The question of whether student affairs work is a profession has been long debated (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007); a running theme in that debate has been the discussion of what constitutes a profession. While perspectives vary, two elements that receive consistent attention are the preparation of student affairs professionals and the development of agreed-upon standards of practice, grounded in a distinct theory base (Carpenter, Miller, & Winston, 1994). These elements reflect the needs and concerns that led to the creation of the Council for the Advancement of Standards for Student Services/Development Programs, now the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS, 2012). Organized as a consortium of professional associations in higher education, the CAS mission focuses on enhancing the student experience through improving programs and services.

The mission of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) is to promote the improvement of programs and services.
to enhance the quality of student learning and development. CAS is a con-
sortium of professional associations who work collaboratively to develop
and promulgate standards and guidelines and to encourage self-assessment
(CAS, 2008). (CAS, 2013)

The CAS approach involves promoting cross-functional collaboration to
define and disseminate standards of practice, including standards for gradu-
ate preparation programs, and to encourage and support their use. Since its
inception in 1979, CAS has brought together representatives from disparate
programmatic areas to codify collectively how programs and services should
be structured and managed.

The Council of Student Personnel Associations in Higher Education
(COSPA) was formed in the late 1960s to create a profession-wide entity for
student-affairs-related associations (CAS, 2012).

Impetus for its existence was encouraged by a movement on the part of sev-
eral national associations to develop accreditation standards for academic
programs that prepare counselors and counselor educators. This movement,
which culminated in the establishment of the Council for the Accredita-
tion of Counseling and Related Educational Programs in 1980, provided
the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) with an impetus to
create a set of preparation standards for use in master’s level college student
affairs administration programs. (CAS, 2012, p. 2)

Although COSPA had been disbanded, ACPA used the cross-associa-
tional model and invited participation from other relevant organizations.
Two initial meetings in 1979 resulted in the establishment of CAS as a con-
sortium of 11 original member associations (CAS, 2012). In just over three
decades, CAS has grown to include nearly 40 member associations and has
published

43 sets of functional area standards and guidelines, one set of master’s level
academic program standards for college student affairs administration prep-
ration, statements regarding characteristics of individual excellence for
professionals in higher education and the ethical principles that are held in
common across the many areas of professional practice represented at CAS,
and a learning and development outcomes model that reflects the most cur-
rent thought on the intended results of quality practice. (CAS, 2012, p. 2)

New organizations continue to seek CAS membership, reflecting apprecia-
tion for the importance of a broad perspective and a desire to create stand-
ards of practice in new areas, based on the CAS model.
CAS Assumptions and Values

The founding members of CAS were intentional in grounding their work in a clearly articulated set of assumptions and values. These tenets have continued to create a solid and consistent foundation for the work of CAS. First, the standards do not represent an aspirational level of best practice; instead, they reflect a threshold of good practice that can be achieved across settings that vary in size, mission, scope, and resources. This standard of practice is informed not only by experts in the related functional area but also by the perspectives of those working in other areas across the institution. This was designed to prevent what Bud Thomas, one of the CAS founders, often referred to in meetings as *guildism*, an approach in which members of a group set their membership and practice criteria to maintain specific and exclusive control over their area. The involvement of functional area experts and other practitioners serves as a sort of check-and-balance method of ensuring depth and breadth in the standards and that no single perspective dominates.

Further, it is important to note that the CAS standards are not value neutral. “There is a clear set of values that serves as the underpinning for the standards. They are derived from the theories and models that inform our work and from the historical documents that have guided the development of our field; they serve today as important touchstones for the ideas that shape our approaches and that have shaped these standards” (CAS, 2012, p. 4). These values are described as the CAS Guiding Principles, as outlined in the chapter “CAS Context” (CAS, 2012, pp. 7–9) that provides background information for the standards, and include the following:

