

The Functions of College and University Student Personnel Workers

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THERE has been a phenomenal growth of student personnel services in the past few decades, leading to the integration of student personnel services as an important part of American higher education. Thus, both individuals and various national student personnel associations have focused attention on the professional preparation of student personnel workers. Since the development of a relevant professional preparation curriculum is best predicated upon the purposes and functions of the profession itself, these areas have been of particular interest to many investigators. As Mueller has noted: "The knowledge and skills required for personnel work have been listed and classified by many individuals and by appointed committees of the professional associations, and hardly a year goes by without some published opinions or data on this subject."¹

One of the great difficulties, however, in determining programs of professional preparation is in defining and categorizing the functions, or activities, of student personnel work. Some authors, for example, have discussed the functions of student personnel work in specific detail, while others have viewed the functions in broader philosophical terms. In 1937, for example, a committee of the American Council on Education issued a report listing twenty-three specific activities of student personnel workers.² The list included such activities as educational and vocational guidance, housing, financial aids, health, and discipline. The functions of student personnel workers were generally discussed in these terms until 1952, when the Southern College Personnel Association approached the problem of functions in terms of the positions or jobs which should be encompassed in an ideal training program. The SCPA suggested thirteen positions, among them the dean of women, the dean of men, the director of student activities, a director of remedial services, a foreign student adviser, etc.³

¹ Kate Mueller, *Student Personnel Work in Higher Education*, (Boston, 1968), p. 536.

² "Student Personnel Point of View," *American Council on Education Studies*, Ser. 1, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1937).

³ *Report of the Work Conference*, Southern College Personnel Association, Warren Wilson College, Swannanoa, North Carolina, 1952.

The contributors to the 1958 *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, however, tended to take a broader, more abstract approach to the study of the functions of student personnel work. Bennett, for example isolated seventeen functions, and then divided them into two major categories—six in the "leadership in an evolving program" category and eleven in the "direct services to individuals" section.⁴ A few years later, Wrenn in his book *The Counselor in a Changing World*, also took a more philosophical approach to the problem of functions. He maintained there were four basic functions in any counseling program: (1) Counseling students about self-understanding, decision making, and planning; (2) consulting with staff and parents regarding student understanding and planning; (3) studying changes in student population and continually interpreting these changes to administration, faculty and parents; and (4) being a liaison between other school and community resources.⁵ Wrenn's study was followed by numerous reports from individuals and committees. One of the better known of these studies was prepared by the Committee on Professional Development of the American College Personnel Association. The Committee concluded that there were ten basic functions of student personnel work. According to the report these ten functions could be categorized into three major divisions: (1) functions which facilitated individual growth; (2) functions leading and controlling the program; and (3) functions related to accumulating and analyzing relevant student personnel information.⁶ Possibly, the most comprehensive report on the functions of the profession, however, was prepared by the Council of Student Personnel Associations in Higher Education in 1964. The authors of this report argued that there were nineteen fundamental functions of student personnel work, and that these activities could be divided into three major areas; nine administrative functions, six educational functions, and four professional functions.⁷

⁴ Margaret E. Bennett, "Functions and Procedures in Personnel Services," *58th Yearbook of the NSSE* (Chicago, 1959), pp. 103-133.

⁵ Gilbert C. Wrenn, *The Counselor in a Changing World*, American Personnel and Guidance Association (Washington, D.C., 1963), p. 141.

⁶ *The Function and Preparation of College Student Personnel Workers*, American College Personnel Association, unpublished manuscript (1965).

⁷ *A Proposal for Professional Preparation in College Student Personnel Work: A First Report of the Commission on Professional Development*, Council of Student Personnel Associations in Higher Education, (1964).

All of these reports were alike insofar as they assumed the existence of a core of functions appropriate to all student personnel programs. It was further assumed that these core functions could and should serve as the basis for the development of a professional preparation program. While there is general agreement regarding the functions, little systematic study has been done to verify the similarities generally apparent in these reports.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This study was designed to determine the functions of student personnel workers in higher education in order to develop a program of professional preparation.⁸ The COSPA report of 1964 with its list of nineteen functions, was the basic document used for developing the survey form used in this study. The survey form was tested on three groups of approximately thirty respondents each representing practicing college student personnel workers.

