
Chapter 7 Counseling Services

Beginning on the next page you will find a scan of the 7th chapter of the 2008 Student Services in Community and Technical Colleges Practitioners Guide. This is being distributed with permission from Jessica Gilmore-English, the current President of the Washington Student Services Council, in an effort to make more widely available sections of a manual that was only ever available in print. This is specifically intended for the members of the Task Force on Community and Technical College Counselors for research purposes.

We find it important to emphasize that the information you will find in the pages below is dated 2008 and before. As this information is over ten years old, it can provide a historical look at the state of counseling services in the Washington Community and Technical College system, but may not reflect the current reality of counseling services. We ask that you keep this in mind as you read this material.

If you need the information below in a different format and for any other questions, please contact Lexi Swanson at lswanson@sbctc.edu or 360-704-4390

Mission
The mission of counseling services is to provide professionally trained assessment and holistic interventions to maximize the success of students from the point of entrance through the achievement of their educational, career, and personal goals.

Services and Functions
Counselors are vital members of campus planning and retention efforts. They provide essential educational programs and services designed to meet the needs of their unique communities. Counselors use psychological theory and research to help students make progress toward their educational and career goals and with their emotional and social development.

Educational Counseling/Academic Advising
Educational counseling includes helping students learn strategies for academic success and addressing personal barriers. Counselors provide services such as interpreting basic skills and placement test results, reviewing information about educational programs and courses, explaining college policies and procedures, and guiding students to appropriate information in their fields of interest. While academic advising and educational planning are done at various levels of depth and complexity by different employees, counselors are uniquely trained to interview students and develop a holistic educational plan that takes into account a student’s educational background; emotional, social, and academic readiness; levels of support; family circumstances; and schedule. Martin (2004) reports that holistic academic advising has been the most frequently requested student service provided by counselors in the community and technical college system. Other examples of educational counseling include assisting students with choosing a program of study; transferring to a university; withdrawing from classes; coping with math, speech, or test anxiety; exploring learning styles; and improving study skills.

Career Counseling
Career counseling involves students in an exploration of personal interests, motivations, values, and abilities, and teaches the development of decision-making skills through the selection of career goals. Counselors instruct students about employment trends, specific career and job search skills, as well as select, administer, and interpret standardized career assessment instruments.

Counselors may oversee or work in tandem with college career centers to provide additional services. Counselors help students use career exploration databases and other resources that provide students with tools to explore occupations and various training programs.
Personal Counseling

Personal counseling addresses issues such as the balance of school, work, and home; difficulties in class; dealing with anxiety or depression; confronting prejudice or discrimination; relationship problems; identity confusion and uncertainty; managing grief, anger, or shyness; coping with major life transitions; lack of confidence and assertiveness; time and stress management; and dealing with perfectionism and unrealistic expectations.

Crisis Intervention and Mental Health Response

In collaboration with campus security, college administrators, and community referral resources, counselors assist with a host of mental health related issues. Counselors are familiar with the mental health resources in their community and make appropriate referrals as needed. Counselors generally do not provide clinical diagnosis or long-term treatment in the community college environment.

Instruction

Counselors regularly teach classes related to human development and applied psychology. The primary objective of instruction is to improve student success through coping skills, decision making, goal setting, career development, and effective life management.

Consultation and Advocacy

Counselors consult and advocate for students with instructors, administrators, and other campus offices (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2003). They help address complaints, assist in identifying and resolving complex situations, provide training and feedback on classroom behavior and/or challenging students, and serve the campuswide community through committee work, planning bodies, and guest lecturing.

Staffing and Organizational Structure

According to the Revised Code of Washington (RCW 28B.52.020, 1991), community and technical college counselors are faculty members based on their status as “academic employees” (¶ 2). They have a minimum of a master’s degree in counseling, psychology, or related field (Washington Administrative Code, WAC 131-16-091, 2004) from an accredited university that includes a supervised practicum and internship in counseling. Some counselors have additional training or licensure in mental health and/or addictions counseling.

Counselors adhere to a professional code of ethics, maintain confidentiality, and follow duty-to-report laws according to the professional guidelines and ethical standards set by their professional associations and state licensure boards. While there are state laws through the Washington State Department of Health pertaining to counselor registration and licensure, community colleges have varying interpretations of these regulations.

The institution and the state must provide adequate financial resources to ensure the provision of a broad range of counseling services. This requires strong institutional commitment to provide necessary facilities, staffing, and operational funding.

Physical Facilities

The facility for office and program space should be a welcoming and safe environment. It should be located close to other student services units and in an area that is easily visible and accessible to students. Layout and access should be in compliance with the relevant requirements mandated by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA). A variation to this model might include col locating counselors in instructional divisions or departments.

