

ENROLLMENT GROWTH CHALLENGES

AN OVERVIEW OF STUDENT SERVICES IN COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES AND HOUSING AND RESIDENTIAL LIFE

Office of Counseling and Psychological Services

Dr. Michael J. Hughes, Director

Mission

The Office of Counseling and Psychological Services provides a broad range of services to the students of Shawnee State University. Services are offered by a licensed clinical counselor in a confidential setting to students who may be experiencing a personal problem and wish to discuss it with a counselor. The focus of counseling is to maintain open communication while actively listening and not being judgmental, encouraging and teaching skills to solve problems, helping the student to understand the warning signs of psychological disorders, knowing what resources are available both on and off campus and when to ask for help. In addition, the Office offers outreach services for students of the university community. This proactive approach of education/ prevention may encourage students to seek help. Counseling can then focus on assisting the student in understanding the situation before it becomes a crisis and prevent the onset of more serious difficulties thus achieving the goal of the Office which is to ensure the retention of academically qualified but “at-risk” students.

Services

A full range of services are provided by the Office to address the concerns that a student may be experiencing:

- assessment and evaluation
- crisis intervention
- individual and group counseling
- marital/couple counseling
- biofeedback therapy
- relaxation/stress management training
- substance abuse education/counseling
- safe sex counseling
- HIV/AIDS testing/counseling
- skills development workshops
- education/prevention programs
- ACT Residual Testing
- consultation services
- referral services.

Changing Trends

Prior to 1994, researchers noted that relationship issues were the number one reported problem in college counseling centers. Additionally, typical developmental issues that all students face such as academic difficulties, developing independence, coping with peer pressure as well as living up to their own and others expectations were the focus of treatment. After that year, stress and anxiety disorders became the primary concerns. Of additional significance, was the growth in the complexity of the problems experienced by students. Sexual assault concerns, problems related to sexual abuse, alcohol and drug abuse, self- injury, personality disorders and eating disorders as well as depression and suicidal ideation became the issues presented by clientele of the counseling centers. Over the past decade, the number of students suffering from depression has doubled, suicidal students tripled and victims of sexual assault quadrupled.

There appear to be several reasons for this dramatic shift in the focus of treatment. First, the concept of open enrollment has allowed students, who have been in counseling and may be on medication prior to attending college, to become part of the university community. Thus they may bring existing psychological problems with them. Second, college counseling centers are becoming a referral place for mental health professionals under pressure to return clients to the community. The college counseling center is seen as a place where their clients can get the clinical support needed. Third, diminished community mental health resources put pressure on college counseling centers to provide services to students with serious psychological problems that in the past would have been referred off campus. And finally, there is a more general acceptance of counseling. The stigma that in the past prevented many students from seeking services has significantly lessened in our society.

As a result, college counseling centers began to report rapidly increasing numbers of students seeking services. This demand for services has increased at a rate in some counseling centers that are greater than the number of staff to provide the services.

National Survey of Counseling Center Directors

The University of Pittsburgh has conducted a national survey of college counseling centers since 1981 to assess the changing trends in the counseling centers. The 2005 survey provided data from 366 university counseling centers. The following were some of the most significant findings:

- 96% of the centers believe that the increase of students with more serious problems is a growing concern
- 9% of all students sought counseling last year
- 42.8% of those students seeking services were deemed to have severe psychological problems with 8.5% having impairment so serious that they could not remain in school
- 34.5% of those students were experiencing severe problems but with extensive psychological help were treated successfully by the centers
- 17.1% of the students were referred for psychiatric evaluations
- 25.1% were on psychotropic medications
- 2,462 were hospitalized for psychological reasons
- 13.8% increase in self injury by students since 2004

- 12.7% increase in students needing long term care since the previous year
- 154 suicides were reported by the centers surveyed .It is estimated that 1100
- college students committed suicide during the last academic year. Suicide is the
- second leading cause of death among college students.

The survey also polled students on the benefit of counseling. 54.6% report that counseling helped them to remain in school while 60% claimed that it helped their academic performance.

Trends at Shawnee State

The Office of Counseling and Psychological Services appears to be reflective of the national trends. In reviewing the three primary services offered by the Office since 2001, there has been a significant increase in the demand for services. Direct counseling services to students such as individual, group and couple counseling has increased by 68%. The request for outreach programs which include classrooms presentations, workshops and education/prevention programming has risen by 29%. And most significant has been the increased requests by faculty and staff for consultation regarding students who are experiencing problems in the classroom or their student employment positions. Consultation services have increased by 75%.

