments face the challenge of providing evidence of their value. They must translate the rich, qualitative data of their work into what could be considered substantive quantitative measures for administrators, parents, and outside parties. A great deal of the richness and depth of the work accomplished in residence life is potentially lost in translation.

Despite this challenge, however, residence life departments and programs have found moderate justification of their services by assessing the successes of their programs and initiatives. These programs and initiatives include first-year programs; living learning

villages; themed housing; leadership and social interest housing; and joint ventures with other student affairs programs and academic partners, such as Greek housing and residential colleges. All of these types of programs have grown substantially at institutions nationwide (Johnson & Parker, 2008). Residence life and housing staff roles and their relationship to the residential setting is best summarized by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education's (CAS) Self-Assessment Guide for Housing and Residential Life Programs (2006), which states, "What distinguishes [a] group living in campus residence from most other forms of housing is the involvement of both professional and paraprofessional staff members in providing intentional, as opposed to random, educational experiences for students" (p. 3).

Residence Life professionals often face challenges when determining how to govern their programs because of the competing interests that can impact the programs' ability to operate. Residence life professionals must balance the challenge of creating staff positions that ultimately support the campus learning environment, while also working to meet the expectations of students and their parents to provide a community that offers superior amenities and features (Johnson & Parker, 2008). This challenge often forces residential life programs to effect changes that would maintain their competitiveness within the housing market, rather than effecting changes that would better enrich the academic and co-curricular experience (Johnson & Parker, 2008). Decisions regarding student staff retention can be guided by utilizing an assessment of staff performance based upon comparison to the expectations determined for the position at the beginning of the academic year, and supported by the training and preparation that

are provided. This may be evidenced through evaluation-based performance reviews, rehiring processes for resident assistants that require portfolio or past-performance reviews, or training and educational programs designed to provide resident assistants with ongoing education in their roles (Bowman, 1995; Koch, 2011). The connection between how a student staff member is trained and how well the student contributes to the mission, vision, and values of the residence life department is an inextricable one. The student staff is unlikely to succeed without proper training. As institutional resources are continually redistributed across many parties with competing interests, it is essential that residential life programs be able to articulate and provide evidence that their support is essential to the institution's mission and overall priorities (Grandner, 1999).

Because student staff training and performance are interconnected within residence life departments and programs, it is crucial that the training provided be reflective of the goals and philosophy of the department, and that it be aligned closely with the experience that the department is aiming to provide for its residents. This alignment can only be determined by assessing training methods and outcomes and utilizing that assessment to guide future training processes. In order to accomplish this goal, it is imperative that hiring within residential departments focus on finding specifically qualified staff and/or providing effective training to current staff (Johnson & Parker, 2008). It is critical for residence life departments to assess their current training and staff preparation processes in order to determine if those practices are achieving their desired goals/expectations.

At present, a multitude of influences guide residence life departments' decisions on student staff training methods, including the small amount of literature on student staff training, recent developments and trends in residential communities, the fiscal constraints of the individual institution, and the training and experience of the institution's professional residence life staff. As residence life departments continue to grow and shift to meet the changing needs of their student populations, it will become more critical that staff are selected, hired, and trained to possess the necessary skill set to be successful within their positions (Johnson & Parker, 2008). This staff training can, as indicated by Blimling (1995), take various forms, including comprehensive pre-service training, monthly or regularly scheduled in-services, orientation sessions, internships, shadowing, and both non-credit and credit bearing-academic courses. In the nearly two decades since Blimling's (1995) research, the lack of relevant literature indicates that very little change has actually occurred. Literature in the field of RA training programs indicates that there has been very little advancement in the structure or processes of training since the 1960s (Kennedy, 2009).

#### Statement of the Problem

There has been very little academic research on the collection and use of residential life student staff training assessment data. Since Bowman's (1995) research on the diversity of student staff training methods, there has been little to no examination or research regarding how data gathered from student staff programs has been assessed, utilized, or presented within residence life departments and programs. Indeed, there would appear to be little or no evidence that any training assessment data has been

studied or shared in any researchable capacity. This omission is troubling in a field that sustains itself on the concept of best practices and concept sharing; that boasts more than 50 state, regional, or national associations; and that experienced significant growth through the adoption of the principles of professional networks and alliance-building.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to examine methods current residence life departments and programs use to assess their student staff training practices and processes. I investigated the prevalence and frequency of both formal and informal student staff training assessment methods and materials, with specific attention to the assessment process, intended audience, and the incorporation of the feedback collected from those assessments. Several significant studies have focused on training methods of resident assistant staff (Bogarth, 1969; Bowman & Bowman, 1995; Elleven, 2001; Gwaltney, 2000; Kennedy, 2009; Koch, 2011; Koch, 2012; Murray, Snider & Midkiff, 1999;), as well as other aspects of training, such as specific methods and duration of resident assistant training methods (Adams, 2000; Barile-Swain, 2009; Bowman & Bowman, 1998; Crandall, 2004; Waldo, 1989). However, there has been limited research conducted upon the means by which those trainings are assessed and measured, and to what parties, or even if, that assessment is shared. As Koch (2011) has noted, “The lack of research is surprising given the time, effort and institutional resources invested in the employment, training and supervision of RAs” (Koch, 2011, p. 2).

### Research Questions

This study is guided by three research questions and two sub-questions:

1. How do residence life departments and programs assess their RA training programs? If these departments and programs are not formally assessing their training, what other methods of data collection do they utilize to gather this information?
  - a. Sub-question 1: how often do they assess?
  - b. Sub-question 2: which components of that assessment are RA-driven and which are professional staff-driven?
2. What tools and processes do residence life departments and programs use to determine the efficacy of their training programs?
3. How do residence life departments and programs use the data collected from those formal or informal assessments?

## Chapter II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review was to critically examine three key areas of the literature that are relevant to the scope of this case study. First, I reviewed literature on the history of student affairs practices since the foundation of the American higher education system, and based on this literature, I then described the development of student affairs as a functional area of the university. I then reviewed literature that offers specific context to the history and development of Student Development Theory, from its origins in Erikson (1959), through to its current practices and applications. Finally, I examined literature on assessment and evaluation, specifically in the context of student affairs and higher education. I provided a conceptual framework for the intersections among student affairs, assessment, and student development philosophy as it pertains to the assessment of RA training programs within residential life departments. Each of these themes was significant in understanding the motivation, political environment, and practicality of such an assessment and any information derived therefrom.

During a preliminary literature investigation, I searched several bodies of literature devoted to the intersections of assessment and student affairs, including Green's (2006) research on outcomes assessment in student affairs; Winters's (2008) case study research on assessment in several different higher education settings; Cooper's (2009) research on the assessment of university student affairs divisions; and Koch's (2012)

research on current practices in resident assistant training programs, which focused on the assessment and evaluation of those programs. Each of these studies examined the role of assessment in current student affairs practices and the outcomes and importance of assessment as a measure for ensuring integrity and accomplishment within a field that is deeply concerned with maintaining high-quality output for students and institutions.

The aforementioned research notwithstanding, the literature regarding the usage of assessment within student staff training, in any capacity in higher education, was sparse. There existed a significant gap in the literature surrounding student staff training programs, and no research specifically focused on how those training programs were assessed. This gap indicated that the academic need for this research was great, and that a framework for that research needed to be created by weaving together three strands of scholarship: assessment research, student development theory, and research on student affairs practices.

### Student Affairs Practices

In order to understand the overall phenomenon of RA training assessment, there must first be an appreciation of the conditions and historical context of the environment in which the RA position was developed. As institutions developed student affairs divisions, and divisions moved toward professional and paraprofessional roles within the residential community, the training and development of those staff members became a central part of the growth of that division. The quality and overall usefulness of that training then becomes a pivotal measure of that growth and the overall construction of the department and division as well.

### *Industrialization of Student Affairs*

As student affairs continued to develop as a functional area of the U.S. higher education system, it became an industry within the larger industrial entity of higher education. As American society became increasingly commercialized, higher education institutions began to find new competitors in for-profit institutions and internet-based institutions. These introduced into higher education a model that was unforeseen, and in some ways unwelcome: the consumer model. Komives (2003), argues this model caused institutions to shift their focus to the concepts of customer service and quality control, both of those concepts having infused themselves into functions already traditionally offered by institutions, including financial policies regarding tuition and fees; confidentiality and release policies regarding student information, enrollment information, student records and discipline; and campus security information regarding alcohol, drug, and crime statistics and reports. All of these changes affected the likelihood of an institution attracting or dissuading consumers to attend (Komives, 2003).

This model also introduced other business concepts into higher education, such as supply, demand, marketing trends, and competition, with institutions poised and concerned about a bevy of factors that could affect the vitality and functionality of their institutions. Komives (2003) goes on to state that the factors that most prevalently affected institutions were

New enrollment demands, public shock over rising college costs, new competitors for public funds, a weakening of support for access, growing concerns for quality,

and a view that higher education was no longer seen as having a central role in addressing the nation's most pressing problems. (Komives, 2003, p. 77)

The change in consumers' demands for their college experiences had a direct effect on student affairs, which was one of the biggest stakeholders and beneficiaries of the support provided by the institution without having any direct connection to academic output. Simply put, Student Affairs was the largest consumer of institutional funding that was not tied directly to academic courses or instructional efforts. In this non-curricular role, departments and divisions of student affairs sought ways to ensure that their work was appropriately assessed, with accurate weight given to its contribution, in order to ensure its continued presence in this new business-like operating model. This challenge required student affairs professionals to begin finding ways to quantify the effectiveness and usefulness of their work; in this way, they could avoid the loss of or removal of resources and could provide a measure of accountability in their work (Rentz, 2004). In this context, student affairs departments began to rely on assessment as a means of providing the justification for their work that they had, in previous years, found in theory. In their assessment practices, student affairs officers sought to ensure that university leaders made the connection between the success of the student experience at the institution and the work of Student Affairs as a division. These officers also looked to assessment to prove that they were indeed accomplishing the goals and objectives set before them. In the words of CAS, "Programs and services must have a clearly articulated assessment plan to document achievement of stated goals and learning outcomes, demonstrate accountability, provide evidence of improvement, and describe resulting

changes in programs and services” (CAS, 2011, p. 14). Through this shift in focus to incorporate assessment, student affairs officers added new dimension to their work.

### *Relationship among Theory, Practice and Research*

The relationship among theory, research, and practice has been explored for decades. King and Howard-Hamilton (2000) described the intertwined relationship among them as follows: “Explanations of observed phenomena derive from theory; the validity of these explanations is supported through research; action flows directly from these explanations and is governed by standards of practice; and consequences are monitored and documented through evaluation” (p. 21). This relationship directly supports the process by which assessment helps to not only identify, but also support and improve actions by programs, departments and divisions. Through assessment, observations and theories are evidenced through research, developed in practice and reassessed and potentially reaffirmed through evaluation. The utilization of this cyclical process both evidences good assessment, as articulated by Astin (1993), but also supports the interdependent relationship between the uses of theory within the practice of student affairs (King & Howard-Hamilton, 2000). This translation of theory into practice within student affairs practice, which can be challenging in any case, was no less pivotal in the translation of student development theory into student affairs practice. Evans explains simply:

Student affairs practice without a theoretical base is not effective or efficient. Nor can theory meaningfully exist in a vacuum. To be of any utility, theory must be related to practical situations found in real life settings. A link is needed to

connect the everyday reality of students' experiences and the conceptual frameworks provided by developmental theory. (Evans, 1998, p. 19)

In short, according to Evans (1998), development models should connect the abstract theory with the realistic implications of practice. "Models do not define phenomena or explain relationships; they provide guidance in using the theories that do these things" (p. 19). King and Howard-Hamilton (2000) spoke to the dilemma of current student affairs practitioners, in that so many of the theoretical frameworks that support their everyday roles and the overall vision of their departments and programs are founded on, and continue to be operated under, are ideas that were crafted for a generation of students that is starkly different than the ones that currently inhabit college campuses (Evans, 1998). This gap between theory and the current student population continues to be investigated, as opportunities for updated or new theory could potentially emerge (Evans, 1998). "The role of colleges and universities in promoting character development and civic engagement has been increasingly examined and discussed" (p. 32) and consistent and constant evolution is still occurring. There exists opportunity in the future for the continual development of theory, as a means to support future generations of collegiate students.

## Assessment and Evaluation

### *Formal Beginnings of Assessment*

Schuh and Upcraft (2000) defined the assessment process in terms that directly relate to student affairs: "any effort to gather, analyze and interpret evidence which

describes institutional, divisional, or agency effectiveness” (p. 4). They defined evaluation as “any effort to use assessment evidence to improve institutional, departmental, divisional or institutional effectiveness,” and they defined measurement as “the methods we use to gather information for the purposes of assessment” (p. 4). From the inception of formal education, the practices of self-reflexive assessment and evaluation have been recognized as important aspects of the educational system (Dochy & McDowell, 1997); however, these practices were not formalized until the accountability movement of the early 1960s, when they began to be used in a wide variety of educational initiatives (Bock, Mislevy & Woodson, 1982). In its original form, educational assessment followed the model of scientific measurement (Hager & Butler, 1996), and it was designed to be formative with a focus on development and improvement (Volkwein, 2003). Under the leadership of Ralph Tyler (1968), assessment became a means of creating and supporting national standards and benchmarks. In Tyler’s leadership, assessment found a leader for the formulation of a national assessment program (Bock, Mislevy & Woodson, 1982). Tyler’s influence was pivotal in that he emphasized the necessity of creating confidence in assessment programs, specifically by focusing the tasks of planning and monitoring assessments by engaging educators, administrators, and the public (Bock, Mislevy & Woodson, 1982).

Operating under a scientific method, assessment came to be centered on testing results (Hager & Butler, 1996), where knowledge was viewed as context-independent, and learners were held to the standard of the instructor. The scientific method proved to be challenging for the assessment of educational programs in that the inquiry methods did

not correspond to the cognitive dimensions of the educational experience. For example, in educational programs, instructors might have taken a conceptual approach to the subject matter, or may have engaged students in discussion rather than a lecture with a factual outline and bulleted points. In the everyday work environment, people would not complete standardized or artificially constructed examinations as part of their employment, nor would they be able to isolate their tasks or roles in such a way as to have their mastery of a specific skill set assessed, yet these were the very techniques employed by assessment programs that were based on the scientific method (Hager & Butler, 1996). However, due to extended research on the role of cognitive reasoning and development in learning, the 1970s and 1980s saw a change in the prevailing ideology on how thinking and reasoning processes occurred. This shift brought a re-conceptualization of educational assessment approaches and philosophies, and ultimately a shift in how educational processes and training occurred (Hager & Butler, 1996).

The new assessment approach that was created, as a reaction against the conventional philosophical approach, focused on the process by which thinking and reasoning occurred. According to Hager and Butler (1996), this new approach highlighted distinctions such as the “categorization of tasks” and the “products of thinking,” both of which allowed for models that created a realm for growth and development for individuals through an interactive process between both people and contexts (p. 368). Through an approach focused on these concepts, models could be used both to quantify and to understand how the cognitive process played a role in the learning and development process for individuals as well as how that process changed within

different contexts and environments (Hager & Butler, 1996). This made it possible for assessment to frame itself around the works and efforts of higher education and student development theory, as it focused on the cognitive development and subjectivity of personal development as a part of the learning and evaluative process. Hager and Butler goes on to describe the growth of assessment from that transition, specifically the role that assessment had in higher education's administrative and programmatic actions and philosophies, which is highly relevant to the role of assessment within a training program:

Assessment technologies are attempting to move away from an emphasis on the assessment of knowledge and are searching for schemes more closely aligned to the complex practices and procedures that the person will be expected to carry out safely and skillfully. The goal is to ensure that the criteria of success in education or training accreditation processes are the same as those used in the practice setting. (Hager & Butler, 1996, p. 369)

In other words, Hager and Butler argue that by evaluating the cognitive processes that occur during the learning processes, assessment practices are able to increase understanding of the overall learning experience. This shift allows for insight into the evaluation of knowledge acquisition and the effectiveness of the learning process. This shift is especially pertinent to the examination of RA training assessment in that programs exists in various contexts and RA participants can occupy various learning styles and roles, based on a variety of factors, but must create assessments capable of capturing meaningful data for the examination and growth of their training processes.

The shift from assessing comprehension to assessing skill sets provided practitioners with a basis on which to compare their stated visions, goals, and outcomes and be provided rich, contextual data to use in improving their efforts. Given the research and practice founded on the premise of complex and diverse approaches to assessment, the range of the use of assessment broadened to encompass all stages of the learning process (Dochy & McDowell, 1997). In order to achieve effective assessment, researchers addressed the “need to re-conceptualize conventional assessment instruments and the theory underlying them because such instruments were always congruent with current research-based conceptions of the acquisition of knowledge and skills” (Dochy & McDowell, 1997, p. 285). Practitioners and researchers saw an immediate need to diversify assessment instruments and methods according to the individual assessment, and the program and/or population being assessed, due to the fact that no solitary assessment protocol could serve multiple purposes at the same time, and that each assessment protocol had its own unique measure when applied to a person or program (Dochy & McDowell, 1997). Ultimately, it was necessary to use assessment to drive practice because instead of subordinating individuals to the instructional methods, the instructional methods were shifted to benefit the individual, in order to “maximize their [people’s] potential for success” (Dochy & McDowell, 1997, p. 289). This becomes especially relevant in the investigation of assessment practices within the collegiate atmosphere, where learning not only applies to the education process, but the developmental process as well.

The growth of assessment practices is relevant to this study due to the lack of prior research and industry benchmarks regarding current or past assessment practices. There is little insight from empiric work into the prevailing philosophy for the construction or execution of assessment within RA training programs. In order to fully understand the processes that occur within departments and programs within the realm of RA training assessment, a systematic examination of assessment is essential. As the body of research and practice on assessment within learning environments shift, as does the ability for assessment to explore diverse programs and initiatives, outside of the context of the traditional classroom or work environment, such as RA training, which serves as an amalgamation of both environments within one context. Through exposition of the various facets and concepts of assessment, the research is able to better identify and understand the assessment practices utilized by residential life departments within their RA training programs.

#### *Assessment in Higher Education*

Historically, there have existed two primary uses of assessment, first as a starting point for improvement, or formative evaluation, and secondarily, as a focus on accountability, or summative evaluation (Volkwein, 2003). Volkwein (2003) found that the construction of assessment measures was critical for institutions if they were to engage in “developing well defined goals and objectives that characterize in measurable terms the kind of composite skills, understanding and knowledge that institutions of higher education seek to foster;” sound assessment measures were an “essential prerequisite to authentic assessment in these areas of focus” (Volkwein, 2003, p. 11).

Volkwein (2003) also found that it was necessary for an assessment to use multiple measures and to culminate in a synthesis of the outcomes of the institution's educational efforts. Along with using multiple measures of assessment, institutions must also incorporate multiple measurement strategies to assess each intended outcome. This approach would help to assure that the results gathered from the various assessment approaches could be compared in such a way that the measurements were both confirmed and determined appropriate (Volkwein, 2003). Effective assessment worked best as an ongoing process, and not as a series of separate occurrences that were unrelated to a large process; in the same manner that assessment also worked best as a cumulative measure that incorporated the voices and input of the larger institutional community (Volkwein, 2003). If an assessment is to lead to actual improvement; it must be considered a part of a larger initiative geared toward change, including "strategic planning and program review" (p. 23). Assessment is ultimately best when it was designed in such a way that the findings could provide both internal measures for substantial improvement, and confirmation and accountability for an educational program to all partners (Volkwein, 2003). In the scope of student affairs, this dual approach is not only relevant, but necessary, as its work is interconnected with its academic partners, but also must stand alone on its own accomplishments.

#### *Assessment in Student Affairs*

Assessment has served many purposes within student affairs departments and programs, including the identification of which goals, outcomes, and qualities existed at an institution and what correlation or causation existed among them. Specifically for

student affairs divisions and offices, assessment served as a standardized method by which critical decisions could be made and resources could be allocated, with agreement among all stakeholders regarding the performance of the division or office (Schuh & Upcraft, 2000). While student affairs divisions have long been committed to the practice of using evaluations to inform their processes, the use of assessments further legitimize their actions and achievements, by providing them a necessary contrast to big-picture trends in the field. According to Schuh and Upcraft (2000)

One important way of assessing quality is to compare one's own institution to other institutions that appear to be doing a better job with a particular service, program or facility, often described as benchmarking, [to] discover how others achieve their results and then to translate their processes to one's own environment (p. 15).

Schuh and Upcraft (2000), argue that student affairs programs and departments were finding themselves facing a significant desire to be able to adequately demonstrate their importance as a program, and thusly provided a strong theoretical explanation for the necessity of assessment in student affairs. Schuh and Upcraft (2000) go on to discuss assessment in terms of its practical applications for student affairs, beyond its philosophical and theoretical significance. Schuh and Upcraft (2000) speak directly to the ability of student affairs divisions and administrators to be full partners in their department's success within higher education reform. Many, if not all, higher education institutions have exhibited a commitment to strategic planning and visioning, so it was

critical for the field of student affairs to participate actively in those conversations. The use of assessment in the creation of strategic plans and visions helped to better define the goals and objectives, as well as to identify critical trends, issues, or potential challenges that must be addressed and understood in order for the institution to actualize its vision (Schuh & Upcraft, 2000).

In his critical analysis of assessment challenges in higher education, Shipman (2003) emphasizes the importance of being specific, intentional, and declarative in all assessment efforts. In order to develop a strong assessment process, universities must base their efforts upon intended learning outcomes, because without such intended outcomes, there will be a significant gap between what information is gathered in the assessment process and how the information relates to the measure being assessed (Shipman, 2003). Such learning outcomes had to reflect the mission and values of the organization being assessed, and had to be both “general enough to capture important learning but clear and specific enough to be measurable” (Shipman, 2003, p. 342). The assessment process itself must be comprised of formative and summative measures, opportunities for direct and indirect assessment, and with the opportunity to assess from a longitudinal perspective, imbedded within the program as an organic and comprehensive feature (Shipman, 2003). As articulated by Volkwein (2003) and supported by Shipman (2003), assessment must be part of an overarching plan of improvement, and as such, it must be present in the long-term work and plans of that organization, and even be intertwined in upper-level decisions about the future of the organization’s policies, resource allocation, and scope (Shipman, 2003).

In congruence with the literature, specifically Shipman (2003) and Schuh and Upcraft (2000), it was vital to higher education institutions that assessment be conducted as part of holistic process, that was intentional, specific, and gathering relevant data, and not as a means to simply have collected whatever information it could acquire. According to Schuh and Upcraft (2000), “Too often, assessment is done piecemeal, without any real planning or consistency, in response to a crisis—or is not done at all. Often we do not do anything because we do not know how to start or what to do” (p. 12). In the face of incomplete, informal, or even unofficial data, Schuh and Upcraft’s (2000) point of intentionality in assessment efforts posited that even the presence of limited or minimal data was more desirable for the progress of an institution than no data, and impressed upon practitioners that the “absence of data can sometimes lead to policies and practices based on intuition, prejudice, preconceived notions, or personal proclivities, none of them desirable bases for making decisions” (p. 8).

The literature shows that assessment has long been a critical measure of the success and achievement of progress for student affairs as a functional area. The practice of assessment not only provides a means of justifying to internal and external partners the hard work that regularly occurs on behalf of students’ cognitive and personal development; the practice also supports a consistent delivery of standard, explicitly expected services. Komives (2003) has explained as follows:

Assessment can be a very powerful tool in linking goals to outcomes, helping define quality, and determining if quality exists in student affairs. It is a fundamental responsibility of student affairs to provide services, programs, and

facilities that are of the highest quality. Assessment can help us determine if we have been successful in fulfilling that responsibility (Komives, 2003, p. 559).

Susan Komives (2003) found that, because departments ultimately served the needs and political agendas of their governing boards, state agencies, or trustee organizations, student affairs divisions were arbiters of institutional mission, goals, and values as well. Furthermore, she found that it was crucial to capture this feature of student affairs in assessment data. Komives (2003) affirmed that assessment played a pivotal role in assisting organizations at arriving at difficult decisions on policy and other issues that were essential to the growth and development of the institution (Komives, 2003).

*Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS)*

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) was founded in 1979 through a consortium of professional associations as a “direct response to the emerging profession’s need to establish standards to guide both practice and preparation” (CAS 2006, p. 2). Founded to catalyze a unified set of industry standards and expectations, as well as to be an unbiased, unilateral group focused on the advancement and development of the field of student affairs, CAS released its first set of standards in 1986: 16 standards spanning several function areas. The initial CAS standards were focused on the ideal of serving as a “comprehensive and valid set of criteria to judge support program quality and effectiveness” (CAS 2006, p. 3).

In CAS’s (2006) mission statement, the organization declared that its purpose was to promote assessment and improvement of the services and programs at higher education institutions, to articulate professional standards for use by professionals and educators,

and to create and provide resource materials that would support practitioners in utilizing those standards. CAS stepped into a niche where no universal standards or collaborative benchmarking relationships previously existed, thereby serving to meet the fundamental need for continued standardization of practices and assessment in the fields of student affairs and higher education. As stated in the 6<sup>th</sup> Edition of CAS (2006), “Without CAS working collaboratively and speaking collectively on behalf of practitioners and their functional area specialties, there would be no profession-wide criteria of good practice” (p. 3). CAS’s necessary function in higher education was further reinforced by its work to establish the credibility of the field as a formative component of students’ educational and personal development. CAS has operated under the philosophy that higher education gains credibility through collective action, and that in order to become a viable professional practice, higher education must grow to include and represent the needs and values of its individual functional areas and their respective organizations (CAS 2006, p. 3).

CAS has been guided by fundamental principles that are grouped into five categories: Students and their Institutions; Diversity and Multiculturalism; Organization, Leadership, and Human Resources; Health Engendering Environments; and Ethical Considerations. Within each category, several principles were specifically listed to guide the standard for practitioners across functional areas; a number of universal standards were also listed that were common across higher education, under the auspice that by creating universal standards, the *silo effect* so prevalent in higher education would be reduced and consistency would be increased (CAS, 2006). Under the category “Students

and Their Institutions,” the following principle was provided: “The student must be considered as a whole person” (p. 7). Regardless of whether the practitioner worked as an academic advisor, health services intern, or dean of students, the standard established by CAS in that category was that all students were to be considered holistically, and all actions taken would be respectful of that consideration. CAS, in its most recent edition, expanded to over 30 standards, still spanning the entire field of student affairs.

CAS (2011) has served as an industry standard for establishing universal expectations and practices for assessment and evaluation, as stated in Part 14 of its text. CAS was clear in the scope and pertinence of assessment as an essential component of the progression and development of informed work. CAS (2011) stated that assessments must include both direct and indirect evaluation and both qualitative and quantitative measures. Additionally, CAS stated that assessment methods must be able to measure whether the organization had met its mission, goals, and intended outcomes, and that it must measure the degree to which those were done effectively. Finally, CAS (2011) stated that the assessment methods must be representative of various groups, including students, staff, and administrators, and must be shared with appropriate parties. CAS (2011) was also clear as to how assessment and evaluative data should be utilized and incorporated into the institutional improvement process. Assessment data must be utilized to determine several areas of information, specifically ways in which the organization could revise or improve programs and services; methods that would increase efficiency and effectiveness; how student learning and development could be improved; and how the information would be distributed to all appropriate stakeholders (CAS).

CAS fulfilled the need for standards in the functional area of housing and residential life by outlining specific standards in their Self-Assessment Guide (2009), which state the expectations for student staff in those departments. Under Part 4, CAS stated that

Student employees and volunteers must be carefully selected, trained, supervised and evaluated. They must be educated on how and when to refer those in need of additional services to qualified staff members and must have access to a supervisor for assistance in making these judgments. Student employees must be provided clear and precise job descriptions, pre-service training based on assessed needs, and continuing staff development. (CAS, 2009, p. 19)

As indicated by CAS, the need for student employees to be evaluated, and to be trained prior to service, based on some previous needs assessment indicates the importance of assessment of training processes within a residential department or program.

Additionally, CAS specifically addressed the role of student residential staff, such as resident and community assistants as contributing members of the staffing of a HRL department, having stated that they must be able to exhibit skills in the following functions: “(a) educational programming, (b) administration, (c) group and activity advising, (d) leadership development, (e) discipline, (f) role modeling, (g) individual assistance and referral and (h) providing information” (CAS, 2009, p. 19). CAS was clear that housing and residential life programs must employ assessment and evaluation and

that it must adhere to strict and clear practices to maintain expected standards. CAS also stated that residential life departments and programs must create assessment plans that were both regular and comprehensive and that included both qualitative and quantitative measures and that determined the degree to which the stated expectations, learning outcomes, vision, mission, and values were being met (CAS 2009, p. 33). The purpose of the assessment was twofold, in that was it not enough to solely assess for the sake of assessing, the assessment must also provide the organization with an indication for how to best proceed in the future. Volkwein (2003) elaborates that findings of assessment must be used to explore not only what is effective for institutions, but also what is ineffective so that the institution can better provide superior teaching that leads to more effective learning. CAS currently exists as the only and most comprehensive set of standards and benchmarks for residential life departments and programs, on a national scale, for the implementation of assessment processes and practices. CAS also serves to provide a much-needed foundation and starting point for the evaluation of current practices within the field, and an unbiased and relevant resource for further growth and development within assessment practices. Because CAS was created through a consortium of professional organizations, with individuals with both practical experience and educational credentials within student affairs and college student development, the standards presented by CAS provide a context-specific recommendation specifically designed with a conscious understanding of the phenomenon of RA training, providing a relevance and legitimacy necessary for useful application by programs and departments. This allows departments and programs to look to CAS as a measure and support for

industry-endorsed practice within RA training assessment. CAS also provides an adaptable example and framework for the creation of assessment standards within residential life programs and departments, by providing a comprehensive system of strategic and purposeful assessment that is appropriate for the learning that occurs within the training and development process for RAs.

