2016

Preparing New Professionals in Student Affairs: A Supervisory Model to Maximize Graduate Student Success

Bryan Romsa  
*South Dakota State University*, bryan.romsa@sdstate.edu

Katelyn Romsa  
*South Dakota State University*, katelyn.romsa@sdstate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/chd_pubs](https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/chd_pubs)

Part of the [Academic Advising Commons](https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/chd_pubs), [Educational Leadership Commons](https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/chd_pubs), and the [Higher Education Commons](https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/chd_pubs)

**Recommended Citation**

[https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/chd_pubs/37](https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/chd_pubs/37)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Counseling and Human Development at Open PRAIRIE: Open Public Research Access Institutional Repository and Information Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Counseling and Human Development Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Open PRAIRIE: Open Public Research Access Institutional Repository and Information Exchange. For more information, please contact michael.biondo@sdstate.edu.
Preparing New Professionals in Student Affairs: A Supervisory Model to Maximize Graduate Student Success

Katelyn Romsa
Bryan Romsa
South Dakota State University

Introduction
Effective preparation for graduate students pursuing work in the field of college student affairs most often includes both a formal classroom experience as well as a supervised practical experience, such as internships or graduate assistantships (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2012). A formal classroom experience typically consists of specific learning outcomes, regular and structured class meetings, and educational experiences designed by the instructor. This experience is vital to graduate student growth.
and development but is insufficient in preparing them for the real-world experiences they will soon face. Although supervised experiences have historically been a required component of preparation programs’ curricula (McEwen & Talbot, 1977), strategically designed and executed supervised experiences are vital in preparing new professionals to thrive within the rapidly changing landscape of higher education.

With the constant pace and complexity of changes occurring at higher education institutions student affairs professionals will be required to manage more ambiguous contexts in environments demanding a greater degree of responsiveness (Levine & Dean, 2012; Selingo, 2013). Although the learning that occurs in a classroom is important, researchers have found that having a supervised internship experience in addition to classroom instruction is more effective for student learning and development (CAS, 2012). The effect of intentional design in internship, which includes purposeful actions, often leads to successful outcomes (Bruening, Peachey, Evanovich, Fuller, Murty, Percy, & Chung, 2015).

Given the fast change and complexity of higher education contexts, graduate students will need to develop increasingly complex thinking and intuitive problem solving skills during their practical experiences (graduate assistantships or internships), which will likely generalize to new situations that they may encounter during their first professional position (Reber, 1993; Sheckley & Keeton, 2001). Faculty and site supervisors can serve a critical role in helping graduate students achieve these necessary skills prior to graduation through the development of strategic assistantship/internship experiences.

As faculty members who have had experience teaching graduate students involved in an assistantship/internship experience, we want to provide insights to other faculty supervisors and site supervisors as to the manner and design of

"I’ve had a wonderful opportunity to meet people from around the world, all of whom dedicate their lives daily to the success of college students. Connecting with people from China, Italy, France, Spain, Poland, Belgium, The Caribbean, Canada, and across the United States has been a highlight of my presidency. The commitment and passion these individuals have for college student success is inspiring.

Gavin Henning Past President of ACPA

I never imagined I would have the opportunity to serve this great association and our profession in this way, and I owe a debt of gratitude to many people… What an exciting and challenging time to be in higher education. I am proud to be part of an association."
a strategic supervised assistantship/internship experience to maximize graduate student success. In this article we provide a supervisory model for supervisors to help them create and design effective supervised experiences to best prepare graduate students preparing to transition from graduate school to work in the field of college student affairs. The intended audience of this article are faculty and site supervisors at all levels, both seasoned and novice, who are supervising graduate students preparing to transition from graduate school to work in the field of college student affairs.

Why is Strategic Supervision Important?

In order for faculty and site supervisors to best prepare graduate students for work in the field of college student affairs, they will need to be strategic in their supervision approach. A relevant question to answer then is, “why is strategic supervision important”? Strategic supervision can be important because it provides supervisors with a road map of how to help their supervisees achieve specific learning outcomes and work responsibilities (Bruening et al., 2015).

