

RAs face increasingly tougher time

By SUNNI DeNICOLA

Being a resident aide 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 commode.

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 Reshan 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 shit out of me," says Kelly Messick, 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. 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 that in a lot of ways the RA position has become more counselor and mediator because of the complex issues that are coming in," explains Messick. "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 dorms 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, back then it was 18," says Lorna Hiraie, director of campus life at the United States International University in San Diego.

"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 trend, 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," Messick added.

Morales also emphasizes 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 Hiraie feels there are more students needing help. This also has contributed to a change in attitude towards authority.

"When I was an RA (in the early '80s), I had an easier time in terms of discipline. Students today are not as respectful as students in past, probably because of liberation and individuality," she said. "They have a disrespect for authority."

Still, real violence in the residence halls is rare. More often, RAs are called upon to use their training in mediation to help students deal with disputes before things get out of hand.

"I don't think people are teaching coping skills anymore," Messick says with a hint of frustration. "I am doing a lot more conflict resolution stuff and dealing with uncivil behavior, such as people confronting each other in a real hostile manner... a lack of politeness even, if you want to be so quaint."

"Part of it is the litigious nature of our society — I want what I want when I want it. it can be a little hard to overcome when you are building a community of 60-plus residents and trying to work together," he added.

At the University of Virginia, the administration and RAs are

responding to a surge in student-life complaints from students and their parents.

"Students apparently spend so much time in front of computers or interactive video games that they lack social skills," says Ida Lee Wootten, a U.Va. spokesman.

She says that when "Johnny plays his stereo too loudly in his dorm room, it often doesn't occur to his neighbors to knock on Johnny's door and ask him politely to turn the music down."

Instead, she says, students are increasingly voicing anger and frustration over such normal campus experiences to the RAs.

This had led U. Va. to launch student-orientation programs that teach students how to cope with

one another, she said.

The threat of lawsuits also has changed the way RAs are trained to do their jobs. Since the RA often is the first to respond to any incident, they have to understand the laws regarding issues such as privacy, date rape, and more. Most campuses now give RAs extensive training so that they fully understand their role and the university's vulnerability.

"RAs definitely have a better understanding of legal issues, especially liability, than we ever did as undergraduates," says Morales.

But some speculate that the problems RAs face are not new, just more visible. Raechele Pope, a Teachers College professor at

Columbia University and specialist in educating student-life officials, was an RA two decades ago.

She says even then she was dealing with pretty serious issues, but what has changed is the sheer volume of work. She notes that counseling centers used to have to go in search of students needing help; now those centers have long waiting lists from students coming to them.

No matter what they face, most RAs say they still like their job. And Messick has no intention of stopping her work any time soon.

"In spite of all the weirdness that happens," she said, "there's no better place I think to really have an impact on student lives than where they live."

Dixie Conference All-Conference Men's Soccer — 1996

First Team		Second Team	
Forward			
Paul Smith	Methodist	Chris Petrini	N.C. Wesleyan
Bjorgvin Fridriksson	Methodist	Osar Gomez-Romero	Christopher Newport
Ian MacPherson	Christopher Newport	Jabari Richardson	Greensboro
James Galardo	Greensboro		
Midfield			
Dan Collins	Greensboro	Marc Lafley	Greensboro
Scott Kennell	N.C. Wesleyan	Karl McKenna	Methodist
Erik Lawton	Methodist	Carlton Mack	Greensboro
Back			
Derek Scroil	Greensboro	Dylan Hanlon	Methodist
Jim Pierce	Methodist	Sean Flynn	Christopher Newport
Mike Walters	Methodist	Marc Weiss	Greensboro
		Ron Silva	Shenandoah
Goalkeeper			
Bryan Laraque	Greensboro	Hanidor Steingrimsson	Methodist

Player of the Year — Paul Smith, Methodist

Rookie of the Year — Oscar Gomez-Romero, Christopher Newport

Coach of the Year — Steve Allison, Greensboro

Dixie Conference All-Conference Women's Soccer — 1996

First Team		Second Team	
Forward			
Alyson Patrick	N.C. Wesleyan	Nicole Durand	Greensboro
Alexa Kapetanakas	N.C. Wesleyan	Susan Sautter	Ferrum
Casey Nuckols	Methodist	Trisha Clinton	Methodist
Midfield			
Amy Coley	N.C. Wesleyan	Dena Danielewicz	Greensboro
Kathleen Greene	Methodist	Kim Olsen	N.C. Wesleyan
Candace Croal	Methodist	Betsy Jones	N.C. Wesleyan
Alvy Styles	Methodist		
Back			
Kelly Walters	N.C. Wesleyan	Shannon Sayre	Ferrum
Megan Sanderson	N.C. Wesleyan	Nancy Serianni	Greensboro
Gwen Gordon	N.C. Wesleyan	Meehan Kloosterman	Methodist
		Kerry Jacobs	Shenandoah
Goalkeeper			
Jennifer Maurer	Methodist	Jennifer Foreman	N.C. Wesleyan

Player of the Year — Alyson Patrick, N.C. Wesleyan

Rookie of the Year — Alexa Kapetanakas, N.C. Wesleyan

Coach of the Year — Rob Donnenwirth, N.C. Wesleyan

NCAA Div. II All-South Women's Soccer

1st Team — Alyson Patrick, Amy Coley

2nd Team — Kelly Walters