- **Students and their institutions:** This includes eight principles related to how students learn and the environmental conditions that support learning and development. The first four reflect ideas from the 1937 and 1949 editions of the *Student Personnel Point of View* (Miller & Prince, 1976, p. 4; see also American Council on Education, 1994a, 1994b) and emphasize consideration of the student as a whole and unique person, the educational nature of the total environment, and the notion that students will exercise responsible use of resources to support their education. The second set include institutional perspectives reflecting institutional intentionality, the idea that responsibility for learning rests primarily with the student, the nature of institutions as reflections of societal diversity, and the need for learning environments that offer challenge and support.
- **Diversity and multiculturalism:** Diversity enriches the learning environment and must be considered across all aspects of the
institutions. Barriers that prohibit full engagement of all students must be eliminated, and education for multicultural awareness is essential to the development of a positive environment.

- Organization, leadership, and human resources: “The CAS standards reflect the belief that form follows function; consequently, the structure of an organization should mirror the purposes for which it was established” (CAS, 2012, p. 8). The values here include the importance of a focused mission, clear lines of authority, articulated policies and procedures, and the connection of theory to practice. Priority is also given to strong leadership and effective staffing practices.

- Health-engendering environments: The CAS standards go beyond descriptions of programs and processes to emphasize the importance of their environments and the idea that the context itself can be conducive to student learning and development.

- Ethical considerations: Ethical behavior leads to fair and equitable practice. “Just as a mission statement is essential to provide programs with direction, ethical standards are essential to guide the behavior of staff members in ways that enhance the overall integrity of both the program and the institution” (CAS, 2012, p. 9).

These five values underlie the standards and inform the perspectives they reflect. While the CAS process calls for the standards to undergo regular review and revision, the incorporation of these values lends coherence and consistency across time and functional areas. The presence of this set of values has, however, been somewhat controversial. CAS acknowledges that the guiding principles represent a Western, and specifically American, point of view.

While these ideas have been consistently incorporated in the development of the standards to date, there has been some criticism that they are too reflective of the democratic culture of U.S. higher education and therefore not inclusive enough for application to a global higher education environment. As users of CAS standards broaden to an international arena, so does the geo-political environment that increasingly connects us. These new situations and voices may inform future development of the standards, but at this point, they remain grounded in American ideals. (CAS, 2012, p. 4)

As global interest in CAS grows, student affairs professionals working in other cultures will need to adapt the standards to their specific contexts.
Philosophy of Self-Assessment and Self-Regulation

From the beginning, the founders of CAS chose to base their approach on a belief that given the appropriate tools, professionals could do an effective job of self-regulation. Their belief was grounded in part in the recognition that expectations for practice need to be contextualized by the mission and structure of the institution. This echoes the framework by Whitt, Carnaghi, Matkin, Scalese-Love, and Nestor (1994) of an emergent perspective on a professional philosophy of student affairs, which sees our work as context bound, complex, and mutually shaping, as opposed to a conventional perspective, in which the work is conceptualized as objective, simple, and determinate. One of the differences inherent in the CAS standards, when contrasted with accreditation models in particular, is that CAS does not dictate objective measures, ratios, or other quantitative criteria. Accreditation models, in which achievement of levels of practice is evaluated by those external to the institution, were seen as less desirable and potentially less effective. Accreditation was thought to put the emphasis on the results of the evaluation rather than on the internal self-study process that generated the initial report. Reflecting the emergent perspective (Whitt, et al., 1994), CAS has remained committed to the self-regulation model that focuses on the process of rigorous self-study as the most effective avenue to improving programs and services. Sandeen and Barr (2006) further note that “the student affairs field is still too diverse and too fragmented to accept any model it may find constricting to its highly varied purposes” (p. 187). The goal of self-study is both product and process: results that inform improved practice and engagement that leads to insight and commitment.

