



Information BRIEF

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The Impact of Counseling Services on the Academic Success of Students

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"My counselor has been an incredible resource and has changed my life in ways I never knew were possible."

--New College of Florida student

HIGHLIGHTS

- After three or more counseling sessions, most students report improved behavioral and mental health.
- Students who use counseling center services are as likely as or more likely to remain enrolled and graduate than students who do not.
- Counseling center services help students do well academically, remain enrolled and graduate.

Introduction

In September 2016, the Board was informed of a critical need that is impacting students across all state universities. The "The Mental and Behavioral Health of Students and the Need for Increased Counseling Services" information brief showed that student demand for counseling services has outstripped the capacity of the counseling centers in the State University System (SUS). Since 2008-09, the number of counseling service clients served by SUS institutions has increased by 48% and the number of counseling sessions provided has increased by 67%.

The Impact of Counseling Center Services

Numerous studies have shown that poor health – physical, mental, or behavioral – adversely affects all aspects of day-to-day life, including learning. Mental and behavioral health problems often impair the quality and quantity of learning, which puts the academic success of students at risk. Yet, students are successful if these problems are effectively addressed through the services provided by the SUS counseling centers. The SUS counseling centers help improve the mental and behavioral health of students, and ensure the academic success of the students they serve.

Improved Mental and Behavioral Health

The mental and behavioral health of students seeking individual counseling services is assessed at their initial appointment and at varying intervals during follow-up appointments to determine the distress level of students and how their level of distress changes over time.

“It’s a good feeling when friends and the people you love are noticing a difference in how you keep yourself together under unfortunate situations.” --FAMU student

Tables 1A and 1B show that the average distress levels for students receiving at least three individual counseling sessions during fall 2016 decreased between their first appointment and their most recent appointment regardless of the issue they were dealing with.

Table 1A provides average distress levels for students from institutions that use an assessment tool where higher scores indicates higher levels of distress and lower scores indicate lower levels of distress. Therefore, the negative scores included in the “Change” column of Table 1A correspond to *improved* mental and behavioral health.

Table 1A: FAMU, FAU, FIU, FSU, NCF, UCF, UNF, USF-SP, & UWF
SUS Counseling Effectiveness Index:
Average Student Distress Levels Fall 2016

| | First Appointment | Latest Appointment | Change (<i>negative = lower</i> distress) |
|---------------------|-------------------|--------------------|---|
| Academic Distress | 1.20 | 0.73 | -0.47 |
| Depression | 0.95 | 0.29 | -0.66 |
| Distress Index | 1.28 | 0.58 | -0.70 |
| Generalized Anxiety | 1.12 | 0.51 | -0.61 |
| Hostility | 1.25 | 0.37 | -0.88 |

*Data from 2,036 clients treated at FAMU, FAU, FIU, FSU, NCF, UCF, UNF, USF-SP, & UWF between August 18, 2016 - November 18, 2016 for at least three sessions.

Conversely, Table 1B includes results from three SUS counseling centers that use a different scale. High scores indicate lower distress and lower scores indicate higher distress levels. Table 1B shows that students benefited from counseling center services in all areas, especially the ones related to suicide and anxiety. Therefore, the positive scores included in the “Change” column of Table 1B correspond to *improved* mental and behavioral health.

Table 1B: FGCU, UF, & USF
 SUS Counseling Effectiveness Index:
 Average Student Distress Levels Fall 2016

| | First Appointment | Latest Appointment | Change (<i>positive = lower</i> distress) |
|----------------------|-------------------|--------------------|---|
| Alcohol/Drugs | 2.91 | 3.51 | 0.60 |
| Anxiety | 1.46 | 2.13 | 0.66 |
| Depression | 1.83 | 2.40 | 0.57 |
| Global Mental Health | 2.18 | 2.61 | 0.44 |
| Life Functioning | 1.80 | 2.17 | 0.38 |
| Suicide | 2.34 | 3.36 | 1.03 |
| Symptoms | 2.26 | 2.79 | 0.53 |
| Well-Being | 1.31 | 1.88 | 0.58 |

[^]Data from 1,211 clients treated at FGCU, UF, & USF between August 18, 2016 – November 18, 2016 for at least three sessions.

Overall, the results from Tables 1A and 1B point to the same conclusion -- counseling helps students lower their distress levels.

Reduced Risk to Self and Others

The SUS counseling centers regularly evaluate the extent to which a student may be a risk to themselves or others. Students become less likely to be considered at risk for hurting themselves and those around them when they have access to the services provided by the counseling centers. For example, Florida Atlantic University reports that the majority of students (88% or more) who were at risk at their first counseling session in early fall 2016 were no longer a risk to themselves or others after five sessions.

"It saved my life..." --UWF student
"Counseling saved my life." --FIU student

Improved Academic Success

Two state universities compared the academic success of students who receive support from the counseling centers to those who do not. Both institutions reported that students who received support from the counseling centers performed as well as or better than students who did not use counseling center's services.

"I'm getting more school work done (I actually really enjoy my studies now, too)."
 --USF student

Researchers at the University of North Florida found that students who took advantage of counseling center's services were more likely to be retained after the first year than those who did not. These students were also more likely to graduate and graduated with fewer excess credit hours.

**Table 2: UNF First-Year Retention and 6-Year Graduation Rates
Counseling Center Students and Non-Center Students
Academic Years 2006 - 2015**

| | First-Year Retention Rates ¹ | 6-Year Graduation Rates ² |
|---------------------|--|--|
| Center Students | 93% | 63% |
| Non-Center Students | 79% | 49% |

¹N=19,649; ²N=18,334

Source: UNF Counseling Center Analysis of Student Usage and Metric-Related Correlations, November 30, 2016

At the University of Central Florida, researchers compared persistence rates of students who used counseling center services to students who did not. They found that the percent of students who used services in one academic year and re-enrolled the following academic year was comparable to or higher than the percent of students who did not use these services.

Client satisfaction surveys also show that the services provided by counseling centers help students do better academically and remain enrolled. Surveys from Florida State University show that approximately two-thirds of clients treated in the 2015-2016 academic year indicate that counseling center services helped them to do better academically and remain enrolled.

Overall Client Satisfaction

Students who use services provided by the counseling centers report high levels of satisfaction with their counselors and the services they receive. The majority of students indicate that they would use the services again and would refer others to use them as well. Surveys at Florida Gulf Coast University since fall 2013 show that, on average, 95% of clients would recommend the counseling center to others.

“I have felt more satisfied with myself and my life than I have ever felt.”

--UF student

Summary

The SUS counseling centers provide critical services to students facing a wide range of mental and behavioral issues. Students who take advantage of the services offered benefit from improved mental and behavioral health, which impacts their academic success. Overall, students are more likely to do well academically and graduate when they receive the help they need.

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