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**COMMUNITY ASSISTANT ROLE AND ITS IMPACT ON ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE AND MENTAL HEALTH**

by

Abigail LaManna

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Leadership, Administration and Research
College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of
Master of Arts in Higher Education

at

Rowan University

April 19, 2024

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Abstract

Abigail LaManna
COMMUNITY ASSISTANT ROLE AND ITS IMPACT ON ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE AND MENTAL HEALTH
2023-2024

Stephanie Lezotte, Ph.D.
Master of Arts in Higher Education

The purpose of this study was to analyze the multifaceted challenges faced by Community Assistants (CAs) within residential life at Rowan University. Through an examination of existing literature, data, and qualitative insights, this study sheds light on how CAs prioritize their academics and mental health within their role. Three research questions guided the study: (1) To what extent does the demanding role of a Community Assistant impact their ability to prioritize their academic responsibilities? (2) To what extent does the demanding role of a Community Assistant impact their ability to prioritize their Mental Health? (3) How can Residential Life Offices better train and support the needs of the CAs academically? Findings reveal that CAs often prioritize their job responsibilities over their academic pursuits and mental health. Many participants reported difficulties in balancing their roles and were open to initiatives to support their academic endeavors better. This study advocates for the potential implementation of proactive initiatives to foster an environment where CAs feel empowered, valued, and equipped with the resources necessary to navigate their roles effectively while maintaining their academic pursuits and personal well-being. By addressing these challenges and supporting the holistic development of CAs, Residential Life offices can cultivate a more inclusive and supportive community environment conducive to success, well-being, and job satisfaction.

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Chapter I

Introduction

This thesis delineates the central role of Community Assistants (CA) within the field of student affairs, with a specific focus on the intricate balance they must maintain between their official responsibilities and the imperatives of academic excellence and individual mental well-being. CA is the most updated term for the collegiate student leader position commonly known as Resident Assistant, and the position is held by an undergraduate student staff member who oversees and supports students who reside in a residential area (Letarte, 2012). The term CA provides a more holistic view of their role in community-building efforts amongst their living areas. CAs interact and act as a support system for residential students daily with their focus being to foster a community within their designated residence hall (Jaeger & Caison, 2006). The role of a CA provides leadership experience on campus as they typically are the “frontline” of many student concerns (Edwards, 2010). As CAs continue to be a prominent leadership position in higher education, it is crucial that college housing departments critically assess their role in supporting CAs within their position as well as with their personal development. Due to the demanding responsibilities and time commitments encompassed with the CAs position, CAs sometimes have encountered challenges in achieving strong academic standing while concurrently fulfilling their duties within their positions.

This thesis will explore their perspective on self-prioritization, how CAs complete their academic tasks in relation to their work tasks, and potential supportive methods to be considered for future implementation to promote strong academic and job

performance. While CA training focuses on job-related responsibilities, it is crucial to not neglect the critical significance of both academics and well-being. There is a pressing need to reengage and restructure how housing departments support and cater to the multifaceted positions and the people who serve in them.

Statement of Problem

CAs are entrusted to be key figures on campus for numerous situations including academic referrals and mental health check-ins. Due to their frontward-facing role, at times their own scholarly and personal endeavors do not always occupy a centralized position in their collegiate experience. Likewise, placing high emphasis on others' well-being in a helping profession may create a personal struggle amongst CAs due to "working in the same environment in which they live," (Maten, 2020, p. 6). Furthermore, CAs oftentimes are expected to be a support for students who may be navigating similar experiences and challenges as they are mentors for their peers. For CAs to be successful in helping others they must receive the help they need to develop themselves professionally, personally, mentally, etc. This thesis will aim to identify ways in which housing departments can shift toward holistically supporting their staff in the same way it is expected that the staff serves their respective residents. How can CAs effectively assist fellow students when their academic progress and mental well-being remain under-assessed? Likewise, how can higher education professionals utilize the assessment and feedback from CAs to better develop a residential curriculum that holistically supports these individuals to achieve measurable success in their positions, academics, and well-being?

Significance of Problem

As the field of Higher Education continues to evolve, practitioners must continue to research and comprehend the challenges faced by students who are most affected by institutional and environmental changes. Higher Education and Student Affairs professionals rely on CAs to serve as student mentors and advocates for individuals who need a relatable perspective from someone who may have a closer understanding of certain challenges as opposed to professionals who are further removed from the student experience. This connection is why the role of a CA is pivotal in Higher Education (Lynch, 2017). Students look to on-campus living for further learning and social experience outside of the traditional classroom, and CAs play a large role in ensuring that residential students find belonging within their campus communities. While it is important for residents to live in a “community where [they] are known, loved, and accepted” it is equally important for student staff to receive this same collegiate experience (Rizzi, 2016, p. 1). While training efforts aid in providing a guiding path for these student leaders, it can be a challenge to fully prepare CAs to “find a balance and boundaries between creating personal space and fulfilling the needs of the residents living on the floor” (Maten, 2020, p. 4). This is why departments must assess their student workers and provide them with resources for themselves to be able to better handle the capacity of roles that are involved in their positions.

CAs are tasked with providing leadership within their residence halls, acting as a liaison for resource referrals, safety information, and support for mental health concerns, among other responsibilities. However, these multifaceted tasks often demand a lot from the CAs which can divert their focus on achieving their own degrees and academic goals

and present challenges in how they enact all their roles (Edwards, 2010). CAs are expected to be a point person for students, but who is actively engaging in making sure CAs feel equipped to maintain their schedules and make their academics the forefront of their college experience? Additionally, despite the stipulation of a GPA requirement to retain their positions, some CAs have struggled to meet these academic criteria of the position and have consequently been advised or forced to step away from the role to concentrate and prioritize their academics.

In some cases, the CAs who lose their position due to not meeting minimum GPA requirements have done exceptional work in their roles as CAs. While acknowledging the importance of prioritizing their academics over the position in these circumstances, CAs must balance the passion and excitement they have found within the position and the growth in their academic performance. CAs who lose their positions due to their academic performance are met with abrupt loss of support and financial benefits, particularly in the context of housing waivers. This raises the question of whether more can be done to support students so that they do not have to step away from their positions. Many CAs rely on the financial benefits of the position to be able to obtain their education; losing their role due to academic requirements can worsen the goal of having them prioritize their academics when stepping away from the role. The CA position is a “demanding job” that requires the “facilitation of social, academic, and personal needs of students, while simultaneously balancing [their] schedule and priorities as a student,” (Maten, 2020, p. 20). It is the job of Higher Education professionals to equally prepare and support these students in the navigation of the balancing act of being a CA, student academic performance, and personal well-being.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this quantitative research study is to identify the expectations and requirements that impact CAs' ability to prioritize their academics and mental health. This study seeks to gather information from current CAs at Rowan University in Glassboro, NJ, and understand what they believe would be beneficial to their academic success without compromising the critical role on campus that they hold. This study can inform housing departments on how to better support CAs throughout their academic needs and expectations by acknowledging portions of the job that prove the most challenging to balance. Due to the complex and evolving role in which CAs hold, it is crucial to assess what factors of the CA role impact both mental health and academic success the most to promote a better quality of life and work-life balance (McClure et al., 2022). Additionally, this study will also use those same challenging job expectations and requirements to identify potential solutions that may aid in creating a holistic support system for all the roles that CAs hold on campus to better maintain quality performance. Being proactive about the experience of CAs will help formulate additional training, and proper resources, and get a better holistic understanding of their needs.

