

STUDENT CONDUCT ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY, TRAINING, SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE

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A diverse sample of 329 student conduct administrators, holding at least a Master's degree, participated in a study to explore whether their level of specialized training, their need to stay up-to-date on current trends, and mastery of specific skills sets met the necessary criteria to determine whether student conduct administration could be considered an independent and unique profession. Also explored was the relationship between tenure on the job and mastery of skills.

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The functions performed by today's student conduct administrators (SCAs) bear only minimal resemblance to the functions performed by SCAs in the earliest days of higher education (Stoner & Lowery, 2004). According to the Association for Student Conduct Administrators (ASCA, 2018b), an SCA functioning in the field of higher education today is an educator; in the time of the colonial colleges, the person who filled the role most similar to today's SCA would have been primarily a disciplinarian (Rudolph, 1962; Stoner & Lowery, 2004; Waller, 2013). Today's SCAs conduct investigations into violations of the institution's code of conduct, dialogue with all parties involved in conduct infraction, and construct intentional and educational sanctions for infractions of the student code of conduct and other institutional policy breaches by students (Rudolph, 1962; Stoner & Lowery, 2004; Waller, 2013). In addition, the complexity of student conduct violations has increased over time which requires SCAs to consider multiple aspects of a conduct violation in terms of school policies, student developmental level, and any relevant legal issues related to the situation. While meting out discipline is still one aspect of the job, the SCA's responsibilities extend beyond this basic function.

In earlier times, SCAs adjudicated a limited range of conduct violations (e.g., curfew violations, cheating, etc.) and represented the role of institutions as *in loco parentis* (Gehring, 2006); today's student code violations can involve much more complicated and hazardous conduct violations. These may include students gaining electronic access to examination answers and distributing the answers to an entire class, investigations into sexual assault or other criminal activity, as it relates to a student code violation, and other intricate violations (National Center for Higher Education Risk Management, 2014). To be effective in today's higher education environment, it is necessary for the SCA to have a thorough understanding of policy and legal issues, to

possess a multitude of skills, and to be adept at utilizing these skills when investigating and adjudicating a wide variety of incidents (Dowd, 2012; Waller, 2013). It seems clear that today's fast-paced and highly collaborative higher education environment requires SCAs to possess specialized skills and training in order to carry out the position responsibilities (Stoner & Lowery, 2004). SCAs must also recognize that the application of these skills requires attention to the unique circumstances of each infraction. It is not possible to apply a "cookie-cutter" approach to handling student conduct referrals.

As noted, the most basic functions of student conduct administration have existed since the first institutions of higher education were established (Komives, Woodward, & Associates, 2003; Rudolph, 1962). The field of student conduct began to grow its professional roots in the 1930s after publication of the *Student Personnel Point of View* and the growth of the Deans of Men and Deans of Women positions (American Council on Education, 1937). Conceived in 1986 (ASCA, 2018c), the first true professional organization for SCAs was the Association for Student Judicial Affairs; it would later be renamed the Association for Student Conduct Administration. Despite this formalization of the field, combined with the increasingly specialized and diverse skills required, there has not yet been a study that could conclusively determine whether or not student conduct administration is a unique profession in its own right within the discipline of student affairs.

Review of the Literature

Exploring the construct of SCA professional identity is timely given the level of scrutiny student conduct professionals experience from legislators and parents of enrolled students (Kelderman, 2015a). The current level of professional scrutiny is the product of the assumptions of legislators and the public that SCAs fail to provide a fundamentally fair process for all parties involved in conduct infractions, especially in

the area of student sexual assault (Kelderman, 2015b; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). However, SCAs do provide a valuable service for students, and institutions as a whole, by providing a fair process by which to resolve student code violations in an educational manner that upholds the institutional mission and vision (Gehring, 2006; Waller, 2013). Effective student conduct administration hinges on the professionalism of the individuals who carry out the responsibilities of this office. However, there is still the need for evidence that student conduct administration is, indeed, a unique and distinct profession.

