

STATEWIDE NEED FOR AND COORDINATION OF TRAINING OF FINANCIAL AID PRACTITIONERS: THE CASE OF ARIZONA

by Robert H. Fenske and Robert A. Bowman

This article describes a recent effort by a state student aid agency to assess needs and improve training for aid administrators in the state. The project involved cooperation with other agencies and especially with the state professional association of aid administrators. A thorough review of literature was conducted for the study and is summarized in this article. Methods, procedures and findings are also described, and the article concludes with recommendations for implementation of the findings.

Background

The training of student financial aid practitioners has recently emerged as a problem of considerable magnitude because of the concurrence of several factors including (1) the rapid increase in number of practitioners required for administering the burgeoning growth of student aid programs (2) the increasing complexity of administrative responsibilities and procedures, and (3) inadequacies in the professional preparation of aid officers and training of support staff. The last factor is evidenced in an almost total lack of focused preservice academic programs, poorly coordinated inservice education and a lack of standardization for either preservice or inservice programs.

There was sporadic interest in pre- and inservice programs throughout the '60s and early '70s, however, it was not until recent years that massive efforts were initiated to deal with the challenge. These efforts include a consortium comprising the American Personnel and Guidance Association (APGA), National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO) and the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) which jointly offers federally-funded inservice programs in conjunction with regional and state associations of aid administrators. Both the American College Testing (ACT) Program and the College Scholarship Services (CSS) intensified their activities in providing workshops and distributing training materials during the late seventies. Also, the federal government funded training programs in recent years through the 1972 Amendments to the Higher Education Act of 1965.

Robert Fenske is Professor of Higher Education at Arizona State University, Tempe and a member of the *Journal's* editorial board. Robert Bowman is a member of the staff of the Arizona Commission of Postsecondary Education. The authors acknowledge the assistance of Patricia L. Clark of Arizona State University in preparation of the article.

Beginning with the fiscal year 1977 the State Student Financial Assistance Training Program (SSFATP) provided federal funds to each state agency which administers the State Student Incentive Grant (SSIG) program. In Arizona the designated agency is the Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education (ACPE). These modest funds were intended to "increase the efficiency of financial aid administrators". Subsequent regulations have expanded the definition of "administrators" to include such support and ancillary staff as counselors, fiscal officers and office staff. Pursuant to the regulations, the Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education (ACPE) worked closely with the Arizona Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (AASFAA) in sponsoring needed training programs in the first two fiscal years of the program. It was decided that the most effective activity during the third year of the program would comprise an evaluation phase to review the first two years of training activities and to guide future activities. In consultation with AASFAA leaders, the Commission staff determined that the proposed study would:

1. Assess the present and future training needs of, and staff requirements for, financial aid practitioners (financial aid officers, counselors, and support staff personnel)
2. Survey past and present training activities and programs; and
3. Investigate the possibilities of developing and implementing a coordination model for financial aid training activities and programs in the state.

The Commission identified the senior author as a qualified principal investigator for the study and directed him to work closely in the design stage with an AASFAA liaison committee. The committee members represented virtually all important sectors of the financial aid community. Their involvement elicited confidence in the project from the student aid community and enhanced its support. They helped establish the initial research design and provided valuable advice on procedures.

Review of Literature

The search for relevant literature was conducted as follows: First, material was located that dealt with the role of the student financial aid professional and the need for training. Second, reports of other state surveys of training needs were studied. Finally, sample sets of materials for inservice training that other states had developed were examined.

Role and Status of the Profession/Need for Training

The preparation (both preservice and inservice training) of student financial aid professionals through the present uncoordinated training activities may not be adequate to develop and maintain needed levels of competence in administrators. Competence is attained by administrators largely through their own efforts, informal apprenticeship arrangements, and largely uncoordinated inservice programs. Another observation is that the status of the profession is not commensurate with its heavy responsibilities. The Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education shares this overview. In a final report on recommendations for federal student aid programs released just as the present study was initiated, the Council recommended that "the Office of Education should also encourage adequate training and upgrading of student-aid officers." (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, 1979).

Adams (1975) adopted a role model approach in studying the administrative function in offices of student financial aid. He indicates that it is the responsibility of the head of the financial aid office to establish the unit's philosophy, goals and methods. Adams maintains that this process is especially necessary for evaluation and accountability purposes. The chief administrator of the unit is also responsible for staff employment, training, retention and organization. These responsibilities extend to all levels of employed personnel including mid-management, professional counselors, office staff and any part-time personnel that might be employed.