Assumptions and Limitations

There is a degree of personal bias and experience within this study as I have served in this role in my own collegiate experience. Having served as a CA before assuming a role as a Graduate Community Director, I gained firsthand insight into the intricate balance that CAs navigate. The observation of seeing some CAs grapple with maintaining their mental health and overall academic satisfaction has sparked this topic of interest. This experience contributes to the motivation behind the research focus on

enhancing supportive measures for CA development and growth. Furthermore, the current role in supervising CAs in Residence Life may introduce an additional layer of bias. To reduce bias, each participant in the study will remain anonymous and the study is voluntary. This study hopes to find a better understanding on the CA role and their needs to be successful in all the roles they may hold which is not directly related to my personal experience.

This study also does not specifically discuss the inequities in educational resources and opportunities that are present and could be a potential future research addition. Holistically, it is evident that in education inequities and privileges are present and need to be addressed as it can have an implication of data results. To be intentional with my data, my study will be sent out to all CAs at the university so that no voice is left without the opportunity to speak on their experiences and any present educational barriers.

Another potential limitation is defining academic excellence, as this is subjective. Measures of academic success vary from student to student. In this study, the metric for assessing academic performance will primarily be based on the GPA requirements specific to the CA position.

While working on this study, the Rowan University Office of Residence Life and University Housing implemented a new academic support guide in fall 2023 for CAs to support any CA who did not maintain the required GPA and how to support them throughout the year to avoid termination due to GPA requirements. This is a limitation as it may change how CAs reportedly feel academically supported. Readers should consider this limitation when interpreting the findings.

Operational Definitions

1. Community Assistant: Throughout the course of this study, the term *Community Assistants* (CAs) will be used most frequently as it is the direct title of the group of students, from whom data will be gathered. The term *Resident Assistant* or *Residential Advisor* (RAs) can be used interchangeably as it defines the same job description across different post-secondary institutions and is the most common title for the position. Throughout the study, Community Assistant will be capitalized as I am directly referring to the position title.
2. Academic Success: “A student who completes their program and graduates on time while being adequately pleased with their performance and standing” (Reiley, 2016).
3. GPA: GPA represents the average grade point earned in a specific semester or term, incorporating all grades achieved during that period. Cumulative GPA, on the other hand, reflects the overall average grade point earned across multiple semesters, encompassing all courses taken throughout one's academic experience (Community College of Philadelphia, n.d.).
4. Engagement: Engagement encompasses the depth of interactions and connections students establish with their academic pursuits and the broader campus community (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009).

5. Involvement: Involvement, as outlined by Wolf-Wendel et al. (2009), “refers to the active participation and commitment of students in various academic pursuits within the university environment”.

Research Questions

This study will aim to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the demanding role of a Community Assistant impact their ability to prioritize their academic responsibilities?
2. To what extent does the demanding role of a Community Assistant impact their ability to prioritize their mental health?
3. How can Residential Life Offices better train and support the needs of the CAs academically?

Organization of Remaining Chapters

Chapter II of this research study will provide literature related to the Community Assistants role, the academic performance of student leaders, the mental health of Community Assistants, and the challenges this group of students face.

Chapter III will discuss the methodology of the study which will cover the description of the study, population group, and the tools in which data will be collected.

Chapter IV will present the findings of the data collected from the population of Community Assistants.

Chapter V will analyze the findings and provide additional areas to grow upon the research with best practices.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

This chapter will provide context and explain the literature behind CAs, their job responsibilities, their overall mental health, and their academic performance. Student leaders of all kinds know the conflict of balancing their positions, schoolwork, and life; based on the nature of the CA role, they are often expected to be present and available to troubleshoot the needs of their respective building tenants. CAs must be present and proactive in helping students at various times of day and night and are expected to uphold the standards of the institutions in which they are employed. This literature review will include the historical context of the CA role, the conflict of creating a positive work, life, and school balance, the mental health of student leaders on college campuses, and the academic pressures of being a student leader. CAs are often expected to provide resources and support for their residents, however, often overlooked is the fact that they are also students in need of resources and support.

This literature review also aims to examine how the role of a CA impacts their ability to prioritize their academic achievement due to common effects of the position including, burnout and secondary trauma. If untreated, these effects can impact a student's overall mental health and be a barrier to achieving high academic status (Lynch, 2019). As the field of Higher Education is evolving, practitioners must continue to research students who are most impacted by institutional and environmental changes. Higher Education and Student Affairs professionals rely on CAs to be student mentors and to be a voice for students who need a perspective that can relate closer in experience

to their struggles. This is why the role of a CA is pivotal in Higher Education (Lynch, 2017).

Community Assistant Role

CAs are undergraduate student leaders who foster relationships and aid in the acclimation and development of post-secondary residential students (Lynch, 2017). CAs support professional staff with administrative responsibilities and serve as resident crisis-based first responders. Students fulfilling this role are identified as having a strong presence within their institutional communities and are often labeled as: role models, counselors, resource providers, friends, and peers (Renn, 2020). Due to their presence, they have detailed expectations and mandated protocols in which they must follow in order to successfully serve their communities. Likewise, they are expected to be academically strong and have a wide campus knowledge to better understand resident concerns. According to Boone et al. (2016), “In more recent years, federal legislation has required institutions—and, by extension, RAs to pay close attention to residents and the residential environment,” society is constantly shifting and demanding more of students, faculty, and institutions (pp. 46-47). As safety measures and mental health become increasingly more prevalent in students' lives, it is the job of a CA to be able to be proactive in supporting their residents' needs while at the same time maintaining their own. Blimling and Miltenberger (1981) explained the role of the CA position to be:

one of the most comprehensive roles in the student affairs division. . . to hold so many responsibilities, and to be accountable for so many people during the time when you are shaping your own education is one of the greatest challenges you will face during early adulthood. (p. 11)

CAs continuously work to support their residents and uphold the institution's missions and values; they are placed on pedestals with their training to stand on. However, in a helping profession, it is equally important to analyze and assess the helper as it is to assess the person in which they are helping. Several researchers have discussed the need to support professionals working in helping professions and have concluded that repeated exposure to those experiencing trauma can have harmful effects on those who are providing support (Baird & Kracen, 2006; Lynch, 2017). CAs are responsible for aiding in crisis management and supporting serious resident concerns including suicide, suicidal ideations, Title IX, domestic violence, microaggressions, discrimination, harassment, etc... because of this they are at the forefront of many campus issues and yet there is not an emphasis or focus on these individuals and their own required support (Lynch, 2019). As the position continues to develop, the importance of being observers will be more prominent to continue to be proactive with residential concerns (Boone et al., 2016). The question then becomes how institutions continue to add to the CA responsibilities while still effectively supporting them as individuals and students.

