

Resident Directors in Europe - A Phenomenological Study

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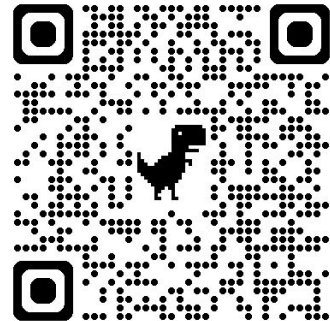
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Introduction and Setting the Stage

- Frontiers Special Issue - U.S. Study Abroad - The View from Europe
- Define the Resident Director role, and other titles used
- Motivations for the study
- Literature Review
- The 4 main themes we will be discussing
 - The Unique Skill Set and Competencies Required of Resident Directors
 - The Challenges and Stresses of Being a Resident Director
 - Finding Our Voice and Support in Community
 - Defining Experiences to Justify the Challenges



Methods

- **Research Question:** What is the lived experience of RDs in Europe?
- **Framework:** 12 steps of the Vancouver School of Doing Phenomenology
- **Participants:** 22 RDs from Czechia (2), France (7), Ireland (3), Italy (5), Spain (4), and the U.K. (1)
- **Data Collection:** 40-60 min. virtual interview
- **Trustworthiness:** Feedback from 4 participants

Choose Participants

Reflective Silence

Collect Data

Begin Data Analysis

Code & Consider Essence

Essence for Each Participant

Verify

Essence for All

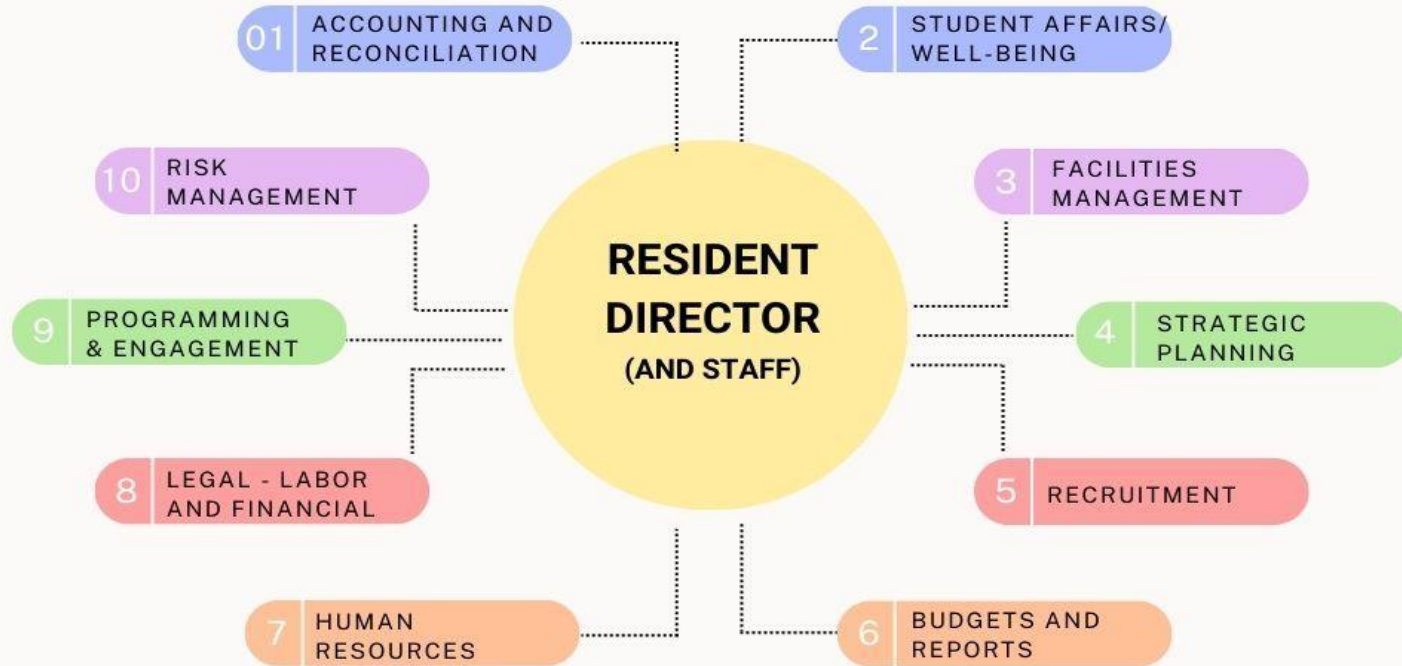
Compare: Essence vs. Data

Interpret the Meaning

Verify

Author Findings

WHAT HAT SHALL I WEAR TODAY?



ELIZA: "... AND THEN BEING THE MODERATOR BETWEEN ALL THESE DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS OR PARTICIPANTS, SUCH AS PARENTS, THE STUDY ABROAD OFFICE AT THE HOME CAMPUS, THE STUDENTS, THE HOST INSTITUTION, THE MEDICAL INSURANCE... THERE'S SO MANY!"

