CAS STANDARDS FOR CAMPUS ACTIVITIES PROGRAMS: A REVIEW OF THE CONTEXTUAL STATEMENT AND STANDARDS

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The purpose of this review is to highlight the differences in the new contextual statement and standards from past editions, as well as to discuss and provide examples of how CAS Standards can be utilized by Campus Activities Professionals.

The Council of the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) was founded in 1979 to create standards of professional practice that further the development of environments that foster student learning and development. The National Association for Campus Activities (NACA) was one of the nine founding members of CAS. The tenth edition of the CAS Professional Standards for Higher Education was released in spring 2019. This edition includes an updated Contextual Statement as well as the Standards and Guidelines for Campus Activities Programs.

CONTEXTUAL STATEMENT

Contextual statements are the "introduction to a set of CAS Standards that offers sufficient background and perspective on the functional area to assist in understanding and applying the standards and guidelines." (CAS, 2019, p. 523). In addition, they provide context to the history, foundational principles, and current issues that influence the functional area standards. The Campus Activities Programs (CAP) Contextual Statement was most recently updated in 2018.

All professionals, regardless of the field involved in, need to know and understand the history of and theoretical constructs that inform them in their line of work. The contextual statement that precedes the Campus Activities Program standards provides the reader with a very brief description of the "why" campus activities professionals are engaged in the work they do, as well as the justification for how they matter. It also gives a brief overview of how student organizations began, as well as addressing some of the work of Astin (1996) and Kuh, Douglas, Lund, & Ramin-Gyurmek (1994) as it relates to our understanding of the theory of involvement.

In the updated CAP contextual statement, a section was added to think about how we serve our more diverse student populations and take into consideration how we create and promote culturally relevant and responsive environments. The Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) Model of College Success (Museus, 2014) suggests five questions that should be addressed each time we are planning an event for our students. These questions are:

1. Does the space or program encourage collaboration toward a common goal?

2. Is the space or program structured so that participants will spend prolonged engagement with specific

faculty, staff, or peers?

3. Have sufficient efforts been made to ensure that all potential participants have acquired information about the space or program?

4. Have program planners sent more than an email to potential participants?

5. Have potential participants been encouraged or pressured to engage by someone they know? (p. 19).

Finally, the contextual statement discusses the role of the campus activity advisor and the multifaceted roles they play. It also challenges advisors to use the CAP Standards and Guidelines "to create quality programs that are engaging, developmental, and experiential for a diverse student body" (CAS 2019, p. 71).

AN EXAMPLE OF HOW TO USE THE CAP CONTEXTUAL STATEMENT

Activities professionals can use the CAP contextual statement to challenge themselves, their colleagues, and student leaders by reading the contextual statement and discussing whether their current programs and services detract or enhance from the CAP Contextual Statement as well as their own organization's stated mission. While much of the CAP Standards offer very specific recommendations for activities professionals, the CAP Contextual Statement provides a view from the balcony and can provide insights that can enhance the direction and alignment of the department to overarching professional standards.

Standards and Guidelines Updates and Suggested Uses
All CAS standards and guidelines have the same 12 common criteria categories, which are commonly referred to as general standards. These categories apply to all functional areas, no matter the area of focus. They were revised in 2018, and have been reclassified and reordered. The twelve areas and suggestions for applying are as follows:

Part 1. Mission. Do members of the organization look at your departmental mission statement, determine if it reflects the values of your professional associations, university, division, and other related units. Is the mission statement understandable to both internal and external audiences?

Part 2. Program and Services. Do student activities professionals determine whether or not the departmental programs and services are meeting the needs of all members of your community as well as if they enhance or detract from student engagement?

Part 3. Student Learning, Development, and Success. Does the staff determine what exactly you are striving for in terms of specific student learning outcomes through your programs and services? Once learning outcomes have been established, does the student activities professionals measure the development and success related to each outcome?

Part 4. Assessment. Does every student activities professional should possess the ability to assess the effectiveness of their programs and services? Do methodologies used for assessment practices include quantitative (numbers of community members attending events, money spent per event, etc.), qualitative interviews, reflection exercises, focus groups, and benchmarking identifying exemplary practices in student activities and learning from those practices?

Part 5. Access, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. How welcoming, accessible, inclusive, equitable, and free from bias or harm are your programs? Have you met with students from diverse backgrounds to inquire about their perceptions of your office, programs, and services? Does your staff mirror the demographics of your community? Have you analyzed the data of who is attending your programs and using your services? Do you have a plan to examine this consistently?