Strategic planning was first introduced in the business world in the 1950s and has led to the success of many businesses, and many of its characteristics can be transferred to the field of college student affairs when supervising graduate students (Steiner, 2010). Strategic planning is a mindset or a way of life. It is having a macro level mindset of specific aims or goals as well as a micro level mindset of clearly defined strategies to achieve those goals. It provides both supervisors and graduate students an opportunity to decide goals in advance while simultaneously allowing room for flexibility of those goals (Steiner, 2010).

In our supervisory model, we have essentially created a strategic plan to help supervisors become more intentional in their supervision with graduate students. Our model consists of attitudes, strategies, and practical ideas that supervisors can

that espouses the right values, has a progressive vision, and is comprised of such talented and dedicated professionals.

Kent Porterfield Past President of ACPA
implement to maximize graduate student success. Our supervisory model is inspired from the work of Janosik, Cooper, Saunders, and Hirt (2014) and consists of five components: (a) conducting a personal skills assessment, (b) setting realistic expectations, (c) developing a contract for the experience, (d) understanding the roles of each person, and (e) assisting graduate students in achieving life-school-work balance.

Conducting a personal skills assessment
A great place to start when beginning a supervised assistantship/internship experience with graduate students is with assessment. Conducting a thorough assessment of the skills graduate students bring to an internship site as well as the skills students need to improve upon is an excellent tool for developing goals and responsibilities for the experience. By completing an assessment, students create a profile of their (a) current skill level and (b) necessary skill level that must be developed prior to graduation. This will allow students to determine ways in which their internship can be a vehicle for them to meet the appropriate skill levels.

How do graduate students know what skills they should be striving to work towards during their internship to best prepare themselves for the field of college student affairs? ACPA and NASPA leaders of the student affairs profession have created a document of 10 competency areas such as advising and helping and assessment (ACPA & NASPA, 2010) that are essential to student affairs practice. A major purpose for the document is to inform the design of professional development opportunities for student affairs professionals by providing outcomes that can be incorporated into student affairs curriculum and training opportunities. In our classes with graduate students, we created a handout that lists these 10 competency areas where students rank their current skill set (on a scale from 0-5 with 5 being excellent and 0 having no skill). Although we only provided this handout to our graduate students in the classroom, we
encourage supervisors to do something similar so that they can also be involved in the assessment of the graduate students they supervise.

We also created two qualitative assessment handouts for both faculty/site supervisors and supervisees titled “Interview Your Supervisee” and “Interview Your Supervisor.” Oftentimes when we want to obtain information, we feel stuck in what, when, and how to ask questions. Some of the questions listed on the “Interview Your Supervisee” handout include: tell me about your academic background; what are your professional aspirations?; and what are some skills that you possess that are an asset to this office and what skills do you wish to improve upon? We created the handout to help faculty/site supervisors to get to know their supervisees better as well as to help supervisees in developing a sense of curiosity and a habit of asking effective questions, which will also help them in the future while working in the field of college student affairs.

A major purpose of the “Interview Your Supervisor” handout was to help graduate students obtain information that could be helpful in developing goals. Some of the questions listed on the “Interview Your Supervisor” handout include: tell me about your career path, what are the responsibilities of your position, and what do you most enjoy about your current position. We encourage supervisors to also create qualitative assessments and to incorporate them into their supervision meetings with graduate students throughout the assistantship/internship experience.

After conducting a skills assessment with graduate students, we encourage graduate students to then develop their goals for the assistantship/internship experience. Scholars have affirmed the importance of writing down goals in order for them to become a reality (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1997). Similarly, if supervisors encourage graduate students to write down their goals for the
experience, they will also be more likely to achieve their goals and make the most of their experience.

Setting realistic expectations

After conducting an assessment(s) of graduate student's skills and developing goals, supervisors will be ready to set realistic expectations for the assistantship/internship experience. This can be broken down into internal opportunities on campus and external opportunities off campus. When thinking about internal opportunities, it will be important for supervisors to discuss how they expect their supervisees to be involved within their office and/or on campus such as attending staff meetings, committees, and/or technology and multicultural opportunities. When considering external opportunities, it will be important for supervisors to discuss how they expect their supervisees to be involved off campus such as attendance at and/or involvement in professional organizations and conferences. We feel that it will be important for supervisors and their graduate students to consider all of the internal and external opportunities available to their students to help them to best develop and improve upon their skills. In addition, it can be a great exercise to help supervisors and graduate students to intentionally design the assistantship/internship experience by linking experiences to goal setting.