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this inquiry was provided by the work of several scholars, including Astin (1993), the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) (2006), Green, Jones and Aloi (2008), and Woolsley and Knerr (2005).

Astin (1993), in his model, *Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning*, provided several key concepts that serve as the theoretical foundation for the investigation into current assessment practices within RA Training. Assessment processes must first begin with educational values, meaning that departments or programs must define a vision of the type of learning they wish to support and achieve, as well as how they will accomplish that (Astin, 1993). Without that vision, there is no foundation for action or learning. Next, Astin states that the best assessment is one that is built upon the idea that the process of learning is “multidimensional, integrated and revealed in performance over time” (p. 2). A strong assessment provides the learner with various methods in which they can provide continuous and longitudinal evidence of that learning. In his third principle, Astin states that assessment processes must also be built with clearly stated purposes and goals, so that participants are able to specifically articulate

data throughout the process, and so that coordinators are able to clearly analyze and synthesize the data collected and correlate that to the assessment's goals. This adds utility and focus to the overall assessment and prevents extraneous actions or data from interfering with the assessment process. This also aids with the clear communication of assessment data when sharing with partners, peers, and stakeholders (Astin, 1993).

Astin's (1993) fourth principle requires that the assessment have a dual focus, attending not only the information provided by the specified outcomes of the assessment, but also to the experiences that create those outcomes. Because learning is a process, creating and utilizing an assessment that addresses the process and the output of learning affords the assessment a depth and strengthens the data it collects. While student learning is the ultimate outcome, an understanding of how students learn and their experience while they learn is crucial to increasing students' learning and assisting their overall development as individuals. The fifth principle of good assessment practice focuses on the need for an ongoing, cyclical assessment process, as opposed to an episodic, one-time phenomenon. Strong assessment takes a cumulative, progressive view of activities that are linked and assessed at several points. Not only does this provide several points of data by which comparison can be made; it also utilizes the learning process of the student and the progress of the program as a means of measuring continuous growth and relevant insight.

Astin's (1993) sixth principle states that good assessment involves representation from across the educational community, in both the coordinator and participant roles. Because student learning is an inclusive process, and students learn from various

interconnected sources, assessment should mirror that interconnectivity and reflect an integrated learning experience. Additionally, good assessment creates questions and illuminates issues or topics about which its coordinators care deeply, and as such; the data collected from assessments and communicated must be relevant, useful, and timely. It must help to educate and inform current practices as well as provide guidance for future practices. Assessment is also best when it provides information that can improve a larger set of actions that support change and growth. Assessment within student affairs can often occur in silos, with each individual department or program conducting their own assessments, drawing their own conclusions, and enacting their own changes. Good assessment ties organizations together to enact large-scale and comprehensive change on several levels. However, assessment cannot be the only means by which to enact or suggest that change. Rather, it must be a component of an overall commitment to progress, a voice for how to best effect that change. Finally, Astin (1993) states that good assessment serves as a means for departments and programs to uphold their responsibility to provide stakeholders relevant information about their work and opportunities to better understand their growth and development.

Astin's (1993) model serves as the primary theoretical framework for this study because it addresses the requirements for effective and useful assessment, and is directly applicable to the context of RA Training assessment. In his model, Astin provides clear direction to assessment creators for the content and the process by which assessment is to be conducted, as well as the usage of the data collected within the larger organization or program. Astin's model is also interconnected with the use of CAS (2006) standards for

assessment within higher education, in that it explores assessment as a primary function of an organization, and as part of the overall mission and vision.

As previously discussed, the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education has served as a significant theoretical foundation piece for this study (Henry, 2009). CAS stipulated necessary components for all facets of a residential program, including the mission, program, leadership, and human resources facets, as well as assessment and evaluation. Most pertinent to this study's scope was the statement made by CAS in their 2011 revision regarding assessment and evaluation: "Programs and services must have a clearly articulated assessment plan to document achievement of stated goals and learning outcomes, demonstrate accountability, provide evidence of improvement, and describe resulting changes in programs and services" (Caretta, 2011, p. 14).

Similar to CAS, the literature on assessment in student affairs also provides a solid theoretical framework for how to best build and establish a strong assessment process. This direction is especially pertinent for RA training and assessment. At its heart, all assessment should be purposeful, useful, and reflective, and should "either (1) reinforce our current practice or (2) provide guidance on what and how to change our practice" (Woolsley & Knerr, 2005, p. 2). As articulated by Green, Jones, and Aloï (2008), an ideal assessment process should be both iterative and continuously improving, and should follow the following steps:

- Create and articulate student learning outcomes
- Develop or select assessment measures
- Select assessment participants

- Implement assessment
- Analyze assessment results
- Report assessment results
- Use results to enhance student learning experiences
- Evaluate the assessment process and suggest improvements. (p. 136)

This approach gives student affairs departments and divisions a framework for their assessment that is founded upon research and discussion before and after the implementation of the assessment, and that has an integrated assessment review process. According to Woolsley and Knerr (2005), past assessments should be used to inform future assessment processes. By reviewing assessment practices and approaches, we find insight as to which information may be missing, which directions it can grow, and which measures can be adjusted to better inform the overall process (Woolsley & Knerr, 2005). Specifically, any review of past assessments should include and examine the following:

- The subject matter, including the goals, purpose, and scope of the assessment
- The methodology
- A timeline
- The use of assessment information
- Provisions for assessment administration including roles and responsibilities
- A plan to evaluate the assessment. (Woolsley & Knerr, 2005, p. 10)

Several studies also serve to provide the conceptual foundation for this study.

Blimling (1995) conducted research on the training components of resident assistants; he also developed his own academic course text and training guide, thus indicating his belief in the necessity and usefulness of a comprehensive training program for student residential staff members. Several studies on student staff training methods did not indicate a specific examination into the types and methods of training, but rather on

components of the RA experience (Elleven, 2001; Gwaltney, 2000; Kennedy, 2009; Murray, 1999). Kennedy (2009), who examined how RAs made meaning of their experience, indicated that “existing literature does not indicate whether these staff members receive appropriate levels of training in order to successfully complete their position responsibilities in challenging and supporting students’ holistic development” (Kennedy, 2009). In the present study, I extend the course and scope of research on student staff training in this direction in an effort to evaluate the depth to which assessments have been used to better prepare student staff for their roles.

### Summary

The success of the on-campus living experience is dependent upon the skill, abilities, and knowledge of the residential staff members who are responsible for guiding students throughout that experience. According to Johnson and Parker (2008), “With the development of new staff positions comes the challenge associated with recruiting and training individuals for these new roles...training will become a more critical factor in establishing a skilled staff” (p. 115-116). A residence life department’s own understanding of its staff’s performance, and the staff’s congruence with or dissent from the institution’s mission, vision, and values, are vital to ensuring that the right staff are in the right place and performing the proper duties. This understanding, as it stands, is based upon carefully determined markers of performance, as highlighted in training and examined in evaluations. The evidence of this understanding and its transmission to student staff during training and staff development are best captured in assessment measures employed by residence life departments. However, the ways in which those

measures are employed, reported, discussed, and eventually utilized remains inconsistent from institution to institution, from region to region, and even from academic year to academic year. Determining how assessment plays into those increased expectations for performance is critical for the maintenance, and hopefully the growth, of residential programs.

## Chapter III

### METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS

Although there is a significant body of research on RA performance and the RA role, there is a noticeable lack of research focused on the assessment of RA training, even though training is currently the way in which RAs gain knowledge and skills for their roles as RAs, and even though RA training is at the center of most departmental initiatives to train and educate RAs on their role in relation to the overall student residential experience. This study investigated current RA training assessment processes and laid the groundwork for additional inquiry to take place in this vein. This chapter outlines and describes the methods for this research, including the context, procedures, participants, instruments, and data analysis methods. This chapter also describes the implications of the research, and key components of the data collection and analysis processes.

#### Research Questions

This study focused on the following research questions:

1. How do residence life departments and programs assess their RA training programs? If these departments and programs are not formally assessing their training, what other methods of data collection do they utilize to gather this information?
  - a. Sub-question 1: how often do they assess?

- b. Sub-question 2: which components of that assessment are RA-driven and which are professional staff-driven?
2. What tools and processes do residence life departments/programs use to determine the efficacy of their training programs?
  3. How do residence life departments/programs use the data collected from those formal or informal assessments?

#### Population

The context of the study is essential to understanding the scope by which the topic was examined, and how the methodology and results were derived. The South Eastern Association of Housing Officers (SEAHO) is a professional organization created in 1965, with the purpose of serving as a regional arm of the Association of College and University Housing Officers-International (ACUHO-I), a national professional organization for housing officers within colleges and universities. As stated in the SEAHO Constitution, SEAHO's purpose is "to provide an opportunity to college and university housing officers for personal and professional growth through attendance at an annual conference and to facilitate an exchange of ideas and dialogue with professional colleagues."

SEAHO began as a partnership between the states of Georgia and Florida as a means to discuss common regional issues in the field, and it blossomed into one of the most powerful and supported regional arms of the ACUHO-I organization. Regional associations include the Association of Intermountain (AIMHO), Great Lakes Association (GLACUHO), Mid-Atlantic Association (MACUHO), North Eastern

Association (NEACUHO), North West Association (NWACUHO), South Western Association (SWACUHO), Upper Midwest Region (UMR-ACUHO), and Western Association (WACUHO).

Currently, SEAHO has over 400 member institutions and is overseen by a Governing Council that is comprised of nine Executive Board positions, each with a 1- to 3-year term; 10 State Representatives, each with a 1-year term; 14 Committee Chairs, with undefined terms; and eight additional positions, each with 1- to 3-year terms, including future conference chairs, a Webmaster, an Archivist, and the SEAHO Report Editor. SEAHO hosts an annual conference, held in a rotation across the region, and is responsible for a quarterly publication, a website, and a placement exchange.

The SEAHO Region is comprised of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Kentucky, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee. These institutions vary in their composition and demographic, including public, private and religious institutions, and between small, medium and large institutions, with anywhere from less than 1,000 students to upwards of 45,000 students. Institutions also vary in location, including urban metropolitan, suburban and rural populations, and vary in either being a junior college, two or four year institution, historically black college/university (HBCU), or predominately white institution (PWI).

All institutions within SEAHO are similar in that they all have an on-campus population, with residential life programs that employ professional and paraprofessional staff. Additionally, they are all similarly voluntarily associated with the SEAHO organization. Their identification as potential participants in the study depends upon any

professional or graduate student within their department being signed up as a recipient of SEAHO/ACUHO-I communications via the SEAHO State Representative list-serves. The list-serves operate on a state level, and are disseminated to affiliating institutions' staff members who have elected to join the list-serve, and is communicated via state board representatives, elected by vote from the participating institutions to serve one to two year terms. I had a relationship with the SEAHO organization and the corresponding list-serves at the time of this research due to my employment with an affiliating institution, as well as my having been a voluntary member of the state list-serve for the state in which I was employed. The data for this study was provided by those institutions located in the 10-state region that comprise the South Eastern Association of Housing Officers (SEAHO), that are voluntary recipients of message sent over their individual list-serves.

SEAHO was selected as the population for this study for several reasons, specifically its dominance as a regional organization within ACUHO-I, its dense participant population, and its convenience. SEAHO is the most active regional arm of ACUHO-I in several measures, including conference participation, both in attendance and in presentations; awards and recognition; outreach; and professional development. Also, SEAHO has exhibited a strong presence in ACUHO-I through the creation and support of its own intra-organizational, national ACUHO-I initiatives, such as its ongoing hosting of the National Housing Training Institute (NHTI), a national mid-manager institute, its hosting of the ACUHO-I annual conference in past years, and several of SEAHO's members ascending into the ACUHO-I national presidency. SEAHO was also

one of the most densely populated regional arms, with more institutions, and a larger region than its counterparts, providing a wider scope for the study and potentially a more diverse set of data.

The final reason that I selected SEAHO as the population for this study is that I have spent my professional career as a member of the organization and am familiar with the research and involvement standards and practices of the region, and the prominence and scope of the region and how that could impact the research as a body of work. Due to my professional affiliation with the region, I had a pre-existing working knowledge of the list-serve and its potential to serve as a means to distribute the survey in a timely and efficient manner. Also, because I was a self-selected member of a state list-serve, I was familiar with the current use of the list-serve, and have evidenced other studies and data collection occurring via that outlet. I utilized the SEAHO organization membership due to the ability to partake in convenience sampling, as a means to reduce barriers to communication and response from participants, as well as to reduce delay and increase specificity in the collection and analysis of the survey data (Maxwell, 2005).

#### Research Paradigm

The study was a qualitative study that followed the research paradigm of basic qualitative research design. Basic qualitative research design was the ideal research paradigm for this study in that it provided a comprehensive framework by which to support the data collection and analysis as pieces of the same puzzle, while it also provided the freedom necessary in qualitative research to add depth and texture to the study's findings. This further supported the dual phases of this study and the

incorporation of two phases of data collection. Qualitative research design is unique in its approach in that focuses on patterns that recur, specifically constructed as patterns, themes or categories, throughout several forms of data (Merriam, 2002). Because of this flexibility, it is the most commonly used research design for educational research.

Basic qualitative research design provides the study with the opportunity to provide data that reflects, “(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their world, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2002, p. 38). This vein of inquiry serves to develop an understanding of how individuals create meaning from their experiences (Merriam, 2002). Basic qualitative research design provides researchers with a means to “uncover and interpret meaning” (Merriam, 2002, p. 39) from phenomenon. Because basic qualitative research design hinges on the connection between the participant’s experience and the researcher’s understanding of the experience, it was ideal in this research. In basic qualitative research, “the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon, in which the meaning is mediated through the researcher as instrument, the strategy as inductive and the outcome is descriptive” (Merriam, 2002, p. 6). This method is inclusive of the viewpoints and perspectives of the participants, in addition to the understanding and analysis of the researcher, combining them to provide a descriptive account of the data in conjunction with the literature used to support the study (Merriam, 2002).

## Research Design

This study utilized a basic qualitative research design that uses semi structured individual interviews, triangulated with descriptive survey and document analysis. Qualitative design was the most appropriate research design due to the desire to collect descriptive data, as well as gather rich, contextual qualitative data through content and document analysis, utilizing both surveys and interviews. By utilizing a basic qualitative research design, the study was able to gain a big picture view of the phenomenon of assessment in RA training through the descriptive data, while also gaining a very specific view of the motivations, perceptions, and individual cases of RA training assessment through the interviews. A case study approach was utilized for the individual interviews within the study, as a means to better understand and contextualize the data offered by participants. Case studies also allow researchers an opportunity to understand “complex social phenomena,” while being careful to maintain the “holistic and meaningful characteristics” of the events (Merriam, 2002, p. 205). Case studies introduce the potential of the recurrence of the phenomena in other circumstances, while conversely highlighting the unique characteristics of the particular phenomena (Patton, 2002). In this study, the case study design was desirable due to its intentional in-depth focus on an event, occurrence, program, or person that is bounded by time and activity, through the use of several means of data collection over a finite period of time (Creswell, 2009).

The research was carried out in two phases, first the survey and the basic description and assessment of documents that the survey respondents provided, and second, a series of individual interviews. This two-phase design allowed one form of data

to inform the other, providing a seamless transition between the analysis and findings provided in the study. Due to the amount of data generated by the survey, but with a lack of specificity for each respondent, the individual interviews were used to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of assessment as part of the RA training program for each participating respondent. This simplified the study's overall research design, reducing the risk of error or loss of information and increasing the ability of the readers to achieve generalizability. The ease and relative simplicity of this type of design is what lead to its success; a researcher can easily follow its processes and provide data that can be described and reported. Through its case study design, this study provided a contextual understanding of the assessment methods of student staff training programs, while recognizing that this experience "might be unique or typical, representative of a common practice or never before encountered" (Merriam, 2002, p. 179). Merriam (2002) states, as further justification for this methodological design, "since the general lies in the particular, what we learn in a particular case can be transferred to similar situations. It is the reader, not the researcher, who determines what can apply to his or her context" (p. 179).

#### *Positionality Statement*

As a researcher, there is no separation between who I am and the influences that are built into my identity, from the work that I do, or the subjects that I examine. I am ultimately an amalgamation of all of the perspectives, cultural influences, and personal characteristics that compose me as a person, and that integrates itself into my role as a professional and as a researcher. As a professional within residence life and housing, with

over seven years of experience both supervising RAs, RA supervisors, and other student leadership roles, in addition to serving in supporting and direct planning roles of RA training and development programs, I have an intimate and intertwined relationship with the practices of training and developing RAs within residential departments and programs. Also, because I am a professional member of the community in which my research took place, I have personal and professional interests and relationships that will have an influence in this work.

Because I am a professional staff member who has been responsible for RA training and its corresponding assessment, as well as someone who has been involved in creating assessment systems within my own institution, my experience creates normative assumptions towards others on what practices may or may not be already happening. This assumption can work to fill gaps and provide insight in the data collected, and can add dimension to the phenomenon of RA training assessment. There exists the reality that because my professional experience is within the same field in which my research takes place, I am provided an inherent understanding and ultimately an advantage to understanding the intricacies of the themes and information gathered in the data of this study. My experience provides me with a terminology and an expertise within the field that lends to my ability to discuss RA training assessment with respondents during the research, as well as to seek out specific information during the course of the research in order to better understand the perspective of the participants.

On the converse, it also means that license may be taken with assuming study participants and potential readers operate in the same understanding and terminology

regarding RA training and its corresponding assessment as I do. My professional experience has influenced my beliefs on what acceptable and conventional practices are within RA training and development, and the diversity of my experience within different institution influences those beliefs as well. From my specific viewpoint, built from those experiences, there is the potential for bias in the collection, analysis and interpretation of the data within this study. My bias includes how I may have framed questions on both the survey and interview instruments, how I may have interpreted responses from interview respondents, how I may have attributed responses from respondents to codes and themes, as well as how I may have chosen to align excerpts from respondents toward cohesive and integrated concepts within my discussion of the data in this study. What is paramount to the depth and richness of qualitative research is to create an understanding of what role the researcher occupies and how that role impacts the overall study.

In order to balance the voice of the participants and my own perspective within the context of this study, I have built in measures to account for and incorporate my own viewpoint into the data and voices collected from others. By triangulating the data collected, I am able to concentrate the voices and perspectives of respondents, and both reduce and refine my own voice within their responses. Qualitative data is not designed to be purely objective and the voice and hand of the researcher can and will often find its way into the study. Merriam (2002) best explains the purpose of the researcher's voice in the findings of their study, with the reality that "the overall interpretation will be the researcher's understanding, mediated by his or her particular disciplinary perspective, of the participant's understanding of the phenomenon of interest" (Merriam, p. 38).

### *Limitations*

During the execution of this research, there were several limitations that were presented, specifically the time frame in which the study was conducted, the population studied, the limited participation, the types of documents submitted, and the scope of the study. The data was collected over a three-week period in the month of October, a season of the year that is marked by high levels of activity for the population studied. The time period included two state conferences, two student conferences, and a 3-4 day fall break for most institutions in the region. This may have lessened the response rate and/or caused an increased survey incompleteness rate, due to respondents not accessing the link during the time of the survey, or due to not completing it by the end time of the survey window. Because the length of time allotted for the survey was much shorter than standard survey data collection periods, there was less time to remind participants to complete the survey and/or capture additional respondents through increased outreach by me. This limited the number of potential respondents, perhaps preventing some potential respondents from participating due to time constraints. The length of time for the survey was shortened due to my scheduling needs as a researcher, specifically attempting to coordinate all data collection within an abbreviated window of time.

In order to compensate for this limitation, I sent out reminder emails to the region on a consistent basis, to remind potential participants to either start or complete the survey. Additionally, the survey was created in such a way that respondents could save their responses for up to a week before submitting their survey responses, to provide participants with an opportunity to enter and leave the survey without losing their

responses, in the event time constraints were an issue for respondents. Both of these actions were executed as a means to attract more respondents and retain more responses to the survey.

Because the survey was posted via Qualtrics and hosted online, there are some potential non-response issues that could be attributed to the study, including technological issues such as complications with accessing the survey link, inability to complete the survey, or potential inability to navigate the survey to completion. Because the survey was hosted online, and self-administered, it is possible that confusion may have occurred for respondents, or instructions may have been unclear, thus discouraging respondents to complete the survey (Evans & Mathur, 2005). The decision to create the survey online as opposed to pen and paper surveys was primarily due to the size of the population and the inability to distribute paper and pen surveys to each institution in the southeast. This decision presented an additional limitation in terms of potential respondents. Although research has suggested that emailed surveys receive higher response rates than pen-and-paper surveys, that increase is only present in the first few days after distribution; after that, the responses are not higher than non-electronically distributed surveys (Barribeau, 2012). Research has shown that online surveys experience a boost of responses during the first 72 hours, after which they typically receive fewer responses than a paper or individual survey document (Koch, 2012).

Also, the study was specifically addressed to staff members who could speak to their departments' RA training processes, and as such, there may have been participants who could have contributed useful information who may have chosen not to participate,

due to not feeling they were the most appropriate person from their department to respond. Because several members of the same department could have received the survey, several individuals may have responded with information for the same institution. This could have resulted in exaggerated or inaccurate data, having two colleagues from one institution reporting the same or even potentially different information for the same RA training context within the survey. This dissonance could create skewed data regarding trends or practices in RA training assessment. Conversely, an institution that could have been represented may not have been represented at all due to the assumption of staff that another staff member in the department would complete the survey. This could potentially explain the lack of participation from medium to large schools and the high participation from small schools, which had fewer professional staff to have potentially already responded to the survey.

Given the context in which the study existed, requesting information from a previous academic year, it was also possible that participants may not have responded due to having not been a member of their institution for the year requested, and/or not being at their institution long enough to feel comfortable providing that information. Potential participants also may not have felt comfortable describing their previous institutions, which may have also fit the guidelines of this study, due to no longer being employed at that institution. Also, because the study requested the respondent to discuss a year that had already concluded, respondents might have been confused or inaccurate in their responses, potentially confusing years of RA training or forgetting important information. Respondents may not have been the primary coordinators for RA training at

their institutions, therefore limiting their feedback to that of a peripheral perspective. This can lead to incomplete information provided on surveys or to a lack of desire to participate in the follow up interview for the survey. Also, this may have meant inaccurate sequencing of events, incomplete understanding of motivations and reasoning, and/or uninformed understanding of the entire assessment process. Due to the broadness of the request for documents to be included, it is possible that respondents were unclear as to which types of documents were being requested, and whether the documents they were submitting might have been useful. Participants also may have not felt confident in submitting documents that included potential institution-specific information, so as to not identify their school unknowingly or without their chief housing officers' permission. They also may not have had the information requested as an artifact, or may not have been able to access that information. All of these reasons or outcomes could have led to respondents not submitting artifacts with their survey.

Because the study relied on self-reporting from respondents, self-reporting bias is potentially existent based on any number of reasons. Self-reporting is "in the strictest sense, not verifiable by any means" (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986, p. 533), which makes the risk for inaccurate or skewed data higher in this type of research design. As posited by Podsakoff and Organ (1986), "there is no direct means of cross validating people's descriptions of their feelings and intentions" (p. 533). It is possible that respondents may have responded inaccurately or falsely, both on the survey and within the individual interview. There is the chance that respondents may have altered their responses due to perceptions of desirable or undesirable responses. Within self-reported data, the problem

of socially desirable responses (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986) presents itself as a challenge to the validity of the responses, especially for questions about respondents' past actions or motivations. "Not only are some responses to some items more socially desirable than others, certain reasons for responses are also more ego-flattering than others" (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986, p. 535). Respondents may have inflated or deflated their own involvement in the events or phenomena they described or skewed their responses to bolster their department or institution. It is possible that because respondents were asked to reflect on their actions, which occurred in the past, they may have attributed more actions to the process than actually occurred, or they may have attributed more meaning to their actions than was actually intended. Because respondents were asked to both speak to their own roles in the process, as well as the motivation and philosophy behind their actions, both of which occurred in the past, there is the chance that they may confuse or misreport components of the assessment process. Respondents are being asked to

Engage in a higher order cognitive process- a process that involves [not only] recall but weighting, inference, prediction, interpretation, and evaluation. Many times during a brief interval, we are requiring the respondents to work at a fairly high level of abstraction (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986, p. 533).

Respondents may view their overall assessment programs from a different lens than an objective outsider, especially if they played a pivotal role in its creation or execution, which may be reported to the researcher with more emphasis than what their behavior or actions

actually entailed. Finally, it is possible that respondents may have utilized hindsight to connect pieces of their assessment process that were not necessarily connected at the time of action. Some effects that may have occurred include “telescoping” (p. 13), when a respondent confuses the time frame being requested in the survey and reports that events took place more recently than they actually did, as well as the “fatigue effect” (p. 13), wherein participants grow tired of responding and the data they provide loses depth and even accuracy (Barribeau, 2012). Because perception and actual past behavior can be significantly different, when utilizing self-reported data as a primary component of data collection, there is a responsibility on behalf of the researcher to acknowledge and insulate the effect this may have on the resulting findings of the study or research (Polkinghorne, 2005). “Because experience is not directly observable, data about it depend on the participants’ ability to reflectively discern aspects of their own experience and to effectively communicate what they discern through the symbols of language” (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 135).

The direction of this study did not include questions that specifically addressed differences in perceptions and actual behaviors for respondents, so there was no opportunity to measure the validity of what respondents reported as their departments’ or programs’ assessment measures. I accounted for some of this variance for survey respondents who participated in individual interviews, by tailoring questions to specifically address their involvement in the process, their understanding of the overall process, and the motivations and decisions that created their assessment processes. By asking questions that required respondents to specifically address components of the

assessment process, as well as to recall specific information and timely events, it reduced the likelihood that respondents would be able to exaggerate their actions or confuse processes. It also allowed respondents to better clarify their responses on the survey, which reduced errors associated with self-reporting.

### *Sampling Plan and Sample Size*

The study's sample size was determined by purposeful sampling, utilizing institutions in the same 10-state geographic region (southeast) as the researcher, with the goal of attaining 35-40 participating institutions of varied population, location, and institutional profile for the survey, and a net goal of four to five participating individuals for the interviews. Purposeful sampling is a "strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can't be gotten as well from other choices" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 88). Purposeful sampling is appropriate for a case study, due to the specificity required for that method of inquiry. It allowed for the study to determine comparison as a means to understand distinction between settings and the individuals within those settings (Maxwell, 2005). It is critical that the institutions studied are not only able to be accessed without undue hardship, but are also willing to participate and offer rich, useful data.

I considered several key factors at play in this study, specifically her relationships with study participants or respondents; any potential validity, feasibility or access concerns; and other ethical or potential logistical concerns (Maxwell, 2005). The institutions surveyed were member institutions of the regional housing officer organization, which contains a significant diversity of types, sizes, and location of

institutions, which then self-selected into the study by responding to the survey and the interview questions. My deliberate focus on finding what would be considered typical or average individuals or departments increased the confidence level of the study's findings, as it better indicated that all findings were representative of other typical or average individuals or departments that fell into the studied population (Maxwell, 2005).

### *Data Collection*

In phase one, surveys were distributed to all member institutions of the South Eastern Association of Housing Officers (SEAHO) via an online link, which was distributed to the organization's individual state list-serves during the fall semester. The survey remained open for two calendar weeks, with reminders being sent out via the list-serves on days 7 and 12 (Koch, 2011). Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants could remain anonymous if desired. Providing their institutional or personal information was optional and was not tied to the survey results (Koch, 2011). Individual consent was requested at the beginning of the survey, and submission was required before the survey would open for the participant. On an introductory message, the participant could indicate that he or she accepted or declined the consent disclosure. The instrument was selected through assessment design research, and as prescribed by the Institutional Review Board for the institution under which the study was conducted (see Appendix G).

In this research, data was collected through the use of a survey instrument (see Appendix D), assessment documents provided by respondents attached to the survey, as well as through individual interviews. The survey was created by the researcher using questions adapted from Koch's (2012) survey instrument, and it contained both scaled

and open-ended questions. The survey was created specifically for this research, and was tied to the research questions. The survey instrument contained 20 scaled questions, of which five questions requested institutional demographic information, including population of on-campus residents, number of RA staff in the department, institution type, and the state in which the institution was located; the survey also included six open ended questions. There were also four introductory questions, requesting the respondent to identify whether they were willing to complete the survey, whether they were responsible for the assessment of RA training for their department, and whether they were able to answer questions related to the topic. The remaining 15 questions focused specifically on what information was assessed, what the process of assessment looked like at their institutions, and how the department utilized the data derived from assessment in their practices. The final survey question requested that the respondent attach documents describing their institution's assessment processes and/or data collection for RA training during the 2012-13 academic year.

