

Stanford Study Cites Neag School's Administrator Prep Program as "Exemplary"

Of all the critical needs in American education, none may be more urgent than the shortage of effective, competent school administrators. The Neag School of Education's program for filling that need recently earned national recognition for its work in recruiting, developing and training such leaders.

The University of Connecticut Administrator Preparation Program, or UCAPP, was found to be among the most comprehensive in the country, according to research done by the Stanford University Educational Leadership Institute.

UCAPP, based in the Neag School's Department of Educational Leadership, works through five cohorts around Connecticut, in Farmington, East Hartford, southeastern Connecticut, Stamford and Windham, and all are grounded in the experience-based process by which adults learn best.

The Stanford School Leadership Study says adult learners should be "exposed to situations requiring the application of acquired skills, knowledge and problem-solving strategies within authentic settings." In that regard, the report calls UCAPP an "exemplary" program, making special mention of its internship component, which places UCAPP students with mentor principals for a total of 80 days during the two-year program. The Stanford report found that this partnership "helps cement a link between fieldwork and coursework."

For Barry Sheckley, professor and head of the Department of Educational Leadership, that "link" has been a key area of improvement to UCAPP over its sixteen years in existence.

"There was a ground shift for us, in that we re-focused our priorities. We wanted the internship to be positioned as the key forum for participants to learn about the subtleties and nuances of educational leadership. The students' work in classrooms was set up to support their clinical internships instead of the other way around," says Sheckley, who holds an endowed position as the Neag Professor of Adult Learning.

He credits a unique partnership between UCAPP and the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS) with helping make this important change to strengthen the internship experience for UCAPP students. In responding to the Stanford researchers, UCAPP participants gave the program high marks for integrating theory and practice, emphasizing leadership for school improvement, and for a faculty that students found "very knowledgeable."

In all three areas, the UCAPP program was far ahead of a comparison sample documenting the preparation and leadership practices of school administrators on both the state and national levels. The

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Stanford study also credited UCAPP with fostering a “continuous improvement” approach to its program. In the months since the study was completed in December 2006, Sheckley says, even more has been done to enhance UCAPP, including a new initiative called an “electronic portfolio” in which students chart their progress in both coursework and fieldwork. This portfolio could include papers, videos, the mentor’s assessment of the student’s work and the student’s reflections on their own work.

The e-portfolio is useful, Sheckley says, in two ways. One, when UCAPP is assessed by the NCATE reviewers, the e-portfolio will show how students demonstrated competence on each of the educational leadership standards established by the National Policy Board. The e-portfolio will also help UCAPP graduates in job interviews when asked about their ability in developing policy or communicating with parents. The graduates can show direct evidence from their portfolios.

More important, Sheckley says “The Stanford report documented that our already strong program will only get better as we solidify our relationship with the Connecticut Association of Schools and re-commit ourselves to the growth and development of accomplished administrative leadership.”

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