Towards the Development of Competency Areas for Student Affairs and Services Administrators: Perspectives for Professionalization

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Abstract

The research is concerned primarily with establishing a set of competency areas for administrators of student affairs and services in the Philippines regardless of their area of specialization or positional role within the field. A total of twenty (20) representatives from major regions of the country participated in the study. The modified Delphi method was adopted as the process of obtaining data. There were nine competency areas presented, namely: Advising and Helping; Assessment; Evaluation, and Research; Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion; Ethical Professional Practice; Human and Organizational Resources; Law, Policy, and Governance; Leadership; Personal Foundations; and Student Learning and Development. It was found that: (1) the competency areas mentioned were relevant regardless of educational background, number of years in service, position or job designation, organization affiliation and type of school where they were working; (2) the competency areas presented were acknowledged and perceived to be most important and/or greatly important by administrators and practitioners of Student Affairs and Services; and (3) the identified competency areas may serve as guidelines for student affairs and services administrators toward the development of the profession.

Key words: Competency areas, student affairs, service administrators, perspectives, professionalization.

1. Introduction

The student affairs and services is one of the vital academic services of any College Institution or University in the Philippines. Its thrust is to promote holistic development of every student by complementing their studies with skills and formation programs that will enable them to become good and able citizen of the nation. However, the administrators of the said service come from various disciplines, with at least a bachelor's degree. Most of them are former campus advisers or former student leaders who have varied educational and cultural backgrounds, and they learn the dynamics of student affairs and services as they experience being one (Villanueva, 2009).

Moreover, their position and placement in the academic organization vary. Some of them report directly to the president of a tertiary institution, while others are under the authority of the vice-president for academic affairs. Some hold the position of a dean, while others are merely coordinators. Thus, the diversity of influence and effectiveness of such administrators may vary from one academic institution to another.

The aim of this study is to create a perspective on the specific competencies that an administrator of student affairs should have in order to help the administrator dispense his/her duties and responsibilities accordingly. Consequently, the said competencies may also be used as a basis for assessing the competencies of the current student affairs and services administrators. The result can be considered as basis for continuous professional development with the end in mind of creating better and innovative student programs towards the achievement of the students' holistic development.
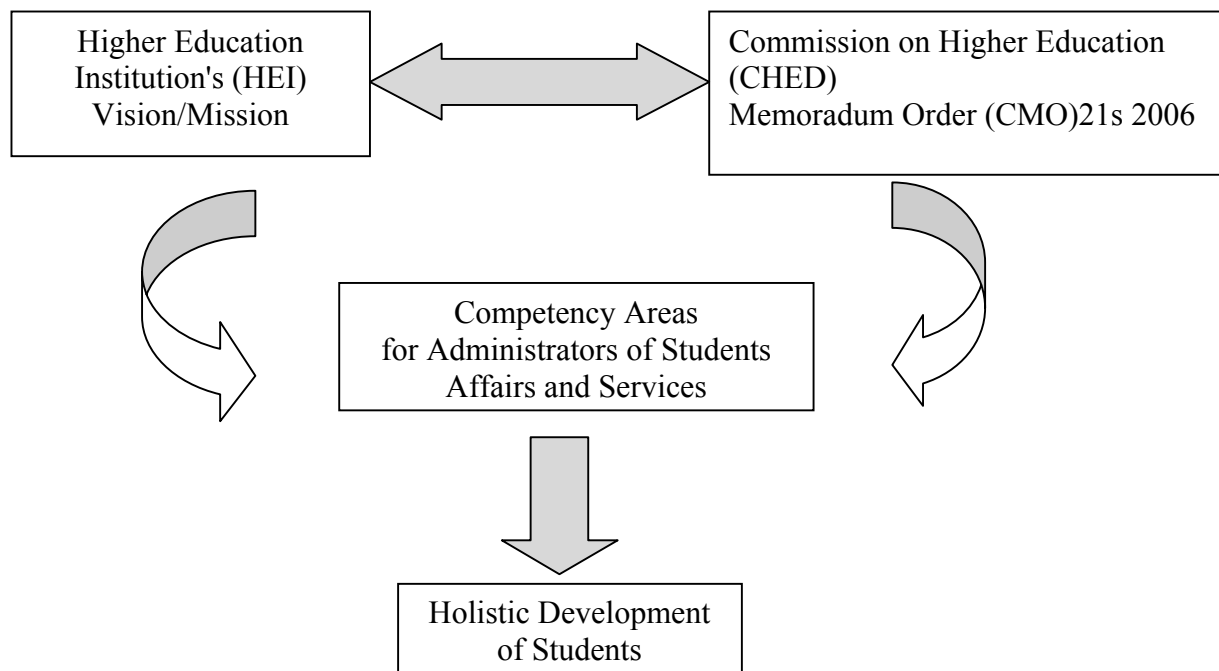
2. Research Framework

