External Team Report: College Student Personnel Administration
Academic Program Review

This report represents the findings and recommendations of the External Review Team (ERT) for the JMU College Student Personnel Administration (CSPA) Academic Program Review. Our analysis is based on 1) a review of the CSPA Internal Self Study and supporting documents, including the 1997 and the 2004 External Team Reports, 2) a site visit and interviews conducted from March 18-20, 2012, and 3) meetings with the CSPA program team. See attached schedule for a complete listing of interviews and meetings. This report provides detailed information regarding the ERT’s observations of the CSPA Program’s strengths and opportunities, with accompanying recommendations.

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Focus of Review

The internal self study completed by the CSPA program team requested that the external review focus on 1) the content and relevancy of the CSPA curriculum compared to other national programs and 2) the alignment of professional competencies for entry level positions in the field with program classroom and experiential activities. Thus, the team framed its work around these areas, focusing on standards as outlined in the Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) document: Masters-Level Student Affairs Professional Preparation Programs (2011), and the 2010 ACPA and NASPA Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Practitioners.

General Observations:

The CSPA program is a highly qualified, unique program that fits well with the lived mission of the university, the college and the Graduate Psychology Department. It receives significant support and approbation from upper level administrators at the university. One of the hallmarks of the program is the high level of commitment by the Division of Student Affairs and University Planning. The Division offers both financial and personal resource commitments to the program,
a feature that has contributed to the program’s longevity and excellence. Another strength of the program is the financial and experiential support provided to students through graduate assistantships and field experiences. Various offices in the Student Affairs Division support these assistantships and practicums. More remarkable than the financial support provided for the graduate assistantships is the degree of involvement by Student Affairs Directors and other professional staff in program management, administration and instruction. The majority of the CSPA program committee members work in the Student Affairs Division (SA). In addition to their other responsibilities they serve the program through teaching, advising, mentoring, and program coordination. The ERT applauds the personal investment of all program members while also recognizing the possible vulnerability of a program that is built on personal relationships and collaborations as opposed to explicit organizational commitments.

Findings
The following section provides more detailed information regarding the ERT’s findings related to strengths of the program and accompanying recommendations.

1.) Student Cohorts

Strengths:

It became very apparent from all information reviewed that the program operates with an optimal student cohort model. Because of the afore-mentioned support from SA for graduate assistantships, the program is able to offer tuition and stipends to all students (in-state and out-of-state) enrolled full time in the program. Students are chosen through a selective admissions process and receive focused advising from program committee members. The ability to restrict the size of the cohorts to 12-14 students/year enables the program to maintain an excellent faculty-student ratio.

Recommendations:

The CSPA also accepts a limited number of part time students and includes a certificate track in the program sequence. Recognizing the high quality of the program, the ERT recommends that the program consider expanding the certificate program perhaps using on-line or workshop delivery models. An expansion would not only serve the needs in college and universities across the state, but it could also provide a revenue options for program support and expansion. JMU’s Office of Outreach and Engagement could assist with marketing such a program. Development and delivery of some modules for the certificate program could include SA staff members who might be interested in expanding their involvement in the current program. This strategy would provide these individuals with professional development opportunity while eventually increasing the pool of available instructors for program courses.

The program has a historically strong connection with the Graduate Counseling Program and states that the foundation of its program is counseling psychology. In a review of the current mission and program description on the website, this foundation is not readily apparent. Thus, some students may enter the program not fully comprehending the program’s counseling orientation. The ERT recommends that the program committee review the mission/program
description with an external advisory board (see # 6 below) to consider emphasizing all aspects of the program (both counseling and administration orientations) and all constituencies (full = -
time, part-time, and certificate students).

2. Assessment

*Strengths*

A high and increased level of commitment to the assessment process was evident. The program
has developed both employer and alumni surveys to inform their program review. The program
committee meets regularly and holds an annual program faculty retreat to review student
performance and conducts an annual program review.

The program’s development and implementation of a summative student electronic portfolio
project is to be highly commended. It is the ERT’s opinion that the portfolio is truly “cutting-
edge” both in terms of its comprehensiveness and its structure. The on-line platform is well
designed from both a students and a reviewer’s perspective. The portfolio guidelines and scoring
rubrics are comprehensive, and it is obvious that a successful student submission is evidence of
his/her attainment of recommended entry-level professional competencies. The portfolio
provides students with the opportunity to reflect and feel well prepared for upcoming job
interviews.

*Recommendations*

While acknowledging the good progress made in the area of program assessment, the ERT
would encourage the program committee to examine available data in order to close the
assessment loop as they make continuous program improvements. There was no evidence of an
explicit linkage of student performance on the portfolio to related program objectives. As the
program continues to refine its assessment system, another suggested consideration would be to
develop opportunities for inter-rater reliability within and across the portfolio sections. On-site
supervisors and other interested and qualified student affairs staff members could assist with the
grading, thereby providing these individuals with an increased level of engagement with program
curriculum. Again, this strategy would build program faculty capacity.

The ERT recommends sharing aggregate assessment results with students and other stakeholders,
including sharing the portfolio process in professional settings. It was stated that many other
programs both across the university and within the student affairs profession would benefit from
such opportunities. Conference presentations and professional journals would both be
recommended avenues. Participation in scholarship at this level would serve to further enhance
the reputation and visibility of the CSPA program both across campus and nationally.

