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ABSTRACT

Throughout the history of the student affairs profession, a deep abiding concern for students and their development has been the guiding principle. The two-year college, with its rich tradition of commitment to teaching and expanding educational opportunities, has been a fertile ground for the student affairs profession. In recent years, despite the acknowledgement of the importance of student affairs in two-year colleges, questions have been raised about the effectiveness and relevance of such programs and recommendations have been made for the development of professional standards for student affairs. Since 1980, the Council for the Advancement of Standards for Student Services/Development Programs (CAS) has worked on the professional standards for the student affairs field and for graduate programs which prepare student affairs professionals. The functional areas for which standards have been developed include academic advising, career planning and placement, student activities, commuter student programs and services, disabled student services, orientation, counseling services, and learning assistance programs. CAS has also developed a set of general standards and guidelines for student affairs. These standards, which are endorsed by 20 professional associations, in combination with clearer program goals, will strengthen the role of student affairs in two-year colleges. (EJV)

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NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR STUDENT
AFFAIRS: OPPORTUNITY FOR RENEWAL

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JC 870 263

Introduction

There are several goals I plan to achieve in this afternoon's presentation. First, I will give provide background information on the status of the student affairs profession, especially as it relates to the two-year college. Second, I will give you information about the national standards for student affairs which have recently been published and which, I believe, offer an opportunity for professional renewal. Last, I will present some questions regarding how the standards might be used by student affairs professionals in two-year colleges. After John Keyser and Martha Smith react to this presentation, there will be an opportunity for discussion.

Student Affairs in the Two-Year College

I suspect that most of you are familiar with the history of student affairs in higher education in America. It is a relatively short history, probably no longer than one hundred years. It could be argued that the formal field of student personnel work is exactly fifty years old, dating from the 1937 ACE Statement entitled The Student Personnel Point of View. Regardless of the historical time line, the constant thread that has been associated with student affairs is a concern for the welfare of students. Throughout the history of student affairs, a deep abiding concern for students, and their development, has been, and continues to be, the guiding principle for the profession.

The two-year college, with its rich history of commitment to teaching and to expanding educational opportunities, should be fertile ground for the student affairs profession. In fact, this

appears to be the case. Throughout the early history of the two-year colleges, there were calls for including guidance and counseling among the major purposes of two-year colleges. Medsker, writing in 1960, concluded from his historical analysis that the need for counseling assistance for students in two-year colleges had been evident and addressed since the very beginning of the junior college movement. In 1970, O'Banion, Thurston and Gulden, in their now classic book entitled Student Development Program in Two-Year Colleges, indicated their belief that the philosophical underpinnings of the "student personnel point of view" and "the community college point of view" were one and the same; namely, a commitment to humanitarian, democratic principles.

In recent years, while there is still acknowledgement of the importance of student affairs in two-year colleges, there are also many who are raising questions about the effectiveness and relevance of such programs. Elsner and Ames (1983), among others, have called for a redesign of student affairs in two-year colleges. Matson and Deegan (1985) concluded that "a reassessment and agreement on mission and priorities . . ." (p. 147) is needed in student affairs. Writing in the April/May, 1987, issue of the Community, Technical and Junior College Journal, Deegan and Tillery indicate the need for a national study of student services programs as one of the priorities for action for community colleges.

In addition to those outside the profession who have been calling for a redesign of student affairs, many individuals

within the profession have been raising another kind of concern. One of those concerns has been the professional status of student affairs. Specifically, is student affairs a profession at all? Carpenter and Miller (1981), using criteria established to judge the status of a profession, characterized student affairs as only an emerging profession. One critical factor missing in the quest for student affairs to meet the criteria requested for recognition as a profession has been a set of professional standards. Could the development of such standards, and their use by student affairs professionals in two-year colleges, provide the vehicle for renewal so many seem to feel is necessary?

The remainder of this presentation will be devoted to that question.

The Move to National Standards

Phyllis Mable and Ted Miller, writing in 1983, set forth their reasons why professional standards for student affairs should be developed.

