

The Residence Life Case Studies Binder

Practice, Perspective & Preparation

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An Introduction to *The Residence Life Case Studies Binder*

In order to make meaning of certain situations they may encounter, residence life staff members need learning tools that help them bring topics to life. Case studies are some of the best tools around, as they allow staffers to examine the nuances of a situation while providing the basis for discussion.

The 50 case studies presented here address a variety of real-life residence life situations. From community dilemmas to counseling scenarios and everything in between, you'll find useful tools to help supplement your training on important residence life topics.

Experiencing these case studies can help staff members become confident and well-prepared to handle the challenging tasks present within their positions. The fear of the unknown can be appeased somewhat as they explore possible scenarios in the safety of a group discussion.

We wish you the best with these case study experiences and with the real-life scenarios inherent in residence life work.

Take good care,

The Folks at PaperClip Communications

Personalization Prep

On each case study page, you'll see a "Personalization Prep" box with suggestions about preparing additional materials that have to do with your campus and its specific policies, resources and more. This can help give your staff members more tools as they discuss case studies and apply them to real-life situations.

The Residence Life Case Studies Binder

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"How Did I Let This Happen?"

Confidentiality and
Title IX Compliance

"I'm so embarrassed
and I can't stand
the thought of
anyone else knowing
that I let this
happen."

Personalization Prep

Make sure staff members know what's expected of them when it comes to Title IX and supporting students who have been sexually assaulted, as well as how they're expected to support those who've been accused, too.

One night, around midnight, someone knocks repeatedly on your door. You open it to find a resident, Bonnie, crying and looking frantic.

You quickly bring Bonnie into your room and invite her to sit down. She can't sit still and paces continuously, as you patiently wait for her to be ready to tell you what's up. Bonnie is muttering, "What did I do? What did I do?" and crying. She smells like beer.

Once she calms down a bit, Bonnie tells you that she went to an off-campus party with some friends that evening. She drank underage — and hopes you won't "bust her" for it — and got pretty intoxicated. Bonnie remembers flirting heavily with one guy, she says, and making out with him in one of the upstairs bedrooms. She can't remember much else because she's pretty sure she passed out. Yet, when she woke up, her clothes were off and that guy was lying next to her.

Bonnie says she then "freaked out" when the guy tried to kiss and touch her. She put on her clothes and ran downstairs, but she couldn't find her friends. So, she walked home, blaming herself for what happened. "I shouldn't have gotten so drunk," she wails to you. "Oh, my God, I think I was just raped."

As you listen to Bonnie, you're trying to determine what to do next to help her. You've never faced a sexual assault before! You try to calm her down and suggest that you get your supervisor who can really help her. But Bonnie is frantic and adamant about the fact that "you can't tell anyone!" She asks you to swear that you'll keep this confidential. "I'm so embarrassed," she says, "and I can't stand the thought of anyone else knowing that I let this happen."

You know from training that you can't keep this case of sexual assault confidential because, as a responsible campus employee, you're bound to comply with Title IX. You need to consider the safety of the entire campus community, in addition to Bonnie's safety. Yet, as she pleads with you, looking so scared and so vulnerable, you want to do anything you can to make her feel even a little bit better.

What do you do next?

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"How Did I Let This Happen?" *(continued)*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ▶▶ What are your responsibilities under Title IX when it comes to sexual assault or sexual harassment?
- ▶▶ How do residence life student staffers need to handle issues of confidentiality? Is it the same for all cases?
- ▶▶ How might you explain your responsibilities to an upset individual like Bonnie?
- ▶▶ What are some of the first things you need to do to help Bonnie in this situation?
- ▶▶ When students blame themselves for "letting" a sexual assault occur, what might you say to them?
- ▶▶ How does the issue of underage drinking at an off-campus party factor into this situation?
- ▶▶ What types of proactive programming and discussions can you plan so that other residents can hopefully avoid being in the same situation as Bonnie?
- ▶▶ If the man that Bonnie claims sexually assaulted her came to you, looking for support in the aftermath of being accused, what might you do?

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The Untouchable

Disruptive Visitor

Reza, a student staffer, falls asleep sometime around midnight, but is awoken by a loud voice in the hall around 1:00 am. It's a Tuesday night, which means that quiet hours started at 11:00 pm in his hall. He waits for a minute or two to see if the person outside the door will quiet down. He then realizes that the person is having a very loud phone conversation.

Personalization Prep

What is your campus visitation policy?
What responsibility do residents have if they welcome a visitor into your building?

He drags himself out of bed and goes into the hallway. He is surprised to see that the man on the phone is not one of his residents. He walks toward the man, who turns in the opposite direction so he does not have to make eye contact with Reza. Reza walks behind the man and waits for a break in the phone conversation. Reza taps him on the shoulder and says, "Hi, I'm Reza. I'm sorry to interrupt, but I'm the staff member on this wing. It's actually past quiet hours, so no one's allowed to talk in the hallway. Are you staying with someone?"

