

RAs struggle with increasingly difficult student, social problems

The College Press Service

Being a resident advisor on a college campus used to mean acting as a big brother or sister to younger students.

Duties included refereeing disagreements over loud music, hand-holding homesick freshmen, and reprimanding such drunken mischief as cherry bombs launched down a comode.

Today, with increasing social problems and violence on campuses, RAs are dealing with problems such as drug abuse, rape, and in rare cases, murder. Earlier this fall, Jay Severson was just doing his job as an RA at Purdue University when he was shot to death. He reported freshman Jarrod Eskew to university police for cocaine possession. Eskew shot Severson and then committed suicide.

This incident, while extreme, has shaken up many RAs and has them questioning whether the job is worth the free room and board.

"Quite honestly...it scared the hell out of me," said Kelly Messicks, a resident director who supervises RAs at the University of Oregon. "I look at my staff and think, they are there 24 hours a day and we ask them to be part of their students' lives. But there is so much uncertainty about what could happen from day to day."

Violence on campuses is increasing. A national study by the Chronicle of Higher Education found a 26.3 percent increase in homicide in 1994, the largest increase for any crime on campus. Just this year, a stu-

dent was killed by a sniper at Pennsylvania State University; a student was murdered, allegedly by a colored boyfriend, at the University of Colorado-Greeley; and students were found murdered at the University of Pennsylvania and James Madison University.

Often, it is the RA who deals with the underlying emotional problems that may lead to these homicides, or the trauma of their aftermath on fellow students.

"Housing operations all over the country are asking undergraduates to be on the 'front lines' of students' lives and the issues that we are asking them to face are enormous," says D.J. Morales, director of residential life at the University of Oregon.

"I think in a lot of ways the RA position has become more counselor and mediator because of the complex issues that are coming in," explains Morales. "RAs are not just going to plan programs and go out for pizza. We are asking them to deal with more substantial issues as well."

This doesn't mean RAs haven't had to face tough problems in the past. While the days of monitoring midnight curfews in women's dorm may be a thing of the past at most colleges, certainly drugs, alcohol and sex are not new issues, particularly when you think of the 1960s.

"Back then, alcohol was more acceptable; we were riding the liberal '60s; now the legal drinking age is 21, while back then it was 18," says Lorna Hirae, director of campus life at the United States International

University in San Diego.

But changing the legal drinking age actually has given campus officials less control over alcohol and its abuse, they say. Administrators used to be able to monitor students' drinking in public settings. But now underage students drink behind closed doors--often in the dorm room, the RA's domain.

"I think the issues of drug abuse and alcohol experimentation have been around for 30 plus years. That's nothing new," says Messick. "What we are seeing is an increase in mental health issues. On this campus this year, I don't know if it's a coincidence or a trend, but we are dealing with folks that may be on medication, or not taking their medication, in which case we may be dealing with behavior that affects the community."

"This is a place that people feel like they can send their student to, and we'll take care of them. It puts a burden on us because we are not a mental health treatment center. We are not trained to monitor medication."

Morales also emphasizes that RAs are not trained counselors. "They need to work on being good listeners and great at referring folks to the appropriate places."

The breakdown of the traditional family is one of the reasons Hirae feels there are more students needing help. This also has contributed to a change in attitude toward authority. "When I was an RA (in the early '80s), I had an easier time in terms of discipline. Students today are

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The Methodist College faculty and staff line up to cheer the December 1996 graduating class during the traditional recessional in front of Reeves Auditorium. During the Dec. 13 ceremony, 113 students received their bachelor's degrees and 13 students received associate's degrees. (Photo by Jamee Lynch)

Job market looks promising for 1997 graduating seniors

The College Press Service

BOSTON--Dan Witalec, a senior economics major at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, interviewed with 25 companies this fall in search of a job in finance or consulting.

"It takes up a lot of time and I've really worried about it," he said of his job hunt. "I've been dissed by a lot of companies I really liked. It's really stressful."

But already, Witalec has received one offer, and that was as of December. "I'm thinking about it, but a lot of companies that I'm interested in don't even come [for campus recruiting] until January," he explains.

Job hunting may still be nerve-racking, but much has changed since the early 1990s recession, when graduating seniors banged their heads against the wall in search of a single job prospect.

In fact, the class of 1997 can look forward to the friendliest job market in years and higher starting salaries, a new survey predicts.

Overall, employers said they expect more than a six percent increase in job opportunities, said Michigan State University in its annual report "Recruiting Trends."

"When characterizing the overall job market for college graduates this year, employers describe it as stronger than a year ago," said Patrick Scheetz, director of MSU's Collegiate Employment Research Institute and author of the report.

Starting salaries, on average, are likely to be as much as four percent higher than last year, according to 508 employers surveyed.

Engineering continues to top the list of estimated starting salaries. Chemical engineers can expect the most, or \$42,758, for their first year

on the job, closely followed by mechanical, electrical, and industrial engineers.

Charles Sestok, a senior physics major at MIT, is asking for a salary as high as \$45,000 as he interviews for a job in electrical engineering, management consulting, or finance.

"I looked at those fields because there's a market for people with quantitative and analytical skills--people who can program computers and solve math problems," he said.

According to the report, the most sought-after grads are computer science majors, computer programmers, systems analysts, computer engineers, marketing and sales majors, actuaries, transportation and logistics management majors, and electrical engineers.

Also, employers are searching for grads with excellent communication skills and Internet experience, the report noted.

As part of his job search thus far, Sestok has interviewed with campus recruiters, met with MIT alumni and checked out his parents' business connections.