Professional Identity as a Construct

The concept of professional identity has been acknowledged and examined in many fields, such as the trade crafts, primary and secondary education, counseling, and student affairs (Bodman, Taylor & Morris, 2012; Rickard, 1988; Williams, 1988; Young, 1985). Due to the diverse nature of professional fields, there is no single definition of the construct of professional identity that can be universally applied across all disciplines. However, individual researchers across many decades have examined and attempted to identify the various components that make up the construct of professional identity (Bodman et al., 2012; Prosek & Hurt, 2014; Williams, 1988; Wrenn & Darley, 1950; Young, 1985).

In the 1980s, Rickard (1985, 1988) looked tangentially at the construct of professional identity of student affairs personnel. According to Rickard (1988), professional identity is primarily constructed based on sociological criteria of the profession. As a student affairs professional, Rickard (1988) provided a figurative model of the various components of a professional paradigm, complete with various examples within the five layers he developed to define the construct. These layers included "foci," "roles," "skills," "disciplines/professions," "models & theories," and "functional areas" (p. 391). Bodman et al. (2012) further added to this

definition by noting that professional identity may be influenced by legislation and politics, which is highly applicable to the role of the student affairs personnel. This suggests that SCAs must maintain awareness of current trends in their discipline, any changes in law or policies related to their role, as well as be able to understand the theoretical underpinnings of student conduct administration. These factors are examples of the specific ways in which SCAs perform distinct tasks related to their roles.

Professional Identity of Student Conduct Administrators

Scholars have explored the field of student conduct and the roles of SCAs as these relate to factors that SCAs consider when making decisions (Dowd, 2012; Hyde, 2014; Waller, 2013; Wannamaker, 2005). Effective SCAs must possess a strong understanding of nuance in order to properly execute the responsibilities of the SCA position, regardless of institutional type. The fundamental practices of student conduct have been molded over time through best practices, legislation, and case law (Waller, 2013). There is, however, currently no specific research on the professional identity of SCAs. At a business meeting of the ASCA Board of Directors, a call was made to institutions and SCAs to gather and publish data regarding how student conduct personnel, investigators, and adjudicators are trained and to highlight what individual factors are considered when decisions are made (D. Jutenin, personal communication, February 7, 2014). It is clear that specific skills are necessary to administer just and fair sanctions for students as well as to understand the ways in which legal issues may influence the actions of SCAs on college campuses today. Further, it is clear that there is a call to further define the professional role and relevant preparation for SCAs as its status as a profession warrants consideration.

Wrenn and Darley's (1950) definition of a student affairs profession is the most appropriate description to use to set up a

research problem regarding the professional identity of SCAs. The term "professional identity" is not defined by any single attribute, but is the sum of all professional aspects that comprise the professional identity in a given profession (Bodman et al., 2012; Prosek & Hurt, 2004; Rickard, 1985, 1988). Professional identity is comprised of the performance of the role, taking into account all of the aspects of the position (Prosek & Hurt, 2004). Further, it is assumed that SCAs' skills and knowledge will develop over time, as their experience and familiarity with their roles deepen and their confidence in their performance grows.

Based on the existing literature, there are several distinct skill sets that SCAs must master on the job to be able to perform their duties effectively. These include skills related to 1) investigative exploration (Gehring, 2006; Waller, 2013); 2) conflict resolution (Stimpson & Stimpson, 2008); 3) application of legal knowledge (Letzring & Hol-

comb, 1996; McNair, 2013) and 4) relevant theory (Dowd, 2012). Each of these skill sets makes up just one aspect of the professional role of the SCA. To develop and maintain these skills, it is proposed that SCAs will also participate in appropriate training as well as engage in continuing education activities that keep them up-to-date on the field. These are aspects of professionalism that are components of a framework developed by Horton (1944) that included 10 specific criteria of a profession.

The 10 Criteria of a Profession

Perhaps the most comprehensive description of the qualities of a career area that supports its categorization as a profession is that developed by Horton (1944). This model included 10 criteria for determining whether or not a field of employment existed as an independent profession. These criteria are listed in Table 1.

