

**The Unsung Hero Next Door:  
Resident Advisors Protect the Basic Rights of Students Each Day**

*By Erin Leung*



What do you think about when you hear the word ‘college’? Some may think of life-changing professors, soporific classes, meaningful friendships, Greek life, etc. I think of the dorming experience. One’s residential experience at their university can greatly add or subtract from one’s overall college and learning experience. While the thoughts of living in the dormitory may mainly include crazy roommate adventures, flirting with the resident down the hall, or the occasional hall event, it is rare to give a second thought to a key person in this experience- the resident advisor. The resident advisor (RA) is a student who is employed by the university to supervise and assist students who live on their hall.

Chapman University, a private University located in Orange, California, currently has 33% of their students living on campus or with Chapman affiliated housing. This number will continue to increase now that the class of 2021 onwards are required to live on campus for a minimum of two years. The dormitories and apartments operated by Chapman University are under the care and supervision of 58 RA’s. On the daily, they may be called in to help mediate roommate conflict, throw events to build community, and write up students who violate student conduct. Although it is not explicitly said in their job title, these student leaders advocate for the basic rights of residential students. Chapman’s website includes a section that lists out what rights campus students possess- one of them being “the right to be free from intimidation, physical, and emotional harm”. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for this right to be violated.

Patricia Voss, a third year at Chapman University, is serving her second year as an RA. She has been the hall advisor for both freshmen and upperclassmen. Voss commented, “I was trained about crazy things like this in my first year, though I never thought in a million years that this would happen- but it did.” Without disclosing names or personal information, she recounted

how one resident chose not to run out during a fire drill and would make offensive comments such as, “let’s just leave all the poor and ugly people to die in the fire”. In the same degree of absurdness, Voss told of how she had to deal with a resident who would constantly lower the temperature in the room at the expense of her anemic roommate, who would then go into shock due to the change in temperature. With discretion and professional mediation, Voss had to advocate for the basic right to be free from intimidation, physical, and emotional harm.

How do you respond to comments and outrageous behaviors like that? When asked if she feels prepared when it comes to advocating for the basic rights of students, She sincerely responded, “Honestly, it depends. I’m more prepared with offensive language now that I have dealt with it. Honestly, you are trained by experience. You can go through training, like you can learn from a lecture, but it’s different when you actually go through it. When someone calls themselves a mini-hitler, all your training kind of goes away. Training gives you a good overall structure, but you really learn from individual conversations and from advice from your resident director.”

Voss presents a unique perspective. She is both a student and a staff member. This dual identity positions her to be one who can empathize with the students and one who understands the rules and regulations upheld and reinforced by the University. The impact is obvious, but often underappreciated. When asked about her relationship with her residents, Voss commented, “They look up to you, they have no one else to go to, and they think you have way more authority than you do.” On the daily, Patricia Voss and countless other resident advisors are responsible for caring for the practical’s of student rights. She has had to tactfully address a resident who steals her roommates belongings. She has had to compassionately support victims of the emotional harm inflicted through offensive language. She has to actively advocate for those who are faced with systemic barriers within residence life. The basic rights for Chapman students is commendable in ideology, but sometimes challenging to defend in practicality. Regardless of how difficult it may be, Voss and many other student staff choose to selflessly and sacrificially protect the halls of Chapman University. So do not fear, your RA is here!