Model of Standards Development

CAS standards are informed by both expertise and broad perspectives. The goal is a set of standards that reflect current research, literature, and knowledge in the specific functional area and are informed by the perspectives of other functional areas. The additional perspectives become particularly important when professionals from specific functional areas attach particular meaning to terms like counseling and confidentiality that may be used by others in a broader way. Because the standards are intended for use not only by those working in a particular area but also by those who supervise them, those who are seeking guidance for program development, and those who need to integrate organizational structures, it is crucial that they are designed to communicate clearly across multiple audiences.
To facilitate the inclusion of multiple perspectives, CAS (2012) uses a standard protocol for the development of new standards. First, the decision is made that an area of practice has developed enough consistency across settings that it is reasonable to define standards; recent examples include programs and services for transfer students, for veterans and students in the military, and for parent and family programs. CAS then appoints a standards development committee of board members; typically, a member association is the champion of the new standards because it reflects that area of practice. The committee chair does not come from this relevant association to prevent an overly narrow perspective influencing the document. The relevant association is represented, and other committee members are appointed from interested board members. An initial draft is developed with significant input by representatives from the interested professional association. This draft must use the general standards (see the next section) and add appropriate specialty standards to each section. The committee then identifies CAS member associations with interest in the area as well as experts in the field to review the document and provide feedback; the goal is to gather broad perspectives across institution types and related functional areas. The draft is revised to incorporate this input. The document is then submitted for review to the CAS Executive Committee, which makes additional revisions based on the context of other standards and CAS philosophy and style. Questions may also be asked of the committee to clarify intent and rationale. With Executive Committee approval, this final draft is published for review and input by the full board of directors. The proposed standards are presented for final discussion and approval at a meeting of the board.

At each step of the process, it is important that all perspectives are heard and that changes are made by consensus. Consistent with CAS values and philosophy, consensus ensures that one agenda does not dominate the outcome. The CAS model is designed to move the development of standards out of the purview of a single association so that the final product fits in a larger context.

**Structure of Standards**

The structure of the materials also echoes this sense of balance, reflected in two ways. First, each set of standards contains general standards and specialty standards. Specialty standards are of particular concern and application for the functional area. They address the purpose of the program or service and describe practices distinct to that particular area that are essential in achieving a high level of quality. General standards represent essential practice across all functional areas. With the exception of the preparation program
standards, the general standards, also known as *boilerplate*, appear verbatim within every set of functional area standards, representing practice that is necessary regardless of the area of focus.

From the CAS perspective, virtually all functional areas of practice, no matter how specialized, have identifiable commonalities with other functions. For example, an institution’s admission, academic advising, campus activities, and career services programs, although established to accomplish clearly different purposes, will each benefit from establishing a written mission statement that is compatible with the mission of the institution. Likewise, the same is true for human, fiscal, physical, and technological resources; legal responsibilities; institutional and community relations; ethical considerations; and assessment, among others. Consequently, CAS developed and has incorporated a number of common criteria that have relevance for each and every functional area, no matter what its primary focus. These common criteria are referred to as “general standards” and form the core of all functional area standards. These general standards are designed to overcome the “silo effect” so common throughout higher education in which autonomous administrative units, programs, and services function independently and sometimes inconsistently. (CAS, 2012, p. 3)

The general standards have 12 parts, which provide the structure for all functional area standards: Mission; Program (including learning and development outcomes); Organization and Leadership; Human Resources; Ethics; Law, Policy, and Governance; Diversity, Equity, and Access; Institutional and External Relations; Financial Resources; Technology; Facilities and Equipment; and Assessment and Evaluation. In recent years, the general standards have been revised every three years to ensure they are current and reflective of changes in the field. Examples of changes include the creation of a separate section for technology, increased emphasis on policy and governance, and a shift in terminology from *campus* to *institution* in recognition of online elements of practice. Learning and development outcomes were added in 2003 and were revised in 2008 by a think tank convened by CAS to integrate elements from *Learning Reconsidered* 2 (Keeling, 2006) and reflect the current thinking from across the profession (CAS, 2012).