Evaluation of the Professional Identity Status of Student Conduct Administration using Horton's (1944) 10 Criteria as a Framework

Profession Criteria	Evidence exists?	Source of Evidence
1. A profession must satisfy an indispensable social need to be based upon well-established and socially accepted scientific principles.	Yes	Bickel & Lake, 2013; NCHERM, 2014; Waller, 2013
2. It must demand adequate pre-professional and cultural training.	Yes	Gehring, 2006, Komives et al., 2003
3. It must demand the possession of a body of specialized and systematized knowledge.	Yes	Gehring, 2006; NCHERM, 2014; Waller, 2013
4. It must give evidence of needed skills which the general public does not possess.	No	N/A
5. It must have developed a scientific technique which is the result of tested experience.	Yes	NCHERM, 2014
6. It must require the exercise of discretion and judgment as to the time and manner of the performance of duty.	Yes	ASCA, 2018a; Komives et al., 2003; NCHERM, 2014; US Congress, 1974; Waller, 2013

Table 1.

Evaluation of the Professional Identity Status of Student Conduct Administration using Horton's (1944) 10 Criteria as a Framework (continued)

Profession Criteria	Evidence exists?	Source of Evidence
7. It must be a type of beneficial work, the result of which is not subject to standardization in terms of unit performance or time element.	No	N/A
8. It must have a group consciousness designed to extend scientific knowledge in a technical language.	Yes	D. Jutenin, personal communication, February 7, 2014; Rudolph 1962
9. It must have sufficient self-impelling power to retain its members throughout life, i.e., it must not be used as a mere steppingstone to other occupations.	Yes	Gehring Academy, 2018
10. It must recognize its obligations to society by insisting that its members live up to an established and accepted code of ethics.	Yes	ASCA, 2018a; Dowd, 2012; Komives et al., 2003

While the existing literature base for student conduct administration does not include existing research specifically addressing professional identity of SCAs, Horton's model provides a format for exploration of the ways in which a particular discipline measures up to the status of an independent and unique profession.

Measuring Student Affairs Administration against Horton's Criteria

Six years after the development of this set of criteria, Wrenn and Darley (1950) considered whether the field of student personnel work, now student affairs, constituted a profession, as defined by these criteria. Although student personnel work, as a whole, did not meet the criteria to be considered a profession, their findings did indicate that some segments of student affairs came closer to being considered a profession at that time than others, such as student activities and university housing. However, since that time, no other researcher has explored whether the field of student conduct

administration meets these 10 criteria and this study seeks to bridge that gap.

A careful review of the existing literature revealed evidence that the field of student conduct administration met eight of the 10 criteria identified by Horton (1944). Please refer to Table 1 for additional information related to the sources in which this evidence was found for each of these eight criteria. However, there was no evidence to support two of the criteria. These two points are the fourth one, professions require *skills not possessed by the general public*, and the seventh one, a profession requires individuals to perform *beneficial work not subject to standardization in terms of unit performance or time element*. These remaining two criteria address the specialized role that a professional would carry out on the job and that experience and training are an important aspect of performing this role.

Years in the Profession

The number of years in the profession, or the SCA's *tenure in the profession*,

has been identified as a factor in decision making (Dowd, 2012; Hyde, 2014; Waller, 2013; Wannamaker, 2005). In 2000, Scott presented findings from a survey of SCAs who had five to eight years in the profession. Scott's results highlighted the particular factors considered by SCAs who had that level of experience when adjudicating cases.

In a more detailed study, Wannamaker (2005) provided the number of years in the field for 396 SCAs. Wannamaker found that the longer an SCA functioned in the field of student conduct, the more selective the SCA was about which factors were considered in making a decision. While some case types may become routine, the sanctions imposed by the SCA should be appropriate for each particular student (Waller, 2013). With each year of experience, an SCA adjudicates a growing number of conduct cases while gaining greater experience in identifying individual student needs. This enables SCAs to provide individualized sanctions to students in tandem with appropriate educational opportunities (Waller, 2013).