Figure 1: Research Framework

The vision and mission of the Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) has laid its foundations on the mandate of the 1987 Philippine Constitution which was geared towards becoming an excellent provider of education and to develop students holistically thereby becoming Filipino citizens that will manifest patriotism and promote nation building. The Office of the President Commission on Higher Education (CHED) is the government agency that was tasked to oversee the compliance of such mandate. In 2006, a CHED Memorandum #21 (Office of President Commission on Higher Education, 2006) issued a set of guidelines on how to comply with the mandate of promoting students' holistic development by acquiring life skills and values through various co-curricular and extra curricular programs and activities. This memorandum also requires all HEI's to dedicate an office to implement such programs and it should be called Student Affairs and Services department. However, the said memorandum did not prescribe a set of qualifications and competencies that an administrator of the student affairs and services should have.

A set of competency areas by an administrator of student affairs and services should be determined to enable the office to function according to the mandate of the government as well as the HEIs in producing a holistically developed students thereby becoming excellent professionals.

3. Literature Review

Meriam and Webster dictionary define competency as an ability or skill of doing something. Kuk, Cobb, and Forrest (2007) conducted a study on the perceptions of entry-level practitioners in student affairs regarding competencies. The focus of the study was to gain additional understanding of what professional competencies were considered important for entry-level practitioners by student affairs administrators and preparation program faculty, and whether these competencies were expected to be attained in either preparation programs or on the job. Significant differences were found between three surveyed groups related to both importance and where the competencies were expected to be attained. The findings have

implications for both preparation programs and the mentoring role of supervising administrators.

Templonuevo's (2007) study was about the life competency framework. First, he expounded on the different views about competencies in terms of number, context, nomenclature, competencies on the basis of their inherit nature. He put emphasis on the life competency as personal or enabling in nature and is very much a product of one's personal characteristics as well as intellectual and interpersonal skills and aptitudes. His study was seen as valuable in achieving workplace success and excellence.

Ludeman and Strange (2009) emphasized that higher education must be an agent of change in promoting ideals and values associated in world culture. While each country has its own unique principles, values, and beliefs, their tenets have universal appeal. Thus, its programs, activities, and services should be student-centered in nature which should promote the value of being a citizen of each country as well as the importance of community relationships both locally and internationally. Student affairs and services efforts have always been at the centre of recognizing cultural differences and, simultaneously, promoting universal values. Higher education student affairs and services are designed to provide access to higher education, enhance student retention and graduation rates, develop global citizenship skills, and provide society with new human capital and potential that can help everyone as we move forward toward a true family of nations. Education of students must be done in a holistic fashion, treating the student as a whole person (Ludeman, 2009)