Data depended upon responses from two different groups. The first group (the Selected Sample) consisted of 310 members of the student personnel profession selected by the officers of the COSPA organizations: AACRAO, ACPA, ACU-I, ACAC, ACUHO, NAFSA, NASPA, NAWDC, and CPC. Each officer was asked to select 15 representatives from his organization whom he considered to be "most qualified to contribute to a study of this nature." Of the 310 members in the Selected Sample, 217 (70 per cent) returned useable surveys. The 30 per cent who did not return surveys included 11 per cent who acknowledged the letter asking them to participate. These 11 per cent did not participate for one of the following reasons: (1) they did not have enough time; (2) they disagreed with the assumptions; (3) they did not feel qualified; or (4) they indicated the survey was too difficult. The 19 per cent who did not respond were compared on title, state, and sex with those who did respond by either a return or acknowledgement of the survey. The groups were similar with respect to these characteristics.

The second group (the Expert Panel) consisted of 15 members of the student personnel profession recommended by recent presidents of ACPA and APGA. The Expert Panel members represented three important dimensions of student personnel work—counselor educators,

⁸ Terry U. O'Banion, "Program Proposal for Preparing College Student Personnel Workers," *Journal of College Student Personnel*, July, 1969.

student personnel educators, and deans of students. Five members were chosen to represent each of these areas for a total Expert Panel of 15 members. All members of the Expert Panel returned their survey form, but one member answered in the form of a long letter, and it was impossible to categorize the response. Therefore, the data reflected the responses of only 14 of the 15 Expert Panel members.

Functions were defined in this study as the non-instructional activities designed to support the instructional program, respond to student needs, and foster institutional development: thus, functions were viewed as the means for accomplishing the goals of student personnel work. The nineteen functions of the COSPA study were grouped as to (1) administrative functions, (2) educational functions, and (3) professional functions. The participants ranked each function by indicating whether they considered the function a) *Essential* to student personnel work, b) *Desirable but not essential* to student personnel work, or c) *Unimportant* to student personnel work. Only the essential responses of the Selected Sample and Expert Panel were presented. The Selected Sample responses were considered the primary data for the study because of the sample number and the breadth of representation. The Expert Panel responses were used to supplement those of the Selected Sample.

A critical level for the responses of the Selected Sample was established in order to determine the relative importance of each function. Consequently, all items rated essential by two-thirds of the Selected Sample were considered important to student personnel work and included in the design of the professional education program. Items rated essential by less than two-thirds of the Selected Sample but by more than one-third of this group were considered desirable but not essential to student personnel work and for inclusion in the design of a professional education program. Items rated essential by less than one-third of the Selected Sample were considered unimportant to student personnel work and irrelevant to the design of a professional education program.

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

The 19 functions were divided into three categories on the survey form: nine administrative functions; six educational functions; and four professional functions.

The first group, those of an administrative nature, referred to the

activities of the administrator of the offices that provide personnel services for students (see Table I). Of these nine administrative functions, "Determining objectives and planning, organizing, and coordinating the student personnel program," was rated essential by 95 per cent of the Selected Sample and by 100 per cent of the Expert Panel. "Selecting, training, and supervising the student personnel staff," was also considered important, for it was rated essential by 92 per cent of the Selected Sample and 93 per cent of the Expert Panel. According to the respondents "determining student personnel program objectives" and "selecting and supervising the staff for such programs" seemed to be undisputed functions of student personnel administrators.