Upon recommendations of the think tank, CAS revised the student learning and development outcomes into six broad categories (called domains): knowledge acquisition, construction, integration and application; cognitive complexity; intrapersonal development; interpersonal competence; humanitarianism and civic engagement; and practical competence. To comply with CAS standards, institutional programs and services must
identify relevant and desirable learning from these domains, assess relevant and desirable learning, and articulate how their programs and services contribute to domains not specifically assessed. (CAS, 2012, p. 23)

It is important to note that the standards address administrative and programmatic factors as well as learning and development outcomes. Assessment must address delivery of programs and services and student learning and development outcomes so that practitioners can determine the results of their work and the mechanisms used to achieve those results (Jacoby & Dean, 2010).

In addition to the dual focus of the general and specialty standards, every set of standards includes two kinds of statements: standards and guidelines. The standards represent essential elements of practice that are indispensable regardless of the setting. They use the auxiliary verb must, and in print they are in boldface. The guidelines, which often use the auxiliary verbs should and may, are intended to explain, illustrate, or amplify the standards and guide advanced levels of practice. The presentation of standards and guidelines aids in the use of the documents by functional areas at any size institution and at any stage of development or complexity.

Scope of Functional Areas: Expansion Beyond Student Affairs

The original CAS member associations all represented traditional student affairs functional areas; however, in subsequent years, the scope of practice that CAS addresses has grown, as professional associations beyond those areas have approached CAS for membership and the development of standards. These include the following groups: the Association of Collegiate Conference and Events Directors-International, Collegiate Information and Visitor Services Association, College Reading and Learning Association, NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising, National Association of College and University Food Services, National Women’s Studies Association, National Association of College Stores, and National Association of College Auxiliary Services (CAS, 2013). This broadening of interest likely reflects the growing emphasis across higher education in assessment and accountability as well as the growing reputation and credibility of CAS as the source for widely recognized standards of practice.

Master’s-Level Student Affairs Preparation Programs

Although most of the CAS standards provide guidance for functional area programs and services, the foundational discussions included a focus on standards for the preparation of master’s-level professionals in student affairs.
According to the contextual statement for the preparation program standards, “The primary value of the CAS student affairs professional preparation standard is to assist in ensuring that an academic program is offering what the profession, through representative consensus, has deemed necessary to graduate prepared student affairs and student services professionals” (CAS, n.d., p. 1). As is true for the functional area standards, promulgation of standards for preparation helps to ensure that such programs reflect training that is consistent across academic settings and informed by broad perspectives, including professionals from the functional areas where graduates will be employed. “In theory, if all graduate preparation programs adhered to the CAS standards, new professionals graduating from these programs would gain a competent, basic, working understanding of the issues in the areas mentioned by CAS” (Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009, p. 98).

The preparation program standards are structured to reflect the important elements of conducting an academic program and include Mission and Objectives, Recruitment and Admission, Curriculum Policies, Pedagogy, Curriculum, Equity and Access, Academic and Student Support, Professional Ethics and Legal Responsibilities, and Program Evaluation. While all elements are important, the central focus is on the curriculum.

Curriculum standards are organized around Foundation Studies, Professional Studies, and Supervised Practice. Foundation Studies pertains to the historical and philosophical foundations of higher education and student affairs. This includes historical documents of the profession such as Learning Reconsidered I and II (2004, 2006), Student Personnel Point of View (ACE, 1937), Return to the Academy (Brown, 1972), the Student Learning Imperative (ACPA, 1996), Principles of Good Practice (Blimling & Whitt, 1999), Powerful Partnerships (Joint Task Force, 1998), and Reasonable Expectations (Kuh et al., 1994) among others. Professional Studies pertains to student [learning and] development theory, student characteristics, the effects of college on students, individual and group interventions, the organization and administration of student affairs, and assessment, evaluation, and research. Supervised Practice includes practica, internships, and externships under professionally supervised work conditions. (CAS, n.d., p. 2)

Kuk and Cuyjet (2009) pointed out that the curriculum serves as an important mechanism for professional socialization, since “the philosophy of the profession, its values, vision, and ways of seeing the world are manifested through the curriculum and serve as the foundation for what is taught and what is modeled in the preparation program” (p. 91).

