

Review of the M.S. in College Student Personnel Administration

Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) Code: 13.1102
College Student Counseling and Personnel Services

The M.S. in College Student Personnel Administration (CSPA) program is housed in the Department of Educational Administration and Foundations within the College of Education. All academic programs in the department are graduate-level programs. They include the M.S., M.S.Ed. in Educational Administration; the Ed.D., Ph.D. in Educational Administration; the Post-Master's Graduate Certificate for Superintendent Endorsement in Educational Administration; and the Post-Master's Graduate Certificate for Chief School Business Official.

The CSPA program is intended to provide students with the practical and theoretical knowledge needed to perform the roles of administrator, advisor, and programmer in student affairs and higher education administration. Program graduates will have acquired the skills, knowledge, values, and commitment necessary to succeed in entry- to mid-level student affairs positions at public and private colleges and universities. Target enrollment for the CSPA program is 25 new students per year, or a total enrollment of 50 students. This enrollment target has consistently been achieved, as demand for the program remains high.

The CSPA program at Illinois State is one of three programs at public universities in the state assigned CIP code 13.1102. The program at Illinois State is the only one of the three that enrolls part-time students who are currently working in student services and the only one to offer courses dedicated to community college administration and adult learning theory.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY PROGRAM REVIEW SELF-STUDY REPORT

Self-study process. The program review self-study was undertaken beginning in fall 2014. The process involved program faculty, the program advisor, the department chairperson, staff from the University Assessment office, and the program advisory board. The self-study involved review of assessment data from prior years, review of the program against standards of the Council for the Advancement of Standards, administration of exit interviews to program graduates, and review of literature regarding the discipline and profession. The program coordinator and another faculty member in the program led the effort, working independently and meeting at least weekly to review progress and share information.

Program curriculum. Admission to the CSPA program is highly competitive and attracts applicants from across the United States and occasionally from other countries. Students seeking full-time enrollment in the program must have completed an undergraduate degree and been actively involved as a campus leader. Part-time students must be employed on a college campus in a student services position. The curriculum is sequenced using a theory-to-practice orientation and includes three options. Students may choose to complete 42 credit hours (14 courses) including the capstone course, complete 36 credit hours (12 courses) with a comprehensive examination, or complete 36 credit hours (12 courses) with a thesis. Full-time students generally take the 42 credit-hour option that involves completing two internships. Most part-time students enroll in the 36 credit-hour option with a comprehensive examination. Because students typically enter the program to prepare for administrative careers rather than for doctoral study, the thesis option is rarely recommended or chosen. The curriculum is very similar for full-time and part-time students. Full-time students take three foundational courses in their first semester that introduce the history and philosophy of student affairs, student development theory, and organization of student affairs programs. Additional required courses in the first year include college students and student culture, law and policy related to student services, and adult learning theory. In the second year students take courses in counseling skills and issues, administration of community colleges, and introduction to research methods; the capstone seminar; and two 150-hour practica. Two elective courses are also required. Part-time students take only one practicum. Most part-time students complete a comprehensive examination as their capstone experience rather than enroll in the capstone seminar.

Program or academic unit faculty. CSPA is a specialized area of study requiring faculty with both academic and practical work experience. Serving as core faculty of the program are two faculty members who teach multiple CSPA courses. They are assisted by four faculty members who each teach one course in the program and three adjunct faculty members who are practicing CSPA professionals. All faculty members contributing to the program continue to demonstrate high productivity in scholarship, teaching, and service while advising students and serving on dissertation committees for students in other programs of the college. Core faculty members continue to hold leadership positions in national organizations and serve on publication boards of major journals in the discipline.

Program goals and quality indices. Goals of the CSPA program are to provide students with the theoretical knowledge necessary to perform varying roles within the college student personnel profession including, but not limited to, administration, advising, and programming; to equip students with the practical competencies necessary to succeed at entry- to mid-level student affairs positions in public and private colleges and universities; to introduce and foster the values and dispositions needed for ethical practice and career success; to lead students to an understanding of how increased diversity among college students (in terms of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, socioeconomic status, and age) affects higher education generally and influences student affairs practice in particular; to help students understand how college student personnel professionals in colleges and universities foster student success and influence student persistence; to prepare college student personnel professionals to respond and adapt to changes in professional practice, students, and higher education; to develop a plan of action for keeping current with changing trends in college students and college student personnel practice; to critically evaluate and utilize current research in college student personnel and higher education; and to assess, evaluate, and improve college student personnel services in colleges and universities. Faculty has identified three quality indices for the program: student-faculty ratio, curriculum, and publications and presentations by students. All three indices have been targeted by faculty for improvement, to be guided in part by experiences of aspirational programs with respect to the indices.

