

**Student Staff Selection, Training, and Retention: A UMR Assessment Project  
Short Summary 2008**

Conducted by:

Trapper Mitchell, University of Wisconsin – Platteville  
Amanda Krier, University of Wisconsin – Whitewater

With the changing generation of students from which we draw our staff, Residence Life programs may have to start adapting their processes to help get the students to buy into the RA/CA position. As you will see in this report, most schools are experiencing a decreasing applicant pool. In 2008, the UMR-ACUHO Assessment and Information Management (AIM) Committee decided to collect data from throughout the region to determine if the perceived trend was in fact reality, what some schools have done to maintain a well-trained and satisfied staff, and to offer suggestions as to what may help in the future. The committee chose to focus on a few questions in particular such as recruitment methods, application and interview styles, length of training time and method, return and transfer processes, and compensation initiatives.

Eighty-three schools began the survey, 79 completed it in its entirety, resulting in a 68.1% return rate. Of the 79 institutions that completed the survey, 63.3% were public while 36.7% were private. 2.5% of the schools were 2-year institutions, while 97.5% were 4-year institutions. 100% of the responding institutions employ student housing staff such as Resident Assistants, Resident Advisors, Community Advisors, Student Advisors, or House Fellows. The majority of schools (58.2%) employ between 21 and 75 student staff members. 29.1% employ more than 75 students, while only 12.6% employ 20 students or less. All institutions were located in the upper Midwest region, including Iowa, Kansas, Manitoba, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

Currently for every one female position available, the highest percentage of respondents (40.5%) has between 2-2.9 applicants on average. Only 10.1% of schools have over 5 applicants per available position. Currently for every one male position available, the highest percentage of respondents (44.3%) has between 1-1.9 applicants on average. Additionally, 94.9% state that they have not had a candidate (in the last 5 years) identify as transgender. While it would be intriguing to know how this compares to the past, the vast majority of respondents replied “unknown” to the question. Also interesting, there is little to no difference between public and private schools in response to this question.

100% of respondents utilize some sort of application process. 93.7% include a reference form, and 92.4% include an information form. 82.3% include a short answer or essay section, while only 40.5% ask for a resume. 97.5% of schools utilized a centralized process, meaning that applicants apply to an overall department instead of a particular residence hall. Only 2.5% of schools utilize a decentralized process, where applicants apply to a residence hall of their choice. Of the schools using a centralized process, 70.1% take the applicant’s residence hall preference into consideration. 81.0% utilize a combination of a group process and individual interview style.

The vast majority (79.8%) of the institutions take part in a training period of over 8 days. 55.7% train in a centralized manner, meaning that all staffs come together for joint sessions but may have some individual staff time. Only 3.8% train in an individualized manner, meaning that the majority of training is staff-specific with few joint sessions. 39.2% use an even division of both training styles.

Of the 79 schools completing the survey, just under half (49.4%) grant extra compensation to returning RAs/CAs. This extra compensation comes as bonuses such as bookstore credits, increase in stipend, or scholarship monies. The highest average retention rate is 41-50% and is seen by 36.7% of the institutions. Interestingly, the results of this question resulted in a near-perfect bell-shaped curve from 0-100%.