

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education

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Prologue

This 2003 edition of The Book of Professional Standards for Higher Education is the fourth edition of standards promulgated by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS). This edition contains 29 functional area standards, including one revision (Career Services) and four new areas (Campus Information and Visitor Services; College Health Programs; Educational Services for Distance Learners; and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Programs). The CAS initiative continues to emphasize programs and services in support of student learning and personal development. This expanding arena of the CAS initiative reflects an increased emphasis on developing standards to guide professional practice throughout the whole of higher education.

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education was established more than 25 years ago for purposes of developing and promulgating standards of professional practice to guide higher education practitioners and their institutions, especially in regard to work with college students. Currently, CAS is composed of delegates from 37 professional higher education associations from the United States and Canada. Organized as a Board of Directors, CAS embodies a broad range of the higher education community concerned with student learning and personal development, particularly the services and programs that are commonly identified as the field of student affairs. In addition to its 29 functional area standards of practice, CAS has also adopted a set of academic program standards at the masters degree level to guide the preparation of student affairs entry level

practitioners.

CAS seeks to promote standards that are current and that reflect the best practices of professional work in higher education. As institutions of higher learning face new challenges, faculty and staff members often are required to implement their educational responsibilities in new and different ways. Approaches and strategies that previously worked are amended as institutions and programs evolve to be effective. History confirms that the educational and developmental needs that students bring to campus become manifest in different ways over time, requiring new and different approaches to provide the support necessary for those needs to be met effectively. As new developments occur that result in previously unrecognized or newly identified student needs, institutional student support services and programs must adjust to remain effective. In light of these inevitable evolutions, each CAS standard must be viewed as a living document that will change over time.

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education was originally established in 1979 as a not-for-profit corporation called the Council for the Advancement of Standards for Student Services/Development Programs. In 1992, CAS became the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, reflecting a broader context of services and programs in higher education. The impetus for the existence was precipitated by a movement on the part of some national counseling associations to develop standards to guide and accredit academic programs that prepare counselors and counselor educators. This movement, which culminated in the establishment of the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) in 1980,

provided the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) with the impetus to create a set of preparation standards for use in master's level college student affairs administration programs. Rather than promulgating these standards as its own, ACPA sought to identify other professional associations interested in the development of standards for academic preparation programs for student affairs administrators. The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) indicated an interest in standards of actual practice as well as standards for academic preparation programs. The two associations jointly issued invitations to a meeting of possible interested professional associations. Seven student affairs oriented organizations sent representatives to the exploratory meeting held in Alexandria, Virginia in June 1979. This meeting resulted in the creation of an inter-association consortium for purposes of developing and promulgating professional standards to guide both student affairs practice and academic preparation of those who administer student support programs and services in colleges and universities. A subsequent organizational meeting was called inviting the participation of higher education oriented professional bodies interested in an inter-association consortium standards development project. As a result, CAS was officially incorporated as a not-for-profit organization in September 1979 with 11 charter member associations.

Today, after 25 years of collaborative endeavor and a name change to reflect its expanded interests, the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education is composed of 37 member associations, and has generated and promulgated 29 sets of functional area standards and guidelines and one set of master's level academic preparation program standards.

The CAS Mission

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education was established with the intent of accomplishing several purposes from a profession-wide perspective. The following five statements reflect the mission that has guided CAS initiatives from the beginning.

1. To establish, adopt, and disseminate with broad consensus timely professional standards for student services, student development programs, academic support services, and related higher education programs and services.
2. To promote the improvement of higher education services and programs through the use of CAS standards for program self-study and evaluation.
3. To establish, adopt, and disseminate with broad consensus timely professional preparation standards for the education of student affairs practitioners.
4. To promote the improvement of professional preparation programs for student affairs practitioners through self-study, evaluation, and the use of CAS standards.
5. To promote inter-association efforts to address the issues of quality assurance, student learning, and professional integrity in higher education.

