

The Office for Commuter Services

Internal Review

Executive Summary

The Office for Commuter Services has been reviewed in comparison to the CAS Standards for Commuter and Off Campus Living Programs. The CAS Standards and Guidelines are comprised of fourteen competencies: mission, program, leadership, human resources, ethics, legal responsibilities, diversity, campus and external relations, financial resources, technology, facilities and equipment and assessment and evaluation.

Commuter and off-campus students are defined by the CAS as students that do not live in university owned property. They account for roughly 80% of college students in the US (Jacoby, 2000). At Bridgewater State University we have found that with roughly 2,790 students living on campus, there are more than 8,200 students commuting. This includes evening, full-time, part-time, undergraduate and graduate.

Although commuter students make up the majority of the population at BSU, there is a long standing American tradition in higher education that focuses more on the needs of resident students. The CAS Standards and Guidelines work to bridge that gap and promote equitable access to institutional programs and engagement opportunities. The needs of our commuter students are varied and unique. The Office for Commuter Services is committed to striving to meet their specific needs through intentional programming and engagement opportunities.

I am happy to report that the fourteen competencies outlined in the CAS Standards and Guidelines are currently met in some fashion. While there is always room for improvement, this is remarkable given some of the limitations for the department.

The mission for the Office for Commuter Services aligns with the CAS Standards and Guidelines by providing opportunities for equitable access to programs, services and engagement opportunities regardless of place of residence. We have found that we have a considerable amount of students living in close proximity to the institution; we have been referring to this population as “resimuters” and recognize that they have different needs and access than our more traditional commuter students.

In terms of programs, CAS Standards and Guidelines recommend programs meet a wide variety of needs and interests. They outline five dimensions: knowledge acquisition, cognitive complexity, intrapersonal development, interpersonal development, humanitarianism/civic engagement, and practical competence. These dimensions align with the program model currently used by the department. The model states that all programs and activities offered must

fall under five categories: diversity, community service, social, academic/educational, personal development. These are more specially outlined in the appendix of this document.

Leadership has been found to be practical and effective. CAS Standards suggests leadership is an essential part of an operation or organization. The Office for Commuter Services provides leadership opportunities through the Commuter Assistant program, the Commuter Student Association positions and the work study students employed in the Commuter Lounge. Their responsibilities and expectations are aligned with the mission of the department and are focused on not only providing programs and services for commuter students but advocating on their behalf.

Human Resources is an integral part of every operation. With regard to Commuter Services, the CAS Standards indicate that there must be established procedures for staff selection training and evaluation. The policies and procedures set forth by Human Resources as well as the Student Employment Office are followed and enforced. Furthermore, all students inquiring to work for the department are interviewed and hired in a fair and equitable process. Students undergo semesterly training and are also evaluated semesterly. This not only provides an opportunity for Commuter Services to connect with student employees but allows student employees to learn skills and knowledge that they will take with them in further employment opportunities. This checks and balances system align nicely with the CAS standards expectations.

CAS indicates an area of ethics. This competency discusses ethical standards and practice as well as confidentiality. Given the nature of the work we do here there are not many instances of confidentiality. That being said, there are ethical expectations that are followed by all members of the staff. Setting a positive example professionally teaches students valuable work ethic and fosters a professional environment.

The only legal responsibilities the Office for Commuter Services deals with is in regard to off campus housing. The office provides an off-campus housing database. This database is an opportunity for faculty, staff and students to search for available housing in the area. All interactions are solely between the parties involved. The institution does not interfere or negotiate in any dealings. That is I made very clear in a disclaimer provided at the beginning of the database. Furthermore, this database is available to only members of the BSU community, requiring a BSU username and password.

Equity and Access speaks to non discriminatory policies and equitable access to facilities. Commuter Services operates in compliance with the university policies regarding this. Furthermore, diversity is met through programs offered under the previously mentioned program model.

The campus and external relations component discusses establishing, maintaining and promoting effective relations. The external relations employed by the office are in dealings with the off campus housing database renters and landlords. While there is limited institutional involvement

in some fashion, relationships built with landlords is always professional and suitable. There are guidelines in place for this database. Any other opportunities for external relations are appropriately utilized through the External Affairs department.

The main goal of the financial resources component is that there is adequate funding that supports the mission and goals. It could be argued that funding is somewhat limited; nonetheless, it is properly aligned to our mission and goals and properly managed through collaboration with the coordinator and bookkeeper.

Technology speaks to compliance with institutional policies and procedures which Commuter Services adheres to. The last two competencies are facilities and equipment and assessment and evaluation. The facilities and equipment competency is not completely up to par in terms of the CAS standards. One dimension of this competency is a work space for professional staff that has the ability to have private or sensitive conversations. Currently there is not adequate space for that. However, another dimension states that staff and employees are adequately trained in safety and emergency procedures. Commuter Services does this through partnering with Campus Police for specialized trainings on a semester basis. Assessment and evaluation is an area that needs to be expanded with more regular program evaluation. This competency is currently met through surveys and employee evaluations. Limited program evaluations are provided currently.

Overall, the Office for Commuter Services has been created to reflect the CAS Standards and Guidelines including the dimensions within the competencies. The following report provides information in more detail as well as information included in an Appendix to support the document.

Respectfully submitted,

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