

## **A competency-based approach to the master's degree preparation of higher education professionals**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this manuscript is to describe a competency-based approach to designing and assessing master's level professional preparation programs in the field of higher education administration. Given the absence of a universal set of competencies defined for HEA master's degree programs, the authors draw from the CAHEP (2010) and Wright (2007) general guidelines for HEA graduate programs, and the literature pertaining to graduate competencies and outcomes that are specific to early career student affairs positions. The competency-based approach described here contributes to the literature on competency-based assessment models for master's level graduate programs, and has utility for faculty and administrators seeking to assess professional master's programs, especially those that lack nationally defined standards or certification.

Keywords: higher education administration, competency-based assessment, graduate programs

While the quality of undergraduate education in the United States is the source of substantial debate among policymakers, scholars, and the general public (e.g., Arum & Roksa, 2011), master's degrees receive considerably less attention. Yet their popularity is on the rise. In 1987, U.S. universities awarded 290,000 master's degrees, a number that more than doubled to 670,000 by 2009 (Jaquette, 2011). Although over two fifths of contemporary undergraduates go on to receive master's degrees (Jaquette, 2011), whether these degree programs effectively prepare students for success in their fields is an open question.

Ascertaining master's program quality and associated student outcomes is critical, especially given increasing external pressures for colleges and universities to be accountable for all students' success (Palomba & Banta, 2001). Yet the vast majority of models to assess academic programs focus on the undergraduate level. Maki and Brokowski (2006) recently drew attention to the need to better document doctoral student learning and career outcomes, but despite the expanding enrollments in master's degree programs, consideration of how to define and document student success at this level has been comparatively scant (Delaney, 1998).

Professional fields, which include business, social work, engineering, journalism, public administration, and education, represent the vast majority of master's degrees (Conrad et al., 1998; Conrad, Haworth, & Millar, 1993; Sun, 2004). Some institutions assess graduate students using common standards, regardless of field (e.g., Khan, Khalsa, Klose, & Cooksey, 2012). Many experts, however, contend the academic experiences and expected outcomes of graduate students are heterogeneous, and useful assessment processes must be attentive to field or disciplinary differences (Dougan, 1996; Dunbar et al., 2006; Nesheim et al., 2006)

This manuscript focuses on professional master's degree programs in higher education. Education programs are lightning rods for public critique (Borko, Liston, & Whitcomb, 2006). For instance, a 2009 Center for American Progress policy brief characterized master's programs in education schools as "a notoriously unfocused and process-dominated course of study," lacking in quality and true impact that results in improved professional practice (Roza & Miller, 2009, p. 1). While not substantiated empirically, this sentiment reflects the need for education graduate schools to assess students' outcomes associated with master's degree programs to demonstrate efficacy, as well as identify areas needing improvement. The purpose of this manuscript, therefore, is to describe a competency-based approach to designing and assessing master's level professional preparation programs in the field of higher education administration.

## **COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH TO PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION**

In contrast to the liberal arts and social sciences (Voorhees, 2001), professional academic fields are characterized by "specialized competence, acquired as the result of intellectual training" (Carr-Saunders & Wilson, 1933, p. 307). Graduate professional schools are charged to "inculcate knowledge of the theory and practice so that the candidates of the profession are sufficiently competent for practice in the respective field" (Sun, 2004, p. 6). In the professions, this notion of competency is a central principle to guide academic program development, as well as the evaluation of student learning and success.

Competencies are defined as the "integration of skills, abilities, and knowledge as focused on a particular task" (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, p. 1) and are easily measured (Voorhees, 2001). Although the terms "competency" and "outcome" are often used interchangeably (Banta, 2001) and some argue that no real differences exist between outcome-versus competency-based education in practice (e.g., Morke, Dornan, & Eika, 2013), the model

described here focuses on competencies for three reasons. First, in higher education, student outcomes often also encompass retention, graduation, and placement rates, which do not necessarily reflect mastery of skills or knowledge (Voorhees, 2001). Second, “competency” implies expertise that is directly transferable to a specific employment field (Banta, 2001), which is why it lends itself especially well to professional graduate programs (Bilder & Conrad, 1996). Finally, curriculum design and assessment can be integrated with one another around competencies, creating a coherent and consistent language from which teachers and learners can work (Voorhees, 2001).

