

SEAHO 2014 Case Study—Graduate Students

You are a 2nd year graduate student in a higher education and student affairs program at a small, private, liberal arts institution located in rural town in the Southeast region of the United States. Your assistantship is in Housing where you serve as an Assistant Hall Director (AHD). You've returned to the same community you worked in last year, Sparks Hall, which provides an opportunity to take on additional responsibilities within the position. Your residence hall is a 400 bed, co-ed, suite-style, building with primarily 2nd year students. There are several student organizations, interests, and passions present in your community, however there no living-learning communities and themed housing options in Sparks Hall as they are located in the other residence halls on campus.

Your supervisor, the Hall Director (HD) for Sparks Hall, is new to the university and department this year; he has just received his Master degree in Higher Education from a large public institution in the northeast this past May. He is excited to join the Housing department, and is also looking forward to supporting fraternity and sorority life on campus. Your supervisor would like to work in fraternity and sorority life in his next position. He chose to work in Housing for his first position out of grad school to develop his skills so that he will be in a shoo-in when he applies for fraternity and sorority life positions after being a HD for two years.

The student staff for Sparks Hall are an eclectic mix. You have 10 Resident Assistants (RA), six women and four men. Three of the ten are returners from last year. All three returners are female, two of them worked in Sparks Hall last year while the other worked in first-year community last year. All ten RAs are involved throughout campus; two of the females and two of the males are connected to the Greek community as they each have officer positions in there fraternity or sorority. You were excited for the chance to have a fresh start this year as the team dynamic in Sparks Hall ended on a sour note at the end of the last academic year.

As part of your role as the returning AHD to the community, you have taken on implementing the programming model for your RA team. You were excited for this piece of your job as this is an area of passion. You update your supervisor on this area each week during 1:1 meetings, but he seems to be taking a "hands off" approach. You are enjoying the autonomy to make decisions.

It is the first week of October and you have noticed that all three of your returning staff aren't connecting with you and your approach as an AHD. In addition, these same staff don't seem to be connecting with the new HD well either. They have expressed negativity in attitude and effort, which has affected their overall performance in their role as a RA. This is starting to impact the attitudes of your first year staff members. Through meetings and word of mouth, you're starting to believe that morale is low for your team as expectations are inconsistent between the HD and yourself. You understand this is a year of transition, and start to think about ways to improve the situation.

For your Sparks Hall weekly staff meeting, you have asked the HD to include programming on the agenda as you want to remind staff that they need to be doing in-hall organized events in order to meet their program requirements. You support on campus initiatives, but recognize the increased value of doing activities within the residence halls.

The HD places programming as the final item on the agenda. As the HD concludes discussing last week's fire evacuation drill, which is the second to last item on the agenda, he transitions on by expressing his disappointment in the programming that has occurred in the community this semester. "Attendance has been low at your floor programs so far, and I can't understand why. It's not that difficult. I am really disappointed that we spent \$75 for food last Wednesday for a diversity program on the 3rd floor and only two residents attended." You notice that the staff is visibly upset at the accusation. He continues, "The only staff who seem to get what we're asking for here are those of you who get your students out to Greek events on campus. You're attendance numbers are through the roof! Thanks for your hard work! I hope everyone else can take a look at how they are doing this and start to pull their own weight."

Feeling caught off guard, you allow your supervisor to finish his thought as well as the meeting. As the meeting ends, you glance around the room and sense that staff morale has reached its lowest point.

Please develop a plan for how you will respond to this situation. What will you consider as you make these decisions?