North (1975) examined the role of aid officers in terms of organizational structure. He maintains that aid programs bring so much money into the institution that they demand the highest quality administrator obtainable. According to North, ". . . the institutional aid officer should be responsible to the president or the chief executive officer of the institution. The personnel appointed to perform the task should have the personal qualifications and career aspirations and potential necessary to make such an appointment practical" (p. 264).

In contrast to the somewhat exalted status recommended by North, Haines (1976) offered a different and possibly more realistic view. "On most campuses, the Directors of Admissions and Student Financial Aid have not been included in the traditional planning process. One reason may be that planning has never been viewed as a high priority activity requiring broad input. A second and perhaps more valid reason is that these positions are generally considered to be at the second or third level in the management structure. This attitude is certainly supported by a review of organizational charts, and by the salaries paid to these two officials" (p. 3).

King (1975) reviewed the lack of standardized academic preparation of practitioners in the student aid field. He points out that "This situation may change, of course, as the professional organizations for financial aid personnel begin to make people in general more aware of the profession and its possibilities and as graduate schools respond with programs and course offerings. Meanwhile, however, the situation favors the development of in-service programs of preparation and improvement" (p. 295). King recommends that graduate programs be developed in a number of strong institutions located strategically around the country.

A number of years ago NASFAA developed criteria for the certification of financial aid administrators. These were challenged broadly by persons in the field and by some scholars. For example, Moore (1975) indicates that criteria based on traditional qualifications like degrees would not be practical or useful for the near future. He suggested that certification, if it should be utilized generally, should be based on competency relating to the actual responsibilities of aid administrators. Meanwhile, internships seem to be a widely acceptable method of developing entry-level practitioners.

The entire issue of professional development of financial aid officers continues to be a live and unsettled issue in the field (see, for example, Sanderson (1917) and Willingham (1970) for two reviews of this issue).

Other State Surveys

Kentucky was among the first (1977-78) to conduct a comprehensive survey under the SSFAT program. The Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority utilized the services of ACT in development of the conceptual model for the needs assessment which was conducted. The survey results were published in a report (Commonwealth of Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority, 1978) which was extraordinarily complete, and provided a point of departure for development of the item pools used in the present study. The study populations included financial aid administrators, fiscal officers, high school and vocational school guidance counselors, students and satellite groups and agencies. The results enabled the state agency to develop training content in five areas: (1) Packaging techniques, (2) Student budgets, (3) Communications, (4) Compliance, and (5) Management practices.

The Iowa College Aid Commission (1979) conducted a questionnaire survey in 1978 of all Iowa financial aid administrators, para-professionals, and support staff. The results strongly supported the development of training opportunities for support staff as well as other practitioners.

A needs assessment survey was made of 240 financial aid administrators at postsecondary institutions in Tennessee during the 1977-78 academic year (Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation, 1978). Some of the salient findings were that:

"Financial aid administrators in Tennessee exhibit the most critical need for training in the area of office management. Other areas of training need include student expense budgets, independent students and refund and repayment policy. The findings of this survey influenced the planning of the comprehensive workshop for financial administrators which was conducted in June, 1978" (page 4).

The New Jersey State Student Financial Assistance Program (1978) began its inservice training activities in the Fall of 1977 by surveying training needs and by assessing the strength and weaknesses of the training already being offered. The results enabled the state agency (the Department of Higher Education) to develop an outline of the outstanding training needs. These, in turn, formed the basis for workshops offered in subsequent years.

The West Virginia Board of Regents (1978) surveyed the state's aid administrators in 1977-78 in order to determine training needs. Workshops were then conducted to meet the needs and the results were evaluated. This process was repeated in subsequent years. The researchers found that certain areas (such as need analysis, student budgets, and independent student) continued to rank high in need for more training even though the areas were covered repeatedly in workshops.

Reports of assessment surveys were also received from SSFAT-designated state agencies in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, North Dakota and Washington.

Training Materials and Activities

Several states provided training documents, modules, and manuals used in their SSFAT program. Many of these were based on needs revealed during research surveys similar to the present study. The North Carolina State Edu-

cation Assistance Authority and the North Carolina Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (1978) developed and utilized an extensive instructional syllabus. The syllabus was modified and adapted to be used in three levels of instruction for aid administrators: novice, intermediate and advanced. Texas developed an extraordinarily detailed *Handbook for Consultants and Trainers* for use in SSFAT programs throughout the state (Texas College and University Coordinating Board, 1977). This publication includes historical information and background materials, a description of legislative authority for the state financial aid programs, an overview of federal student aid, and detailed instructions for carrying out training activities.