Part 6. Leadership, Management, and Supervision. Do you and all your staff model ethical behavior? Is there regular training to examine this? Do your area's mission, goals, and ethical practices align with your institutions? How are you regularly analyzing this? Is there adequate training, appropriate feedback and evaluation, and pro-

fessional development opportunities for you and your staff? Have you developed a strategic plan/direction for your organization, and is it reviewed on a regular basis?

Part 7. Staffing and Support. Is there adequate staffing for your organization? Do the staff have the appropriate credentials for the work? Are there procedures for personnel recruitment, selections, training, supervision, performance, and evaluation? Is there adequate onboarding and continual professional development opportunities for staff?

Part 8. Collaboration and Communication. Does your organization seek out and work with partners within student affairs, academic affairs, and where appropriate, community organizations? Does your organization use multiple avenues and ways to communicate internally and externally? Does your organization tailor your communications toward distinct members of your campus community?

Part 9. Ethics, Law, and Policy. Do you and members of your organization's staff review university and professional association ethics statements and audit your compliance? Do members of the staff know the law and liabilities pertaining to campus activities programming at the local, state, and federal levels? Do members of the stay current on university policies and procedures?

Part 10. Financial Planning. Do the staff engage in long term strategic planning that includes forecasting and budgeting? When planning, do the staff consider multiple financial forecasts based on history and even worse case scenarios?

Part 11. Technology. Is the technology for the staff adequate for the day to day operations of the staff as well as the programming the department is required to produce for the campus community?

Part 12. Facilities and Infrastructure. Does the physical plant of the department (offices, reception area, and conference rooms) meet the needs of the personnel, including private space for student/advisor discussions? Is the physical space of the office open and inviting to all students?

All functional areas have specialty standards and guidelines. All standards use the verbs "must" and "shall," designating whether the statement that follows is an imperative or a suggestion and appear in bold print to be quickly identified. Guidelines are intended to provide suggestions and illustrations that can assist in establishing programs and services that more fully address the needs of students. They appear in regular font and use the verbs "should" and "may."

CHANGES FROM PREVIOUS VERSIONS

The last time the CAP standards were updated was 2006. Hence, there are significant changes to the Standards, which will be quite helpful to professionals. In addition, the general standards having been significantly revised and updated, making the entire document new and updated. Anyone using these will see major differences compared to the last version of CAP Standards. In Part 1, Mission, the new version helps us to think about how we connect to the bigger picture of our institution and challenges us to think about our CAP mission as it ties to the overall student educational experience.

The most comprehensive revisions were in Part 2, Program and Services. In addition to clearly stating that a set of written goals and objectives must be done and tied to the mission, the list of fundamental functions have more breadth to them, and also expand our thinking of what opportunities and environments are necessary for our students as they participate in co-curricular activities. Part 2 also addresses identifying online platforms to engage students, as well as lengthy considerations for advising student organizations. Other areas with extensive standards recommendations are student governance, stewardship of student activity fees, providing resources to implement student organization events and programs, and training, education, and development for students. These revisions will provide a tremendous gauge for professionals who wish to be cutting edge and establish best practices in their work.

Another area that will be extremely helpful is the updated Part 4, Assessment. As the general standards have been significantly updated, the CAP standards in Part 4 give a comprehensive list of areas where campus activities professionals should have evidence to support their work. This part has a good blueprint for what must be done to successfully to assess our programs and services, including what data sources should be used.

Part 7, Human Resources, has been upgraded to include an extensive list of positions that could be used in a staffing model, primary functions of CAP professionals, qualifications necessary for working in CAP, and recommended support for professional staff development and training. Part 8, Collaboration and Communication, clearly identifies what must happen in collaboration with others to ensure the success of CAP, while Part 9, Ethics, Law, and Policy clearly identifies legal and ethical issues that CAP must be aware of. The remaining areas (Parts 3, 5, 6 10, 11, 12) all have minor revisions and are updated and reflect industry standards for each section.

USING THE CAMPUS ACTIVITIES PROGRAMS STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

An underlying principle of the CAS standards is that they are designed for self- assessment for programs and services offered by functional areas in higher education. As a self- assessment tool, CAS functional area standards, and guidelines offer a great place to start with a programmatic self-assessment process.
CAS also recommends the following steps when conducting a self-assessment:

1. **Plan the Process.** Map out the steps for the process, develop a timeline, build buy-in with all stakeholders, and explicitly identify desired outcomes of the self-study.

2. **Assemble and Educate Team.** Identify 5-10 individuals, comprised of stakeholders, including students. Train the team on self-assessment concepts and principles.

