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Date: December 17, 2012

To: Members of the College of Education and Other Interested Parties

From: David Monk, Dean of the College of Education  
Damon Sims, Vice President for Student Affairs

Re: A New Design for the Study of Student Affairs

We are pleased to endorse a new degree program being developed within the College of Education. This program results from substantial conversations held by colleagues and students in the College and Student Affairs for several months as they sought to develop a new program of study focused on student affairs. The new program is an outgrowth of collective good faith diligence and effort, for which we are grateful. It is with absolute confidence in the promise this hard work has produced that we pledge our support for this new degree.

The plan modifies the existing free-standing M.Ed. in College Student Affairs to become a scholar-practitioner focused M.S. in Higher Education and Student Affairs. The new M.S. will be a 43-credit, two-year program that stresses the importance of research that engages problems of practice, as well as the analysis of evidence that is the basis of high-quality professional work in student affairs. Graduates of this new program at Penn State will enjoy a comparative advantage in the job market given the program's emphasis on problem solving using evidence-based practices and innovations.

It is important to note that the new degree will retain several key features from the precedent free-standing M.Ed. in College Student Affairs. Principal among these retained elements are the examination of social justice in this context and the provision of funded assistantship opportunities within Student Affairs and related areas of the University. We will formally propose the new degree to the Graduate School in the coming days, and we hope to secure approval in time to admit new students to the program in the fall semester of 2014. Meanwhile, students with interest in student affairs will be admitted into the existing M.Ed. in Higher Education program with the understanding that they will be able to complete the courses that are proposed for the new degree and transfer into the new program upon its approval.

Governance for the new degree will follow the successful partnership model the College has developed with the State College Area School District. Many of you know that the Professional Development School (PDS), which has been in operation for 15 years, follows the premise that both Penn State faculty members and professionals in the area schools bring useful and relevant perspective to the partnership. In the case of the new M.S. degree program, we will be building a partnership between the College of Education and Student Affairs, and personnel from both units will be full partners in the delivery of the new program.

An executive faculty committee will provide guidance for this initiative. Members of the committee will include faculty members from the College and professional staff from Student Affairs, and the committee will interact with the Graduate School through the Office of the Associate Dean for Undergraduate and Graduate Studies in the College of Education. Two program coordinators will oversee the program—one will be appointed by the Dean of the College and the other will be appointed by the Vice President for Student Affairs. Beginning January 2013, these two positions will be held by Jacqueline Edmondson from the College and Philip Burlingame from Student Affairs.

Members of the new program's faculty will come from the College of Education, Student Affairs, and other related units. All these faculty members will have Graduate Faculty status. There will be an expectation that they periodically teach courses in the program, serve as advisors to students in the program, and participate on various committees, including the admissions committee. The faculty will meet at least once a semester, and the Program Coordinators will manage day-to-day operations.

We hope you agree that this is a unique and exciting partnership. The possibilities this opportunity affords allow us to establish a model for all of higher education. It certainly encourages a new era of collaboration between the College and Student Affairs at Penn State, and it invites all of us to join in the spirit of high quality professional practice that is informed by true scholarship. The College has learned valuable lessons about such partnerships from its success with the PDS experience, and Student Affairs has gained increased confidence in such partnerships by way of other collaborations it has pursued in recent years with academic units. We have every confidence that similar success and accomplishment will be achieved in this instance.

If there are any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact either one or both of us. We welcome your engagement in this important initiative.

Many thanks.

xc: B. Bowen  
R. Pangborn