Student conduct administrators should not simply issue the same sanctions to each student for the same violation; that may be counterproductive to the student's educational career and to the educational nature of the student conduct process (Stimpson & Stimpson, 2008). Some institutions have a policy of mandatory or minimum sanctions for certain offense types. Minimum or mandatory sanctions negate the value of the SCA's experience in the field (NCHERM, 2014). Without the autonomy to issue individualized sanctions for an offense, regardless of number of years in the profession, SCAs and students are placed at a disadvantage (Dowd, 2012; Hyde, 2014; Waller, 2013; Wannamaker, 2005). Just as court justices possess the autonomy to weigh the evidence of a particular case and consider each case independently, SCAs are able to function in a similar manner when allowed autonomy that is warranted based on their years of experience and expertise. If there

is no room for consideration of individual cases and the unique circumstances of the parties involved, the SCAs of today would be placed in the position of reenacting the limited and narrowly focused role of disciplinarian. Given this information, the number of years in the profession has been identified by multiple researchers as an important factor to consider for SCAs when making a decision about a student conduct matter (Dowd, 2012; Hyde, 2014; Waller, 2013; Wannamaker, 2005). Thus, experience is another facet of professional development that relates to professional identity status.

In summary, professional identity provides the basis for defining professionals in any given field, including who they are, what they do, and why they perform the tasks that they do (Bodman et al., 2012; Cutler, 2003; Rickard, 1988). To date, there has been no conclusive evidence provided to confirm that student conduct administration is an individual, unique profession. This lack of confirmatory evidence warrants a further exploration of the perceptions and experiences of contemporary SCAs as they relate to the skills necessary to perform their roles. The four skills sets of interest, investigatory skills, conflict resolution skills, legal knowledge, and student development/academic theory, are all relevant to an SCA's ability to address each referral from the most appropriate perspective, rather than rely on a standardized "one size fits all" approach to the job. Further, it is expected that the longer an individual's tenure on the job, the stronger one's skill set and performance will be.

The present study was undertaken to explore the skills sets, continuing education activities, tenure in the field, and perceptions related to professional identity of individuals employed as SCAs. To determine how well the field of student conduct administration met the remaining two criteria of a profession out of the 10 specified by Horton (1944), the following hypotheses were examined:

1. Beliefs regarding the need for inves-

investigatory skills, conflict resolutions skills, legal knowledge, and student development theory and knowledge are related to the belief that student conduct administration is an independent and unique profession.

2. Tenure in the field is related to the self-reported level of mastery of relevant skill sets.

a. Tenure in the field is related to self-reported mastery of investigatory skills.

b. Tenure in the field is related to self-reported mastery of conflict resolution skills.

c. Tenure in the field is related to self-reported mastery of legal knowledge.

d. Tenure in the field is related to self-reported mastery of discipline-specific knowledge

3. A significant amount of variance in participants' beliefs regarding the professional identity of SCAs will be accounted for by beliefs about the importance of the following variables: staying up-to-date on evolving issues and trends in the field, specialized training, and specialized skills sets.

Methodology

The target population (N) for this study included all SCAs in higher education institutions, worldwide; "N" is unknown. In an attempt to extrapolate data for "N," a sample of the population (n), which is comprised of 2,760 members of the Association for Student Conduct Administration, was surveyed. All self-reported active ASCA members received an invitation to complete the study. Based on G*Power calculations, a priori, it was necessary to have a minimum of 180 responses to the survey instrument to ensure validity in the results, and that not more than an acceptable level of Type I or Type II error was committed.

After receiving Institutional Review Board approval for the study, recruitment emails were disseminated to members of

the organization that contained a link to an electronic online survey, located in Qualtrics. A total of 399 responses were received; this represented a 14.4% response rate. Of that number, 329 participants provided complete data and held at least a Master's degree; however, this number exceeded the minimum *a priori* count necessary for statistical accuracy.

Participants

The resulting sample of 329 participants was a heterogeneous group of SCAs. In terms of gender identity, 54.4% were female, 43.8% were male, and the remaining six respondents were either transgender, gender-fluid, or chose not to respond. Regarding professional status, 37.7% were mid-level conduct administrators; 27.4% were senior-level conduct administrators; 15.8% were senior-level student affairs officers, 10.3% were entry-level conduct administrators; and 8.8% were senior level student affairs officers. In terms of years of experience, 36.5% had five to nine years of experience; 27.4% had zero to four years of experience; 18.2% had 10-14 years of experience; and 17.9% had 15 or more years of experience. The Master's degree was the highest degree for 77.8% of the sample; 16.7% held a doctoral degree; and 5.5% possessed a Juris Doctorate. It should be noted that membership of ASCA is disproportionately skewed, and includes more entry-level and mid-level professionals, compared with more seasoned professionals. This may reflect the shrinking professional development funding in higher education settings along with the disproportionate enthusiasm that new professionals exhibit for opportunities for networking and professionalization as they enter a new field.

