

Research Needed on the Use of CAS Standards and Guidelines

Don G. Creamer*

This article suggests research projects that would extend the knowledge base about the use of CAS standards and guidelines in useful ways. Included are five research questions and specific research methodologies to guide researchers.

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), a consortium of professional associations in higher education, was founded in 1979 and published its first book of standards for practice in 1986 (Bryan, Winston, & Miller, 1991; Miller, 2001). CAS was founded on the belief that self-assessment and self-regulation were a legitimate alternative to traditional accreditation practices that depend for their completion on external reviews. Founders also believed that consensual standards, appropriately applied, would contribute significantly to quality assurance in higher education. The CAS approach allows professionals in the field to promulgate CAS standards and guidelines for use by other practitioners in a flexible manner that most ideally fits a particular institutional culture and needs of a particular educational program or service.

Evidence suggests that CAS standards and guidelines increasingly are used in educational programs and services in higher education. CAS sells hundreds of copies of *The Book of Professional Standards for Higher Education* and *Self-Assessment Guides* each year (P. Mable, personal communication, November 25, 2002). Studies by Arminio (2002) reveal impressive use of standards and guidelines in disparate educational programs and services throughout higher education in the U.S. and Canada. Annual reports of CAS activities (Creamer & Mable, 2002) show many association-related activities using CAS materials each year. This evidence and informal communication of CAS leaders at professional meetings and conferences and in the conduct of their routine CAS-related duties collectively suggest widespread use of CAS standards and guidelines by thousands of professionals each year. Scant evidence is available, however, that shows the effects of the use of such standards and guidelines on student learning and development or on educational programs and services.

Furthermore, users of CAS standards and guidelines seem increasingly satisfied with the materials published by CAS in the context of the purposes for which they were created. This evidence mostly is anecdotal, but consistently suggests that CAS standards and guidelines have heuristic value to practitioners and that they use them to establish new programs, to evaluate program effectiveness, to conduct assessment activities, to complete self-studies for accreditation, to carry out in-service education programs, to structure planning activities, and other similar

* Don G. Creamer is Professor of Higher Education and Student Affairs at Virginia Tech. Correspondence concerning this article should be sent to dgc2@vt.edu.

functions. Likewise, many, if not all, master's level preparation programs use the CAS standards in their teaching of young professionals that leads them to expect the routine use of CAS standards and guidelines in their careers.

Student Learning and Developmental Outcomes

One of the hallmarks of CAS standards and guidelines is their insistence that each functional area be grounded in the purpose of promoting student learning and development. Every standard published by CAS includes a list of relevant and desirable outcomes, mostly developmental outcomes that must be a focus for each functional area. This list of outcomes forms a template for all CAS standards and is a centerpiece of CAS General Standards and includes:

- intellectual growth,
- ability to communicate effectively,
- realistic self-appraisal,
- enhanced self-esteem,
- clarification of values,
- clarification of career choices,
- leadership development,
- healthy behaviors,
- meaningful interpersonal relationships,
- ability to work independently and collaboratively,
- social responsibility,
- satisfying and productive lifestyles,
- appreciation of diversity,
- spiritual awareness, and
- achievement of personal and educational goals. (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education [CAS], 2002)

These developmental outcome requirements for all functional areas for which CAS writes standards and guidelines represent the heart of the idea of standards of practice and suggest powerfully, if not always clearly, why a program deserves to exist in an institution of higher learning. Programs exist and deserve to be supported by the institution precisely because they serve the institution by contributing directly to the core institutional function of promoting student learning and development.

Thus, the CAS standards and guidelines remind practitioners of one of their most basic functions—to be sure that the educational programs and services over which they preside promote student learning and development in some meaningful manner. There has been a long-standing debate among CAS leaders about whether all educational functional areas should be held to the standard of promoting learning and development in all relevant and desirable outcome areas as cited in the General Standards. The current position of CAS is that, “Each program and service must provide *evidence of its impact* [italics added] on the achievement of student learning and

development outcomes” (CAS, 2002). Each functional area is permitted to state its priorities among the required outcomes and to present its own evidence from illustrative forms of the outcomes, but must include in some form in its self-studies all outcome areas as required by the General Standards.