Another important area to address with graduate students is the importance of legal and ethical issues. As faculty members we created a legal and ethical issues handout that asked students to write down a list of the major activities they do at their graduate practicum and internship sites such as the following: answering phone calls, handling confidential files, attending meetings where sensitive information is shared, distributing information to students/parents, participating in hiring practices, operating office equipment, supervising others in or away from the work site, and/or planning events. Next, we had them rate the potential of liability of each activity. This is an
excellent exercise for supervisors to do with their graduate students as a learning tool to identify the potential of liability as well as to better understand the training that supervisors should provide and expectations they should address with their graduate students to minimize liability and maximize success.

Developing a contract for the experience

Developing a contract is a great way for faculty/site supervisors and their graduate student to write down and outline the goals and realistic expectations they have for the assistantship/internship experience. It will be important for supervisors and graduate students to create the contract at the beginning of the experience, so that expectations are clear right from the start. When we taught graduate students involved in a practicum and internship class, we required our students to take the lead in creating this document, but they were required to ask their supervisors for feedback and approval. Students were to include the following elements in their contract: a purpose statement, goals/objectives, activities, skills or competencies, proposed work schedule and time for each activity, and signatures of the student and faculty/site supervisor(s). We found that it was also helpful to add a section for the faculty/site supervisor’s responsibilities, so that they were also aware of what was expected of them such as: (a) meeting with the student once a week for one hour of supervision; (b) providing orientation and ongoing training; (c) providing feedback to the student; and (d) identifying resources that the student will need to be successful during the experience (e.g., personnel, facilities, equipment, and financial and insurance needs).

Although we required our graduate students to create the document, we encourage supervisors to be contributors. Supervisors could create a list of specific expectations they want to be on the contract before meeting with their graduate students. Being prepared ahead of time will assist supervisors
to articulate the roles and responsibilities not only of graduate students but also of themselves.

Most importantly, it is our hope that the contract represents what graduate students hope to contribute and achieve during their supervised experience. Knowing graduate students’ dreams, goals, and ambitions will help faculty/site supervisors to be more intentional in designing the assistantship/internship experience by matching and/or creating opportunities that will allow graduate students to reach and achieve those initiatives. Reviewing and updating the contract throughout the academic year will also be important for supervisors and students to stay on task and make sure that goals are being met.

Understanding the roles of each person
From teaching graduate students involved in an assistantship/internship experience, we have learned how important it is for graduate students and supervisors to understand each other holistically. Graduate students bring much strength to the internship setting such as their skills, experience, and a fresh perspective. Given their role as graduate students, they also bring a wealth of knowledge from the courses they have recently taken or are currently taking (e.g., theories, crisis intervention, multicultural counseling, and administration in higher education). In addition to work and school, graduate students are also balancing their personal lives. We discovered that when faculty/site supervisors understood that their graduate students were balancing many life roles, they had a much greater level of empathy, understanding, and realization of how their student intern’s strengths could be best utilized and stretched. In addition, when the supervisor understood what courses graduate students have taken or were taken, they were better able to have discussions about how real-world work situations connected with their coursework.
While working and communicating with faculty/site supervisors, we found a reoccurring theme of faculty/site supervisors not giving themselves enough credit of the incredible role that they can have on their graduate students professional and personal lives. In other words, the vehicle of students’ learning and development often occurs through a positive working relationship with their supervisor. The importance of the supervisory relationship in students/clients’ development has been supported by several scholars, including Loganbill, Hardy, and Delworth’s (1982) developmental model of supervision. As most solid relationships require an investment of time, it is most often during 1:1 weekly supervision meetings when a supervisory relationship will blossom while supervisors take the time to teach, actively listen, and genuinely care for their graduate students.

Supervisors are not only professionals who provide orientation and training to their students, they are also educators and developmental mentors (Janosik et al., 2014). We created two handouts to help faculty/site supervisors become the best educators and developmental mentors they can be. The first document we created was a live supervision form where supervisors are to (a) observe and/or listen to their student during a “live” encounter that their student has at their internship and (b) document and provide feedback to the student about that event/experience. We had our faculty/site supervisors do this six times throughout the academic year. We saw how impactful those live supervisions were both to faculty/site supervisors and graduate students in sharing or receiving important feedback, developing goals, and developing their relationship.