The Iowa College Aid Commission (1979) developed a sophisticated *Program Learning Manual on Financial Need Analysis* utilizing the resources of both CSS and ACT. Essentially, the manual is a self-contained device for providing both instruction and evaluation to be used by practitioners individually.

One of the most complete training manuals available for novices or beginners in the financial aid field is that developed by the California State Student Aid Commission (1979). It comprises five separate modules which deal with history and purpose of student aid, the application process and needs analysis, packaging and processing, verification and accountability, and professional development.

The most extensive single training manual provided by a state agency to the senior author was developed by the Alabama Commission on Higher Education (1979). The manual comprises well over 200 pages of comprehensive information for training in twelve areas, e.g., office management, student budgets, needs analysis, and the procedures and requirements of all major state and federal programs.

Recently, NASFAA (1978) developed a highly sophisticated series of four fundamental training workshops. The modules deal with management, professional development, evaluation and student relations. To insure that the training modules are used to the fullest extent, the Association selected regional lead trainers who comprise a network of resource persons to (1) coordinate NASFAA training within their respective regions (2) insure consistency of training and quality control (3) provide consultative services to trainers to clarify intended use of the material (4) assist in actual training if requested by the purchasers, and (5) provide feedback to the training committee on the use and effectiveness of the materials. In addition, the previous year NASFAA sponsored the development of *A Handbook for Use in the Preparation of Student Expense Budgets* (Clark, 1977). These materials comprise the primary resource for training programs sponsored by the national association.

Method and Procedures

The needs assessment survey research was developed by consulting extensively with Arizona financial aid practitioners and with ACT research staff on an appropriate research design which would not only meet study objectives but also conform to generally accepted research standards. The survey was not restricted to administrators, but also included support staff like counselors and office staff, as well as fiscal or business officers.

This general approach was similar to a number of previous state survey efforts (for example, see Commonwealth of Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority, 1978) derived from the River City Model of Self-assessment of Personal Needs developed by the ACT research staff. The previous applications of this model in state student aid training need surveys had focused on need as a time dimension, that is, a past or present need for student aid training. However, in the Arizona study two dimensions were assessed, (1) the extent to which prior training programs had met the respondents need for *information* to carry out their present responsibilities, and (2) the extent of need for future *training* programs. Accordingly, the following format was used in the present study for the data-gathering instrument applied to a) administrators, b) counselors, c) office staff, and d) fiscal officers.

Prior Training Programs Met Information Need:			Present Need for More Training on This Subject:			
Well	Partially	Not At All	No Need	Weak Need	Moderate	Strong

I need to
know more
about _____
financial
aid program:

The list of topic areas to be assessed were selected from among those (1) used in previous surveys (see Commonwealth of Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority, 1978) and (2) developed in consultation with the AASFAA liaison committee. The latter items were pilot tested in a variety of Arizona postsecondary institutions.

It was decided that the unit of analysis would be individual student aid practitioners in institutions which met certain eligibility criteria. The principal reason was that an accurate listing was available of the institutions and their student financial aid activities, while a separate preliminary survey would be needed to determine the number and identifying information of practitioners in the four categories of administrators, counselors, office staff, and fiscal officers.

The relatively small number of postsecondary education institutions in Arizona indicated the feasibility of surveying all that met relevant criteria. Eligibility required (a) that the institution designate available financial aid programs and list a financial aid officer, (b) that it be accredited, and (c) that at least one of its educational programs be of at least six months duration. In addition, several agencies which include educational counselling as a major function (for example the Phoenix Educational Opportunity Center) were included to bring to 67 the total number of institutions included. The roster used was the 1979 *Directory of Postsecondary Educational Institutions in Arizona*, an annual publication of the ACPE.

Separate questionnaires were developed for each of the practitioner categories. A total of nineteen training need items were common to all four practitioner groups to allow cross-comparisons. In addition, forty-five items were specific to administrators, twenty-five to counselors and office staff and forty-one to fiscal

officers. The needs assessment items were preceded by six basic data items common to all four groups, with an additional three items for administrators. Every eligible institution was sent multiple copies of each of the four types of questionnaires along with a cover letter with instructions and an appeal for cooperation. The packet was mailed in early May, 1979.