Instruments

Participants completed an electronic survey that included a total of 27 items developed by the researchers to gather demographic data along with information related to the variables of training, staying-up-to-

date on current knowledge, and optimal skills sets. In addition to three variable-related open-ended questions (i.e., "Please describe any other forms of training in which you have participated (not listed above) . . ."), 5-point Likert-scale items (1= "Not at all important;" 5= "Extremely important") were used to assess participants' beliefs about the importance of specialized training through questions related to interest in and participation in training events; the importance of staying up-to-date on trends and issues in the field; and the importance of specific skills sets for effective job performance. A single Likert-scale item (1= "Strongly disagree;" 5= "Strongly agree") was used to assess the belief that the field

of student conduct administration could be categorized as an independent and unique profession. The Cronbach's alpha was .69 was for this sample.

Results

Data were analyzed using SPSS 22.0.1 and an alpha of .05 was set for determining statistical significance. Descriptive statistics were calculated for all demographic variables and for each item on the survey. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients, analyses of variance (ANOVA) and regression analysis were used to examine the research hypotheses. In Table 2, the means and standard deviations for the study variables are presented.

Table 2.
Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Specialized Training			
Importance of specialized training		4.53	0.624
Staying up-to-date			
Importance of staying up-to-date		4.72	0.514
Specialized Skills			
Optimal performance-investigatory skills		4.41	0.702
Optimal performance-conflict resolution skills		4.25	0.756
Optimal performance-legal knowledge		4.33	0.703
Optimal performance-discipline-specific theory		4.01	0.848
Professional Identity			
Unique professional identity		4.39	0.749

Optimal Skills Sets and Professional Identity Status

A Pearson product-moment correlation was calculated to test the first hypothesis that the possession of specific skills sets were necessary for optimal job performance was related to the belief that SCAs possess an independent and unique professional identity. This calculation revealed a significant positive correlation between the following variables: the belief that student conduct administration is an independent and unique profession and investigatory skills ($r = .225$), conflict resolution skills ($r = .114$), and legal knowledge ($r = .216$), as presented in Table 3. There was no relationship found between the belief that student conduct administration was an independent and unique profession and the possession of discipline-specific knowledge or theory (i.e., student development theory or academic achievement theory). However, as noted in Table 3, significant positive correlations were revealed among all four of the skills sets. The first hypothesis was partially supported.

Tenure in the Field and Mastery of Skills Sets

The second hypothesis stated that a participant's tenure in the field (i.e., 0-4 years, 5-9 years, 10-14 years, 15 or more years) was related to self-reported mastery of four specific skills sets: investigatory skills, conflict resolution skills, legal knowledge, and knowledge of discipline-specific theory (See

Table 4). A separate sub-hypothesis was created for each skills set and four separate ANOVA calculations were conducted. In the case that significant results were revealed, a Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference post-hoc test was calculated to determine which of the age groups were statistically different from the others.

Investigatory skills. Tenure in the field was significantly and positively related to the self-reported level of mastery of investigatory skills ($F=8.802$; $df=3$, $p<.001$). The longer one's tenure on the job, the higher the level of self-reported mastery in investigatory skills. Individuals with 0-4 years on the job had significantly lower levels of self-mastery than all other groups. There were no other statistically significant differences between the other groups.

Conflict resolution skills. Tenure in the field was significantly and positively related to the self-reported level of mastery of conflict resolution skills ($F=4.680$; $df=3$, $p=.003$). The longer one's tenure on the job, the higher the level of self-reported mastery of conflict resolution skills. Individuals with 0-4 years on the job or 5-9 years on the job revealed significantly lower levels of self-mastery of conflict resolution skills than those with 15 or more years of experience. There were no other statistically significant differences between the remaining groups.