In addition, the same shift in the focus of problems addressed by other counseling centers as well as the increase in the severity of the problems presented by students has been seen by this Office. There has been a significant increase on this campus of:

- threatened and/or attempted suicides
- disciplinary referrals for students who have violated the Student Code of Conduct, primarily related to alcohol abuse and acting-out behaviors
- students referred off campus to local psychiatrists or their family physicians for medication due to the severity of their anxiety and depression
- number of students who report being sexually assaulted
- students enrolling at Shawnee State with serious psychological disorders such as bi-polar disorder, personality disorders and PTSD.

The reasons for the changing trends at Shawnee State is no different than those at other college counseling centers previously cited. However, two additional factors have impacted Shawnee State recently. The first is the significant increase in enrollment over the past several years. With additional students on campus, more students needing counseling services can be expected. The second is the rapid expansion of the residence halls. Students who are living away from home for the first time, lacking the familiar support systems, experimenting with new found freedoms, not yet fully adapt at making appropriate decisions and struggling with finding ways to cope with the pressures and demands of the college environment are more likely to develop serious emotional problems, turn to abusing substances to cope and exposing themselves to risks such as sexual assault when seeking the emotional support of others.

Current Staffing

The Office is currently staffed by a 1 FTE doctoral level clinical counselor and a ½ FTE clerical support staff member. The current student to counselor ratio is 3820 to 1. It should be noted that

in the National Counseling Center Directors Survey (2005), the average student to counselor ratio for the 366 universities sampled was 1698 to 1.

With the current staff, it has at times become increasingly difficult to respond to the needs of the University community's request for services. One of the problems with the increase in students requesting counseling services, which is viewed as the Office's priority, is that it limits the provision of other programs, particularly in the area of outreach services. It becomes a choice of where to utilize existing resources to achieve the maximum benefit. Consequently, the Office has maintained counseling services to students as the primary objective and is operating under the brief psychotherapy model. This is a technique whereby the counselor actively focuses the treatment on the critical aspects of the problem and then utilizes the shortest, most effective treatment techniques to resolve the student's concerns as quickly as possible. This is a common method utilized by counseling centers when the demand for services has increased at a rate greater than the number of staff available.

In addition, to compensate for this Office's lack for sufficient staff to respond quickly and in all cases to the student's needs, several procedures have been utilized so that no student goes unserved. Some students need more than brief psychotherapy. In such cases, the Office has developed cooperative agreements with local mental health centers, drug/alcohol detoxification and treatment centers and private practitioners for students in need of long term, more intensive or specialized care. The Office has also instituted an in-house referral mechanism to other counselors and social workers on campus in other departments within the Division of Student Affairs when a student arrives in crisis and the Office counselor is not available. In order to provide 24/7 crisis intervention services in the evenings, on weekends and during holidays, students are referred to the community Crisis Hotline staffed by the local mental health center. These mechanisms have been developed in order to ensure that students seeking counseling services are served in a timely manner. However, Shawnee State is in the midst of rapid growth through increased enrollment and the expansion of the University's residence halls. Consequently, it is projected that there will be continued increasing demands for the services provided by this Office.

Next Steps

With a student to counselor ratio of approximately 3900 to 1, and as the University works toward its project goal of 5000 students; a change in the staffing pattern of the Office of Counseling and Psychological Services needs to be implemented.

Research

It is important to discuss what recent research has identified as needs beyond the traditional counseling offered in order to better serve the university community by a college counseling center.

Consistent with recent research is the need for counseling centers to be more involved in outreach to the larger campus. What is suggested is that the centers need to continue to expand their roles through increased communication with faculty and staff. This will increase the

visibility of the center on campus as well as promote collaboratively efforts with other campus systems to provide support to students in need.

Another theme suggests that outreach to students should be targeted toward incoming freshmen who are vulnerable to a variety of personal, social and academic pressures. Research has estimated that 20% of incoming freshmen classes are already experiencing emotional problems and are in need of counseling. It is strongly recommended that counseling centers actively address the needs of the incoming freshmen.

Other areas recommended for outreach includes prevention programming on sexual assault, substance abuse and personal safety. Obviously campus-wide education on recognizing and understanding mental health issues before they become a problem is suggested. A critical area is involvement in the development of resident life classes, workshops and activities so that counseling centers may prevent or reduce problems that typically arise in this setting. Also outreach services should work to identify and address the concerns of specific “high need” populations such as non-traditional students, women and minorities. Another suggestion is to develop ways in which the university community can receive information and training on the issues facing college students to improve the way in which the larger campus can respond to difficult situations.

By increasing outreach efforts, developing mental health education programs and interventions, creating campus awareness of issues of concern and improving counselor visibility, the counseling center may better serve the needs of the university community.