Student learning outcomes assessment plan and process. CSPA faculty has mapped the nine program goals (see above) to courses and assignments within the curriculum. For the past seven years faculty and staff have been engaged in an assessment process that includes annual student exit interviews, curriculum mapping of national competencies with course outcomes and assignments, regular program review using national norms and competencies, assessment of student learning through a survey developed by students and faculty, and discussions with program advisory board members and other professionals in the field.

Specialized accreditation. An option for specialized accreditation of the M.S. in College Student Personnel Administration program is not available at this time.

Responses to recommendations resulting from the previous program review. Because this is the first review of the program on the eight-year program review cycle, there were no prior program review recommendations to which to respond.

Changes in the academic discipline, field, societal need, and program demand. The CSPA program at Illinois State is nationally recognized and in high demand, receiving four times the program capacity in applications each year. There are no major changes in the discipline or field to report.

Major findings of this program review self-study. From this self-study and from ongoing evaluation of the program, its faculty and staff members have identified numerous program strengths. Many students have described the program as a transformative learning experience and have cited the holistic view of student affairs work they have gained from completing the program. Contributing to those student experiences are the theory-to-practice framework underlying the program, the curriculum that complies with national standards in the discipline, the numerous experiential learning opportunities available to students including practica and graduate assistantships, the variety of assignments which challenge students to think critically and in original and creative ways, and the well-developed partnerships between the program and external institutions and organizations. Job placement rates for students completing the program remain high, and alumni continue to support the program after graduation by hosting practicum students, assisting students with their job searches, returning to campus to share with current students, serving on the program advisory board, and providing financial support for the program including program scholarships. Other points of pride and distinctiveness include the three options students have to complete the program, the ability of students to complete the program while working full-time at a college or university, and the

ability of the program to provide every full-time student a graduate assistantship with a tuition waiver. The latter is unusual nationally and is a strong student recruiting tool. A major challenge for the program is finding ways to relieve the program coordinator of the many administrative duties involved in maintaining a strong program, so the coordinator can focus on the curriculum and students. Assistance is needed with academic advisement, recruitment, the admissions/selection process, alumni relations, practicum sites and related documentation, assessment, professional development, and course scheduling. Two curricular opportunities identified through this self-study include offering a certificate program for practitioners interested in working at small colleges and creating a distinct program track for part-time students.

Initiatives and plans for the next program review cycle. The program has identified three priority initiatives for the next program review cycle. Living in Bloomington-Normal has not been a positive experience for some students of color enrolled in the CSPA program. During the next program review cycle the program will explore ways to improve satisfaction with the university and local community by students self-identifying with racial/ethnic groups traditionally underrepresented at the University. One option to explore is establishing a mentorship program to link students with alumni and professionals on campus and in the community. A second priority initiative is to explore creating a separate track for part-time students that would better integrate their work experiences in class topics, assignments, and discussions. Having courses that enroll only part-time students has been recommended by students who participated in a special section of a summer course organized to help a group of part-time students graduate in a timely manner. Students enrolled in that course expressed satisfaction with the course because of the opportunities students had to learn from each other. A third priority initiative is to explore offering a certificate program for practitioners interested in working at small colleges. Such a certificate program would be the first of its kind in the nation.

PROGRAM REVIEW OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the M.S. in College Student Personnel Administration to be in Good Standing.

The Academic Planning Committee commends the College Student Personnel Administration (CSPA) faculty for developing and delivering a curriculum that is comprehensive in its coverage of the discipline and unique among CSPA programs in the state. Although accreditation is not available to the program, faculty has aligned the curriculum with standards published by the Council for the Advancement of Standards to ensure coverage of all facets of the discipline. The program is the only CSPA program in the state designed to accommodate both full-time students and student affairs practitioners who are only able to enroll part-time. For the convenience of part-time students and students completing a practicum experience off campus, some courses in the program are offered via distance education. The curriculum is also unique in its specialized instruction intended to prepare students for work in community colleges.

The committee recognizes student recruitment efforts of faculty and staff, which have led to stable enrollment of highly qualified and diverse students at or near the enrollment target (50 students). Recruitment efforts such as attending student affairs conferences and networking with colleagues at other universities have led to submission of four applications for each available seat in the program, including applications from residents of other states and countries. Efforts to build a diverse pool of applicants are especially commendable. The multitude of backgrounds and perspectives resulting from these efforts exposes students in the program to the diversity they will likely encounter on the job. Contributing to recruitment successes is the ability of the program to offer every student a graduate assistantship for the duration of their time in the program. The committee recognizes efforts of faculty and staff to make that happen, particularly efforts to seek placements in units across campus and at other colleges and universities in the region.

