



Social Justice CAS Standards in Learning Assistance Program Evaluation

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Theoretical Framework

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), a consortium of professional associations in higher education, promotes the use of its professional standards for the development, assessment, and improvement of quality student learning, programs, and services (CAS, 2021). As an organization that reflects the broad and diverse higher education community, CAS is committed to advocating for equitable outcomes for all students and partnering with member associations for creating inclusive and equitable environments.

CAS recognizes the importance of developing culturally responsive standards for program assessment. As a result, in its newly revised 2021-2023 Strategic Plan, CAS addresses the issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belongingness as a key focus in the development of standards in order to promote fair, equitable, culturally responsive assessment. An outcome of using CAS standards is the creation of student programs and services with a sense of inclusion and belongingness.

The CAS Learning Assistance Program (LAP) standards ensure that Learning Assistance Programs track, monitor, and ensure student success (CAS, 2019). While all CAS standards (including LAP standards) address diversity and inclusion as part of the general standards, examples of specific social justice standards are those for Indigenous Student Affairs (ISA), Women and Gender, and Multicultural programs. For example, the mission of ISA standards addresses the diversity and complexity of identities, backgrounds, and histories of its members and promotes the academic and personal growth of all Indigenous students (CAS, 2021).

The CAS LAP Standards address the instruction and services for the development of reading, mathematics and quantitative reasoning, writing, critical thinking, problem-solving, learning strategies, and disciplinary literacies (CAS, 2019). Research notes that participation in learning assistance programs and services improves student retention (Beal, 1980; Ryan & Glenn, 2004) and academic engagement, providing the kinds of rewarding interactions that foster student intellectual and social growth (Tinto, 1987, 2004).

However, the intersectionality of identities of race, socio-economic status, gender, and culture present significant challenges for underrepresented students in a college environment. Hence, specific programs respond to a gap in services for marginalized students, advocate for them, and create inclusive environments (Ortiz & Santos, 2009). For example, challenges such as racism, discrimination, and inadequate access to resources have significant impacts on Indigenous student persistence and graduation (Cote-Meek, 2014).

One of the new CAS initiatives is to “grow CAS’ multicultural competence by including more diverse voices within the organization and considering Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) when developing products and services” (CAS, 2021). This is a significant contribution to the field of program evaluation. The consideration of culturally responsive assessment that honors the identities of culture, race, gender, and socioeconomic background (to name a few) aims to ensure that program assessment considers the diversity of students. Thus, the creation of new CAS standards, such as those for Indigenous Student Affairs, speaks to this need for culturally responsive standards in the field.

For example, as noted by Bazemore-James, Oxendine, and Hancock (the authors of these new CAS ISA standards), attending college for Indigenous students can be both an empowering experience and a means of resistance, decolonization, nation-building, and self-determination (Brayboy et al., 2014; Salis Reyes, 2014); addressing this dichotomy can be part of the self-study. Furthermore, integrating diversity, equity, inclusion, and belongingness in the CAS General Standards is a significant CAS contribution to the field of program evaluation, ensuring that all of the CAS standards, inclusive of the LAP standards, promote fair and equitable assessment.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the articulation of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) standards in the CAS Learning Assistance Program (LAP) Standards. The overall goal of this investigation is to inform the revision of the CAS LAP Standards for fair and equitable assessment of student programs and services.

Methodology

The CAS Learning Assistance Standards were reviewed for specific statements of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). In particular, the standards for Part 5 Access, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion were reviewed.

Results

The CAS LAP Standards, inclusive of the CAS General Standards provide specific DEI statements and guidelines that promote fair and equitable assessment. The statements, though, need to address the more recent CAS initiatives that focus on justice and belongingness.

Conclusions and Recommendations for the Future

Recommendations for the CAS Council of Representatives include updating the CAS LAP standards in light of recent CAS DEI social justice initiatives and its adopted JDEIB Statement, passed by the CAS Council of Representatives (November 16, 2021): “CAS is committed to advocating for creating programs and services that advance equitable outcomes for all students. CAS serves as a conduit of professional standards for post-secondary institutions and member associations to foster a framework for inclusive and equitable environments. CAS will also work to identify and address barriers and inequities to promote socially just assessment and evaluation practices and partner in support of student learning, development, and success” (CAS, 2021).

CAS LAP Standards Part 5 (CAS, 2019)

5.1 Inclusive and Equitable Educational and Work Environments

Within the context of each institution's mission and in accordance with institutional policies and applicable codes and laws, Learning Assistance Programs (LAP) must create and maintain educational and work environments for students, faculty, staff, administrators, designated clients, and other constituents that are welcoming, accessible, inclusive, equitable, and free from bias or harassment.

LAP must not discriminate on the basis of race; color; national origin; sex; disability; age; cultural identity; ethnicity; nationality; citizenship; family educational history (e.g., first generation to attend college); political affiliation; religious affiliation; sexual orientation; gender identity and expression; marital, family, social, economic, place of residence, or veteran status; or any other basis included in codes, laws, and institutional policies.

5.2 Organizational Aspects of Access, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

LAP must provide equitable access to facilities and resources for all constituents.

LAP must respond to the needs of all constituents when establishing hours of operation and developing methods for delivering programs, services, and resources.

LAP must identify and address actions, policies, and structures within its operation that perpetuate systems of privilege and oppression.

5.3 Advocating for Access, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

LAP must advocate for accessible facilities and resources, and address issues that impede access.

LAP must advocate for inclusion, multiculturalism, and social justice within the institution.

LAP must enact culturally responsive, inclusive, respectful, and equitable practices in the provision of services.

LAP instructional content, materials, and activities should provide opportunities to increase awareness and appreciation of the individual and cultural differences of students, staff, and faculty.

LAP must develop plans for ongoing professional development on cultural competence and workplace inclusion.

5.4 Implementing Access, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

LAP must establish goals for access, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

LAP must address the characteristics and needs of diverse constituents when establishing and implementing culturally relevant and inclusive programs, services, policies, procedures, and practices.

LAP must ensure that personnel are trained in diversity, equity, access, and inclusion and are held accountable for applying the training to its work.

LAP must have an established protocol for, and foster expectation of, bias incident reporting.

Personnel within LAP must cultivate understanding of identity, culture, self-expression, and heritage.

Personnel within LAP must promote respect for commonalities and differences among people within their historical and cultural contexts.

LAP should facilitate student understanding and appreciation of the diverse academic and social cultures of the institution and community.

When educational and/or workplace accommodations are requested, LAP must provide individuals with an interactive process to determine reasonable accommodations.

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CAS Statement of Shared Ethical Principles

Principle IV - Justice

We actively promote human dignity and endorse equality and fairness for everyone. • We treat others with respect and fairness, preserving their dignity, honoring their differences, promoting their welfare • We recognize diversity and embrace a cross-cultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of people within their social and cultural contexts • We eliminate barriers that impede student learning and development or discriminate against full participation by all students • We extend fundamental fairness to all persons • We operate within the framework of laws and policies • We respect the rights of individuals and groups to express their opinions • We assess students in a valid, open, and fair manner and one consistent with learning objectives • We examine the influence of power on the experience of diversity to reduce marginalization and foster community.

