Interpreting the CAS Standards for Academic Advising

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What is CAS?

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), founded in 1979, is a consortium of more than 43 professional associations (White, 2006, ¶ 1). The CAS Board, made of up two delegates from each member association, believes that "a standard to guide practice is an essential characteristic of any established profession" (CAS, 2009, p. 11). Thus it is vital that standards be developed and promulgated by and for those working in the arena (CAS, 2009, p. 8). CAS produces and promotes standards for functional areas aligned with student affairs roles within higher education (White, ¶ 1). CAS standards and guidelines are intended to "be used for design of new programs and services, for determining the efficacy of programs, for staff development, or for programmatic assessment as a part of an institutional self-study" (CAS, 2009, p. 11).

To be considered for inclusion by CAS a functional area must support student learning and development, endorse quality assurance, promote professional integrity, and have a sponsoring association (White, ¶ 1). The list of the CAS member associations includes NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising, the National Institute for the Study of Transfer, ACPA: College Student Educators International, the National Association of Student Affairs Professionals (NASPA), and the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) among others. A complete list of CAS member associations is available at http://cas.edu/

Of significance to those who advise are the CAS Standards and Guidelines for Academic Advising Programs (AAP). The AAP standards were developed by CAS member committees and endorsed by NACADA www.nacada.ksu.edu. It is important to note that while members of NACADA contributed to the AAP standards (and will contribute to the 2014 revision of AAP standards and guidelines), a vital component of each standard's strength is the fact that the standards were vetted and published by a third party (CAS) with a long and respected history in the student affairs profession.

CAS General Standards for all functional areas

CAS (2009) believes that there are identifiable commonalities across functional areas (p. 3). These common General Standards are included for all functional areas, including academic advising (AAP) and transfer student programs and services (TSPS). The General Standards include twelve criterion categories including:

1. Mission
2. Program
3. Organization and Leadership
4. Human Resources
5. Ethics
6. Law, Policy and Government
7. Diversity, Equity, and Access
8. Institutional and External Relations
9. Financial Resources
10. Technology
11. Facilities and Equipment
12. Assessment and Evaluation (CAS, at press).

Within each General Standard criteria category there are standards that **must** be followed (White, ¶ 5). For instance, one General Standard requirement within the Human Resources (No. 4) criteria category is that "***staff members must hold an earned graduate or professional degree in a field relevant to the position they hold or must possess an appropriate combination of educational credentials and related work experience"*** (CAS, at press).

As noted above, the CAS General Standards are included as "boilerplate language" in the standards for each functional area. All standards, be they General (boilerplate) Standards or standards applicable to a single functional area, are easily recognized by the inclusion of **must** as the verb in the statement. **Must** statements for General Standards (boilerplate) are highlighted in ***bold and italics*** in all CAS documents while standards (**must** statements) applicable only to individual functional areas are highlighted in non-italic **bold**.

For instance, in the Program (General Standard) criterion category 2 all functional areas *must:*
- *assess relevant and desirable student learning and development*
- *provide evidence of impact on outcomes*
- *articulate contributions to or support of student learning and development in the domains not specifically assessed*
- *articulate contributions to or support of student persistence and success*
- *use evidence gathered through this process to create strategies for improvement of programs and services*

Additionally, each functional area *must be*
- *intentionally designed*
- *guided by theories and knowledge of learning and development*
- *integrated into the life of the institution*
- *reflective of developmental and demographic profiles of the student population*
- *responsive to needs of individuals, populations with distinct needs, and relevant constituencies*
- *delivered using multiple formats, strategies, and contexts* **(CAS, at press).**

Another example of a **must** statement applicable to all functional areas is within General Standards Facilities and Equipment (criterion category No. 11) that states that **"the design of the facilities must guarantee the security and privacy of records and ensure the confidentiality of sensitive information"** (CAS, at press). The same General Standard criteria category notes that "**staff members must have workspace that is well-equipped, adequate in size, and designed to support their work and responsibilities. For conversations requiring privacy, staff members must have access to a private space** (CAS, at press).