Community Assistant History

Resident Hall Assistants first were utilized throughout college campuses in the early 1960s as supervisors to their residents (Upcraft & Pilato, 1982). Resident Hall Assistants (RAs) are selected individuals who are strongly developed, academically excellent, empathetic, and positive candidates (Renn, 2020). Renn (2020) depicts the CA role as one that aids other students in achieving academic success and provides mentorship. CAs are chosen due to their demonstrated academic performance and for the purpose of promoting healthy academic behaviors and habits (Renn, 2020). However, this

is not always the case when it comes to being able to prioritize their own academic behaviors.

Academic Success and Mental Health

Academics have always been at the forefront of a student's journey, as they play a pivotal role in what comes next following graduation. However, CAs are often viewed in the forefront by their title and not as students, so attention to their academics may sometimes be treated as secondary to their job duties. Given these evolving job duties, students now more than ever are struggling to find a balance between their academic performance and their mental health. One of the six factors Kruisselbrink (2013) identified “as contributing to mental health concerns in higher education is academic pressure” (Kruisselbrink, 2013). Students identify academic stress as a leading cause of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation (Kruisselbrink, 2013). According to research conducted by Furr et al. (2001), among 1,455 American students found that 53% of participants reported an increase in depressive symptoms after beginning college (Furr et al. 2001, pg. 2) The primary reason identified for this increase in mental health concerns was academic challenges. In more recent years, the pressure of academic demands has intensified due to elevated expectations for high grades and the disparity between academic aspirations and actual achievements (Kruisselbrink, 2013). Students are pushed to excel without being adequately instructed on how to cope with failure, an essential aspect of maturing (Kruisselbrink, 2013).

Community Assistant Mental Health

As more students identify struggling with mental illness and utilizing more campus resources, data show that while it is positive that students are seeking mental

health resources, there is a definite negative link between mental illness and academic outcomes (Jeffries & Salzer, 2022). This is important because if CAs are struggling with mental health and are not at the forefront of institutions' minds, they are left behind to battle their own concerns for themselves and suffer the academic and personal consequences due to their granted autonomy over their student experience. In addition, CAs who have experienced burnout and secondary trauma in their position are more likely to have longer lasting mental health implications (Jeffries & Salzer, 2022). While institutions require CAs to be present and aware in their own areas, the concern is if they are appropriately acknowledging their own challenges or placing them off to the side to focus on their job responsibilities. Jeffries and Salzer (2022) concluded that mental health symptoms have a negative effect on several academic factors including GPA standings and retention rates. Furthermore, the study concluded that levels of anxiety and depression coincided with lower academic self-efficacy (Jeffries & Salzer, 2022). As the number of students with anxiety and depression increases each year, it is important to assess the needs of the community and student staff to appropriately serve students individually. CAs are expected to support students with their mental health issues but are not always being assessed or supported by their supervisors as they do for their residents.

CAs play a crucial role in the academic and mental well-being of college students. As highlighted in Novotney (2014), an assistant at the Ohio State University said, “for students to be able to learn at their peak capacity, they need to be physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually well” (p.1). CAs' academic performance and mental health may be influenced by their roles and responsibilities as they navigate the demands of their coursework alongside their duties in supporting their peers. Thus, understanding the

relationship between CAs' academic performance and mental health is crucial for developing effective support systems within university settings.

CAs are also responsible for aiding students in crisis and providing resources to support mental health concerns that their residents are experiencing. Burnout, secondary trauma, and negative workplace relationships are built when workers are not being supported (Vaughn et al. 2016). The authors also explain that part-time post-secondary student employment, specifically regarding workplace relationships, can have a large impact on student mental health (Vaughn et al., 2016). Vaughn et al. (2016) issued a survey that requested self-reported data regarding the relationships between the participant and their supervisor and work peers, their own mental health, and job factors including burnout and available support networks. As this study concludes, the prevalence of positive workplace relationships, available support, and mental health can prove to hold a large amount of weight and implication on the overall experience of undergraduate college student worker experience (Vaughn et al. 2016).

The Secondary Trauma in Resident Assistant Scale (Lynch, 2017) and findings show secondary trauma is a factor in the negative impacts of resident assistant burnout and increased anxiety and depression correlated to the position. The study suggests implications for CA training that can be incorporated to support staff in acknowledging work environmental factors that lead to secondary trauma and how to better take care of themselves before, during, and following incidents helping students in crisis (Lynch, 2017).

Community Assistant Academic Success

One of the major barriers for CAs to perform academically is the lack of dialogue surrounding the importance of academic success (Renn, 2020). Prioritizing student success and making sure CA supervisors actively have discussions with CAs about their coursework and their mental health is crucial in being able to properly supervise and train them. Additionally, when supervisors begin to take notice and acknowledge the academic and personal lives of their workers, they are more likely to be able to proactively anticipate secondary trauma triggers and interactions, signs of burnout, and mental health awareness. In most universities, CAs must meet a GPA standard in order to be hired and retain their position, however, they are not taught how to manage their role while prioritizing their academics. As CAs hold a leadership role they are expected to utilize training and uphold legal elements regarding confidentiality while still attending to their individual student needs, their assigned community, and student development (Boone et al., 2016). It is a large role to place on students with no professional experience when they are expected to be a primary resource to struggling students. This begs the question why continue to have this position if students are struggling? The CA position has evolved and includes a higher emphasis on fostering an environment that is safe as well as social (Manata et al., 2017). Because of this, community-oriented practices are a focal point of the CA position (Manata et al. 2017). Several positive outcomes have been identified for those who are employed as CAs, due to the emphasis on more community-based tasks, including building friendships, a sense of belonging, resident personal development, and an increase in academic performance (Manata et al., 2017).

Torress et al. (2010) describe the intricate relationship between employment, academic success, and mental health among college students. Their study highlights time commitments, and the importance of supervision and support for student workers. CAs' attention can divert from socially supportive relationships with their peers on campus due to their job involvement (Torress et al., 2010). Furthermore, the authors emphasized the pivotal role of supportive interactions with faculty and staff in fostering a positive work environment for student employees (Torress et al., 2010). Educating faculty and staff about the importance of such interactions could enhance job satisfaction and contribute to better mental health outcomes for working college students (Torress et al., 2010). This can be demonstrated in assessing common concerns among CAs and implementing supportive measures to create a more positive work environment. These findings suggest that by creating supportive work environments and facilitating meaningful interactions between students and staff, colleges can promote the mental well-being of student employees, enabling them to thrive mentally, physically, and academically (Torress et al., 2010).

Higher Education researchers have been focusing on the imperative work that CAs provide within their respective communities but often neglect the equally important side of growing these students professionally as well as serving them academically and personally. Studies have shown that mental illness can have great impacts on student performance, likewise, workplace relationships and burnout have similar effects (Jeffries & Salzer, 2022). Students are at risk of lower self-efficacy when there is not constant dialogue encouraging their academic performance (Jeffries & Salzer, 2022). When students do not believe that they can perform well, they often stunt their development and

lose motivation (Jeffries & Salzer, 2022). It is imperative that as Higher Education continues to develop, practitioners assess their student workers to make sure that we are developing them to be successful when they receive their diplomas and leave post-secondary education. It is the responsibility of supervisors, Higher Education professionals, and institutions to actively engage and encourage their student workers to achieve academic excellence while preserving their mental health. The following chapter outlines my own study's research methodology, which aims to contribute to this body of knowledge and find an understanding of the impact of not properly supporting CAs as students first.