The latest revision of the Master’s Level Student Affairs Professional Preparation Program Standards and Guidelines (CAS, n.d.) includes increased
attention to provisions for part-time students, distance degree programs, achievement of learning outcomes, and focus on professional competencies. The goal of each revision is to incorporate changes in program structure, current thinking and pedagogy, and up-to-date perspectives from the field about what knowledge and competencies are needed by master’s level professionals.

Review of Relevant Literature

While professional preparation programs in student affairs have existed for nearly a century (Nuss, 2003), not a great deal of research has been done on them. In particular, few studies have been conducted on the use of standards for professional preparation programs in student affairs. In Chapter 3, DiRamo’s study revealed that despite their use of various standards, even top-ranked programs make little mention of standards in general and CAS in particular. His findings revealed that many preparation programs are using standards and professional competencies developed by CAS, NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, ACPA, or some combination of the three; however, not much is known about how the use of those standards and competencies affects the quality of the programs. The literature on the use of CAS standards for student affairs professional preparation programs highlights their use, issues in professional preparation, and where doctoral programs are situated in the conversation.

Studies on the use of CAS standards in graduate preparation programs reveal greater student learning gains in CAS-compliant programs (Young & Janosik, 2007), positive perspectives from supervisors of graduates from CAS-compliant programs (Cuyjet, Longwell-Grice, & Molina, 2009), and the influence of CAS graduate preparation program standards internationally (Howman, 2010; Li, 2009). As mentioned previously, the purpose of CAS professional preparation standards is to assist in ensuring that future professionals are receiving the necessary educational experiences for success as determined by a representative consensus (CAS, n.d.). Since CAS has published its standards for programs, other studies have investigated the necessary components of professional preparation for new student affairs professionals. Burkard, Cole, and Stoflet (2008) conducted a consensus-building study among mid- and senior-level student affairs administrators regarding entry-level student affairs positions, responsibilities, skills, and theoretical knowledge bases. Their collective findings suggested that human relations, administrative/management, technology, and research competencies—as well as several personal attributes—are important for successful entry-level practice. The competencies and skills listed by participants
to be important and necessary are congruent with the CAS standards on graduate preparation. Around the same time, Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) conducted a study with new professionals that revealed experiential learning through practica experiences in multiple settings was critical to future success in the field. This study supported the importance of the practical components of professional preparation suggested by CAS. Inclusion of these areas of focus by professional preparation programs seems to make a difference. Furthermore, graduates from CAS-compliant programs overwhelmingly report greater understanding than their counterparts from noncompliant programs (Young & Janosik, 2007). These findings are supported by reports of supervisors of new professionals who graduated from programs using CAS professional preparation standards (Cuyjet, et al., 2009). Supervisors ranked the level of knowledge acquired in areas identified in the CAS standards as high among these new professionals.

