Taking the next step toward a career in student affairs, five ECU senior resident advisors (RAs) attended the 39th annual Oshkosh Placement Exchange (OPE) at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh in late February. The three-day event proved fruitful as all five students – Hannah Hensley, Hayden Raynor, Katie King, Ashley Konarski, and Geoffrey Whitley – secured a graduate assistant position.

According to ECU Director of Residence Life Waz Miller, the five students represented the largest contingent of ECU students ever to attend the event.

"All five of our students have enjoyed their experience as RAs. It's neat that they want to become our colleagues," said Miller. "Many schools' graduate programs are set up to provide their GAs with two years of very good housing experience as well as the opportunity to earn a master's degree in those two years."

Hensley and Raynor will attend Oklahoma State University, where they will study college student development. An English major from Richmond, Virginia, Hensley became involved in hall government before joining the RA staff at Tyler Hall as a senior.

"I would eventually like to move into administration," Hensley said. "As an RA, I've become very passionate about helping others."
Raynor spent two years as an RA in Scott Hall before moving to Tyler Hall this year. A nutritional sciences major from Benson, he plans on a career in university administration. In addition to his role as an RA, Raynor was the founder and president of ECU's Piratethon, a dance marathon fundraiser for the James and Connie Maynard Children’s Hospital at Vidant Medical Center.

"I would like to help in the development of other students," said Raynor, who has also worn the uniform of ECU's official mascot PeeDee. "As an RA, I have had the chance to see the diverse backgrounds that everyone comes from."

King, who hails from Yorktown, Virginia, is headed to Texas Tech University to pursue a master's degree in higher education. Majoring in communications with an interpersonal/organizational communication concentration, she became interested in student affairs as a potential career shortly after arriving at ECU.

"I didn't know about student affairs as a profession before I came to college," King recalled. "Since I've been here, I've have great experiences with staff, and I am hoping that I can serve that role for others in whatever capacity I end up in."

Konarski is a marketing major from Braselton, Georgia. She will attend Ball State University to study student affairs and higher education. Active in hall government, she served as parliamentarian on the RHA executive board before spending the past two years as an RA at Jones Hall. She was awarded a Minority & Friends Network/James M. Chitwood Oshkosh Placement Exchange Travel Scholarship award to help defray her expenses for the trip to Wisconsin.

Last year, Konarski was one of two ECU students to attend both the National Association of College and University Residence Halls Incorporated (NACURH) and Association of College and University Housing Officers – International (ACUHO-I) conferences along with Miller to present ECU’s SHOES program, which was honored as the 2016 National Program of the Year.

"I have a passion for programming, so I would like to help implement large scale programs on a campus that make an impact," Konarski said.

Geoffrey Whitley, who is in his second year as an RA at Umstead Hall, received a graduate assistant position at Old Dominion University. The communications major from Goldsboro, who minors in fashion merchandising, has his sights set on a career in student affairs upper administration. He credits his experience as an RA with the ability to apply what he has learned to a variety of different situations.

"As RAs, we often do things differently, but we try to do it the right way. We approach situations the way we've been taught, but sometimes with different residents it takes a different approach."