



4-26-2010

ORL Does More than Provide Housing

Katie Webb '13

Illinois Wesleyan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news>

Recommended Citation

Webb '13, Katie, "ORL Does More than Provide Housing" (2010). *News and Events*. 1396.
<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/1396>

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@iwu.edu.

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

ORL Does More than Provide Housing

April 26, 2010

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Students at Illinois Wesleyan University might think they can recognize an employee of the Office of Residential Life (ORL) on sight. They know the residential advisor (RA) who helps them on their floor, and the desk aide who can be seen at the front desk of every hall.

However, according to Director of Residential Life Matt Damschroder, there are roles in ORL that transcend the recognizable positions of desk aides and RAs. ORL also employs students in areas such as sustainability educators. “Their goal is to teach students to leave as small of an ecological footprint as possible,” said Damschroder, who noted educators help with events such as Eco-Week.

It is the overall goal of ORL, said Damschroder, to do more than create a home away from home. He and his staff of more than 100 students work to create a community for students.

With around 1,200 students living in 12 residence halls – including four first-year halls, five upperclassmen halls, and three small halls – the Office of Residential Life (ORL) currently provides housing to 60 percent of the nearly 2,000 students enrolled at Illinois Wesleyan University. Within such a large community, the official mission of ORL is to “facilitate enjoyable, sustainable and inclusive communities that support and enhance students’ academic achievement and personal development.”

According to Damschroder, most of creating this sense of home happens at the front lines. “Resident advisors and first-year resident advisors are the closest to the students because they are in their lives everyday, but all of our student staff members help with the transition from home to college,” he said. Student staff members are not the only ones responsible for creating this sense, Damschroder said, “Students going to meals and programs together also contribute to that sense of belonging and community, adding to the feeling of Illinois Wesleyan being a home-away-from-home.”

In any given year, ORL employs around 10 percent of the students at Illinois Wesleyan through work-study and currently employs 100 students as desk aids, 10 as sustainability educators, five as multicultural educators and 54 as resident advisors, first-year resident advisors or residential community advisors.

Desk Aides

Desk aides staff the centralized desk in every traditional residence hall. “The job is a popular work study position for first-year students,” said Damschroder. The desk serves as a reception area to welcome guests, answer questions and distribute mail. Students may also purchase stamps and borrow shared items such as pots and pans from the desk. According to Damschroder, about half of the students who work as desk aides have never had a job before coming to Illinois Wesleyan. “Working as a desk aide helps them learn valuable skills such as customer service and communication. The inexperienced workers learn from the experienced, while the experienced learn more from teaching – building a nice, mentoring relationship,” he said.

Sustainability and Multicultural Educators

For students with interests in the ecology or multicultural diversity, ORL offers the positions of sustainability educator and multicultural educator. There are currently nine sustainability educators, one in each traditional residence hall, and three multicultural educators on campus. Sustainability educators

teach students ways to live more sustainably, both here at Illinois Wesleyan and at home. Sustainability educators are also responsible for working a few hours a week at the desk of their assigned residence hall. The multicultural educators strive to teach students about the importance of diversity.

The multicultural educators work with other ORL staff to put together programs to promote social justice through cultural education. Multicultural and sustainability educators also work with groups on campus that correlate with their missions, such as the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs and the Sierra Student Coalition respectively.

Resident Advisors

Upperclassmen have the opportunity to become a first-year resident advisor (FYRA) or a resident advisor (RA). FYRAs and RAs live on each floor of the traditional residence halls to assist students with any problems or concerns. According to Damschroder, FYRAs play an important role in continuing orientation for first-year students by organizing floor meetings and bonding activities and by answering any questions that students may have throughout the year. Both FYRAs and RAs are responsible for creating a sense of community, counseling residents, confronting inappropriate behavior and making sure their residents live in a safe environment. RAs and FYRAs are also responsible for completing weekly duty rounds where they ensure the policies of Illinois Wesleyan are being followed.

A two-week training program is held in August, along with a one day recap of the training in the spring, to teach RAs and FYRAs everything from how to get a student more involved on campus to how to confront a potentially life-threatening situation.

Each year current ORL staff members nominate students on their floors who they view as positive role models to the other students to become a RA or FYRA for the following year. Those students are then contacted and asked to apply for a position. Students who are not nominated may also apply. “RAs have a reputation on campus as being skilled, competent, go-to people. Some students see that and want those skills, so they pursue it on their own,” Damschroder said.

Residential Community Advisor

Students have the option of becoming a residential community advisor (RCA) their second or third year on the ORL staff. RCAs live in each of the traditional residence halls to manage the front desk area and supervise the RAs and FYRAs in that hall. RCAs also mentor new student staff members, supervise the sustainability educator and multicultural educator, act as the first responder to any crises in their residence hall, cover shifts of primary campus duty on weekends and serve as the primary contact in the absence of the residence hall director.

RCAs begin training a week before the RAs and FYRAs do, giving them a total of three weeks of training in August. In the spring, a day of training is also held for students who will hold the position of RCA in the upcoming school year.

“I have loved being a RCA,” said Samantha Rohl, the RCA for Ferguson Hall. “It gave me a ton of experience and skill development that I can use for the rest of my life.” She credits ORL for developing her leadership, teamwork and communication skills. “I have always been an introverted and shy individual,” she said, “Working in ORL has really helped me develop my communication skills and has made me more confident, which will be very important in my future.”

For additional information on the Office of Residential Life or any of the positions mentioned, contact the Office of Residential Life at (309) 556-3113 or orl@titan.iwu.edu.

Contact: Katie Webb '13, (309) 556-3181