"Look. I don't care how late it is and I don't care who you are. I'm going to have this conversation where I want and when I want. I don't appreciate you telling me what to do. I'm an adult. I'll do whatever I please. Deal with it."

The man stops his phone conversation for a moment and says, "Yeah, I'm staying with Joe in there. Joe said this was fine." He then loudly continues the phone conversation and walks down the hall. He clearly has no intention to end his phone conversation.

Reza says, "Look, I don't want to be a pest, but I really need you to take your conversation into Joe's room or the study lounge. It's too late for you to be talking on the phone in the hallway because it's disruptive to the other residents."

The man pauses his conversation again and stares right at Reza, telling him, "Look. I don't care how late it is and I don't care who you are. I'm going to have this conversation where I want and when I want. I don't appreciate you telling me what to do. I'm an adult. I'll do whatever I please. Deal with it."

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Practice, Perspective & Preparation

The Untouchable *(continued)*

Disruptive Visitor

By this time, Reza is very irritated. He goes to Joe's room and knocks on the door. Joe answers and asks Reza what is wrong. Reza explains that Joe's friend is violating quiet hours and shouldn't be talking in the hallway. Joe apologizes and then tells his friend to come inside. His friend complies, but he sends Reza a dirty look before closing the door.

Reza angrily heads back to his room and tries to fall asleep. About 30 minutes later, Reza hears the visitor's voice in the hallway. Once again, he is loudly talking on his phone.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ▶▶ What should Reza do at this point?
- ▶▶ Would you have handled the initial confrontation differently? If so, how?
- ▶▶ Should you approach guests in the same way that you would approach residents? Why or why not?
- ▶▶ Guests do not face the same set of consequences as residents and might not show student staff the same level of respect. What can you do to help the guest understand your role and the policies that you enforce?
- ▶▶ How can you help your residents understand that they are responsible for the behavior of their guests?
- ▶▶ What is your university or college's visitation policy? Why is it important to enforce a visitation policy?

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Practice, Perspective & Preparation

Making Ends Meet

Financial Challenges

Amina is a transfer student who joined your floor mid-year. From what you can tell so far, she is a very hard worker when it comes to her studies and her part-time job as a waitress off-campus. She tells you that she lived at home for two years while attending community college and that now she's ready to finish things off so she can become a speech therapist. This is really important to Amina because she grew up with a younger sister who stutters and she saw how difficult it was for her. She wants to help other kids like her sister live better quality lives through improved speech.

As friendly as she is, you hardly ever see Amina because she is always working or studying at the library. You've heard her talk about money concerns several times in off-hand ways such as "Time to go squeeze blood from a stone to pay back all those loans" or "I'm not sure how I'm going to pay that bill when it comes in." You sense that financial worries loom over Amina consistently, to the point that she's working herself to death to stay afloat.

Things come to a head when Amina's car needs major repairs. You find her crying one night in her room, as she sobs, "I've been working so hard but now it's like ten steps backward. I'll never be able to come out ahead!" You know that she needs her car in order to get to work and feel awful that she's facing such a dilemma.

You've seen other students drop out because they couldn't afford to stay in school, and you don't want to see that happen to Amina. Her dreams are so important and she's such a hard-working student — it would be a real shame if money concerns sunk her. However, you don't have the funds personally to help her out, wish as you might.

You wonder how to help Amina make ends meet and how to present it to her in a way that she might accept...

Personalization Prep

What resources are available to help students facing financial challenges on your campus? Where can staff members refer them for assistance?

"I've been working so hard but now it's like ten steps backward. I'll never be able to come out ahead!"

The Residence Life Case Studies Binder

Practice, Perspective & Preparation

Making Ends Meet *(continued)*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ▶▶ What resources are available to students who are struggling with financial challenges, especially when it comes to basic needs?
- ▶▶ If a student keeps her money troubles to herself, is it ever right to bring them up? Why or why not?
- ▶▶ What challenges do transfer students face that other students may not?
- ▶▶ What type of support can you offer Amina to help her stay in school and finish college?
- ▶▶ When students work off-campus, how can you help them stay engaged with on-campus happenings, too?

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A Hard Time Saying "No"

Relying Too Much on
a Staffer

Because he was in
such a fragile state,
it was difficult for
Laura to ask JJ to
leave.

Personalization Prep
Emphasize to staffers their
limitations when it comes to
counseling situations and the
services available to help them.

Laura attends Central State and has been a member of the Murphy Hall staff for two years. Over that time, she has developed a reputation as a very approachable student staff member. She is a great listener and spends a lot of time on her wing, so she knows many of the intimate details of her residents' lives. Her residents have taken to calling her "Auntie Laura" because she always has time for a chat and usually offers good advice. In fact, her residents from last year often come to visit and chat.