Chapter III

Methodology

Context of Study

This study was designed as a quantitative survey and consisted of self-reported data from employed CAs, at the time of the survey, within the 2023-2024 academic term at Rowan University's main campus in Glassboro, New Jersey. The position name was changed from Resident Assistant to Community Assistant in 2022 due to being a holistic encompassing explanation of the role. Rowan University was founded in 1923, and now Rowan has grown into a well-regarded institution (Rowan University, 2023). At the time of this study, I was a graduate community director for the Office of Residential Learning and University Housing.

The research will further previous knowledge about how CAs prioritize their academics and mental health within their required job expectations. At Rowan University, some of the most time-sensitive and long-term job responsibilities, found in the current 2022-2023 CA job description, will be referenced throughout the methodology to assess how students prioritize these tasks over their academics. These tasks are listed below:

- (1) Provide direct assistance to residents by mediating roommate conflicts and disagreements,
- (2) Facilitate 1:1s with each resident in the assigned area once a semester, in line with social mapping expectations,
- (3) Provide active and passive programs based on the residential curriculum expectations for your population of students,
- (4) Serve as a mandated reporter and responsible employee for highly

escalated and sensitive situations, (5) Complete health & fire safety inspections at least once a semester and other times as expected by supervisors as needed, (6) Participate in the nightly duty rotation as assigned, complete assigned rounds and provide lock-out, emergency, and other assistance to residents as appropriate from 8pm – 8am each night as scheduled with building staff. (Rowan University, 2023, n.p.).

Population and Sample

The nature of this study was specific to the 2023-2024 academic year community assistants. The population of students employed as a CA at the time of the study, and included in the survey distribution was 143 students. To ensure findings were representative of the population, the number of responses needed was approximately 109 which would be considered a 95% confidence level and leave for a 5% margin of error. To participate in the study, the respondents needed to meet all four criteria: (1) the participant must be 18 years or older, (2) a current Community Assistant at Rowan University, (3) currently enrolled in an undergraduate program, (4) a full-time student at Rowan University. All currently employed CAs, at the time of this study, were 18 and older and were matriculated undergraduate students. Anyone who was not a current CA at Rowan University was excluded from this survey. This study also excluded any CAs hired mid-year as they may not have been able to speak on their experience within the position and this study's survey may have been distributed before they began their roles as a CA. I worked with the housing department to filter out any newly hired CAs from being included in the sample.

Instrumentation

The study's instrumentation consisted of a voluntary and anonymous survey that utilized Qualtrics, titled Community Assistants Role and Its Impact on Academic Performance and Mental Health. At any point in the survey, participants were allowed to skip a question if they did not feel it related to their experience in the role. The survey did not take participants more than 15 minutes to fill out on average.

The survey categories were divided into blocks. The first block was labeled consent to participate. This section was mandatory and was where participants gave their voluntary consent to participate in the survey. If a participant did not consent, they were unable to move forward to the survey questions to guarantee the consent of all participants. This block explained that there was no risk to participants who completed the survey. This section also explained the purpose of the study and that while there may not be a direct benefit to participants, their perspectives and potential solutions may be used by housing departments to better support Community Assistants in future years. This block also explained to participants that their identity would remain confidential and would be stored in a secure computer file. Participants would have to click that they are consenting to participate in the survey before they can view any survey questions.

The second block included the introduction questions. These introduction questions were utilized to potentially identify common themes between answers. This section included general informational questions regarding the participants and included their GPA and whether they were satisfied with their overall emphasis on academics and mental health.

The third block focused on the CA role and questions asked included whether the participant prioritized job responsibilities over their academics and mental health. This block also included a question where the participant could identify some potential initiatives that would be beneficial in implementation. These initiatives included: academic check-ins with their supervisor on a more regular basis, scheduled study hours, specific training sessions on balancing their role and academics, scheduled drop-in hours at the tutoring center/writing center catered to CAs, and having an academic support coordinator for CAs to utilize when they need support.

The last two blocks consist of a five-point Likert scale; the first pertained to academics and the other pertained to mental health. Likert scales are a user attitude scale format for measuring public opinion, which assesses how strongly individuals agree or disagree with statements; they are commonly utilized in survey research to gauge attitudes and opinions on topics (Robinson, 2023). These questions were utilized to see whether participants felt the department supported them in both categories as well as to see how they gauged their own experience of academic and mental health prioritization. This section was the most crucial to the research as it created numerical that allowed me to see what areas community assistants may need additional support or direction in.

Each block included questions to assess the following Research Questions:

1. To what extent does the demanding role of a Community Assistant impact their ability to prioritize their academic responsibilities?
2. To what extent does the demanding role of a Community Assistant impact their ability to prioritize their mental health?
3. How can Residential Life Offices better train and support the needs of the CAs academically?

Procedures of Gathering Data

Participants were recruited via student email. The utilization of an online survey was to encourage more participants to feel comfortable in participating (McMillan, 2016). I was approved access and use of CA emails by the institution's Director of Residential Learning and University Housing. Recruitment email language was approved by IRB. These emails included an explanation of the research study and survey. The email sent to participants stated that the survey was voluntary and would have no impact on their employment or evaluation as a CA. On December 1st, 2023, IRB approved the study's data collection methods and instrumentation.

Data Analysis

This study was conducted over a seven-to-eight-month timeframe which corresponded with the length of the graduate seminar course. This time frame was utilized to allow for an adequate amount of time to receive approval from IRB, recruit participants, conduct the study, and assess the data results. The data collected were scanned for any outliers and were analyzed for any missing data before analysis (Bannon, 2015). As such, the dataset was cleaned to ensure quality, completeness, validity, and accuracy (Arevalo et al., 2022). The independent variables of this study included the role of the CA, how many years a CA has been employed, individual CA GPA, and the individual CA's expected graduation date. The dependent variables because of these factors included how often CAs prioritize their jobs over their academics, and how often they prioritize their jobs over their general mental health. Another dependent variable is how CAs view certain support initiatives to help balance their roles.

The answers of individuals who participated were not disclosed to the Office of Residence Life or Community Assistant supervisors as this survey in no way influenced CAs current employment with the Office of Residence Life.

The following chapter will discuss the findings of the survey questions.

Chapter IV

Findings

Profile of Sample

The participants of this survey consisted of undergraduate student staff members from the Office of Residential Learning and University Housing (RLUH) at Rowan University. The survey was distributed via Qualtrics email using a current roster of staff members from the department. The survey was distributed on December 11, 2023, and was closed on February 12, 2024. Within that period, the survey was sent out via Qualtrics three times to engage non-respondents to receive more participation. The survey was sent to 143 Community Assistants and received 38 responses. Thirty-three participants completed the full survey. Of the five participants who did not fully complete the survey, two participants completed 85% of the survey and three completed 62% of the survey. This yields a response rate of 26.57%. Due to the small response rate, the data collected should be seen as a foundation to build upon in future research and findings may not be representative of the population. All numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number for tables and therefore percentages may add up to 101%.

