

RA's: More than 'camp counselors'

By KAREN STIRLING
Of the Emerald

"The dormitory resident assistant, who reports to the Complex Director, is an upperclass or graduate student who encourages positive and responsible citizenship by working with students individually and in groups, advises student government and assumes some administrative responsibilities for the operation of the unit."

—Oregon Housing Department job description

Perhaps dorm residents know them best as sneaky, conniving shadows lurking about the halls, waiting for the hiss of a single beer bottle being opened, and the chance to rush in and heroically save a minor from delinquency. Or perhaps they bring to mind an irate, unreasonable person who complains about little things like unlocking the door for you at 3 a.m. Whichever, the dormitory resident assistants (R.A.'s) are a necessary part of dorm life, according to the housing department, and they'll be around for quite awhile.

"I think the most important quality of an RA should be a type of sensitivity to all aspects of human relations," said Dick Romm, assistant director of dormitories. "They must also be very flexible — there's no 'cookbook' way to being an RA. In hiring an RA we look for a person who is able to make fair decisions, is outgoing, could facilitate relationships with students and staff members, and could willingly meet deadlines and do the paperwork accurately. Most students don't realize it, but there's a lot of work involved in being an RA. A lot of paperwork."

Applications for next year's resident assistants are being accepted until April 9 in the Housing Department, and Romm expects a large turnout. "We'll be hiring about 36 people, equal numbers of males and females, for this position," Romm said. "I think about 20-30 per cent of our RA's re-apply, but they're not automatically rehired. We review their year and treat them as we would any other applicant. All applicants are interviewed in late April or May, and then we choose."

According to Romm, being an RA is not so much just a job as a way of living. It includes both administrative tasks, such as conducting fire drills as scheduled, supervising student behavior in the dining room, handling emergencies as they arise within his/her unit or within the complex, and identifying nonpaying freeloaders — and advising tasks which include identifying problem areas in units involving both individuals and groups, encouraging an atmosphere of responsibility in group living, and attending all unit functions as active participants.

The advantages of being an RA include free board and room at the dormitory, and a bit over \$100 per year, but according to Romm there are many greater benefits. "When I talk to RA's at the year's end, they say the greatest benefit is meeting people and introducing them to a new way of living," he said. "I think it's a job with really high standards."

"I guess the part of the job that RA's find least enjoyable is enforcing the alcohol rules," Romm continued. "It's really hard to bust up a party when some of the time you'd rather just go and join in. The hardest part of being an RA, I think, is the lack of privacy. If something comes up at three in the morning they have to deal with it."

According to Romm, the only prerequisite for applying as an RA is a fairly high academic standing. "The RA's are under a lot of pressure during testing periods," he commented. "Often that's the time they're needed most, and they can't just ignore the problems."

"I think the hardest part of the job for me is to act on the same level as the students," said graduate student Bronwyn Boekenstein, an RA in DeCou-Walton. "It's important to have the students think of you as a friend, and not a camp counselor. And it's hard."



Drawing by JoAnn Fahlgren

"Actually I had to get a job and I figured that this would be right for my time schedule," Boekenstein continued. "I knew I wouldn't have to make a special time for my job; I could just incorporate it into my lifestyle. If I were going to live in Eugene again next year I'd probably do it again — I think I've learned as much as any of the freshmen. Being an RA is really a growth experience, and in that sense it's very worthwhile."

Boekenstein agrees that the alcohol problem in the dorms is a primary concern, and that the problem stems from the 21-year old drinking age. "The only redeeming factor we have to work with is our individual discretion," she said. "We have guidelines as to what we are supposed to do if we see alcohol in the dorms, but we can react differently according to what the people possessing the alcohol do."

"For example, if we walk into a room and ask the people to get rid of their beer, and they say 'All right' and go dump it out, or agree to take it off campus immediately, there's no hassle. But if we talk into the room and the people start yelling and being idiots we might just offer to get rid of it for them. It really depends on the circumstances." She added, "Every weekend we come in contact with about three or four small group parties, and at least one keg. I'm not condoning drinking in small groups, but if people would just be a bit more discrete it would sure help."

"I wish people just wouldn't do completely ridiculous things," commented Keith Mountain, a graduate student in geography and an RA at the University Inn. "We always catch idiots kicking in the elevator and things. The problem isn't really with the alcohol itself, but with the people

who drink it. I mean, recently we had someone throw a couch out of the fourth story window. It's obvious someone could have been killed, it just splatted on the driveway."

Mountain, who supervises underclassmen, upperclassmen, and graduate students all at once, maintains that people are entitled to as much privacy as they want to give themselves.

"If people are discrete there's no reason for us to hassle them," he said. "Another myth is that the freshmen cause all of the damage. I think there's probably more frequency of problems with the younger students, but they're usually solved much easier. The older students tend to be more defensive, like saying they're too old to be bossed around. I say if they sign the contract, they agree to abide by the rules — if they don't the RA's should have some influence in kicking them out as soon as possible."

"To be perfectly honest, the best thing about my job is the pay. I mean, I have to find some way to stay in school," continued Mountain. "But if I hated it I would definitely leave — there are some benefits to it. The Housing Department is fair. I think the most important thing a person should consider before applying for this position is what they want to do academically. It really cuts into your time."

"As far as things I really dislike about the job, there aren't really that many," added Mountain. "I hate these damn trains that keep whistling by my window all day and night, and I wish that people wouldn't think that RA's should organize everything for them. I mean, we can't be both the Godfather and Santa Claus — we're students too."

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