



# JMU Residence Life

## Placement Description

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The department handles operations related to residence life, university housing, first year programs, and graduate level instruction

## Intern or Field Placement Responsibilities/Opportunities

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- Assistance with departmental/instructional research
- Development and presentation of residential programs (e.g.: substance abuse, human relation skills, academic skills, career development, etc.)
- Assist with functions related to residence life administration
- Development and presentation of programs related to first year transition to college
- Development and presentation of programs related to second year transition from college
- Development and presentation of outreach programs designed to create liaison relationship between residential students and university support services (e.g. Career Services, Counseling and Student Development, working in the housing area.)
- Assist with advising student community advisory board

## Other Notes

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Opportunities include working in the First Year Involvement Center, working in the Area Office, working in the Housing area.

## Contact Information

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**Read about students' experiences at this site below:**



***Fall 2016 – Rachel Collins***

Throughout the fall semester of 2016, I completed 150 hours of field placement at the Office of Residence Life. ORL provides many resources for first year students to encourage active participation and involvement in the JMU community. ORL strives to provide extensive opportunities for students to become involved early in their college experience. The belief is that involvement from early on will mold involved and well-rounded students who are eager to participate and contribute to the JMU community. Active participation and contribution also contributes to students' willingness to learn and become active in academics and, eventually, society as a whole. This belief helps to describe the foundation of ORL's services, which are rooted in values including a supportive transition to the JMU community, academic achievement, providing positive learning experiences, and providing excellent service and accommodations. The services provided by the Office of Residence Life strive to encourage students to become actively involved in many different aspects of their own education. ORL states on their website that they recognize their greatest contribution to campus and students' education is encouraging them to actively become involved and engaged in university life in order to create and maintain a learning-centered community. The Office of Residence Life states that they are "committed to designing and maintaining a caring environment that encourages academic success, respect, personal growth and responsibility to one's community."

These goals and missions contribute to the variety of services provided by ORL in order to encourage student involvement and success. The Office of Residence Life as a whole provides many services to students. This semester marked the beginning of a new program implementation. The program was called the Niche and was designed to be a first-year resource center that was more centralized to first-year students. The Niche was located in Frederickson Hall in the village. Program assistants and myself were asked to staff the Niche during operating hours on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday from 4-7pm. The Niche was brand new, so I was able to witness and participate in the early stages of creating a student involvement program. This provided me with an interesting perspective of university services and how they are created from the beginning. It began with outlining a mission statement of the Niche so that students could easily understand the importance of the program and why it was developed. The mission statement of the Niche is "to centralize a network of support services and programs that address academic, personal, and social need of new students and promote student success, to actively promote positive student engagement with the university campus and culture, to work collaboratively with faculty and staff across the campus to provide additional resources for new students, and to offer services and necessary interventions to students who are experiences academic and social difficulties." The hope was that students would be more likely to come and ask questions and seek involvement from peers. ORL planned to provide guidance and information about other programs on campus that students would be interested in. The Niche had some difficulties getting started, as many new ideas do, about which I was able to provide input and work to solve these issues. For example, the Niche name was developed alongside a tag line that described the area as *a space to find your place*. This encompassed the Niche's services that hoped to help students with academic, social, and involvement difficulties. However, another campus office had a very similar tag line to the Niche and we were unable to move forward with



it. This hindered advertising, branding, and understanding of the space. The student employees and myself worked to solve issues like these that come with a new program being introduced on campus. Interest and understanding of the services of the space introduced problems that we worked to solve through a strong social media presence and partnership with other offices and programs on campus. Responsibilities I had as a part of working to develop the Niche included brainstorming and problem solving working to fix problems that arose with the development of the Niche, communication with campus partners in order to spread the word about our services, helping to maintain the Niche's social media, staffing the Niche, weekly progress meetings, and other activities such as making posters and developing the technology and décor in the space. Since the development of the Niche, the vision has changed slightly to adapt to the needs of first-year students and may even include a name change as we progress into next semester. Work on this program has been exciting and interesting, as I have gained a new perspective on developing university programs and some of the "red tape," so to speak, around developing student services.

