
RLA EDUCATIONAL FOCUS PROGRAMMING

Change to RLA role starting Fall 2018

The Residence Life Advisor, or RLA, role has been an essential part of residential living at Lawrence since it was first created almost twenty years ago. As our student body has changed, so have the individual resident needs, and in turn the needs and expectations of the RLA staff as front-line advisors and peer educators. One difficulty for Campus Life has often been to balance the RLA role as an important peer mentor and educator, while fitting into the appropriate boundaries of compensation and hours expected as a student employment opportunity. Some changes to the position over the last several years - to accommodate for time commitment versus compensation - has been removing the requirement for on-going training each term that involved two one-hour training sessions on different topics relating to the position - student development, being a resource, etc. While this helped solve one concern, it also created another issue: RLAs were getting less “life skill” educational information from resources across campus that they could then pass on to their residents via their one-on-one interactions and educational programming within the hall.

Campus Life staff and Lawrence staff have heard from students across campus asking for more education of their peers on topics such as diversity and inclusion, wellness, etc. Recent events on campus such as sit-in conversations where students shared personal stories and lists of demands from the university asking for growth in cultural competency, more representation, and more education of all students has brought to light the need to help students have a better understanding of others and themselves. Some students have expressed that Lawrence does a fantastic job of helping students get a critical education, but that we do not do a satisfactory job of ensuring that all students are getting the life-skills and personal developmental education they should be to appropriately face the personal and interpersonal challenges of the world today. This means there is an opportunity to look at educational programming at the ground level in the residence halls differently than we ever have before. To understand where we need to go, we need to look at our previous project to improve educational programming within the residence halls.

Educational programming, through the RLA programming reports, has shown to account anywhere from a third to as little as a fourth of the programming coming out of the residence halls over the last several years. When we have asked RLAs via staff meetings, at year-end wrap-up conversations, and anecdotally throughout the year why this is and what kept them from starting or following through with educational programming, reasons boiled down to the following two reasons: 1) they found it difficult to think of topics that they could teach their peers about or they felt they weren't an “expert”

at a topic and 2) that they don't always know where to start the process or whom to reach out to on campus to become an "expert" on a topic in order to do a program.

Hearing these issues, Campus Life partnered with other resource offices on campus and created an online form system (known as "Request a Resource") that would include lists of resource programs available from different offices, and then the RLAs could easily fill out the online form requesting the office to help host a program in a residence hall with that RLA. The form would take away some of the ambiguity of how to get started AND it would connect the RLA directly to the office/area that were the experts on the topic for a program. Despite these efforts, we saw only a slight bump in educational programs the first year of using the form, and we have seen little use of the form since. After Campus Life changed RLA programming requirements two years ago to say that each term they have at least one social and one educational program, changing language from 'active or passive' and 'planned or spontaneous', we still saw little change in numbers of educationally focused programs and no increase in use of the resource form online.

Campus Life is taking this reflection of the last several years along with the feedback and input of RLAs from the past several years to seize a unique opportunity. We will be starting Educational Focus areas of programming for Residence Life Advisors (RLAs) within the residence halls for the 2018-2019 academic year with main support from Residence Hall Directors, and supplemental support via different offices and staff members across campus. This reimagining of the programming requirements will assert the importance of educational programming for all of our students within the halls while giving the RLAs a focused subject to guide them and extra resources and time built into their position to appropriately focus their educational efforts. Our goal is to see an increase of educational programming to be between one third and one half of all programs reported by the end of the second year of implementation, knowing that social programs are easier to do on-the-spot and that those will happen more naturally and more frequently. However, giving the RLAs an opportunity to immerse themselves in one educational area, we are confident this will start to diminish the barriers and concerns about WHAT educational programs to do and WHO they have as experts to turn to and get support from.

Outlined below are the **major components** and **time commitments** of these changes:

- RLAs will have an educational focus area in one of the following:
 - Sustainability & Eco-efforts
 - Diversity & Inclusion
 - Wellness & Personal Development
 - Service & Social Responsibility
 - and Leadership & Professional Development

- RHD collateral areas will determine the oversight of each Educational Focus Area and those RHDs will use their collateral offices, as well as other offices on campus, for materials, ideas, support and programming within these areas. The following collateral matching includes:
 - Sustainability & Eco-efforts – RHD in Events Coordinator and Student Organization Support collateral
 - Diversity & Inclusion – RHD in Diversity/Inclusion/Retention/Support collateral
 - Wellness & Personal Development – RHD in Wellness collateral
 - Service & Social Responsibility – RHD in Volunteer/Service collateral
 - Leadership & Professional Development – RHD in Greek Advisor & Leadership development collateral

- Each staff will have one or two RLAs in each focus area – larger staffs may have one area that has up to three representatives from that educational focus area.

- Educational Focus areas will have staff meetings at least twice a term. These meetings will take place during the traditional RLA staff meeting time of Mondays at 9pm (unless schedules can be configured otherwise) during term weeks 3 and 6.
 - Up to two hours of other Educational Focus area staff meeting time can be planned and implemented by the RHD of an area. Whether this is split into two smaller meetings or used as one longer planning and working session is up to the discretion of the RHD and the schedule availability of the RLAs.
 - Fall training, Winter Retreat, and an additional Spring Refresh at the start of Spring Term will include training and/or staff time in Educational Focus areas.

- Two of the three termly bulletin boards for the year on the floor or in the building need to incorporate the RLA's educational focus area.

- At least two programs a term must fall into the Educational Focus area per RLA. Already-required bulletin boards cannot be counted towards these two programs. These can be active or passive.