The RAP App:
An Online Training and Networking Tool for RAs

Glenda Sanchez (Team Leader), Alexa Petzold, Arielle Soury

New York University Steinhardt
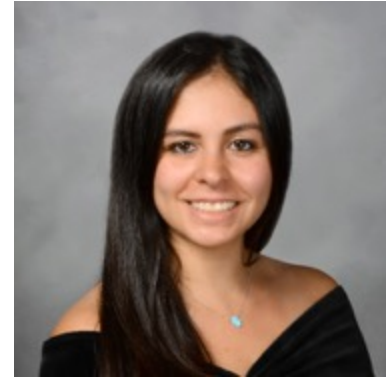
Introductions

Glenda Sanchez

Hello! I'm a first year graduate student at New York University Steinhardt in the Bilingual School Counseling Pre-K-12 MA program.

Alexa Petzold

Hello! I'm a first year graduate student at New York University Steinhardt in the School Counseling Pre-K-12 MA program.

Arielle Soury

Hello! I'm a first year graduate student at New York University Steinhardt in the School Counseling Pre-K-12 MA program.

The Challenge

Ongoing training is required to ensure that RAs receive support, updates and relevant information that is needed to assist students and RAs alike during their time at the institution. Our challenge is this: How might we ensure that RAs stay up to date with proper procedures and knowledge on pressing issues without overwhelming RAs with more days of training?

The Opportunity- RAP App

To meet our challenge we've created the the Residential Assistant Program App (RAP App for short).

Instead of requiring more days of required training, RAP App provides training flexibility for the R on-the-go. The RAP App gives RAs the opportunity to complete part of their required training in the comfort of their own room, and at their own pace. It is meant to be used in complement with typical face-to-face training. This app is also updated throughout the year so RAs can stay current with issues to give residents the assistance that is needed.

Components of the RAP App

COMPONENT 1:
Training Modules

There are 10 educational topics that the app includes as part of mandatory training: LGBTQ Awareness, Students with Autism, Nutrition and Wellness, Time/Stress Management, Campus Crime and Safety, Dating Violence, Alcohol and Drugs, Cultural Awareness, Mental Health and Suicide.

COMPONENT 2:
Assessment/Badges

Each module is designed to create a real-world problem-solving experience where RAs are asked to apply the information presented in the module to pick the correct steps in dealing with each situation. Upon completion Resident Directors will be notified of the RAs progress. Completion of each module and successfully passing the assessment results in gaining a new badge.

COMPONENT 3:
Networking:

Just as in any profession, networking is crucial for the growth and development of the individual. RAs have a lot of responsibilities and roles and being able to connect with others in the same position or with more experience will allow RAs to have an online support group to grapple with the material in the modules and beyond.

Training Module 1: LGBTQ Awareness

EDUCATIONAL TOPIC:

- Research suggest that colleges around the world are in need of a more inclusive campus (Call to Action, 2015).
- Higher education institutions should be encouraged to provide training and education to staff in order to change heterosexist attitudes and beliefs that causes LGBTQ studends to feel unsafe and underrepresented.
- Included in this lesson will be video clips of LGBTQ college students speaking about their experiences.

ASSESSMENT:

- This module would be assessed by passing "Safe Zone" training-
  - Safe Zone curriculum involves:
    - LGBTQ terminology
    - Self reflection questionnaire about first impressions of LGBTQ People
    - Scenarios
    - Do's and Don'ts of being an Ally
  - After this training is passed, RA's can receive a colored triangle symbol to post on their room or office door signaling to students that they are open to discussing and being suportive of LGBTQ identities.
  - By RA's being Safe-Zone trained, students will know there is a real commitment to establishing an all-inclusive and safe campus.

Training Module 2: Students with Autism

EDUCATIONAL TOPIC:
- Higher education enrollment rates for students with Autism-Spectrum disorder (ASD) have increased within the past 8 years
- Unfortunately, there is a lack of knowledge about how to best support their needs (Alcorn MacKay, 2010; BCTF, 2012; Chown and Beavan, 2012).
- Students with ASD struggle with social skills such as communication and interaction, changes in routine, inflated mental health issues, and more. Without the proper support, they may not graduate. In fact, students with ASD are about 12% less likely to graduate from any 2 or 4 year program compared to the general population (Newman et al., 2011).
- Studies and surveys show that mentoring programs are effective in enhancing academic performance as well as assisting in social involvement with ASD students (Coles, 2011).