"First, professional standards provide uniform reference points for student affairs practitioners and institutional leaders in (1) evaluating the quality of student services programs, (2) evaluating staff members, and (3) giving direction for creating new and better programs of intentional development. Standards represent the criteria that are used to assure quality of both program and staff. Second,.....concisely defined professional standards....

assure higher quality staff and programs, and they also assure higher quality experiences for students involved. Finally, written standards provide consistent criteria for institutional and academic accreditation in student services and student development areas. (1983, p. 200)."

Since 1979, a mechanism has been in place to develop professional standards for student affairs. The Council for the Advancement of Standards for Student Services/Development Programs (CAS) is a consortium of 20 professional associations which has been working on professional standards for the field on student affairs and for graduate programs which prepare student affairs professionals. Throughout the history of CAS, the National Council on Student Development, with support from the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, has been fully represented on the CAS Board of Directors. The years of effort by CAS have come to fruition with the publication of a set of professional standards for student affairs.

CAS, officially established in 1980, has representation from nearly all major associations within the field of student affairs. The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, the American College Personnel Association, the National Association of Women Deans and Counselors, the three major professional associations in student affairs, have been active members of the consortium. From the inception of CAS, the National Council on Student Development has also been an active member of CAS, and the only association representing student affairs professionals who work in two-year colleges.

In 1980, CAS stated its purposes as follows:

- (a) To promote cooperative inter-association efforts to improve the quality of service offered to students by establishing, adopting and/or recommending professional standards for student services/development programs.
- (b) To encourage accreditation agencies to utilize student services/development programs standards;
- (c) To provide professional standards and consultation to assist institutions of higher education in the evaluation and improvement of their student services/development programs;
- (d) To increase awareness of the importance of professional standards for student services/development program areas or activities. (CAS, 1980).

Having established these purposes, CAS put in place a process for developing standards for most of the major functional areas in student affairs. The functional areas for which standards have been developed include: Academic Advising, Career Planning and Placement, Student Activities, Commuter Student Programs and Services, Disabled Student Services, Orientation, Counseling Services, and Learning Assistance Programs, among others. The Council has also developed a set of general standards and guidelines for student affairs. These general statements serve as an introduction to the standards for the functional areas, and contain statements regarding requirements for funding, facilities, legal responsibilities, and equal opportunity, access and affirmative action, among others.

From the beginning of the process, the Council has been clear in its intent not to move in the direction of becoming a separate accrediting body. Rather, it is intended that the standards be used by professionals in the field of student affairs as a guide to practice. It is also intended that the standards be used as a resource by regional accrediting associations as they routinely review their own standards relating to student affairs.

Will Standards/Guidelines Make a Difference?

The development of a set of standards does not in itself guarantee a higher level of professionalism. It has been argued elsewhere (Dassance, 1984-85) that a set of national principles would be too general to lead to a meaningful improvement of professional practice in student affairs. Rather, it has been suggested, student affairs professionals assume responsibility for clearly articulating their program purposes on their own campuses. However, the importance of the development of a set of national standards for student affairs should not be diminished. It is a monumental achievement to obtain the endorsement of twenty different professional associations, even those in the same general field, of a set of standards. Moreover, a set of national standards, in combination with clearer program goals at the college level, would strengthen the role of student affairs in two-year colleges. The development of standards is an especially significant undertaking when no set of professional standards has been developed previously for the profession and should be

considered as a major step forward.

Presidents, Chief Student Affairs Officers, Academic Affairs Officers, as well as other administrators and faculty in two-year colleges, are urged to review the standards which have been published. It is hoped that the standards can lead to discussion and debate about student affairs and, most importantly, the long-term improvement of the profession. The student affairs profession and the two-year college share a common philosophical commitment. The newly developed standards should be of assistance to two-year colleges in reviewing and improving their student development services program, and thus strengthening the two-year college itself.

Questions for Consideration

As an ending to this presentation, I want to raise some general questions for the reactors, and for our general discussion later.

1. How can student affairs' professionals in two-year colleges use the standards to improve their student affairs programs?
2. What role can presidents of two-year colleges play to promote the use of the standards?
3. Is there a role for the National Council on Student Development in promoting the use of the standards?
4. Will these standards make any difference?

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