There have been lots of studies conducted that are geared towards defining the set of professional standards for Student Affairs practitioners. As such, different perspectives came out and were considered. One of the milestones of this effort is the establishment of the Council for Advancement of Standards for Student Services/Development Programs (CAS) in March 1979. This council published general standards and guidelines for functional areas for student affairs. On July 24, 2010, American College Personnel Association (ACPA) - National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) jointly published the ACPA/NASPA Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Practitioners Preliminary Version. This document was published to "define the broad professional knowledge, skills, and for some competencies, attitudes expected of student affairs professionals, regardless of their area of specialization or positional role within the field. The said publication wishes to provide an opportunity to explore other areas of student affairs practices for future growth and development. The target group of this publication is the student affairs professionals practicing in the United States. Adaptation and utilization as deemed appropriate by other Student Affairs Administrators was encouraged (ACPA/NASPA Publication 7/24/2010).

With the related readings presented, this study intends to define a set of competency areas needed to address appropriately the challenges of developing students holistically to become good citizens of the Philippines as well as to acquire globally desired values.

4. Method

A modified Delphi Study was employed in this research. This study carefully considered competency areas identified by American College Personnel Association (ACPA)- National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) which was published in 2010, along with Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) (2006), and University City of Davis (UC Davis Staff Development and Professional Services, 2007) Student Affairs Officer Interview Guide of 2007. These were evaluated and analyzed in the light of the Office of the President Commission on Higher Education Memo (CMO) 21s2006 guidelines. Related studies locally and internationally were likewise considered in the development of a pre-determined set of structured competency areas that were used in this study.

A total of twenty (20) subject matter experts from the four major regions in the Philippines namely: Luzon, National Capital Region (NCR) Visayas, and Mindanao particpated in the study. The respondents were all Student Affairs and Services administrators with different job designations namely: Vice-President, Dean, Director, Head, and Coordinator. Their number of years in their respective profession ranged from 1 to 25 years. Majority of them (65%) were master's degree holders, while 30% were doctorate degree holders and 5% were bachelor's degree holders. They were selected to develop competency areas for student affairs and services administrators in the Philippines. School representation consisted of 50% from private universities, 30% from private colleges, and 20% from state colleges and universities.

A perception survey was deployed to the chosen participants. It made use of a series of carefully selected pre-defined statements from nine competency areas adopted from ACPA-NASPA Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Practitioners (ACPA-NASPA, July2010). There were nine competency areas presented, namely: Advising and Helping with ten descriptive statements; Assessment, Evaluation, and Research with six descriptive statements; Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion with eleven descriptive statements; Ethical Professional Practice with five descriptive statements, Human and Organizational Resources with eleven descriptive statements; Law, Policy, and Governance with five descriptive statements; Leadership with eleven descriptive statements; Personal Foundations with eleven descriptive statements; and Student Learning and Development with eleven descriptive statements. There was a total of 81 items presented to the panel of experts.

The competency areas were interspersed with information summaries and feedbacks from preceding responses. Furthermore, the results were validated through the conduct of focus group discussion participated by the student leaders from different colleges and universities held in June, 2011.
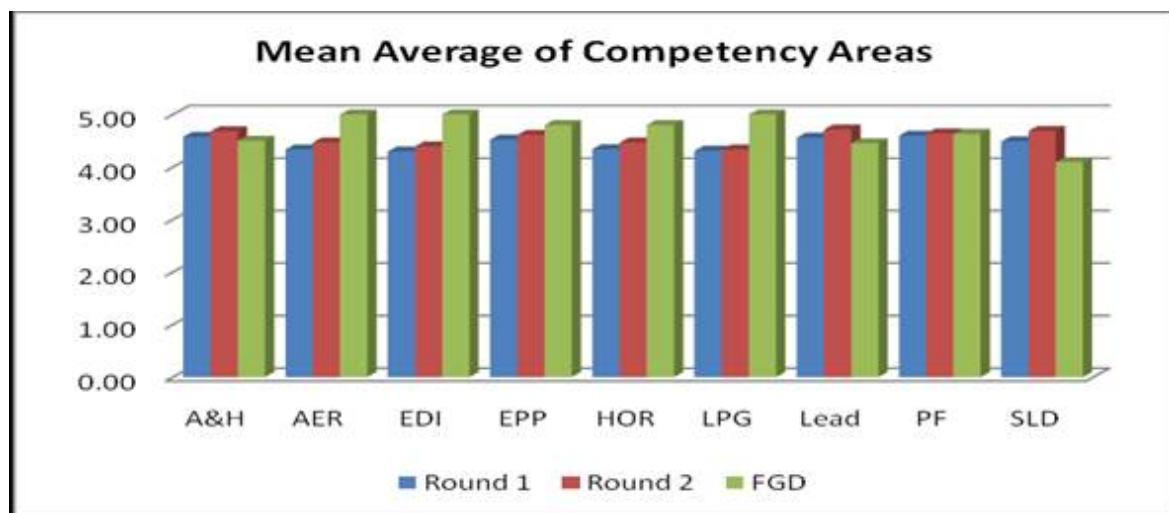
5. Results