Considerable improvement in the usability of the CAS standards and guidelines was achieved when the new General Standards were adopted in fall 2002. They included specific demonstration of what is meant, in illustrative form, by each of the relevant and desirable outcomes. What now is needed is carefully designed and executed research and assessment studies to demonstrate effects or consequences of using CAS standards and guidelines.

Quality Educational Processes

CAS standards and guidelines also are designed to instill quality educational processes into the functional area programs and services. They require for each functional area:

- an appropriate mission for each area that is clearly linked to the mission of the institution;
- a program function that demonstrates an impact upon specified student learning and developmental outcomes;
- appropriate leadership that can guide the program to the achievement of its purposes;
- workable organization structure and management practices;
- adequate human resources;
- sufficient financial resources;
- satisfactory facilities, technology, and equipment;
- acknowledgement of and responsiveness to its legal responsibilities;
- provision of programs and services that provide for equity and access by all constituents;
- satisfactory campus and external relations;
- the embodiment of appropriate diversity;
- the application of ethical practice; and
- the use of assessment and evaluation in its operations.

Taken together, these elements constitute a CAS conception of quality in higher education programs and services. Despite considerable evidence of use of CAS standards and guidelines in some manner by a wide range of educational programs and services, evidence still is inconclusive that implementation of such standards and practices leads decisively to quality, or even to improved educational practice.

Purpose

Existing literature on CAS standards and guidelines emphasizes the most current version of the materials and how to use them in particular functional areas, such as

for learning assistance programs (Materniak & Williams, 1987), for commuter student programs and services (Jacoby & Thomas, 1986), for accreditation processes (Jacoby & Thomas, 1991), for program evaluation (Bryan & Mullendore, 1991), and for professional preparation (Miller, 1991). Winston and Moore (1991) explored the use of CAS standards in outcomes assessment and Cooper and Saunders (2000) studied the perceived importance of “must statements” in the CAS standards.

Two types of literature are needed now to address the issues of effects on student learning and development and contributions to quality educational practices. First, studies are needed to measure student learning and development that ties practice to program outcomes. Second, studies are needed to address effectiveness of programs and services that use CAS standards and guidelines.

The purpose of this paper is to suggest approaches to research and assessment that can be carried out by practitioners (and graduate students) that will illuminate the benefits and other consequences associated with the use of CAS standards and guidelines in educational programs and services in higher education. Several examples of needed studies will be suggested; however, it is hoped also that practitioner/researchers will be encouraged by this beginning to design their own studies, carry them out, and report their findings in scholarly journals to provide all professionals access to the knowledge generated.

Contexts for Studies

Researchers in student affairs tend to be motivated to better understand students, professionals, and the institutions in which they work. Certain values are inherent in any study and reflect what we care about and what we want to discover. Studies about student learning reinforce our beliefs that student learning and development are the principal criterion variables of concern to student affairs professionals. Such an assumption leads researchers to design their studies to explore the relationship of selected independent variables and some form of learning or development outcome in students. The point is that we want to know what affects student learning and development in the college environments in which we work. Such knowledge may allow professionals to shape their practice to directly influence students in desirable ways.

Other studies that address professional behavior and its antecedents reveal our concern for the centrality of professionals in the quality of educational service or programs and our interest in their continued professional development. The quality of educational programs and services is linked directly to the quality of professionals themselves (Winston & Creamer, 1997). Thus, what professionals know and what professionals are able to do consistently and predictably are vital to enable supervisors to provide the most valuable continuing education for them. This link between professional behavior and quality also suggests a need to know the consequences of certain professional behavior on student learning and development and on program effectiveness. Because we value this knowledge, we design studies

to focus on professional behavior and often use such knowledge to shape organizational and professional behavior.