Table 1 contains responses from CAs to gather information on how many years they have served as a CA in the department. The total number of responses to this question was 38. Twenty participants are within their first year of the position, which is 53% of the survey participants. This provides insight into the participants and their time within the position as their prioritization may vary depending on the years, they have held this leadership position.

Table 1*Years of Respondents' CA Experience*

Years as a Community Assistant	Count	Percentage
1 year of less	20	53%
2 years	12	32%
3 years	5	13%
4 years or more	1	3%

Note. This survey question had a 100% completion rate from respondents N=38

Table 2 provides CA responses on their reported academic year at the time of the survey. The total number of responses to this question was 38. Many respondents were upper-divisional students – meaning they were juniors or seniors at the time of the survey. No participants were freshmen as all CAs must be at least a sophomore in status based on credits.

Table 2*Current Academic Year of Respondents*

Academic Year	Count	Percentage
Sophomore	8	21%
Junior	13	34%
Senior	17	45%

Note. This survey question had a 100% completion rate from respondents N=38

Table 3 contains the self-reported cumulative GPA of CAs based on a scale range. The total number of participants for this question was 38. Sixteen CAs who completed the survey reported their GPA within the range of 3.6 - 4.0, which is 42% of the participants. Fifteen CAs reported that their cumulative GPA was between 3.1 – 3.5, which is 39% of the participants. Seven CA’s GPA was reported to be under 3.0 and 0 participants reported a cumulative GPA of under 2.0 as that would fall under the GPA requirement for their position.

Table 3

GPA of Respondents

Cumulative GPA	Count	Percentage
4.0-3.6	16	42%
3.5-3.1	15	39%
3.0-2.6	6	16%
2.5-2.1	1	3%
2.0 or below	0	0%

Note. This survey question had a 100% completion rate from respondents N=38

Table 4 contains the responses from 38 CAs and their reported relationship with Academic Probation. Thirty-one participants, or 82%, have never been on Academic probation within their role. Four participants, or 11%, were not currently on academic probation but have been in the past. Three participants, or 8%, reported to be currently on

Academic Probation within their role as a CA at Rowan University at the time of the survey.

Table 4

Academic Probation Status of Participants

Current Standing	Count	Percentage
No	31	82%
I am not currently on Academic Probation but have been in the past	4	11%
Yes, I am currently on Academic Probation	3	8%

Note. This survey question had a 100% completion rate from respondents N=38

Table 5 consists of the general satisfaction with the participating CA's academic performance. This question received a 100% completion rate of 38 participants. Of the participants, 63% or 24 individuals reported that were satisfied with their current academic performance. Fourteen CAs, or 37%, reported that they were not satisfied with their academics at the time of the study.

Table 5

Academic Satisfaction

Current Satisfaction	Count	Percentage
No	14	37%
Yes	24	63%

Note. This survey question had a 100% completion rate from respondents N=38

Table 6 contains the responses from participants on whether they felt their academics had an impact on their general mental health. Of the participants, 27 reported that their academics did have an impact on their mental health. Eleven reported that their mental health was not impacted by their academic performance.

Table 6

Academic Impact on Mental Health

Impact on Mental Health	Count	Percentage
No	11	29%
Yes	27	71%

Note. This survey question had a 100% completion rate from respondents N=38

Table 7 identifies specific CA job responsibilities that occupy a CAs typical schedule. Participants were instructed to select the job tasks that they would prioritize

over an academic requirement. The participants were allowed to select more than one response for this question depending on their own experience with prioritization. The total number of participants who completed this question was 35. Of those responses, two participants reported that they would not prioritize a job task over their academic expectations. Twenty-two participants reported prioritizing one of their residents asking to meet with them over their role as a student. Twenty-four participants reported prioritizing an escalated roommate mediation over their academic commitments. Thirty participants or 86% reported that they would prioritize a resident crisis emergency over their academics.

Table 7

Academic Prioritization and Job Responsibility

Job Tasks	Count	Percentage
None	2	6%
Resident Crisis Emergency	30	86%
Resident 1:1s	11	31%
Health and Safety Inspections	12	34%
Escalated Roommate Mediations	24	69%
Task from Supervisor	18	51%
Resident asking to meet	22	63%
Hosting a program	16	46%

Note. This survey question had a 92% completion rate from respondents N=35. Participants could choose more than one answer.

Table 8 suggests five different support initiative suggestions that the CA participants could select based on whether they would utilize or be interested in the support measure implemented within their positions. Five participants selected that none of the initiatives would be beneficial or interest them in terms of academic support. Twenty-two participants selected that having an individualized academic support coordinator for CAs to utilize throughout the year would be beneficial or a method of support in which they would want to utilize in the future. The participants were able to select more than one method if they believed that they would utilize the resource or be interested in its implementation. Thirty-five participants completed this question of the survey.

Table 8

Academic Support Initiatives

Initiatives	Count	Percentage
None	5	14%
Academic check-ins with supervisor	8	23%
Scheduled study hours on a weekly-Basis	8	23%
Specific Training on Balancing Academics and Position	10	29%
Scheduled drop-in hours at the tutoring/ writing center for CAs	2	11%

Initiatives	Count	Percentage
Having an Academic Support Coordinator for CAs to utilize throughout the year	22	63%

Note. This survey question had a 92% completion rate from respondents N=35. Participants could choose more than one answer.

Table 9 utilizes the same framework as Table 7 but focuses strictly on mental health prioritization of CA participants. The participants were able to select as many tasks as they felt they normally prioritize over their own personal mental health. Four CAs reported that they would not prioritize any job responsibility over their own personal mental health. Thirty-five participants completed this question. Eighty-six percent of participants reported that they would prioritize a resident crisis emergency over their own personal mental health.

Table 9

Mental Health Prioritization and Job Responsibility

Job Tasks	Count	Percentage
None	4	11%
Resident Crisis Emergency	30	86%
Resident 1:1s	11	31%
Health and Safety Inspections	11	31%

Job Tasks	Count	Percentage
Escalated Roommate Mediations	23	66%
Task from Supervisor	19	54%
Resident asking to meet	21	60%
Hosting a program	15	43%

Note. This survey question had a 92% completion rate from respondents N=35. Participants could choose more than one answer.

Table 10 utilizes a 5-point Likert scale utilizing (Robinson, 2023) based on how often CAs felt academically supported within their student leadership position at Rowan University. Eighteen CAs reported that they have never skipped a class due to their job expectations. Fourteen CAs reported that they have not often felt academically supported within their position. Eleven CAs reported that they somewhat often look to the department for ways to receive academic support. Thirty-three participants completed this portion of the survey for an 86% participation rate. Participants were asked eight questions to assess their experience with academic support. It is noteworthy that while 14 participants expressed a lack of academic support within their position, 17 CAs reported being often encouraged by their supervisors to excel in their academics.

Table 10

Academic Support Within CA Position

Field	Never	Not Often	Somewhat Often	Often	Extremely Often
How often have you felt academically supported within your CA position?	1	14	11	6	1
How often are you to prioritize your CA position over academic assignments?	1	5	17	6	4
How often are you encouraged to perform well in your courses by supervisors in housing?	0	5	5	17	6

Field	Never	Not Often	Somewhat Often	Often	Extremely Often
How often have you skipped a task to perform a needed job task?	18	8	4	2	1
How often would you utilize reserved study hours for classwork provided by the department?	5	6	12	4	6
How often do you look for ways the department can better serve you academically?	5	12	11	4	1
How often would you benefit from department check-ins regarding your academics?	4	8	8	4	2

34

Note. This survey question had a 86% completion rate from respondents N=33.