From the beginning of the year, Laura noticed that her resident, JJ, was having a difficult time. At first, JJ, who is from a big city, struggled to adjust to the small-town environment of Central State. She noticed that he wasn't connecting well with her other residents, so she did her best to include him in activities and make introductions. During that time, JJ began to rely on Laura as his primary friend on campus.

As JJ struggled to find his niche on campus, he became increasingly sad. Aside from his chats with Laura and going to class, he rarely left his room. Laura noticed that JJ was sleeping a lot, so she tried to stop by more often to get him up and moving. When JJ visited Laura's room, he wanted to talk about his struggles. Laura and JJ would have two-hour conversations a few times per week.

After a certain point, Laura recognized that JJ might need the help of a counselor. She worried that he might be depressed. She offered to walk JJ over to the campus counseling center, but JJ said he would not feel comfortable talking to someone he didn't know.

Laura began to feel like she was JJ's dumping ground. She also felt like JJ was taking up too much of her time. Even when she told JJ she couldn't talk because she needed to do work, he would proceed with the conversation. Because he was in such a fragile state, it was difficult for Laura to ask JJ to leave.

Since Laura was spending so much time talking to JJ about his troubles, she had less time to study. Often, she would stay up until 3 or 4 am in order to complete her assignments. Laura knew that she was JJ's only friend on campus and worried that giving JJ less of her time would make his situation even worse. Yet, she was getting overwhelmed by how much he had come to rely on her.

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A Hard Time Saying "No" *(continued)*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ▶▶ Given the severity of JJ's sadness, is Laura's support the best thing for him in this situation? Why or why not?
- ▶▶ How can Laura draw boundaries with JJ without making him feel abandoned?
- ▶▶ How can Laura help JJ understand that seeing a counselor on campus might be a positive thing?
- ▶▶ How might the fact that Laura is spending so much time with JJ affect her other residents?
- ▶▶ What might Laura need to effectively disengage from this sensitive situation?
- ▶▶ What resources are available on your campus for students who might be struggling with depression?
- ▶▶ Why is it important for student staff to have some balance and downtime in their lives?

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Failing to Share the Load

Uncooperative Staff
Members

“Why don’t you ask
some of the other
people on staff who
don’t have that
much of a life?”

Personalization Prep

This can be another
place to either share
or revisit staff expect-
ations of one another.

LeRoy and Dawn are two high-achieving staffers on your student staff team. They both do very well academically and take pride in that fact. In addition to being on staff, Dawn is the vice-chair of the student programming board and a reporter for the campus paper. LeRoy is on the lacrosse team, has a work-study job in the communications department and is also an officer of the campus sustainability committee.

As a result of all their involvements, they often ask fellow staff members to switch duty shifts and cover certain events for them. You haven’t minded doing this every now and again, yet it struck you the other day that this relationship isn’t very reciprocal. You had been eating lunch with LeRoy and Dawn when you asked them to switch a shift with you so that you could go home for your nephew’s first birthday party. Dawn answered, “There’s no way — I’m so swamped with everything and don’t have that kind of flexibility.” And LeRoy said with a laugh, “Why don’t you ask some of the other people on staff who don’t have that much of a life?”

This leaves you in a tough spot, as you’d really like to go home for your nephew’s birthday but you’re also concerned about asking a few other staff members who you’ve tapped into for favors before. You’ve never asked LeRoy or Dawn for a favor before, because you always view them as “too busy,” yet you thought this one time they might come through for you. Their responses are very disappointing.

Dawn and LeRoy’s attitudes toward fellow staff members — and toward you as someone who has done them favors before — really don’t sit right with you. After all, you are busy on staff, you have a job at the campus daycare center and you serve on several campus committees yourself! It feels like they’re being a bit elitist and selfish when it comes to sharing time and cooperating with fellow staff, as if their “busyness” is more taxing and important than anyone else’s. That condescending attitude doesn’t support the team expectations you all agreed to in the beginning of the year.

You’d like to say something, yet you’re not sure it’s worth rocking the boat and you wonder if you’re being oversensitive. Plus, you definitely don’t want to have LeRoy or Dawn as an enemy. Where do you go from here?

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Failing to Share the Load *(continued)*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ▶▶ What about this situation is bugging you most, if anything?
- ▶▶ How could you effectively bring up your concerns to LeRoy and Dawn?
- ▶▶ What are your thoughts on student staff members having multiple involvements? Why is that?
- ▶▶ How might reviewing team expectations several times a year help prevent a situation like this?
- ▶▶ What is your policy about switching duty shifts?
- ▶▶ How do you feel about involving your supervisor in this type of situation?
- ▶▶ How can we prevent staff and students from having “I’m busier than you” contests?