Likewise, studies that seek to understand program effectiveness reveal our concerns for institutional development. Educational programs such as academic disciplines and educational support services serve as the structure of higher education. Academic advising, campus activities, residential education, and career services are examples of these programs. Because the work of educators is delivered within these organizational units, it is important to understand the effects of collective professional behavior on criteria important to the institution including student learning and development. It also may be important to institutions to understand program effectiveness indicators such as cost efficiency, scope or range of effect, and institutional mission achievement. Studies that examine program effectiveness reveal our underlying concerns for institutional effectiveness.

Problems with Measuring Student Outcomes

The first, and possibly the most illusive, issue in studying student outcomes is that learning and development occurs naturally whether institutions intervene with programs and services or not. Influences on student learning and development are difficult to partition to conclusively point to the precise source; chances are that any influence can be traced to multiple sources. It is, after all, the nature of a college environment to be ripe with stimuli and opportunities for learning. Under such conditions, no one source can likely lay claim to exclusive effect on certain changes in students. Further, whether students learn or do not learn depends more, or at least as much, on them as it does on the provider of programs and services. Students who are motivated to learn, will. Those who are not motivated may not, regardless of efforts on their behalf. Research studies, therefore, need to attempt to determine causal relationships between program features and activities and student learning and development.

Germane to this paper is the issue of whether the adoption or implementation of CAS standards and guidelines by a specific program or service may be associated with any effects on student learning and development of student clients who use the service. It may not be clear what it means to adopt or implement the standards and guidelines. A program or service may profess belief in the standards and guidelines and still not employ them in all aspects as intended by CAS. Other programs may fully employ the standards and guidelines in a general sense, but rely upon practitioners who are not fully effective all of the time. Thus, research on CAS standards and guidelines needs to address this phenomenon of adoption or application in real-world terms and to design studies that meaningfully explore what this means.

Recommended Approaches

Despite the difficulties, student learning and development can be studied within the context of specific programs and services regarding the effects of the use of CAS

standards and guidelines. Ideas for studying these sometime illusive factors are suggested here specifically with practitioners in mind. These ideas suggest the advantages of studying effects on student learning and development by practitioners operating from within the programs and services. Certainly, researchers from outside of the programs, such as graduate students, can employ these approaches, but there are advantages given to insiders to some suggestions.

Each of the following approaches to studying effects of the use of CAS standards and guidelines might pursue these general research questions, but more specific questions are proposed for each type of study:

1. What student learning and development outcomes are associated with the use of CAS standards and guidelines by practitioners within a specific functional area?
2. What behaviors of staff members are associated with the implementation of CAS standards and guidelines in their functional area? (Attitudes of staff members might also be studied.)

Research questions (RQ) about the use of CAS standards and guidelines are proposed next and each is followed by a suggested way to address the question(s). The suggestions are not complete research designs; rather, they suggest a general line of attack, leaving the design details to individual researchers. The suggestions are somewhat cumulative also, assuming that previously stated issues are appropriate in later suggestions. Three types of studies are suggested—descriptive surveys, case studies, and narrative inquiry research.

Descriptive Survey Studies

“Descriptive studies describe and interpret what *is*” (Best, 1993, p. 105) and may assume three basic forms—assessment studies to determine the current status of a phenomenon; evaluation studies to determine whether a program is working as intended; and descriptive research to determine the relationship between selected variables, to test hypotheses, and to develop generalizations, assumptions, or theories. Survey results “... describe the incidence, frequency and distribution of the characteristics of a population” (McMillan & Schumacher, 1989). Assuming appropriate sampling, descriptive studies possess advantages, especially the capacity to generalize findings to the population. They also may be advantaged by ease of administration and interpretation and by economy.