The survey instrument was hosted via Qualtrics. The survey was created to be confidential and was securely stored on the Qualtrics server, accessible only via a secured account. The survey did not record IP addresses or require respondents to provide private identifiable information to complete the survey, and it permitted respondents to enter and leave the survey for up to one week before they had to either submit or erase their survey responses. The survey also allowed respondents to attach documents, which were requested as part of the data collection. The attachment of documents was not required to complete the survey, and all attachments may have included institutional identifiers such

as headings, logos, terminology, or building/logistical references from which it may have been possible to ascertain the identity of the institution. The survey asked respondents if they would like to self-select into a follow-up interview, and provided them space to leave contact information for either themselves or the appropriate parties at their institutions.

Individual interviews were scheduled as follow-up to a purposeful sample of all participants that completed the survey and indicated that they were willing to be interviewed, and directed to all persons identified as eligible professional staff responsible or representing the assessment coordinators for the residence life department or program. The interviews took place within 30 days of the end of the survey submission period and were delivered via email, as requested by the researcher. Each of the questions during the individual interviews was directly connected to a research question, in an effort to address that question and provide insight into that inquiry. Each interview lasted for 30 minutes. In the interviews, the participants were asked open-ended questions, based upon the research questions. I recorded the responses via audio recording.

The study utilized a blended qualitative interview method, merging the standardized open-ended interview method and the interview guide method, as described in Patton (2002). The standardized open-ended interview “requires carefully fully wording each question before the interview,” in order to ensure that each interviewee gets asked “the same questions—the same stimuli—in the same way and the same order” (Patton, 2002, p. 344). This method was selected by the researcher in order to compensate for variability in skills of the interviewer and provide consistency in the interview process

(Patton, 2002). The interview guide method allowed the interviewer to proceed with topics or subject areas freely as a means to probe or further explore the breadth of the interview, which remaining in the same area of study, in order to provide the interview with a conversational texture and maintain consistency (Patton, 2002). By blending and combining methods, the study exercised “flexibility in probing and determining when it is appropriate to explore certain subjects in greater depth” (Patton, 2002, p. 347), focusing on “new areas of inquiry that were not originally anticipated” (p. 347). The individual interviews focused on the participant’s understanding of their department’s assessment efforts, as well as their perceptions of the effectiveness and usefulness of various components and nature of the assessment.

Individual interviews were a critical component of the research design for their ability to provide data as to the context of the phenomenon of RA training assessment, as well as to make meaning of the assessment process at their institution and in their experience.

A researcher can approach the experience of people in contemporary organizations through examining personal and institutional documents, through observation, through exploring history, through experimentation, through questionnaires and surveys, and through a review of existing literature. If the researcher’s goal, however, is to understand the meaning people involved in education make of their own experience, then interviewing provides a necessary, if not always completely sufficient, avenue of inquiry (Seidman, 2006, p. 11).

Further, individual interviews also provided an opportunity to examine the behavior behind assessment and how that affects the actions a department or individual takes, as well as to better understand the individual or department (Siedman, 2006). The need for individual interviews as a means to provide contextual data was clear, as it forced the researcher to ask the questions of why or how things occur in the world (Patton, 2002).

The individual interviews collected qualitative data through the use of open-ended questions that were adapted from survey questions and tied to the research questions of the study. The interview protocol contained eight questions, which focused on the type of assessment that the model utilized, the data collected during assessment, and the use of that data in future training processes (see Appendix F). It was critical that the questions be open-ended because the purpose of the interviews was to gain a better understanding of the perspectives involved in RA training assessment directly from the sources, without influencing the direction of the study. Open-ended questions provided the respondent with an overall scope of the information requested without restricting their responses, and while allowing them the free rein to provide data (Merriam, 2002). The interviews followed a blended format, including standardized open-ended and interview guide formats, in order to allow the respondent to provide rich, contextual data, as well as provide elaboration on the data collected from the survey.

In the interviews, respondents were asked to reconstruct the assessment process employed on their campuses for the 2012-13 academic year, and to respond to questions from that viewpoint. It was critical that they were able to reconstruct that process during

the interview, as opposed to attempting to remember specific dates and times, because the process of reconstruction allowed them to rely on their memories of the event combined with retrospect as a means to identify those things which were found to be important about the event itself (Merriam, 2002). By reconstructing the process, the participants were able to assign meaning to the occurrences and weigh the significance more appropriately. The interviews were recorded via voice recorder for phone interviews. The recordings were then saved to a password-protected external hard drive. Recordings were then sent electronically to a private transcriptionist who had no affiliation to my profession or institution, and were transcribed using a word processor and the original voice recordings. Transcriptions were then sent back to me from the transcriptionist electronically, along with the original recordings. Transcriptions were saved to the same password-protected external hard drive.

Upon the conclusion of the data collection, all data was saved to a password-protected external hard drive, to ensure the data were not lost or damaged on the Qualtrics server. The external hard drive was my personal property, and no other parties had access to it or the password for the data collection files. All data was stored on the Qualtrics secured servers for 12 months after the completion of the study, and during that time, they remained username and passcode protected. At the conclusion of the 12 month period, I destroyed the survey and all associated data and removed it from the Qualtrics server, and I also removed it from the external hard drive storage.

Table 1: Research Questions and Corresponding Survey Questions

Research Question	Survey Question(s)
RQ1. How do residence life departments and programs assess their RA training programs? If they are not formally assessing their training, what other methods of data collection do they utilize to gather this information?	10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 22, 23
RQ1a. How often do they assess?	20
RQ1b. Which components of that assessment are RA-driven and which are professional staff-driven?	29, 30
RQ2. What tools and processes do residence life departments and programs use to determine the efficacy of their training programs?	18, 19, 24, 25, 27, 28, 37
RQ3. How do residence life departments and programs use the data collected from those formal or informal assessments?	12, 13, 21, 26
Demographic Information	3, 4, 5, 6, 7
Introductory Information/Questions	1, 2, 8, 9, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 38
Documents Provided by Respondents	37

### Procedures

This study employed both a survey to the general body membership of the SEAHO professional housing organization, as well as individual interviews with survey

respondents. Each of the 10 participatory states in SEAHO also had a state organization with an executive board of between five and nine members and a SEAHO state representative, who reported to and communicated with the over-arching SEAHO organization. Each member institution possessed graduate and professional staff members who self-selected to receive communications via the individual state list-serves, which were created and maintained by the state-affiliated SEAHO organizations and served as the main communication tool between the SEAHO state representatives, who were elected members, and the general body of affiliated institutions. Each state list-serve was comprised of members from up to 60 individual institutions, all members of SEAHO.

During phase one of the research, the survey instrument link and a brief introductory email were distributed to all 10 SEAHO state representatives to distribute via their individual state list-serves to all general body members (see Appendix C). Respondents then self-selected to participate in the survey by clicking the survey link, agreed to take the survey, and submitted responses as well as attached documents to be compiled via the Qualtrics analytics software program. Because the survey was conducted via the Internet through an external data collection sight, there was no personal identifying information required for completion, and all responses were confidential. Participants were not required to provide personal identifying information including name, title, and area of responsibility, experience, or current role during any part of the survey. Respondents could provide that information and could indicate whether they were willing to participate in a follow-up interview.

The survey instrument opened on August 1, with an introductory email disseminated via the state list-serves on August 1, and remained open for two weeks, to be closed no later than August 14 (see Appendix C). During the data collection time, I submitted two additional email prompts to be disseminated via the state list-serves, on August 7 and August 12, respectively (see Appendices D and E). I then closed the survey and disabled the link for any additional responses. All responses and attached documents were then extracted from the survey and downloaded to the Qualtrics server, and copied to an external hard drive belonging to me, both of which were password-protected.

During phase two of the research, the individual interviews were conducted one week after the conclusion of the survey. Respondents who indicated they were willing to participate in individual interviews on their survey response were contacted via email to their indicated email address, and times were coordinated to interview them via phone (see Appendices G & H). By interviewing participants, I was able to gather unique and salient responses about the context in which the respondents assessed their training programs, as well as the conditions and qualities unique to the context (Patton, 2002). Because of the constraints around phase one of the research, phase two was constructed as a means to better understand the experiences of respondents, from their own lenses, and their own meaning, which is truly one of the standards of interviewing within qualitative research (Siedman, 2006). Respondents provided their preferences for method and time, and were contacted and confirmed (see Appendix J). Interviews took place during a two-week period, with each interview lasting 30 minutes. Transcripts from each interview were downloaded to the external hard drive belonging to me, and password

protected. A transcriptionist transcribed interviews after one week, and the transcriptions were sent to the respondents for verification.

### *Participants*

Participants of phase one in this study were employees of institutions within the 10-state southeastern region of the United States that were members of the South Eastern Association of Housing Officers (SEAO). Participants were staff members, either graduate students or professional, that was familiar with the assessment practices used in their departments' RA training program for the 2012-13 academic year and varied from residence hall director to Executive Director of Residence Life and Housing. Participants accessed the instrument and participated in the study by completing the confidential survey sent out via the state organization individual list-serves. Participants were also asked to attach to the survey copies or documents of any assessment data or information for the 2012-13 academic year. This included evaluations and assessments used, data collected from staff, analysis and results of assessment data, assessment plans, and other qualitative data that pertained to assessment practices within RA training at the participant's institution. The anticipated yield for the survey instrument from the region was 40 respondents, with an actual yield of 81 surveys. An ideal yield for the individual interviews was four to five respondents, and the actual yield was 10 interviews.

### Data Analysis

The study utilized a basic qualitative research design, in an effort to gather data that was "holistic and context sensitive" (Patton, 2002, p. 447). It was critical to the study that the data resultant from the investigation was not only indicative of the trends and

standards of the housing profession as an industry, but also true to its source, and the context in which it was provided. Within a case study, because there is exactly one unit of analysis, it is possible for the researcher to retain the context as much as possible while still being able provide data that can be generalized (Bernard, 1995). It is the challenge of the analyst to ensure that all data is held to its appropriate unit of analysis. Although a study or case study may include several different cases, as well as may cause the analyst to conduct cross comparison across cases, it is imperative that the analyst retains the original unit of analysis as primary to their research (Stake, 2000). The case study as a research design affords me the opportunity to frame the research around the bounded system which I have an interest in studying, allowing the event to shape the format of the research, as well as providing me with data that is both rich and contextual, which extends to the reader in such a way that they can pull from the particulars of the data and generalize to their own needs and understandings (Merriam, 2002).

Utilizing a basic qualitative research design for the interview data allowed me to observe student staff training program as a phenomenon, rather than as a singular event (Merriam, 2002), and to pay attention to how meaning was assigned by the professional staff that coordinated and assessed their trainings. This intentional focus on the meaning that was made by professional staff during RA training assessment was made in an effort to “examine how RAs make meaning of their training experiences as well as the application of those experiences to their residential communities” (Kennedy, p. 103). This was done through the use of multiple sources of data that were brought together to provide a meaningful understanding of the overall phenomenon, as well as to cross-

validate the findings of the study (Patton, 2002). The data collected was comprised of descriptive data, which were obtained from survey responses from the institutions, as well as qualitative data, which were obtained from assessment data provided by the institutions as well as from individual interviews conducted with respondents. The survey data was analyzed using descriptive analysis, and the qualitative data was analyzed utilizing content analysis. By utilizing descriptive analysis, I was able to derive trends and connection among respondents and was able to produce a large-scale summary of current assessment practices within RA training.

This study utilized content analysis to interpret and organize the data collected, which included a specific attention to identifying, coding, and classifying patterns found in the data (Patton, 2002). This was done principally through the support that content analysis provides case study research, and how it furthered complements coding, theme identification, and bracketing of survey data. In a case study, a qualitative analysis is funneled into a process from inception to conclusion, including how data is collected, organized, and analyzed (Patton, 2002). This practice is supported in content analysis as well, in which basic phrases and ideas are denoted as patterns or themes, and the process of determining those patterns and themes is referred to as pattern or theme analysis (Patton, 2002).

In this study, assessment documents provided by respondents were analyzed utilizing content analysis, with each artifact coded and themed to elucidate vital data (see Appendix G). By utilizing content analysis, I was able to gather contextual information regarding individual assessment practices and processes, and provided indication and

direction for the deeper analysis via individual interviews. The individual interview recordings were transcribed, and each transcript was analyzed through content analysis. Content analysis provided rich and contextual data on the phenomenon of RA training assessment, and gave both a voice and meaning to the data collected. Seidman (2006) is supportive of this approach, positing “without context there is little possibility of exploring the meaning of an experience” (p. 17). In this study, it was critical that the content of the interview was conveyed in the analysis through accurate transcripts, in order to reduce potential blurring of the respondents’ voices and perspectives.

The integrity of the individual interview data was maintained through careful evaluation of the interview transcripts to identify patterns in the data, including concepts, key words, and ideas in an effort to find connections across interviews and tie concepts to actions within interviews (Patton, 2002). By identifying patterns and recurring themes within the interview transcripts, the researcher was able to reduce the data to more substantial segments, and then from those smaller segments, extract relevant codes and themes for analysis (Merriam, 2002). By using exact phrases from the participants, I retained their understanding and the truth embedded in their words and by reducing the paraphrasing of respondents’ thoughts, I reduced the opportunity for the researcher’s own understanding to replace that of the respondent (Seidman, 2006).

After the qualitative interviews were conducted, the recordings were transcribed with the assistance of a non-affiliated transcriber. The original recordings of the interviews were provided to the transcriptionist electronically, who then transcribed and returned them to me. Upon the transcription of each interview, I utilized the original

recordings to review each transcript for grammatical, spelling, and syntax errors not related to the vernacular of the interviewee, resulting in edits made to transcripts in order to more accurately reflect the interview recordings. I then utilized open coding for content analysis, and utilized the code and theme system applied to survey documents (see Appendix G). Each interview was coded and reviewed several times to avoid technological error that may result from the use of coding software. Interview responses were triangulated through an examination of the survey documents, and data provided via the survey instrument in an effort to refine the content analysis of the interview transcripts, and to better highlight codes and themes where appropriate, in both the documents and the interviews.

Content analysis hinges on the analyst utilizing inductive and deductive analysis to inform their ability to identify codes, themes, and categories. Inductive analysis requires researchers to find patterns and themes in the data, from which findings emerge, as opposed to a deductive analysis, in which a researcher imposes upon the data and interview extracts a framework that meets the data's contingencies. As Strauss and Corbin (1998) have explained, "Qualitative analysis is typically inductive in the early stages, especially when developing a codebook for content analysis of figuring out possible categories, patterns and themes" (p. 223). Coding and theming were also ideal data analysis methods for this study, as they provided a means to extract "meaningful categories" of information (Creswell, 2003), as well as to provide a "rich, thick description" (Merriam, 2002, p. 29) of the case as a means to increase generalizability for the data collected. This was essential in ensuring that the findings of the study were

constructed in a format supportive to synthesis of understanding for readers, hinged on the concept that data description is thus balanced by analysis and interpretation.

The purpose of analysis is to organize the description so that it is manageable.

Description provides the skeletal frame for analysis that leads into interpretation.

An interesting and readable report provides sufficient description to allow the reader to understand the basis for an interpretation, and sufficient interpretation to allow the reader to appreciate the description. (Patton, p. 503)

This study utilized coding and theming, in order to collect and categorize groups of data and information based upon similar categories so that it could be analyzed efficiently and adequately, as described in Janesick (2000). The study utilized convergence and divergence to ensure that codes, themes, and categories were internally and externally homogenous, specifically ensuring that the data that “belong in a certain category hold together or dovetail in a meaningful way” (Patton, 2002, p. 465), and that “differences among categories are bold and clear” (p. 465). By converging data, I was able to determine which codes and patterns fit together cohesively, and by diverging data, I was able to understand the complexities and aberrations that existed in the research, providing a deeper contextual understanding of the case itself (Patton, 2002).

By utilizing coding and theming, I ensured that the data retained the authenticity of the participants’ responses; this method allowing me to extract the meaning of the data, rather than providing it externally (Merriam, 2002). This sequence of data interpretation and analysis was used effectively in Kennedy (2009), in his study of meaning making among RAs during a fall training program, and has several implications

for identifying and interpreting departmental assessments of training programs. Concepts and ideas presented in the raw data were grouped into themes, then provided with a code or cluster, based upon the meaning derived from that data, and then interpreted by the researcher and confirmed by the participant (Kennedy, 2009).

The study was able to employ content analysis to identify stronger connections or divergences between concepts and ideas found in the data. Limitations existed when utilizing a qualitative research design, specifically the absence of statistical significance and quantifiable results. Once the researcher determined the themes and categories present in the data through inductive analysis, an examination and comparison of contradictory themes or categories was conducted to affirm the reliability of the themes and categories determined during the inductive analysis (Patton, 2002). To ensure the significance of the data, the study employed several measures to increase validity and reliability for the reader. Patton (2002) articulates that in the place of statistical significance, qualitative data is judged by its “substantive significance” (p. 467), which refers to its ability to be determined by readers and users as significant or pertinent information in their own judgment (Patton, 2002). The study utilized inductive analysis to identify patterns, themes and categories for data analysis, focused on contributing knowledge that can lead readers to make inferences and generalizations to their particular needs and concerns. This was accomplished by posing queries such as:

How solid, coherent and consistent is the evidence in support of the findings? To what extent and in what ways do the findings increase and deepen understanding

of the phenomenon studied? To what extent are the findings consistent with other knowledge? To what extent are the findings useful for some intended purpose?

(Patton, p. 467)

### *Code and Theme Identification*

For content analysis of the documents, I utilized open coding, followed by theming. I employed deductive codes and themes by extracting essential information from documents based upon the research questions and survey questions. I utilized inductive analysis to identify codes and themes, identifying patterns, trends, or concepts that were prevalent in both the interview transcript and the documents provided by respondents. I noted themes as they appeared in the text, and then designated a code and recorded the frequency by which the code repeated in the text. Upon the identification of codes, I identified categories in which the codes best fit, and grouped them accordingly. I chose not to incorporate pre-determined codes, but rather allow the text to identify areas of significance, as the researcher wanted to increase reliability and credibility to the researcher. I also utilized convergence as a means to confirm the necessary inclusion of codes into specific themes, and divergence to reduce themes into meaningful, significant concepts, and reduce any overlap between codes and themes.

Thirty-eight codes were identified, and they were grouped under four themes. Themes included training curriculum instruction design, presentation/training content, evaluation/assessment design, and feedback requested in assessment (see Appendix G). Each theme covered between 6 and 13 codes that fell under that heading, and each theme was related to a research question. Training curriculum instruction design specifically

related to respondents having described or evidenced their departmental assessment focus on how training was designed overall, how individual sessions were designed and delivered, and how training curriculum was determined, whether via external or internal means. Presentation/training content related to respondents having described or evidenced their departmental assessment focus on the content of the sessions and/or the training program, specifically on the competencies desired for RAs, the ability to understand the RA role, an understanding of their position-specific expectations, and a measure of the usefulness and overall satisfaction level of individual presentation sessions.

Evaluation/assessment design related to respondents having evidenced through interviews or documents their departments' level of focus on the assessment process and its included stakeholders, as well as how the assessment was carried out, through what means and by what measures, for example whether informal or formal processes were used; whether responses were self-reported by RA staff; whether supervisors and/or presenters were assessed; and whether there was an assessment of campus partners. Feedback requested in assessment related to respondents having evidenced their department's focus of evaluation, whether to improve current or future training, or a combination of both, with respondents having indicated what components of evaluation were included, including perception of training, perception of preparation for RA role, overall training experience, and feedback for current training and future training processes. Codes included, but were not limited to, surveying/evaluating training, reported by supervisors, relationship building with staff, length of training (overall),

perception of training (overall), meals/logistics of training, informal assessment, partnership in assessment, training or RA role competencies, improvements/feedback for current training, assessment of presenters, effectiveness of RA training, self-reflections (by RAs), and overall training experience.

### *Trustworthiness*

I addressed the issues of overall trustworthiness of the instrument and the study, through the utilization of several methods, as prescribed by Barribeau (2012), Koch (2011), Siedman (2006), and Merriam (2002). Due to the use of a basic qualitative research design, the study relied upon several measures to ensure trustworthiness, including study design, triangulation and the utilization of reader/user generalizability. Specifically, the research study was designed to be both repeatable and documentable, and structured in such a way as to be reasonable and rational (Seidman, 2006). The study utilized triangulation within the data collection through the implementation of individual interviews, survey questions, and assessment documents. Triangulation stands as a fundamental and critical approach to ensuring validity and reliability (Merriam, 2002). Triangulation provided data saturation for the study, to ensure that all findings were reinforced and that no information or potential findings were missed (Merriam, 2002).

Reader/user generalizability was used to strengthen trustworthiness. Through the use of this concept, readers are able to determine what of the study's findings and data can be applied or utilized within their departments or programs (Merriam, 2002, p. 29). This method, when coupled with providing rich, thick description within the study becomes a significant component to the process of ensuring that external validity and

trustworthiness are achieved within a qualitative study (Merriam, 2002). Transferability can be achieved if a reader believes that the information gained from the analysis of a particular case or environment can be transferred to another situation, specifically within qualitative research (Merriam, 2002). As Creswell (2009) has explained, “The value of qualitative research lies in the particular description and themes developed in context of a specific site” (p. 193). Furthermore, Creswell (2009) explained, “particularity rather than generalizability is the hallmark of qualitative research” (p. 193).

The trustworthiness of this data was ensured by the implementation of a standard of dependability (Merriam, 2002). Specifically, the standard of dependability was achieved when the researcher operated under the position that the results made sense, and were “consistent and reliable” (Merriam, 2002, p. 27). I employed several measures to ensure the credibility of the data collected. As indicated by Patton (2003), trustworthiness was obtained through the use of inductive code and theme identification, the incorporation of institutional description as part of the data analysis, and the triangulation of data collected as part of the study. Through triangulation of survey responses through the incorporated analysis of documents and through the individual interviews, I was able to gain a richer understanding of the assessment processes utilized by participating respondents’ institutions. This allowed me to adjust codes as appropriate to better articulate respondents’ perspectives.

Given the diversity of the respondents and of their affiliated institutions (types and sizes), trustworthiness was adequately achieved. Additionally, transferability was strengthened due to the identification of trends related to major demographic indicators,

namely location and size; this demographic information enabled the reader to gather relevant data respective to the institution's size or location. There was enough convergence and divergence amongst the interview respondents that readers can come away from the research with a reasonable indication of current practices in relation to their own respective departments or programs.

### Ethical Considerations

The research design took into account ethical considerations in order to reduce any potential risks, danger, or questionable measures for participants. For the first phase of the research, survey participants accessed the survey from the link, which took them directly to the secured Qualtrics survey. Participants were not required or asked to provide any personal information to access the survey, and their self-selection was indicated by their completion of the survey instrument. There was no requirement that they open the link to the survey or that they complete and submit the survey, or that they participate in follow-up interviews. Their participation was completely voluntary. There was no structure for staff that did not speak English, as each submission to the list-serve was in English and therefore was only read by participants who could read and/or speak English. Participants were presented with the informed consent form at the beginning of the survey, where they designated their consent by responding to the corresponding question. They indicated a response of "I agree" in order to proceed to the survey. The data were collected and stored on the Qualtrics server and were password-protected and stored under the private account of the researcher. The data were downloaded and saved to a password-protected external hard drive, where I analyzed the data. Once all of the

survey data was downloaded from the Qualtrics server to the external hard drive, the data and the survey were destroyed and the survey link became inactive. Upon completion of the research, I also erased the data from the external hard drive and destroyed it.

For the second phase of the research, interviews occurred via my personal cell phone and the respondents' professional phone lines. Prior to their scheduled interviews, participants were presented with a copy of the informed consent via email. I also verbally read the informed consent form at the beginning of each interview, and the participant provided verbal agreement before proceeding to the interview questions. I utilized audio equipment to record the interview. Each interview session was held in a private space, and the recordings of the interviews were stored on a password-protected external hard drive owned by the researcher. Upon completion of the research, I provided the recordings of the interviews to a transcriptionist not affiliated with the study, which transcribed the interviews and saved them to the password-protected hard drive. The transcriptionist was provided the recordings via an emailed Dropbox link, and in turn provided the transcripts to the researcher via a Dropbox link to the researcher's email account. Once the transcriptions were complete and provided to the researcher, the Dropbox links and associated folders were deleted, and the transcriptions were saved to the password-protected hard drive.

Privacy was assured to participants by conducting the interviews in a private space, and by briefing participants on the processes by which the interviews were recorded, the recordings being transcribed and analyzed, as well as how the data would be reported. The survey was anonymous, with participants given the option

of providing their name and contact information in order to be contacted for an interview. For those who wished to provide information for the survey, but did not desire to participate in the interviews, no personal information was requested or required, and their surveys were anonymous. For those participants who indicated they were willing to participate in follow-up interviews, their institutions were assigned pseudonyms and their responses were coded in order to protect their identity and provide confidentiality. Participants did not receive compensation, payments, extra credit, or any other form of special consideration for participation in the study, and there was no deception utilized as part of the research.

There was no requirement that participants provide any identifying information on the survey instrument or during the follow-up interview, and therefore no risks were identified for criminal, civil, financial, employment, insurance, or reputational impacts to the participants. There were no additional known risks associated with the study; this was communicated to participants via the Informed Consent form, and by the interviewer during the follow-up interviews. No known personal benefits were derived from the study for individual participants, but the study itself contributed to the body of knowledge and shared practices regarding RA training assessment practices within housing and residential life departments. There was informed consent language included in the brief explanatory email circulated to solicit participants, at the conclusion of the survey instrument, as well as at the beginning and the conclusion of the individual follow-up interviews.

## Conclusion

In the fall of 2013, I administered a two-phase investigation comprised of an online confidential survey and individual interviews. These instruments were used to gather data from current members of the South Eastern Association of Housing Officers (SEAHO) organization for the purpose of exploring three research questions, which were framed around current assessment practices of RA training within participants' residential life departments and programs. The study utilized basic qualitative research design as the research paradigm and a case study research design, both selected to investigate the problem and answer the research questions through the gathering of descriptive qualitative data, as well as documents and archival data focused on the use and purpose of assessment within RA training practices for the 2012-13 academic year. Participants were solicited via the member list-serve of SEAHO, and the information provided by respondents was collected via Qualtrics analytic software. The data provided by participants was used for the purpose of this study, and then permanently destroyed within 12 months of the completion of this study. The study utilized descriptive analysis and content analysis to identify and highlight important themes. Basic qualitative research design provided the rationale by which the collected data was able to be both generalized and related to the field of residential life and housing.

## Chapter IV

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this research was to examine which methods residence life departments and programs used to assess their student staff training practices and processes. I investigated the prevalence of both formal and informal student staff training assessment methods and materials, with specific attention to the assessment process, intended audience, and the incorporation of the feedback collected from those assessments. I utilized both survey and interview instruments, as well as documents of assessment data submitted by survey participants. The sampled population for the research included housing and residential life staff from colleges and universities in the southeastern United States.

The purpose of this chapter is to present a detailed description of the findings of this inquiry into current RA training assessment processes. This chapter begins with a review of the research questions, and then provides a descriptive summary of all data collected as part of the research. This chapter also provides a demographic description of the departments in which the respondents were employed, on both the survey instrument and the individual interviews. Finally, this chapter provides a description of the major themes and codes discovered during the data analysis process, as well as a description of the interview respondents who participated in the study.

I sought to determine whether housing and residence life departments were utilizing formal and/or informal assessments to determine and evidence the quality and

effectiveness of their RA training programs, and to inform their future processes. In order to investigate this phenomenon and better understand current practices, I designed a qualitative study that would survey the larger organization and investigate specific institutional practices, in addition to soliciting assessment documents to triangulate findings.

This study was guided by three research questions and two sub-questions:

1. How do residence life departments and programs assess their RA training programs? If they are not formally assessing their training, what other methods of data collection do they utilize to gather this information?
  - a. how often do they assess?
  - b. which components of that assessment are RA-driven, and which are professional staff-driven?
2. What tools and processes are residence life departments/programs using to determine the efficacy of their training programs?
3. How do residence life departments and programs use the data collected from those formal or informal assessments?

The data from this study provided descriptive information that served to explain current practices in RA training and RA training assessment, specifically looking at how departments formally and informally assessed RA training; which components of their RA training programs were included in their assessments; who was the intended audience captured in current RA training assessments; and how, if at all, the departments and programs utilized the data collected in their assessment. The data also provided

descriptions of the specific sources of assessment and the utilization of the assessment data captured. The individual interviews provided rich descriptions of the contexts in which RA training assessments were created, executed, and integrated into the overall RA training experiences. Additionally, the RA training assessments provided by survey respondents provided specific data regarding assessment processes and the collection and presentation of assessment data, as well as a larger contextual understanding of the assessment practices of residential department and programs. There is no better way to demonstrate what is currently taking place and what next steps have been identified than to look to the data for direct support and reference.

#### Context of Study

##### *Survey Respondents*

Survey respondents were 81 individuals all employed within housing and residential life programs within the 10-state SEAHO region. SEAHO's membership extends to professional level staff and graduate level staff that play any role within a residential life department, including those who do not directly interact with RAs or residents, and those who operate in support roles. The survey instrument was sent out via the SEAHO list-serve with the instructions that any individual with a reasonable understanding of their program's RA training assessment could respond, and that it did not need to be limited to those in charge of the coordination of RA training assessment or chief housing officers.