A total of 153 usable questionnaires from 56 different institutions and agencies (84% of the total of 67) were received. These comprised 58 administrators, 33 counselors, 43 office staff, and 19 fiscal officers.

The questionnaires were then edited and delivered to the ACT national headquarters for keypunching and processing onto computer tapes.

The analysis strategy was to compare the 19 common items across practitioner types and to examine thoroughly the responses on all other items. The responses were analyzed in relation to the background or demographic items. Indexes of satisfaction with prior training programs and of future training needs were also developed.

Findings

This section contains the findings from the following analyses: (1) Comparisons among the four respondent groups on demographic and institutional factors; (2) Comparisons among the four respondent groups on the nineteen financial aid items common to all four groups; (3) Development of indexes for these nineteen common items on both evaluation of prior training programs and need for future training programs; and (4) Interaction between the two indexes.*

Demographic/Institutional Data

The distribution of types of institutions of the respondents corresponded quite closely to the distribution of types of eligible institutions, and to general knowledge about staffing patterns among different types of institutions in Arizona. For example, the largest single cluster of respondents was that of administrator in proprietary schools. As indicated earlier, in many of these schools the financial aid administrator also serves as counselor, fiscal officer, and even in office staff roles. Community colleges are well represented across all respondent types as are the three public universities.

An interesting pattern of sources for acquiring knowledge of financial aid was revealed by the data. Informal apprenticeship might be a good way of characterizing the sources reportedly most helpful in acquiring knowledge of financial aid. Over half of the respondents indicated that "Other Aid Practitioners" and "Own Reading/Study" has either first or second rank among all of the seven sources listed in the questionnaire. Other sources found useful were "State Association" and "Federal Training Programs", both of which were ranked among the top three by over half of the respondents. The two sources found least helpful were "Formal Courses" and "Regional Association", both of which were ranked either sixth or seventh by over half of the respondents.

The responses of administrators indicated that over half (54%) preferred that a combination of a variety of agencies should have primary responsibility

*For brevity, only summaries of most analyses are presented here. The final report contains full tabular data, and is available from the Arizona Commission for Post-secondary Education, 1937 W. Jefferson, Phoenix, AZ 85009.

for their training. Another way of interpreting these data is that the administrators were reluctant to assign a monopoly on their training to any single source. A minority (22%) of the administrators indicated that the federal government should have primary responsibility, while 12% believed that colleges and universities should have primary responsibility.

Evaluation of Prior Training Programs

The following analysis focuses on the nineteen items common to all four respondent groups. An index was developed to summarize the respondents' views of how well prior training programs had met their needs for information. This index was computed as the percentage of administrators reporting "Need Met Well" minus the percentage reporting "Needs Met Not At All". Table 1 shows the combined indexes.

Table 1
Average Rank and Value of Indexes of
How Well Prior Training Programs Met Needs
(all four respondent groups combined)

	Average Rank	Average Index*
BEOG	1.25	14.00
Renewal of Financial Aid	3.00	9.65
NDSL	4.00	7.10
College Work-Study	4.50	7.12
Repayment of BEOG	4.75	6.10
Supplemental Grants	5.75	2.35
FISL	5.75	1.07
Student Rights and Responsibilities	9.00	-11.20
Student Consumer Protection	9.50	-26.10
Need Analysis	10.00	-11.67
VA Benefits	12.00	-29.70
Exchanging Information About Students	12.50	-28.87
ACPE Student Aid Programs	13.25	-33.41
Improving NDSL Collections	13.50	-43.49
L. E. E. P.	14.00	-43.82
Reporting Fraud to HEW	15.50	-54.75
Voc. Rehab. Grants	16.25	-62.66
Nursing/Health Profession Scholarships	16.50	-55.43
Social Security	17.50	-63.85

*Computed as percentage of office staff reporting "Need Met Well" minus "Need Met Not At All"

This index discriminated well among the nineteen items for all four respondent groups. The average index for all nineteen items combined for the four groups is -1.72 for administrators, -18.73 for counselors, -21.53 for fiscal officers. The relatively large number of positive rankings for administrators is probably a function of their exposure to many training programs compared to the other three groups, especially to fiscal officers who reported *no* positive rankings for any of the nineteen items. This analytic method enables identification of areas covered well (e.g., BEOG which was ranked highest by three of the groups and second by the fourth group), and also those which have not been covered well (e.g., Social Security which is ranked no higher than sixteen among the nineteen items by any of the four groups). There was considerable

similarity among the four groups on many items but a number of items revealed strong differences probably reflective of amount of access to prior training programs. For example, three of the groups ranked "Renewal of Financial Aid" either second or third, but fiscal officers ranked it only tenth.