TABLE I
ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTIONS
TERMED ESSENTIAL BY SELECTED SAMPLE AND EXPERT PANEL

<i>Administrative Functions</i>	<i>Selected Sample</i> %	<i>Expert Panel</i> %
1. Formulating policy	75.6	100.0
2. Selecting staff	91.7	92.9
3. Determining objectives	95.4	100.0
4. Planning facilities	49.8	50.0
5. Planning budgets	76.5	57.1
6. Applying principles of administration	68.2	71.4
7. Communicating with relevant groups	73.3	85.7
8. Acting as a catalyst	65.9	85.7
9. Conducting research	57.1	64.3

There was some disagreement between the Selected Sample and the Expert Panel, however, on "Participating in the policy formulation of the institution." Although all Expert Panel members rated it essential, only three-fourths (76 per cent) of the Selected Sample agreed with the Panel members. Fifty per cent of each group believed that, "Planning and managing physical facilities related to the program of student personnel services," was essential for student personnel administrators. Planning student personnel budgets was deemed essential by 77 per cent of the Selected Sample, but only 57 per cent of the Expert Panel agreed to its importance. Approximately 70 per cent of each group indicated that, "Identifying, analyzing, and solving problems through the application of principles of administration," was essential. "Communicating with relevant groups" was judged essential by 73 per cent of the Selected Sample and 86 per cent of the Expert

Panel. The function, "Acting as a catalyst for institutional and student response to changing conditions," was rated essential by 66 per cent of the Selected Sample; however, 86 per cent of the Expert Panel rated it essential. "Conducting research" was not perceived as essential by either of the groups: only 57 per cent of the Selected Sample and 64 per cent of the Expert Panel rated this function essential.

The second group of functions, those of an educational nature (see Table II), involve the student personnel worker more directly with the student in providing a service. An essential rating was given by 87 per cent of the Selected Sample and 100 per cent of the Expert Panel to "helping students to examine, define, and strengthen their values and to learn to act responsibly in their academic, social, and civic relationships." Similarly, 86 per cent of the Selected Sample and 93 per cent of the Expert Panel gave an essential rating to the function, "Counseling students on various kinds and levels of problems."

In contrast, "Advising students concerning courses and programs," received a vote of only 20 per cent of the Selected Sample and 36 per cent of the Expert Panel. The function of counseling students was supported by a large majority of the participants in this study, but the function of advising students on academic matters was rated less essential than any other function.

Seventy-one per cent of the Selected Sample and 86 per cent of the Expert Panel rated, "Interpreting institutional policies, procedures, and goals to students and other relevant groups," essential. Conversely, almost half the respondents felt that teaching human relations skills was not an essential function for the student personnel worker. Approximately two-thirds of both the Selected Sample (66 per cent) and the Expert Panel (64 per cent) believed that the development of student activities was a major student personnel function.

TABLE II
EDUCATIONAL FUNCTIONS
TERMED ESSENTIAL BY SELECTED SAMPLE AND EXPERT PANEL

<i>Educational Functions</i>	<i>Selected Sample</i> %	<i>Expert Panel</i> %
10. Helping students examine values	86.6	100.0
11. Counseling students	86.2	92.9
12. Advising students	19.8	35.7
13. Interpreting policies	71.0	85.7
14. Teaching human relations skills	47.9	57.1
15. Stimulating the development of student activities	66.4	64.3

TABLE III
PROFESSIONAL FUNCTIONS
TERMED ESSENTIAL BY SELECTED SAMPLE AND EXPERT PANEL

<i>Professional Functions</i>	<i>Selected Sample %</i>	<i>Expert Panel %</i>
16. Developing professional philosophy	71.4	92.9
17. Maintaining professional communications	68.6	71.4
18. Promoting recruitment and education	56.2	71.4
19. Aiding in placement	47.0	35.7

The third group of functions, those of a professional nature, (see Table III), referred to the activities of the student personnel worker as a professional person.

Seventy-one per cent of the Selected Sample rated "Developing and strengthening the professional philosophy, ethics, and standards of student personnel work" essential; 93 per cent of the Expert Panel agreed. More than two-thirds of each group believed that student personnel workers should maintain professional communication with other members of their profession. Seventy-one per cent of the Expert Panel considered "Promoting the recruitment and professional education of qualified persons in the student personnel profession" essential, but only 56 per cent of the Selected Sample agreed. "Aiding in the placement and advancement of those in the student personnel profession" received a larger percentage of the Selected Sample vote than the Expert Panel vote. Forty-seven per cent of the Selected Sample and 36 per cent of the Expert Panel felt this function was essential.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The rank order of 19 student personnel functions is illustrated in Table IV. Thirteen functions were considered essential to student personnel work and thus to the design of a professional program of study. The first twelve functions were considered essential to all student personnel programs in higher education by the Selected Sample. Ten of these 12 functions were also rated essential by two-thirds or more of the Expert Panel. The Panel did not consider "planning budgets" and "stimulating student activities" essential student personnel functions, but these activities were included in the essential list because of the high percentage of Selected Sample responses. "Acting as a catalyst" (No. 13) was also considered essential because of the high percentage (86 per cent) of Expert Panel responses and because it was rated essential by 66 per cent of the Selected Sample.