The committee commends program faculty members for their efforts to encourage and support student research, including faculty-student research collaborations. In 2014-2015 alone, students made 15 professional presentations, assisted faculty with a grant application, and participated in two independent research projects. Program faculty efforts to instruct and mentor students in research methods are aided by efforts of the Milner Library subject

specialist, who each year orients incoming students to library resources and services and provides research instruction in two core courses.

The committee recognizes that most of these efforts are undertaken by just two faculty members, who teach between one-half and two-thirds of the courses taken by students and who provide student mentoring and administrative support. The committee commends and thanks these two faculty members, as well as their faculty and staff colleagues, for their ongoing dedication to preparing students for work as student affairs professionals. However, this staffing arrangement, should it continue, concerns the committee.

One hallmark of high quality graduate education is exposing students to multiple perspectives and experiences. This is accomplished in large part by assigning multiple faculty members with differing perspectives and experiences to teach courses in the program and to mentor students in completing their capstone experience. Another concern is the ability to sustain a high-quality program, especially if one or both of the core faculty members were to leave the program. The committee asks program faculty and staff to work with the Department of Educational Administration and Foundations to develop a plan for addressing these staffing concerns. Strategies to consider might include, but are not limited to, expanding use of adjunct faculty, team teaching with faculty in other programs, hiring appropriately-credentialed student affairs practitioners at other universities to teach via distance education, reassigning faculty with CSPA expertise from other programs in the department to teach in the CSPA program, and requesting additional faculty lines from the dean. The committee asks that the plan include strategies for the short term (1-3 years), medium term (4-8 years), and long term (beyond 8 years). The committee asks the Department of Educational Administration and Foundations to submit the plan to the Office of the Provost by May 15, 2017.

A related concern is the ability of the program to sustain student learning outcomes assessment should the current program coordinator change positions or leave service with the University. The program has a well-developed plan for assessing student learning and has for many years implemented a process for annual review of assessment results, including review by the program advisory board. It is also clear that assessment results have been used by faculty to identify and implement program enhancements. However, the plan lacks specificity about how assessment methods map to student learning outcomes, how those assessment methods are implemented, and how assessment results are interpreted (e.g., through rubrics). The committee asks the program to provide this information through an expanded student learning outcomes assessment plan. The committee asks the Department of Educational Administration and Foundations to submit the plan to the Office of the Provost on behalf of the program, also by May 15, 2017.

Recommendations

The Academic Planning Committee makes the following recommendations to be addressed within the next regularly scheduled review cycle. In the next program review self-study, tentatively due October 1, 2023, the committee asks the program to describe actions taken and results achieved for each recommendation.

- The program is unique in Illinois for its accommodation of practitioners interested in completing the program part-time. Practitioners enrolling in the program have expressed satisfaction with opportunities to learn from one another by taking courses together and have requested additional opportunities to do so. Accordingly, the committee recommends that the program investigate formalizing its work with part-time students into a practitioner track with course, professional practice, and capstone requirements that may differ from those applicable to non-practitioners. The program might consider offering additional courses via distance education for the convenience of students in the track, when deemed pedagogically appropriate by faculty.
- The committee supports program faculty in its plan to investigate offering a certificate for students preparing for student affairs work in small colleges. Such a certificate program could meet an unmet demand in Illinois and could further differentiate the program from its comparator programs.
- Exploration of a part-time track for practitioners and a certificate for student affairs work in small colleges offers faculty an opportunity to conduct a more comprehensive review of the program curriculum, including content, sequencing, professional practice requirements, and capstone experiences. The committee recommends that the program conduct such a review. Among the issues the committee encourages faculty to explore are consistency across capstone options with respect to rigor, incorporating additional content such as theory and

advisement without increasing the minimum number of credit hours needed to graduate, enhancing integration of content across courses to accommodate additional content and mitigate duplication if it exists, and exploring student development of learning outcomes prior to the practicum experience. The committee also encourages faculty to explore the nature of support provided to students with their capstone experience regardless which option the student selects. Best practice in graduate programs is to organize a committee of faculty members to guide the student through the capstone project rather than assigning just one faculty member to do so. Considering the limited faculty resources available to the program, faculty might consider an interdisciplinary approach to forming capstone committees by involving faculty members from other programs and units.

- An emphasis of the CSPA program has been encouraging student involvement in research, either working individually or collaboratively, and sharing results of that research through presentations and publications. The committee supports faculty efforts to increase such opportunities, especially opportunities to collaborate with program faculty.
- Beyond the work requested by the committee to revise the student learning outcomes assessment plan for the program, the committee urges the program to continue to utilize information collected through student learning outcomes assessments over the next eight years to make program improvements and to document how that has been done.