Another ORL service that I had a hand in working on this semester was the F.O.C.U.S. Program. F.O.C.U.S. is an academic resource for first-year students to opt-into if they feel they may be struggling academically. The program is a five-week course that covers various topics related to academic success in college. I was able to participate in facilitating the course to students; this was by far my favorite aspect of my internship. I was able to work directly with first-year students and discuss the importance of and tips to reach academic success in college classes. The students were overall very eager to learn and would often stay after our classes to discuss other aspects of school and academics. Some students would even email me to get coffee or have meetings if they needed further support. The mentoring aspect of this program was very rewarding and I was able to work directly with first-year students in order to help them towards success in college.

Overall, my work with ORL was very rewarding and allowed me to develop as a professional. Moving forward, I intend to go to graduate school to study clinical or counseling psychology. My field placement at ORL helped me to gain hand-on experience working with professionals on a college campus and first-year college students during a difficult transition in their lives. If I could change anything about my ORL experience, I would have liked to have participated in mentoring students more. F.O.C.U.S. did not start until halfway through the semester, so the first half was mostly working with ORL professional and student staff. This was still a valuable experience that allowed me to develop my skills as a professional in an office and collaborative setting. I would highly recommend the Office of Residence Life as a field placement site to students who are interested in another perspective on academia and involvement in college from a university office perspective and to students who are interested in higher education and college counseling.

*Spring 2015 – Victoria Salyers*

The mission of the Office of Residence Life is to foster an environment that is caring and encourages academic success as well as personal growth and one's responsibility to their



community. In the First Year Involvement Center (FYI), the mission of ORL is carried out in a more specific way. The FYI Center is in part present to assist with the needs of the Resident Advisors (RA). The RAs come to the FYI center to create programs and boards that can help their first year residents learn and be reminded of subjects from health to academics. These boards and programs help the first year students learn what the JMU community is all about.

One of my experiences in the FYI office included being an academic mentor to first year students that were on probation from their first semester. Subjects we went over were things such as: time management, note taking, talking to professors, and effectively balancing a social life. The mentors were also provided with a GPA calculator that we could show the mentees so that they could continuously keep up with their grades to make sure that their GPA was enough to stay at JMU. The mentors and mentees decided when they would meet on their own time. Meetings with mentees could include going to get dinner, having a coffee, or even having a study date.

In addition to being a mentor, I helped facilitate and plan the Clothesline Project (CLP). This Project is a demonstration of t-shirts that are hung by a makeshift clothesline. The individuals that are survivors of intimate partner violence as well as the friends and families of victims come to tell their stories on these shirts. The event is very sensitive. People not only come to tell their own stories, but people come from all over Harrisonburg to view the stories on these shirts. Two of the main jobs that I had while helping with CLP were to research new statistics and give volunteer training sessions. The researching of new statistics for intimate partner violence was interestingly difficult. Many statistics that I came across were outdated. The statistics that I found would be turned into part of the volunteer slideshow that I made. I also researched a new informational video for the volunteers about how the event would run. There were two volunteer training sessions that I presented in order to train the volunteers on their job descriptions, as well as give them an explanation of how the event would be put on. Once the larger tasks were done with the project, new posters had to be made with statistics that would be displayed around the event. There were also many other decisions made by the CLP team that I was privileged enough to be able to give my opinion about and help with.

Other tasks that I had while doing my hours included logging my communication with my mentees, helping my coworkers with their projects, as well as my supervisor. When I would arrive at the office most days, logging my communication with my mentees was one of the first things I would do. Every meeting, text, or email would have to be put onto my Qualtrics survey that is analyzed at the end of the semester. Every Program Advisor (PA) in the office is given an event that they organize at some point within the year. Most of the time, there was at least one program being organized. If I ever had down time in assignments that were necessary for CLP, I would offer my help with whatever they needed me to.

Having my placement at the Office of Residence Life in the FYI center was one of the best placements I could have received. It gave me experiences in the JMU community that I would have not otherwise had the opportunity to have. The atmosphere in FYI made it so that I never dreaded going to spend five or more hours at a time there. It also gave me an insider's



view about what being in residence life is like- there is much more to it than one would think! An advantage of being placed here would be that it is a very good resource for just about anything. At FYI and ORL they know just about everything that is going on around campus all the time and I also got to be “in the know”.