RQ1: What is the level of use of CAS standards and guidelines by functional area, institutional type, and geographical region? This large-scale national descriptive survey study would provide baseline data on the use of CAS standards and guidelines by all practitioners for whom such documents have been promulgated. Level of use could be defined as 1=not aware; 2=aware, but not used; 3=used informally and occasionally; and 4=used formally and regularly. Institutional type could be defined by Carnegie classification and geographical region could be defined operationally according to researcher needs, by using NASPA (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators) organizational regions, or by using regions of the regional

accreditation agencies. The purpose of this type of study would be to establish the level of diffusion of CAS standards and guidelines into each educational area in which CAS has developed standards of practice. Currently, there are 29 published functional area standards and they could be organized in the survey either into 29 separate items or scales or grouped by some logical arrangement as in a conceptual factor scheme. Informants for this type of study should be persons carrying out the educational services or programs within the 29 functional areas or the directors of such services. Perhaps the surveys for each campus in the study could be sent to the executive student affairs officer for distribution to representatives of all 29 functional areas, if available.

RQ2: What is the type and frequency of use of CAS standards and guidelines by educational practitioners in student and academic affairs? This descriptive survey study would explore the type and frequency of use of CAS standards and guidelines by practitioners in educational programs and services in student affairs, such as campus activities, and academic affairs, such as academic advising. Type of use might include 1=not used at all; 2=service or program development; 3=staff development; 4=program evaluation; 5=program assessment; 6=accreditation self-studies; 7=structure planning activities; 8=program benchmarking. Frequency of use might include 1=not used; 2=less than once per year; 3=at least once per year; 4=twice or more each year. The purpose of this study would be to determine multiple uses of CAS standards and guidelines by practitioners. This study would need to identify the programs and services in student and academic affairs to be studied in multiple institutions, perhaps by Carnegie classification and by region as posed in RQ1, and distribute surveys to program directors or coordinators for survey completion.

RQ3: How does the use of CAS standards and guidelines shape professional practice? [Alternatively] What is the degree of awareness of the value of using CAS standards and guidelines? To what extent do practitioners feel compelled to use CAS standards and guidelines in their practice? This type of descriptive research addresses the concerns of practitioners prior to the adoption of CAS standards and guidelines. What do practitioners think of standards of practice? To what extent are they influenced by standards of practice? Do they feel a need or pressure to include external standards in individual practice? If not using CAS standards and guidelines in their practice, what inhibits their adoption of them? Are there varied reactions to these questions by different types of stakeholders such as executive level administrators, mid level administrators, individual practitioners, and student clients?

Thus, there are many alternatives to studying prior-to-adoption behavior of practitioners. To present variable specifications as in the previous suggestions is premature; rather, the researcher first must make decisions about the precise concern to be studied. Following this decision the guidance offered in previous study designs can be used to shape this particular study.

Case Studies

“A qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit” (Merriam, 1998, p. xiii). Case studies bounded in at least three ways—by professional behavior, student learning, and program effectiveness—likely will reveal important information about the use of CAS standards and guidelines. A major advantage of case studies is the opportunity to examine deeply the phenomenon of interest. In some cases, the organization unit may bound the phenomenon of interest and the researcher may be asked to study all (or selected) aspects or functions of the unit. If so, this type of study might be called an intrinsic case study (Stake, 1995) where the shape and scope of the study will depend upon the unique elements of the case and what is expected from studying it. Alternatively, the researcher may be interested in issues or research questions of importance to the educational community and frame one or more case studies to address them. In this form, it is the questions of the researcher that are paramount, not the case or the organizational unit, and such a case study might be called an instrumental study (Stake, 1995). In the suggestions offered in this paper, the stated research questions or issues being investigated drive the methods of data collection and their interpretation. The studies suggested here are generally of the instrumental case study type where the research questions represent the principal concern rather than the features of a particular organizational unit.

