

WHO REALLY ISN'T DOING THEIR JOB?

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This case focuses on human resources in higher education. Professionals in the field are often tasked with making important decisions regarding the hiring, supervision, and termination of undergraduate student staff members. This process becomes increasingly difficult when professional staff must rely on graduate student perceptions and evaluations to make critical employment decisions. In this case, Monica, a Resident Coordinator at Rolling Springs University, must decide whether or not to rehire Jack, a sophomore Resident Adviser who has received conflicting evaluations from his supervisor, Graduate Hall Director Emily. Monica must weigh various factors regarding the situation and its key players to determine who stays and who goes.

Monica stared at her email in disbelief. How could a staff member who received such a strong mid-year evaluation from his supervisor just a few weeks ago now have his future employment hanging in the balance?

RESIDENT ADVISER AND GRADUATE HALL DIRECTOR POSITIONS

The Resident Adviser (RA) position at Rolling Springs University is a full-time undergraduate student job. Each RA reports directly to a Graduate Hall Director. The RA lives with a group of 15-65 residents and works with them in areas of advising, community development, policy enforcement, administration, and general operation of the residential community. The RA receives a stipend of \$3,000 and a single room at no cost to them, which would cost a non-RA student \$7,000 for the year.

The Graduate Hall Director (GHD) is responsible for the general supervision and management of a residence hall community, which houses about 200-350 undergraduate students. The GHD assistantship is a 10-month, live-in position. This position includes a stipend of \$7,150 and a free apartment which includes utilities, internet, cable, laundry facilities, staff parking pass, laptop, and \$800 meal

plan for dining on campus. Specific job responsibilities include supervising a Resident Adviser staff, managing a programming budget, and upholding all policies outlined by RSU and University Housing

THE INSTITUTION

Rolling Springs University is a mid-size private institution in the Midwest. The university is located in Briarfield, a city best known for being the largest producer of fresh bottled water in the United States. RSU is an institution whose generous alumni have ensured the continued growth of the campus. As part of the strategic plan of the University, they are currently working on securing over a billion dollars from donors to create a new recreation center and parking garage, and building two new residence halls and a free standing business school. Endowments have also brought nationally renowned faculty and researchers to the university; as such, RSU is known as one of the most academically rigorous and elite universities of its type. Ninety-nine percent of the students who attend RSU have placed in the top fifty percent of their high school class. Students who attend RSU pay upwards of \$52,000 per academic year for tuition, fees, room, and board. The socioeconomic demographics of the school show that the majority of its students are clearly in the upper class, with most families paying each year's bills out of pocket with limited financial aid. However, some students choose to work on-campus jobs to provide themselves with additional income.

JACK

Jack is a sophomore at Rolling Springs University (RSU). An involved student leader as a freshman, he participated in Student Government and various religious organizations. When Jack's Resident Adviser application was reviewed, one of his letters of reference came from a high-ranking student affairs professional (who was very well-respected in the campus community) recommending him for the position. Ultimately, Jack's positive recommendations, combined with his interviews, grade point average, and co-curricular involvement, made him a strong candidate for the RA position. Jack was hired and placed on a staff of nine RAs, which was one of the largest staffs on campus. This staff is in charge of three different buildings on campus, and is overseen by one Graduate Hall Director. Jack's residents are a mix of junior and senior residents living in apartments. Each apartment has four single bedrooms, which open to a living room, kitchen, and two bathrooms. Because of its single rooms and spacious layout, this residence hall is the most desired place to live on campus, and is the first to be chosen by residents to live in each year. As a RA, it is a privilege to be placed in this building because each RA gets a suite to themselves with a single bedroom, kitchen, living area, and bathroom.

EMILY

Emily is in her second year of a Counseling graduate program at RSU. While attending a large public institution as an undergraduate, she was heavily involved in the orientation office, but was not involved with university housing and only lived on campus for two years as a student. With a magnetic, outgoing personality, Emily received numerous awards for her dedication to her academics and leadership positions. When beginning graduate school at Rolling Springs University, Emily wanted an opportunity to supervise undergraduate students as well as build relationships with them, so she applied to be a Graduate Hall Director (GHD). She was ultimately hired and placed in the largest residential area on campus, which included over 350 residents. She supervises three different residential buildings and their respective staffs; Jack is a first-year RA she supervises.