Table 11 utilizes the same five-point Likert scale as Table 10 however it focuses on mental health support within CAs position at Rowan University. The participants were asked six questions to assess mental health support within their experience with the department. Thirty-three participants completed this portion of the survey for an 86% completion rate. One participant expressed that they had never received felt mentally supported within their role as a CA. Fifteen participants reported that they somewhat often look to the department to better support them mentally within their position. Ten participants reported that they often prioritize their role over their mental health. Twelve participants reported that they extremely often prioritize their role over their own interests.

Table 11*Mental Health Support Within CA Position*

Field	Never	Not Often	Somewhat Often	Often	Extremely Often
How often have you felt mentally supported within your CA position?	1	8	14	6	4
How often are you to prioritize your CA position over your mental health?	2	6	9	10	6
How often are you worried that you will not meet an academic deadline due to your mental health?	3	8	12	9	1
How often do you prioritize this position over your own interests?	2	3	10	7	12

Field	Never	Not Often	Somewhat Often	Often	Extremely Often
How often do you look for ways the department can better support you mentally?	3	9	15	4	2
How often would you benefit from regular check-ins regarding your mental health?	3	6	14	9	1

37

Note. This survey question had a 86% completion rate from respondents N=33.

Chapter V

Summary, Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Summary of Study

This study explores the CA role at Rowan University and how CAs prioritize both their academic and mental needs within their student leadership position. The purpose of this study is to be able to better support students who hold this role on campus while equally empowering them and emphasizing the importance of student success and mental well-being and care. Of the 143 CAs who were employed at the time of the study, 38 completed the survey. The survey was distributed via Qualtrics on December 11, 2023, and was closed on February 12, 2024. Within this time frame, CAs who had yet to respond were sent three additional reminders for participation. The survey data was downloaded and stored on a laptop secured with a password for analysis.

Discussion

Research Question I

As a reminder, the first research question that guided the study and survey question was: To what extent does the demanding role of a Community Assistant impact their ability to prioritize their academic responsibilities? Participants were asked six questions that revolved around academics within their role as a CA. Table 7 and Table 10 directly discuss academic prioritization within the CA position. Table 7 presents the outcomes of surveying participants about which of their specific job duties they would prioritize over their academic commitments. Only two of the thirty-five participants for

this question explained that they would not prioritize the job over academic priorities. Respondents were allowed to choose more than one response to this question. The responses to this question demonstrate that of the study participants, approximately 94% of them would prioritize at least one of their job tasks over an academic need. The tasks that obtained the highest prioritization from the participating CAs were escalated roommate conflicts, resident crisis emergencies, resident requests for meetings, and tasks assigned by their supervisors. This survey data indicates that the majority of the CAs who took part in this study prioritized their role over their student responsibilities in several job task categories.

The academic prioritization of CAs presents some contradicting perspectives between perceived support from the department and the expectations set by supervisors. Despite supervisors' encouragement for academic success, many CAs reported feeling inadequately supported academically by the department. Renn (2020) concluded the persistence of existing responsibilities alongside additional expectations for student success initiatives creates a sense of burden and, consequently, enables CAs to prioritize certain aspects of their role over academic pursuits (Renn, 2020). The disconnect between encouragement and actual support may contribute to the challenges CAs face in effectively balancing their academic responsibilities with their role obligations. Additionally, job responsibilities present a significant challenge to prioritizing academics. While only 6% of participants reported not prioritizing any task over their academics, more than 50% of participants indicated they would prioritize at least four out of the seven job tasks listed in Table 7 over their academic pursuits.

Table 10 surveyed respondents utilizing a 5-point Likert scale. Thirty-three participants completed this survey question in which they were asked how often they were to prioritize their CA position over academic commitments. Among the participants, 81% stated they prioritize their job over their student status at least somewhat often. This statistic is a combination of participants who reported they somewhat often, often, or extremely often prioritize their position over their academic needs. To break it down further, 17 participants indicated that they somewhat often prioritize their jobs over their academics. Six participants prioritize their jobs often over their studies, while four prioritize their jobs extremely often over their role as students. To continue to discuss Table 10, participants selected that they do not often miss or skip a class session due to their positions. Of the participants, 33% reported that they are somewhat often worried that they will miss a deadline due to their job expectations. This data shows that Rowan University CAs, who participated in the survey, tend to prioritize their job responsibilities over their student assignments and projects at least somewhat often. However, they are less likely to skip or miss classes due to their job tasks.

Research Question II

The second research question that was utilized to guide this study is as follows: To what extent does the demanding role of a Community Assistant impact their ability to prioritize their Mental Health? Three survey questions focused on mental health within the CA position including surveying how CAs who participated prioritized their mental well-being in their role. Table 6, Table 9, and Table 11 aided in the analysis of this research question.

In Table 6, participants were asked whether their role as a CA affected their overall mental health. Among the 38 respondents to this question, 71% indicated that their position did have an impact on their mental well-being. This suggests that the demanding nature of the CA role does indeed affect their ability to prioritize participants' mental health to a considerable extent.

Table 9 asked participants to select job tasks in which they prioritize or do not prioritize over their mental health needs. Thirty-five participants completed this question, and participants were allowed to choose multiple answers as they felt fit. Four participants selected that they would not prioritize any of the listed tasks over their mental health. Of the remaining results, they trended slightly lower than that of academic prioritization; meaning that of the CA participants, they are more likely to prioritize their mental health over their position as opposed to how often they would prioritize their academics over their position. However, a majority of participants indicated a willingness to prioritize at least one job task over both their mental health and academic obligations. The data reveals that the same job tasks, which were prioritized over academics, also emerged as top priorities over mental health. These tasks include a resident crisis emergency, escalated roommate conflicts, a resident asking for a meeting, and a task given by their supervisors. This suggests that these four tasks are particularly demanding or consuming within their responsibilities as Community Assistants.

The job responsibility that had the largest response rate in both academic and mental health prioritization was responding to resident crisis emergencies. Given the prevalence of mental health support in higher education settings and the crucial role of CAs in supporting residents facing suicidal ideation, crisis response reportedly can take

precedence over CAs' well-being (Lynch, 2017). This emphasis on crisis intervention arises from the urgent need for CAs to provide immediate assistance to individuals in emotional distress. Furthermore, CAs are expected to navigate a wide range of traumatic incidents, including severe mental health conditions, which can lead to increased levels of secondary trauma (Lynch, 2017). Table 11 verifies that CAs are feeling the emotional impact within their role as 45% indicated that they somewhat often seek departmental support of their mental well-being within their role. This highlights the importance of ongoing efforts to enhance support mechanisms within the department, ensuring that CAs are equipped to maintain and prioritize their mental well-being while fulfilling their responsibilities effectively.