ASSESSMENT:
- In this module will be a simulated mentoring experience that comes after an educational video course.
- First, videos will teach RA's to use skills that are scientifically proven to be effective when assisting students with mental disabilities.
- RA's will then be tested by a scenario-based simulation. A fictional case scenario involving a freshman student with ASD will be presented and the RA will have to pick from a variety of different possible actions to help them. Each action will follow with more situations and possible choices. This is a stress-free way to implement new knowledge without having the fear of misguiding their first mentee.
- Once an RA has finished the courses and passed the quiz, they can be matched with a mentee through RApAPP and begin organizing meetings over the course of the mentee's first year.

Training Module 3: Nutrition and Wellness

EDUCATIONAL TOPIC:

Research shows that college students tend to immerse themselves in destructive health behaviors including

- Poor eating habits
- Minimal exercise
- Fast food consumption
- Lack of sleep
- Skipping meals
- Increased use of alcohol and drugs

- 35 % of college students are overweight or obese (Cousineau, Goldstein, & Franko, 2014)
- Developing an unhealthy lifestyle in college can lead to an increased risk in obesity, osteoporosis, diabetes, and more (Lua & Wan-Putri-Elena 2012).

- Included in this section will be healthy dorm room food and snack ideas along with sleep and exercise tips that RA's can share with their residents
- This module of RAp APP will educate RA's on all of their college's resources that are available to students such as campus dining choices, athletic facilities, gym memberships, and workout class schedules

ASSESSMENT:

- The final piece of this module will be a virtual cooking game that involves following a recipe to create healthy dorm room meals

Training Module 4: Time/ Stress Management

EDUCATIONAL TOPIC

- For RAs and for RAs to teach students about time and stress management.
- According to Gall, 1988; Longman & Atkinson, 1988; Walter & Siebert, 1981, students who hold part-time/ full-time jobs, as well as attend school, have a difficult time in regards to stress and time management (being an RA is a full-time job).
- In a study conducted by Macan, Shahani, Dipboye & Phillips (1990), the researchers administered a questionnaire to students that highlighted areas in which they may be struggling focusing on time management skills. They found it more effective to allow for students to pinpoint where their struggles lie, rather than them just showing them time management skills.

PRE- ASSESSMENT/ ASSESSMENT

- This part of training would include a similar questionnaire, while teaching RAs different time management strategies for themselves, and to teach their residents when they are struggling, or to create a resident floor presentation.
- As an assessment of what was learned, RAs will be required to take a quiz to recap
- This module on RApAPP will include an online forum where RAs can chat with others for support during difficult times, or for techniques they can use when they are feeling a crunch for time

Training Module 5: Campus Crime and Safety

EDUCATIONAL TOPIC:

- According to the National Center for Victims and Crime, 88,444 crimes were reported to college and university campus police in 2012.
- Most Common campus crimes include:
  - Aggravated assault
  - Burglaries
  - Motor Vehicle Theft
  - Robberies
  - Sex offenses
  - Stalking
- The following link bove link can be used as a tool to RA's to educate them on the crime rate at their school:
  https://ope.ed.gov/campussafety/#/compare/search

- RA's should consider taking self defense courses (outside of online training) which they can then organize and promote to residents
- bSafe app- Student can download this app and share with their roommates or RA so they can monitor each other's where abouts on weekends and nights. Includes an SOS button that shares location.

ASSESSMENT:
- Completion of this module will be specific to the college or university including identifying on a map the location of campus safety, blue light phones, and on/off campus transportation areas.
- Create your own- Opportunity to think and write up your own emergency response plan for RA staff and or dorm building

Training Module 6: Dating Violence

EDUCATIONAL TOPIC

- Dating violence comes in many forms, can happen to anyone regardless of race, gender, sexuality, etc., and tends to be a continuous cycle. (Know Violence, SUNY Oneonta)
- There are different types of abuse: Physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, and isolation
- The cycle of violence is the term used to describe the pattern of abusive behavior. Once the cycle of violence has begun, movement through the stages happens at a faster and faster rate and the violent acts gain intensity **(Know Violence, SUNY Oneonta)**
- RA training in this topic is extremely important because dating violence occurs on all college campuses. Knowing the warning signs, though it may not be extremely obvious, facilitates the conversations RA's can have with their residents who they suspect, or find out, are going through some sort of relationship violence.

ASSESSMENT

- This training will include a link so the RA's sign up for the one love foundation, a requirement is to become a one love program facilitator. One love is a program that was created for Yeardley Love, a college student at the University of Virginia who died as a result of dating violence
- Facilitators are trained to teach classes for students on dating violence
- https://www.joinonelove.org/
- https://suny.oneonta.edu/know-violence/learn-more

Training Module 7: Alcohol and Drugs

EDUCATIONAL TOPIC

Taub et. al, (2014) found that RA training programs devote minimal amount of time to topics such as alcohol, drugs and other emergencies that happen in dorms.