TABLE IV
FUNCTIONS
TERMED ESSENTIAL BY SELECTED SAMPLE AND EXPERT PANEL BY RANK ORDER

<i>Functions</i>	<i>Selected Sample</i> %	<i>Expert Panel</i> %
1. Determining objectives	95.4	100.0
2. Selecting staff	91.7	92.9
3. Helping students examine values	86.6	100.0
4. Counseling students	86.2	92.9
5. Planning budgets	76.5	57.1
6. Policy formulation	75.6	100.0
7. Communicating with relevant groups	73.3	85.7
8. Developing professional philosophy	71.4	92.9
9. Interpreting policies	71.0	85.7
10. Maintaining professional communications	69.1	71.4
11. Applying principles of administration	68.2	71.4
12. Stimulating activities	66.4	64.3
13. Acting as a catalyst	65.9	85.7
14. Conducting research	57.1	64.3
15. Promoting recruitment	56.2	71.4
16. Planning physical facilities	49.8	50.0
17. Teaching human relations	47.9	57.1
18. Aiding in placement	47.0	35.7
19. Advising students on academic programs	19.8	35.7

Less than two-thirds but more than one-third of the Selected Sample gave essential ratings to items 14 through 18 in Table IV. Items 14 through 18 were similarly rated by the Expert Panel except for "Promoting recruitment" which was rated essential by 71 per cent of the Expert Panel. Functions 14 through 18 in Table IV, therefore, were categorized as desirable but not essential to a student personnel program in higher education.

"Advising students on academic programs" was rated essential by 19 per cent of the Selected Sample and 36 per cent of the Expert Panel. In terms of rank order, "advising students on academic programs" was rated the lowest of all 19 functions by both the Selected Sample and Expert Panel.

According to this study the 13 essential functions of student personnel work in higher education are:

1. Determining objectives and planning, organizing, and coordinating the student personnel program.
2. Selecting, training, and supervising the student personnel staff.
3. Helping students to examine, define, and strengthen their values and to learn to act responsibly in their academic, social, and civic relationships.

4. Counseling students on various kinds and levels of problems.
5. Planning and administering student personnel budgets.
6. Participating in the policy formulation of the institution.
7. Communicating with all appropriate and relevant groups in the institution and the community.
8. Developing and strengthening the professional philosophy, ethics, and standards of student personnel work.
9. Interpreting institutional policies, procedures, and goals to students and other relevant groups.
10. Maintaining professional communications with other student personnel workers.
11. Identifying, analyzing, and solving problems through the application of principles of administration.
12. Stimulating the development of meaningful student activities.
13. Acting as a catalyst for institutional and student response to changing conditions.

Any list of general student personnel functions in higher education that fails to include these should be seriously questioned. Additional functions, especially "conducting research," "planning facilities," and "teaching human relations" should be carefully considered for the development of a comprehensive student personnel program although these functions were not considered essential by the respondents in this study.

The function "Advising students concerning courses and programs" is not essential for student personnel work according to this study. It was clearly rejected by both the Selected Sample and the Expert Panel. Advising students on courses and programs is primarily a function of the teaching faculty and not of the student personnel staff. The student personnel staff should probably have, however, some responsibility for coordinating or administering the academic advising program, but respondents in this study reject the idea that student personnel workers should work directly with students in academic advising.

The functions of a student personnel program can describe only in a general way the activities of student personnel workers. The quality of performance of those functions reveals the essence of a student personnel program. To the extent that functions are important in organizing and evaluating a program, this study has contributed to a clearer definition of the major functions of student personnel workers in higher education.