The second handout we created was a journal entry handout that graduate students were to fill out weekly and share with their faculty/site supervisors occasionally. Students were to write down a recent event while outlining a description of it as
well as their thoughts, feelings, and plans for action because of the event. This handout was a very effective tool for teaching graduate students a way in which they can become reflective practitioners.

Assisting students in achieving life-school-work balance

When discussing the roles of the assistantship/internship experience, we mentioned the importance for supervisors to holistically mentor and educate graduate students. When teaching and working with graduate students, faculty/student affairs professionals may think of students holistically but often think of their primary identity as “graduate students” or “graduate interns” depending upon their role as faculty or student affairs professionals. We encourage supervisors to view graduate students in a balanced triadic order of life-school-work balance. We encourage supervisors to think of “life” at the top of the triangle with “school” and “work” balanced at the bottom two corners of the triangle. In this article we have addressed the school and work items, and now we want to emphasize the importance of the lives or personal needs of graduate students. When considering the personal identity of graduate students, we encourage supervisors to think of graduate students' well being, which includes their health, happiness, and prosperity.

In our years of working with faculty/site supervisors, we discovered those who were most effective were the supervisors who cared about students as people first and as employees/students second. Contrary to this, those supervisors who lacked a genuine interest or care about the satisfactory condition of their graduate students seemed to have more conflict in their work settings, and oftentimes their graduate students lacked a sense of belonging to their office. We encourage faculty/site supervisors to engage in appropriate conversations with their graduate students to get to know them as human beings. One way supervisors can do this is by asking
their graduate students about their goals and aspirations, which will begin a dialogue that will often lead to a healthy and lasting relationship. As graduate students come to understand their supervisor’s care and investment for their lives, they will be even more eager to learn from them and receive their mentorship.

Conclusion
Scholars have concluded that a successful assistantship/internship experience is most often one that is intentional in its design (Bruening, Peachey, Evanovich, Fuller, Murty, Percy, & Chung, 2015). With the constant pace and complexity of changes occurring at higher education institutions graduate students are needing to be more prepared than ever to manage more ambiguous contexts in environments demanding a greater degree of responsiveness (Levine & Dean, 2012; Selingo, 2013). In order to best prepare graduate students for these changes as they transition from graduate school to work in the field of college student affairs, we recommend faculty/site supervisors to be strategic in their supervision approach. It is our sincere hope that our five component supervisory model will provide faculty/site supervisors with a road map of attitudes, strategies, and practical ideas that they can implement to maximize graduate student success.

Discussion Questions
1. How might you apply some of the concepts addressed in this article to your current supervision style?
2. What expectations do you have for the graduate students whom you supervise? How and when have you communicated those expectations to them?
3. What role has assessment had in the development of expectations for the assistantship/internship experience?
4. How can you help graduate students put their goals into practice as they transition to work in the field of college student
5. How can you assist graduate students in achieving life-school-work balance?

References

About the Authors
Katelyn Romsa, Assistant Professor of Counseling and Human Development at South Dakota State University, has nine years of higher education experience in both practitioner and scholarly roles. Katelyn’s research interests include the evolution of student-faculty interactions, what matters to millennial college students, preparing graduate students for success, and initiatives to improve student retention and satisfaction.

Bryan Romsa, Assistant Professor of Sport Management at South Dakota State University, has been working as a college professor for the last seven years. Bryan’s research interests include cultural learning through a sport tourism experience, students’ perceptions of leadership behaviors through service learning, and preparing graduate students for success. Both Katelyn and Bryan have taught practicum and internship courses to graduate students pursuing a master’s degree in College Student Affairs or Sport Management. Katelyn and
Bryan have created several handouts aligned with the five components of the supervisory model.

Please email inquiries to Katelyn Romsa or Bryan Romsa.

Disclaimer
The ideas expressed in this article are not necessarily those of the Developments editorial board or those of ACPA members or the ACPA Governing Board, Leadership, or International Office Staff.