1990

Decentralization of the university counseling services

Douglas David Kilian
University of Northern Iowa

Decentralization of the university counseling services

Abstract

There is a growing trend in colleges and universities throughout the country to reintegrate existing centralized counseling services by coordinating these resources through a decentralized concept. This has been particularly true in colleges where counseling has become an integral part of the educational program (Kapraun & Stephenson, 1982). Faculty and student personnel administrators realize that meeting student needs goes beyond acclimatization to the college environment. There is a growing momentum to go a step beyond acclimatization, to prevention, career vocational planning, lifelong wellness programming, and liaison counseling programs within the residence halls (Huebner, 1987; Kapraun & Stephenson, 1982; McLeod, Tercek, & Wisbey, 1985).

DECENTRALIZATION OF THE UNIVERSITY COUNSELING SERVICES

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Administration

and Counseling

University of Northern Iowa

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

---

by

Douglas David Kilian

August 1990

This Research Paper by: Douglas David Kilian

Entitled: Decentralization of the University Counseling Services

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

June 21, 1990
Date Approved

Michael D. Waggoner
Adviser/Director of Research Paper

June 22, 1990
Date Approved

Thomas W. Hansmeier
Second Reader of Research Paper

6/25/90
Date Received

Dale R. Jackson
Head, Department of Educational Administration and Counseling

There is a growing trend in colleges and universities throughout the country to reintegrate existing centralized counseling services by coordinating these resources through a decentralized concept. This has been particularly true in colleges where counseling has become an integral part of the educational program (Kapraun & Stephenson, 1982). Faculty and student personnel administrators realize that meeting student needs goes beyond acclimatization to the college environment. There is a growing momentum to go a step beyond acclimatization, to prevention, career vocational planning, lifelong wellness programming, and liaison counseling programs within the residence halls (Huebner, 1987; Kapraun & Stephenson, 1982; McLeod, Tercek, & Wisbey, 1985).

Heard (1988) stated that it is not unusual when more than half of the students do not return for a second year; in fact, 30 to 40 % usually do not return after the first term. There may be little that can be done to retain a portion of any student group, no matter how well the essential tasks of admission, advising, and instruction are performed. Research has shown, however, that the reorganization of counseling services may make a positive difference in retention. Decentralization of counseling services throughout the campus appears to be an effective method of such reorganization.

The problem of student attrition in higher education is complex, but there is some evidence that counseling services are related to successful retention programs. Comparisons of groups of students indicate that those receiving counseling services graduate at a higher rate and are less likely to leave higher education with poor academic standing than those who do not participate in such programs (Lenning & Mohnkern, 1986). In addition, Bishop and Brenneman (1986) found that 86% of the students who were concerned about persisting in college and who sought counseling did enroll for at least another semester.

University counseling centers have reported that 84% of their clients seek help in the areas of developmental and situational crises. Examples include difficulties in shifting from child-parent interactions, to adult-adult relationships, and resolving crises related to roommate problems, failing of a course, and ending a relationship (Hoffman & Weiss, 1986). When comparing the types of crises and problems that students present to the various treatment facilities available across a single university campus, a case may be made that resources could be more appropriately distributed.

Volk, Rengel, and Loeffler (1985) found that approximately 83% of the student population had never used counseling services available on campus. Of that group, 60% of the students were either unaware of the counseling center, did not want help, or were hesitant to take that first

step in seeking help. In the last twenty years, research has focused on student-faculty perceptions and knowledge of counseling center services, on the possibility that students and faculty may negatively view counseling centers which attributes to the lack of referral and participation (Brown & Chambers, 1986).

The purpose of this paper is to examine the factors which may influence the utilization of counseling centers on college/university campuses. First, by reviewing the continuous growth of dropout rates among college/university students, the increasing importance of preventative measures by counseling centers will be supported. Secondly, as students and faculty have adopted perceptions of the university counseling center function, the need to identify and respond to the concerns of both groups is evident. The third part of this paper illustrates the division of counseling and advising services to students and faculty in the instructional divisions while maintaining concurrently comprehensive services and resources in the centralized counseling area. The final section suggests ways to be most effective in administering programs that will make maximum contributions to students beyond the academic environment of the university, thereby allowing students to become better prepared with the complex world in which they find themselves.

Attrition Among College Students

Approximately 20 % of college students who drop out are academically capable students. Many of today's students are withdrawing from college due to emotional stress and conflicts that are interfering with studies. Many cannot make the transition from high school to college, and others are fearful of the world of work (Hoffman & Weiss, 1986).