Legal knowledge. Tenure in the field was significantly and positively related to the self-reported level of mastery of legal knowledge (including professionally rele-

Table 3.
Correlations between SSCA as a Profession and Optimal Importance of Skill Sets

	1	2	3	4	5
1. SCA Profession	–				
2. Investigatory skills	.225**	–			
3. Conflict resolution skills	.114*	.394**	–		
4. Legal knowledge	.216**	.404**	.248**	–	
5. Discipline-specific theory	.035	.124*	.297**	.329**	–

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

vant federal and state laws) ($F=12.447$; $df=3$, $p<.001$). The longer one's tenure on the job, the higher the level of self-reported mastery of legal knowledge. Individuals with 0-4 years on the job had significantly lower levels of self-mastery than all other groups; individuals with 5-9 years on the job had significantly lower levels of self-mastery than those with 15 or more years on the job. There were no other significant differences between the remaining groups.

Discipline-specific knowledge.

Length of time on the job was significantly and positively related to the self-reported level of mastery of discipline specific theories (including student development, academic achievement, etc.) ($F=7.995$; $df=3$, $p<.001$). The longer one's tenure on the job, the higher the level of self-reported mastery of discipline-specific knowledge. Individuals with 0-4 years on the job had significantly lower levels of self-mastery than those with 5-9 years or over 15 years on the job. There were no other significant differences between the remaining groups. The second hypothesis, that tenure in the field was related to self-reported mastery of skills, was supported.

Predictors of Belief regarding the Professional Identity of SCAs

The third hypothesis stated that a significant amount of the variance in belief that SCAs possess an independent and unique professional identity would be accounted for by the participants' perceptions of the importance of the following variables: staying up-to-date, engaging in specialized training, investigatory skills, conflict resolution skills, legal knowledge, and knowledge of discipline-specific theory. To test this hypothesis, these six variables were entered into a stepwise regression equation. The standardized regression coefficients were analyzed to determine the predictive value of these variables regarding the belief that SCAs have an independent and unique professional identity. The results indicated that there was a collective significant effect between the importance of specialized training, investigatory skills, and belief regarding the professional identity of SCAs ($F(2, 326) = 21.297$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .11$); these two variables account for 11% of the variance in beliefs related to professional identity. The individual predictors were examined further and revealed that specialized training ($\beta = .263$ $t(2, 326) = 4.885$, $p < .001$) and

Table 4. *Tenure in the Field and Skills Mastery*

Years in Field	Investigatory Skills		Conflict Resolution Skills		Legal Knowledge		Discipline-Specific Theory	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Total (n=329)	3.89	.852	3.85	.826	3.59	.949	3.83	.833
0-4 (n=90)	3.54	.863	3.72	.948	3.17	1.019	3.53	.877
5-9 (n=120)	3.92	.866	3.73	.775	3.58	.923	3.87	.788
10-14 (n=60)	4.07	.800	4.00	.664	3.83	.827	3.87	.791
15 + (n=59)	4.19	.682	4.14	.798	4.02	.731	4.19	.754

investigatory skills ($\beta = .159$ $t(2, 326) = 2.952$, $p = .003$) were significant predictors in the model. Thus, the third hypothesis was supported.

Discussion

This study of 329 SCAs, holding at least a Master's degree, was conducted to explore the professional identity status of the field of student conduct administration. Three specific hypotheses were explored and each of them was supported by the findings. It is apparent that student conduct administration meets the criteria for categorization as an independent and unique profession. In addition, it is clear that while SCAs do value the education they receive regarding discipline-specific theory, the skills that they find most applicable to their professional identity are investigatory skills, conflict resolution skills, and legal knowledge. Perhaps not surprisingly, the longer one's tenure in the field, the stronger one's mastery of these skills. Lastly, it was found that the importance of participation in specialized training and possession of investigatory skills predicted participants' beliefs about the professional identity of SCAs.

Implications for Educational Preparation of SCAs

As the world grows more complex, so will the types of issues faced by SCAs. The findings of this study emphasize the need for these individuals to develop and maintain strong skills related to incident investigation to ensure that they are proficient in their role. While the responsibilities of the SCA include meting out sanctions for infractions of the conduct code, as required, the overarching purpose of student conduct administration in higher education institutions is to be educational, not punitive (Stoner & Lowery, 2004; Waller 2013). Thus, the practice of student conduct incorporates the skills and knowledge from multiple fields, including critical thinking (education), investigatory skills, and legal knowledge (law and law enforcement), and conflict resolution

(psychology). Unfortunately, regardless of an individual's undergraduate field of study, it is unlikely that students entering graduate programs in higher education and student affairs will be bringing with them knowledge or coursework from all of the relevant subject areas. However, graduate programs may be able to help better prepare future student conduct professionals.