To bridge divisions caused by the numerous specialty areas now so prevalent in higher education, a simple consortium was created. Common cause and linkages built between and among the many professional associations, most of which represented the interests of highly specialized programs and services. Through this collaboration, professional standards of practice and preparation that reflect a profession-wide

perspective could be developed and promulgated. It was believed that a single voice would have greater impact on the evaluation and improvement of student support services and programs than would many voices speaking for special interests by individual student support service practitioners.

The CAS Rationale

CAS was clearly an outgrowth of the need for the profession to establish standards for both its practice and the preparation of those who seek to enter the profession. Though not a new idea, the desire to establish a profession-wide entity that could speak as one voice was an aspiration of many experienced practitioners. Before CAS, the most comparable group of student affairs associations was the Council of Student Personnel Associations in Higher Education (COSPA). This relatively short-lived council, which functioned as a consortium of some 10 professional associations during the late 1960s and early 1970s is best known for the *COSPA Statement* (1983), "Student Development Services in Post-Secondary Education."

CAS was established as a consortium comparable to that of COSPA, for an equally important though different purpose. Whereas COSPA was intended to represent a group of professional associations to deal with a full range of professional issues and concerns, CAS was established to focus on the development and promulgation of professional standards and on informing practitioners about the role and function of such standards in higher education. The Council prides itself on its lack of special interest motivation and on being driven by common values.

Without CAS, which involves and speaks

collectively for concerned practitioners and educators and their functional specialties, it is unlikely that a profession-wide threshold of good practice could be crossed.

Although individual professional associations, and in some instances, small interassociational task forces, may seek to establish standards of good practice, they are unlikely to succeed and become an enduring part of the culture of higher education unless or until they are viewed by a majority of practitioners as representing both the interests of the students with whom they work and their own personal and professional interests. Further, it is easier to establish credibility in the whole of higher education through collective action than through the narrowly defined interests of separate professional associations. To be viable and effective, professional standards for student affairs, student development, and student support services and programs must reflect the interests and core values of each participating professional organization and its functional areas of responsibility.

Foundations for Standards and Guidelines

The *CAS Standards and Guidelines* (CAS, 1986) were written on the premise that practitioners concerned with high quality professional practice need access to comprehensive criteria upon which they can rely as they judge how well they are fulfilling their responsibilities. Further, these standards should be credible, representing best practices that are reasonably achievable by *any and all programs* of quality within all institutions of higher learning.

Most functional specialty areas have some characteristics in common with other administrative or program counterparts. For

example, although considerably different in purposes, an admission program, a campus activities program, academic advising, and a career planning and placement program will each benefit from establishing a mission statement that is compatible with the mission of their institution. Although the mission and purpose of each functional area program will vary from both comparable and dissimilar programs within and among institutions, a clearly defined mission that articulates the program's primary and secondary purposes and objectives is essential for program effectiveness. This is also true for such areas as human, fiscal, technological, and physical resources; legal responsibilities; campus and community relations; professional ethics; and evaluation efforts. Consequently, the CAS Standards and Guidelines incorporate a number of *general standards* that are relevant and essential for all functional areas, no matter what their focus and reason for being. These standards statements use the auxiliary verbs "must" and "shall" and appear in bold print throughout the text so that users can quickly identify *standards* and distinguish them from *guidelines*. In addition to the general standards, all functional areas have *specialty standards* that are both essential to accomplishing the program's purpose, and unique to a particular specialty. These specialty standards, which also appear in bold print, are not usually found in other functional area standards.

The CAS Standards were constructed to represent the minimum criteria that every institution and its programs should, with the application of adequate effort, be expected to meet over time. To clarify these standard statements, to assure they are being properly interpreted, to enhance or strengthen programs, and because effective practice occurs and can be viewed as a continuum, there is need to provide users with additional criteria that *may* be used as circumstances warrant. Consequently, in addition

to the standards, CAS has established guideline statements designed to clarify and amplify the standards and to guide enhanced practice beyond the essential levels of the various standards. That is, when a program has achieved effectiveness, according to the standards, opportunity to achieve enhanced effectiveness has been built into the statements and is referred to as *guidelines*.