Recommendations

With a larger, more diverse student body, changes in the types of services offered will need to be implemented. Direct counseling services to students have been the strength of this Office and needs to continue to be the focal point. However, as the number of residential students increase, formal evening hours may need to be established. Education/prevention programs need to be offered in the evening so that students attending classes primarily during the day have the opportunity to attend. Stronger efforts need to be made to get into the residence halls for outreach services since traditionally these are the most “at-risk” students. Enhanced training of the residence advisors in order to deal more effectively with the problems they face as the residence halls continue to expand needs immediate attention. In addition, the residence halls are where most “crisis” occurs during the evenings and on weekends. More structured agreements with the local mental health center, area emergency rooms and the Police Department are indicated since they possess the needed resources to assist the Office during a crisis as well as the power to act when treatment or hospitalization is indicated.

Office of Student Activities & Auxiliaries

Mr. Randall L. Warman, Director

The Office of Student Activities & Auxiliaries encompasses many facets of student life, among which is Housing and Residence Life.

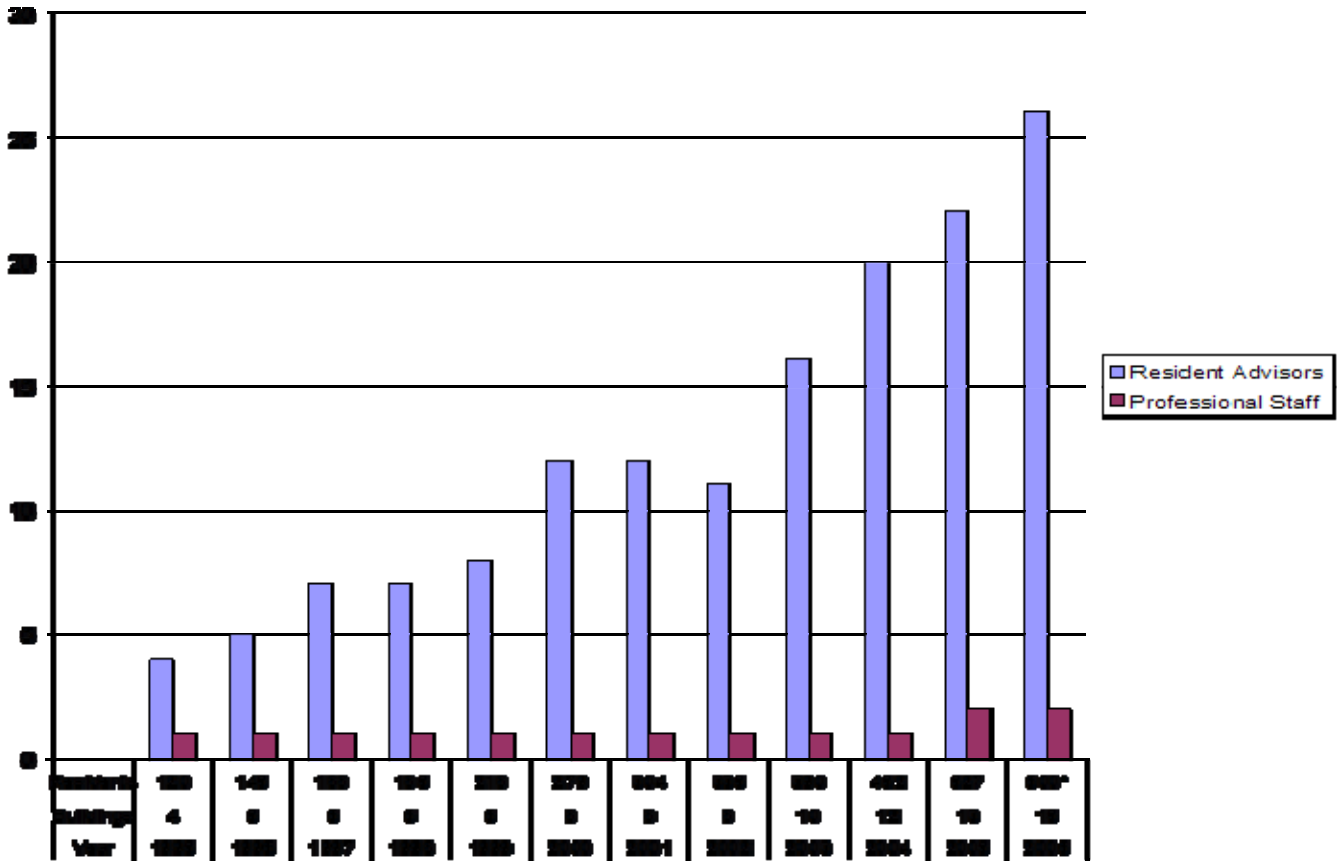
Overview

Increased enrollment has yielded more students who are required to live in University housing. The number of residence units has increased from the original University-owned townhouses (124 students) in 1995, to include Cedar House (46 students) and Carriage House (15 students) for a total of 185 students. In order to provide enough bed space for our increasing population, the University has entered into an agreement with a local developer for additional housing units. To date seven Campus View units (334 students) that are privately owned by a local developer are managed by staff in the Office of Student Activities. The University and the developer plan to open an additional two units this coming fall, 2006 (96 students). The combined total of University housing and that provided by the developer is (will be) 615 students.