3. Collaboration between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs

*Strengths*
As referenced earlier, there is a high degree of support from upper level administrators across both the Academic Affairs and the Student Affairs division. This collaboration results in a wide range of practicum and graduate assistantships, a well-articulated professional development series and mentoring opportunities, all of which are highly beneficial to students in the program. The commitment by the counseling program in the Graduate Psychology Department was also evident both in terms of course offerings and administrative support.

**Recommendations:**

Although the program is highly collaborative, much of the visibility and recognition of the program rests in the Student Affairs Division. The ERT recommends that the linkages between the various offices and departments involved be made more explicit through the establishment of some Memorandums of Understanding and acknowledgement of all program personnel roles in departmental and/or division position descriptions. It is also recommended that the program faculty strengthen their identity as academic faculty by engaging in a broader range of Academic Affairs activities, including applying for college grants and sharing accomplishments and rewards of program faculty and students with the Graduate Psychology Department as well as the college and the Graduate School. While many of the individuals the ERT spoke with identified the CSPA as “self-sufficient”, this self-sufficiency also increases the program’s vulnerability. Increasing their faculty identify and campus visibility will strengthen the reputation of the program.

Also, it is recommended that program faculty increase their visibility in the American College Personnel Association and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators faculty activities. Both organizations offer programs targeted at program faculty and program coordinators. Increasing their visibility and faculty presence at the annual meeting of these two generalist Student Affairs organizations would also serve to expand the program’s national reputation and to provide program faculty with a wide range of professional development opportunities.

**4. Curriculum**

**Strengths**

The ERT committee reviewed the program goals and curriculum in terms of alignment with CAS (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education) standards and current ACPA/NASPA competencies. The CSPA program has a solid generalist training and solid counseling training. Curriculum coverage provides a good blend of administrative and counseling theory to practice. Recommended curriculum revisions are apparent and reflect current issues in the field. While CAS recommends a minimum 42-hour graduate program and the ERT understands that current polices at JMU work against increasing the curriculum from 36 to 42 hours, the current curriculum does reflect the content as specified by CAS. Also, the experiential focus of the program is very solid, and the electronic portfolio provides students with an opportunity to integrate their knowledge and skills into a reflective, application-based analysis of their learning.
**Recommendations**

The program would benefit from conducting a comprehensive curriculum review including texts currently in use. It is recommended that consideration of student affairs foundation texts such as those published by ACPA and NASPA be considered. The curriculum review would include developing a matrix to show alignment of program goals with CAS standards, and the new ACPS/NASPA competencies. The ERT acknowledges the challenge of covering all the necessary competencies within the current program structure and the current policy makes it unlikely the program could move from 36 to 42 hours. As such, the ERT recommends that a focus of the curriculum review be duplication of topics, outcomes, and goals across courses. This might result in developing some elective modules, if not courses, within the program. It is also recommended that the program review all course descriptions and titles to ensure that they accurately reflect present course content.

5. Field Experiences

**Strengths**

Both the practicum and the graduate assistantships provide full time students with opportunities to apply what they are learning across a range of placements. The application process, learning outcomes and contracts are all well developed and provide a level of structure that supports both the student and the site-supervisors. Training for the supervisors is particularly good, and is regarded as helpful.

**Recommendations**

Recognizing the sometimes-conflicting needs of the program and the field experience sites, the ERT recommends that the program committee regularly solicit feedback from the field experience supervisors. This seems particularly problematic with assistantships where there is the potential for conflicts (dual relationships) between the employment and the educational aspects of the student’s experiences. It is recommended that the program committee hold a retreat with GA site supervisors to review and refine the GA placement process. The ERT recommends that a matching process for assistantships be developed. This could also assist with clearly delineating the performance evaluation processes and procedures to address possible dual role conflicts.

The selection and placement process for all placements should be reviewed to ensure that both site supervisors and student requests are shared and rationales for final placement considerations explicitly communicated to all involved. Because many students complete their practicums prior to enrolling in the related seminar course, it is recommended that the program committee review the current practicum structure and requirement to ensure that students who are participating in practicum experiences as a program requirement have adequate liability coverage. Both ACPA and NASPA provide student liability insurance at reasonable rates.
6. Program Commitment

**Strengths**

The program has a strong foundation, grounded in a shared vision of its importance to the university. The current program faculty are all very experienced, highly knowledgeable, respected professionals. The ERT recognizes and commends their commitment to the program. They have maintained this high level of commitment while engaging in varied job related roles and responsibilities over a significant period of time. This wide range of commitment and support provides students in the program unique and exceptional opportunities leading to a solid education and high placement rate of graduates. The program faculty have worked to revise curriculum and improve program outcomes. They have recently undertaken a project with the university Development Office to explore strengthening their ties with alumni and other external supporters.

**Recommendations**

As noted previously, the program delivery currently rests on many personal commitments, relationships and collaborations. To ensure the sustainability of the program, the ERT recommends that the program committee join with other stakeholders in developing a long-range plan for program governance and support. As CAS recommends for all graduate preparation programs, a minimum of one full time faculty member, the ERT understands this may not be a viable option for the program. However, the ERT recommends that by engaging in a discussion of possible long-range solutions (i.e. full time faculty, clinical faculty, hybrid model, etc), the program has the greatest possibly of being sustained and remaining viable.

It is our belief that the establishment of an External Program Advisory Board (made up of all program constituents-site supervisors, field experiences supervisors, alumni, employers, current students, etc.) could assist with these efforts. Throughout the recommendations above, the ERT has recommended expanding the involvement of others in the governance and delivery of the program. The sustainability and viability of the program was paramount for the ERT. Thoughtful consideration of ways current program faculty could mentor the next generation of program faculty would help ensure the continuance of the program.