Implementing a competency-based approach to professional academic programs begins by conceptually defining intended competencies. These definitions should be specific enough to facilitate assessment (Voorhees, 2001). Often, competencies are designed around standards identified by national professional organizations, such as the Council of Social Work Education for Master’s in Social Work degrees (Meyer-Adams, Potts, Koob, Dorsey, & Rosales, 2011), the American Society for Training & Development for Master’s in Workforce Training and Development degrees (Gaudet, Annulis & Kmiec, 2008), and the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) in Higher Education for Master’s in Student Affairs degrees (Kuk & Banning, 2009). For fields lacking national guidelines, however, intended outcomes and competencies are less prescribed. Also, while such external guidelines provide helpful benchmarks, they are not necessarily ongoing or fully reflective of an individual program’s own goals, as well as those set forth by the department, college, and institution. Program faculty and other stakeholders must therefore draw from external, as well as internal resources to reach consensus about the competencies that graduates should possess (Voorhees, 2001).

After defining competencies, the next step is to determine how they will be developed in learners. Faculty should map them onto courses and associated learning activities, and ensure that academic content is aligned with the competencies (Bers, 2001). Identifying how competencies will be measured is critical. Professional graduate degree program administrators and faculty often rely on external evaluation metrics (e.g., rankings, accreditation, program reviews, certification or licensure examinations) (Funk & Klomparens, 2006). In addition, programs (especially those in fields without nationally defined competency standards and associated measures) often rely on internally defined competencies and evaluations to collect data pertaining to the types of competencies described above; that is, student, alumni, and/or faculty self-reported perceptions of learning (e.g., Delaney, 1997; Gaudet, Annulis, & Kmiec, 2008; Meyers-Adams et al., 2011) and/or program quality (e.g., Delaney, 1997; Ketefian & Hagerty, 1987). While self-reports promote reflective practice (Walser, 2009), many students are not aware of the full benefits associated with their graduate degree experience until after graduation (Bilder & Conrad, 1996). For this reason, supplementing perceptions and satisfaction with direct measures of competency is essential to comprehensive program evaluation (Maki, 2001).

The peer-reviewed scholarship pertaining to designing and implementing competency-based assessment models for master’s level graduate programs, especially those that focus on professional practice (e.g., social work, education, and nursing), is limited (Kaylor & Johnson, 1994). The competency-based approach described here contributes to this gap and has utility for faculty and administrators seeking to assess professional master’s programs, especially those that lack nationally defined standards or certification. The remaining discussion is organized as follows: after a brief explanation of the field of Higher Education Administration, the authors describe their specific program, how they developed expected competencies for the program,

identified where the competencies would be addressed in the curriculum, and designed methods to measure the competencies. The conclusion emphasizes the importance of communicating with internal and external stakeholders about the model, with an aim towards developing a competency-based program culture.

## HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION GRADUATE EDUCATION

The first degree program in Higher Education was implemented at Clark University in 1893 (see Goodchild, 2013 for history of the field). No external accrediting body exists for the field, but today there are approximately 161 universities in the U.S. that offer a doctoral and/or master's degree in Higher Education Administration (Jensen, 2013). Broadly speaking, Higher Education Administration (HEA) is a specialized field of study that is “concerned with the behavioral interaction of students, faculty, and administrators within the context of a college or university environment, and the interrelationship of this environment with the larger society” (Wright, 2007, p. 19). Typically, coursework encompasses the history and philosophy of higher education, administration and leadership, finance, law, policy, and organizational change/development (CAHEP, 2010; Hyle & Goodchild, 2013). Master's degree graduates enter a range of positions within two- and four-year colleges and universities, including admissions, orientation, advising, human resources, financial aid, intercollegiate athletics, and student affairs, as well as other for-profit and not-for-profit organizations with higher education-related foci.