Table 11 utilized the same 5-point Likert scale as Table 10 and focused on mental health prioritization within the Rowan University CA role. This question received thirty-three responses from participants. Specifically, 76% of participants reported prioritizing their position over their mental well-being at least somewhat often. Additionally, the fact that 12 participants stated they extremely often prioritize their role as a CA over their passions and personal interests highlights the substantial impact of the demanding role on their overall well-being and personal fulfillment. This data indicates that the demanding role of a Community Assistant significantly affects their ability to prioritize their mental health.

Research Question III

The third and final research question which outlines the trajectory of this study is:
How can Residential Life Offices better train and support the needs of the CAs

academically? Tables 8 and 10 were used in the consideration of this question. Table 8 shows results from 35 participants and Table 10 shows results from 33 participants.

Table 8 surveyed participating Rowan University CAs regarding potential future implementation initiatives to assess their perceived benefit to their academic pursuits and prioritization. Of the recorded data, 14% of respondents explained that none of the initiatives would prove beneficial to their academic needs. The remaining respondents selected at least one initiative that they would utilize if implemented and feel would benefit their academic experience within their student leadership role. This data tells us that of the participants, many are looking for ways the department can support them further academically, and CAs would indeed utilize added efforts to increase their academic prioritization and emphasis.

Recommendations for Practice

According to the findings and analysis of the reported data of this study, these are recommendations for implementation or consideration to be utilized by housing departments that actively supervise student leaders to support their holistic needs better.

1. A large majority of CA participants expressed an interest in and benefit from working further with campus partners in the Academic Support Programs office in having a specific support coordinator who could be a liaison for academic needs within student leaders. This could provide a 1:1 support network for CAs and aid in the emphasis on academic success and balance within the job.
2. There were 105 employed CAs at the time of study who did not participate in the study. University housing departments should consider utilizing an assessment to

routinely audit the prioritization of job and mental health within their role to ensure they are adequately supporting their student workers.

3. CA prioritization and work-school-life balance should be a key topic that is covered within CA training sessions as well as should be implemented in continuous training sessions throughout the academic year to ensure that CAs are frequently reminded to emphasize their academics and mental health within their role.
4. The department of RLUH could create specified training sessions to discuss aspects of the CA job that were found to be often prioritized over their academic and mental health needs. This could be a preventative measure and a proactive way to approach training to prepare incoming CAs of how to ensure they are taking care of themselves both academically and personally in more rigorous job tasks.
5. To emphasize academic prioritization, housing departments should develop optional study hours to provide a working place for staff to come and place emphasis on their academics within their role, as finding time and a space to be productive may not be easy within their demanding job responsibilities.
6. RLUH and other institutions' housing departments should continue to promote GPA requirements within the position to promote the importance of academic success in their role on campus. This can be seen in the developed Academic Support Plan that was introduced by RLUH in 2023 to be more active in supporting students who are placed on academic probation within their positions due to their GPA not meeting expectations.

7. Housing departments should continue to remind CAs of mental health resources and find ways to integrate their passions and interests into the job position, so they gain fulfillment and are therefore less likely to feel burnt out due to the role. A tangible way to do this would be to have a direct wellness coordinator to act as a liaison for student staff well-being needs.

Recommendations for Future Research

An important area for future research or expanding this study would be to investigate how much time students in leadership positions spend on their academic responsibilities in terms of their role on campus. Research on the time CAs spend engaging in academic activities is essential for understanding the potential benefits of academic support for CAs themselves, particularly in terms of their involvement and engagement with academic matters (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). As highlighted by Tinto, involvement in academic and social activities is central to the integration process, emphasizing the importance of academic engagement for both students and those who support them (as cited in Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). Moreover, Astin (1984) suggests that “the amount of time students spend with faculty and other academic matters” has a more powerful impact on student learning and college outcomes than any other factor, (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009, p. 411). This emphasizes the significance of investigating how CAs' involvement in academic pursuits can contribute to their academic growth and engagement. Hence, further research in this area could offer valuable insights into how providing academic support for CAs may enhance their academic involvement and overall effectiveness in supporting student success within the university context.

Another aspect worth exploring is how universities distribute their resources and set up learning opportunities to encourage student participation and derive benefits from such engagements (Kuh, 2001). While this study focuses largely on the specific housing department at Rowan University, it would be informative to see how universities on a grander scale prioritize their academic emphasis with student leaders. This broader institutional context plays a role in shaping how students in leadership positions manage their academic responsibilities and would be a valid expansion to this study.

Conclusions

The findings from this study show the explicit need to assess the CA's role and how CAs prioritize their academics, mental health, and job expectations. Continuous conversations and efforts to better support CAs are crucial for their development and overall well-being. By fostering an environment where CAs feel supported, valued, and equipped with the resources they need, institutions can enhance the effectiveness of their roles while also promoting their personal growth and development. The research data suggest that the implementation of ongoing/additional training, mentorship programs, regular check-ins, and opportunities for assessment and collaboration could greatly support these efforts of development. Ultimately, investing in the support and development of CAs not only improves their individual experiences but also contributes to a more positive and thriving community environment and more engaged student workers.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the data collected. With prioritization, a significant portion of CAs who participated in this study tended to prioritize their job responsibilities over their academic and mental health commitments. This prioritization is

consistent across various job tasks and indicates the demanding nature of the CA role. The demanding role of being a CA has a notable impact on their mental health as well. Most participants reported that their position affected their mental well-being and resulted in prioritizing the role over their personal needs.

There is a need for better support mechanisms for CAs to balance their responsibilities effectively. Future initiatives should aim to provide resources and strategies to help CAs manage their workload while maintaining their well-being. The data can conclude that a majority of CAs who participated in the study are open to potential future initiatives that could aid in balancing their academic and job responsibilities. These initiatives should be designed to support their academic endeavors while recognizing the demands of their role as Community Assistants.

Overall, the data underscores the complex balance that CAs must navigate between their job responsibilities, academic commitments, and personal well-being. It highlights the importance of providing adequate support and resources to help them thrive in their academic, personal, and professional roles.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval



DHHS Federal Wide Assurance Identifier: FWA00007111
Rowan IORG/IRB: Glassboro/CMSRU
IRB Chair Person: Dr. Ane Johnson
IRB Director: Eric Gregory
Effective Date: December 1, 2023

Notice of Approval - Initial

Study ID: PRO-2023-370
Title: Community Assistants Role and its Impact on Academic Performance and Mental Health
Principal Investigator: Stephanie Lezotte
Study Coordinator: Abby LaManna
Co-Investigator(s): Abby LaManna
Sponsor: Internal
Study Sites: Rowan University, Glassboro

Submission Type: Initial
Submission Status: Exempt
Approval Date: December 1, 2023
Review Type: Exempt
Exempt Category: Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;

Pregnant Women, Human Fetus, and Neonates Code: N/A
Pediatric/Children Code: N/A

ALL APPROVED INVESTIGATOR(S) MUST COMPLY WITH THE FOLLOWING:

1. Conduct the research in accordance with the protocol, applicable laws and regulations, and the principles of research ethics as set forth in the Belmont Report.
- 2a. Continuing Review: Approval is valid until the protocol expiration date shown above. To avoid lapses in