Approximately 4 out of 10 college students will encounter an emotional disturbance that is serious enough to produce symptoms that adversely affect academic performance (Mathiasen, 1984). Faced with such problems as apathy, vocational indecision, financial stress, poor study habits, and social maladjustment, students are still reluctant to seek counseling services, which are provided free at most universities. It has been found that the problems faced by today's college students vary little from college to college, regardless of the location or size of school.

In the past, student attrition and retention rates have been viewed as an acceptable occurrence at institutions and colleges due to open-door admission policies and academic conditions. Recently, however, there is an increased awareness of the costs of attrition, both to students and to institutions. The relative costs of attrition are viewed in a variety of perspectives. Many feel that students who dropout have wasted a great deal of time, energy, and money; furthermore, the negative college

experience may discourage them from trying again elsewhere. For some students, dropping out is a desirable and needed action, especially if they achieved their intended ends during the time they were enrolled (Lenning, 1980). Lenning also stressed that attrition and retention can be influenced only if the notion is rejected that retention measures success and attrition signals failure. Rather, the goal should be to help resolve problems which individual students may encounter, thus, to serve their best interests as well as those of society and the institution they choose to attend.

A review of the literature has shown several generalizations about the research on student attrition. First, research indicates that no single factor explains student attrition at the college level. Second, the population of students withdrawing from college is not homogeneous with respect to their educational history, reasons for attrition, and prognosis for continuing higher education. Third, research on attrition would be better conducted using a theoretical model rather than a descriptive approach (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980).

Getzalf (1984) conducted a study at Washington State University using Tinto's model of institutional attrition. This particular model conceptualizes voluntary institutional attrition as a product of the student's characteristics, abilities, and goal commitments interacting with the institutional environment. This interaction can be described in terms

of the academic and the social substructure of the institution and surrounding area. Integration produces, within the student, a commitment to the institution and a strengthened commitment to attaining his/her educational goals. Lack of integration leads to withdrawal from the institution.

> The focus is on the interaction of student and environment, on the ways in which the system of which the student is a part of influences his or her behavior, feelings, attitudes, and so on. Interventions aim to change environment, influencing mental health by creating a better student-environment fit. (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 1973, p. 17)

College students as a group have rated career issues and financial hardships as major concerns, and view college as a vehicle for developing marketable skills and getting a job (Volk, Rengel, & Loeffler, 1985). Yet, Huebner (1987) reported that counselors indicated professional weaknesses in career counseling, consultation, program development, group work, assessment, and research. Skills such as system-level and environmental interventions were not included. It seems, then, that opinions differ on what problems college and university students have that can be dealt with by counseling services.

Delivery of counseling services should be solidly grounded on the foundation of accurate assessment of student needs, while offering programs that are found to be appealing among students in need of help.

Perceptions and Uses of Counseling Services

There are well supported findings that (a) students perceive potential helpers, identified by different titles, quite differently and that (b) these different perceptions affect students' tendency to seek help from help providers. Brown and Chambers (1986) found that students are more willing to go to a counseling center labeled Personal and Career Counseling Services and that faculty in turn would be more likely to refer students to this service. In addition, they found that faculty-student knowledge of counseling services tends to be limited and inaccurate but that agency outreach efforts and oral and/or written information positively impact perceptions and willingness to use these services. It seems important to find titles that create perceptions that are accurate and that positively affect counseling center utilization.

Watson and Ault (1983) found that students, when they need help, differentiate between educational-vocational and personal problems when choosing a help-giving source. For educational vocational problems, students reported that they would go first to college-provided services such as faculty members or counseling centers. For personal-social problems, college students overwhelming reported that friends

and relatives are their first choices, with faculty and clergy as last choices. College counseling centers typically fall in the middle of the rankings. Academic and vocational problems are ranked as most appropriate for a counseling center, whereas personal problems are ranked third or least appropriate (Watson & Ault, 1983).

Further review of the literature consistently documents that different types of problems are viewed as appropriate for different types of counselors, usually identified by different helper labels, and that the nature of the client's problem influences his or her help-seeking behavior (Brown, 1986). There are well supported findings that students perceive potential helpers, identified by different titles, quite differently, and thus these different perceptions affect students' tendency to seek help.

A recent study at Ohio State University considered changing the counseling center's name to reflect the services it provided. Students were given four agency titles to rank order: Psychological and Career Exploration Service, Personal and Career Counseling Service, Psychological and Career Counseling Service, and Counseling, Career, and Consultation Service. The results indicated that students would be more willing to go to a counseling center labeled Personal and Career Counseling Service than a counseling center having any of the other titles ranked. Similar analysis showed that faculty members were more willing to refer a student to a counseling center labeled Personal and

Career Counseling Service than to a center possessing any of the other three titles (Brown & Chambers, 1985). It can be assumed, then, that the perceptions students hold of a university counseling center does indeed affect their decision of whether or not to utilize the centers services. Therefore, a decentralized concept has been implemented in interesting ways at several institutions.

