Proposal for a Graduate Certificate Program in College Admission Counseling

A program of study leading to a graduate certificate in College Admission Counseling is proposed to begin in the Fall of 2009 to supplement the current offerings available in Suffolk University’s School Counseling Program in the Education and Human Services Department. Two pathways exist for certificate attainment: a combined program with the M.Ed. in School Counseling (12 credits, 48 credits total), or a standalone certificate (18 credits).

The work of the high school guidance counselor is varied and diverse; however, most practicing high school counselors would agree that a significant amount of time is dedicated to helping students plan for post-secondary education. Of the 63,903 graduates of high schools in Massachusetts during the 2006-2007 school year, 58% planned to attend a four-year college, and 22% planned to attend a two-year college. Adequately counseling students and their parents as they navigate the ever-changing landscape of college admissions and financial aid is of paramount importance – particularly for first generation college students and other traditionally-underrepresented populations in higher education.

The amount of high school counselors spend engaged in guiding the college admission process in their work is not aligned with the amount of time they spent in graduate school studying facets of college admission counseling. Graduate preparation programs rely on the field-based experience to provide knowledge of college admission counseling. There is only one school counselor preparation program in New England that requires an academic course on the subject (Southern Connecticut State University), and only five that offer an explicitly-named college admission counseling course. In the greater Boston area (50 mile radius), 12 graduate programs exist for school counselor preparation. Of those, Boston University and Bridgewater State are the only programs offering a college admission counseling related course.

Nationally, there are only two certificate programs known to exist which focus on college admission counseling, and both are located in California. The UCLA Extension School offers a six-course, online "College Counseling" certificate program which requires possession of a Bachelor’s degree. The UC San Diego Extension School offers a six-course certificate program with four courses occurring over the summer and two online courses occurring in the Fall. The UCSD "College Counseling" certificate program appears to have no admission requirements. No programs in New England exist which offer a specialized certificate in College Admission Counseling.

Suffolk University’s College Admission Counseling certificate program would be the first in the country to be offered as a post-graduate certificate, and the first program in New England, to provide students with coursework that engenders both practical skills and theoretical knowledge for high school counselors to draw upon as they engage in college admission counseling activities.

Reasons for initiating this program. Graduates from Suffolk and other institutions with Master’s degrees in school counseling who would like to work as ‘traditional’ high school counselors have no options for certificate-bearing programs which capture what constitutes a large part of their work as school counselors – guiding the college admissions process. In Massachusetts, school counselors seeking the professional-level license are required to accumulate a total of 60 graduate credits. Upon attainment of professional level status, school counselors are required to participate in ongoing professional development throughout their careers. Graduate coursework is one option available for continued professional development.

Other reasons for initiating the program include:

1. The need for graduate-level training in college admission counseling issues is great
2. There is a movement nationally to offer at least one course in college admission counseling to future school counselors
3. The vast majority of Suffolk School Counseling graduates go on to work in high schools
4. We have a higher education administration program in the department with relevant courses

Admission Requirements. Possession of a license to practice school counseling from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, its equivalent in other states, or admission to Suffolk University’s School Counseling Program, is required to matriculate into this program.
Proposed Course Structure

Required Courses (12 credits)

- Career Development or Adult Development*
- Fieldwork: College Visits (new course)
- College Admission Counseling Fundamentals (new course)
- Access and Equity in Higher Education Opportunities (new course)

Electives (6 credits)

- College and University Cultures
- Multicultural Counseling
- Junior/Community College: Processes and Problems
- The American College/University Student

* In the combined M.Ed / Certificate program, the career development course would count towards both the M.Ed. and certificate, and only one elective would be required. Students who have previously taken a career development course will be required to take adult development.

Key Course Descriptions

College Admission Counseling Fundamentals. This course will discuss issues surrounding admission testing and financial aid practices, admission policies and procedures, diverse students (e.g., first generation, students with learning disabilities, traditionally underrepresented populations in higher education), and the technology tools used to facilitate the college search and application process (e.g., Naviance, ConnectEdu, the Common Application). School-based programs to promote early college awareness will also be discussed, and the perspective of both the high school and undergraduate admissions counselor will be considered.

Fieldwork: College Visits. This course will require students to visit a minimum of 8 public and private four-year and 2 two-year higher education institutions. Students will meet with admission, diversity services, and disability services personnel of each college to gain insight into how prospective students with diverse backgrounds and abilities would fit the campus resources and offerings.

Access and Equity in Higher Education. Historical and current problems regarding access and equity to higher education opportunities for traditionally underrepresented groups in the college classroom will be explored, with a focus on research describing the problems, and their solutions.

The American College/University Student. The course is an in-depth examination of post-secondary students at all levels utilizing available statistics and other resources to describe various campus cultures and explore student attitudes toward society in general and the post-secondary experience in particular. Focus is given to exploring trends and changes in the enrollment characteristics of college students and addressing the attitudes and values of campus sub groups and cultures. Consideration is given to methods of locating resources on students and to measuring the effect of post-secondary education.

College and University Culture. The purpose of this course is to provide students with an overview of college and university cultures in American higher education. Students will gain an understanding of the properties of campus culture, including norms of behavior, values, stories, physical artifacts, sagas, myths, symbols, and architecture, all of which guide and shape institutional behavior. In addition, students will examine the cultural norms of behavior of various institutional stakeholders - faculty, staff, students, and administrators - and develop an understanding of how campus culture affects each of these groups. In order to become more familiar with the ethos of institutional functioning and behavior, students will conduct a small-scale independent research project, employing qualitative research techniques, to investigate and analyze a particular campus subculture.