RQ4: What is the role of CAS standards and guidelines in shaping educational programs and services. [Alternatively] In what ways, if any, does the adoption of CAS standards and guidelines by an educational program or service affect (a) professional behavior of practitioners individually or collectively, (b) perceived value of the program to student clients, or (c) perceived value of the program or service to the institution? Two major issues loom over the design of this type of case study. First, what does adoption of CAS standards and guidelines mean? Does it mean, for example, that practitioners routinely think about them in their professional conduct? Might it mean that the standards and guidelines are frequently referenced in staff meetings? Perhaps it means that performance evaluations are shaped by efforts to achieve certain outcomes as specified in the standards and guidelines. Could it mean that the standards and guidelines are used to shape program reviews and evaluations or to form self-studies for institutional accreditation?

The second issue looming over this type of study is case selection. If the research question(s) pertain to the effects of the use of CAS standards and guidelines, the researcher must select organizational units that have taken some formal action to use them within the unit. Perhaps length of time of use of such standards and guidelines is important to the design of the study. If the researcher wants to compare effects between organizational units that do and do not use CAS standards and guidelines, case selection is complicated by the need to find similar units, perhaps within the same institution, that have taken different routes to achieve their common purposes.

Data collection for case studies designed to address these research questions likely will take three forms: interviews with practitioners, observations of practice by the researcher, and document reviews. The researcher will be looking to triangulate data from each of these sources and to achieve redundancy in each. An interview protocol will need to be developed that either seeks to discover conceptual categories that describe professional behavior and/or anticipated effects of behavior or that structures data sought by pre-conceived conceptual categories taken perhaps from literature of professional practice. These conceptual categories might then be used to structure the nature of observations of practice and the review of documents produced within the unit that reveal crucial aspects of educational practice. Regardless of how the categories are identified, they must inform the stated questions or issues, in this instance inform important relationships between adoption of CAS standards and guidelines and results of programs and services offered by the unit(s) under study.

To be of most use to understanding the value of the use of CAS standards and guidelines in practice, detailed accounts of individual practitioners' efforts to conduct their practice in light of standards would be important. Interpretations by the researcher should inform the profession about what it means to practice by the application of standards and guidelines derived by consensus of other professionals in the same functional areas. It would be valuable for future researchers to build upon cases of this type by using the conceptual categories identified to design further research. To agree upon an operational definition of adoption would be helpful to future researchers. Is it meaningful to practitioners to think about levels of adoption? What might these levels be in the minds of practitioners?

RQ4a: Do practitioners perceive that the use of CAS standards and guidelines to conduct their practice effectively improves their performance? [Alternatively] Can practitioners demonstrate that their use of CAS standards and guidelines in their practice results in improved outcomes in student learning and development? This type of case study requires purposeful sampling in the selection of informants and intensive interviewing, perhaps over time, to collect meaningful data. Individual practitioners who are committed to the use of CAS standards and guidelines and who are willing to participate in substantial reflective discussions with the researcher would need to be identified. An interview protocol that encourages deep reflections by the practitioner-informants would need to be developed. The protocol might include such questions as: "What circumstances influence your thinking and behavior in the conduct of your professional duties?" "How do you decide on a course of action with your clients?" "How are your relationships with your colleagues involved in your thinking and behavior?"

This case study approach highlights the problem of researcher deduction skills. It is likely that practitioners will not have ready answers to such questions as are posed in this protocol. They will have to be encouraged to think expansively about the protocol questions and to reflect genuinely and profoundly on their responses. Their responses may not be clear nor in concise form; the practitioner-informants may not know what they believe about these questions and will need to ramble a bit and to

try out thoughts on themselves that may not have been explored previously. The researcher needs to skillfully probe and to patiently encourage the informants and to offer deductive comments even during the interviews. It is likely that the researcher will need time after the interviews to think about what was said and, most importantly, *what was meant*. This form of thinking on the part of the researcher should result in insightful or penetrating conceptual categories of information that then may need to be confirmed or explored further by the researcher and the informant. Thus, follow up interviews may be necessary until the findings are clear and confirmable.

