

SIUE CSPA graduate students spread nationwide this summer to complete competitive field placements

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EDWARDSVILLE - Southern Illinois University Edwardsville College Student Personnel Administration (CSPA) graduate students are refining their leadership and

organizational skills, building professional networks and developing personally as they take a step outside their comfort zones and complete competitive field placements in seven states across the nation.

“The CSPA program’s increased reach and reputation is related to a greater emphasis on professional preparation and the competitiveness of our students, which is reflective of our contemporary and rigorous program curriculum,” said Pietro Sasso, PhD, assistant professor in the School of Education, Health and Human Behavior’s Department of Educational Leadership, and CSPA program director. “We are proud of our students’ success in securing these competitive national placements that will further develop them as emerging leaders.”

CSPA graduate students are currently placed at 12 institutions, including Florida International University, University of Massachusetts Lowell, Washington University in St. Louis, Randolph Macon College in Virginia, Cedar Crest College in Pennsylvania and the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign, among others.

Groveland native Chelsea Gilles was drawn to Cedar Crest College for both the professional opportunities it held and the personal perseverance it would require to spend a summer that far from home.

“I remember sitting in orientation for the CSPA program and hearing that we should do at least one practicum that is completely out of our comfort zone,” Gilles explained. “After accepting this position and arriving onsite, I could not be more thankful that I chose to take a risk. I have learned that sometimes you have to enter the unknown, and trust that you will learn and grow in that space.”

Gilles’ summer placement is through the National Association for Orientation, Transition and Retention (NODA). Upon completing her degree, she aspires to work in either student success or first-year experience areas of higher education.

“I have grown professionally by becoming more adaptable, taking more initiative and simply being more confident in my work,” she added. “My experiences here will enhance my work as a student affairs professional. Having gained these skills has been very rewarding.”

Conversely, Mason Prata, of Haverhill, Mass., is spending his summer closer to home as he works at UMass Lowell.

“This has been a phenomenal opportunity, and has contributed to my professional growth and development greatly,” Prata said. “I am passionate about helping students make the most of their undergraduate experience. My more immediate career aspiration

is to work as a residence hall director. UMass has a well-developed and implemented Living Learning Community program which has been incredibly interesting and directly increased my career preparation.”

Prata’s summer placement has boosted his confidence, and offered experience in effectively navigating the various positions and roles that everyone plays among a large staff.

“It’s been incredibly rewarding to work with UMass’s Summer Conferences program,” he explained. “Being a part of coordinating and working with such large numbers of students and conference guests has helped me refine many of the social skills and leadership abilities necessary to work in student affairs. I’ve also forged relationships with other professionals as I begin building my network of student affairs colleagues.”

The SIUE CSPA program is one of the few programs in the region to offer placements at professional colleges, community colleges and historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs).

According to Sasso, CSPA students who engage in rigorous field placement opportunities are often complemented by additional experiences within graduate assistantships in student affairs at SIUE or at neighboring partner institutions in the St. Louis Metropolitan area.

“Our students immerse themselves in experiential learning in at least two areas of higher education,” he said. “The experiences provided to students prepare them as emerging professionals, and make them competitive on a national scale for employment in student affairs and higher education administration.”

By preparing the next generation of leaders in a knowledge-based economy, [SIUE’s Graduate School](#) fulfills the region’s demand for highly trained professionals. Graduate School offerings include arts and sciences, business, education, health, human behavior, engineering, nursing and interdisciplinary opportunities. SIUE professors provide students with a unique integration of theoretical education and hands-on research experiences. Students can obtain graduate certificates or pursue master’s degrees, and be part of a supportive learning and rich intellectual environment that is tailored to the needs of adult learners. The Graduate School raises the visibility of research at SIUE, which ranks highest among its Illinois Board of Higher Education peers in total research and development expenditures according to the National Science Foundation. Doctoral programs are available in the Schools of Education, Health and Human Behavior (EdD) and Nursing (DNP). The School of Engineering and the Department of Historical Studies feature cooperative doctoral programs (PhD), and the College of Arts and Sciences features an environmental resources and policy cooperative PhD.