Beginning in 1964, what is known as the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) in Higher Education established guidelines specific to masters-level college student personnel and student affairs professional preparation programs (COSPA, 1964).<sup>1</sup> While the outcomes associated with these standards have been studied extensively (e.g., Burkard, Cole, Ott & Stoflet, 2004; Cuyjet, Longwell-Grice, & Molina, 2009; Herdlein, 2004; Kretovics, 2002; Richmond & Sherman, 1991; Waple, 2006), including surveys of faculty about their graduates' outcomes (e.g., Dickerson, Hoffman, Anan, Brown, Vong, Bresciani, Monzon, & Oyler, 2011; Herdlein, Kline, Boquard, & Haddad, 2010; Kuk, Cobb, & Forrest, 2007), there has been little empirical consideration of the application and use of these standards within master's degree programs themselves (Creamer, 2003). DiRamio (2013) sampled 44 student affairs graduate programs and observed less than half advertised on their websites that they used the CAS standards. After reviewing syllabi, he found even fewer (29%) explicitly identified and used CAS in course designs.

Even less attention has been given to systematically defining or studying the competencies associated with master's level HEA degree programs as distinct from student affairs professional programs. Wright (2007) proposed a set of guidelines to define the HEA knowledgebase. Based on Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, she organized competencies into three domains: conceptual skills, (i.e., decision-making, research and

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<sup>1</sup> An important clarification is that Higher Education Administration programs are distinct from Educational Administration programs designed to prepare primary and secondary level principals, superintendents, and other K-12 leaders. Another more nuanced – and underspecified (Wright, 2007) – distinction within the universe of education graduate degree programs is made between those that emphasize postsecondary administration (which is the focus of this manuscript) and those that are college student affairs specific (CAS, 2006) or community college specific (CAHEP, 2010).

evaluation, resource allocation behavior, entrepreneurial behavior, and introspective behavior), human relations skills (i.e., leadership, problem solving, conflict resolution behavior, and self-development), and technical skills (i.e., fiscal management, communication skills, planning, and technology). Wright's taxonomy does not distinguish between competencies expected of master's versus doctoral level graduates, and she acknowledged, "much work remains to be done in terms of identifying requisite skills and competencies expected of the effective higher education administrator, manager, and leader; related indicators of performance; and outcomes evaluation" (p. 30). In 2010, the Council for the Advancement of Higher Education Programs (CAHEP) released a set of baseline recommendations for master's programs in Higher Education Administration, (CAHEP, 2010). While they propose general curricular content and that programs should define outcomes that are consistent with their visions/missions, CAHEP's guidelines do not articulate specific competencies. To date, no model for programs to implement these guidelines, define competencies at the HEA master's degree level, or suggest strategies to assess competencies has been published.

## **CASE BACKGROUND**

Arizona State University's (ASU) master's degree program in Higher and Postsecondary Education (HED) is part of the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, the top-ranked graduate school of education in Arizona and 18<sup>th</sup> nationally (U.S. News & World Report, 2014). The HED program was established in 1964 and over the course of its history has awarded Ed.S., Ph.D., M.A., and Ed.D. degrees. Currently, the program offers an M.Ed. degree only. Enrollment-wise, ASU is among the largest face-to-face master's programs in the HEA field,<sup>2</sup> with approximately 140 degree-seeking students. The M.Ed. consists of 30 credits, and most students complete the degree in one and a half years.