Quo Vadis? Professional Pathways to the RD Position

01

U.S.-based study abroad or faculty
or
private business or industry

- **Mike:** "...it does feel like the journey to being director has been like I've been in 10 different jobs but within the security of being in the same university and company."
- **Gene:** "I worked in private industry in my previous life, and due to a series of coincidences...we (with US institution) came to an agreement."
- **Sid:** "I worked in Journalism before this. But I am happy to be here now."
- **Angelo:** "I don't think there is any training for what we do."

02

Diverse professional past informs
unique leadership skill set

- **Peter:** "In all the roles, that experience helps bring your inner self-confidence...If you're more self-assured, then even when a crisis comes up, you can pull from that experience and deal with it."
- **Alexander:** "We are highly qualified professionals. We have accumulated incredibly complex skills. If you put us in a other fields, we would survive."

The Unique Skill Set and Competencies Required of RDs

03

That's nice. Do you have a Ph.D.?

- **Diana:** “I don’t believe a Ph.D. is necessary to being an effective RD. In fact, I think it can be a hindrance. There is something to be said about choosing a career and having the expertise to deal with students, which is a different skill set from being able to complete a Ph.D.”
- **Angelo:** “Maybe I am a product of the older way of getting into the field because I have a Ph.D., which has nothing to do with education. And then just went from teacher to administrator to program director. I think that’s how it used to happen. It’s maybe a good thing that it won’t be happening like that in the future. I think it will eventually shift to certificates and qualifications.”
- **Nicole:** “... there was a time when academic credentials were considered highly desirable and an asset. No longer, apparently. Administrative and managerial skills are clearly viewed as more critical. I could cite several examples of this downgrading.”

The Unique Skill Set and Competencies Required of RDs

04

Teamwork and leadership

- **Helen:** “For me it’s important that the people who come to the office are happy. They come to work knowing the mission of the program.”
- **Em:** “I’ll go back to my team and the loyalty I feel to them. It’s hard to see myself doing anything else. That’s what keeps me going.”
- **Margaret:** “the RD must be able to listen. I mean not only to your colleagues or your boss, but also to listen to the students.”

05

Communicator, Cultural Mediator, and Advocate

- **Alexander:** “There has to be a lot of bottom-up management on our end to educate and to ensure that instead of getting, ‘we do it this way’ ...you get, ‘let’s see where we can find a compromise’.”
- **Angelo:** “It takes a steady hand to navigate complex decision-making scenarios...and decision-making ability in these scenarios.”

The Unique Skill Set and Competencies Required of RDs

06

Jack-of-All-Trades

- **Charles:** “We ”did a list of all the on-campus services we provide and are expected to replicate and it was at least 20 offices.”
- **Alexander:** “We alone cover the heads of many offices on campus. Typically, on campus you have a person for privacy and legal, a person for student services, a person for facilities - actually a unit -for academics, emergencies, and diversity. We do not have that big a portfolio.”

07

Diplomat and Policy-Maker

- **Eliza:** “We work on a political level institutionally, between the politics of working with the host institution and what that requires in terms of diplomacy...”
- **Alexander:** “Senior management in the States is driven by anxiety and a lack of cross-cultural competence. So there is a lot of education that has to be done.”
- **Diana:** “RDs are fundamental to the educational philosophy of the program.”

The Unique Skill Set and Competencies Required of RDs

08

“A world of opposites”

- **Natasha:** “You have to be resilient but also sensitive. You have to be somebody who can take things in and feel them. You have to feel empathy. You have to be able to put yourself in the shoes of a student... but then you have to also be able to sort of put that aside and deal with it on discipline, empathy, resilience and sensitivity. Caring but detachment. Friendly, but not friends

09

Every day is different

- **Alexander:** “I love the fact that every day is different. I think that it’s what’s keeping me in the job!”
- **Charles:** “I really like the unexpected nature of our day to day activities.”

The Challenges and Stresses of Being a Resident Director

01

The weight of "carrying" the program

Sid: *"The expectation (...) that somehow you have the tools and be able to manage things like mental health fallout, or health issues, or accidents"*

Nicole: *"I've often felt more like a customer service rep than an educator"*

Giulia: *"Everything is on the RD's shoulders (...) Must be always available in the office and also outside"*

Em: *"Do it or manage it all with limited staff versus the home campus"*

Helen: *"The pressure that comes with successful resolution to emergency situations, there is a fear that the sending institution will "go elsewhere" in a competitive study abroad environment"*

The Challenges and Stresses of Being a Resident Director

02

Student mental health issues - one of the greatest stressors:

Mike: *"More and more students are on psych medications, with conditions such as OCD, anxiety, depression, eating disorders."*