Ideally, several individual practitioner cases need to be created in this study to enable triangulation of findings and/or saturation of conceptual categories. Constant comparative analysis (Glaser, 1978) could and probably should be used in these studies for maximum benefit to understanding the research questions posed. Each case should be used to better inform the researcher in each subsequent case to enhance ever-refined and perceptive conclusions.

Such work as this might be used to develop theory about practitioner application of knowledge. This exciting possibility may go beyond the scope of recommendations of this paper, however, where more modest outcomes are expected.

RQ4b: Do student users of selected educational programs and services that are guided by the use of CAS standards and guidelines perceive a benefit to their learning and development that they ascribe to (a) participation in the program(s) or service(s) or (b) to the professional conduct of service providers? This type of case study requires student-client informants who are able to be reflective about what they know and are able to do. They also must be articulate enough to think deeply about their experiences in much the same fashion as was suggested in the first type of case study proposed. The interview protocol may need to be supplemented by critical observations of student behavior, perhaps observed in classes or in organizations. The researcher might then note specific behaviors engaged in by the students—perhaps even unconsciously—and explore these observed behaviors in intensive interviews. This exploration begins with the researcher seeing behavior of interest in informants, then proceeding to seek explanations of the origins or basis of the observed behaviors through individual and group interviews. While individual interviews have some very important and distinctive advantages of pursuing information from interviewees thoroughly, group interviews may also have some distinctive advantages because of the social nature of the event where members of the group may be stimulated by comments made by other members and, thus, can offer thoughts of their own that may never have occurred to them if the interview had been conducted one-on-one.

The same problem of researcher deduction as noted in the first case study type exists in this type also. The researcher must hear and observe acutely to enable interpretation that can be triangulated and confirmed. In the end, the researcher wants to be able to say whether, and if so to what extent, participation in specific program or service activities contributed to the observed behaviors. Further, the

researcher wants to be able to say what behaviors, if any, of professional service providers contributed to the observed behaviors in student-clients.

RQ4c: Are educational programs and services that are guided by CAS standards and guidelines more effective than similar programs and services that are not guided by CAS standards and guidelines? [Alternatively] What is the influence of adopting CAS standards and guidelines on program effectiveness?

Case selection is crucial in this type of study. Specification of the dependent variable, program effectiveness, also is crucial. Perhaps the study could be conducted within a single institution where two programs are judged to be equally effective (that is, determine the dependent variable first) but where one program embraces CAS standards and guidelines and one does not. Care also should be exercised to equalize, if possible, environmental constraints and opportunities for each program. It may be unfair, for example, to compare Greek life programs with career services. The former has some programmatically uncontrollable conditions (such as student irresponsibility) that likely would not affect career services. It would help if the two programs also were of comparable size, perceived value to division goals, and funding adequacy. An interesting possibility for case selection might be to select units of career services (where CAS standards and guidelines are adopted), counseling services (where counseling center standards are adopted, but not CAS standards and guidelines), and campus activities (where no particular external standards have been adopted). A comparison of these cases where the units hold similar characteristics and value to the institution could be very informative.

This study may have elements of both an intrinsic and instrumental case study (Stake, 1994) since the study is driven by research questions, but also invites exploration of any aspect of the programs under study that contribute to program effectiveness. Perhaps this study could be labeled a collective case study (Stake, 1994) where the study of the instrumental nature of each case chosen is the primary focus of study. Given an authoritative perception of equal effectiveness within the division and/or the institution, the study should attempt to discern the contribution, if any, of adoption or application of CAS standards and guidelines to program effectiveness. No doubt, multiple forms of data or information about program functioning need to be collected—such as through observations, document analyses, and interviews—and a careful analysis of findings is required to reveal whether programs using CAS standards and guidelines are more effective than those not using them.