From the 81 respondents, 23 percent had an overall undergraduate housing capacity of fewer than 1000 students, indicating that they were considered a small-sized

institution. Forty-five percent of respondents had a population of between 1,000 and 3,999 residents, categorizing them as a small- to medium-sized institution, while 10 percent had a housing population of 4,000 to 4,999 students, indicating they were a medium-sized institution. Twenty-four percent had a population of between 5,000 and 9,999 undergraduate students, indicating they were large-sized institutions (Table 2).

Table 2: Institutional Undergraduate Housing Capacity

Responses	n	%
Less than 1,000	1	23
	9	
1,000-2,4999	2	27
	2	
2,500-4,999	2	28
	2	
5,000-9,999	1	21
	7	
10,000 or more	1	1
Prefer not to respond	0	0
Total	8	100
	1	

Additionally, four had an RA staff of fewer than 50, indicating they were small-sized housing departments. Of the survey respondents, 20 percent had an RA staff of 50-99, indicating they were medium-sized housing departments, and 11 percent hosted a staff of between 200 and 299 RA staff, with the largest number of RA staff being 299, indicating they were large-sized housing departments, with the remaining 28 percent varying between 50 and 200 RAs. No respondents reported more than 300 RAs on staff in their departments (Table 3).

Table 3: Size of RA Staff

Answer	Responses	%
Less than 50	33	41%
50-99	20	25%
100-199	19	23%
200-299	9	11%
300-399	0	0%
400 or more	0	0%
Prefer not to respond	0	0%
Total	81	100%

Each state in the SEAHO region was represented among the respondents, with 19 percent of all respondents from institutions located in Georgia and 21 percent from institutions located in North Carolina. Both Kentucky and Louisiana represented the smallest group of respondents, with two percent (Table 4).

Table 4: Institution by State (in SEAHO Region)

Answer	Responses	%
Alabama	8	10%
Florida	11	14%
Georgia	15	19%
Kentucky	2	2%
Louisiana	2	2%
Mississippi	9	11%
North Carolina	17	21%
South Carolina	5	6%
Tennessee	8	10%
Virginia	3	4%
Prefer not to respond	1	1%
Total	81	100%

### *Document Analysis Findings*

Documents of RA training assessment practices were solicited via the survey instrument. Respondents could attach documents, surveys, and evaluations, and any data derived from assessment, or overviews or timelines of their assessment practices to demonstrate their current practices. I would be able to gain a deeper understanding of the assessment practices in participants' departments and programs from the data they provided via documents. Document collection was incorporated into the study as a means to triangulate the data of the assessment processes utilized by institutions in the study. Document collection also served as a means for respondents to evidence their data collection procedures and assessment process, within the context of why they chose to use the method they employed. In order to understand the complexity of their decision-making processes, it is critical also to gain an understanding of how their processes were driven; the most effective method for this was determined to be an analysis of a sample assessment document. Documents submitted by interview participants included collections of data from RAs during the assessment of RA training; copies of surveys and/or evaluations used; reports of findings from RA training assessment; and post-assessments used as part of RA training assessment.

### *Participant Profiles*

Interview participants were comprised of 10 professional-level staff within housing and residential life departments and programs in the SEAHO region. Participants were masters-level coordinators or higher, and were responsible for supervising

undergraduate staff either directly or indirectly. Of the interview participants, eight were Assistant Director-level, and thus were considered mid-managers with 3 to 10 years of experience or higher, and five were directly responsible for coordinating or planning RA training as part of their professional position (Table 5).

Table 5: Demographic Information of Interview Participants

Participant	Gender	State	Position	Institution Type/Size
Smith	M	NC	Assistant Director	Medium Public
Miller	F	FL	Assistant Director Campus	Medium Public Small Public
Jackson	M	FL	Coordinator	
Brown*	F	AL	Assistant Director Associate Dean	Small Public Medium
Cruise*	M	GA		Private
Stevens	F	NC	Assistant Director	Large Public
Jones*	F	NC	Director Community	Small Public Large Public
Walters	F	NC	Director	
Williams*	M	GA	Director	Small Public
Anderson	F	GA	Senior Coordinator	Large Public

*\*Denotes RA Training Assessment as part of position description.*

Interview participants served an integral role in their institutions' assessment, with around three-quarters having served as either the creators or coordinators of the assessments for their staffs. Interview participants also participated in the analysis and presentation of assessment data, both to the RA staff and to their interdepartmental peers, and worked as the reviewers and revisionists of future assessments within their programs. Their roles as assessment coordinators provides a potential limited perspective to the study, because there is no participating interview respondent whose department does not assess their RA training program. As evidenced in most self-selected research, individuals that choose to participate tend to do so out of their own involvement in the

process or their overall familiarity with the topic, and those individuals less experienced or of the perspective that the research does not apply to them, tend to not participate.

Interview participants provided additional information about their professional careers and organizational and departmental profiles so that the researcher would have context for their responses in the interviews.

### *Smith*

Smith was an assistant director at a medium-sized institution located in North Carolina, with a total enrollment of 17,500 of students and an average in-state tuition cost of \$3,000 per semester. Smith's institution served as one of 17 institutions under the University of North Carolina system; it was created initially as a women's college but was considered a public research university by the time of the study. Housing 80 percent of the freshman class, Smith's institution hosted a staff of more than 100 RAs for roughly 500 residents, and employed graduate and masters-level or higher professional staff. Smith's institution had provided student housing since its inception as a university, but had built its housing program within the previous 20 years to become a program focused on providing a comprehensive residential education, including living learning villages, additional support staff, focused programming, and new and renovated properties for on-campus students. Smith's institution was considered a mid-tier university; located in a low-socioeconomic status area, it had a large population of first-generation students and community college transfers students, both populations for whom college-transition challenges occur at higher than normal rates.

Smith has been working within the department of Housing and Residential Life for 9 years, with the entirety of his residential experience being at his current institution. In his role as an assistant director, Smith was responsible for professional and paraprofessional staff recruitment, selection, and training, and has supervisory responsibilities for close to 50 staff, including professional, graduate, and undergraduate staff. Smith had been a member of the department through two senior director staff changes, as well as through the construction of more than four new residential communities, which provided Smith a longitudinal view of the growth of the institution's department and residential population. Smith identified as a white male, and was not originally from the state in which he was currently employed at the time of the study. His educational background was neither higher education nor student personnel services. At the time of the study, he was in a doctoral program focused on educational leadership and administration, and had previous work and educational experience in labor relations and in other leadership roles. Smith had been in his current role for five years, and was promoted from within the staff into that role. Smith served as the primary coordinator for his department's RA training program, and for the assessment of that program, and he worked with the professional staff in his department to present the data to the entire team. He made improvements to ongoing and future trainings based on the data collected.

*Miller*

Miller was an assistant director at her institution, a small public institution in Florida that had a total enrollment of slightly over 16,000 students and in-state tuition of approximately \$6,000 per semester. Miller's institution served as part of the State

University System of Florida, and was considered a public regional university. Miller's institution required first-year students to live on campus. The university had a total residential population of around 2500 students and an RA staff of more than 50 RAs, and it employed masters-level or higher professional staff. Opened in 1972, this institution had experienced significant growth in a short period, due in part to its forward-thinking approach to embracing change. Miller's institution served a large percentage of the local population and was considered a mid-tier institution, with students earning, on average, more than 1200 on their SATs. The institution designated 42 percent of its budget to providing financial aid for students.

Miller had been a housing and residence life professional for 5 years, having served as both a hall director and coordinator before assuming her current role within her institution. Miller had been at her institution for one and a half years, and was directly responsible for all staff selection and training, as well as the management and supervision of their related committees. Miller had worked at a variety of institutions, including both large and small public institutions, as well as within several different regions of the country, including the Pacific Northwest, the Midwest, and the South. Miller identified as a white female, held a Masters' degree in Higher Education Administration, and had ambitions to complete a doctoral program in higher education in the near future. Miller's graduate experiences included working with alcohol and drug prevention programs, orientation, and new student services, as well as within housing and residence life. Miller served as the primary developer and coordinator for her department's RA training

assessment protocol, and she served as the primary presenter of the information, which was informally presented to internal staff throughout the training.

*Jackson*

Jackson was a residential coordinator at his institution, a small liberal arts college in Florida and had served as part of the State University System of Florida. Jackson's institution hosted a total enrollment of approximately 800 students, of which 600 were residential. Tuition was approximately \$6,700 per semester for in-state residents.

Jackson's institution had no requirement for students to live on campus, which was significant, considering the amount of students who did choose to live on campus; this may indicate a high level of involvement on the part of the students, as well as a stronger need for adequate training and preparation for housing and residential staff. Jackson's institution employed about 30 RAs for its residential population of 600, which provided an average ratio of 20 residents per RA, as well as masters-level professional staff to supervise the RA staff. Jackson's institution hosted primarily in-state students and had a student to teacher ratio of 10:1.

At the time of the study, Jackson, a new professional, served in a residential coordinator position, where he was responsible for the supervision and oversight of an area of residential students and staff, as well as programming, student conduct, facilities management, budget management, and customer service. Jackson identified as a white male, held a Masters' degree in College Student Personnel Administration, and had worked in similar positions for 3 years, including graduate assistantship work as a hall director. Jackson's department, Housing and Residence Life, had experienced consistent

professional staff turnover, which impacted the growth and progress of the housing program. Prior to his current role, Jackson worked at small- to medium-sized institutions in the Midwest, where he attended both undergraduate and graduate school. At the time of this study, Jackson served in the capacity of coordinating the daily evaluations of RA training and worked with a fellow residential coordinator to manage all the components of the assessment. Jackson was also responsible for presenting the assessment data to the internal residential life staff at the conclusion of training.

*Brown*

Brown was an assistant director at her institution, a small public research institution located in Alabama. Brown's institution hosted a total enrollment of 7,700 students, of which 1,600 were graduate students. Brown's institution was an autonomous branch in the University of Alabama system, which is comprised of public universities located at various points throughout the state of Alabama. Tuition was approximately \$4500 for in-state students, and Brown's institution had both a 1st and 2nd year live-on requirement. At the time of the study, the campus housed approximately 1,500 residents, an RA staff of about 30, and masters-level or higher professional staff. Brown's institution was considered a mid-tier institution, with several larger institutions in the state that were both heavily active in academic and athletic recruiting, leaving the institution to serve the 20<sup>th</sup> to 40<sup>th</sup> percentile of students within the state of Alabama.

Brown was a mid-level professional with 11 years of experience with residential departments and programs, and had been in her current role for 2 years. In her role, she was responsible for the creation of the assessment materials used for RA training, and

also served as the coordinator for the processing and analysis of those assessments. Brown oversaw all residential programming and educational processes, including staff training and development, recruitment and selection, living learning ventures, and wellness and student development; she also supervised and oversaw the residential staff that worked and lived in the halls. In addition, Brown coordinated the communication of the data to outside presenters for RA training and internal staff at the conclusion of RA training. Brown held a Master's degree in College Student Personnel. Although she had been geographically located in the southeast for a portion of her professional career, she would not classify herself as a southerner. Brown identified as a white female, but did not share any personal information about her experience in residential life nor about her aspirations for future experience.

### *Cruise*

Cruise, an associate dean at his institution, had been in that role for close to 8 years. Cruise's institution was a private, creative arts college located in Georgia, and served autonomously with two primary campuses and two additional international programs. Cruise's institution served a combined enrollment of 11,500 students, of whom 14 percent were international. At the time of the study, tuition for in-state students was approximately \$33,000. The main campus, where Cruise was employed, housed approximately 3300 residents, and did not have any live-on requirement. The institution employed more than 50 RAs as well as masters-level professional staff. Cruise's institution was highly selective and extremely competitive, both for admission and for continuation within its programs. Considered one of the region's top institutions in the

creative and applied arts, it articulated its mission as the support of students as artists, with the goal of having all institutional experiences support and undergird their professional aspirations, and center on the learning of the student.

Cruise was responsible for the oversight of a residential program, including but not limited to financial oversight and budget management; staff selection; recruitment and training; crisis management and conflict resolution; risk management; supervision of professional, graduate and undergraduate residential staff; and the strategic planning and oversight of residential education and leadership positions within the department. Cruise was a high-level, experienced professional with a range of residential experience, both as a building supervisor, and also in coordinator roles for facilities, technology, student conduct, camps, conferences, and residence hall association advisement. Cruise had seen the institution, his department, and the division under which he worked grow and develop over time, and had been involved in several large-scale shifts, including strategic planning and visioning, the articulation of new learning outcomes, and the realignment of the department under new philosophies and operating visions. Cruise identified as a white male, held a Masters' degree in Public Service Management with a concentration in Higher Education, and had worked in a variety of institutions on the East Coast, including large public, medium public, and medium private institutions. Cruise served as the primary coordinator for his department's RA training assessment, working in a collaborative relationship with a campus partner, Institutional Assessment, to design, execute, and implement an assessment process. Cruise also served in the role of

presenting the data from this assessment to all internal groups, including RA staff, graduate and professional RA supervisors, and superior student affairs officers.

*Stevens*

Stevens was an assistant director at her large public institution, which was in fact the largest public university in North Carolina, with a total enrollment of 34,000 students who attended classes on two campuses, Main campus and Centennial campus. Main campus was segmented into three campuses, of which Stevens worked on what will be referred to here as segment one. At the time of this study, undergraduate in-state tuition was approximately \$4,100 per semester. Stevens' institution, which did not have a live-on requirement, housed approximately 8,000 residents between the three segments of campus, with an RA staff of over 250, and both graduate staff and masters-level professional staff. Segment one housed approximately 3,500 of those residents, and hosted a staff of almost 70 RAs, six RDs, and three assistant directors, which were full time mid-level residential staff.

Stevens had been employed at her current institution for approximately 7 years, and within her current position for 4 years. Stevens previously served as a community director within what will be referred to as segment two, prior to occupying her current position. Stevens' institution had undergone significant changes since Stevens had been employed, shifting from an all-graduate student RA supervisor model, to incorporating the use of professional entry-level RA supervisor positions, with Stevens being the first person to occupy that new position. Stevens had also seen a shift in the size of the on-campus population, growing to cap over 5,000 students, and from adding 1200 beds in

the previous year to being able to hold upwards of 9,000 residents. Stevens identified as an Asian woman, held a Masters' degree in Student Affairs in Higher Education, and had spent the duration of her career working within residential departments and programs, for a total of nine years, including graduate assistantships. Having attended college as an international student, Stevens came from a very diverse background and had worked for a variety of institution types and locations, including the Pacific Northwest, the Midwest, and the South, as well as medium public and large public institutions. At the time of this study, Stevens was preparing to enter a doctoral program, possibly at her current institution, and had a great interest in how her role in student development could be broadened and enriched through doctoral study. Stevens was responsible for the oversight and supervision of a residential complex that housed approximately 700 mixed classification students, including but not limited to budget and facilities management; staff supervision of professional, graduate, and student residential staff; coordination of a living learning community; oversight for residential education and leadership opportunities; and strategic and long-range planning for the entire complex. Stevens also supervised two graduate students and one professional staff member and hosted a large living-learning village within her building, for which she worked with a non-housing affiliated staff to coordinate that program. Stevens served as a coordinator for the RA training program, and oversaw its assessment processes with Segment one.

### *Jones*

Jones was a director of a small, public institution in North Carolina that had a total population of approximately 1300 students, of which 63 percent were in-state and 30

percent identified as students of color. Jones's institution recently transitioned from being a college to a university, and was considered autonomous rather than being part of the University of North Carolina System. At the time of the study, in-state tuition at Jones's institution was approximately \$11,500 per semester, and the campus housed around 1055 students, or approximately 68 percent of the total student body. The department had a professional staff of two, four graduate-level staff, and fewer than 50 RAs, with an average ratio of 1:26 for RAs to residents.

Jones had been employed at her current institution in several capacities for 5 years, including her current role, in addition to serving as an adjunct instructor. Jones had approximately 20 years of professional experience, of which one half were within higher education institutions, and the other half were in youth-based and religiously based organizations. Jones identified as a white woman, held a Masters' degree in Management and Leadership, and served as the chief housing officer for her department's residential program. Jones had been the backbone of her department, serving not only to manage the day-to-day operation of the halls and supervise the staff that lived and worked there, but also to single-handedly manage the long-range visioning and planning for her department's growth and development. Jones sought to grow the department by adding structures, policies, protocol, and positions in order to better serve the needs of her residents, of which a large portion were student athletes and first-generation college students. Jones had lived in many diverse areas, working for various small institutions and private organizations, but the bulk of her higher education experience had been in the Southeast. Jones had served in various leadership positions within housing organizations,

on both the state level and the regional level, including SEAHO. Jones directly oversaw operations, services, resources, and staff for an on-campus population of more than 1000 residents; she had also supervised one professional, four graduate students, and approximately 60 undergraduate student staff. Uniquely, Jones was, for 4 years, the sole professional staff member at her institution before an additional staff member was added. At the time of the study, Jones served as the designer and coordinator of RA training and its associated assessment, and she had implemented, analyzed, and presented assessment data to graduate and professional staff.

#### *Walters*

Walters served as a community director for the largest public university in North Carolina, with a total enrollment of 34,000 students who attended classes on two campuses, the Main Campus and the Centennial Campus. The Main Campus was segmented into three campuses, and Walters was employed at what will here be referred to as segment two. At the time of this study, undergraduate in-state tuition was approximately \$4,100 per semester. Walters's institution did not have any live-on requirement. The campus housed approximately 8,000 residents across the three segments of campus, with an RA staff of over 250 and staff members at the graduate and masters-holding professional levels. Segment two housed approximately 3,000 of those residents and hosted a staff of almost 70 RAs, as well as five RDs; one Community Director, who was a full time entry-level residential staff member; and two assistant directors, who were full-time mid-level residential staff.

At the time this study was conducted, Walters had been employed in her position for 4 years, and had been in her current position as a community director for that entire period. Walters had seen growth at her institution while employed there, and she had been central in providing additional opportunities in her area. Within her hall, Walters created a village that was designed to meet needs articulated by students, and that drew on existing partnerships with campus resources; she had overseen that village since its inception. Originally from the Southeast, Walters had remained within the southeastern region for the duration of her career. Walters had been employed professionally for 4 years, all of which had been within a residential department or program. Walters identified as a white woman, held a Masters' degree in College Student Personnel Administration, and had worked for student activities and residential life while earning her graduate degree. Walters had an interest in the intersection of academic achievement and the residential experience, focusing on living learning villages, academic advising and mentoring, and academic partnerships within residential populations. Each of these played a role in her area, where she hosted an international living learning village as well as an arts village, and collaborated with academic departments to provide academic-minded programming in her halls to her residents. Walters directly supervised a staff of 16 RAs within two buildings, with a combined occupancy of approximately 320 residents; oversaw two living learning communities in those buildings; provided oversight and management for facilities operations; and held fiscal responsibilities. Walters also oversaw all residential education, programming, and leadership opportunities for both communities, and served within a duty rotation for the entirety of

segment two. Walters served as part of a committee that coordinated RA training and their corresponding assessments for segment two, and as a result, she designed and coordinated the assessment process for all segment two RA staff.

*Williams*

Williams, the director of housing at his institution, had served in that capacity for almost 8 years. As one of the 34 public institutions comprising the University System of Georgia, it was considered a state college, with two campuses with a total enrollment of 3,300. Of the total enrollment, more than one third, or 1,000 students, are residential and housed on the main campus. The institution had a first-year student residency requirement, with students living in one of two residential areas, staffed with masters-level professional staff and a total RA staff of approximately 40. Tuition for an in-state student was approximately \$1,900 per semester. Considered an access institution, the institution was promoted by its University System as an opportunity for students to attend college who would otherwise not, due to a variety of reasons, including academic, demographic, financial, and geographic factors. The institution hosted a significant amount of first-generation, veteran, and non-traditional students, through its use of night classes and a second campus. It also served as a starting point for students who were interested in transferring to larger institutions within Georgia, including state and regional institutions.

Williams oversaw all of the residential life portions of his department's housing program, including staff recruitment, selection, training and development, student conduct, crisis management and incident response, residential education, leadership and

development, campus and community partnerships, as well as strategic planning and departmental growth and development. Williams directly and indirectly oversaw both professional and student residential staff in all residential communities on his campus. Because Williams's department housed a significant number of entry-level positions, he had been a constant at his institution throughout staff turnover and transitions. Williams also designed and coordinated the RA training process, including its assessment, and executed that assessment and its corresponding data analysis; he also presented the data to internal staff through informal measures. Williams identified as a white male, held a Doctor of Education in Adult Education and a Masters of Business Administration, and had approximately 13 years of professional experience in student affairs. Williams had served in various leadership positions within housing organizations on both the state level and the regional level, including SEAHO.

*Anderson*

Anderson was employed as a senior coordinator at a large, public institution in the state of Georgia, the flagship and oldest institution in the University System of Georgia. With a total enrollment of 34,400, including enrollment in extension and remote programs in the state, it was one of the largest institutions in the state, and was considered a doctoral-level research institution. Anderson's institution was highly competitive for admission, including both new freshmen and transfer students, and hosted extension programs in several corners of the state, which were equally as competitive. At the time of this research, in-state undergraduate tuition was \$4,500. The institution did have a first-year residency requirement. Sixty-one percent of all first-year students lived on

campus, in one of 22 halls, out of a total residential population of approximately 7,600 residents. The institution had over 250 RAs, and staff members at both the graduate and the masters-professional levels. Anderson's institution hosted several different living styles, including traditional, semi-suite, suite, and apartments, and housed all classifications of students, including undergraduate, graduate, family, faculty, and staff.

Anderson had been employed by her institution for approximately 20 years, all of that time within the residential program. During those 20 years, the residential life department had undergone significant changes, including the addition of halls, renovations, and new properties; the shifting of professional positions; the additions and removals of professional positions; the use of graduate assistants and interns within the department; the incorporation of technology; and the centralization of several large-scale processes. Anderson had also served as interim director for another department during her time at her institution, but had served in four distinct roles within the residential program. Anderson had been in her current role for approximately 1 year, having served as an area coordinator for a section of campus for 14 years prior to moving into her current position. Because of Anderson's previous experience as a building/area supervisor, and her direct and indirect contact with RAs and their subsequent training and supervision, Anderson provided a unique perspective to her current role, specifically her understanding of the process of RA development from a holistic perspective. Anderson had also been employed within other higher education institutions and governmental organizations for a combined professional career spanning 36 years. Anderson identified as a black woman, held a Masters' degree in Public Administration, and had completed

all coursework and comprehensive examinations for a Doctor of Public Administration degree. Anderson had also worked at various public institutions, including medium public and large public institutions, located in both the Midwest and the Southeast regions. Anderson had also served in various leadership positions within housing organizations on both the state and regional levels, including SEAHO. Anderson was responsible for staff development and student conduct for the entire residential life program, including the supervision and oversight of training and development programs for all entry- and mid-level professional residential staff, all graduate staff, and all RA staff. Anderson was responsible for the oversight and supervision of all student conduct processes within the residential program, as well as in the planning and coordination of staff recognition and appreciation efforts. Anderson was directly responsible for designing, coordinating, and completing the RA training assessment, and also served in the role of data analyst for said assessment.

#### How Residence Life Programs Assess RA Training

The first research question specifically addressed what current methods residence life departments or program utilized to assess their RA Training programs, including informal methods of data collection. In phase one of the research, on the survey instrument, respondents were asked which components were included in their departmental RA training programs. They were asked to indicate yes or no to each subheading, or prefer not to respond if there were either unclear or uncomfortable with replying to this question. More than half of respondents indicated that they utilized pre-service training and in-service training as part of their RA training program, 65 percent

and 69 percent respectively. Twenty-eight percent indicated that they utilized campus-specific online modules as part of their RA training programs, while 32 percent indicated the use of an academic course, and 38 percent indicated the use of a non-academic course as part of their RA training. These results indicated that departments and programs utilized assessment over the course of several different types of RA trainings. An overwhelming proportion of the respondents indicated that they did not use commercially developed online training components for their RA training, with 91 percent responding in the negative. Because the field of RA training is diverse and does not adhere to a specified set of standards, with the exception of mandated state and governmental human resource requirements, I could make no assumptions about training programs in a universal sense. Understanding first how departments and programs trained their RAs, I was able to gain an understanding of the breadth of training. The survey data indicated that respondents' training programs were similar in construction and components, and included pre-service training, a for-credit or not-for-credit course, and/or in-service training periods.

Respondents were asked whether they assessed the effectiveness of their RA training programs for the 2012-13 academic year, 76 percent of respondents indicated that they had assessed their training for effectiveness. There was a significant, though small, body of prior research (Bowman, 1985; Koch, 2012) that indicated the presence of assessment as part of an RA training program. Since 73 out of 81 respondents (or 90 percent) reported that they had utilized assessment in some form for their RA training programs, individual institutions have established a culture of assessment, evaluation and

review within their own departments, without there being a required course of action for the field as a whole. This finding highlighted the need for establishing benchmarks in RA training assessment, using existent data provided by residential department and programs.

Respondents were asked whether they had completed formal or informal assessment for their RA training programs for the 2012-13 academic year. Respondents were specifically asked whether they utilized formal, informal, or a combination of both approaches, to which 35 percent of participants responded that they used both approaches. Thirty-four percent of respondents indicated that they utilized formal assessment only, and 27 percent indicated that they utilized informal assessment only. A total of three percent of respondents indicated that they did not use formal or informal assessment (Table 6). Sixty-four percent of the respondents used formal assessment and/or a combined approach, indicating they collected formal data in some capacity, either as a support for their growth and development or a means for further change and progress. Twenty-four percent indicated that they gathered informal data or no data while assessing their RA training programs. A significant portion of the field conducts RA training on a reoccurring basis with a lack of data to indicate the success, usefulness or efficiency of their program via email formal processes. Measuring how many programs utilized formal and informal data provided a benchmark for future practices in RA training assessment.

Table 6: Utilization of Formal or Informal Assessment of RA Training

Answer	%	Response
Formal	34%	25
Informal	27%	21
Both	35%	27
Neither	3%	3
Prefer not to answer	1%	1

Respondents were asked if they utilized a governing body, agency or outside policy, curriculum or standard to govern their formal or informal RA Training assessments. Eighty-six percent of respondents, a total of 65 respondents, indicated that they did not use any external program, policy, or standard by which to govern their assessment practices for RA training. Twelve percent of respondents indicated that they did, and were asked in a follow-up question to identify which programs. Three interview respondents indicated EBI (Educational Benchmarking, Incorporated), and one interview respondent indicated CAS (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education). By indicating their use of external programs, policies or standards within their assessment processes, these respondents provided the study with the context of how larger, industry driven mandates translated in true professional practice to effective assessment processes. Given the limited body of literature on RA training (Bowman, 1985; Koch, 2012) and its corresponding assessment, I felt it was necessary to ascertain what connections existed between outside governing bodies and the assessment of RA training, in respect to their use or incorporation into assessment practices. This exploration adds dimension to the overall phenomenon by directly addressing any current

organizational or governing body relationships within the assessment process. While such areas as academic initiatives; facility and environmental influences; administration; and fiscal responsibility do have bodies of literature to articulate their past development and overall growth, RA training and RA training assessment do not have many predictors or established processes. I wanted to specifically explore the presence or usage of outside organizational standards, policies, or curricula within RA training to better evaluate the frameworks of those assessment programs.

Respondents were asked to describe what components of their RA training program were assessed, including pre-service, in-service, academic and non-academic courses, and any online training either institutionally developed or commercially developed. Sixty-four percent of respondents indicated that pre-service training was incorporated into their RA training assessment, and 35 percent of respondents indicated that in-service training was incorporated into their RA training assessment processes. Twenty-five percent of respondents, or a total of 17 respondents, indicated that a for-credit academic course was also included in their RA training assessment (Table 7). These findings indicate that assessment was primarily relegated to single-occurrence training events, such as pre-service or in-service trainings, each of which was planned primarily by the housing department or program. For academic courses, either credit or non-credit, there was some collaboration or cooperation, either with an academic program or division partners, which may have impacted the participants' ability to assess or the form that assessment took. Understanding the frequency in which the reported assessment was conducted via the various types of RA training provides insight into the

overall assessment process. The data indicated that in some instances, all facets were being assessed to some degree; the data also indicated the areas where assessment was lacking within RA training programs.

Table 7: Components of Assessment for RA Training

Question	Yes	No	Prefer not to respond
For-credit academic course: A multi-week, formal training experience that is for-credit.	25.7% (17)	46	3
Not-for-credit academic-style course: A multi-week, formal training experience that is not-for-credit.	32.8% (21)	42	1
Pre-service training: Single to multi-day intensive experience occurring immediately prior to beginning the RA experience	64% (41)	21	2
In-service training: Generally brief sessions (1-2 hours) scheduled regularly (during or in addition to staff meetings) occurring after the RA has begun the job.	35 % (23)	41	1
Institution-developed online training: Campus specific topical modules provided through a course management system such as Blackboard.	14.5% (9)	50	3
Commercial online training: Topical modules developed by a commercial provider (e.g., ResLife.net, StudentAffairs.com).	.3% (2)	58	2

In my data analysis of the survey responses, I cross-tabulated specific research questions with the size of the RA staff. When respondents were asked about the utilization of formal or informal assessments, their responses in comparison to the population of their staff were significant. Respondents who reported less than fifty RAs, considered a small sized department, reported higher percentages of implementing any kind of assessment, whereas respondents who reported more than 199 RAs, considered a

large department, reported lower percentages in all areas, averaging 43 percent utilization of assessment for smaller schools to fourteen percent utilization of assessment for larger departments. This provides some evidence that size of RA staff can factor into the use of any type of assessment, whether formal or informal. For departments where there are a large amount of staff, and where assessment of their training would realistically require more planning, implementation and resolution time, there is less of an incorporation of assessment measures. The converse is also true in that smaller staffs report the usage of assessment for RA training, which could be in part due to having less staff to have to conduct assessment for.

