



Submission Date: November 14, 2019

Policy Sponsor: Initiative Committee

Approving University Officials: Stevenson University Student Government Association

Responsible Officer: Jessica Koch, Speaker of Senate; Norman Greenwell, Associate Justice

NEW POLICY PROPOSAL

for Residence Life and Student Involvement

I. Background Reasoning

This report is designed to note the data found when conducting the survey: “Student Leadership and Residence Life” as created by the Student Government Association (hereafter referred to as “the SGA”), offer conclusions based off of that data, and put forth potential solutions to the issues presented that spurred the responses to the above survey.

On Monday, November 4th, a Resident Assistant (hereafter referred to as “RA”) information session was held for prospective RAs to learn more information about the position itself and how to apply for that position. Several current RAs were also in attendance. It was at that information session that the Office of Residence Life and Housing (hereafter referred to as “ResLife”) issued a new rule for both prospective and returning RAs: Senior Resident Assistants (hereafter referred to as “SRA”) and RAs were no longer allowed to hold executive board, cabinet, council, or any other such offices in clubs, organizations, Greek Life, or student government in any capacity, to take effective for the 2020-2021 academic year.

In an Inservice meeting open only to currently employed (S)RAs, Interim Assistant Vice President Jeremy Munson and Resident Director Patrick Murnane elaborated on this policy further. The chief reasons for this policy included curtailing burnout, prioritizing time spent in the RA-specific communities, and ensuring that the required grade-point average for the RA position is being met.

Before getting into the conclusions of the survey, we find it important to clarify a few things, so as not to mischaracterize our findings:

1. We are aware that the policy does not prevent student involvement for RAs in clubs as a whole, but rather for executive board and other similar office positions.
2. We understand that both ResLife and the students are actively working towards the same goals-- curtailing burnout, ensuring the needs of the RA position are being fulfilled, and being certain that RAs are fulfilling the needs of their residents.

Results

When examining the population that responded to the survey, over 48% of respondents identified as prospective or current SRAs or RAs. Just over 15% of respondents were advisors of clubs or organizations, while 37% of respondents did not affiliate with ResLife in any capacity.

The responses largely echoed the same sentiments: this policy would largely affect Student Life in a negative way. In response to large student concerns we, the initiative committee assembled through the Student Government Association, has identified three areas of concern:

1. Maura Thomas, “Time Management Training Doesn’t Work”, *Harvard Business Review* (April 2015)
2. Marian Spencer, “How You Can Empower Your Team with Self-Care Planning”, *Black Dog Institute* (October 2018)

I) This policy actively dissuades both RAs and non-ResLife affiliated students from becoming leaders on campus.

An argument in support of this policy posits that by preventing RAs from pursuing leadership positions on campus, other students will take up the mantle and pursue leadership positions as well. We, the initiative committee, are not inclined to agree.

One of the advisor respondents noted that “[s]ome of our best and most involved students across the university are also RAs.” They are not mistaken. Of the 59 (S)RAs and potential (S)RAs represented in the survey conducted by SGA, 63% of them actively pursue leadership roles in at least one organization. Another advisor noted that RAs are “the best of the best on campus when it comes to ... leadership abilities, and both [RAs and club leaders] have extreme capacity to do much good.” The RAs are not pursuing leadership positions simply because they are greedy, but rather that they see a need in the community, and they fulfill it. This is integral to the RA position: an unwavering sense of abnegation to their university, and a willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty to ensure that their community is functioning properly. As another advisor put it: “If a student is a leader, they need to be able to lead in every capacity.”

II) In an effort to enforce this restriction evenly, (S)RAs that consistently meet ResLife requirements will be negatively impacted

One of the issues that ResLife had in enacting this policy was that they wanted this policy to be specific and unyielding. They were right in doing this. A system that has too many exceptions is not a system at all. However, in their effort to make something that works for everyone, ResLife has instead created a system that punishes those who budget their time effectively, and in doing so, creates a precedent for not being involved on campus.

Some organizations will outright crumble if this policy is enacted. From a student respondent, “We would not have a president for next year. Our constitution requires [the] president to be on the e-board for at least [one] year and we will no longer be able to fulfill that.” Some major-centric organizations will also have extreme difficulty functioning. From a student respondent, “With a small club such as NBS-FMI, this policy could hurt the future of the clubs as it could severely limit the number of people who would want to run for important board positions.” This sentiment is echoed throughout the responses gathered by Student Government.

III) There exist other alternative options that can accomplish the goals set out by ResLife.

The respondents to the survey have issued several possible solutions to the burnout and GPA dilemma posited by ResLife. Some solutions proposed by Students and Advisors include:

- Evaluate individuals on a case-by-case basis
- Limit the number of E-Board positions to one or two per person
- Stronger enforcement of already existing ResLife policies
- Create a Grandfather Clause
- Redraft a policy based on benchmark institutions and publish results
- Have (S)RAs create an involvement plan
- Utilize SRAs in monitoring the mental health/burn out of their individual staffs

1. Maura Thomas, “Time Management Training Doesn’t Work”, *Harvard Business Review* (April 2015)
2. Marian Spencer, “How You Can Empower Your Team with Self-Care Planning”, *Black Dog Institute* (October 2018)



II. Policy Recommendation Overview

On the behalf of the Student Body, the Initiative Committee has deemed it fit to create an alternative policy recommendation that seeks to reach a compromise between the Student Body and the Office of Residence Life and Housing. The Initiative Committee Proposes:

- **Remove the restriction on (S)RAs holding titles in clubs, organizations, Greek Life, and Student Government**
- **Increase the time spent on extracurricular activities and outside ResLife employment from 10 hours to 15 hours per week**
- **Strictly enforce hourly restrictions, no exceptions**
- **Implement a time reporting system that would track (S)RAs commitments outside of SU Residential Spaces**
- **Implement more comprehensive training sessions in regard to time management. This includes, but is not limited to:**
 - **Clarity around role priorities rather than specific task priorities¹**
 - **Attention management skills rather than time management¹**
 - **Comprehensive workflow management¹**
- **Implement more comprehensive training sessions in regard to self-care and burn-out prevention. This includes, but is not limited to:**
 - **(S)RAs should be asked to create self-care initiatives in physical, professional, emotional/relationship, psychological/spiritual areas of their lives²**
 - **Resident Directors will consistently follow up with (S)RAs on their self-care plan and initiatives to ensure completion**
- **Brainstorm with Student Activities office to create a more inclusive policy**
- **Utilize Senior Resident Assistants to help monitor the mental health and burn-out risk. This can be accomplished through:**
 - **Weekly reports sent to SRAs to relieve RD overwork**
 - **Biweekly one-on-ones between SRA and RAs**
 - **Monthly mandatory team bonding**
- **Add to the accountability matrix the appropriate response if an (S)RA's involvement conflicts with their ability to perform job responsibilities**

III. Stakeholders

The identified Stakeholders in the policy, the offices and groups that would be most effected, are as follows:

- Responsible Officers for this Policy Recommendation
- Senior Resident Assistants and Resident Assistants that are involved in leadership positions across campus
- Members of the Student Body involved in Student Leadership Positions
- The Office of Residence Life and Housing Professional Staff Members
- The Office of Student Activities Professional Staff Members
- The Office of Student Affairs at Stevenson University
- Stevenson University Student Government Association
- Advisors of clubs, organizations, Greek Life, and the Student Government

1. Maura Thomas, "Time Management Training Doesn't Work", *Harvard Business Review* (April 2015)
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