International recognition of the utility of CAS standards for new professionals by supervisors further showcases their usefulness. Discussions surrounding the professional preparation of Canadian and Chinese student affairs professionals have been undergirded by the CAS standards (Howman, 2010; Li, 2009). Cultural discrepancies have prevented in-depth analyses of the utility of the standards in their current form; however, investigations in these two contexts have revealed that most of the professional preparation program components suggested by CAS are useful in preparing professionals for practice. In the Canadian study, Howman (2010) reported that respondents said the most important courses for a master's degree program in student affairs administration were Organization and Administration of Student Affairs, Student Characteristics and Effects of College on Student Development, and Student Development Theory. The field of student affairs in China is going through a process similar to the one in the early 20th century in the United States; administrators are working to define student affairs as a profession (Li, 2009). Some of them have looked to the CAS standards for professional preparation programs for guidance in establishing their own programs. However, Li (2009) discovered that the cultural differences between the U.S. and China result in difficulty in applying some of the CAS standards. Supervised practice, however, was one area in which all participants expressed agreement. Chinese faculty and student affairs administrators “viewed the internship as important and necessary because student affairs administration is an applied field and purely theoretical knowledge is not enough” (Li, 2009, p. 236). As the profession of student affairs continues to evolve domestically and globally, conversations about student affairs professional preparation will only gain in relevance as internal and external demands of accountability for all working in higher education increase.
Student affairs preparation programs, like those in other professional areas, face internal and external demands to produce quality professionals. Conrad and Rapp-Henretta (2002) found that employers expect graduate students to leave the university prepared with the specialized skills and knowledge necessary to join the workforce with minimal additional training; they further expected these new employees to keep current by becoming continuous, lifelong learners who can keep up with changes in their field and changes in technology. Although the focus of that study was the field of library and information science, the expectations of employers may have broad applicability to master’s-level professionals. Chief student affairs officers have expectations that graduates will leave preparation programs not only with skills specific to the work but also with skills in critical thinking, writing, assessment and research, and campus politics (Herdlein, 2004). Additionally, students place their own demands on preparation programs; Conrad and Rapp-Henretta (2002) argued that to meet the demands of students, programs are pressured to create “strong but fluid and highly relevant program[s] in which the currency of knowledge attained by learners will be self-evident based on when a student leaves the master’s program” (p. 94). For the profession of student affairs, CAS standards for preparation programs provide guidance on training and educating professionals in a way that meets external and internal demands. However, as DiRamio suggests in Chapter 3, and as reflected in the literature, debate remains among student affairs professionals about which standards, guidelines, or competencies are most necessary for professional preparation.

Finding a consensus on how to successfully train student affairs professionals continues to be a challenge. There are different areas of emphasis among programs, with some having an emphasis on counseling, others emphasizing student development theory, and others focused on the “building of selected skills and competencies deemed necessary to be successful in the field” (Waple, 2006, p. 2), sometimes categorized as administration (Kuk & Cuyjet, 2009). Pertaining to building skills and competencies, data have shown graduates of student affairs preparation programs are attaining a prescribed set of skills and competencies and using them at a moderate to high degree in their first professional positions (Waple, 2006). In spite of this, though, Herdlein (2004) found that graduate students were not well prepared for some student affairs administrative and management responsibilities, such as strategic planning, finance, and budgeting. Additionally, he found that new professionals’ proficiency in writing skills was also a shortcoming in their readiness for work. Burkard, Cole, Ott, and Stoflet (2008) suggested that graduate programs may want to include instruction on advanced counseling/human relation competencies (i.e., collaboration, consultation, group facilitation, conflict resolution/mediation, supervision,
Training in basic counseling helps new professionals intervene at the individual level, but they argue these advanced competencies would help professionals intervene more effectively at the group and organizational levels.

The conversation surrounding professional preparation for student affairs has focused on master’s-level education. No document has been created to suggest standards of professional preparation at the doctoral level in the way the CAS standards have done for master’s-level graduate preparation, nor have any been offered by NASPA or ACPA (Coomes, Belch, & Saddlemire, 1991). CAS has not chosen to develop standards for a doctoral program, because compared to master’s programs, there is a wider range of program models, curricula, and approaches. It is much more difficult to set standards for what should be included in a PhD/EdD curriculum or to state definitively how such a program should be structured. CAS standards represent a balance between being descriptive of current, high-quality practice and prescriptive of desirable practice, and new standards have tended to be developed when there is enough coherence across descriptions that those elements that are most important to prescribe through standards can be identified. Doctoral-level education in student affairs does not currently have that level of coherence; whether it should is debatable. Doctoral education, which typically focuses at least in part on original research in an area of individual interest, tends to permit some level of individualization in course selection to support the research topic and methodology as well as specific career goals. If standards were to be created, it would be important to develop a structure that reflects essential elements of doctoral education while also identifying those areas that should be open for individualization. McEwen and Talbot (1998) asserted that the goal of doctoral preparation in student affairs should be to develop scholar-practitioners who have skill in research and the capacity for leadership in student affairs but go on to raise the question of “whether indeed consensus about doctoral curricula is even a desired outcome” (p. 146).