Reflective Narrative Inquiry Research

Narrative inquiry as a method creates exemplars or models of inquiry for others to try out. Exemplars are models of how practice works (Lyons & Kubler LaBoskey, 2002). They may take the form of stories of critical events that accurately portray the educational process through the eyes of the storyteller. These stories then become the focus of critical discussion and analysis by practicing professionals to better understand their work and its effects on students. Lyons and Kubler LaBoskey

(2002) write about how teaching is not merely about the transmission of information, but is about the construction of knowledge and meaning by individual practitioners. Addressing the process of validation of exemplars, Lyons and Kubler LaBoskey (2002, p. 6) assert,

We believe that the process is one of the ways that teachers, teacher-educators, and researchers do in fact revise and refine their practices: by trying them out. In this way, the validity of claims can be tested through discussion by those who have themselves tried a practice: the knowledge of practices is warranted through a process of social construction.

Narratives or exemplars of practice allow practitioners to understand more fully why the narrative occurred. They reflect real human actions and permit practitioners and researchers the opportunity to "... interrogate some puzzle or compelling question..." (Lyons & Kubler LaBoskey, 2002, p. 29). This process of interrogation involves thinking about and discussing with colleagues plausible explanations for the narrative that may lead to testing of current theories and/or developing new theories to predictably explain common occurrences in educational practice.

RQ5: How does professional behavior influence student learning and development? Is professional behavior influenced by formal adoption of CAS standards and guidelines? This approach to studying the effects of selected professional practices on student learning and development requires that a practitioner function as a scientist constantly engaged in the process of observing all aspects of what occurs in the course of practice, including what is done consciously and what reactions occur in clients. Such a practitioner/scientist must be constantly alert to what is happening in his or her work and grow accustomed to making critical notes or observations about all relevant aspects of the work. Such behavior will invariably lead to observations of patterns of behaviors/effects and most likely some of them will defy easy explanation but will appear to be critically related to successful practice. Consider, for example, some common academic advising puzzles: Why are students so dependent upon educators for guidance in making and carrying out their educational plans? Why is a student unmotivated to learn or to take necessary actions to learn even though he/she is paying substantial sums of money for the privilege? Why does providing students official answers to their questions often result in the same students asking the same questions over and over of advisors? Perhaps the practitioner/scientist could construct one or more real-life narratives or stories of actual experiences with students, then engage in a process of interrogation of the narrative until the inquiry reveals dependable insights.

For this paper, intended to propose ways of conducting research into the effects of the use of CAS standards and guidelines, perhaps a group of practitioners within a common functional area could be taught the skills and behaviors of observation of professional practice and narrative construction to capture critical puzzles or problems that emerge from their practice pertaining to the use of standards. Perhaps they might consider questions like these: "What good does the use of standards

do?” “Do practitioners value standards of practice? If so, why? If not, why not?” “When influence of standards occurs, is the influence more on policy or on practice?” Practitioners could be challenged then to construct narratives from their everyday work that seems to fit one or more of these questions. Analysis of constructed narratives could be accomplished through a series of structured and unstructured dialogues or focused conversations. The researcher, of course, must be privy to all aspects of this process—perhaps even engaged in it—and would be responsible for recording insights of the practitioners in a systematic and well-organized manner.

There are two major benefits to the reflective narrative inquiry. First, the process teaches practitioners critical skills, attitudes, and predilections to action that should be useful in everyday practice. Practitioners learn the value of collecting, organizing, and analyzing information arising from their own day-to-day experiences. The conditions and consequences of professional behavior yield legitimate data and are available to all observant educational practitioners if they pay attention to everything happening around them and take some straightforward action to record what they experience. In this process, practitioners learn to learn from their own work and learn that they have access to valuable data that may benefit themselves and other practitioners if properly studied, analyzed, and disseminated.