Figure 2: Comparison of the Mean Average of Competency Areas

All the nine competency areas were presented and accepted by the panel of experts as well as their major clients who were the students. Figure 2 below presented the summary of the mean average obtained after the conduct of the survey. The competency areas that were perceived to be of most importance as they garnered a general weighted average of greater than 4.5 after Round 2 were the following: Advising and Helping(A&H) (4.68), Ethical and Professional Practice (EPP) (4.42), Leadership (Lead) (4.71), Professional Foundations (PF)

(4.64), and Student Learning (SLD) (4.69). On the other hand, the competency areas that were perceived to be of great importance as they garnered a general weighted average of less than 4.5 were the following: Assessment, Evaluation and Research (AER) (4.47), Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) (4.39), Human and Organizational Resources (HOR) (4.46), and Law, Policy, and Governance (LPG) (4.33).

Obtaining an inter-quartile range score of less than 1.2 (Zeliff and Heldenbrand, 1993) is an indication of reaching the consensus of the respondents. Figure 3 below exhibited that the result after Round 1 has initially indicated that this study has already reached the consensus of the respondents. This means that the competency areas presented to them were perceived to be important in the practice of the profession. The result of Round 2 further strengthens the consensus of the respondents as shown in the improvement in the result of the inter-quartile range which obtained a score of 0.90. All descriptive items under each competency area were able to reach the respondents' consensus as they obtained an inter-quartile deviation (IQD) of less than 1.20.

A focused group discussion conducted with randomly selected students from different universities and colleges in the National Capital Region and Luzon was able to confirm the perception of the student affairs and services administrators as it yielded a result parallel to them. Though the general weighted average had minimal variations, the result showed that the competencies presented were of great importance and of most importance. Moreover, it yielded a consensus as it obtained IQD results of 1 and 0 intermittently for all competency areas presented.