Examples Of Decentralized Counseling

Research has identified three distinct areas of concentration which are needed to lower the high attrition rate, these are: academic assistance; campus orientation; and mentor programs.

The first area is academic, consisting of basic-skills coursework in the area in which help is needed; the second area relates to acquainting students with the basics of the campus culture, an orientation that many students need in order to survive (for example, registration procedures, course selection, and study skills).

This second area could be in the form of a course carrying one credit coordinated through the counseling center, wherein a survival skills seminar could be taught by an academic advisor. This structured course approach is becoming a common strategy in colleges and universities in order to increase student satisfaction and thereby reduce attrition (Eddy, Cochran, & Harvey, 1980).

Trenton State College has a ten-year history of requiring that a college seminar, which is a credited course, be taken by its first-year students. An added value of this program is the finding that frequent absences from the course can easily serve as an early warning of likely attrition (Dunphy, 1987). Throughout the research, what has remained constant is the continuing awareness of changing student needs and a commitment to the centrality of a counseling center role in advisement and orientation (Garland, 1985).

The third focus requires the implementation of a Mentoring Program designed to provide additional attention to those students who are "falling through the cracks" and not receiving the personalized care that most colleges espouse. The specific objectives of a Mentoring Program are these (Miller, 1987):

1. To arrange for senior faculty and staff members of the college community to facilitate new student assimilation into the academic community.
2. To provide a support group of peers for new students so issues of mutual concern could be addressed in a peer-group setting.
3. To personalize the academic environment for new students.
4. To enhance relationships between new students and faculty members and administrators.

5. To provide a continuing orientation to college life and increase the involvement of new students in the academic community.
6. To aid new students in developing the skills necessary for them to cope with their challenges and improve their chances for academic success.
7. And finally, to help students identify positively with the college by conveying concern for and care to them (p.63).

The results of a Mentoring Program at Canisius College has proven to enhance student retention and academic performance. Evaluations conducted over the years have shown that it is also a program that fosters good will and commitment to the college. A wide cross section of the college community has been actively involved in this program, collaborating to ensure its success. The program has enhanced relationships between faculty members and administrators and students (Miller, 1987).

Many campuses promote Academic Intervention Programs designed to assist the academic underachiever to improve academic performance through increased personal awareness. The development of such programs are based on the premise that there is a pattern of personality traits common to the academic underachiever. These include a lack of motivation, a fear of failure or success, a fear of taking risks,

social insecurity, and a weak, inconsistent value system (Neal & Heppner, 1986).

The Academic Intervention Program should follow five sequenced phases in order to have an impact on the student. Each phase is interrelated and integral to the program's success (Woodruff, 1987).

1. A letter of correspondence to the home of the students prior to the start of a new semester stating his or her eligibility to participate in the Academic Intervention Program.
2. An evening orientation meeting is held the first week of the semester, at which time the purpose and mission of the program is outlined, and a brief overview of what the students will experience.
3. The third phase is the intake interview, which is a brief individual session with a counselor. The student is than notified within one week of his or her group assignment and schedule.
4. The student participates in eight weekly, one-hour group meetings. The exercises are thematic and sequential, designed to lead the students through levels of self exploration.
5. The final phase is the conclusion of the eight group sessions, and each student meets individually with the group leader for a wrap-up session (p.49).

The Academic Intervention Program capitalizes on the influence of the peer group and the students' desire for adult support, through the use of group sessions and the development of a positive relationship with the leader. The program is designed to provide an environment that promotes honesty in response, motivates the establishment of goals, and initiates a pattern of self-help.

It has been found that peer counselors play a major role in assisting "high risk" students. Peer helpers who are trained in study skills techniques, in teaching techniques, and especially in self-concept development strategies do contribute to successful programs (Forristall & Brown, 1984). Recently, counseling centers have begun to establish a more comprehensive, proactive, and developmentally oriented service, utilizing peer workers in this time of change.

Reorganization

Just as social factors caused a change in the way colleges and universities dealt with students in the 1960s, economic factors are causing changes in the l990s. One of these important changes is a move by many counseling centers to establish new goals and missions (Jenkins & Cerio, 1983).