My time at FYI has helped me to improve my communication skills as well as my determination. The improvement in my determination came a lot from working with my mentees. I had mentees that loved communicating with me and others that challenged me in getting through to them. With the mentees that challenged me, I had to be determined to help them. Being a mentor has also expanded my leadership skills. I have had previous experiences with being a leader, but being a mentor was a rare type of leadership. Not only do the mentees look to their mentor for guidance in academics, but also in balancing their personal lives. Being a mentor gave me experience in being a special kind of leader. FYI did not just improve my communication skills by replying to emails and texting my mentees, but it has helped me with face to face interaction. Every day when I was in the office, various RAs would come in for their programs and I would have to get used to interacting with people that I did not know. Having different interactions with all of the PAs, RAs, and all other people in the different wings of ORL have certainly expanded my communication skills.

The experiences I have had at FYI have made me question where I would like to be in the future. I do not find my confusion a bad thing because having my placement at FYI has made me realize that I do like to be around the professional college atmosphere. I plan to go to graduate school, but am still unsure about what I would like to do with a master’s degree. However, my placement has made me think that I would like to go more on the route of being a professor. I enjoy being around academics and doing research while in the presence of the energy of the students. I am very thankful for my experience at FYI and for giving me a great support system while making important life decisions in my last semester at JMU.

### ***Meghan Ward***

The Office of Residence Life’s mission is to design and maintain a caring environment that encourages academic success, respect, personal growth and responsibility to one’s community. The First Year Involvement (FYI) Center furthers the ORL mission while encouraging a positive college experience. One of the main services offered at my site is to provide the resources necessary for resident advisors and hall directors to successfully run programs with JMU on-campus residents. Along with this, FYI interacts with students one on one through their writing center. Designed specifically to help first years, the writing center’s goal is to promote growth in a learning environment while facilitating the assistance needed to help students succeed academically.

During my experience at I was to assist students through a large majority of the services and programs that FYI offers them. One of my main duties within FYI was to co-facilitate “Grad Club,” a freshman seminar course that strived to provide the skills and tools necessary for



freshman to succeed through their first semester of college. Co-facilitating allowed me to help students develop better time management, note taking, goal setting and test taking skills in a once a week class, for five weeks.

Another position I held while in FYI was the vendor coordinator position for FYI's Brick Wall Project, a campus wide alcohol awareness program that creates a brick wall through having students write their positive and negative experiences with alcohol on a gray or red paper brick. As vendor coordinator, I contacted and met with local vendors throughout Harrisonburg to entice them to donate prizes for the event. Their prizes created a gift basket that was given to the resident advisor that best advertised the event. During the week of the Brick Wall Project, I advertised the event, while having students help contribute to the wall by writing their anonymous personal experiences with alcohol, to display in Warren Hall to help raise awareness.

Smaller duties that I had throughout the course of the semester included more office work related tasks such as researching information about learning communities for the head of Office of Residence Life, and entering the pre and post test scores for Graduation Club assessment. I also assisted my supervisor in creating activities for a leadership workshop called SHAPE that occurred bi-weekly for the hall presidents.

Overall, I enjoyed my time at the First Year Involvement Center. Working here allowed me to get a firmer grasp about what the first year experience was about. Through this experience I was able to work with a more specific demographic within student affairs, that is on-campus first year residents. One of the major advantages of the site is that I was able to participate in and observe a lot of different programs and resources offered within the Office of Residence Life. My experience was most certainly a diverse one, and allowed me to interact with students in both a campus wide and one on one type atmosphere.

Through my experience at FYI and my active participation in Grad Club, Brick Wall and SHAPE meetings, I further improved my facilitation and communication skills within a student affairs context. I became proficient in mastering the delicate balance of being both professional and personable to students and university officials. Also, through my work at FYI, I was able to actively assist in the assessment process from a university program. I especially enjoyed comparing and contrasting assessment within the psychology department and how assessment occurs in student affairs. Witnessing and being actively involved in the pre and post assessment data of Grad Club, was both an educational and influential experience.

Overall, my experience in the Office of Residence Life's First Year Involvement Center has further solidified my decision to pursue both a graduate school education and future career in student affairs. Furthermore, my experience has reinforced my decision to pursue a student affairs program where I can both personally and academically influence students. Working with students and ORL staff at FYI made me helped solidify my belief that college is a one of a kind environment and college students are one of the kind people. Perusing a future where I can be actively involved in students' development and overall college experience is something that I am passionate about, and I am grateful for my experience at FYI for helping me realize this.