Features important to a counseling services center are

- a comfortable reception area for students;
- private offices for counselors to meet with students and store confidential records;
- local printing availability to print confidential materials and resources;
- a conference room for staff meetings and group meetings with students;
- adequate storage facilities and a workroom for office equipment;
- an area for professional library resources.

If a career center and/or transfer center is linked with counseling services, adequate space for these functions and their materials should be allocated.

Quality Indicators

Colleges may use multiple sources of data to determine the quality of counseling services. Examples include classroom and workshop evaluations, satisfaction surveys, demographic descriptions of students served, student-to-counselor ratios, access and availability, quality of educational background of employees, cultural and gender balance, professional licensure and/or certifications.
held, and the amount of counselor participation in professional development activities. Some colleges may also evaluate the quality of counseling services against measures of student retention, achievement, and graduation rates.

**Best Practices**

Coats, Ash, and Dorsey (1998) developed K–14 guidelines for comprehensive counseling and guidance so that schools and colleges could develop and implement their own plans. These guidelines were ultimately endorsed by a variety of state and national organizations that provide direction for counseling programs and provide a strategic planning foundation for individual colleges.

Inasmuch as it is still a challenge, another best practice of counseling services is an emphasis on multicultural counseling (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). Students and counselors are often exposed to new perspectives that challenge their perceptions, stereotypes, and behavior. According to Santos, Ortiz, Morales, and Rosales (2007), “campus climate plays an important role in student success or failure” (p. 105) and add that a negative climate contributes to poor psychological adjustment, poor academic performance, and low persistence across various ethnic identities. Counselors are in a good position to work with students to enhance multicultural competencies and to provide institutional leadership and training.

Counselors have been involved in educating employees and students about mental health issues and managing difficult situations. North Seattle Community College, for example, uses e-mail to provide suggestions on how to intervene in cases of student/campus emotional distress. Similarly, Lake Washington Technical College has distributed checklists for risk assessment related to suicide and violence. Clark College has implemented a series of workshops titled “Mental Health Mondays.” Topics have included substance abuse, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and warning signs of serious mental health problems associated with violence.

**Challenges**

Meeting student counseling needs continues to be an ongoing system challenge. Counselors are encountering progressively more frequent and complex student issues that require intensive services and resources. Contributing factors include an increasingly diverse student population with numerous needs in social, behavioral, gender, and cultural areas, compounded by a lack of community/mental health resources and increased societal pressures.

One of the biggest challenges facing counselors is the reduction of positions and increased workload within the community college system. An analysis of student-to-counselor ratios in Washington State community colleges from 1985 to 2000 demonstrates an increase by 48% from 1,086 students per counselor in fall quarter 1985 to 1,604 students per counselor in fall quarter 2000 (Martin, 2004). However, several authors (Bishop & Walker, 1990; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Jenkins, 1996) have clearly identified the positive impact that counseling has on student retention. Therefore, institutions and counselors must identify strategies to continue providing quality services to meet students’ needs. Another challenge facing counselors related to reduction of positions may be connected to a lack of recognition of counseling value to the maintenance and growth of full-time equivalent (FTE) students. Several authors (Bishop & Brenneman, 1986; Bishop & Walker, 1990; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Jenkins, 1996) have identified the positive impact that counseling has had on retention, but more state and institutional research may be useful.

Online instruction, evolving technology, and student expectations are having an impact on counseling services. Students are increasingly expecting access to online counseling resources and virtual counseling appointments. As more students are able to simultaneously enroll at multiple campuses, institutions will need to develop policies that address availability, procedural issues, and ethical/quality standards related to virtual counseling services.

**Future Directions**

As the frequency and severity of mental health problems increase on open-door campuses (Blom & Beckley, 2005; Kadison, 2004), it is vital to have counselors who can respond to these concerns. The National Council on Student Development advocates that college counseling centers provide consultation services with psychologists and psychiatrists to meet the needs of students (Garrett, Bragg, & Makela, 2006). Consultation with individuals who have advanced training can be especially helpful when working with students who present particularly difficult cases. Some schools have already started placing greater emphasis on mental health licensure in the hiring process and have developed wraparound health services that include access to nurse practitioners and prescription services.
High-profile cases such as the April 2007 shootings at Virginia Tech and the University of Washington put pressure on colleges to review and/or develop comprehensive programs related to campus safety. Counselors can play a unique role in faculty/staff training and developing programs and policy surrounding risk and behavioral incident assessment and crisis response.

Another issue is one of developing standards. In 1997, the California Community Colleges adopted statewide standards of practice for counseling programs. These standards were a result of Title 5 legislation in California (California Community College Chancellor's Office, 2003). Counseling standards currently exist within Washington State for the K–12 system (RCW 28A.410, n.d.) and were strengthened with the passage of HB 1670 during the 2007 legislative session. This approach could also maintain and improve counseling standards for the community and technical college system.

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References and Resources