Less than 20 % of college students use conventional counseling centers. Instead, students desire assistance with their social, academic,

and vocational problems. As a result, university administrators are forced to reassess the prevailing services being offered to students on campus. Many administrators now realize that the traditional clinic approach of counseling centers is not sufficiently relevant to the needs of students nor to the goals of higher education (Foreman, 1977).

Counseling centers are utilizing more preventative approaches for the remaining 80-90 % of the student body not being reached. This change in focus is beginning to result in psychoeducational workshops, consultation, and training for various groups within higher education (Canon,1982).

However, the operating budgets within higher education may be jeopardized due to the number of new high school graduates who will dropout, at a rate which will exceed 25 to 35 % by 1992. If this trend develops, counseling centers may be forced to generate their own revenues in order to survive. Many hope that counseling centers will not return to serving a smaller target population to ensure their existence. Both philosophical and pragmatic concerns will need to be weighed before this issue is settled (Zwibelman & Redick, 1977).

Not only have counseling centers failed to reach the majority of students, but services to university staff and faculty have been largely underdeveloped. Consultation with, and developmental services to, this neglected population may well be needed to attend to their needs, but

also to indirectly influence students. Specific counseling center staff time could be allocated to other resource professionals which could be justified in terms of cost efficiency (Jenkins & Cerio, 1983).

To offer developmental services is to take a preventative approach, while traditional one-to-one therapy serves the purpose of remediation; a counseling center cannot choose one approach to the neglect of the other. From the perspective of William Butler, an administrator for over 25 years, a counseling psychologist must be outreach oriented, engaging in group work, psychological education, prevention, and should be less involved in traditional one-to-one psychotherapy (Zwibelman & Redick, 1977).

Prevention can take many forms, including workshops in residence halls, structural groups within the counseling center, and participation on faculty committees reevaluating institutional policies. Involvement in these activities increases the visibility of the counseling center and broadens faculty and student knowledge of available services. This approach also permeates a more positive mental health wellness view. Professionals involved in these preventative efforts not only enhance their remedial responsibilities, but may have potential for reducing therapist burnout (Mcleod, Tercek, & Wisbey, 1985).

Preventative services are designed to assist students to function more effectively within their domains. Such developmental services will

be helpful in eliminating self-defeating behavior, overcoming procrastination, and in the strengthening of time management and communication. This concept should, hopefully, dramatically reduce the college dropout rate (Geer, Mahaffey, & Whiteley, 1987).

Consultation and liaison activities within residence halls, as well as libraries and audio tapes, can be useful, since this is essentially a captive audience. Historically, it has been known that counseling centers could provide more efficient services for many more students if counseling were done in groups. Yet, counseling centers have resisted the implementation, because it was judged more difficult. The reasons for this are not clear. Some speculate that students and staff are biased toward individual counseling, because it does not require the setup time or the training that group counseling requires (Mcleod, Tercek, & Wisbey, 1985).

Where restructuring has occurred, the results have been dramatic. In the counseling area, the number of new clients has increased 32 %, accounting for 55 % of the center's total counseling sessions (Weissberg, 1979).

Conclusions

The roles and functions of counseling centers will continue to be scrutinized due to the issue of accountability. As counseling centers examine factors in planning future services and roles, the value of

research data should not be underestimated or ignored. Continued research in the area of decentralized services could potentially aid administrators in planning and evaluating directions of counseling centers. Before any major changes are undertaken regarding a counseling center's overall direction and philosophy, it is imperative that the higher administration at the institution is supportive of any realignment of services.

In summary, the research has yielded data supporting the importance of a university counseling center title in the help-seeking and referral process. It appears that much more attention should be given to the effect the title may have on the utilization of counseling services.

The issues in a decentralized philosophy involves focusing on developing a comprehensive counseling service which is developmental, proactive, preventative, and outreach oriented in nature. The entire arena of student services, as well as the academic community, need to totally mobilize their services in a united front. A participatory management approach will encourage and promote a greater utilization of the counseling center.

Prevention and intervention are paramount to the entire mission of implementing a decentralized concept. Beginning with orientation, admissions, and continuing while the student is in residence, the office of career planning and the department of residence are key components in

assisting students in utilizing their vocational and developmental skills at an optimum level.

While most would agree that the counseling center should develop a clear written statement of its philosophy and purpose, this step is often overlooked or taken for granted. It is this statement of philosophy which provides the basis for future decisions regarding the services to be offered, the method of service delivery, counseling center priorities, and objectives and accountability efforts.

Overall, university housing seems to be a key agency for outreach programming and client referrals, because it possesses the visibility needed to promote the counseling center services. The assignment of counseling liaison personnel to the department of residence ensures active participants in campus resource teams, involvement with resident assistant training, and initiation of various programs and workshops in residence halls. In order for a counseling center to have a maximum impact on the university environment and to do an effective job of enhancing the personal growth and development of all its students, it must become an integral part of the total university.