- approval, submit a continuation application at least eight weeks before the study expiration date.
- 2b. Progress Report: Approval is valid until the protocol expiration date shown above. To avoid lapses, an annual progress report is required at least 21 days prior to the expiration date.
- 3a. Expiration of IRB Approval: If IRB approval expires, effective the date of expiration and until the continuing review approval is issued: All research activities must stop unless the IRB finds that it is in the best interest of individual subjects to continue. (This determination shall be based on a separate written request from the PI to the IRB.) No new subjects may be enrolled and no samples/charts/surveys may be collected, reviewed, and/or analyzed.
- 3b. Human Subjects Research Training: Proper training in the conduct of human subjects research must be current and not expired. It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator and the investigator to complete training when expired. Any modifications and renewals will not be approved until training is not expired and current.
4. Amendments/Modifications/Revisions: If you wish to change any aspect of this study after the approval date mentioned in this letter, including but not limited to, study procedures, consent form(s), investigators, advertisements, the protocol document, investigator drug brochure, or accrual goals, you are required to obtain IRB review and approval prior to implementation of these changes unless necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects. This policy is also applicable to progress reports.
5. Unanticipated Problems: Unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or others must be reported to the IRB Office (45 CFR 46, 21 CFR 312, 812) as required, in the appropriate time as specified in the attachment online at: <https://research.rowan.edu/officeofresearch/compliance/irb/index.html>
6. Protocol Deviations and Violations: Deviations from/violations of the approved study protocol must be reported to the IRB Office (45 CFR 46, 21 CFR 312, 812) as required, in the appropriate time as specified in the attachment online at: <https://research.rowan.edu/officeofresearch/compliance/irb/index.html>
7. Consent/Assent: The IRB has reviewed and approved the consent and/or assent process, waiver and/or alteration described in this protocol as required by 45 CFR 46 and 21 CFR 50, 56, (if FDA regulated research). Only the versions of the documents included in the approved process may be used to document informed consent and/or assent of study subjects; each subject must receive a copy of the approved form(s); and a copy of each signed form must be filed in a secure place in the subject's medical/patient/research record.
8. Completion of Study: Notify the IRB when your study has been completed or stopped for any reason. Neither study closure by the sponsor nor the investigator removes the obligation for submission of timely continuing review application, progress report or final report.
9. The Investigator(s) did not participate in the review, discussion, or vote of this protocol.
10. Letter Comments: There are no additional comments.
11. **NJDOH Approved Studies:** IRB approval granted per the Data Use Agreement. Upon receipt of the fully executed Data Use Agreement (DUA) from NJDOH, the Principal Investigator is responsible for ensuring an electronic, fully signed DUA is emailed to the Rowan University IRB.

CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE: This email communication may contain private, confidential, or legally privileged information intended for the sole use of the designated and/or duly authorized recipients(s). If you are not the intended recipient or have received this email in error, please notify the sender immediately by email and permanently delete all copies of this email including all attachments without reading them. If you are the intended recipient, secure the contents in a manner that conforms to all applicable state and/or federal requirements related to privacy and confidentiality of such information.

Appendix B

Data Collection Instrument

11/21/23, 8:50 PM

Qualtrics Survey Software



Consent to Participate

You are invited to participate in this online research survey entitled Community Assistant Role and Its Impact on Academic Performance and Mental Health. You are included in this survey because you are currently employed as a Community Assistant within the 2023–2024 Academic Term. The number of subjects to be enrolled in the study will be 150.

The survey may take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary. If you do not wish to participate in this survey, do not respond to this online survey. Completing this survey indicates that you are voluntarily giving consent to participate in the survey.

The purpose of this research study is to identify the expectations and requirements that impact Community Assistants' ability to prioritize their academics and mental health. This study can inform housing departments on how to better support Community Assistants throughout their academic needs and expectations by acknowledging portions of the job that are most challenging to balance.

https://rowan.co1.qualtrics.com/Q/EditSection/Blocks/Ajax/GetSurveyPrintPreview?ContextSurveyID=SV_dbVuDQeSVvyvoJuK&ContextLibraryID=UR_cyrgt3k4

Rowan University
BRQ-2023-370
Approved on 12-1-2023

Additionally, this study will also use those same job expectations and requirements to identify potential solutions that may aid in creating a holistic support system for all the roles that Community Assistants hold on campus to better maintain quality performance.

There are no risks or discomforts associated with this survey. There may be no direct benefit to you, however, by participating in this study, you may help us understand how to better support incoming Community Assistants and help them achieve their academic goals.

Your response will be kept confidential. We will store the data in a secure computer file and the file will be destroyed once the data has been published. Any part of the research that is published as part of this study will not include your individual information.

If you have any questions about the survey, you can contact Abby LaManna at the email address provided below, but you do not have to give your personal identification.

Lamanna9@rowan.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at (856) 256-4078– Glassboro/CMSRU.

This study has been approved by the Rowan IRB, Pro-2023-370.

- To participate in this survey, you must be 18 years or older and you must be employed for at least 1 semester within the department of housing.

Please Click to Consent to Participating in this Survey

- Completing this survey indicates that you are voluntarily giving consent to participate in the survey

Community Assistant Role Introduction Questions

What is your Cumulative GPA?

- 4.0-3.6
- 3.5-3.1
- 3.0-2.6
- 2.5-2.1
- 2.0 or below

How many years have you been a Community Assistant?

- 1 year or less
- 2 years

- 3 years
- 4 years or more

What Academic Year are you Currently in?

- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

Have you ever been on/are you currently on Academic probation?

- No
- I am not currently on Academic Probation but have been in the past
- Yes I am currently on Academic Probation

Are you Satisfied with your Academic Performance?

- No
- Yes

Has your Academic Performance Impacted your general

Mental Health?

- No
- Yes

Community Assistant Role: Prioritization

Which Job Tasks would you Prioritize over your Academic Expectations?

- None
- Resident Crisis Emergency
- Resident 1:1s
- Resident Health and Safety Inspections
- Escalated Roommate Mediations
- Task from supervisor
- A resident asking to meet with you
- Hosting a Required Program

Which of these Initiatives would you find Beneficial in Strengthening your Academic Prioritization within the CA Position?

- None
- Academic Check-ins with Supervisor
- Scheduled Study Hours on a Weekly Basis

- Specific Training Sessions on Balancing Academics and Job Positions
- Scheduled Drop-in hours at the tutoring center/writing center specifically for CAs
- Having an Academic Support Coordinator for Community Assistants to utilize when they need support

Which Job Task would you Prioritize over your Mental Health?

- None
- Resident Crisis Emergency
- Resident 1:1s
- Resident Health and Safety Inspections
- Escalated Roommate Mediations
- Task from Supervisor
- A resident asking to meet with you
- Hosting a Required Program

Academic Suport

Please respond with the most appropriate answer

	Never	Not Often	Somewhat Often	Often	Extremely Often
How often have you felt academically supported within your CA position?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Never	Not Often	Somewhat Often	Often	Extremely Often
How often are you to prioritize your CA position over academic assignments?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How often are you worried that you will not meet an academic deadline due to the position?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How often are you encouraged to perform well in your courses by supervisors in housing?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How often have you skipped a class to perform a needed job task?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How often would you utilize reserved study hours for classwork provided by the department?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How often do you look for ways the department can better serve you academically?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How often would you benefit from department check-ins regarding your academic?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>