Guidelines use the auxiliary verbs "*should*" and "*may*" and are presented in small regular print to distinguish them from standards. This two-tiered presentation is most helpful because functional area programs in both early and advanced stages of development can use CAS Standards and Guidelines to good purpose.

In summary, CAS functional area standards and guidelines are basic statements that should be achievable by any program in any institution when adequate and appropriate effort, energy, and resources are applied. Further, *standards* reflect a level of good program practice generally agreed upon by the profession at large. In addition to the standards, *guidelines* have been included for each functional area to amplify and explain the standards and to guide enhanced practice.

CAS Applications

The *CAS Standards and Guidelines* were established for institutions and their student support services programs to use for program development, program self-study, and staff development purposes. Although the standards and guidelines have utility for institutional and program accreditation purposes, CAS has not been inclined to establish an accreditation body for student affairs programs and services, but rather takes the position that *self-regulation* is the preferred route to enhanced program quality and effectiveness. As a profession-wide entity, CAS

considers its role to be developing and promulgating professional standards to guide practice, not to accredit, certify, or otherwise sanction professional student support service practices or programs. Institutions and programs can use the CAS Standards and Guidelines for self-assessment, to promote program development and program effectiveness. CAS standards can be used nevertheless to frame self-studies for regional or specialty accreditation.

CAS Role in Professional Practice

The professional role of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education has become increasingly important over the past three decades. The first order of business was to develop and promulgate professional standards. CAS currently is viewed by many in the profession as an important educational, professional development vehicle as well. Two surveys that have been conducted of CAS standard users in which respondents identified how CAS influenced their professional work and how they used CAS materials. Following is a summary of responses from the first survey with emphasis upon the utility of CAS as a professional entity.

Several responding practitioners noted that they view CAS standards as highly important professional documents because the standards speak to the issues of change on campuses everywhere as practitioners have struggled to meet the needs of their ever changing student constituent bodies. One respondent shared the perspective that “as each campus has examined it’s own situation, and looked to it’s peers for

ideas, the CAS standards have guided not only implementation but review and evaluation. Most of this work was done in times of institutional expansion. Now as we regroup, downsize, or retrench, we must have some means by which to measure what we do. The CAS standards, in all of the functional areas, serve as an excellent tool to begin that process. They are flexible without being vague, broad without being limitless, and ideal for what we constantly face in higher education, change.”

One comment that reflected the value of the CAS initiative for entry level professionals was most telling. “I can easily imagine that the standards would provide indispensable guidance for some of our younger or less experienced colleagues in graduate education. It must be like having a consultant’s report at your finger tips that attests, ‘Do at least this much well, and you will find success in your program’.” This suggests that the CAS standards have great utility for providing a foundation of practice to which all college student service providers can aspire. It also suggests that academic preparation programs and new staff professional development orientation programs would be enhanced by incorporating the CAS standards as an essential part of their content.

The CAS enterprise has led to professional groups expanding on standards to meet sometimes highly specific professional needs. One example is in the area of learning assistance. As one response noted, “No sooner than the first Learning Assistance Program Standards were published, we were already talking about how to build upon that work. Whereas the CAS standards addressed broad basic elements that are essential to a comprehensive learning assistance program, practitioners in the field expressed

interest in obtaining similar statements that addressed pedagogical components as well.” Consequently, the National Association for Developmental Education [NADE] responded to the challenge by creating “NADE Guides.” These documents emulated the CAS standards assessment model and addressed the specific functions of tutoring services, adjunct instructional programs, developmental coursework, and the teaching/learning process. As the respondent noted, “I can think of no other project that has generated, nurtured, and advanced such inter-association collaboration. I see the CAS standards as being a major force in consolidating a diverse profession.”

A related comment was made by a close observer of CAS initiatives since the Council’s inception. “I have two general observations. First, CAS has filled a void that no other organization could accomplish. A credible network has been established to equip the student affairs profession with standards of performance. Second, the CAS effort has attracted increased attention and offered increased value over the years. A genuine service has been provided to the academy by helping and guiding all students toward achieving holistic development.”