References

Banning, J.; Kaiser, L. (1974). An ecological perspective and model for campus design. Personnel and Guidance Journal, 52, 370-375.

Bishop, J. B.; Brenneman, K. A. (1986). An initial assessment of a counseling center's role in retention. Journal of College Student Personnel, 27, 461-464.

Brown, M. T.; Chambers, M. (1986). Student and faculty perceptions of counseling centers: what's in a name?. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 33, 155-158.

Brown, R. D. (1987). Evaluating counseling centers. New Directions for Institutional Research, 56, 59-70.

Canon, H. J. (1982). The future of college and university counseling centers: one vice presidents view. The Counseling Psychologist, 10, 3, 57-60.

Dunphy, L. (1987). Exemplary retention strategies for the freshman year. New Directions for Higher Education, 60, 39-60.

Eddy, J.; Cochran, T.; Harvey, C. (1980). College student retention studies and strategies. College Student Personnel Development, Administration, and Counseling. University Press of America, Washington, D.C.

Foreman, M.E. (1977). The changing scene in higher education and to the identity of counseling psychology. The Counseling Psychologist, 7, 45-48.

Forristall-Brown, D. Z.; Brown, W. F. (1984, March). Reducing attrition through student-to-student study skills, instruction and guidance. Annual Convention of the American Association for Counseling and Development, Houston, TX.

Garland, P.H. (1985). Serving more than students: a critical need for college student personnel services. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 7. Association for the Study of Higher Education, Washington, D.C.

Geer, C. A.; Mahaffey, P. J.; Whiteley S. M. (1987). The campus counseling center: a profile of staffing patterns and services. Journal of College Student Personnel, Jan, 71-80.

Getzalf, S. B. (1984). Two types of voluntary undergraduate attrition: application of tinto's model. Research in Higher Education, 20, 257-268.

Heard, F. B. (1988). The development of a retention plan to mitigate low enrollments at shelby state community college. Ed. D. Practicum, Nova University, 43p.

Huebner, L. A. (1987). The impact of the ecological approach on therapy and diagnosis. NASPA Journal, 25, 103-109.

Jenkins, S. J.; Cerio, J. E. (1983). Some issues facing counseling psychologists in college/university counseling centers. Contemporary-Education, 55, 20-24.

Kapraun, D. E.; Stephenson, G. W. (1982). Organizational plan and procedures for the integration of centralized counseling with instructional divisions. St. Louis Community College at Forest Park, St. Louis, MO.

Lenning, O.T. (1980). Student retention strategies. AAHE-ERIC Higher Education Research Report No. 8, American Association for Higher Education, Washington, D.C.

Lenning, O.T.; Mohnkern, D. F. (1986, June). Programming dramatic decreases in freshmen attrition: we can make it happen and IR can help. Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research, Orlando, FL.

Mathiasen, R.E. (1984). Attitudes and needs of the college student client. Journal of College Student Personnel, May, 25, 274-276.

Mcleod, M.; Tercek, T.; Wisbey, M. (1985). Facilitating mental health on college campuses: consultation between university counseling centers and offices of residence life. Journal of American College Health, 33, 168-175.

Miller, T. E. (1987). The mentoring program at canisius college. New Direction for Higher Education, 60, 39-60.

Neal, G. W.; Heppner P.P. (1986). Holding up the mirror: research on the roles an functions of counseling centers in higher education. The Counseling Psychologist, 11, 1, 81-90.

Terenzini, P.T.; Pascarella, E.T. (1980). Toward the validation of tinto's model of college student attrition: a review of recent studies. Research in Higher Education, 12, 271-282.

Volk, M. K.; Rengel, E.; Loeffler, D. (1985, August). A university wide survey of student's needs for counseling. Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Los Angeles, CA.

Watson, B. A.; Ault, R. L. (1983, March). So you think you've got troubles? college students' referrals for friends with various personal problems. Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association, Atlanta, GA.

Weissberg, M. (1984). Developing a comprehensive counseling center: guidelines for getting started. NASPA Journal, 21, 40-55.

Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (1973). The ecosystem model: designing campus environments. Boulder, CO.

Woodruff, T. (1987). The academic interaction program. New Directions for Higher Education, 60, 39-60.

Zwibelman, B.B.; Redick, R.J. (1977). Building fences at the top of the cliff: an interview with a higher education administrator, William R. Butler. The Counseling Psychologist, 35, 7, 38-40.