While graduate programs in higher education or student affairs, specifically, are the most appropriate locations to train future SCAs, some programs may benefit from curricular updates that address the skills sets most valued by professionals. Course projects may be added that would encourage students to sharpen their investigatory skills through problem-based learning exercises. These could be incorporated into existing courses while providing students with opportunities to develop their inductive and deductive reasoning skills. Additionally, conflict resolution is another area in which experiential practice in graduate programs may be of significant value to career development, as SCAs in the study felt this skill was also key to their performance. Often, graduate students pursuing careers in student affairs may perceive student conduct administration as a profession in which there is little room for autonomy in their work with students whom they believe might represent a challenging population. By providing students with a more accurate understanding of the field and the ways in which individual expertise and experience shape professional roles, faculty may encourage students to release any notions that the role of an SCA is simply that of a disciplinarian.

Focused study of relevant legal issues and trends in higher education law also should be included in coursework. Learning the letter of the law should be combined with opportunities to explore the practical application of policy and law through practice cases and experiential role-play. As SCAs revealed, theoretical knowledge is valuable and provides a foundation for their roles; knowledge of legal issues and policy

is essential to their success on the job. However, to successfully function autonomously and appropriately, SCAs also need a clear understanding of the unique circumstances and the developmental levels of the student referrals with whom they will work.

A niche that some graduate programs may consider addressing is the development of specific program tracks for students interested in pursuing careers in student conduct. This would provide an opportunity to offer courses that specifically explore content areas related to student conduct administration as well as offer experiential practice in integrating and applying this knowledge. Specific courses might address such topics as "Legal Issues related to Student Conduct" and "Conflict Resolution on the College Campus." In light of the challenges of adding new courses to degree programs, students who express interest in careers in student conduct could be encouraged to seek out coursework beyond their major program that is related to areas such as helping skills, conflict resolution, and legal issues and policy in higher education. Student development theory courses could be enriched to ensure that students can understand the ways in which conduct violations are perceived differently based on a student's developmental level as well as the ways in which sanctions may need to differ based on student developmental levels.

Implications for Current Practice of SCAs

The results of this study give evidence that job experience enhances an SCA's confidence in their skills and their self-reported mastery of the skills needed to effectively perform their duties. While specialized training may not be available in every graduate preparation program, relevant seminars, workshops, and trainings can be of significant benefit to early and mid-career SCAs.

The seismic shifts in the use of and capabilities of educational technology platforms generates the need for specialized training in the impact of technology on student con-

duct issues. For example, it is not enough for a SCA to know that educational software programs, such as Blackboard™, accept assignments or exams from students. It is necessary to know that all access attempts and actions are logged within the system and that these system logs can be accessed and viewed by faculty for the course and system administrators. It is necessary to know that error messages in Blackboard™ are rare and often unique, thus screenshots should be captured to verify the authenticity of a particular error message. If SCAs are unfamiliar with the technical workings of computer programs, their jobs can be made more difficult.

Specialized and continuing training in the areas of legal issues and policy may also be especially valuable as these can change to keep up with new technologies and cultural shifts. However, it is important that SCAs not lose sight of the fact that the student conduct process should never serve as a substitute for the legal process.

Conclusion

Results from this research study indicate that student conduct administrators fill a unique professional role on campus and their training, scope of responsibility, and continuing education needs give credence to the affirmation that the field meets the criteria necessary for identification as a unique profession. No longer is the role of the SCA limited to that of a disciplinarian. The student conduct process of today is an educational process that provides students the opportunity to learn from their mistakes. Student conduct administrators, as do all student affairs professionals, have an obligation to grow with their students as civilization shifts and grows in complexity, while keeping the tenets of the profession at the forefront of their minds as they fulfill their professional responsibilities to their institutions and their students.

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