The second major benefit to reflective narrative inquiry is its capacity to reveal insights into sometimes-intangible conditions of learning. The assertion that “we deal with un-measurable phenomena” is not defensible for a researcher (or for policy makers) and this method provides a sensitive methodology to uncover aspects of professional practice that practitioners are not accustomed to articulating and may not be sufficiently revealed by use of other research methods.

Summary

While the use of CAS standards and guidelines is increasing in student affairs, research into the effects of such use on student learning and development, practitioner behavior, and program effectiveness is lacking. This paper presented three general approaches to advancing knowledge about the use of these standards and guidelines through research—descriptive surveys, case studies, and reflective narrative inquiries. In each approach, illustrative research questions were posed and suggestions made about how the questions might be addressed. Suggestions in this paper may give guidance to practitioners and researchers about how to investigate these important areas, but there are no easy answers and the paper makes no pretense of this.

It is hoped that practitioner/researchers will conduct some of the needed studies and that they will move beyond the suggested research approaches to designs of their own that will lead to substantial additions to current knowledge about the benefits or effects of using CAS standards and guidelines in practice.

References

- Arminio, J. (2002). *After 16 years of publishing standards, does CAS make a difference?* Unpublished manuscript, Shippensburg University, Shippensburg, PA.
- Best, J. W. (1993). *Research in education* (7th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Bryan, W. A., & Mullendore, R. H. (1991). Operationalizing CAS standards for program evaluation. In W. A. Bryan, R. B., Winston, Jr., & T. K. Miller (Eds.), *Using professional standards in student affairs* (pp. 29-44). New Directions for Student Services, Number 53. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Bryan, W. A., Winston, R. B., Jr., & Miller, T. K. (1991). *Using professional standards in student affairs*. New Directions for Student Services, Number 53. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education. (2002). *General standards*. Washington, D. C.: Author. Retrieved January 2003 from <http://filebox.vt.edu/users/dgc2/cas/generalstandards.html>
- Cooper, D. L., & Saunders, S. A. (2000). The perceived importance of the CAS standards: Implications for practice. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 19(2), 71-81.
- Creamer, D. G., & Mable, P. (2002). *Annual report of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education*. Available at: <http://filebox.vt.edu/users/dgc2/cas/executivecommittee.html>
- Glaser, B. G. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity: Advances in the methodology of grounded theory*. Miller Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
- Jacoby, B., & Thomas, W. L., Jr. (1986). Introduction to the CAS "standards and guidelines for commuter student programs and services." *NASPA Journal*, 24, 55-57.
- Jacoby, B., & Thomas, W. L., Jr. (1991). Professional standards and the accreditation process. In W. A. Bryan, R. B., Winston, Jr., & T. K. Miller (Eds.), *Using professional standards in student affairs* (pp. 19-28). New Directions for Student Services, Number 53. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lyons, N., & Kubler LaBoskey, V. (Eds.). (2002). *Narrative inquiry in practice: Advancing the knowledge of teaching*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Materniak, G., & Williams, A. (1987). CAS standards and guidelines for learning assistance programs. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 11(1), 12-18.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (1989). *Research in education: A conceptual introduction* (2nd ed.). Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman.
- Miller, T. K. (1991). Using standards in professional preparation. In W. A. Bryan, R. B., Winston, Jr., & T. K. Miller (Eds.), *Using professional standards in student affairs* (pp. 45-62). New Directions for Student Services, Number 53. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Miller, T. K. (Ed.). (2001). *The book of professional standards for higher education*. Washington, DC: Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education.
- Stake, R. E. (1994). Case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 236-247). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Winston, R. B., Jr., & Creamer, D. G. (1997). *Improving staffing practices in student affairs*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Winston, R. B., Jr., & Moore, W. S. (1991). Standards and outcomes assessment: Strategies and tools. In W. A. Bryan, R. B., Winston, Jr., & T. K. Miller (Eds.), *Using professional standards in student affairs* (pp. 63-82). New Directions for Student Services, Number 53. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.