#### *Use of Surveys for Assessment*

From the document analysis of items submitted in phase one, it was evident that departments utilized surveys and evaluation to assess their RA training programs. Each participant spoke to the use of surveys as the predominant method by which they evaluated training, including both paper and electronic versions that collected both qualitative and quantitative information. Of the 10 participants interviewed, five utilized electronic surveys through a survey host—such as Google Documents, Qualtrics or Survey Monkey—and five participants utilized paper surveys. One participant out of 10 utilized a pre- and post-assessment as an additional portion of their surveying. Understanding how surveys were submitted and what means were utilized to administer assessment were key components to understand in the overall assessment process.

Respondents attributed the decision to utilize electronic or paper assessments to factors such as convenience for assessment creators, convenience for assessment

audience, cost of overall assessment protocol, technological aptitude or constraints of department or staff, higher response rate, opportunity for richer responses, use of data collected from assessments, costs associated with assessment protocol, and ability to modify or maintain assessment protocol over time. By understanding how departments arrived at the method they chose to execute RA training assessment allowed a better understanding of the context in which the assessment takes place, because it allowed us an examination of another dimension of their overall process. This understanding indeed factors into the determination of the purpose of the assessment, and the eventual function of the data it collects. Being able to place the assessment itself within an understanding of the factors that determine its design allowed me to better assign meaning to the assessments' design. For example, I was able to understand the reasoning behind why an institution with 200 RAs, considered a large staff, would choose to utilize an electronic evaluation. By selecting that format of assessment, they were provided with convenience in terms of survey distribution, data collection, data analysis, and countless other benefits that may not have been discussed.

Of the surveys that interview respondents utilized to assess their RA training programs, the assessment designs included gathering data via Likert scales regarding the rating of individual programs; the logistics of training, venues, meals, and overall training experiences; the usefulness and meaningfulness of individual sessions; and the overall RA training. This information also included qualitative data in the form of open-ended questions, short answers, focus groups, and informal conversations regarding perceptions of preparedness for the RA role, the appropriateness of presenters and presentations, and

even the time commitments for large-scale training events, such as Behind Closed Doors, socials, in-hall time, and hall/area opening preparation. Williams provided an example of how the data collected as part of assessment was used to inform future practices, stating that those areas of the training that “received high liking and positive qualitative responses were included, and those areas that received low ratings and negative qualitative responses weren’t necessarily eliminated, but they were modified to take into account the recommendations from the CAs through the survey” (Williams). Each interview respondents discussed in detail the types of questions included on their assessments, which provided a view into the construction of their assessments. By providing information as to the contents and construction of the assessment, interview respondents illuminated the depth of the assessment as an instrument and as a process. Miller elaborated on the questions included in her department’s assessment, specifically focused on gathering both the RAs’ understanding of the training content and their overall comfort with the training process. Miller stated that her department asked questions to determine what

Staff thought [was] the correct answer as a way to measure [and] to see whether collectively they got that piece of information or that concept. Other questions were focused around their comfort level going in a Behind Closed Doors or confronting a certain type of situation (Miller).

Brown’s department also used this approach, which in its evaluation sought to identify indications that “they [RAs] felt prepared, felt confident in their ability to act upon the topic at hand” (Brown). Assessments that sought to understand the RA experience or

opinion on the entire training program were comprehensive and layered, and requested information from RAs, specifically focused on their acquisition of knowledge or concepts, in a variety of questions and throughout the training process. A strong example of this approach is found in Cruise's description of the assessment protocol for his institution. Cruise detailed the multiple occurrences of assessment that occurred for his RAs over the course of one year of employment, including a pre- and post-test, daily assessments during training, and a mid-year assessment.

How we assessed RA training for last year: the assessments we do after our staff is hired for the upcoming fall, we do a pre-assessment test, typically in [the] spring quarter or on the night before training starts on various categories. We do the same exact test as a post-test at the conclusion of training on the very last day. And then last year we did a January post-test; the exact same test, but wanting to see how they responded after one quarter on the job to the actual post-test. So those are the assessments, formal assessments, and then we do a daily assessment for every session. And then we do overall feedback (Cruise).

#### *Evaluation/Assessment Design*

Participants discussed how their evaluations and assessments were designed, how that design coordinated with their training design, and how the design of their assessments provided them with the information necessary to evaluate the efficacy of their overall RA training programs. All participants indicated that surveys were distributed immediately upon the conclusion of training, and intended to measure the outcomes of the training as identified by the departments/programs. Smith stated that in the design of his institution's assessment, they had one goal in mind, and that this goal

framed their assessment: “We thought about what’s the best way to assess their learning and assess their satisfaction, and that’s how we wrote the questions. We didn’t work hard to make sure the questions were worded properly” (Smith). Williams spoke to the informality of the design process, with the primary focus of the evaluation design being centered on the training schedule and/or categories. “I didn’t necessarily do an intensive reliability and validity on that survey. Each survey question was based on our training categories” (Williams). Evidenced in the interview data, all respondents communicated that RA training assessment processes were planned and executed by residential life staff, possessing a Master’s degree or higher, but not within curriculum design or assessment. How professional staff constructed the assessment and what methods they utilized in order to create their assessment processes helped to gain understanding into the overall phenomenon. How the assessments and the corresponding training are constructed, and the presence or lack of curriculum design and assessment within that construction is a pivotal piece of the discussion of the overarching utility of RA training assessment. Cruise also referenced how their overall RA training assessment folded into their departmental value that their RAs would be developed as staff members and as individuals in line with their career goals; their assessments would be tailored in order to support this value.

Our assessment is very much driven by art and design career principles. For our students, how are they becoming a better artist or designer, which is why the question during our in-service is “Does this help you in your career?” as a component because in our training, we want it to cover professional development for the position of RA and career development for their future career beyond residence life and personal development for who they are as a person. (Cruise)

## Cyclical Processes of Assessment

The first research sub-question sought to address the prevalence of residence life departments and programs assessing their RA training programs, including formal and informal methods of data collection. Survey respondents were asked how often departments or programs assessed their RA training programs. Respondents were asked to indicate how often, if at all, their departments utilized methods to assess their RA training programs. The data indicated that the online post-training survey/evaluation was the most used method of assessment, with 26 percent of respondents indicating they always used that method. Twenty-three percent of respondents indicated they always utilized the method of collecting oral feedback at staff meetings. Of the survey respondents, 34 percent also indicated that they sometimes used focus groups, and 35 percent of respondents sometimes used oral feedback collected at staff meetings, occasionally as part of their RA training assessments. Results indicated that paper and pencil post-training evaluations were the least used method of assessment, with 46 percent of respondents indicating never for that option. Retention information, specifically data on how long RA staff members were employed in the position, was indicated by a significant portion of respondents as a means of assessment for departments and programs; however the majority, 56 percent, indicated that information was never used as part of their assessment. Forty-seven percent of respondents indicated that statistics on RAs with performance concerns were never used to determine the assessment of RA training (Table 8). These findings support the belief that, while many departments and programs evidenced some variance in their assessment approach, the

methods that were consistently used most often were online post-training surveys/evaluations, used by 75 percent of respondents in some capacity, and oral feedback, which was used by 98 percent of respondents in some capacity. The variance between assessment approaches is highlighted by the number of respondents that provided a “sometimes” response for both oral feedback and focus groups for their departmental assessment, which were respectively higher than those groups that indicated “always” for post-training surveys/evaluations and oral feedback.

Table 8: Frequency of Assessment Strategies During RA Training

Question	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the Time	Always	Total Responses
Paper and pencil post training evaluations	30	7	16	6	5	64
Online post training surveys/evaluations	16	8	10	14	17	65
Focus groups	24	5	22	1	2	64
Collected oral feedback at a staff meeting	1	3	23	23	15	65
Retention statistics	36	1	10	7	0	64
Statistics on RAs with performance concerns	31	8	12	12	2	65

Interview respondents also provided information as to how often data was collected as part of the training assessment process. Because the primary assessment period was pre-service training, which occurred in the weeks leading up to the fall

semester, the research was able to establish that, at a minimum, training assessment occurred at least annually for all institutions as part of that training process. Four participants indicated the usage of assessment at mid-year training, which made their assessment a semi-annual process. As a component of any assessment program, the cycle of assessment and its frequency of repetition provide an accurate description of the depth of said assessment program. By adding the variable of frequency into the assessment process, it provides context to how the data collected serves as part of an overall training process.

All participants in this study utilized the benefit of a precedence of assessment, having utilized the same or a similar assessment to measure their RA training for several years, throughout staff changes on both the RA and the professional staff sides. This precedent, as articulated by participants, provided departments and programs with stability, with longitudinal data, that could potentially be transferable, as there was already a bank from previous years to which to compare. The hallmarks of this practice are the pre-training review of assessment questions and the revisions made in the spring or summer semester prior to the pre-service training. For some participants, this assessment was updated to reflect the needs of the current population. According to Walters, “The survey has been kind of an ongoing survey that has been passed down year to year, and so in the committee, I work with two RDs and three lead RAs to determine if the questions that were being asked are still accurate” (Walters). Interview participants noted that their framework for training was pre-constructed, and that it was revised each year. While interview participants noted that RA feedback played a role in future

training, they also indicated that the success of a past assessment played a role in future assessment, but there were no noted or implied connections between the two elements. The potential lack of connection evidences a dissonance between how training programs are created and how they are assessed; it also highlights the necessity for additional research in understanding RA training assessment as an integral component of the RA training experience.

### Stakeholders in RA Training Assessments

The second research sub-question asked which specific components of the RA training assessment were driven by professional staff, and which were driven by RA staff. Survey instrument respondents addressed which parties were included in the formal and informal assessment, including distinctions between RA staff and professional staff. Respondents were asked to identify which groups were included in their formal and informal assessment measures for the 2012-13 academic year. Respondents could select several different groups and indicate a yes or no for each. Seventy-four percent of respondents indicated that RAs were included in formal assessments, while 37 percent of respondents included graduate-level RA supervisors. Additionally, professional-level RA supervisors and professional HRL staff were included in formal assessments, at rates of 48 percent and 46 percent respectively (Table 9).

Table 9: Groups Included in Formal Assessment of RA Training

Question	Yes	No	Total Responses
RAs	44	15	59
Graduate level RA supervisors	21	35	56
Professional level RA supervisors	27	29	56
Professional HRL staff	25	29	54
Internal Presenters	10	41	51
External Presenters	6	44	50
Campus Partners	8	44	52
Community Partners	5	45	50
Other	2	41	43

When respondents were asked to identify which groups were included in their informal assessment practices, 87 percent of respondents indicated that RAs were involved, and 53 percent indicated that graduate-level RA supervisors were as well. Sixty-six percent of respondents indicated that professional-level RA supervisors were also included in informal assessments; while 72 percent of respondents indicated that professional HRL staff was included in informal assessments as well. Forty-four percent of respondents indicated that other internal presenters were also included in informal assessments of RA training programs (Table 10). The data suggests that while professional staff did not have a voice within the formal assessment process, there was an overwhelming inclusion of professional RA supervisors and professional housing staff, which may or may not have direct contact with RAs within the informal assessment process. This data also suggests that graduate RA supervisors—while not a focus of this study—were also a significant population within the informal assessment. While

unexpected, this finding describes the role that graduate-level staff have in the assessment process.

Table 10: Groups included in Informal Assessment of RA Training

Question	Yes	No	Total Responses
RAs	49	7	56
Graduate level RA supervisors	29	26	55
Professional level RA supervisors	37	19	56
Professional HRL staff	39	15	54
Internal Presenters	24	30	54
External Presenters	14	39	53
Campus Partners	19	34	53
Community Partners	9	43	52
Other	2	41	43

Interview respondents also discussed the role of graduate and professional RA supervisors in the assessment process. All participants indicated that their primary assessment audience was RAs, with RAs participating in both formal and informal assessments. Formal assessments were overwhelmingly RA-driven, with all participants identifying RAs as the primary audience in their formal assessments. While not all respondents indicated the use of informal assessment from their RA staffs, seven participants indicated the collection of informal assessment from RAs as a secondary means to gather data, including informal focus groups, staff meetings, group gatherings, meals, and in-area or in-hall time. Smith described how his department used time during group meeting at the end of each training day to gather informal data about the quality and progress of the training day and its components, from both an experiential and a content-driven perspective:

We conducted informal assessments as well through the supervisors on a daily basis. Following up on the sessions that day, we made sure they were clear on the goals and customs of whatever we wanted them to learn. We also had a “demo-ing” [*sic*] portion, where every single student was required to ask a question through the day and if they needed additional information on that, they follow up during the group or individual time with their supervisors (Smith).

Miller also illustrated how informal data was collected from the RA staff and utilized as part of the RA assessment process throughout the training experience. He reported, “If they share anything with us, or if the RDs or any professional staff have just a random, informal conversation with an RA and they express a concern or praise of something about training.” Almost half of the other interview respondents utilized this practice of gathering informal data, indicating that informal data collected through various means and from various audiences throughout the process, occupied an important role in the overall assessment, perhaps equal to the formally collected data. This finding can provide creators of assessment processes with a description of the overall training process, to a depth that would otherwise not be possible within a strictly formal data collection process, or within a process that did not solicit data from professional or graduate-level RA supervisors.

Although not formally included in the assessment efforts of any of the participants’ departments, graduate and professional RA supervisors were often included informally. Stevens described the intentional effort by her department to gather such data:

During the in-hall time, which is an informal gathering of RAs and their immediate supervisor, to assess and answer any specific questions from the day of training. The RD's, Residence Directors, open up the floor to any questions. And they will also highlight certain things that they've observed throughout the training or specific points they want to emphasize. And then it allows the RAs the venue to provide any feedback. And then after the entire training is done when they have their first staff meeting after we open, they also kind of conduct an informal session. (Stevens)

In this excerpt, Stevens described the common practice of gathering two forms of data, informal data from RAs and contextual data from RDs. In their role as RDs, these officials are able to provide an additional understanding of the knowledge RAs gained and lack from the day's sessions, as well as distinguish the methods that can be used to assist RAs in understanding the information with which they are presented during the training process. The type of in-person, real-time feedback presented during these in-hall times provided the RAs with a training process that became instructional and responsive, as well as providing the eventual assessment with responses that existed in the context of observing the learning process for RAs, by RDs themselves.

Professional staff was often the sounding board for the overall training experience, with training coordinators using formal staff meetings to have informal conversations with professional staff regarding the overall effectiveness and improvement of their training programs.

With professional staff, we do more of a qualitative assessment, in a staff meeting, or scheduling a separate meeting and we just break down training and talk about how did this go? What were some things we observed? What we were

some concerns we had? So it's not as formal, but we did take some time to debrief with the professional staff (Brown).

In this excerpt, Brown describes the informal gathering of very critical data regarding the overall training process, and a holistic examination of the overall training period. This is done as a means to both debrief the professional staff, to allow them an opportunity to share their perspectives and views of the RAs experience, as well as their own experience during training.

#### Tools and Processes Utilized in RA Training Assessment

The second research question specifically addressed which tools and processes residence life departments or programs utilized to assess their RA training programs, including formal and informal methods of data collection. The survey instrument employed in phase one specifically asked respondents to describe and identify the tools and/or processes their departments or programs used to assess their RA training for the 2012-13 academic year. The survey asked respondents whether technology and social media were used for the purposes of assessing the effectiveness of their training programs. Sixty-five percent of respondents indicated that technology was used in some format to assess their training, while only eight percent of respondents indicated that social media was included as part of their assessment processes. This finding indicates that very few respondents utilize social media as part of their RA training assessment processes. Through the reported use of technology to survey or evaluate RA training, respondents indicated the potential longevity of the assessment data, as well as its potential multidimensional use. Being conducted in electronic format, the data collected exhibited greater potential for distribution, publication, and benchmarking. Data was

reported both internally and externally, including upward reporting to administrative superiors. While social media is not being used by respondents for RA training assessment, by asking respondents to report their use of social media as part of their assessment process, the adaptation of assessment to technological advancements is evidenced. The field is able to gauge the growth and development of their assessment processes by reporting the usage of social media—a constantly changing technology. This assists researchers in creating notable baselines for growth in further research.

Analysis of the documents submitted indicated the use of an evaluation of the RA training program as a whole, with those surveys and evaluations asking RAs to rate or describe the effectiveness of the RA training program overall. Six of the documents submitted in this study focused on presentation and/or training content, and six documents focused on the evaluation of the RA training program as a whole. All interview participants utilized RA training assessments as a means to evaluate the effectiveness and overall experience of the individual sessions that comprised the overall training schedule, including those presented by internal and external presenters. Their assessment materials included opportunities for staff to rate and offer feedback on individual presentations and presenters, and determine the usefulness of the presentation material and content to the RA position. Anderson provided a specific, but shared description of how her department utilizes the data collected via open-ended questions on their assessment, with a specific focus on gaining an understanding on how RAs felt about components or portions of the training, as well as individual presenter-specific details.

We do look at the comments about whether—how people feel about that particular piece of training and determine whether or not we need to use the difference style with that training, whether or not that was adequate, whether or not they felt like they were prepared or not, so we can give that information to the next presenter or determine whether or not we need to do that training in a different way. (Anderson)

Both survey respondents and interview respondents indicated that RA training assessments expanded to evaluate the training programs as a whole, but were complex enough to solicit and measure specific session information. The complex nature of the assessment, as well as its relationship to the training schedule, provided the study with a substantive framework by which the reader was able to generalize the data presented.

#### *RA Position Expectations for Job Performance*

The surveys and evaluations submitted during phase one specifically centered on an assessment of RA position-specific expectations, and measuring the ability of RAs to understand and comprehend the expectations of their position and how that informs their performance, as well as how the RA role serves to assist students, and what role it plays in the student assistance process. All surveys and evaluations indicated that departments placed an emphasis upon the RAs' understanding of their roles in specific incidences requiring them to assist students. The RAs' understanding of that role worked as a secondary theme alongside the primary role of understanding their position expectations and responsibilities. This connection provided further evidence that assessment documents focused on RAs exhibiting an understanding of their position-specific expectations and any policies governing their actions or behaviors in their roles. As Brown defined it, this understanding is the RAs' ability to "break down what we expect

out of them for general protocols and what they're supposed to do," while "making sure they understand what's expected of them going into the year" (Brown).

Of the interview participants, seven participants used RA training assessments as a means of evaluating the RAs' ability to understand position expectations and responsibilities, and nine participants used RA training assessments as a means to evaluate specific RA competencies that were expected for all staff to exhibit upon the completion of training. Participants used specific survey or assessment questions as a means to evidence RA learning as a result of a training session, with training coordinators using responses as a means of "measuring to see what staff thought the correct answer was to the topic" as a method to "measure to see whether collectively they got that piece of information or that concept" (Miller).

Interview participants Jackson and Williams articulated the use of frameworks and/or competencies specific to the RA role, which included several areas which became the focus of the RA training individual presentation sessions, specifically describing the competencies as "skill based" and including "team building, communication, community building, critical thinking and problem solving, remediation and confrontation, counseling and helping skills" (Jackson). Williams outlined the major competencies to be addressed in his department's training and assessments: "Those categories were from student development theories, crisis interventions, remediation, customer service, administrative tasks, administrative roles, safety, student conduct, community development, programming and advertising." By elaborating on the specific competency areas upon which his department built its assessment, Williams evidenced the complexity

of the role that RAs occupied, and that their training and the corresponding training assessment must cover. Williams's department was not unique in the breadth of information that was covered in RA training and in the corresponding assessment. This was corroborated by the previous statement from Jackson, and also by the following statement from Walters, in which he described the importance of competencies as a part of both their training and assessment programs. Walters highlighted an important distinction in the use of competencies as a means to evaluate RA learning, that while RAs were viewed as students who were being challenged to grow and develop, they were also seen as student leaders, and sometimes most importantly, as student employees, which made the stakes for their training performance much higher: "We need to know that this is working because sometimes the RAs are looked at more as employees than they are student leaders" (Walters). Jackson mentioned the use of performance in the RA role as another means of assessing RA training, and subsequently creating a course of action for the further supervision and training of RAs. In his explanation, Jackson noted the connection among training, performance, and supervision, and how one informs and affects the others, a theme that was prevalent in at least four other participants' interviews.

We informally do observatory evaluations of how current RAs are performing and what areas that if there are any, significant deficiencies in their development or performance. We'll look to try to connect the dots between that and the training. Was it a training issue? Was it an input issue? Was it a deficiency before they came in and the training helped but didn't help as much as we'd like? (Jackson)

As evidenced by the data, RA training assessments focused on exhibiting a knowledge base for RAs, through the use of frameworks or competencies, or through testing or measuring RA performance on specific training content. This focus on the ability of the RA to retain, synthesize and report specific information, as prescribed by a pre-determined framework or competency, or based on the explicit learning outcomes of the training sessions, indicated a minimal curricular approach to RA training. This approach was also extended to its corresponding assessment. There was no mention from interview respondents of the use of any literature base or educational foundation for their training programs, beyond the position description or training learning outcomes, all of which were related to the position from a performance lens. This approach indicated a lack of the use of any scholarly or educational foundation, benchmarking or practices to inform their training program or its assessment. This further supported the concept that training for RAs is not viewed within the traditional realm of student learning, but instead forged components of student development, human resources training and professional development. The focus on the RA behavior as an indicator of the training process' overall effectiveness evidenced that departments and programs viewed the role of training to also serve in its most literal sense: on-the-job training. While RA training coordinators did not possess the formal educational background to indicate a usage of a curricular design, the use of frameworks, competencies, and learning objectives indicated a curricular approach. This, coupled with a human resources perspective, provided a complex approach to RA training assessment. RAs are then viewed from the multi-

faceted perspective of student leader, employee and learner, for which their training programs must grow to meet each of those facets.

#### How Residence Life Department/Programs Use Assessment Data

The third research question (RQ3) asked how residence life departments or programs utilized the assessment data collected from their RA training assessment measures, including both formal and informal methods of data collection. The survey asked respondents to identify whether the data collected from the 2012-13 academic year was used in the planning or execution of RA training for the upcoming 2013-14 academic year. Seventy-nine percent, or 52 respondents, indicated that the assessment data was used for future assessment, while 17 percent indicated that it was not, and five percent chose not to respond (Table 11).

Table 11: Use of Data Collected from Assessment in the Next Year’s RA Training

Answer	Response	%
Yes	52	79%
No	11	17%
Prefer not to respond	3	5%
Total	66	100%

#### *RA Feedback*

Interview participants noted that they used informal assessment measures to complement and inform their formal assessment measures, and thereby gain a deeper understanding of how RAs synthesized the information presented at training. One participant stated, “I like being able to talk with them, but I also like the hard data, the paper data” (Jackson). As noted by Jackson, in addition to their formal assessment of

RAs, they implemented an informal process as well, to capture additional information they found critical to the success of their RAs' overall success within their positions. "We also did an informal process with the RAs after our first staff meeting. How did they feel training went, and what other trainings would they feel like they need in terms of training in order to be successful in their jobs" (Jackson).

Three participants indicated that RA performance was one of the most significant indicators of change toward presentation and training content, so much so that the RA performance data may often supersede some of the assessment data collected. Smith stated that, if he could "hear from RAs that they need[ed] preparation in a certain area, that [would] take precedence" over what he saw himself (Smith). Additionally, participants noted that if they observed certain patterns of behavior within staffs over time, they would use that anecdotal observational data to inform their future training processes. Cruise explained, "We take a look at past incidents, a frequency of an incidence type or a violation; that way our RA staff has responded to incidents to determine training needs" (Cruise). Interview participants noted that RAs' informal qualitative feedback about specific presentations impacted their decisions about which presentations to continue and which methods to utilize. This feedback, combined with the overarching goal of preparing RAs for their positions and instilling confidence in their ability to do their jobs effectively, gave RA training coordinators a sense of their next steps. It allowed training coordinators to conduct both program and needs assessments simultaneously, and to utilize the feedback from RAs to confirm or rebut aberrant data, as a check-and-balance to their assessment processes. Jackson discusses his department's

use of the data as a check and balance to ensure that what they hoped to accomplish was actually accomplished, and that they were able to effectively execute the important components of the training programs:

Different days and different trainings should impact the different skill sets, and so that's what the overall evaluation was trying to see if, did we hit that mark? Was there any change and did we emphasize the competencies where we thought we should?

### *Planning Future Trainings*

Interview participants provided insight as to how RA training assessment data informed, supported, or influenced their individual training presentations and/or overall training content. All participants indicated that the data collected as part of their RA training assessments was used, in large part, to inform the planning and execution of their training curricula, both for current-year training and for future years. Participants indicated that plans for mid-semester and mid-year training were based on areas that RAs and their supervisors had highlighted as being where they wanted or needed more development, and also areas where, in assessments, RAs expressed a self-assessed lack of confidence.

Participants often used some assessment data immediately; Jones, for example, stated that her department used data from training assessments to inform their immediate responses to RA supervision and current year training: "One of the things we have is, each month we have a training session, and it helped [*sic*] us to determine what we needed to focus on in that training session for that month" (Jones). Walters articulated that his department utilized feedback from their training assessment to make immediate

changes to their training program: “Especially if there were a substantial number of people who felt unprepared, we would readdress that topic during an in-service” (Walters). Cruise corroborated this point, indicating that the data collected in his department informed the training for the proceeding academic year: “We use that data to basically think about and confirm what winter topics we might do, what the initial in-services might be, what some of the staff topics or staff meetings might be” (Cruise). More than half of the interview participants, eight in all, also noted that they used open-ended data from RAs to ensure their training design and curriculum met the needs of their staff populations.

With the comments section, we created an extra list along with those personal observations, from all of us, about things that we did and could definitely do better, and then when we formed the training committee for this year, we have that list readily available and referred to it quite often throughout the process and used it as a starting point to make sure that we addressed the concerns that were brought forward to us, if they were addressable. (Brown)

This process allows for a critical examination of their roles as training coordinators or facilitators, and provided them with meaningful qualitative data to utilize in planning the following year’s training program. This act helped to reduce some of the information loss from training program to training program, as well as allowed historical data to be captured in a useful way for future use.

Participants used the data to form longitudinal views of how they intended to develop their training programs, both in the short term for the following academic year, and the long term for the next few years. Participants noted that this was a response to the

feedback from RAs about their own perceptions of readiness, their observations as professional staff on their RAs' performance, and their vision and goals as departments and programs. Smith articulated the long-term view for infusing training assessment data into the training program, stating, "We've added a few topics, looking at the historical data, and seeing the areas students typically struggle in, for things they know how to train or they are not as prepared for and make sure we address those as well" (Smith). In the short term, Smith, in line with a number of the other interview respondents, noted that they utilized information gathered throughout the entire academic year to inform the next year's training program.

We use it at the beginning of the semester when we plan what are we are going to do throughout the semester, with continuing goals and we come back to it in the spring. As we get ready to plan this fall, we will look at it again to get some ideas for session topics that were really popular where we felt learning was really good (Smith).

Five interviewees discussed the practice of utilizing reports provided by supervisors, whether formally or informally, to gather assessment data about RA Training; they also discussed utilizing assessments of individual training sessions in the overall assessment of the RA training programs. All participants indicated that their assessment practices gathered both qualitative and quantitative data from RAs, and that the data were used to plan future RA training sessions, both in the same academic year and in the immediate next year, with all surveys providing space for open-ended responses from RAs.

We use it for session development, and it informs as to which sessions we can take out of what sessions might potentially be needed. It also gave us an

opportunity to look at whether the content of the session that is not presented by a campus resource, can be adjusted to address a need for our RA training. We also use that information to help shape the in-service staff opportunities that we have during the course of the semester. We also utilize the information from RA training to help structure our January training session. (Stevens)

Participants used data from several different components of the assessment process to recommend or make changes, including qualitative or quantitative data provided by RAs via surveys, informal assessments with staff or presenters, and internal and external practice sharing regarding RA training, with all participants indicating at least one component of an assessment program. Formal evaluations, informal sharing, and internal/external sharing all impacted how future training was adjusted to meet the needs of RA staffs. When asked to elaborate on what information staff, specifically RDs, provided to enrich the assessment data, Stevens stated,

We ask them for any anecdotal information to see if there are any trends in what the RAs have informally shared with us through their small meetings so that then we can use that information to look at if there additional training or development that needs to happen, specifically in to an area or procedure or on-campus resource or issue that we need to target for the rest of the semester. (Stevens)

In addition to utilizing the data for future trainings, participants used the data to provide them with a platform to encourage intra-departmental exchange. Jackson noted how his department utilized their RA training assessment data as a means to truly examine the purpose and scope of their residential staff training program, and what they hoped to accomplish, and how.