Standards applicable to individual functional areas

Beyond the *must* statements in the General Standards criteria categories that apply to all functional areas, there are **must** statements crafted especially for each particular functional area. An example of a **must** statement within the Programs criteria category (No. 2) General Standard for Academic Advising Programs (AAP) is that advisors **must assist students to understand the educational context within which they are enrolled** (CAS, 2005, p. 3)**.** Another **must** statement in the Programs (No. 2) General Standard for AAP is that advisors **must evaluate and monitor student academic progress and the impact on achievement of goals** (CAS, 2005, p.4).

In the General Standards Facilities and Equipment Criteria category (No. 11) a standard specifically for AAP is **privacy and freedom from visual and auditory distractions must be considered in designing appropriate facilities** (CAS, at press).

Guidelines for individual functional areas

While standards are **must** statements all institutions should follow, CAS also provides guidelines that establish the criteria that every institution of higher education is expected to reach with reasonable effort and diligence (White, ¶ 5). "Guidelines are designed to provide suggestions and illustrations that can assist in establishing programs and services that more fully address the needs of students than those mandated by a standard. CAS guidelines appear in regular font and use the auxiliary verbs 'should' and 'may'" (CAS, 2005, ¶ 5). Although not required for acceptable practice, a guideline provides guidance in ways to exceed fundamental requirements, and should be used to help programs to function at more optimal levels (CAS, 2010).

Examples of Academic Advising Program (AAP) guidelines within the Program General Standard (No. 2) include:
- the ultimate responsibility for making decisions about educational plans and life goals should rest with the individual student
- AAP should provide information about student experiences and concerns regarding their academic program to appropriate decision makers.
- AAP should make available to academic advisors all pertinent research (e.g., about students, the academic advising program, and perceptions of the institution) (CAS, at press).

CAS Self Assessment Guides

As noted earlier CAS standards and guidelines are "used for design of new programs and services, for determining the efficacy of programs, for staff development, or for programmatic assessment as a part of an

institutional self-study" (CAS, 2009, p. 11). To aid institutional teams in the self assessment process CAS has developed and makes available (at the current cost of $35) Self Assessment Guides (SAGS) for each functional area. The SAGS break down each standard and guideline within a General Standard criteria category into measurable statements that self-study teams use to gain informed perspectives on the strengths and deficiencies of their programs and services and to plan for improvements (CAS, at press). An example of such a statement can be found in Academic Advising Program SAG 2.6

AAP is:		
2.6.1	integrated into the life of the institution
2.6.2	intentional and coherent
2.6.3	guided by theories and knowledge of learning and development
2.6.4	reflective to needs of individuals, diverse and special populations, and relevant constituencies.

(CAS, 2009b, p. 5)

Challenges for those who serve more than one functional area

It can be challenging when a practitioner serves in more than one functional area. Results of the NACADA 2011 national survey of academic advising (Carlstrom, at press) indicate that academic advisors routinely hold any one of more than twenty-two job responsibilities on campus (e.g. participate in new student orientation, help student explore career options, determine disabilities accommodations and work with transfer students).

Advisors who work in several different functional areas should understand the CAS Standards and Guidelines for each area to help students meet their goals. Additionally, understanding applicable CAS standards will help advisors work with campus decision makers to develop and improve services and programs that support student success.

How to access the CAS Standards and Guidelines for functional areas

The CAS Standards (**must** statements) and Guidelines ("should" and "may" statements) discussed above are examples of the comprehensive CAS standards and guidelines for more than 43 functional areas. The Academic Advising Programs (AAP) standards and guidelines are included in this manual and are linked from the NACADA website at http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Standards.htm#CAS. The complete Standards and Guidelines for the other 42 functional areas usually are linked from the sponsoring association's website (e.g., standards for transfer student programs and services are linked from the National Institute for the Study of Transfer http://transferinstitute.unt.edu/).

White (2005) noted that in an era where accountability is often the final word, professionals must monitor their own practices, set their own standards, seek to achieve these standards. We owe it to our students to provide the highest quality programs and services we can. When we use CAS Standards and Guidelines, we demonstrate our commitment to student success (¶ 16).

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