"I think it's going pretty good," Sestok said. "I've had a lot of interviews. A couple of companies have offered to fly me out to their headquarters."

On the other hand, the report notes that journalists can expect the lowest starting salary--\$22,102.

"Oh, wow, I think that's kind of high," said Melissa Sepos, a senior journalism major at the University of Missouri.

Sepos, who is hunting for a job as a newspaper reporter, said she isn't surprised journalism bottoms out the list. "I knew all along that it was

that low," she said. "I think it's more of a civic duty for me. This is what I'm good at. Regardless of the pay, I'm happy doing it."

But even Sepos turned down a recent offer for an \$18,000-a-year position. "The pay doesn't usually bother me," she said. "But I need at least \$19,700. That's \$13,000 after taxes. After paying all my bills, it leaves me with \$280."

Other fields low on the list of starting salaries include telecommunications, home economics, natural resources, and liberal arts.

The report also noted that college grads with find the most job opportunities in the southeastern and north central states.

Overall, "job prospects are very good in all regions of the country--better in some than others, but good throughout the country," Scheetz said.

Economic growth, retirements and other employee departures have created considerable job opportunities for new grads, he said.

Witalec, of MIT, hopes to wrap up his job search in early February "so I can enjoy my last term," he said.

He advises other job seekers to "narrow your focus. I think it's good to figure out what you want to do."

Sestok said he often tries to beat out the competition by telling recruiters that he was state champion in impromptu speaking while in high school.

"Anything unique that you've done will really make you stand out," he said. "I think you need to come up with a strategy that pinpoints the skills you can best sell to the company."

More college students study abroad

The College Press Service

NEW YORK--In high school, Amy Kleine opted to study overseas at a traditional school in France. But when she chose to study abroad again as a Kalamazoo College junior, she ventured further afield to Ecuador.

"There was a certain intrigue for me," said Kleine, 22, a 1996 Kalamazoo graduate. "We have been taught very little about those parts of the world."

Kleine, an intern at Kalamazoo's Center for International Programs, said she encourages students to think beyond the traditionally popular overseas programs in Scotland or Ireland. "I say, 'Have you thought about Zimbabwe?'" she said. "There are other possibilities."

A rising number of students are studying abroad, and more--like Kleine--are choosing nontraditional destinations such as Ecuador, Belize, Australia, and Zimbabwe, a new study found.

About 84,400 U.S. students studied overseas in 1994-95, an 11

percent increase over the previous year. This continues a 10-year upward trend in the number of students studying abroad, according to the "Open Doors" report released by the Institute of International Education.

Although a majority, or 19,410 students, studied at universities in Britain, the report shows a growing number are choosing more diverse destinations. The number of students going to Africa increased by 25 percent to 1,842, while those studying in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands increased by 39 percent to 3,643.

The growing array of destination choices reflect the fact that Americans are being exposed to other cultures on their own campuses, said Richard M. Krasno, the institute's president.

"We believe that increased 'internationalization' is beginning to influence the choices students are making in their studies, as they seek to become more competitive both in the world of ideas and in the global marketplace," he said.

Where students study overseas

The 13 countries with the most American students in 1993-94 and 1994-95 and the percent change are:

Country	% change
Britain	+15.5
France	-0.6
Spain	+7.7
Italy	+10.2
Mexico	-0.1
Germany	-0.2
Australia	+41.8
Israel	+27.9
Costa Rica	+30.4
Japan	-0.8
Austria	-27.0
Russia	-14.7
China	+30.4

Liz Kopp, assistant director of international programs at the State University of New York-Cortland, said the reason why students study abroad has changed dramatically over the years.

"Now they want to expand their horizons so they're more marketable," she said. "Before it was almost like 'The Grand Tour,' like a finishing school type of experience."

Kleine spent six months in Ecuador during her junior year, then returned for three months to complete her senior thesis. "I was certain it would help me fulfill my personal, professional, and academic goals," she said.

She recently was accepted into the Peace Corps for a 27-month assignment in Morocco.

"My [study abroad] experience is directly involved with my competitiveness for that program," she said. "It's almost a prerequisite now if you expect to get any type of position with an international corporation."

For information on Methodist College's study abroad program, call Dr. Neal McCrillis at 630-7079.

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Estimated Starting Salaries for New College Graduates in 1996-97

Academic Major	Percent Change	Estimated Starting Salary
Chemical Engineering	4.3%	\$49,758
Mechanical Engineering	4.5%	\$39,852
Electrical Engineering	4.0%	\$39,811
Computer Science	4.5%	\$36,964
Materials and Logistics Management	4.0%	\$34,520
Nursing	4.0%	\$32,927
Civil Engineering	4.0%	\$32,170
Mathematics	4.0%	\$32,055
Physics	4.0%	\$31,972
Geology	4.0%	\$31,606
Chemistry	4.0%	\$31,261
Accounting	4.0%	\$30,393
Financial Administration	4.0%	\$30,054
Marketing/Sales	4.0%	\$28,658
General Business Administration	4.0%	\$28,506
Human Resources Management	4.0%	\$26,024
Retailing	4.0%	\$25,856
Education	4.0%	\$25,742
Communications	4.0%	\$25,224
Hotel/Restaurant Management	4.0%	\$25,176
Advertising	4.0%	\$24,757
Social Science	4.0%	\$24,232
Natural Resources	3.5%	\$22,950
Journalism	4.0%	\$22,102

Source: Michigan State University Collegiate Employment Research Institute