3. **Identify, Collect, and Review Evidence.** Define what constitutes evidence, then gather, collect, manage, and review evidence. This process is often more difficult than people think it will be.

4. **Conduct and Interpret Ratings using Evaluative Evidence.** Clarify the team's rating criteria; employ a process for rating [small group, individual, and staff]; negotiate rating differences; and manage group ratings. You will need to have the Self-Assessment Guide (SAG), which can be purchased on the CAS website. The current cost for a SAG is $65.

5. **Develop an Action Plan.** Identify discrepancies, corrective action, and recommended steps (e.g., identify strengths, weaknesses, benchmarks, resources, timeframe).

6. **Prepare a Report.** Identify the audience for the report(s); describe self-study, evidence gathering, the rating process, evaluations, strengths, weaknesses, and action plan; draft executive summary.

7. **Close the Loop.** Put action plans into practice; navigate politics and secure resources; identify barriers; and build buy-in to the program review results.

As a new director of student activities/union in 1989, one of the authors of this article (Bill) was searching for ways to credibly justify changes that he felt needed to occur in his functional area of responsibility. CAS provided the credibility and documentation in the Campus Activities and Campus Union functional areas to increase the scope of programs offered and a much-needed renovation of a student union. Admittedly, we have a bias based on our successful use of the standards throughout our careers. As the needs of student affairs professionals changed and became more complex, the CAS Standards was often the go-to resource to help navigate the often-changing currents we needed to navigate. Later in his career, as a person promoted to a new position as Assistant Dean for Leadership Programs and Assessment, CAS provided the framework for the Leadership Programs design and implementation at his institution. In 2003, CAS provided a comprehensive list of desired student learning outcomes that Bill was able to use to provide and measure student learning outcomes throughout the student affairs division. As the NACA representative to the CAS Board of Directors, both of us witnessed the very beginning of discussions among the CAS Board members to consider cross-functional standards that break down functional area silos. In the most recent version of the published CAS Standards, those cross-functional

standards are now providing current student affairs professionals the needed resources to provide programs and services that provide a more holistic vision for student affairs professionals moving forward.

The most pertinent of the CAS Standards related to NACA and Campus Activities professionals are the Campus Activities Programming standards. There are at least five additional standards that should also be considered to use as a resource, dependent on the functional areas that fall under your purview. We all know campus activities professionals wear many hats, and therefore it is beneficial that additional functional areas are included in the CAS Standards including; Leadership Programs, Campus Media Programs, Fraternity and Sorority Advising Programs, Campus Unions, and College Honor Society Programs, to name a few. Cross-functional standards can now be ordered through the CAS website, allowing you to put together a set of standards that meet the unique nuances of the area in which you work.

If you are able, you can also use CAS standards to conduct an outside review of your area. After your team has conducted their self-assessment, 1-3 content experts can be brought in to review the self-assessment, meet with your staff, campus and community stakeholders, faculty, staff, and students to get a better account of your office and what can be improved or should be recognized as good practice. It is also good to use outside reviewers to have an objective and unbiased view of what is transpiring in your work.

CONCLUSION

Conducting a self-assessment is often an eye-opening experience. It is helpful to make a case for additional resources and lets you identify areas that require improvement, while seeing areas that are often up to standards as well as exemplary. CAS standards are also helpful to use when an impending accreditation visit is on the horizon to collect data that will inevitably be helpful for the review. While many advanced degree programs in higher education administration have been known to familiarize their students to CAS and even have had them use them experientially, using the CAS standards in undergraduate classes can also be useful. It is clear that a necessary skill that professionals must possess is the ability to assess their areas of responsibility. One of the authors uses the CAS framework to have their undergraduate students assess an element of their undergraduate co-curricular experience to gain practical competence in assessing and forming recommendations in an organization in which they are involved.

As stated earlier, the authors have found the CAS standards to be helpful throughout their careers in a variety of ways, and we hope we have interested the reader in considering the uses we have outlined in this review. However, it is further recommended that users of the CAS Standards for assessment and program improvements consider using additional sources to take their program to exemplary levels. First, professional associations provide resources for members that can be instrumental in improving functional areas such as NACA's Competencies for Campus Activities Professionals and Competencies for Diversity and Inclusion. Attending professional association conferences and workshops can also prove to be helpful as one discovers exemplary programs offered by professionals at other colleges and universities.

We highly recommend the use of CAS Standards in your work. We believe the newly revised Campus Activities and Programs will be of great benefit to you as you work to provide the best activities and programs for the students on your campus. The use of the CAS Standards will also be a great professional staff opportunity for you as a professional!

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