## **COMPETENCIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION MASTER'S DEGREE GRADUATES**

While the best practice is to align an assessment program with standards set by professional or disciplinary associations (Rivas et al., 2010), as discussed above, HEA does not have a universal set of competencies defined for master's degree programs. Its faculty therefore drew from several sources to define those for their program: the CAHEP (2010) and Wright (2007) general guidelines for HEA graduate programs, and the literature pertaining to graduate competencies and outcomes that are specific to early career student affairs positions (see Herdlein, Riefler, & Mrowka, 2013 for a recent meta-analysis of this literature). In this research, competencies are commonly described from the perspective of employer representatives such as chief student affairs officers or published position descriptions (Burkard et al., 2004; Herdlein, 2004; Hoffman & Bresciani, 2012) or based on the opinions of faculty (Arellano & Martinez, 2009; Dickerson et al., 2011; Herdlein, Kline, Boquard, & Haddad, 2010; Kuk, Cobb, & Forrest, 2007).

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<sup>2</sup> According to the authors' analyses of 2011-12 IPEDS completion data, the largest two programs are Drexel University (131 degrees) and Capella University (88 degrees). Both are online master's degree programs. Arizona State University is a face-to-face program and was the third largest in 2011-12 completions, awarding 73 degrees.

Consistent with the suggestion of Maki (2001) and others (Bresciani, 2011; CAHEP, 2010), the authors tailored the competencies to ensure they were directly aligned with the program's mission/purpose statement. Similar to other professional fields, they equally emphasized acquisition and application (Delaney, 1997) and organized the competencies according to the knowledge and skills that successful higher education practitioners should demonstrate at the conclusion of their master's degree, as indicated in Figure 1. (Appendix A.).

## **METHODS AND CRITERIA TO ASSESS COMPETENCIES**

This assessment approach blends direct and indirect methods. Direct assessment involves experts reviewing artifacts produced by students (e.g., exams, papers, portfolios, projects, and presentations) to determine whether they demonstrate mastery of competencies, while indirect assessments capture students' self-reported perceptions of their skills, knowledge, and learning experiences (e.g., surveys, focus groups, and exit interviews) (Maki, 2010).

### **Direct Methods of Assessment**

Arizona State University's master's program curriculum is divided into a core of twelve required credits and a menu of structured electives from which students may choose the remaining eighteen credits. The authors mapped the competencies onto the requirements, ensuring that the main course assignments (as indicated in Figure 2., Appendix A.) reflected the identified knowledge and skills.

The authors developed three rubrics to directly assess how well students' three core assignments demonstrated the competencies (Mertler, 2001). The rubrics rely on a non-linear design to assess the extent to which student performance is related to multiple broad standards or competencies. They were designed to be criterion referenced, such that level of competence is not evaluated according to fellow students' performance (i.e., norm-referenced) but instead reflect the individual's independent performance according to standards set by the program leadership (Mager, 1997). All components of the rubric measure the objective of a specialized knowledge or skill associated with the core curriculum (i.e., content validity), and clear distinctions are made between performance levels for each of the criteria being assessed to help ensure accurate, consistent, and fair assessment. The rubrics are provided in Appendix B.

### **Indirect Methods of Assessment**

Many institutions use commercially developed indirect assessment tools, such as the National Survey of Student Engagement, or internally developed instruments like course evaluations or exit surveys (Hogan, Lusher & Mondal, 2012). These measures do not typically focus on field-specific competencies, so the authors created a survey instrument tailored to the program's needs. The instrument design began with a series of focus groups with students and alumni to better ascertain their experiences in the program, generally, as well as identify possible competencies not initially identified through the literature review and faculty discussions. The multiple iterations of the instrument, which included student feedback and pilot testing, ultimately produced a four part online survey that sought information from students on their

perceptions of competencies, as well as professional experiences, career plans and aspirations, and demographics. The items pertaining to competencies are listed in Appendix C.

The authors developed two versions: a pre-test for incoming students and a post-test for graduating students. Students are invited to participate in the pre-survey prior to the start of their first semester in the program. Likewise, graduating students are asked to complete the post-survey at the conclusion of their final semester of the program. Program faculty then compare the corresponding responses to determine whether significant changes in self-perceived competency occurred.