MONICA

Monica is in her second year of employment with Rolling Springs University Housing Department. She grew up in a suburban town in the Northeast and attended a small private college a few hours from her home. As an undergraduate student, Monica was very active on campus, serving as an orientation leader and resident adviser while playing on the college's softball team. It was during her time in undergrad that Monica became interested in working in higher education, and immediately after graduation she moved to the Midwest to attend a nationally-known Higher Education Administration program at a large public institution. While in the program, she had a graduate assistantship with University Housing, which prepared her for her first post-graduation position as a Resident Coordinator (RC) at RSU. As the RC, Monica oversees 13 buildings and a staff of seven Graduate Hall Directors and 51 Resident Advisers. She approaches the position with her trademark optimism and friendliness, and is consistently recognized for her thoughtful handling of difficult situations. She is also known for holding staff members accountable for their work, a quality that has earned her the nickname of "The General."

THE SITUATION

At the end of each semester the GHD evaluates each RA they supervise to track their performance. While the documentation for the performance review is recorded in December, the official performance evaluation meeting does not occur until the beginning of the spring semester in January. At the same time as the GHD is completing their evaluation, all of a RA's residents are asked to evaluate their RA as well. In December, Emily completed the evaluation documentation and gave Jack excellent marks (EXHIBIT 1). Additionally, Jack's residents also completed their evaluations of him (EXHIBIT 2), although the comments were far less

favorable. Emily did not see the residents' evaluations before completing her own evaluation.

During an early January staff meeting roughly three weeks after Emily completed her initial positive evaluation of Jack, Monica explained to the GHDs that they would soon have to give recommendations detailing whether they believed each of the RAs should be rehired for the upcoming academic year. If the GHD thought that a RA on their staff should *not* be rehired, they had to have documented rational for their decision. At this point, Emily had not yet met with Jack to review his evaluation documentation from December. However, she recommended to Monica that Jack not be rehired for the upcoming academic year (EXHIBIT 3). When asked about documentation to support her recommendation not to rehire Jack, Emily was unable to provide sufficient evidence.

The following week, Emily first documented issues with Jack's job performance. At RSU, poor job performance is documented through a form called a Job Performance Action (JPA). There are five different levels of employment sanctions that a staff member can receive as a result of earning a JPA. In order of severity, these levels are: oral reprimand, written reprimand, probation, suspension, or termination. These levels are not sequential, as a staff member can be placed on probation without being placed on the oral then written level. At the beginning of the academic year, staff members are provided with a manual, which explicitly states that the level of sanctioning is determined by their infraction. Each staff member also signs a job contact where they agree to uphold all job responsibilities outlined in the staff manual (EXHIBIT 4). University Housing policy dictates that all JPAs must be discussed with and approved by the Resident Coordinator before they are assigned to an RA by the GHD. For consistency between all student staff, University Housing has guidelines of when a JPA is appropriate and the level it should be assigned (EXHIBIT 5).

Jack was first placed on oral reprimand in early January for checking in 30 minutes late for duty. Two weeks later, he was placed on written reprimand because he did not complete various aspects of his duty responsibilities. Jack did not complete one of his rounds, and did not sit in the residence hall office during the hours to which he was assigned.

During the first week in March, approximately one month after Jack's first documented job performance issues, the professional staff members were gathering to make final hiring decisions for the following year. On the morning of the hiring decision meeting, Monica woke up and checked her emails on her smart phone before heading out to the office. One email caught her immediate attention, as she was BCC'd (blind copied) on an email Emily wrote to Jack the night before:

Jack,

I'm shocked right now. I cannot believe that I am receiving this email from the Hall Director on duty when you and I literally just had a conversation last night about the inappropriateness of calling the duty phone for non-emergencies. I very clearly detailed in the email that I wrote to you that the HD duty phone is not a question/answer hotline. It is for reporting purposes only. That I why I supplement verbal conversations with emails (sic). I went to find you in the office to speak with you in person, and you were not there.

As I said last night in our meeting, your improper calling-up action with the Hall Director last week was sufficient enough to render a JPA yet I did not complete one. Due to the fact that I just had this conversation with you last night, yet proper calling-up procedures were not followed tonight with the Hall Director, I will be assessing a JPA. I will fill out the paperwork and we can have this conversation together on Friday.

Emily”

Today it will be up to Monica to decide if Jack should be rehired for the following year. Additionally, Monica needs to decide how to address Emily's behavior.