Future Training Needs

Table 2 summarizes the findings on the assessment of future training needs. Such data is intended to guide formulation of training programs in Arizona in the years immediately ahead. A special index was developed which was intended to discriminate among the nineteen items common to all four respondent groups as well as to allow a standardized basis for analyzing differences among the four groups.

Table 2
Average Rank and Value of Indexes of
Need for More Training
(all four respondent groups combined)

	Average Rank	Average Index
ACPE Student Aid Programs	2.25	192.37
Voc. Rehab. Grants	2.25	188.37
Exchanging Information About Students	4.50	176.95
Social Security	5.25	141.85
Student Rights and Responsibilities	7.75	160.87
Supplemental Grants	8.00	161.90
Reporting Fraud to HEW	9.25	159.20
Student Consumer Protection	9.50	157.82
VA Benefits	10.25	154.62
Repayment of BEOG	10.25	154.15
Need Analysis	11.50	148.25
FISL	12.00	150.07
BEOG	12.25	145.15
Improving NDSL Collections	12.25	139.82
Renewal of Financial Aid	12.50	142.87
NDSL	13.00	143.08
Nursing/Health Profession Scholarships	13.75	128.85
L. E. E. P.	14.75	129.56
College Work-Study	18.75	100.37

The Average index used is the total of products computed by multiplying percentages responding to each item by the following weights: 1 = Weak need; 2 = Moderate Need; 3 = Strong Need. This index successfully discriminated the nineteen common items and the four respondent groups. The data (not presented separately in tabular form here) revealed strong differences in degree of need for more training, with the administrators showing the least need (121.55) compared with counselors (167.44), office staff (142.01) and fiscal officers (182.43) as a composite average for all nineteen items. The responses for the separate categories revealed training needs related to functional areas. For example, the highly sensitive area for fiscal accounting and public relations (Reporting Fraud to HEW) is ranked highly by fiscal officers (fourth) and administrators (third), however, there is less of a concern for counselors and

office staff who both ranked it fifteenth. However, as was true for the evaluation indexes, there were both similarities and differences in the ranking of the items among the four respondent groups. For example, "Vocational Rehabilitation Grants" was ranked first by administrators, second by fiscal officers and third by both counselors and office staff. Another item which was ranked consistently high was "ACPE Student Aid Programs". The only item which ranked consistently low was "College Work-Study" which ranked last (nineteenth) by three groups and eighteenth by the fourth group.

In general this index differentiated the training needs of the four respondent groups most effectively. There were only a few items (those just noted) which ranked consistently low in need for more training among all four groups. Most of the items were seen as of high need by some groups and of low need for more training by other groups. Thus, it is evident that future training programs should take into account the differential level of needs among these groups, and should be targeted quite specifically for each of the four groups. The two groups that seemed most similar in the pattern of need for more training were counselors and office staff. This is not surprising since these two groups most consistently work directly with student concerns and thus have a common source of awareness for training needs.

Interpretation of Indexes on Nineteen Common Items

The index of how well prior programs met information needs is intended primarily for evaluation; the second index of need for more training is intended for a different dimension of training, that of assessment of future needs. These two indexes are related only when the over-riding factor of operational importance is considered, e.g., an area like BEOG may have received the most prior training activity of any program (and indeed it has and is so ranked), yet the need for more training may be high because of the large scale of the program and/or the extensiveness and frequency of procedural changes in the program. Or, an item may be ranked low on prior training and equally low on need for more training simply because it is not perceived as a high priority need at this time; for example, both "Nursing/Health Professions Scholarships" and "L. E. E. P." are ranked relatively low because financial aid practitioners perceive that their future involvement with these programs, both of which are being phased out by Congress, will be minimal.