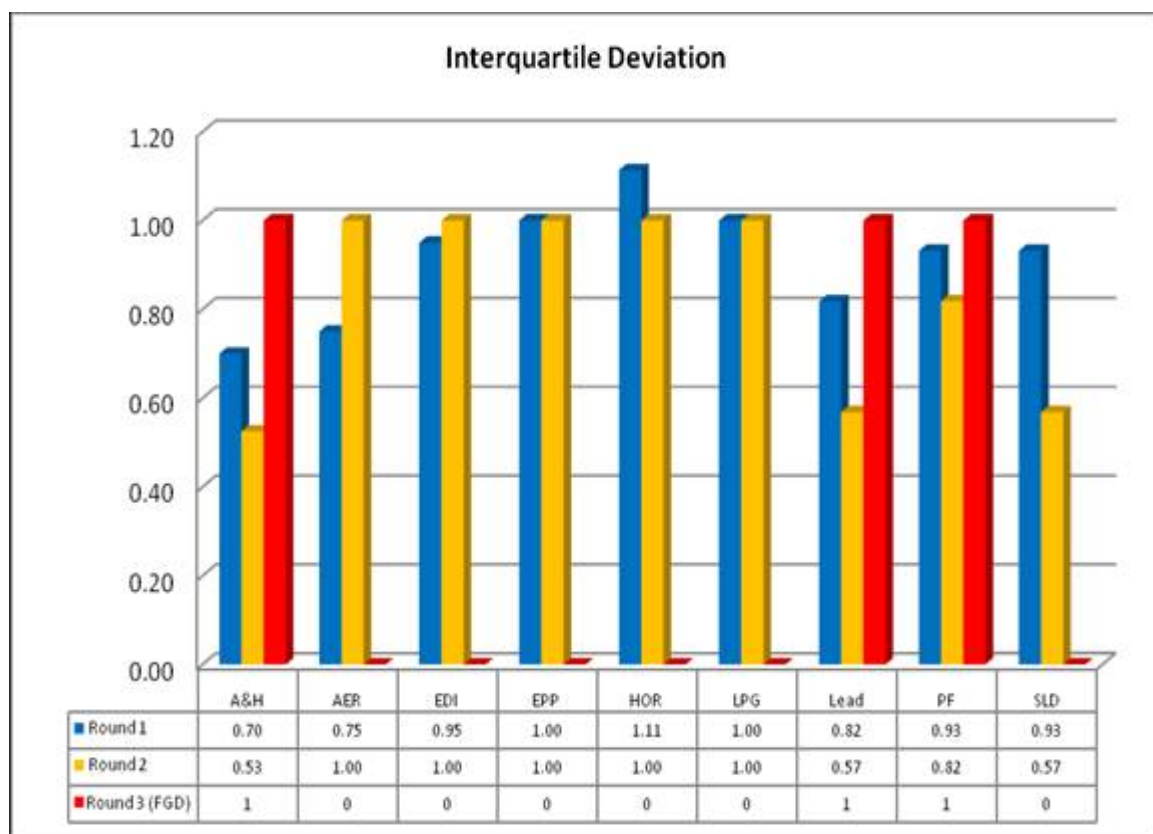|	A&H	AER	EDI	EPP	HOR	LPG	Lead	PF	SLD
Round 1	0.70	0.75	0.95	1.00	1.11	1.00	0.82	0.93	0.93
Round 2	0.53	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.57	0.82	0.57
Round 3 (FGD)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0

Figure 3: Comparison of the Inter-Quartile Deviation obtained in Three Different Rounds were < 1.2.

The result of this study revealed the necessity of defining the parameters of the competencies appropriate for student affairs and services administrators. Furthermore, the competency areas presented were perceived and recognized to be of importance and therefore suggestive of their being accepted as relevant to the practice of the profession.

The study was undertaken mainly to pave the way to develop the competencies needed and appropriate for Student Affairs and Services administrators. The result of the study showed that the nine competency areas were perceived to be most important and / or greatly important for Student Affairs and Services administrators.

On the basis of the result of Delphi Technique and appropriate statistical treatment of data, the following conclusions are drawn. (1) The competency areas mentioned were relevant regardless of educational background, number of years in service, position or job designation, organization affiliation and type of school where they were working. (2) The competency areas presented were acknowledged and perceived to be most important and/or greatly important to administrators and practitioners of Student Affairs and Services. (3) The identified competency areas may serve as guidelines for student affairs and services administrators towards the development of the profession.

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6. Conclusion and Recommendation

The study was undertaken mainly to pave the way to develop the competencies needed and appropriate for Student Affairs and Services administrators. The result of the study showed that the nine competency areas were perceived to be most important for Student Affairs and Services administrators. The main objectives set forth have been achieved and the competencies considered necessary for Student Affairs and Services administrators have been recognized and acknowledged.

The identified competency areas may serve as guidelines for student affairs and services administrators in creating job description as well as job qualification for aspiring personnel who will assume the role or the position in a college and/or university. This could also be used as a tool for designing the personnel's continuous professional development.

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