EXHIBIT 1

Jack’s Evaluation by Emily

“1” being the lowest rating- unacceptable performance
 “3” is considered completing the outlined expectations of the job
 “5” being the highest rating- excellent performance

The RA...	GHD Rating :
Is available on his/her floor and within the building.	5
Is a positive role model for his/her residents.	5
Properly enforces Rolling Springs and University Housing policies.	5
Completes administrative responsibilities in a thorough and timely fashion.	4
Has actively worked to develop community within his/her area of responsibility through programs.	5
Is able to properly mediate and resolve conflicts among his/her residents and residents in the building.	5
Contributes to the team environment with fellow RAs.	5
Has developed a good working relationship with the supervisor.	5
Attends staff meetings, turns in monthly reports, and responds to emails from their GHD consistently and on time.	4
Overall, how would you rate the job performance of this Resident Adviser?	4

Please list major strengths/accomplishments thus far.

Jack is wonderful! He is so friendly, outgoing, and very personable. He has demonstrated great interest in the job and in his residents and is extremely thoughtful in how he approaches each situation. I am so proud of him. He has shown tremendous growth in his role as a RA. At first he seemed very anxious about working with residents who are older than him, and balancing being a friend and a professional student representative of the university. Over the past few months he has done a fabulous job; he’s mature, understanding, and has established himself in his role. He’s so thoughtful and kind. I enjoy being around him very much!

What changes/recommendations would you suggest to improve job performance (if needed)?

Please continue to keep me “in the loop” about your personal status. Although I don’t need details, I need to know ahead of time if you’re going to miss something or not. I cannot find out afterwards, or during, when I’m looking for you. Thanks for doing this!

EXHIBIT 2

Residents’ Evaluation of Jack

“Jack is not accessible, even at the times when he said he would be available. I’ve spent three days trying to track him down to get hall information that he requires us to know but he is nowhere to be found, even after I have emailed him, text him, called him, and left a note under his door. I do not appreciate this when I have finals to study for. Also, I don’t think sophomores should be in charge of a primarily junior/senior dorm. His behavior shows that he is incapable of handling the responsibility and that he is insensitive to our schedules.”

“I think more activities should be planned and there should be more emphasis on community on the halls.”

Out of the 20 residents who evaluated Jack, 15 out of 20 rated him below satisfactory.

EXHIBIT 3

“Jack is frequently late, does the minimum expectations and requirements of the job, and has yet to display passion for this staff for position. He always has excuses, and is quick to defend himself during times when maturity and/or admittance would be better suited. He needs several reminders and frustrates his fellow RAs for not pulling his weight. His residents have expressed genuine concern over his leadership capabilities, so it is my suggestion that a year off to reorganize commitments and priorities may be ultimately beneficial. Then, with growth, perhaps his senior year he would be better equipped for this position again. It is with a heavy heart I write this, but I cannot honestly recommend him for rehire at this time.”

EXHIBIT 4

Staff Manual Excerpt

“The Resident Adviser position is a one academic year commitment, or may be limited to one academic semester, depending on need and availability of positions. Reappointment is not guaranteed, but is based upon performance and the successful completion of all interviews and applications required for returning staff. The Resident Adviser’s performance is under continuous evaluation so as to maintain the highest standards. Failure to meet any of the qualifications, requirements or responsibilities listed in this agreement or specified by the Graduate Hall Director and/or committing any unprofessional, unethical or other action in direct conflict, through electronic formats or otherwise, with the policies outlined in the Rolling Springs University Student Handbook, University Housing Guide to Living on Campus, and the Staff Manual, may result in personnel sanctions which could include, but are not limited to, verbal or written warnings, withholding of partial or full pay, suspension, probation or termination.”

EXHIBIT 5

**Rolling Springs University
University Housing Staff Performance Guidelines**

Please note that in any given incident any one of the mentioned sanctions can be imposed. This is not a definitive structure for all personnel action. Each issue will be evaluated on the merits and facts of the situation.

Violation	1st Offense	2nd Offense	3rd Offense
Unexcused absence from a staff meeting	Oral/Written Reprimand	Probation/Suspension	Termination
Consistently poor administrative work	Oral/Written Reprimand	Probation/Suspension	Termination
Failure to complete on-duty tasks	Oral/Written Reprimand	Probation/Suspension	Termination
Failure to meet supervisor expectations	Oral/Written Reprimand	Probation/Suspension	Termination
Failure to meet program requirements	Oral/Written Reprimand	Probation/Suspension	Termination
Failure to maintain confidentiality	Oral/Written Reprimand	Probation/Suspension	Termination
Violation of University Housing/ University policies	Probation/Suspension	Termination	
Possession, consumption or use of alcohol while on duty	Termination		
Illegal possession/use of drugs	Termination		
Loss of Staff Keys	Cost of replacement and possible termination		