

CDS Working Group on Academic Accreditation

In October 2019, the CDS Board of Directors established a working group under the Vice Chair of Programs to develop and make recommendations on establishing an accrediting body and procedure for professional academic degree programs. This endeavor follows advice given fifty years earlier by Lee Cary and his colleagues at the University of Missouri Columbia as they formed the Community Development Society. As his concluding remarks in *Community Development as a Process* state,

Professional education for community development has been referred to only briefly in this book, yet much of the future of community development rests here. The social science building blocks of this emerging profession need to be more clearly identified; there needs to be more specificity in terms of what the community developer should know and be prepared to do; there is a need to articulate an emerging theory of practice; there is also a need to prepare many more people for careers in community development. (Cary 1970, 198-199)

Emejulu and Shaw (2010) argue, “What community development means at any particular time is defined by all those interests which have sought to name, frame and regulate it” (5). While CDS and IACD have named and framed the field in an adopted definition, and CDS has adopted the Principles of Good Practice (currently undergoing updating revisions), to determine which particular knowledge and skills are required for professional practice are still the tasks at hand. Furthermore, higher education must ensure that professional degree programs disseminate this knowledge and build these skills.

To be clear, this Working Group is *not* developing a new certification process for practitioners—such opportunities already exist. Instead, we are digging deep into available information on core competencies—including ethical principles and standards—to identify the state of the art in the field. Source data comes from CDS, IACS, and Extension, in addition to the many professional degree programs now in existence. Some of these programs are master’s degrees in community development, and some are specializations in other professional degrees like planning, public administration, and social work.

We are also looking to the accreditation bodies and procedures of these allied disciplines for guidance in overall professional degree program standards and self-study processes. Of particular interest is the highly flexible (as opposed to prescriptive) approach used by NASPAA (<https://www.naspaa.org/>), the accrediting body for public administration.

Also for clarification, our current scope does not include inquiry into undergraduate degree programs. While some of our sister fields do accredit such academic programs, we are limiting our scope as a starting point.

Our first year’s efforts focused on the pursuit of adequate funding to complete this extensive research project, including participatory planning hosted by CDS as a program element during its annual conferences. With support from CDS, IACD, and NACDEP, our proposal to the USDA Higher Education Challenge Grants was recommended by the reviewers for funding but was not

awarded due to the program's very limited budget last fiscal year. As many of us know, NIFA, the unit that oversees this grant program, experienced great challenges during its move to Kansas City. We were encouraged to reapply in this fiscal year and intend to do so.

This does not deter us from continuing the work! The current team, led by Margaret Stout (West Virginia University), includes Michael Dougherty (West Virginia University), Mary Emery (South Dakota State University), Cornelia Butler Flora (Iowa State University), Ron Hustedde (University of Kentucky), Paul Lachapelle (Montana State University, Rhonda Phillips (Purdue University), Mark Roseland (Arizona State University), and Tiffany Thomas (Prairie View A&M University). We welcome any other CDS members who wish to join the team! If you would like to do so, or would like more information about the Working Group, please reach out to Margaret Stout at Margaret.Stout@mail.wvu.edu. We are eager to engage you!