### **Creating a Competency-Based Culture: The Importance of Communication**

In some professions, including HEA, no separate accrediting agency or certification body exists to define expected student outcomes associated with master's degrees. Creating a culture that values defining and assessing competencies is nonetheless imperative for programs in these fields, especially given public attention to hold postsecondary education writ large more accountable. To promote a competency-based culture, implementing the type of assessment plan described here should be accompanied by strategies to communicate with external as well as internal stakeholders (Bers, 2001).

External audiences with an interest in program competencies include prospective students, employers, policymakers, and the general public. To inform these groups, the ASU HEA program's promotional materials and public website includes an explanation of the competencies. When recommending students for jobs in conversations with employers or in written letters, faculty and program administrators describe the competency model and the types of skills and knowledge that graduates possess. The program also provides a summary of assessment results in annual reports that are publicly available. Strategies to communicate with internal stakeholders are similarly important. Faculty are stewards of student learning who should have ongoing input in how competencies frame the curriculum. At the beginning of each academic year, the ASU HEA master's program convenes a meeting of all tenure and non-tenure line faculty to solicit feedback on how well the competencies align with their individual courses and whether adjustments are necessary. Being able to define, explain, and demonstrate competencies is valuable for students as they seek employment. In the ASU HEA master's program, faculty socialize their students to this model early. Prospective students are provided with an overview of the competencies in information sessions and program materials. The required new student orientation includes a discussion of what the program competencies are, how they are developed and assessed across coursework, and how they connect to career success post-graduation. All new students subsequently are asked to complete the pre-program survey (one of the indirect assessment measures). They are enrolled in the Introduction to Higher Education course in their first semester, where the final project and its associated rubric are aligned with the program competencies.

The competency-based approach described here offers a template for higher education administration master's degree programs, as well as those in other fields that lack nationally set standards. Expanding enrollments, coupled with intense calls for accountability at all levels of higher education, require master's program faculty and administrators to ensure that students possess demonstrable knowledge, skills, and abilities that will lead to career success.

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**APPENDIX A.**

**Figure 1. Master’s Degree in Higher & Postsecondary Education Core Competencies**

<p><i>Specialized Knowledge Associated with Core Curriculum</i></p> <p>K1. Mission and Values of Higher Education: Analyze the mission, purpose, and goals of higher education and how administration helps to advance institutional and enterprise-wide outcomes (Wright, 2007).</p> <p>K2. History of Higher Education: Demonstrate mastery of the historical foundations of American higher education and explain how historical influences can be observed in administrative practice today (CAHEP, 2010; Herdlein et al., 2013; Herdlein et al., 2010; Wright, 2007).</p> <p>K3. Higher Education Stakeholders: Understand the roles that faculty, administrators and staff, and students play in the functioning of American colleges and universities, and analyze contemporary issues confronting each of these stakeholder groups (Herdlein et al., 2013).</p> <p>K4. Higher Education Administrative Theory: Recognize, explain, and apply the key theoretical frameworks that guide administrative practice in higher education (CAHEP, 2009; Herdlein et al., 2013).</p> <p>K5. Ethics of Practice: Recognize, explain, and apply the ethical codes of conduct that guide administrative practice in higher education (Herdlein et al., 2013; Herdlein et al., 2010).</p> <p>K6. Methods of Inquiry: Demonstrate knowledge of action-based methods of inquiry and how to use these to design best-practice, innovative solutions in higher education administrative practice (Herdlein et al., 2013; Herdlein et al., 2010; Wright, 2007).</p>
<p><i>Specialized Skills and Abilities Associated with Core Curriculum</i></p> <p>SA1. Data-driven decision-making and problem-solving: Ability to identify problems of practice within a higher education functional unit (e.g., department, office) and analyze available data as well as action-based methods of inquiry to implement best-practice, creative solutions (Burkard et al., 2004; Herdlein et al., 2013; Wright, 2007).</p> <p>SA2. Innovation: Ability to be innovative in administrative practice, applying new technology and ideas to success in the profession (Wright, 2007).</p> <p>SA3. Communication: Demonstrate effective spoken and written communication skills, as well as listening skills, that attend to a variety of audiences, including college students, faculty, and administrators (Burkard et al., 2004; Herdlein et al., 2013; Herdlein et al., 2010; Wright, 2007).</p> <p>SA4. Collaboration: Ability to collaborate across functional lines and diverse backgrounds, as well as cultivate professional relationships across institutions and organizations (Burkard et al., 2004; Herdlein et al., 2013; Herdlein et al., 2010).</p> <p>SA5. Reflective practice: Ability to engage in critical self-reflection and commit to ongoing professional improvement (Herdlein et al., 2013; Herdlein, 2004; Wright, 2007).</p>

