

# Features

*Life on the front lines:*

## Classes, courses and 3 a.m. phone calls

*RAs balance roles as students and disciplinarians*

by Danette Parrett

*The Collegian*

**R**esident Assistants (RAs) are students just like everyone else. They carry the same class load, have the same stress, and keep the same number of friends. However, there's one difference that separates an RA from the average student. They have taken on the responsibility of caring for and supervising an entire floor, suite complex, or apartment building.

The selection process for becoming an RA is tedious, but rewarding. To begin the process, a student must fill out an application and then participate in a group interview.

If the student is chosen to continue, he or she would next participate in an individual interview. After these interviews, candidates are evaluated, and the remaining students are invited to enroll in a preparatory class.

After this selection process, the selected students are required to take a three-credit training course.

The course required for the RA hopefuls is designed to introduce the RA candidates to the Resident Life Coordinators and to help develop a sense of what is to be expected of the students once they become RAs.

Pam Peter, an RA for the apartments, felt that she benefited a lot from the class. "It taught me to share my ideas. I came from the city, so I learned a lot about people from smaller towns. It changed a lot of my views on things like homophobia, racism, and sexism."

Greg Berckmiller, the RA on first floor Niagara Hall, described the course as "one of the most practical classes offered. It teaches people how to deal with problems and communicate. I used to be really shy, but I've changed."

The opportunities presented through the class can be summed



Craig Breter/The Collegian

**Talk to me:** Resident Assistant Greg Berckmiller, one of 28 RAs on campus, lends an open ear to a fellow student's problems in the Niagara Hall duty office.

up when Mike Kongelka, the RA on third floor Niagara Hall, says, "Even if you don't become an RA, you benefit. You have a world to gain and nothing to lose."

After the students have finished the course with at least a C, they are then chosen and assigned to an RA position.

As part of the RA position, the students not only have to supervise other students; they must also maintain certain

requirements to insure that they keep their positions.

Once accepted into the resident assistant program, the student must maintain a 2.25 grade point average, have a good conduct standing with the university, and attend courses at Behrend at least

once a year after completing the training course. The expectations may seem difficult, but they offer benefits also.

Ron Rebel, the RA on second floor Niagara, says, "You definitely learn to manage your time. You find out you can't

across some of your underage friends drinking, you have two alternatives: either you walk away, or you uphold your duties and refer them. Most RAs would refer them, and your real friends would understand. You have a job to do and they'll realize that."

As a part of the RA job, the RAs are expected to attend weekly building meetings and individual meetings every other week with the coordinator in charge of their residence hall.

With the exception of Perry Hall, the RAs are expected to be on duty at least one night a week. In Perry Hall, because there aren't as many RAs, they have duty more often. While on duty, RAs are expected to perform rounds from 8 p.m. to midnight in the

residence building they are responsible for.

Also, they are responsible to be on duty on alternating Friday and Saturday nights. It may seem that a lot is expected of the RAs, but as Rebel explains, "There's tons more that go into the job. Being disciplinarian is not the only job. A lot of people think you have to be 'Super RA.' It's not like that. I've never met anyone who regretted it."

From residence hall to suite to apartment, the job varies.

"It's harder to reach the students when you're not in the dorm," Pam Peter explains. "Here [the apartments] you have to go out and find the people. It's harder to pick programs that interest the older students."

Amy Jones, another RA in the apartments, thinks, "In the dorms you deal more one-on-one emotionally. In the apartments you deal more with policy."

The university offers benefits to students who become RAs. The remuneration this year consists of free housing, a free pre-chosen meal plan, and two-hundred fifty dollars toward tuition each semester.

The remuneration package varies from year to year.

If the material benefits aren't enough, there are also many personal benefits to gain from being an RA.

"A lot of people look up to you," Berckmiller explains. "You accumulate so many friends. Every year you're in charge of a new bunch of people. I know I make at least a dozen new friends each year."

Jones believes the best feeling is "...when someone comes to you with a problem they can't discuss with anyone else. When you help them, and see it through to the end, it gives you a great feeling."

Danette Parrett, a first semester communication major, is a weekly cartoonist for The Collegian.

**"You definitely learn to manage your time ... you've already made a commitment"**

**-Ron Rebel  
Resident Assistant**

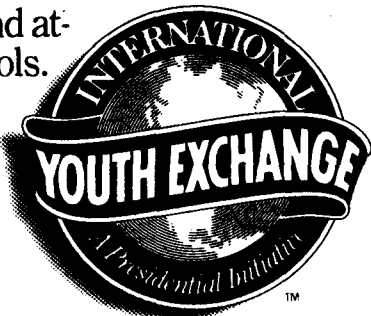
procrastinate. When you're needed for something you have to be there. You've already made a commitment."


Rebel also thinks that by becoming an RA "...you learn who your real friends are. If you have a situation where you come

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What do free cases of beer, lingerie from Victoria's Secret, 900 party lines, Beatles CDs released in mono, wide-collar velour shirts, VCR tapes in the letterbox format, condom distribution in bible-belt middle schools, candy corn and the U.S. Army have in common? I'm not really sure either, but they certainly did help fill this awkward space...

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