

Being an RA at Wiess

I have a unique perspective of being an RA at Wiess as I am an RA by proxy (my wife is affiliated directly with Rice, and I am not). This was a role that I was initially not familiar with, and one that, quite frankly, seemed a little strange: why would a faculty member or staff member elect to live in a dorm with college students? As I learned about the incredible culture that the residential college system creates, and more specifically this incredible place called Wiess College, I grew more excited about the opportunity of being an integral part of it.

To describe my “RA duties”, I would say that our job is to live amongst the students and serve as a role model and resource. We take our meals with the students; we attend student activities; we host activities of our own. We are not, however, monitors or enforcers of the rules. This may seem confusing from the outside – isn’t the RA role traditionally to go around and make sure the students behave themselves? Well, yes. And we do serve that purpose at Rice, we just go about it differently. I think I could sum it up by saying this: we ensure students’ safety and personal growth not by serving punitive roles but rather by intervening when necessary and encouraging a student to take the correct course of action on his or her own. There are always times when, as adults in the community, we must enforce a policy or engage in emergency actions – after all, our primary concern is students’ safety. But as a whole, we strive to teach students to figure out the best way to achieve their desired goals through modeling and self-initiation. Furthermore, RA’s serve the traditional role of being a “sounding board” of sorts for a myriad of student issues and/or difficulties. This can include anything from relationship or roommate difficulties, academic struggles, family challenges, identity difficulties, to anything else that might come up over a typical college career. Rice does an outstanding job of providing the students and RAs with extensive resources to help in almost any situation.

I’m not going to lie or sugar coat it, being an RA is indeed a job –make no mistake about it. Sometimes this job will have you going to bed very late at night; you may feel at times like your personal time is no longer your own and you will miss some of the conveniences of your own house. But at the same time, I can tell you from my personal experience that it is a very rewarding job; serving this position will bring you pure joy and satisfaction. The students at Wiess are of an outstanding caliber – and not just academically. Our students have a level of enthusiasm that is pervasive and all-encompassing. It is an absolute blast to attend powder puff football games and get swept up in the cheering from the sidelines; or have students over with the excuse of watching old episodes of “Friends” and end up having conversations that will have an impact on a life decision they take – sometimes without you even realizing it; or being there to see that student whom you helped navigate that rough freshman year get awarded his or her undergraduate degree. Our students are truly a joy to be around. We are proud to wear goldenrod and find ourselves constantly seeking out the company of the students, even after a long day at work – and I assure you that you can look forward to doing the same!

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