In the fall of 1997 – 1998, the University had 188 residents and 7 Resident Advisors, a ratio of 37 to 1. In the fall of 2005 – 2006, the University had 532 residents and 23 Resident Advisors, a ratio of 43 to 1. This represents a residential student increase of over 353% and over 304% in Resident Advisors since 1997. While demonstrating terrific growth for SSU, it has also increased the workload for all staff members in the housing area and substantially reduces our ability to meet the many important needs of residential students.

A Look at the Numbers

The below chart will reflect the dynamic growth of housing residents in relations to the professional staff available to serve their needs.



National Standards

ACUHO-I, the Association of College and University Housing Officers-International recommends one professional individual living on campus per 300 student residents. Our current (and future) student population places Shawnee State outside of this standard, meeting it at only 50% of the recommended level. This staff-student ratio is founded on the premise that assistance, broadening influence and concern of trained professionals are invaluable aids to the self development of the individual residential student.

Statistically, “Generation Next” is experiencing more issues dealing with emotional problems and normal mental adjustment. These same students are bringing these issues with them to campuses across the nation and it is reasonable to assume that Shawnee State should experience a proportionate amount of these problems.

The time has come once again for us to address our residential growth and the level of service we are able to professionally give students. As the number of residents in University housing has grown it has become a challenge for our professional staff to meet the needs of resident students.

Current Staffing/Responsibilities

Current staff levels and a summary of duties are as follows:

Assistant Director, Student Housing: Responsible for every aspect of residence life. Ensures facilities are safe, clean, and provides an environment conducive to student success. Addresses and plans for maintenance issues, both current and long term. Monitors student behavior in coordination with the resident advisors, to ensure compliance to policies and adjudicates violations that occur. Maintains records mandated by state and federal government relating to alcohol violations, meningitis shot records, and assaults. Manages financial operations and works with Director of Student Activities in preparation of annual budgets. Frequently meets with parents and students to discuss issues relative to living on campus. This position does not live on campus, but must be accessible at all times via pager or cell telephone.

Assistant Coordinator, Student Activities and Housing: This is our only “live-in” professional staff member. This person is the first responder if the RA’s need after-hours assistance or advice. She is the immediate supervisor of the resident advisors (RAs) and meets regularly with them to ensure residents’ needs are being met. This position currently assists both the Assistant Director (Housing) and the Coordinator of Student Activities.

Resident Advisors: These 25 students have a wide spectrum of responsibilities. They are the eyes and ears of the professional staff; guiding our residents through the campus living experience and other challenges that college life presents.

Professional staff members facilitate more interaction between RAs and the students living on campus. Professional staff members make a positive impact on our efforts to provide more educational and social programs, each improving the environment of our residential community and the retention of students. As the University continues to grow, we are very desirous of embarking on new initiatives that our fellow institutions have already initiated such as living/learning communities and theme housing.

Students reap many benefits from on-campus professional housing staff:

- Adequate coverage and quicker responses to emergency situations that may arise, e.g., suicides, drug overdoses, alcohol abuse.
- Reactivation of the Residence Life Council which has been in a state of limbo due to a lack of staff availability and necessary resources.
- Parents will have a higher degree confidence and satisfaction regarding the safety and supervision of their student. Ultimately, this should translate to increased retention in the residence halls and the University.
- Resident Advisors will have more support resources enabling them to better perform their duties.
- Greek life should improve as those assigned to advise it will be able to devote more time to its success.
- Current staff will be able to address issues such as improving housing procedures, programming, leadership development, and discipline guidelines.

Summary

The current staff of The Office of Student Activities and Auxiliaries is stretched thin. While the University in general is experiencing moderate, manageable growth, housing is growing at a considerably larger percentage. As previously stated, today's youth are arriving on campus with unprecedented amounts of emotional baggage. According to the authors of *College of the Overwhelmed*, "since 1988, the likelihood of a student's suffering depression has doubled, suicidal ideation has tripled, and sexual assaults have quadrupled".

We have been very fortunate on this campus to date, but are seeing an increase in the above mentioned areas. While having professional staff is certainly no guarantee against these maladies, the extra presence, expertise, and leadership would go a long way towards shifting the odds in our favor. This would greatly enhance our service capability to students while bringing the University to a comparative level with national standards already in place at other colleges and universities across the nation.