Honestly, the housing program here was pretty new and unintentional and it was just like, the people before, the staff, they did the things they needed to do but it wasn't really learning based or outcome-based; it was just they know that they had to do Behind Closed Doors. There wasn't any sort of intentional foundation to it, and so when we did this, we wanted to confirm that this is the intentional foundation that we wanted to pursue, and [ask], did it work? (Jackson).

Jackson illustrates the larger view of how assessment, specifically, for the training of new staff, ultimately contributes to the overall vision and growth of the department and without critically examining both, there can be challenges toward reaching that vision.

Participants noted there was a focus placed on the assessment of RA training and its relation to the planning of current or future RA training curricula, specifically with pre-service, often referred to as fall training, receiving the largest emphasis in both design and assessment, and with ongoing in-services and mid-year training receiving lesser components of both. All participants used pre-service training as their primary assessment period for RA training, while four of the participants utilized assessments during mid-year training. Walters described this observation and speculated, "Whenever we're focusing on fall training, there is definitely a lot more input from the professional staff than there is for the in-services. They believe that fall training is an extremely crucial part of preparing the RAs and the in-service is more the bonus training than something that's critical" (Walters). This response indicates a great amount of accountability placed upon the assessment process to not only serve as an accurate indicator for current RA supervisory and training, but also to create, establish, or moderate trends in future RA supervision and training. Assessment processes need to be

not only relevant to current practices, as indications of current achievements; they also need to be innovative to inform departments and programs in the future.

### *Internal Practice Sharing*

Participants discussed the use of internal sharing as both a tool and a process in their training assessment protocols. Five interview participants specifically discussed the practice of providing internal departmental and/or campus partners with data derived from RA training program assessments. All participants integrated internal practice-sharing into their RA training assessment procedures, meaning that all the participants' housing and residential life departments specifically shared assessment data within themselves and up through the chains of command. There was some variation among institutions; five participants presented the information formally or informally to non-residence life presenters and campus partners who had an active role in RA training. The internal sharing of data varied from program review/evaluation sharing with non-residence life presenters, or collaboration with campus partners to design, implement or analyze the assessment process and data derived therein. Intra-departmental sharing that overwhelmingly took place within the departments of the individuals who participated in the surveys, Smith summarized the level of communication as follows: "Formally, we put together a presentation for our staff members, but it's not something that we share outside of the departments" (Smith).

By contrast, in the following excerpt Brown describes how the communication among her campus and institutional partners regarding training assessment data was

constructed to be mutually beneficial for both parties. Brown states that the parties' ultimate purpose was:

To be able to skim with our external presenters and develop learning outcomes, not only to know for the correcting of evaluations about what we want our RAs to get out of it, but then our external presenters know what we need them to talk about.

Explaining further, Brown went on to state that her office also provided feedback to the program presenters who participated in their RA training sessions as a means of fostering professional development in exchange for the subject matter those presenters contributed to the training. Brown asserts the goal was to provide feedback that was both useful and pertinent: "We tried to keep it specific to the individual so that they can use it and take into account that feedback as they move forward and then it would help develop them professionally."

Similarly, Cruise explained that his internal sharing of assessment data was meant to be useful for both parties but also ultimately informative for his work within his department: "We meet with a lot of partner departments, and we review the year, but we ask them what our priorities that our staff should be aware of." Whereas, in contrast to the approach employed by Cruise's department, Anderson's department training assessment data was not shared, nor did anyone within the department communicate beyond the department how training or assessment were conducted: "We probably say we do training, and I think we do some overall numbers in terms of the effectiveness of the training with our VP of student affairs." The distinction between approaches in

Anderson's and Cruise's departments could in part be attributed to their difference in roles for their department. Cruise serves as the Assistant Dean for his small, private, creative arts school, which allows him to interact with campus partners in a way that would support internal data sharing. Anderson, however, serves in a middle management role within her department, at a large, public, research institution, where communication with internal partners may prove to be more complex or difficult to form. Five interview participants indicated strongly that internal data sharing was, at best, inconsistent. From such participant responses, there was a lack of consistency in how assessment data was reported or utilized by departments or programs, and it was also evident that there existed no standardized or formal expectation for what would be shared and what would not.

#### *Communication and Feedback*

Interview and survey participants discussed the overall assessment process as a tool within the cycle of communication. Participants articulated the necessity of feedback as an agent to create change in that process, specifically the RA staff role. While collecting and incorporating feedback is an essential part of the assessment process, the communication of those changes and the rationale and support behind them were communicated to all stakeholders, who were given time to process the information. The communication process occurred annually for all participants with more than half indicating that they reviewed the data post-training with internal staff, including RAs and RA supervisors. Cruise spoke to this process and the overall buy-in required from RAs in order to make the training or presentation content changes successful for his department:

We would present all of the feedback back to the student staff so they can see what they said. We talk about what we can change and what can't change as a

result of it. Then we would talk about the additional training that we are perhaps implementing based on if there were certain topics that we noticed they didn't seem to be as confident or they, themselves decided they wanted more information on, that they could actually see. That's why these topics are being presented in their in-service sessions, because it's based on the feedback that they provided. (Cruise)

This act of 360-degree communication as part of the change process allowed Cruise's department to implement change more efficiently and effectively, with much less backlash and more buy-in from people at all levels. When asked to describe the design of their assessment and what the ideal information that it would retrieve for them, more than half of the participants, seven in all, described assessments that would capture not only a snapshot of the RAs' comfort level in the position, but also an understanding of the overall training experience and the transferability of the information gathered from training into the RA position; this would reinforce and support the confidence level of the RA. Jackson provided an overview of the content of his department's assessment:

We asked seven things. The first is [whether] the objectives of this session are clearly portrayed during the session. The second, I gained valuable information from this session. The third, I believe I will use the information from this session in my day-to-day position. Four, this session should be repeated in future RA training. Five, an effective amount of time was dedicated to this session. Six, this session contributed to the development of transferrable skills (skills that can be used outside of the RA position). And seven, I enjoyed participating in this session. (Jackson)

Finally, participants also noted how assessment data served as a means for the department or program to communicate with their division or institutional organization as to their progress as a department and as an entity. As stated by Jones, the data collected from all facets of her training program informed parts of her institutional effectiveness plan, which in turn served as both an internal and external accountability statement and roadmap for her department's growth and advancement.

We use it for our institutional effectiveness plan; part of our goals is programming, and we use it in part of our programming for our student staff is the educational sessions and the follow up sessions that we used as part of our data and our institutional effectiveness plan goals that, overall, is an in-house item that we use to see where we're at. (Jones)

Jones illustrated how the data collected as part of the assessment could be part of a larger picture of the overall department's efforts and effectiveness, from the perspectives of human resources, student development, and educational programming. By incorporating RA training assessment data into the institutional effectiveness plan, this study highlights the important role that this information can play in the overall mission, vision, and development of the institution as a whole.

#### Summary

In this chapter, I described the data collected in this study's investigation of current RA training assessment practices within housing and residence life departments and programs in the southeastern United States. I described the qualitative findings, including data from surveys, from documents provided by the surveys and from individual follow-up interviews with participants. Findings indicated that respondents

primarily utilized online surveys for their assessment programs, these surveys being completed by RA staff upon the conclusion of training; the purpose of these surveys was to evaluate current training effectiveness and gain feedback regarding future training processes. This study also indicated that departments and programs sought information regarding the competency rate of RAs as determined by their position tasks and responsibilities, and as measured through questions designed to gather position-specific information as part of the RA training assessment.

The findings confirm that residential departments and programs in the southeastern United States utilize assessment for RA training as a means to assess both the effectiveness of their RA programs and the overall preparedness of their RAs for their positions as RAs. All interview respondents indicated that, while they do assess their RA training programs, their assessments do not follow any standardized assessment principles or framework, and they are created as an extension of the learning outcomes of their RA training; 86 percent of respondents, or 65 respondents, indicated that they did not use standardized assessment frameworks such as CAS or EBI. The study also indicated that RA training assessment was overwhelmingly formal for RA staff, with 10 out of 10 interview respondents and 75 percent (n = 44) of survey respondents indicating a yes response.

The study indicated that informal assessment was predominately used for professional staff as well as for graduate staff, but not for campus partners, with no interview respondents indicating formal assessment for either professional or graduate staff or campus partners. However, 37 percent of survey respondents indicated that

professional staff was included in formal assessments; while 48 percent of survey respondents indicated that graduate staff were included in formal assessments. Assessment was also created internally by masters-level staff, and was predominately focused on RAs providing feedback on the individual training sessions and the overall training experience, as well as logistical and experiential feedback; all ten interview respondents indicated this usage.

The findings of this study support previous research on RA training by Bowman (1985) and Koch (2012). Both of these earlier studies indicated that RA training is far more structured in practice than it is reported in literature. The data suggest that programs and departments have been conducting assessments and measuring the growth of their training programs for years, from both cyclical and longitudinal perspectives. Thus, there can be said to be a significant gap in the literature, both theoretical and practical, on the scope and depth of assessment in RA training programs and on the usage of the data therein. This point is supported by the data, in which respondents overwhelmingly indicated that data derived from assessment is rarely shared beyond internal staff, with nine out of ten interview respondents indicating that no one outside of their departments viewed this data.

This research extends the current body of knowledge by creating a descriptive starting point, which can be made to increase scholarly study of the assessment design and processes of RA training programs. With this starting point determined, practitioners can now execute a comparison of their own institutional practices to a generalizable set of

data, and can begin to create a plan for the growth and improvement of their own assessment practices.

## Chapter V

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarizes and discusses the study's findings, describes the implications for practice and policy, and makes recommendations for future research. First, the introduction of this chapter provides a brief overview of the study, describing the research scope and participant sample. The following section describes the results, particularly the most meaningful conclusions arising from the data. The chapter then includes implications as determined by the researcher, and ideas for further research efforts. Finally, the chapter concludes with a synopsis of the study's most relevant conclusions.

#### Overview of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the current practices of housing and residence life programs regarding their RA training assessment. This study is guided by three research questions and two sub-questions:

1. How do residence life departments and programs assess their RA training programs? If they are not formally assessing their training, which other methods of data collection do they utilize to gather this information?
  - a. how often do they assess?
  - b. which components of that assessment are RA-driven and which are professional staff-driven?

2. What tools and processes do residence life departments and programs use to determine the efficacy of their training programs?
3. How do residence life departments and programs use the data collected from those formal or informal assessments?

Assessment and evaluation literature highlighted the use of the cognitive approach to assessment, which was ideal for the assessment of student affairs practices, as it focuses on the process and products of thinking as a means to determine a capacity for learning, and ability to comprehend and execute skilled tasks (Hager and Butler, 1996). A review of assessment and evaluation literature also provided an understanding of the two pillars of assessment in student affairs: formative and summative evaluation, both of which were utilized in the assessment of RA training programs (Volkwein, 2003). Schuh and Upcraft (2000) explained the necessity of assessment within student affairs, as a means to ensure the quality and usefulness of departmental programs and initiatives.

A review of student development theory and student affairs practices literature confirmed the necessity of the RA role and indicated that the accurate assessment of that role and its training is critical to the success of that role within the residential learning environment, as evidenced by King and Kitchener's (2000) work on the relationship among theory, practice, and research. Due to the central role of the RA position in the residential experience, by extension, this intentionality and purpose must be ensured.

The study, which was conducted using a qualitative case study research design, incorporated a 38-question survey, with respondents requested to attach examples of their departments' or programs' assessment practices, and followed up with an eight-question

individual interview. Of the 81 participants who completed the survey, 13 documents were submitted, and 19 respondents indicated a willingness to participate in a follow-up interview. Of the 19 willing participants, 10 interviews were completed. The population sampled included graduate and professional staff members of housing and residential life departments or programs at member institutions in a 10-state region in the southeastern United States. Survey respondents varied in position title and responsibilities, as well as years of service and past experience. Survey respondents were not asked to provide any individual demographic information; rather, they provided department demographic information, including number of on-campus population, size of RA staff, number of residents per RA, and state in which they are located. Interview participants were all masters-level professional staff, employed within positions at the coordinator level, considered entry-level with one to three years of experience. Fifty percent of interview participants were directly responsible for planning or implementing RA training and its corresponding assessment for their department or program.

### Conclusions

The findings from this study indicate several conclusions that are important to understanding RA training assessment as a phenomenon. The primary conclusions are that residence life programs utilized surveys as the primary tools for assessment; qualitative and quantitative data were collected within the assessments, including both formative and summative data; and assessment data was primarily communicated internally. In this chapter, I will discuss in detail each of these conclusions, including how they are supported by the literature and what implications can be drawn from them.

Additionally, I will point out areas for future research in this field and the limitations of the present research study.

### *Use of Surveys to Evaluate Training*

Participants overwhelmingly used survey instruments to evaluate and assess their RA training programs. Of the 10 interview participants, five noted that their surveys were physical copies that RAs completed with paper and pen/pencil, and five noted that their surveys were electronic, hosted by a variety of programs, including Google Documents, Survey Monkey, Qualtrics, and Polleverywhere.com. Of the 81 survey respondents, 65 percent indicated they used technology within their RA training assessments, which was consistent with the interview respondents. These findings were also consistent with past research by Koch (2012), which indicated that more than half (62 percent) of respondents assessed their training programs. Of those, 50 percent never utilized pen and paper assessments (Koch, 2012). For both groups of respondents, the surveys varied among being based on specific job/position competencies, responsibilities, or information covered through training sessions; reflective instruments that requested RAs' perceptions of preparedness or readiness for their roles; or overall evaluations of the training program. Further, surveys could be a variation or amalgamation of all three purposes, with components that sought to address or consider each element.

This finding has significance for the function of assessment within RA training because it indicates that, for the institutions that participated in interviews, assessment became a sort of one-trick pony. These institutions utilized a single instrument for a one-time comprehensive assessment of all components of their training programs, or several

iterations of the same instrument for daily assessments of their training program, in order to gather self-reported data from RAs. While the format of the instrument and the specific components included varied across institutions, the overall type of survey instrument was similar for each interview respondent's institution. Suskie (2009) addressed this type of assessment protocol, stating that institutions that utilize a single point of evaluation in their assessment protocol lack a comprehensive and dimensional process of assessment of their program or service. Further articulated by Suskie (2009), the use of a singular method for assessment is ineffective. In RA training assessments, this inefficiency can be compounded by the fact that the individuals that were primarily responsible for creating the assessments are often student affairs professionals with little to no formal training in curriculum design or evaluation (Koch, 2012). A lack of training can negatively impact both the design of the survey instrument and the process of analysis and interpretation (Suskie, 2009). This can be due to several factors, including learning styles and response rates. Surveys have moderate success with individuals with specific learning and information processing styles (Koch, 2012), and electronic surveys have been proven to exhibit a lower response rate than their paper counterparts (Barribeau, 2012). There is a limited reliability that is possible with surveys, because of its limitations toward adapting to the varying learning styles of the respondents, as well as the fact that electronic surveys exhibit lower response rates over time (Evans & Mathur, 2005). Institutions that rely on surveys to gather their data risk losing vital information or having lower participation from respondents who may not exhibit similar learning or information

processing styles, in addition lower response rates across the board from respondents after a seventy-two hour window (Barribeau, 2012).

### *Assessment Design and Implementation*

Interview participants noted that their assessments primarily focused on the fall pre-service training experience, with all interview respondents, 10 in total, indicating this was their first priority. Of the ten, three interview participants noted that assessment was conducted at mid-year training as well, and one participant noted that assessment was conducted at monthly in-service trainings. Of the four interview participants who assessed beyond pre-service training, one respondent indicated that their department did a tiered assessment process, which included pre-service training, mid-year training, and post-year training, as a means to gather longitudinal data about the training program and RA performance. As indicated by assessment literature, including the works of Schuh and Upcraft (2000), Shipman (2003), and Grayson (2012), any assessment process should be ongoing and comprehensive, and should be a living, breathing component of the program. Assessment must be part of a larger plan for the overall execution of the program in order to truly be meaningful; it must be cumulative and not confined to a single large event (Shipman, 2003; Volkwein, 2003).

Those programs that assessed only the fall training session gained a limited understanding of their entire RA training program from start to finish. Because assessments for RA training can use both formative and summative evaluations, measuring both the learning that occurred and the overall success of the program itself, an understanding of the design and implementation of that assessment is essential.

Utilizing a single point of assessment that occurs at the conclusion or after a program has ended, an “add-on assessment,” in Suskie’s (2009) words, presents a major challenge to the assessor, who must impress upon respondents that the assessment is not only necessary and relevant, but also requires serious time, thought, and effort. Given this major limitation, an add-on assessment should never be the centerpiece or main component of an assessment program (Suskie, 2009).

It was determined through the study that when the assessment included learning objectives, outcomes, or expectations, they were derived from the learning objectives, outcomes, or expectations of the training program itself. The assessment was often organized based on the training schedule, in the order of the sessions presented, or based upon the specific learning outcomes for the overall training program. It could also be connected to position expectations for the RA role and/or any specific framework or competencies. In higher education, assessment is either formative or summative, and is used to justify the meaningfulness and usefulness of a program (Schuh & Upcraft, 2000). Evaluations or assessments must be designed with learning outcomes or purposes in order to prevent a potential disconnect between what is being assessed and the information being collected as part of the assessment (Judd & Keith, 2012; Shipman, 2003). An effective evaluation determines the relationship between the intended and the actual outcomes, while also determining the quality or worth of a program (Suskie, 2009). While this was not part of the focus of this study, it remains a critical component of the overall evaluation of effective and useful assessment.

In this study, the surveys used for assessing RA training were created based on the chronology of the training schedules themselves, and the surveys were often culminating assessments of the overall training program. Interview respondents consistently indicated that assessments were conducted at the conclusion of their training programs, with only three respondents noting that they conducted assessments at various points throughout their training programs. Of the three respondents who conducted assessments throughout training, the rate at which they were collected varied between each day, and between daily distribution/collection of assessments. Those respondents who assessed training at its conclusion indicated that they created one survey instrument that was either distributed by hand, for paper versions, or via electronic link to RAs on the last day of training, along with an expected date of completion, generally not exceeding fourteen days.

While not explored or determined definitively during this study, in most cases, assessments that gather information after the fact result in a bevy of potential collection issues, including telescoping, in which respondents confused the time and date of past training events; and memory loss or confusion of actual sequence of events, in which respondents can forget or neglect important components of training or confuse the training schedule itself. The structure of an add-on assessment can also provide respondents an opportunity to change their minds about their perceptions, feelings, or overall impressions about the training program (Patton, 2002). For those study participants who requested and gathered data each day of their training period, the potential is great that emotional or physical fatigue could have impacted responses,

causing some of the responses to be shorter or less accurate (Creswell, 2009). RAs may have had less time to reflect on their responses, which could cause some responses to lack depth or perspective (Creswell, 2009). For the participants who requested data each day of their training period, but did not gather the data until the conclusion of the training program, there was the possibility that, RAs could have changed their responses after the fact, based on the training experience. There is also the possibility that RAs may not have completed the assessment in a timely fashion, waiting until the assessment was due to complete it. Rushing responses to complete the assessment on time or working with peers present or assisting in completing the assessment could have changed or colored participants' responses to some of the questions.

RAs were the primary audience for all informal assessments, both during and after training sessions, including staff meetings, in-hall and/or area times, informal gatherings, meals, large-scale events, and other training events. Graduate and professional RA supervisors were the primary audience for informal RA training assessments, with the greater audience being professional staff members. Graduate and professional staff members were also used to conduct or mediate informal assessments of RA staff either during or immediately following RA training. Graduate and professional staff participated in the informal assessment of RAs as coordinators, rather than in the capacity of audience. Supervisors who were included in informal RA training assessments were used to either corroborate or refute the information provided by RAs during formal RA training assessments. The supervisors were asked to identify areas where staff members were struggling or indicated an uncertainty or inability to perform,

as well as asked to provide feedback for the direction of follow-up conversations or trainings. Their role in this process was mainly to provide checks and balances to the data provided by RAs, to verify the message or components of the data.

While this check-and-balance role can be meaningful in shaping the data collected from RAs within the assessment, it does not give the professional staff a voice within the assessment. Instead, the professional role could best be described as a vote or a veto on the data collected from RAs. Any understanding of the overall training assessment phenomenon that did not weigh the parties and the information included within that assessment, including that which is, purposefully or accidentally deprived, is baseless and one-dimensional. The audience included in assessments, RAs primarily, indicated a one-dimensional nature of training assessment. Respondents gather data from one audience, using isolating assessment practices or through limited, disconnected forms of assessment. This can be a challenge for residential programs to truly get an accurate assessment of the training program, due to the virtual exclusion of RA supervisors from formal data collection. RA supervisors, due to their position, have a more holistic and sophisticated understanding of the overall training process and the content included. But because they were evaluated informally, the depth and value of the information they provided through informal assessment was lessened, and potentially lost. This can result in a loss of information that may be vital to the assessment of the training model, and could greatly reduce the analysis and synthesis of the information provided by RAs in their formal assessments. The assessment literature speaks to the specific role of incorporating varied and representative audiences within assessment (Volkwein, 2003;

Terenzini, 1989), and CAS (2006) is also clear in its expectations of residential life program assessment in that it must bring in representation from various groups, including staff and students.

#### *Assessment Data and its Uses*

With RAs as the primary audience for formal assessment, those surveys or evaluations asked RAs to provide three distinct types of information for this study, the degree of which varied across the responding programs. Assessments asked RAs to provide evidence and/or discuss their confidence level for entering the RA position, and their overall preparation for the RA role at the conclusion of training; assessments asked RAs to demonstrate their understanding and/or competence in specific position-related information, including learning outcomes, competencies, and frameworks, through an examination of their knowledge; and finally, assessments asked RAs to provide evidence of their overall experience during the training program, including provide feedback about individual sessions, presenters, the training overall, logistics, and other details, as determined by the assessment creators.

RAs were asked about their confidence level in the RA position, including whether they felt prepared, whether they found training sessions or training itself to be useful, whether they felt they needed additional assistance, or had areas where they felt unprepared or unsure about their performance. RAs were asked about their perceptions of the RA role, their ability to perform in that role, and their perceived eventual success in that role. RAs were also asked about specific portions of the RA role, including specific policies or rules regarding their performance as RAs; expectations of their behavior while

in the RA role; the function and use of the RA as a member of the residential community; the RA role within student assistance, crisis, and conflict; and the RA role in the overall university system. RAs were asked to provide evidence of their understanding of certain protocols and processes related to their role, through correctly answering questions on the evaluation. They were also specifically required to recall and retrieve information from presentations or training topic-related resources in order to successfully answer questions, providing evidence that they understood their position descriptions and the organizational structures of their residential programs. RAs were asked a great deal about the training experience, both in a presentation-specific and overall perspective. They were asked to evaluate the logistics of the experience, including meals, informal events, in-hall or in-area time, large-scale events, meeting spaces, scheduled meeting times, and unscheduled times. They were asked to evaluate individual topics covered in training; the usefulness of the information provided, as well as the order in which the presentations occurred. Cruise described how his department created their assessment to capture all of this data, including both preparedness and confidence level:

What we are most interested in is the confidence level of the staff prior to and leaving training and then their understanding and knowledge in certain areas. In terms of comfort level, in terms of dealing with situations, understanding the terms of maybe what their roles are and what they believe the overall goal/mission with the work that they do is. We are interested in how does training impact that for students. So that's what we developed based on that and for the pre-assessment, post-assessment and the one that's a quarter after, it's the same exact ones to see that. As a staff, we looked at that, created that, worked with institutional effectiveness on overall wording and layout and then it is administered in paper form prior to training. (Cruise)

Cruise's remarks illustrated the multiple iterative approach that the assessment often takes for residence life departments and programs, capturing summative information-the RAs' ability to understand their role, the overall work they do, their confidence level and their overall impressions of whether the training session prepared them for their roles. Additionally, Cruise indicated the depth of the overall assessment process, pointing out the many stages of his own department's process and also highlighting that assessment can be comprised of many separate components that together provide the department with a comprehensive view of the overall training experience.

In this study, programs used evaluations for the purpose of gathering information about the RA training experience as a bounded phenomenon. The data collected regarding the logistics and overall training experience indicated respondents used evaluation data to plan future training sessions, including mid-year training, and the next academic year's fall training. Of the interview participants, five of them indicated that they used the data collected from assessments to inform their training for the same academic year as well as the training for the following year. Half of the interview participants, five in total, indicated that they utilized the data for the next academic year only. Three of the interview respondents indicated that the data collected via the assessment on the individual presentations and the information RAs were expected to learn, worked to influence how RAs were supervised during the academic year. The data collected on individual presenters and their respective sessions provided the basis of

feedback about the construction and planning of the next academic year's fall training. In the example of one participant's program, the data was used to provide professional development to those presenters for future presentations. Evaluations provided a means of gauging the self-perceived preparedness of RAs in specific areas, as well as their self-perceived lack of preparation in other areas, as a means to predict future performance issues or supervisory needs. Supervisor feedback, if collected, was used in conjunction with RA performance to determine whether additional training was necessary in certain areas throughout the academic year.

Programs are using their training assessments for both summative and formative purposes: to understand both the learning that occurs as part of the training program and the overall experience of the training program itself. By combining the summative and formative functions of evaluation within one assessment model, residential programs utilize both a student learning and human resource management perspective of the training program on the back end. Stevens best evidenced this approach when she discussed how her department sought out specific summative and formative information when reviewing the findings of its assessment. In her department, the evaluation documents submitted asked for RAs to self-report their confidence levels with specific aspects of their perceived readiness for the RA role, as well as their comfort level in completing specific tasks within this position.

In the formal survey, we look back at our learning outcomes that are established for each session, and then we try to ascertain whether the RAs were able to gain what they were supposed to gain from each session and then also to see how prepared they felt after the sessions were completed (Stevens).

This comment, however, does not indicate that both perspectives were being utilized on the front end. While five participants, half of the interview respondents, indicated the use of learning outcomes, competencies, or training frameworks, their evaluations were not solely tied to those outcomes, and therefore contained some aspects of both models. This disconnect can be challenging when examining the RA role itself, as it can operate under either a student-learning model or a human resources model, depending upon the residential program. This approach could ultimately influence the way in which the RAs are trained, although this cannot be conclusively proven within the confines of this study.

In any case, it is evident that programs are utilizing the data collected from their surveys to determine the progress of their training programs, apparently without addressing the potential inconsistency of the assessments themselves. While respondents indicated a revision process for their assessments based on the content of the training programs and how the content shifts from year to year, there was no focus or mention of examining the assessment process for effectiveness, efficiency, or scope. The data being collected through these assessments is used to make decisions regarding the training program, but the department or program has not reevaluated the assessments throughout their continuous use. This practice can be detrimental to the process of revising the training program if it relies heavily on assessment data for the inclusion or removal of items from the program. While it has been established that the anecdotal information gathered from supervisors is used in some way for ongoing training, there is no indication

or discussion of how the additional information provided by supervisors is utilized in the overall design of the training program and its assessment.

Current assessment literature indicates the use of both formative and summative evaluations for staff training (Grayson, 2012; Volkwein, 2003). Residential programs use their assessments in a formative manner to gather data that would aid in the improvement of the overall training experience for both the current year and future training processes. Residential programs can also utilize their assessment processes in the summative manner, to gather data that would aid in holding RAs accountable for the information presented, and for a measure and/or predictor of their ability to hold their positions effectively (Volkwein, 2003). None of the respondents' programs appeared to make any use of Bloom's Taxonomy or any other measurable model for the acquisition of knowledge, awareness, or skills. Instead, various evaluative measures existed that could collectively be applied to the acquisition of knowledge (the RAs' responses on surveys), awareness (the RAs' informal assessment data), and skills (the RAs' performance in such case studies as *Behind Closed Doors*) (Volkwein, 2003). Strong assessments include formative and summative evaluation measures and both direct and indirect measures of gathering assessment data (Shipman, 2003). However, even in the instances of those respondents who did not utilize sophisticated measures of assessment or did not collect multiple viewpoints of data, some data was better than no data (Schuh & Upcraft, 2000). While assessment data itself does not support or precipitate learning, as Suskie (2009) has shown, it should be used in some capacity as a tool by staff and administrators as a vehicle for improving learning.

### *Communication during Assessment Process*

This research found that residential programs kept the reporting and sharing of assessment data to a minimum, mostly sharing it only within the realm of their department, with professional and/or graduate staff, or up through a reporting chain within the department or division. In some instances, as reported by three interview participants, assessment data were reported externally from the department; to other departments within the same institution that aided in the creation of the assessment process; to other departments within the same institution that aided in the training program; or to individual outside presenters within the same institution. Information exchange was conducted in this manner as a means of providing those parties with information that was relevant to their own work with the residential life program. This study also found that information-sharing occurred with RA staff, as was specifically noted in three interview participants' programs, as a means to facilitate communication among the RAs and the department as a whole. There was no indication that any of the interview respondents or survey respondents shared any of the RA training assessment data beyond their respective institutions.

Each institution, while executing very similar training programs and using very similar methods, was essentially working in a silo in terms of program development because of the lack of information exchanged between or even within organizations. Because the only information exchange occurring between individuals existing in the same context, or with individuals who were removed from the residential program and the field of residence life and housing (ie: non-residence life presenters), there were no

opportunities to truly learn from others' work or gain a contextual understanding of challenges and advancements that were occurring in other, similar programs. It was evident that residential programs were creating open channels of communication within their own departments through the utilization of several different levels of staff, including professional, graduate and undergraduate, to discuss the training program and the feedback collected, giving them the opportunity to increase consistency and uniformity within the department. This is evidenced through the usage of informal data review periods, such as staff meetings, debrief sessions, subsequent in-services, and training reports within the department across several levels of staff. The results of this study suggest that practices such as this are imperative when planning significant structural changes to a training program based on assessment data; such changes require understanding and buy-in from all levels of the department.