**Staying Current and Future Directions**

Higher education is undergoing significant and rapid transformations. Student demographics, funding models, and technology are all creating changes in our institutions and in the ways we do our work. CAS protocols are designed to keep the standards reflective of current realities and practice. All standards are reviewed and revised on a regular basis, incorporating trends and developments, and this rate of change reinforces the importance of expert and widely informed input on ensuring that standards remain relevant. The
attention to technology in the standards is an example of responsiveness to
trends: there was little mention up through the fifth edition (CAS, 2003; it
was added to the heading of the former Facilities and Equipment section in
the sixth edition (CAS, 2006), and finally was given a section of its own in
the eighth edition (CAS, 2012).

The CAS board of directors includes representatives from professional
organizations and public directors, who are chosen for their ability to bring
external but relevant perspectives to the work. Public directors have repre-
sented international student affairs work, higher education consulting, and
government/public policy professionals. Further, ongoing strategic planning
takes into consideration broader and longer-ranging issues and trends that have
implications for the work of CAS. Some of these are logistical in nature and
involve consideration of the implications of technology; these are related to
issues such as Web presence, electronic availability of materials, and enhanced
mechanisms board can use to conduct their work. Others focus more on con-
tent and the need to ensure that the standards reflect trends like assessment of
learning and development outcomes and changes in relevant laws and regula-
tions. Still others involve CAS’s place within the higher education landscape,
partnerships with others in the assessment industry, and the balance of prom-
ulgation and protection of intellectual property. Finally, CAS will also continue
to strive to balance the descriptive and prescriptive approaches to defining
standards. Higher education institutions have been criticized for operating
too much in silos that do not communicate, collaborate, or integrate their
efforts in ways that lead to coherent experiences for students; the proliferation
of student affairs functional area-based professional associations mirrors this
separation of focus (Sandeen & Barr, 2006). Although discussions often refer
to “seamless learning environments” (e.g., Schroeder, 1999, p. 134), the CAS
standards in their current form focus on discrete, specialized functional areas.
While this is certainly descriptive of general practice today, CAS may also have
a role to play in the future in beginning to explore ways that functions can
be combined rather than separated. Love and Estanek (2004) argued, as did
Whitt et al. (1994) a decade earlier, that student affairs needs to move away
from a stance of dualism to transcend paradigms, allowing for coexistence of
models depending on the needs of the context. This will be a challenge for
CAS to contend with as the models for our work continue to evolve.

Conclusion

In any profession, it is important for practitioners to understand the stand-
ards of good practice. To practice effectively, they must know what quality
looks like (Jacoby & Dean, 2010). This is important not only so the public
knows what to expect but so the professionals themselves can use a widely accepted and well-informed benchmark to assess whether they are doing good work. Professional standards provide such a benchmark, and their utility can be evaluated, in part, by the degree of their acceptance. The CAS standards, in their nearly 35 years of existence, have gained wide use and credibility, as demonstrated by the growing number and breadth of member associations and functional area standards. Their application increases the level of consistency in practice across institutional settings and program areas. Moreover, their use as content in professional preparation, and the use of the standards that address master’s-level student affairs professional preparation, contribute to an increased sense of competency in graduates of programs that are structured around the standards (Young & Janosik, 2007). Professionalism is a desirable trait for practitioners; professionalization is desirable for an area of work that seeks credibility, recognition, and consistent, high-quality practice. The development, use, and teaching of standards can contribute to professionalism, professionalization, and high-quality practice that benefits the students whom we ultimately serve.

References