Peter: *"An increase in student emotional immaturity post-Covid, manifesting in challenges with interpersonal issues"*

Pablo: *"Surprised that some students are getting sign off for travel from their home schools"*

03

A sense of dread or impending danger, especially tied to 24/7 support:

Nicole: *"We are constantly on heightened alert. The potential phone call that can come anytime, requiring on-the-spot action, is a significant source of worry"*

Paul: *"Some pretty terrible, pretty tragic situations"*

Eliza: *"This is the worst part of the job"*

The Challenges and Stresses of Being a Resident Director

04

An impact on RDs' emotional stability and personal life

Paul: *"There is absolutely no way they can understand the amount of stress"*

Franky: *"Constant fear"*

Mike: *"Can impact the work/life balance"*

Em: *"I hardly ever see my kid. Something's got to change"*

05

The challenge of staffing and other HR issues

Gene: *"On the thin line between the [country] labor laws and the American influence"*

Vanessa: *"I have always been understaffed"*

Diana: *"Saddled with responsibility of HR, payroll, and financial administration, but not my expertise"*

Eliza: *"Was never trained in budget management, doing it by the seat of the pants early in my career"*

Finding Our Voice and Support in Community

01

RDs in Europe are in a unique position

- **Eliza:** *"I always say the only people who really understand this job are the ones who've done it. And that applies of course to all the people we work for. Most people we work for in the States have never done this job."*

02

The missing voice of the Resident Director

- **Pablo:** *"Lost....but that might be a bit harsh. In a network of stakeholders, I think the opinions and the experiences of the Resident Director often come further down that list."*
- **Charles:** *"I think a very flippant response would be out of sight, out of mind."*
- **Angelo:** *"Resident Directors are very important and should be heard more and contribute more to the theory of what we do"*
- **Natasha:** [The voice] *"is louder than it has been in the past"*

Finding Our Voice and Support in Community

03

Why aren't RDs in Europe more influential?

- **Franky:** *"the imperialist and colonialist [ways of doing things in the sector]"*
- **Mike:** *"Sometimes there's not enough hours in the day"*
- **Alexander:** *"all the training that comes to us is heavy on the U.S. perspective, which is not always helpful"*

04

Developing community for Resident Directors and on-site staff

- **Charles:** *"So I think our country association and our sister organizations in other countries are essential and have completely changed the way we do things"*
- **Diana:** *"I do rely on them [country associations] for an emotional kind of support....knowing that other people are going through the same thing just to make sure that I'm not going crazy"*
- **Anonymous:** *"[The European Institute was an] incredibly valuable opportunity to have these conversations together as a field in a more intimate / targeted way....for onsite professionals, by onsite professionals"*

Defining Experiences to Justify the Challenges

01

Playing a positive role in a young person's life

- **Eliza:** *"I don't think you can do this job if that doesn't bring you some kind of satisfaction."*
- **Peter:** Students *"come with a freshness that sometimes reinvigorates you as an individual."*

02

"That light bulb moment"

- **Paul:** *"I can't think of anything better than when a student tells you they've had a life-changing experience."*
- **Charles:** The importance of *"going back to the U.S. and realizing that America is not the center of the universe."*

03

"It's not always about the classroom"

- **Angelo:** *"I love just sitting down somethings with students in the library or at the coffee bar and just talking to them."*
- **Franky:** *"I try to lead by example" and share stories from "my personal life and my personal challenges."*

Defining Experiences to Justify the Challenges

04

A thank-you note and the ultimate thank you

- **Paul:** *"To get a thank-you note from a student at the end of the semester ... it doesn't get any better than that."*
- **Nicole:** *"It's extremely rewarding when "you have students who develop a lifelong love of <country> and want to come back again."*

05

Variety of work and self-growth

- **Giulia:** *"There is always something that you cannot predict. And this is exactly what makes me motivated to learn."*
- **Nicholas:** *"You need to work constantly on finding new things, new inspirations, new teachers, new people, new ideas."*

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations for Practice

- The evolving RD voice and role amidst a changing landscape
- Coming together as a community
- What makes up keep going....?

Recommendations for Practice

1. Continue to find voice in a Community of Practice
2. Take time for wellness and personal care
3. Heightened engagement and collaboration between the European Associations and the major professional organizations (e.g. The Forum on Education Abroad, NAFSA)

Thank you!

Questions?

Key issues that ranked **negatively** relating to job satisfaction;

- Career advancement opportunities
- Ability to take vacation when students are on the ground
- Staffing levels
- Remuneration levels
- Maintenance of good work-life balance
- Professional development opportunities
- Home institutional understanding of the role

Key issues that ranked **positively** relating to job satisfaction;

- Institutional dedication to staff and student safety while abroad
- Feeling of personal accomplishment
- Respected as the person on the ground who knows how things operate
- Institutional dedication to international education
- Job makes use of my skills and abilities