Assessment research indicates that the data collected from the assessment process should be shared with stakeholders in order to inform them about the performance and vitality of the program and should also serve as a measure of accountability within the residential program itself (Volkwein, 2003). Assessment provides a standardized basis for decision-making for departments and divisions where fiscal resources or external accountability are strong factors in their programs' livelihoods (Schuh & Upcraft, 2000). Assessment also serves to provide oft-needed legitimization of a program's work to other partners (Schuh & Upcraft, 2000). In an industry that measures itself through best practices and benchmarks, it is critical that comparisons be made, either to peers or to external standards, as a means of contextualizing the assessment data and benchmarking

the program's successes (Schuh & Upcraft, 2000). Assessment should be used to determine the quality of the program for external and internal shareholders, and to give the program a voice during the upper administrative decisions about the direction of the program itself (Komives, 2003). None of the respondents in this study indicated that the data collected as part of their RA training assessment was used for either of those means specifically. While the research has made evident that these actions should be happening, this study gave no evidence to support the claim that this is already occurring.

Even beyond the external validation and knowledge exchange, it is critical for an organization to share assessment data in order to encourage learning from others and to establish standards for practice and growth (Schuh & Upcraft, 2000). Standards were first created for assessment under the auspice of collective action for the good of the industry and the field (CAS, 2006). Another reason for the establishment of standardized practices was the need to reduce or eliminate the *silo effect* (CAS, 2006). According to Schuh and Upcraft (2000), the data collected during assessment should be utilized internally to better inform and shift the strategic planning and visioning for residential programs, departments, or divisions (Schuh & Upcraft, 2000). Assessment all by itself is an insufficient condition for powerful learning and improvement (Shneider & Shulman, 2007, p. viii). It is not the assessment itself but how faculty, staff, and institutional leaders use it that leads to improvement in student learning (Suskie, 2009).

### Implications

This study has several important implications for departments and programs hosting RA training programs, irrespective of whether the departments and programs are

currently implementing assessment for their training programs. For all housing and residential life programs that host RAs and train those who enter that position, the data from this study provides an indication of the importance and function of program assessment. Whether assessment is used to measure the efficacy, personal development, preparation for role, or effectiveness of individual and overall training presentations, the program that does not assess is the program that loses an opportunity to learn.

### *Practice*

The data provided by interview respondents indicate that the sample was split evenly between evaluating the usefulness of the training sessions themselves and evaluating the RAs' ability to comprehend the session material. There were some departments that incorporated elements of both, but there was no comprehensive curricular design of RA training, thus no comprehensive curricular design extended to RA training assessment. This created a dissonance between the RAs' ability to apply appropriate learning styles to the content, and then to retain the necessary information. Consistent with previous literature (Bowman, 1985; Koch, 2012), the involvement of curricular design within RA training assessment is an important aspect of high-quality assessment. Curriculum design is the process by which each of the components of a curriculum is built into a cohesive and substantive entity in an effort to provide a framework for the practitioner, as defined by Ornstein (2004).

Interview respondents did not mention using any literature or educational theory as the foundation for their training programs. The most frequently used foundation was the RA position description, indicating the absence of scholarly texts, educational

theories, and/or benchmarking practices to inform their training programs and assessment. This finding supported the conclusion that training for RAs is not viewed within the traditional realm of student learning, and instead is forged from elements of student development, human resources training, and professional development. The focus on RA behavior as an indicator of the training's effectiveness suggests that departments and programs viewed the role of training in its most literal sense: on-the-job training. It is important to synthesize this perspective of the RA training program and its assessment, as this indicates the merit and value that the department placed upon the overall training program. RAs were viewed from a multi-faceted perspective as student leaders, employees, and learners, and, as this study suggests, their training programs must grow to meet each of those facets. In some of the programs described by interview respondents, a multi-faceted approach is being considered and attempted, and may fully emerge in the near future.

Curricular design in RA training programs and assessments is recommended as a result of this research. This is due, in part, to the need for those who design assessment programs to further develop a foundation of skills in curricular design, including “a full palette of significant learning goals, rich teaching and learning activities, effective feedback and assessment methods, and precise understanding of situational factors” (Koch, 2012, p. 161). The most apt justification of the need for curricular design for RA training programs and their evaluations is the knowledge that when RA Training programs are created on a foundation of a strong design and with full implementation, addressing both formative and summative evaluation methods, they are better positioned

to support student learning and student development through the creation of learning outcomes that are both “purposeful and holistic ... prepar[ing] students for satisfying and productive lifestyles, work, and civic participation” (Koch, 2012, p. 147).

The findings indicate that all RA training assessment processes were planned and executed by masters-level or higher residential life staff. While RA training assessment coordinators did possess masters-level or higher degrees, there were no respondents who indicated any formal training in curriculum design, curriculum assessment or assessment design. In creating an understanding of how the assessments were created, it is imperative to understand the educational and professional experience of the assessment coordinators responsible for its design. How professional staff constructed the assessment and what methods they utilized were a key component to understanding the overall phenomenon. Because those who were designated as the designers and coordinators of RA training were student affairs professionals, and not faculty who were formally trained in curricular design and/or instruction, current training programs are built upon a framework not tailored to curriculum and instructional design. This limited use of varied and diverse instructional methodology creates a potential learning barrier and limits the capability of the training program to reach all participants, contradicting the very foundation of student learning and development (Koch, 2012).

This study provides evidence that RA supervisors are the main executors of RA assessment. Although researchers and practitioners do not often emphasize this fact, this can be dangerous because these RA supervisors are usually new professionals or graduate students who are novices in assessment techniques. Additionally, these early-career

professionals commonly work in the department for only short periods of time which can limit or restrain the development of assessment procedure. This can lead to data loss, redundant efforts, and over-evaluation of student staff. These problems can hinder the growth and development of assessment programs and severely limit the breadth and depth of data collected, and its subsequent transferal and incorporation into future RA training programs. As Brown eluded in his interview, high turnover at this level can have implications for the success of the training program as a whole. Brown described how turnover within his department, specifically on the RA training coordinating committee, hindered its ability to retain any organizational history and context. The loss of this history and context meant that this committee started from scratch each year, re-collecting the data that were essential to its efforts to adequately train and prepare its student staff. As Brown stated, “This coming year, the committee shifts so much, we don’t have anyone from last year’s committee, because folks have moved on or left because there is turnover at the RLC level. I think some of that data does get forgotten” (Brown). Brown’s comment reinforced the previously discussed fact that those who serve in the capacity to train RAs are in entry-level professional or graduate-level positions.

A portion of the survey respondents (3 percent) indicated that they did not utilize formal or informal assessment of RA supervisors in any fashion. This finding indicates that there is not assessment occurring at those institutions for how the type of training programs, the learning that occurs, or the learning environments themselves ultimately impact the efficacy of the residential programs. Jones described how the assessment that her department undertook served as a gauge of the department’s progress, specifically in

facilitating the learning process for her student staff, and also as a measure of the progress her department has made toward the vision it has created for its training program. Jones specifically discussed how the evaluations gathered from RA training assessments provided her with that feedback, which was important to her as a department head. “I’m seeing a difference in the evaluations. I’m seeing a difference in the learning process. It has been a very effective way for me to see if our program’s progressing toward where I want it to go” (Jones). Jones described how by shifting her department’s assessment processes, she is able to discern a difference in the quality of data she is able to gather from the assessment, and how that data contributes to a better understanding of her department’s growth. Jones, along with several other interview respondents, expressed that she placed a great value in the data collected from the assessment as a measure of both the formative and summative growth of her department.

In order to promote a culture of benchmarking and practice-sharing for RA training assessments, RA training coordinators must be willing to provide their processes, practices, and data to their peers on the state, regional, and national levels, through presentations, publications, and other technological resource-sharing networks (Koch, 2012). Beyond that, RA training coordinators must be willing to form cooperative and collaborative relationships with campus partners and other university staff within their university systems. These relationships support the effort to create holistic training programs that provide staff with complex and diverse training on topics that run the gamut of the institutional environment, as well as a multifaceted assessment protocol to match the updated training model (Koch, 2012). Assessment must continue to grow and

develop as an essential element of the functional area of residential life and housing, as it creates a standard for which best practices are shared. For smaller institutions or those that have newer or less-established departments, or for those with few professional staff members, the probability is that assessment, however necessary, may not exist. An interview respondent, Jackson, whose institution would be considered a small-sized school, stated,

We wear multiple hats, and assessment is one of those areas that a small school tends to go on the back burner, as you might imagine. And for some reason, it's like one of those things where you know how to ride a bike but you know if you haven't ridden a bike for a long time, you feel really out of place. (Jackson)

Jackson went on to state the belief that assessment needed to be a greater area of emphasis, especially in the context of RA training methods and RA performance measures:

It has to be one of those things, in my opinion, that not only is there an expectation but there is an accountability component to it. The assessment can be very easily forgotten, and people can make excuses as they can think of as to why they're not resourced enough or they don't have time enough or, you know, they have other priorities enough not to do assessment. [But] You have to have strong leadership to kind of enforce the priority. (Jackson)

Jackson captures the challenge of appreciating the necessity of assessment as a tool and measure of positive growth, while also understanding the realistic constraints that exist for some departments. Jackson represents this challenge for departments and programs that struggle with resources, staffing, support or even vision, all of which directly impact

the department's ability to complete good assessment. The direction in which RA training coordinators need to move their efforts if they are to increase the efficacy of RA training programs is, according to Koch (2012), toward the pursuit of "rigorous and comprehensive assessments of student learning within their training programs to enhance student learning on their campuses as well as to contribute to the body of knowledge about paraprofessional training programs" (p. 162). Within programs that currently use RA training program assessment, staff can deepen learning experiences by incorporating "thoughtful learning assessments and program evaluations" (Koch, 2012, p. 162). Meanwhile, those programs that are orienting new staff to their current assessment models can better serve the reinvigoration of their assessment processes by utilizing "meaningful assessment and record keeping" (Koch, 2012, p. 162). This is due to its ability to provide a means for new staff "to understand why the training program is designed the way it is and make appropriate decisions to further contribute to student learning" (Koch, 2012, p. 162).

RA training assessment programs can also use technology to upgrade assessment processes, to match the technology within the training program. Further, the use of technology serves to eliminate user errors, delays, or other human-error factors. As data collection becomes more convenient for the participant and the recipient, it can be done with greater ease. It can reduce redundancy in distributing surveys and evaluations, as well as help to limit the costs of assessment to departments. However, the use of technology can also have drawbacks. It may cause oversaturation for RAs who are already over-exposed to technology, loss of information due to technological errors, and

software security issues. As articulated by interview participants, the shift to more technological applications in training and assessment was borne out of the need to do more teaching and have the RAs do more learning with fewer resources and less time.

Brown, an interview participant, stated,

We started shifting to incorporating modules as part of our training as a way to find ways to cut and we implemented that this year where we had about five different modules that RAs had to complete before, during or after training.  
(Brown)

The respondent further stated, “I think that’s helped, but they still have to take the time to do those modules. So it’s not fair to ask them to do it before training because they’re not working with us, but if they had to do it during training, that’s still time they have to take” (Brown). And in what has become the articulation of so many departments’ internal struggle to manage the balance between giving more and using less, the interview respondent stated,

I think we’re always looking at ways we can cut, what do they need to know? What do they need to know day one? What can they learn in week six and how can we spread that out? I think that’s a constant struggle we have with designing trainings and how you manage that information (Brown).

### *Policy*

There is an abundance of field-determined assessment standards to use in RA training assessment. In this study, the lack of assessment standards was made evident by the participants’ reports: specifically, zero percent of interview respondents used them,

and only 12 percent of survey respondents reported the use of any type of assessment standards. As previously mentioned, the Council for Advancement of Standards (CAS) is a highly endorsed professional association within the field that produces standards for student affairs programs, particularly housing and residential life programs. The standards govern staff selection as well as training and development, with specific attention to the assessment of training programs (CAS, 2006). CAS standards are endorsed by both ACUHO-I and ACPA, under which almost all residential programs reside (CAS, 2006). CAS standards are extensive, exhaustive, and tied to the underlying organizational accreditation program to which most student affairs divisions adhere, but which are noticeably absent in RA training assessment development. CAS standards outline the scope of an assessment program for housing and residential life departments and programs, expressly indicating that programs must conduct assessments on both a regular and continual basis. CAS employs several different types of measures to “determine whether and to what degree the stated mission, goals and student learning and development outcomes are being met” (CAS, 2006, p. 219). CAS standards are clear in that all assessments must provide opportunities for students to voice their concerns and needs, and must be comprehensive and sound (CAS, 2006). CAS also stipulates that the role of such assessment should be to inform and improve future programs and trainings, as well as to recognize staff performance (CAS, 2006).

As previously indicated by Green, Jones and Aloï (2008), strong assessment practices focuses intentionally on the communication processes that should be occurring once data has been collected, analyzed, and synthesized by departments, as a means to

evidence the department's contributions to the institution's mission of student learning. The reporting of assessment data should provide the department with the opportunity to discuss the attributes and progress of the training program, and convey to stakeholders evidence of student development and learning. The report should be indicative of the growth of the program and should provide foresight into the development of the program and its future vision. Green et al. (2008) also discussed the use of student learning outcomes as a means to better measure student learning and aid in the student learning assessment process. This method might prove pivotal to the growth of RA training assessment. As the study indicates, learning outcomes are already being utilized in assessment, and although currently only tied to position performance and competency, there exists the opportunity for it to be applied to the curricular approach as well. As curriculum design literature has established, student learning can be a multidimensional process, and thus assessment should have several dimensions as well, including cognitive and affective higher-level thinking domains (Green, Jones and Aloï, 2008). The creation and utilization of student learning outcomes invites collaboration among division and institutional partners, thus increasing assessment efforts, communication, and benchmarking among peers (Green, Jones and Aloï, 2008).

Additionally, Terenzini (1989) provides four basic dimensions of learning outcomes for student learning: "(1) knowledge (both breadth and depth) outcomes; (2) skills outcomes (including basic, higher-order and career-related skills); (3) attitudes and values outcomes; and (4) behavioral outcomes (what students do)" (Terenzini, 1989, p. 647). Each of these dimensions is evinced in the interview respondents' assessments, and

can also be triangulated by survey responses and document analyses. However, what has been made clear throughout this research is that the consistency and incorporation of all dimensions of outcomes within RA training assessment is noticeably lacking. While every department may not incorporate all dimensions into their vision for their training program or its corresponding assessment, the need to view training and its assessment as a phenomenon that includes all dimensions has been established. By incorporating the dimensions of student learning outcomes, departments and programs address the key components of training: the human resources (on-the-job training) component, the student development experiential learning component, and the student learning component. As a result, the training coordinators are better able to create assessments that are built utilizing outcomes and frameworks to gather and synthesize data.

By utilizing assessment practices, departments are able to improve organizational decision making, enhance departmental credibility, improve program-specific deficiencies, and possibly create opportunities to secure additional resources to meet their needs (Grandner, 1999). Additionally, assessment is vital to ensuring organizational credibility because it can increase the likelihood that the organization's decisions will be based more on "accurate information and less on untested assumptions" (p. 22), and that through the work of assessment, program success can be demonstrated unilaterally to students, faculty, parents, and senior administrators (Grandner, 1999). In short, more investigation must be conducted in the field of residential training program assessment in order to ascertain the current benchmark and standard of practice, or to determine the lack of one.

Astin (1993) provided several principles for good practice in assessing student learning that I find to be highly relevant to the discussion of how to frame policy or standards for RA training assessment processes. As stated previously, learning is a process that is varied, diverse, and unique to each learner. This is especially the case within the construct of RA training, because in this context, RAs' learning would be evinced both through the assessment and through their performance within the position. This is relevant to the assessment of RA training, as that data has the opportunity to be shared among students, staff, administrators, and outside partners, and must be expressed clearly and concisely, yet comprehensively. Within his principles, Astin (1993) emphasizes the importance of a dual focus for assessment, with it both addressing specific learning outcomes as well as the experiences that led to those outcomes. While student learning is the ultimate outcome, an understanding of how students learn and their experience while they learn is crucial to increasing students' learning and assisting their overall development as individuals. Both of those factors are critical to the RA training process, in which RAs are trained as leaders and developed as students, all while being taught as individuals. In this context, the assessments must be sophisticated enough to encompass each of these perspectives. Because each training experience is unique, it is important that there be connection between those unique experiences and the overall RA experience. Only then can insight and inferences be drawn on how to improve the overall training program and better capture the data necessary for understanding the RA experience.

Astin (1993) goes further to stipulate that good assessment is both representative of all stakeholders in the community, including assessment coordinators and participants. This is necessary in order to create a balanced data set that reflects the multiples sources that contribute to student learning. This is relevant when considering each of the campus and community partners that participate in an RA training program, even minimally, which should all be reflected and included in the corresponding assessment protocol. Because each partner makes a contribution in some way, each one's experience and feedback enables better understanding of the phenomenon as a whole. Assessment, while an agent for change, cannot be the only outlet that indicates or identifies necessary programmatic changes. Assessment should be the voice to which change and progress as a process is articulated, as well as serve to confirm or reinforce other indicators of necessary change. This is relevant to RA training in that the assessment data cannot and should not be the only indication for changes to be made within the program; instead, it should be used to support and articulate what changes can be made and to provide guidance on how to make those changes.

Especially relevant to RA training, strong assessment provides a residence life program with the opportunity to clearly define its contribution to the mission and vision of student learning for its institution, as well as to articulate how it impacts the student experience. It is critical that RA training assessment be able to communicate that information, with various groups and levels, in order that support can be gained, benchmarks can be established or enhanced, and the body of literature can be strengthened. Within his guidelines, Astin (1993) provided a strong framework on which

to develop policy in the realm of RA training assessment. With the adoption of a framework that is comprehensive without being overly complex, departments and programs have the opportunity to seamlessly shift away from their current assessment practices, leading to a more successful transition.

### *Future Research*

This study illuminates the current practices within residential departments and programs in the southeastern United States regarding RA training assessment. This study, by measuring current practices in RA training assessment, shows the need for future research in this area. As has been noted throughout the study, there is a lack of research on RA training assessment, with the most recent work addressing a similar topic being Koch's (2012) study of RA training methods, an update to Bowman's (1985) original research.

The next step of this project will be to expand the study to the entire ACUHO-I membership, which would include upwards of 900 participating institutions. This study should survey a larger population on current RA training assessment practices, and thus the data will be more generalizable, on the same standing as influential research on RA training programs (Bowman, 1985; Koch, 2012) and RA stress and job satisfaction (Dickson, 1975; Frame, 2009). Additionally, future research should plan to expand the study to take a longitudinal view of selected institutions nationally, with a 3-5 year perspective to evaluate trends in RA training assessment and its impact on the growth and development of an RA training program as well as a housing and residential life department or program. This study should be conducted with a limited sample, and

should include qualitative and quantitative methods to ensure triangulation of data. This expanded study should plan to utilize current practices in comparison to CAS Standards for Resident Assistant Training assessment, to benchmark or assess the progress of residential programs in comparison to nationally accepted standards and expectations. While CAS is not mandated or required, the failure to implement the CAS standards on the part of departments or programs that operate under institutional assessment and certification seems incongruous.

This research evidenced the limited scope of current RA training assessment, showing the overwhelming focus on formal assessment for RA staff. This finding highlights the challenge that, by only utilizing undergraduate staff within an assessment, departments and programs are operating from only one formal perspective. While the study did find that the use of informal assessment data from professional and graduate staff was more prevalent than anticipated, there is still significant work to be done in developing an assessment design that is both holistic and representative of the training programs' partners and stakeholders. In order to gain a perspective that is both rich and contextual, it is necessary for RA training programs to model an assessment that will seek to gather data from multiple, layered sources and in various formats. Thus, in future research, additional study should use an expanded version of the survey instrument to include additional questions aimed at understanding the professional role in the RA training assessment, as well as the graduate student role, both as RA supervisors and presenters of RA training content. RA training assessment as a research subject requires an understanding of the prevalence and scope of current assessment measures in order to

appreciate its role in the overall efficacy of residential programs within colleges and universities. Without an understanding of professional and graduate staff, and without the quantitative data to enable that understanding, RA training assessment can only be viewed from the perspective of the recipient and not the provider.

In addition to those quantitative extensions of this research, additional research should also plan to expand the research qualitatively and investigate the design and implementation of assessment, as well as the dominant usage of informal assessment for professional staff and the virtual absence of formal assessment for professional staff. This can be done by extending the current interview questions, as well as incorporating a larger sample by which to gather information and limiting interviews to RA training coordinators exclusively, so as to better establish causality and correlations between motivations and findings. As long as the practice of RA training assessment does not include a formal assessment of those who serve in coordinator, presenter, and supervisor roles for a training that constitutes a great deal of the oversight within their positions, only one side of the data is being reported.

In future research, there should be an incorporation of an additional survey or additional interview questions to address the role of external or campus partners in the assessment process for RA training programs, whether formal or informal, as that relationship is tenuous and unclearly defined. While this topic was addressed in the survey instrument, there is a need for additional research in this vein, considering the amount of content that RAs receive from non-HRL departments, offices, or programs in order to effectively perform in their roles. Additionally, as evidenced by the data,

assessments of RA training overwhelmingly focus on the competency of RAs to manage the multiple facets of their position, of which the resources and training necessary for them to succeed is provided by campus partners or external entities.

This study has highlighted that though residential departments and programs are assessing their training programs for residential student staff, and though they focus on how to improve their training processes, it is clear that there is little to no sharing of that information. It is evident that there must be an intentional focus on creating a culture of practice sharing in the realm of RA training, specifically in the area of assessment. Until practices are shared and progress is articulated on a consistent stage or platform—whether that is through presentations, publications, or partnerships—the advancement and evolution of our craft remains underdeveloped. Additional research on RA training assessment is a desperate need, as there is very little relevant literature for current practitioners to utilize as benchmarks or foundations for practice. It has been made clear that the incorporation of existent standardized assessment processes and practices, such as EBI and CAS Standards, is simply not occurring in this realm. Without the utilization of those standards to guide our practices and benchmark our progress, practitioners will continue to lack a vital component that is necessary to reaching the next level of innovation with staff training and development.

This study also makes evident that while the field of student affairs has gone to great lengths to articulate and formalize standards for its work, as practitioners, we are moving at a much slower rate to utilize those standards as benchmarks or foundations for our programs' operations. We work within a field that progresses through the utilization

of best practices and practice sharing, but practitioners are not applying either of those actions to RA training assessment. I have found prior research on the format and delivery of RA training to be the most indicative of the progress that we have reached in this area. The point was best articulated by Koch (2012): “Higher education leaders have challenged student affairs practitioners to see ourselves as educators and rethink our role as facilitators of student development and learning” (Koch, 2012, p. 170).

### Significance of the Study

The success of the on-campus living experience is of paramount importance to a residential student, and the potential of this experience to provide the student with invaluable resources is evident (Johnson & Parker, 2008). As stated in CAS (2006), the benefits of a positive residential experience have several facets:

Students living in residence halls participate in more extracurricular, social and cultural events; are more likely to graduate; and exhibit greater positive gains in psychosocial development, intellectual orientation, and self-concept than students living at home or commuting. In addition, they demonstrate significantly greater increases in aesthetic, cultural and intellectual values; social and political liberalism; and secularism (CAS, 2006, p. 3)

The success of the on-campus living experience is dependent upon the skill, abilities, and knowledge of the residential staff that are responsible for guiding that experience. As more and more positions are created, the need for successful recruiting and training of individuals to be successful in those roles, and the challenge of doing so will be

increasingly apparent. This work is critical to the success of the staff as a whole (Johnson & Parker, 2008).

A student staff member's ability to understand, within the context of its own community, the nature of student development, crisis management, and conflict resolution, as well as their ability to provide social, cultural, and environmental stability and growth, directly contribute to the health of the on-campus community. Residence life departments or programs' understanding of their staff performance is vital to ensuring that the right staff is in the right place, doing the right things. This understanding, as it stands, is based upon carefully determined markers of performance, as highlighted in training and examined in evaluations. The evidence of this understanding and its transmission to student staff during training and staff development are best captured in assessment measures employed by the residence life department. However, as this study has discussed, the ways in which those measures are employed, reported, discussed, and eventually utilized remains inconsistent from institution to institution, from region to region, and even from academic year to academic year.

Without an intellectual body of past and current knowledge to inform current best practices in residence life and housing, this field cannot be measured according to any significant, consistent, and reliable benchmark (Koch, 2012). Despite the intensity and purpose with which residence life departments and programs share the knowledge, skills, and experience of other facets of their programs, there is far less consensus and best practice-sharing as it relates to how student staff training is evaluated, and how those evaluations come to shape student staff training. The presence of this data and the

information it can provide can improve the credibility of the department or program, regardless of whether the information or data collected is positive or negative, because it allows the department or organization to be informed (Grandner, 1999).

Residence life programs are on the cusp of great transformational and structural changes in response to several significant shifts in how universities operate in the business of on-campus housing. Specifically, residence life programs are facing significant changes to their structure brought about by external factors, such as occupancy and facilities changes, technology-influenced advances, and a more competitive, customer-service driven market. Also, residence life programs face internal factors that are causing significant change, including personnel changes, updated or new programmatic structures, utilization of more graduate student staff in the halls, and significant shifts in reporting structures (Abramson, 2012).

In each of those areas, residence life departments and programs are finding themselves searching for new ways to produce greater results with fewer materials; more output in less time. Couple the growth in those areas with shrinking federal and state allotments, as well as increased student-to-staff ratios, and departments find themselves pressed to prove their necessity and usefulness on what can begin to feel like a daily basis. As Schuh and Upcraft (2000) best articulated, “we may not know what we mean by assessment, or why we should assess, or what to assess, or how to assess, or how to use assessment, but we all feel the pressure to assess” (Schuh & Upcraft, 2000, p. 3).

Determining how assessment plays into those increased expectations for performance is critical for the maintenance, and the growth, of a residential program. Specifically,

assessments of how student staffs are being trained, which resources they are provided, and how well equipped they are to respond are vital to continuing to prove how indispensable residential staff are to the on-campus living experience. Research in this vein is necessary and pertinent, not only for the immediate impact that it can have on student staff training and development methods and procedures, but also for the implications it can have on current assessment practices within residence life departments and programs.

The findings have the potential to provide a platform upon which RA educators may benchmark their training programs and prompt future researchers to delve deeper as well as the findings may also offer a useful roadmap for designers of RA training programs to develop integrated approaches to student learning and development. (Koch, 2011, p. 1)

By understanding how departments and programs assess their student staff training, as well as how that information is shared after its collection and analysis, the field is afforded valuable insight and a body of knowledge into an area not yet investigated. It is absolutely critical to ascertain how residential departments and programs gather this information, from which it is gathered, what is done with it once it is collected, why or why not this use of the data is made.

#### Summary

The findings from this research offer a number of practical insights for the field of RA training and the assessment of that training. Specifically, given the varying roles that

RA training plays as a human resources process, a student development experience, and an educational experience, it is imperative that its corresponding assessment be as complex and as varied as possible. Additionally, this study reveals the need for RA training assessment to become a process that is integrated into and embedded within the overall training program, pulling from multiple sources and various perspectives through diverse means. This finding is evidenced by the experiences of the study's respondents and corroborated by the assessment literature. Further, the importance of benchmarking and peer-network communication for assessment practices and data by departments and programs as a means to add a level of legitimacy and innovation into the field of residence life and housing as a whole has been evidenced. Finally, the possibility of incorporating governing agency standards, frameworks, or competencies as a means of giving training program assessments the necessary depth and dexterity to lend to their progression and development has been explored as well. In each of these areas, it has been made evident that there is more research and field exploration to be done.

It is my hope that in the same manner that this field has explored the importance of curricular design for living learning communities and residential education initiatives, it will also explore the need for curricular design to be employed in both RA training and its corresponding assessments. For a field that is fueled by student staff members, who often comprise more than 75 percent of the total staff, missing this component is not an option. Research in this area cannot stop; its terrain must continually be reconstructed, contextualized, and connected to the work that is happening on campuses across the

United States. The future growth of the higher education industry requires it, and the livelihoods of its members depend on it.

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APPENDIX A

Institutional Research Board Approval



*Institutional Review Board (IRB)*  
*for the Protection of Human Research*  
*Participants*

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PROTOCOL                      IRB-02960-2013      INVESTIGATOR:    Janine Weaver- Douglas

NUMBER:

PROJECT TITLE:    Making Meaning of Assessment: The Role and Usage of Assessment in Resident  
Assistant Training

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**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:**

This research protocol is **exempt** from Institutional Review Board oversight under Exemption Category(ies)  
2. You may begin your study immediately. If the nature of the research project changes such that exemption  
criteria may no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator ([irb@valdosta.edu](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu)) before  
continuing your research.

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/SUGGESTIONS:**

Although not a requirement for exemption, the following suggestions are offered by the IRB Administrator  
to enhance the protection of participants and/or strengthen the research proposal:

**none**

If this box is checked, please submit any documents you revise to the IRB Administrator at  
[irb@valdosta.edu](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu) to ensure an updated record of your exemption.