In 2014 there was a study conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the online Peer Hero Training. Early findings show that interactive video dramatization could assist RAs (Thombs, et al., 2014).

RAs will be trained through videos, articles, and current state and university regulations in regard to alcohol and and drugs. RAs will walk away with:

- First aid training/efforts
- Referral Process.

ASSESSMENT

In this module, RAs will be assessed on how they would respond to situations related to alcohol and drugs, early warning signs for addiction etc., and how to go about the referral process at his/her institution.

The Assessment will start out with simple scenarios and work there way up to more complex scenarios and in which the RA will select one of the three options.

If RAs are able to select the option with the proper steps, RA will gain this badge.

Training Module 8: Cultural Awareness

EDUCATIONAL TOPIC

Our world is becoming increasingly diverse (Leeson, 2018).

One of the benefits of being an RA is being able to interact, assist and living with residents from various cultural background. RAs deal with conflicts within residents/roommates and some of those complaints and conflicts are related to differentiating cultural norms.

In this module, RAs will be provided with information of various cultural norms that resemble the demographics of the specific institution that the RA is in. There will be videos from students talking about their day to day habits and guidelines on how to be respectful when addressing cultural differences between roommates.

It is essential for RAs themselves to familiarize themselves with cultural differences in order to put together and run programs for residents on diversity, including cultural diversity.

ASSESSMENT

RAs will be given a test in the end of the module in which RAs have to match cultural norms to the specific culture.

RAs will also have to identify words, behaviors and images that are culturally inappropriate.

Training Module 9: Mental Health

EDUCATIONAL TOPIC

One of the roles of RAs is to serve as a counselor to the residents, which will entail dealing with mental health concerns.

- The onset of many mental disorders starts around the age that many students begin college. As research has found, help-seeking behavior is not common amongst college students as students may not be aware of the resources on campus or the symptoms (McLean & Becker, 2017).

- In this module RAs will be provided to information from the DSM-V as well as videos of students who have mental disorders so RAs can hear first hand accounts of symptoms. RAs will also be provided with interactive dramatization of students presenting certain crises and options on the steps that could be taken.
- RAs will be assessed be answering questions on the symptoms of various conditions pairs with the appropriate steps to be taken.

ASSESSMENT

RAs will be assessed on familiarity with DSM-V terminology.

RAs will be tested on fictional scenarios and the proper steps that need to be taken to ensure that safety of the student in crises.

RAs will also be answering questions on the symptoms of various conditions along with how to speak to address the student.

Training Module 10: Suicide

EDUCATIONAL TOPIC

- According to 2010 CDC reports, suicide was found to be the third leading cause of death in 15 to 24- year olds.
- Although college campuses offer mental health counseling, many students do not seek help and sometimes RAs are sought out as the first line of defense as they are the ones that interact and over see residents (Mclean & Becker, 2017).

ASSESSMENT

- In this module RAs will be trained in identifying and acting on the warning signs that resident may present. RAs will also be presented with suicide intervention and protocols.
- RAs will also be provided with phrases on how to respond to things that residents may share. Since RAs may not be studying psychology or counseling, they may need tips in communication and assessing thoughts and feelings. RAs will also be provided with a list of resources and contacts of mental health professionals that may be sought out for support or for referral purposes.
- RAs will be assessed in a similar way as the drug and alcohol module, by presenting them with video scenarios in which they will select the correct steps in addressing the situation. RAs could take this module each depending on his/her level of confidence in familiarity with symptoms and the proper steps needed to be taken.

Component 2: Badges

These are your badges! Each educational component comes with a real-world assessment. Upon completion of each component the RA gets a badge.

Benefits of RA Networking

RAs will benefit from the online networking aspect of this app in various ways:

- Share stresses/anxieties
- Develop a support system
- Have opportunities to ask RAs for opinions on material in the training modules and situations that he/she is dealing with in the real-world.
- Sharing ideas on activities and events to do with residents
- Opportunities in the field

*Research shows, that having more social networks, reduces stress and isolation (Small, 2009).

Conclusion

Through the use of RAP App, RAs will have access to ongoing training in topics throughout the year. The topics presented in these modules are dynamic, always changing and being updated by new research. Although an RA may already have a badge for a certain module, when they complete an updated training they can receive a more advanced badge. By allowing RAs to have access to this training, RAs will become confident school leaders.

RAs are also students and have busy schedules. Therefore, allowing RAs to have the option of learning and completing training at his/her own pace, and in the comfort of his/her own room will allow RAs the opportunity to have the knowledge needed to act on problems that may arise.

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