**Figure 2. Core Assignments for Direct Assessment of Competencies**

<b>Course Title</b>	<b>Artifact</b>	<b>Description</b>
Introduction to Higher Education	Higher Education Presentation	This project traces the history, present status, and future trends pertaining to (a) an important current or emerging topic in higher education, or (b) a practice-based area of higher education that they aspire to or currently work in. It takes the form of a 20-30 minute presentation recorded and uploaded to the internet, requiring students to innovatively incorporate the use of technology.
Practicum	Practicum Placement Reflection Paper	This is a substantive paper that is reflective of content learned during structured practical experience in a college or university setting, supervised by practitioner and/or faculty member with whom the student works closely. The Reflection Paper describes each individual's journey through the experience and how it affected his/her professional identity development.
Applied Inquiry & Project	Action-Oriented Research Project	This project is a small-scale applied study performed in a higher education setting. The student either: 1– has an opportunity to initiate a small change (the action) and evaluate the immediate local consequences (the research), or 2– has an opportunity to investigate a practice-based problem (the research) and suggests specific opportunities for practitioners to ameliorate the empirically defined issues (the action). The results of the Applied Project are documented through a research paper (similar to a professional conference paper), which describes the setting, the need, the action taken, and the short-term results of the study, as well as a poster presentation.

**APPENDIX B.**

**Core Project Rubrics**

**Core Project #1: Higher Education Presentation**

<b>Content &amp; Associated Competency</b>	<b>1 - Inadequate</b>	<b>2 - Acceptable</b>	<b>3 - Excellent</b>
<b>Introduction</b> Provides introduction to topic/ practice-based area K3, SA3	Has basic understanding of the topic/ practice-base area	Describes the topic/ practice-base area with some comprehension of level of complexity	Describes the topic/ practice-base area with a full understanding of level of complexity
<b>Historical Connections</b> Traces the history (past and present) of the topic/ practice-base area K2	Recognizes basic historical elements pertinent to the topic/ practice-base area	Provides some evidence of understanding patterns, cause/effect relationships and critical indicators related to the topic/ practice-base area	Understands and articulates patterns, cause/effect relationships and critical indicators related to the topic/ practice-base area
<b>Literature Review</b> Incorporates and addresses relevant connections to key sources. SA1	Makes relevant connections to a convenient sample of sources, however the sources presented are notably incomplete or lacking key information	Makes relevant connections to various sources, however the presentation of pertinent information is missing some key aspects	Makes relevant connections to a comprehensive collection of key sources
<b>Originality and Innovation</b> Identifies potential future trends of the topic/ practice-base area K2, SA2	Minimally identifies implications, recommendations, and future trends. Ideas do not evidence originality of thought	Is able to predict and evaluate a limited scope of implications, recommendations and future trends. Ideas evidence original thinking but may not be fully developed or clearly articulated	Is able to predict and evaluate a broad range of implications, recommendations and future trends. Impressive originality of ideas
<b>Conclusion</b> Provides synthesis and summary to conclude presentation. SA3	Provides minimal conclusive synthesis and summary of gathered information	Summarizes key aspects of topic and provides some conclusive synthesis of gathered information	Fully synthesizes gathered information and provides well-developed summary and conclusions
<b>Organization &amp; Delivery</b> Organizes and delivers presentation effectively.	Notable absence of organization and lack of a logical sequence of clearly expressed ideas. Student fails to capture and maintain audience attention	Some lack of organization and/or occasional lack of logical sequence of ideas; student does not consistently capture audience attention	Presentation is well organized and follows a logical sequence of ideas throughout; student establishes and maintains audience attention