The data showed that in general a low ranking on how well prior training met information needs is related to a high level of need for more training on that item. Tables 1 and 2 show the average indexes for both prior program evaluation and index of future need aggregated across all four respondent groups. Interpretation should be conditioned by the strong overall differences among the groups and the specific differences on many of the items. Note that only "Vocational Rehabilitation Grants" and "ACPE Student Aid Programs" are ranked as an extremely high priority need for more training by all four groups. Evidently the recent federal rules and regulations regarding legislation for the handicapped had impacted nearly every campus with a clear need for information; Arizona's relatively new major program of student financial aid (SSIG) is administered by the Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education. Hence, the need for future training programs in regard to this relatively new program

and the newly approved Guaranteed Student Loans program account for the relatively high ranking. It would seem that a training experience on a topic like vocational rehabilitation regulations affecting financial aid could be broadly offered to the entire community of practitioners. Also ranked high are concerns about students, namely, "Exchanging Information About Students" and "Student Rights and Responsibilities" which reflect the increasing awareness of students about financial aid, their increasing sophistication about their consumer rights and the sensitivity of financial aid practitioners to legal issues concerning rights of privacy. The item that is ranked last in terms of how well prior training programs met information needs is "Social Security" despite the fact that it evidently affects most financial aid practitioners in many, if not most, institutions. The relatively high ranking of "Social Security" as a need for future training is probably due to both the relatively low evaluation of prior training programs combined with the continuing importance of this program in the financial aid picture. Conversely, "College Work-Study" is an important area for only baccalaureate degree-track types of institutions. Furthermore, it has been well covered by prior training programs. These factors probably account for it being ranked last in terms of need for future training along with the two programs described previously as being phased out ("Nursing/Health Profession Scholarships" and "LEEP").

Conclusions and Recommendations

Although the study reported herein was limited to Arizona, the problems it dealt with seem to be common to most of the states regardless of region and size. A thorough review of the literature describing similar studies elsewhere indicates that the conclusions and recommendations resulting from the present study could well pertain, with appropriate interpolations, to the problem of assessing and coordinating training needs in other states.

Several principal conclusions emerge from the findings of this survey. The Arizona student financial aid practitioners responding to this survey indicate that prior training programs provided good background in many functional areas. However, these prior programs have been mainly utilized by administrators. Other types of practitioners (counselors, office staff, and fiscal officers) have had much less contact and consequently evaluate the impact of such programs on their activities as minimal. The data collected and analyzed in this survey identify the relative effectiveness and impact of the programs on a large number of functional areas. The programs have concentrated effectively on some functional and program areas and have virtually neglected others.

The strong differences among the four respondent groups on both the extent to which prior programs met needs and the present need for more training creates a dilemma for planning future programs: It is clearly vital for the administrator to be well informed via continuing inservice training, but is this improved effectiveness offset by the lack of training for key support and ancillary staff?

This type of difficult question leads to consideration of the complex and sensitive problem of coordination of training programs for financial aid professionals. It seems clear that the state professional association (AASFAA) must be centrally involved in coordinating training activities. While it does not

enjoy majority membership among the total of all student aid practitioners among Arizona postsecondary institutions, it has no strong competitor as an effective voluntary professional association within the state. Neither the regional nor national association level could at this time be as responsive to the needs of Arizona as the state association. Yet, it has very limited resources, no power of sanction or disapproval of training activities, and must of necessity rely on additional resources available from elsewhere to actually mount training programs. The outside sources include ACT, mandated input as from the U. S. Department of Education Region IX office in San Francisco, the APGA/NAC-UBO/NASFPA Consortium project supported by the federal government, the SSFAT program administered by ACPE and others.

It is recommended that future comprehensive planning of training activities be particularly sensitive to the needs of not only administrators but *all* support and ancillary staff. Further, it is recommended that training coordination be carried out by a planning committee appointed for two years and which is broadly representative of all sectors of postsecondary institutions (regardless of association affiliation) and of the federal state agencies as well as ACT and the state, regional and national levels of professional associations. This breadth of representation should nonetheless be focused and coordinated by highly qualified members of the state association. Attention should also be given to including the interests of both postsecondary students and high school counselors to the extent possible under existing regulations.

Discussion of the results of this study at an open meeting of AASFPA revealed interest in building professionalism at all levels of practitioners. It was pointed out that certification for administrators did not seem to be a possibility in the immediate future for various reasons at the state, regional or national level. These concerns led to a recommendation that SSFAT funds could be used to commission the development of a standardized training course for support staff (counselors and office staff). The recommendation led in turn to the development of a competency-based course in student financial aid administration. The course was approved for credit by the State Community College Board and offered by the Rio Salado Community College in Phoenix during the 1980-81 academic year.

Successful completion of the course could, by consensual agreement among student aid professionals in the state, signify a basic level of competence in financial aid practice and in effect comprise a rudimentary type of certification. If successful, this development could also provide the basis for extending the concept of certification to other practitioners such as fiscal officers and have particular application to the need for increasing professionalism among administrators through standardization of training, both preservice and inservice.

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