*Elizabeth W. Olphie                      6/19/15*

***Thank you for submitting an IRB application.***

Elizabeth W. Olphie, IRB Administrator                      Date

***Please direct questions to [irb@valdosta.edu](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu) or 229-259-5045.***

APPENDIX B

Letter of Approval from SEAHO President



SOUTHEASTERN ASSOCIATION OF HOUSING OFFICERS

July 2, 2013

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter in my role as President-Elect of SEAHO. Our President, Ms. Maggie Evans, is currently out of the country. As a result, I am responding to Ms. Weaver-Douglas' request related to her survey to the membership of SEAHO.

SEAHO (the Southeastern Association of Housing Officers) is a regional affiliate of ACUHO-I (Association of College and University Housing Officers International). The membership consists of those professionals working in Housing and Residence Life programs at colleges and universities from 10 states. The mission of SEAHO is to provide "professional development, networking, and involvement opportunities for staff and student leaders working in college and university housing programs as they develop and maintain quality services, programs, and community experiences for those living on campus." In fulfilling this mission, SEAHO is supportive of efforts to discover new information and then utilize this information to determine best practices for the Housing profession.

In this light, SEAHO is supportive of Ms. Weaver-Douglas' request to survey the members of SEAHO for her dissertation work. To distribute this voluntary survey, Ms. Weaver-Douglas will utilize the standard mechanism used to disseminate information throughout the organization. The information from Ms. Weaver-Douglas is distributed to the individual State Representatives and then distributed within each State using established listservs or e-mail groups.

Our only request is that upon the conclusion of her research, Ms. Weaver-Douglas share her conclusions and/or recommendations with the SEAHO membership either through publication in our *SEAHO Report* or presenting at our annual conference.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim Blair". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "T".

Tim Blair,  
President Elect, SEAHO

APPENDIX C

Recruitment Emails

From: Janine M. Weaver-Douglas

Subject: Participation in a Doctoral Study for RA Training Assessment Methods

My name is Janine M. Weaver-Douglas and I am currently pursuing my EdD in Educational Leadership with a concentration in Higher Education at Valdosta State University. I am also currently a full-time housing professional with over 5 years of experience in residential education and housing services. My dissertation research focuses specifically on current departmental practices in RA training assessment, and I am soliciting your assistance in those research efforts.

RA training exists as a necessary component of the success and continuance of our field, and consistently remains to be an aspect of our profession to which there is little to no current research regarding how and why we train RAs in the ways that we do. There is a need within our community to understand the role of assessment in the training of RA staff, and how assessment informs our practices. To complete my degree, I am conducting a study that will explore current assessment practices for RA Training. *Your participation in this study will not only assist in my research efforts, but more importantly, add value and understanding to the awareness and practice of assessment within our field.*

I am seeking to survey housing and residential life departments regarding their assessment practices for departmental RA training for the **2012-2013 academic year**. If you chose to participate in this study, you will complete an anonymous survey via the link provided, and submit documents or templates from your assessment practices.

The survey can be accessed via the following link beginning **September 16, 2013** and will remain open for 2 weeks, or no later than **September 30, 2013**.

[http://ncsu.qualtrics.com//SE/?SID=SV\\_000Wx99PhrhJEe9](http://ncsu.qualtrics.com//SE/?SID=SV_000Wx99PhrhJEe9)

I hope you will consider participating in this study. If you are not the best person in your department to complete this survey, I ask that you consider forwarding this email and all other correspondences to the appropriate person in your department. Please also feel free to forward this letter to others in the field who meet the study requirements.

Thank you for your consideration of participation in the study, and please feel free to contact me should you have any questions regarding the study or your participation

Greetings SEAHO!

My name is Janine M. Weaver-Douglas and I am currently pursuing my EdD in Educational Leadership with a concentration in Higher Education at Valdosta State University. I am also currently a full-time housing professional with over 5 years of experience in residential education and housing services. My dissertation research focuses specifically on current departmental practices in RA training assessment, and I am soliciting your assistance in those research efforts. I received your email address from the CHO list-serve provided on the SEAHO webpage ([www.seaho.org](http://www.seaho.org)).

RA training exists as a necessary component of the success and continuance of our field, and consistently remains to be an aspect of our profession to which there is little to no current research regarding how and why we train RAs in the ways that we do. There is a need within our community to understand the role of assessment in the training of RA staff, and how assessment informs our practices. To complete my degree, I am conducting a study that will explore current assessment practices for RA Training. *Your participation in this study will not only assist in my research efforts, but more importantly, add value and understanding to the awareness and practice of assessment within our field.*

I am seeking to survey housing and residential life departments regarding their assessment practices for departmental RA training for the **2012-2013 academic year**. If you chose to participate in this study, you will complete an anonymous survey via the link provided, and submit documents or templates from your assessment practices.

The survey can be accessed via the following link beginning **September 16, 2013** and will remain open for 2 weeks, or no later than **September 30, 2013**.

[http://ncsu.qualtrics.com//SE/?SID=SV\\_000Wx99PhrhJEe9](http://ncsu.qualtrics.com//SE/?SID=SV_000Wx99PhrhJEe9)

I hope you will consider participating in this study. Understandably as the CHO, you may not have time permitted to participate fully, for which I ask that you consider forwarding this email and all other correspondences to the appropriate designee in your department. Please also feel free to forward this letter to others in the field who meet the study requirements.

Thank you for your consideration of participation in the study, and please feel free to contact me should you have any questions regarding the study or your participation!

APPENDIX D  
Survey Instrument

You are being asked to participate in a research project entitled Making Meaning of Assessment: The Role and Usage of Assessment in Resident Assistant Training. This research project is being conducted by Janine M. Weaver-Douglas, a doctoral candidate in The Department of Curriculum, Leadership and Technology at Valdosta State University.

This survey is anonymous. No one, including the researcher, will be able to associate your responses with your identity. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to take the survey, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. Should you agree to participate in a follow up interview, the researcher alone will be able to associate the responses with your identity.

You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your completion of the survey serves as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 or older.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to **Janine M. Weaver-Douglas at PHONE NUMBER or EMAIL**. This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants.

If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-333-7837 or [irb@valdosta.edu](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu).

Q1 By proceeding to the survey questions, you are indicating that you have read the information provided above, and agree to participate in this research study.

- I agree (1)
- I DO NOT agree (2)

Q2 Note: The abbreviation RA is used throughout this survey to represent paraprofessional student staff who are employed by residential life and/or housing departments with titles such as Resident Assistant, Resident Advisor, or Community Assistant. All questions in this survey pertain only to the assessment of the RA training program provided to students who worked in your department during the 2012-13 academic year.

Q3 Please answer the following questions about where you currently work by selecting the response which best describes your institution. If you do not know or wish not to provide this information, please respond "Prefer not to respond".

- Public, 4-year (1)
- Private, 4-year, independent (2)
- Private, 4-year, faith-based (3)
- Public, 2-year (4)
- Private, 2-year (5)
- Prefer not to respond (6)

Q4 What is your institution's undergraduate housing capacity? If you do not know or wish not to provide this information, please respond "Prefer not to respond".

- Less than 1,000 (1)
- 1,000-1,499 (2)
- 1,500-1,999 (3)

- 2,000-2,499 (4)
- 2,500-2,999 (5)
- 3,000-3,999 (6)
- 4,000-4,999 (7)
- 5,000-5,999 (8)
- 6,000-6,999 (9)
- 7,000-9,999 (10)
- 10,000 or more (11)
- Prefer not to respond (12)

Q5 How many RAs work in your department? If you do not know or wish not to provide this information, please respond "Prefer not to respond".

- Less than 50 (1)
- 50-99 (2)
- 100-199 (3)
- 200-299 (4)
- 300-399 (5)
- 400 or more (6)
- Prefer not to respond (7)

Q6 On average, each RA is responsible for \_\_\_ students. If you do not know or wish not to provide this information, please respond "Prefer not to respond".

- Less than 20 (1)
- 20-29 (2)
- 30-39 (3)
- 40-49 (4)
- 50-59 (5)
- 60-75 (6)
- 75 or more (7)
- Prefer not to respond (8)

Q7 In which state in the SEAHO region is your institution located? If you wish not to provide this information, please respond "Prefer not to respond".

- Alabama (1)
- Florida (2)
- Georgia (3)
- Kentucky (4)
- Louisiana (5)
- Mississippi (6)
- North Carolina (7)
- South Carolina (8)
- Tennessee (9)
- Virginia (10)

- Prefer not to respond (11)

Q8 Were you responsible for or participate in planning and implementing RA training on your campus for RAs who served during the 2012-13 academic year? If you wish not to provide this information, please respond "Prefer not to respond".

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Prefer not to respond (3)

Q9 Are you able to answer detailed questions regarding your institution's 2012-13 RA training program? If you wish not to provide this information, please respond "Prefer not to respond".

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Prefer not to respond (3)

Q10 Did you use any of the following components in your RA training program? If you do not know or wish not to provide this information, please respond "Prefer not to respond".

	Yes (1)	No (2)	Prefer not to respond (3)
For-credit academic course: A multi-week, formal training experience that is for-credit. (1)			
Not-for-credit academic-style course: A multi-week, formal training experience that is not-for-credit. (2)			
Pre-service training: Single to multi-day intensive experience occurring immediately prior to beginning the RA experience (3)			
In-service training: Generally brief sessions (1-2 hours) scheduled regularly (during or in addition to staff meetings) occurring after the RA has begun the job. (4)			
Institution-developed online training: Campus specific topical modules provided through a course management system such as Blackboard. (5)			
Commercial online training: Topical modules developed by a commercial provider (e.g., ResLife.net, StudentAffairs.com). (6)			

Q11 Did your department assess the effectiveness of RA Training during the 2012-13 academic year?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Prefer not to respond (3)

Q12 Did your department utilize a corporate, agency, governing body or institutional assessment program or policy in the formal or informal assessment of RA training during the 2012-13 academic year? Example: CAS Standards, EBI, etc.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Prefer not to respond (3)

Q13 If you responded "YES" to the previous question, please describe the assessment program or policy used in the assessment of RA Training during the 2012-13 academic year.

Q14 Did your department utilize formal or informal assessment of RA Training during the 2012-13 academic year? Formal assessment is defined as an organized process by which students and/or staff provide feedback and are assessed in connection with a specific function of the RA training program. Informal assessment is defined as unorganized, organic or non-systemic collection of data from students and/or staff in connection with any function of the RA training program. If you do not know or wish not to provide this information, please respond "Prefer not to respond".

- Formal (1)
- Informal (2)
- Both (3)
- Neither (4)
- Prefer not to answer (5)

Q15 Please indicate which of the following were assessed as part of your department's 2012-13 RA Training program. If you do not know or wish not to provide this information, please respond "Prefer not to respond".

	Yes (1)	No (2)	Prefer not to respond (3)
For-credit academic course: A multi-week, formal training experience that is for-credit. (1)			
Not-for-credit academic-style course: A multi-week, formal training experience that is not-for-credit. (2)			
Pre-service training: Single to multi-day intensive experience occurring immediately prior to beginning the RA experience (3)			
In-service training: Generally brief sessions (1-2 hours) scheduled regularly (during or in addition to staff meetings) occurring after the RA has begun the job. (4)			
Institution-developed online training: Campus specific topical modules provided through a course management system such as Blackboard. (5)			
Commercial online training: Topical modules developed by a commercial provider (e.g., ResLife.net, StudentAffairs.com). (6)			

Q16 Please indicate which of the following were part of a formal assessment as part of your department's 2012-13 RA Training program. Formal assessment is defined as an organized process by which students and/or staff provide feedback and are assessed in connection with a specific function of the RA training program. If you do not know or wish not to provide this information, please respond "Prefer not to respond".

	Yes (1)	No (2)	Prefer not to respond (3)
For-credit academic course: A multi-week, formal training experience that is for-credit. (1)			
Not-for-credit academic-style course: A multi-week, formal training experience that is not-for-credit. (2)			
Pre-service training: Single to multi-day intensive experience occurring immediately prior to beginning the RA experience (3)			
In-service training: Generally brief sessions (1-2 hours) scheduled regularly (during or in addition to staff meetings) occurring after the RA has begun the job. (4)			
Institution-developed online training: Campus specific topical modules provided through a course management system such as Blackboard. (5)			
Commercial online training: Topical modules developed by a commercial provider			

(e.g., ResLife.net, StudentAffairs.com). (6)			
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Q17 Please indicate which of the following were part of an informal assessment as part of your department's 2012-13 RA Training program. Informal assessment is defined as unorganized, organic or non-systemic collection of data from students and/or staff in connection with any function of the RA training program. If you do not know or wish not to provide this information, please respond "Prefer not to respond".

	Yes (1)	No (2)	Prefer not to respond (3)
For-credit academic course: A multi-week, formal training experience that is for-credit. (1)			
Not-for-credit academic-style course: A multi-week, formal training experience that is not-for-credit. (2)			
Pre-service training: Single to multi-day intensive experience occurring immediately prior to beginning the RA experience (3)			
In-service training: Generally brief sessions (1-2 hours) scheduled regularly (during or in addition to staff meetings) occurring after the RA has begun the job. (4)			
Institution-developed online training: Campus specific topical modules provided through a course management system such as Blackboard. (5)			

Commercial online training: Topical modules developed by a commercial provider (e.g., ResLife.net, StudentAffairs.com). (6)			
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Q18 Please describe the process for which you gathered formal assessment data for RA Training in the 2012-2013 academic year.

Q19 Please describe the process for which you gathered informal assessment data for RA Training in the 2012-13 academic year.

Q20 How frequently, if at all, did you use any of the following strategies to assess your 2012-13 RA program? If you do not know or wish not to provide this information, please respond "Prefer not to respond".

	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Most of the Time (4)	Always (5)
Paper and pencil post training evaluations (1)					
Online post training surveys/evaluations (2)					
Focus groups (3)					
Collected oral feedback at a staff meeting (4)					
Retention statistics (5)					
Statistics on RAs with performance concerns (6)					

Q21 Did you use the assessment data collected from the 2012-13 academic year in the RA Training planning or execution process for the 2013-14 academic year? If you do not know or wish not to provide this information, please respond "Prefer not to respond".

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Prefer not to respond (3)

Q22 Did you use technology to assess RA Training for the 2012-13 academic year? If you do not know or wish not to provide this information, please respond "Prefer not to respond".

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Prefer not to respond (3)

Q23 Did you use social media to assess RA Training for the 2012-13 academic year? If you do not know or wish not to provide this information, please respond "Prefer not to respond".

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Prefer not to respond (3)

Q24 Please describe how your department analyzed assessment data collected from RA Training for the 2012-13 academic year. If you do not know or wish not to provide this information, please respond "Prefer not to respond".

Q25 Please describe how your department used technology and/or social media to assess RA Training for the 2012-13 academic year. If you do not know or wish not to provide this information, please respond "Prefer not to respond".

Q26 Please describe how your department used the 2012-13 RA Training assessment data in your current or future processes. If you do not know or wish not to provide this information, please respond "Prefer not to respond".

Q27 Please identify which of the following groups were presenters during your RA training for the 2012-13 academic year. If you do not know or wish not to provide this information, please respond "Prefer not to respond".

	Yes (1)	No (2)	Prefer not to respond (3)
RAs (1)			
Graduate level RA supervisors (2)			
Professional level RA supervisors (3)			
Professional HRL staff (4)			
Internal Presenters (5)			
External Presenters (6)			
Campus Partners (7)			
Community Partners (8)			

Other (9)			
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Q28 Please describe any presenters that participated in RA Training for the 2012-13 academic year that are not identified in the previous question. Please include their position, their department or agency, and the presentation they facilitated. Example: The University President presented a session on the Strategic Plan of the University.

Q29 Please identify which of the following groups were included in your formal assessment of RA training for the 2012-13 academic year. If you do not know or wish not to provide this information, please respond "Prefer not to respond".

	Yes (1)	No (2)	Prefer not to respond (3)
RAs (1)			
Graduate level RA supervisors (2)			
Professional level RA supervisors (3)			
Professional HRL staff (4)			
Internal Presenters (5)			
External Presenters (6)			
Campus Partners (7)			
Community Partners (8)			
Other (9)			

Q30 Please identify which of the following groups were included in your informal assessment of RA training for the 2012-13 academic year. If you do not know or wish not to provide this information, please respond "Prefer not to respond".

	Yes (1)	No (2)	Prefer not to respond (3)
RAs (1)			
Graduate level RA supervisors (2)			
Professional level RA supervisors (3)			
Professional HRL staff (4)			
Internal Presenters (5)			
External Presenters (6)			
Campus Partners (7)			
Community Partners (8)			
Other (9)			

Q31 OPTIONAL: Please answer the following questions if you are willing to be contacted for an individual follow-up interview regarding your survey responses. YOUR PARTICIPATION IN FOLLOW UP INTERVIEWS IS COMPLETELY VOLUNTARY AND WILL NOT AFFECT THE DATA YOU HAVE PROVIDED AS PART OF THIS SURVEY.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Prefer not to respond (3)

Q32 Name (please use the following format: LAST NAME, FIRST NAME)

Q33 Position Title

Q34 Institution

Q35 Contact Phone Number (please use the following format: 000-000-0000)

- Click to write Choice 1 (1)
- Click to write Choice 2 (2)
- Click to write Choice 3 (3)

Q36 Contact Email Address (please use the following format:

[email@institution.edu](mailto:email@institution.edu))

Q37 Please attach examples of your RA Training assessments and/or evaluations from the 2012-13 academic year. This can include copies of the evaluations, reports with specific data obtained, an outline of your assessment processes, and any other applicable documents that would describe the timeline or process of assessment for RA training in

your department. You may remove any institutional or departmental information, or you may retain it, as it will not be linked to a respondent.

ATTACH DOCUMENTATION HERE.

Q38 Thank you for your participation in this survey! Your willingness to provide critical information in this study helps to further advance the practices and growth of the field of housing and residential life!

***Your survey has been submitted. Thank you for your participation!!***

APPENDIX E

Interview Participants Communications

Good evening!

You are receiving this email due to indicating your willingness to participate in a follow-up interview for the following dissertation research study:

**Making Meaning of Assessment: The Role and Usage of Assessment in Resident Assistant Training**

*This research project is being conducted by Janine M. Weaver-Douglas, a doctoral candidate in The Department of Curriculum, Leadership and Technology at Valdosta State University.*

I am emailing to again confirm your willingness to participate in a short phone interview (45-60 minutes) conducted during the following time frame:

**September 30-October 11**

If you are still willing and are able to participate in an interview during those dates, *please complete the linked Google Form at your earliest convenience, but no later than **Wednesday, October 2***, with your **1st, 2nd, and 3rd** preferences:

**<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/12DAU7Co-kosr4ddfjbPdI-45Xj8ImYftFCHjsZv8Ios/viewform>**

Thank you again for your willingness to participate in this research and provide invaluable information and resources about current RA Training assessment practices!

Should you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me via email at EMAIL or via phone at PHONE NUMBER.

## Dissertation Survey Follow-Up Interview

You are being asked to participate in a follow-up interview as part of a research project entitled: Making Meaning of Assessment: The Role and Usage of Assessment in Resident Assistant Training. This research project is being conducted by Janine M. Weaver-Douglas, a doctoral candidate in The Department of Curriculum, Leadership and Technology at Valdosta State University.

In the form below, please indicate your FIRST, SECOND and THIRD preferences for interview times. Interviews will be conducted between the following dates:

September 30- October 11, 2013

The interview will take approximately 60 minutes, and will ask clarifying questions regarding your responses and documents of training assessments provided to me via the survey. I will be recording the interview, and all data will be kept confidential.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Janine M. Weaver- Douglas at 912-572.2675 or [jmweaverdouglas@valdosta.edu](mailto:jmweaverdouglas@valdosta.edu).

Please be advised that you will receive a confirmation email within 24 hours of your submission, which will serve as confirmation of your scheduled interview time. Should you not receive an email within 24 hours, your interview time has not yet been confirmed.

### \* Required

1. Please provide your first and last name \* please use the following format: LAST NAME, FIRST NAME
  
2. Please provide your position title. \*
  
3. Please provide your Institution Name. \*
  
4. Please provide your PREFERRED contact number. \*  
please use the following format: 000-000-0000
  
5. Please provide a SECONDARY contact number.  
\*

please use the following format: 000-000-0000

6. Please indicate your time zone. (IE: Eastern, Central, Mountain, Pacific) \*

please use the following format: EST, CST, MST, PST

7. Please select your FIRST CHOICE interview time and date. \* all times are EASTERN STANDARD TIME.

Monday, 9/30 4p-5p  
Monday, 9/30 5p-6p  
Tuesday, 10/1 9a-10a  
Tuesday, 10/1 10a-11a  
Tuesday, 10/1 11a-12p  
Tuesday, 10/1 12p-1p  
Tuesday, 10/1 6p-7p  
Tuesday, 10/1 7p-8p  
Tuesday, 10/1 8p-9p  
Wednesday, 10/2 2p-3p  
Wednesday, 10/2 3p-4p  
Wednesday, 10/2 4p-5p  
Wednesday, 10/2 7p-8p  
Monday, 10/7 9a-10a  
Monday, 10/7 10a-11a  
Monday, 10/7 4p-5p  
Monday, 10/7 5p-6p  
Monday, 10/7 6p-7p  
Tuesday, 10/8 9a-10a  
Tuesday, 10/8 10a-11a  
Tuesday, 10/8 6p-7p  
Tuesday, 10/8 7p-8p  
Tuesday, 10/8 8p-9p  
Wednesday 10/9 4p-5p  
Wednesday 10/9 5p-6p  
Wednesday 10/9 6p-7p  
Wednesday 10/9 7p-8p

8. Please select your SECOND CHOICE interview time and date. \* all times are EASTERN STANDARD TIME.

Monday, 9/30 4p-5p  
Monday, 9/30 5p-6p  
Tuesday, 10/1 9a-10a  
Tuesday, 10/1 10a-11a  
Tuesday, 10/1 11a-12p  
Tuesday, 10/1 12p-1p  
Tuesday, 10/1 6p-7p  
Tuesday, 10/1 7p-8p  
Tuesday, 10/1 8p-9p  
Wednesday, 10/2 2p-3p  
Wednesday, 10/2 3p-4p  
Wednesday, 10/2 4p-5p  
Wednesday, 10/2 7p-8p  
Monday, 10/7 9a-10a  
Monday, 10/7 10a-11a  
Monday, 10/7 4p-5p  
Monday, 10/7 5p-6p

Monday, 10/7 6p-7p  
Tuesday, 10/8 9a-10a  
Tuesday, 10/8 10a-11a  
Tuesday, 10/8 6p-7p  
Tuesday, 10/8 7p-8p  
Tuesday, 10/8 8p-9p  
Wednesday 10/9 4p-5p  
Wednesday 10/9 5p-6p  
Wednesday 10/9 6p-7p  
Wednesday 10/9 7p-8p

9. Please select your THIRD CHOICE interview time and date. \*  
all times are EASTERN STANDARD TIME.

Monday, 9/30 4p-5p  
Monday, 9/30 5p-6p  
Tuesday, 10/1 9a-10a  
Tuesday, 10/1 10a-11a  
Tuesday, 10/1 11a-12p  
Tuesday, 10/1 12p-1p  
Tuesday, 10/1 6p-7p  
Tuesday, 10/1 7p-8p  
Tuesday, 10/1 8p-9p  
Wednesday, 10/2 2p-3p  
Wednesday, 10/2 3p-4p  
Wednesday, 10/2 4p-5p  
Wednesday, 10/2 7p-8p  
Monday, 10/7 9a-10a  
Monday, 10/7 10a-11a  
Monday, 10/7 4p-5p  
Monday, 10/7 5p-6p  
Monday, 10/7 6p-7p  
Tuesday, 10/8 9a-10a  
Tuesday, 10/8 10a-11a  
Tuesday, 10/8 6p-7p  
Tuesday, 10/8 7p-8p  
Tuesday, 10/8 8p-9p  
Wednesday 10/9 4p-5p  
Wednesday 10/9 5p-6p  
Wednesday 10/9 6p-7p  
Wednesday 10/9 7p-8p

10. Should NONE of the aforementioned times work with your schedule, please  
provide a FIRST CHOICE and SECOND CHOICE preferred time to be interviewed.

Good evening!

This email serves as confirmation of your upcoming interview on:

DATE AND TIME

I will contact you via:

PHONE NUMBER

Thank you again for your willingness to participate in this research!

Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions regarding this research via email at EMAIL or via phone at PHONE NUMBER.

APPENDIX F

Interview Script and Instrument

Good morning/afternoon! I am calling for NAME.

Response from interviewee-

My name is Janine Weaver-Douglas and I am contacting you in response to your volunteering for a follow up individual interview regarding my dissertation research project.

Is now still a good time to talk?

Response from interviewee-

Thank you. Before we begin the interview, I need to read the following Informed Consent information, to which I will need you to verbally respond in the affirmative. Should you respond in the negative, you would not need to provide any additional information and this interview would be concluded.

INFORMED CONSENT LANGUAGE:

As indicated by your responses to the dissertation research survey entitled: Making Meaning of Assessment: The Role and Usage of Assessment in Resident Assistant Training, I am contacting you for a follow up interview. This research project is being conducted by Janine M. Weaver-Douglas, a doctoral candidate in The Department of Curriculum, Leadership and Technology at Valdosta State University.

The interview will take approximately 60 minutes, and will ask clarifying questions regarding your responses and documents of training assessments provided to me via the survey. I am recording this interview, but am in a secured space private to the interviewer, and all data will be kept confidential, stored on a secured hard drive belonging only to the researcher. All data provided will be destroyed within one year of the completion of this study, no later than May 1, 2015.

Do you have any questions about the interview or future analysis at this time?  
Are you still willing to participate in my research?

Response from interviewee-

Q1. Please describe how your department/program assessed RA training for the 2012-13 academic year.

Q2. Were you involved in that process? How did you contribute?

Q3. What information did you collect as part of assessment?

Q4. Who did you collect that information from?

Q5. How did you collect that information?

Q6. How did your department use that information?

Q7. Did your department report or publish that information in any way?

Q8. What other information does your department use in RA training assessment?

Concluding Question: Is there any other information that you would like to share regarding your RA Training Assessment practices?

Reminding Question: Do you have any questions regarding this interview or future analysis at this time?

Notified that dissertation would be completed in December, and can send a copy of dissertation research, if requested.

Response from interviewee

## APPENDIX G

### Codes and Themes used for Data Analysis

	code	theme	RQ
surveying/evaluating training	1	3	1
pre-assessment of RA's	2	3	1
post-assessment of RA's	3	3	1
evaluation of staff performance	4	3	1
self-reported (reported by RAs) information	5	3	1b
reported by supervisors	6	3	1b
assessment of professional HRL staff	7	3	1b
assessment of campus partners	8	3	1b
assessment of presenters	9	3	1b
self-reflection (by RA's)	10	3	1b
understanding of policies	11	2	2
understanding of role in student assistance	12	2	2
position expectations/responsibilities	13	2	2
relationship building with staff	14	2	2
overall training experience	15	4	2
format of training/type of presentations	16	1	2
length of presentations	17	1	2
length of training (overall)	18	1	2
additional training requested/identified	19	4	2
perception of training (overall)	20	4	2
perception of preparation for RA position	21	4	2
training or RA role competencies	22	2	2
useful presentations (useful to role)	23	2	2
least useful presentations	24	2	2
effectiveness of RA training	25	4	2
improvements/feedback for future training	26	4	3
online training components	27	1	2
years as an RA/RA experience prior to training/demographic info	28	4	2

meals/logistics of training	29	2	2
large-scale training sessions (ie. BCD)	30	2	2
communication before and during training	31	4	2
in-hall/unstructured time	32	2	2
improvements/feedback for current training	33	4	3
informal assessment	34	3	2
in staff-sharing/presentation of data	35	1	2
assessment of individual presenters	36	3	2
practice sharing (external)	37	1	2
partnership in assessment	38	3	2

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Janine Michelle Weaver-Douglas began her career in student development and higher education in 2001, attending Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, GA. Earning a BS in Justice Studies in 2005, Janine enrolled in the Master of Education program at GSU. Completing the Master's program in 2006, she enrolled in the Education Specialist program at GSU in Educational Leadership. Janine also began her career as a Residence Life Coordinator at The Art Institute of Atlanta; served a Complex Director at Valdosta State University; an Area Coordinator at The University of West Georgia, and currently serves as an Assistant Director for University Housing at North Carolina State University.

Janine completed her EdS degree in 2009, and began her doctoral work at Valdosta State University, focusing on Higher Education Leadership, in 2010. Janine completed her coursework for the degree and comprehensive exams in 2012, and began working on her dissertation topic, the assessment of RA Training programs within residential life departments in the Southeast region of the United States. Janine had an interest in understanding current practices in an effort to benchmark student staff training assessment, understand trends and identify areas of further research. Janine has received several honors, including GCPA's Graduate Student of the Year (2006), Distinguished Mentor of the Year (2012), Professional Staff Member of the Year (2012), Award of Recognition for GHO (2012), and has been involved in state and regional organizations through executive board positions, presentations, and participation within regional and national professional institutions, including RELI, NPI, and NHTI.