SA3		throughout presentation	throughout
<b>Use of Technology</b> Uses appropriate and creative audiovisuals (A/V) SA2	A/V lacks evidence of preparation and creativity	A/V shows some preparation and creativity	A/V is effective and carefully prepared, creativity evidenced

**Instructor Comments:**

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**Core Project #2: Practicum Placement Reflection Paper**

<b>Content &amp; Associated Competency</b>	<b>1 - Inadequate</b>	<b>2 - Acceptable</b>	<b>3 - Excellent</b>
<b>Stakeholder Analysis</b> Understanding of practicum placement K3	Has basic recognition of organizational structure and stakeholders with minimal evidence of higher level understanding	Recognizes organizational structure and stakeholders with some comprehension of level of associated complexities	Describes organizational structure and stakeholders with a deep and nuanced understanding of associated complexities
<b>Higher Education Theory &amp; Practice</b> Makes connections to program content within higher education practice. K1, K4, K5	Response is incomplete, lacking in connections to important ideas, concepts, and previous knowledge of issue pertaining to higher education theory and practice	Response is adequate, with some meaningful connections to important ideas and concepts. Student response alludes to previous knowledge or larger issues pertaining to higher education theory and practice	Response is thorough with meaningful connections to important ideas and concepts. Student integrates previous knowledge and connects to larger issues pertaining to higher education
<b>Reflective practice</b> Engages in self-assessment SA5, K5	Response provides information about how understanding has changed, but lacks examples or comparison	Response describes, with some examples or comparisons how understanding has changed	Response describes, with specific detail and examples and comparisons how understanding has changed
<b>Professional Development</b> Commits to ongoing professional development SA4, SA5	Response alludes to questions or topics for future learning. However, student does not provide in-depth reflections on collaborative experiences, work environment, or the cultivation of professional relationships	Response mentions new topics or questions for future learning. Student generally reflects on collaborative experiences, work environment, and the cultivation of professional relationships	Response raises important questions for further exploration, learning, or understanding. Student response shows evidence of ability to collaborate with others and cultivate professional relationships. Critical analysis of work environment evidenced
<b>APA Style</b> Uses APA style (SA1)	Frequent lack of appropriate APA formatting	Occasional lapses in use of APA format	Consistent use of APA format

**Instructor Comments:**

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**Core Project #3: Action-Oriented Research Project**

<b>Content &amp; Associated Competency</b>	<b>1 - Inadequate</b>	<b>2 - Acceptable</b>	<b>3 - Excellent</b>
<b>Research Problem</b> Identifies a problem, opportunity or challenge within the research literature. SA1	Has basic recognition of a problem, opportunity, or challenge with minimal detail and understanding	Recognizes a problem, opportunity or challenge with some comprehension of level of complexity	Describes the problem and all component pieces with a full understanding of level of complexity
<b>Theoretical Framework</b> Conceptually frames the research problem within an appropriate theoretical framework K4	Minimally incorporates theoretical framework in presentation of research problem; conceptual framing lacks comprehensiveness and connection to overall paper (data analysis, discussion, and conclusions)	Incorporates theoretical framework in presentation of research problem; appropriate application conceptual framing with some details and areas of connection in need of further development	Appropriately applies theoretical framework to research problem; fully develops conceptual framing with clear connections to overall paper (data analysis, discussion, and conclusions)
<b>Critical Analysis</b> Analyzes the elements of a specific research problem SA1	Recognizes elements pertinent to the research problem, however there are frequent lapses in critical thinking skills (analysis, synthesis, evaluation, problem solving skills, able to support opinions and justify choices)	Provides some evidence of understanding patterns, cause/effect relationships and critical indicators related to the research problem with only occasional lapses in critical thinking skills (analysis, synthesis, evaluation, problem solving skills, ability to support opinions and justify choices)	Understands and articulates patterns, cause/effect relationships and critical indicators related to the current research problem. Shows evidence of well-developed critical thinking skills (analysis, synthesis, evaluation, problem solving skills, ability to support opinions and justify choices)
<b>Literature Review</b> Gathers relevant research literature SA1	Collects relevant research from a convenient sample of sources, however the reviewed literature has a notable absence of key information	Collects relevant research from various resources and databases, however some aspects of the review are absent	Collects a comprehensive collection of relevant research
<b>Data Analysis</b> Interprets data effectively relative to the research problem SA1	Provides minimal integration of gathered information with elements and facts pertaining to the research problem	Provides some integration of gathered information with elements and facts pertaining to the research problem	Supports arguments with relevant data when applicable. Fully integrates gathered information with elements and facts pertaining to the research problem
<b>Discussion and Conclusions</b> Predicts and evaluates	Minimally identifies implications, recommendations, and conclusions	Is able to predict and evaluate a limited scope of implications, recommendations and	Is able to predict and evaluate a broad range of implications, recommendations and