Another respondent noted the value and utility of the CAS standards to a specific functional area in a mid-sized public institution. “The CAS standards were an excellent guide to use in assessing and improving the progress and success of our career center. They outlined expectations and served as a model in striving to achieve high quality services for the college community.”

A CAS sponsored survey was initiated in Spring 2000. CAS surveyed more than 5,000 individual

members of its consortium of 34 professional associations and practitioners from 22 member associations responded. Of those responding, 62.5% had heard of CAS (i.e., 85 percent of responding vice presidents; 67% of functional area directors, 66% of new professionals, and 31% of faculty members). Of those familiar with CAS, 24% had used the CAS standards as a functional area guide, 20% had used them to assess a functional area program, 12.3% had used them to further develop and expand a current program, and 8% had used them to promote or justify the existence of a current program.

Numerous personal observations about the CAS standards were elicited as were comments describing how CAS standards were being used. Some of the more salient comments follow.

“They (CAS standards) serve as a wonderful reminder of what we should be doing.”

“CAS standards remain in a high visibility location in my desk—a clear reminder of what I need to accomplish every day to adequately contribute to quality of campus life.”

“I believe they (CAS standards) are so important in our everyday work and push myself to review them every year as I set goals for the new year.”

“The CAS standards assisted me in redeveloping our departmental mission statement in 1993 and in 2000. I also used the CAS standards to plan and implement a professional development session for my campus.”

“CAS is a great staff builder and long term strategy builder. We’ve learned a great deal about our perspectives (+ or -) by using the assessment pieces.”

“We have adapted the CAS standards to produce an outcome determinative model. This model allows us to link outcomes directly to program quality, service delivery, and resource allocation.”

“We have evaluated our CAS preparation program using the standards. The process was time consuming, but the information gained through the process was invaluable. Likewise the instrument (Preparation SAG) was very useful as a guide during collection of data for distribution to our assessment team and external reviews.”

“I have found the CAS standards very helpful when creating or expanding a program. We can use them as rationale for budget requests.”

“Our assessment has helped us clarify our strengths and weaknesses. It also provides a nice communication tool to our adjunct faculty to ensure that they are clearly aware of our CAS expectations.”

“We have found them invaluable, especially with program reviews and accreditation visits.”

“ Makes you qualify and quantify services/ information in areas such as diversity, ethics, and legal responsibility.”

“It is a great introduction for emerging professionals.”

Most respondents to the survey noted that they used the 1997 Blue Book as their primary guide, closely followed by one or more of the functional area SAGs. Practitioners from nine different professional associations reported that they had used the Housing Program SAG, which was determined to be the most commonly accessed CAS self-assessment guide by those responding to the survey.

Evidence indicates that the CAS standards and guidelines are being used to assess and enhance quality practice in many institutions throughout the United States and Canada. However, as higher education is increasingly called on to assess learning outcomes, the CAS leadership indicated a strong desire to determine whether the users of the CAS standards could detect a link between the standards and student learning and development outcomes. Twenty-four percent of the respondents stated that they are currently measuring learning outcomes within the context of their student support program activities. Of those represented in that group, 16% stated that they believed CAS standards positively influenced learning outcomes, 51% stated that it was too early to say one way or the other, 13% stated they were unsure of any link, and 17% stated that there was no link to influencing such outcomes. These findings suggest that CAS must, if linkages to student learning and development outcomes are to be created, find ways to more effectively connect CAS standards to these important educational outcomes. In addition, future study is needed to answer other important questions about CAS and its initiatives. Questions that deserve consideration at this time include . . .

- Do available resources influence whether institutions conduct self-assessment (“wealthier” vs. “poorer” institutions)?
- What are the barriers to utilizing CAS standards for self-assessment?
- Are the CAS standards appropriate for use in international institutions?

There can be little doubt that the CAS initiative has been fruitful during its two and a half decade existence. Although there is much work yet to do, especially in the standards education arena, the Council for the Advancement of Standards in

Higher Education has made a professional difference and stands ready to continue its important efforts toward promulgating standards in the fields of student affairs and student support services.

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