implications, recommendations and conclusions SA1	Ideas frequently underdeveloped	conclusions. Ideas not always fully developed	conclusions; Ideas fully developed
<b>Use of Academic English</b> Organizes ideas well and uses appropriate academic register. SA1	Notable absence of appropriate organization and structure; flow of ideas is at times incoherent; frequently lacks appropriate, formal and precise register	Occasional lack of organization and appropriate structure; At times struggles with flow of ideas; and uses appropriate, formal and precise register most of the time	Well-organized and structured throughout; the flow of ideas is consistently logical; Regular use of formal and precise register
<b>APA Style</b> Uses APA style (SA1)	Frequent lack of appropriate APA formatting	Occasional lapses in use of APA format	Consistent use of APA format

**Instructor Comments:**

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## APPENDIX C.

### Survey Instrument Items: Perceived Higher Education Administration Competencies and Skills

*Note. Students are given two sets of response options for each item stem. The first set of response options (Part I) asks about self-rated knowledge of competencies, and the second set of response options (Part II) asks about importance given to each competency.*

Part I: Based on your current understanding of higher education competencies, how would you rate your knowledge of the areas listed below? Please select the option that best reflects your current knowledge.

*Response options for each item*

Not knowledgeable - Somewhat knowledgeable - Knowledgeable - Very knowledgeable

Part II: Based on your career aspirations when you complete your Master's Degree in Higher Education Administration, how important are the following competencies to you? Please select the option that best reflects your opinion.

*Response options for each item*

Not important - Somewhat important - Important - Very important

#### Item Stems for Parts I and II:

1. The mission, purpose, and goals of higher education. (K1)
2. The historical foundations of American higher education (K2)
3. The roles that faculty play in the functioning of American colleges and universities. (K3)
4. The roles that administrators and staff play in the functioning of American colleges and universities. (K3)
5. The roles that students play in the functioning of American colleges and universities. (K3)
6. The ethical codes of conduct guiding higher education administration professional practice. (K5)
7. How to network and cultivate professional relationships in the field of higher education administration (SA4).
8. How to conduct literature searches to identify scholarship that might be helpful in ameliorating an issue or question related to higher education practice. (SA1)
9. How to write a literature review on a higher education topic. (SA3)
10. How to do a presentation on a higher education topic. (SA3)
11. The components of a well-designed and well-executed higher education research study. (K6)
12. How to propose research questions related to an issue or problem in higher education. (K6, SA1)
13. Common quantitative methodologies used in higher education research. (K6)
14. Common qualitative methodologies used in higher education research. (K6)

15. How higher education practitioners design and conduct research to better understand a problem of practice. (K6, SA1)
16. The ethical issues related to the study of human subjects, especially college students. (K6)
17. Leadership practices in higher education (K4)
18. Finance and budgeting in higher education (K1, K4)
19. Legal issues in higher education (K1, K4)
20. Diverse student populations in higher education (K1, K3)

