

SECTION I: POLICY, PURPOSE, AND MISSION

A. POLICY STATEMENT

This Policy and Procedure Manual is intended to guide the operations and professional practices of the Nicholls State University Counseling Center (UCC). All UCC staff will perform within these guidelines. Future revisions will be made as necessary.

B. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND MISSION

The University Counseling Center (UCC) is a department in the Unit of Student Services within the Division of Student Affairs. The mission of the UCC is to commit to helping students with personal issues so that they may be better equipped to attain wellness and reach their educational objectives and full personal potential. In order to fulfill this mission, the UCC is committed to the following goals:

- To conduct effective individual, group, and couples counseling
- To conduct quality workshops, presentations, and seminars that meet the needs of the Nicholls community
- To complete quality assurance activities
- To provide consultation services
- To provide appropriate referrals as necessary
- To provide effective crisis response

C. ACCREDITATION

The Nicholls State University Counseling Center is accredited by the International Association of Counseling Services, Inc.

SECTION II: ACCESS AND SERVICES

A. ACCESS

- 1) Students are introduced to the UCC through various routes. Presentations are made to each incoming Freshman class during enrollment in student development courses. These presentations are delivered by a member of the UCC staff and offer basic information about the location, hours of operation, services available,

and counseling staff. Additionally, the UCC advertises regularly in campus publications such as the *Class Schedule Bulletin* and the *Nicholls Worth*.

- 2) Faculty and staff are frequently reminded of the UCC's services via e-mail advertisements, electronic newsletters, flyers, and other methods. Most faculty and staff clients seek services on their own or are referred by peers who have found services to be useful.

B. POPULATION SERVED

Counseling services are offered for currently enrolled student, faculty, and staff of the University. (**Enrolled is defined as having registered for classes and paid any and all tuition and fees required to participate in class*).

C. DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES

- 1) The UCC provides (a) individual, group, couple, and family counseling – without limitation on the number of sessions; (b) consultation; (c) career exploration, (d) crisis response; and (e) psychoeducation.
- 2) Referrals for psychiatric consultation, medical consultation, and/or community resources.
- 3) Workshops, seminars, and lectures on topics of interest to client populations are offered for student groups, classes, faculty development, and staff development.
- 4) Various awareness activities are coordinated and promoted on an annual basis by the UCC staff. Examples include but are not limited to: Eating Disorder Screening/Awareness, Depression Screening, Anxiety Screening, Anger Screening, Women's History activities, and Sexual Assault Awareness Programs.

SECTION III: OFFICE PROCEDURES

A. APPOINTMENT PROCEDURES

- 1) The appointment book will be organized before each semester begins. Information contained in the appointment book includes all scheduled counseling sessions, walk-ins, staffings, presentations, conferences, and other meetings counselors are scheduled to attend. The appointment book will be secured at the end of each day in the filing cabinet where client files are contained.

Counselors are responsible for marking out times when they will be unavailable for appointments/assignments due to vacations, leave, etc. The secretary, with the assistance of student workers, is responsible for:

- (a) making appointments including noting the client's name, phone number, date of call, if they requested their assigned counselor, and if they are a new or returning client. Clients should not be added nor other alterations be made to a counselor's schedule on the current day without prior approval of the counselor or the director.
 - (b) making schedule changes such as calling clients in order to cancel due to counselor illness, emergency assignments, etc. They are also responsible for notifying counselors for changes in their schedules due to client cancellations, etc.
- (2) Appointments will be made according to the following criteria:
- (a) Request for a specific counselor.
 - (b) Referral to a specific counselor.
 - (c) Selection of counselor according to area of expertise.
 - (d) In a manner that ensures appropriate assignment of clients as per counselor schedules.
- (3) When appointments are made in person, an appointment card will be provided to note the date, time, and the counselor's name. The client's name will not be written on the appointment card. As when appointments are made by telephone, the person scheduling the call will reserve an available time slot by writing the client's full name and phone number.
- (4) Appointments will be scheduled for 50 minute sessions unless otherwise advised by the counselor.
- (5) Counselors and clerical staff should be aware of the potential for return appointments to keep the appointment book current and to avoid over-booking or double-scheduling.

B. EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

The UCC counselors follow the University's Procedural Guidelines for Handling Life Threatening, or Potentially Life Threatening Actions when responding to a crisis situation. Exceptions to confidentiality are guided by ethics and standard professional practices. Clients are informed about exceptions to confidentiality before counseling begins. More detailed information on exceptions to confidentiality is addressed under *Section IV part B* of this manual.

FOR CLIENTS IN CRISIS DURING OFFICE HOURS

- (1) A caller in crisis should be invited to the UCC to see a counselor. Clerical staff should consult with a clinical staff member anytime they believe a caller/client may be in crisis and may require immediate assistance. Upon arrival at the UCC, a priority checklist entitled "Appointment Guidelines" will be presented to the visitor for review. The person in crisis will be asked to rate their status according to the imminence of danger regarding the issue at hand. They will be asked to wait for the next available counselor, counselor(s) will be interrupted from session/duties, or the caller will be given the next available appointment.
- (2) In an urgent situation, for example if the person is crying uncontrollably or is otherwise very agitated, it is appropriate to interrupt a counselor who is in session with a client who is not in acute crisis. Clerical staff can help to reschedule the client whose session had to be interrupted due to the emergency situation.

AFTER HOURS EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

- (1) A person in crisis or an advocate should contact University Police (448-4911 off campus or 4911 on campus). University Police will contact the counselor on call for instructions on how to address the situation.
- (2) If necessary, the person in crisis can be encouraged to get to the nearest hospital emergency room for an evaluation by the attending physician.
- (3) The on-call clinical staff should file documentation of the incident, intervention used, and status/follow-up information. These records will be placed in a file for on-call incidents in the event that the call out did not involve an existing client. If the incident did involve an existing client, the documentation should be included in the client's file.

C. REFERRALS**PROCEDURES FOR COUNSELORS**

- (1) Information is provided to referral sources only with written consent of the client. Counselors should determine whether a client wishes information to be made available, and have appropriate consent forms signed before releasing confidential information.
- (2) Any referring person who contacts the UCC regarding a potential referral should be advised that information can not be offered as to whether the

referral is/was a client at the UCC. The referring person shall be urged to discuss this issue with the referred person.

- (3) Consent to Release Information/Waiver of Rights to Confidentiality can be completed when a client requests or agrees to let the referring party disclose specific information and should be included as part of the client's file.
- (4) Clients who have had prior consultation, counseling, and/or treatment prior to seeking services at the UCC may decide to grant access to the resulting records for inclusion in their UCC client file. This may be requested of the client in certain cases involving a team approach to treatment when other professionals corroborate to provide comprehensive services.

PROCEDURES FOR REFERRAL FOR OUTSIDE SERVICES

- (1) All referrals for treatment outside of the UCC are at the expense of the client. Whenever possible, a variety of referral sources will be provided to the client who may select professional of choice.
- (2) Referrals to University Health Services (UHS) for medications require that notification be forwarded to UHS after the client grants written permission to do so.
- (3) With the client's written permission, the counselor may follow up on a referral by contacting the referral agency or person to insure that the client has complied with treatment and has had no difficulties in scheduling an appointment or making contact.

D. CLIENT EVALUATION OF SERVICES

The UCC seeks feedback from all clients regarding their satisfaction with their experiences at the center. A two-week period will be designated during each semester to provide a *Client Satisfaction Survey* to current clients to solicit feedback about all aspects of their experience including scheduling, contact with clerical staff, counseling services, and outcomes. The results of these surveys will be utilized for necessary improvements/adjustments to UCC services.

SECTION IV: ETHICAL PRACTICES

All counselors at the UCC adhere to the ethical standards for professional practice

as per their discipline (Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, American Counseling Association [ACA], 1997). Additionally, Licensed Professional Counselors [LPC] and Licensed Professional Counselor Interns [LPC, Intern] adhere to the Louisiana Professional Counselors Board of Examiners Code of Ethics. Copies of each of these documents are kept on file at the UCC.

A. CLIENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- (1) The Client Intake Form includes a basic description of client rights under the section entitled “Informed Consent” which must be discussed with, read and signed by the client prior to the beginning of counseling. An effort should be made to make certain that all clients understand the perimeters of their rights to confidentiality.
- (2) It is the client’s responsibility to inform their counselor of other ongoing professional mental health relationships in order for the counselor to (a) secure permission to work with the client, or (b) choose not to work with the client.
- (3) It is the client’s responsibility to cancel any appointment that they cannot keep. After two missed appointments for which the client has not called in to cancel or reschedule in advance of the scheduled session, the client will be considered terminated and will be ineligible for counseling services for the remainder of the semester.
- (4) It is the client’s responsibility to keep scheduled appointments. A client who calls in to cancel/reschedule an appointment prior to the session time, but does so five (5) times in one semester will be terminated and will be ineligible for counseling services for the remainder of the semester.

B. CONFIDENTIALITY

- (1) Strict maintenance of confidentiality is required of all staff at the UCC. Any suspected breach of confidentiality should be reported to the director immediately so that action can be taken to manage the situation in an appropriate manner.
- (2) Both the identities of clients and information about them are considered confidential. We will not provide information to anyone regarding who *has* or *has not* used UCC services.
- (3) Files are not left in plain view around the office during office hours. When the office is closed, files and the appointment book are locked in a cabinet in a locked file room.

- (4) Client names are not used in the reception area or open offices when any other client is in the UCC. Public discussion of issues is discouraged by clinical and clerical staff.
- (5) When it is necessary to leave a telephone message for a client, the message should not include that the call is in reference to the counseling center. The secretary will leave her name and division (Student Services) if necessary.

C. RELEASING INFORMATION

- (1) Information regarding a client will not be released to anyone without written permission from the client except for specific circumstances. In accordance with state law, counselors are protected and may break confidentiality by releasing information to proper authorities if the client: (a) demonstrates a clear and imminent danger to self or someone else; (b) indicates that a minor child, elderly person (65 or older), or dependent adult is being abused or neglected; (c) is involved in litigation and the court orders that information be disclosed; and (d) directs via written request that information be released to a specific party or parties. In most cases, if it is determined that there is a need to disclose as mandated by law, the client will be advised of such in advance of the disclosure.
- (2) Client files are not to be copied and released to the client or anyone else. Upon the client's written request, a summary letter regarding treatment and progress notes will be prepared by their counselor or the UCC director. In some cases, actual case notes must be made available. Such might be the situation with court/litigation related matters.
- (3) A new consent to release information form, specific to the situation, should be obtained each time information is requested from a client's record.

SECTION V: MAINTENANCE OF CLIENT FILES

A. GENERAL GUIDELINES

- (1) A file is maintained in the UCC for each client. Counselors are responsible for the maintenance and security of client files and all information contained within them. Client files are maintained in accordance with professional standards. All information contained in client files that identify the client by name will be kept confidential.
- (2) Files are accessible only to UCC full-time staff members.
- (3) Files are distinguished according to whether they are active or inactive client files (they are stored in separate locked cabinets). Active files are those client files that

are maintained for current clients. Inactive files are for those clients who are not current clients. Inactive files are retained for a period of seven (7) years, after which they are destroyed.

B. CONTENTS OF FILES

The following documents are routinely included in client files: (a) Client Intake Form, (b) Counselor Intake Form, (c) Acknowledgement of Advisement of Declaration of Practices and Procedures, (d) Record of Appointments, (e) Medications List, (f) Session Notes, (g) termination summary, and (h) any other documents that are part of the client's treatment plan (e.g. waiver forms, letters written on behalf of the client, referral information, homework/worksheets, etc.)

C. HANDLING OF CLIENT FILES

At the start of each business day, the secretary will review the appointment book and pull client files for those clients scheduled for appointments that particular day. These files are organized according to each counselor's designated file box which is located on the wall in the file room, out of view. As a client arrives for his/her appointment, the secretary will present the file to the counselor. After session, or once session notes have been completed, the counselor will return the file to the file cabinet in the file room. At the end of the day, the secretary will note any missed appointments based on the files that remain in the counselors' file boxes in the file room.

D. OTHER FILES

In cases where the "client" is actually a group of presentation, seminar, or workshop participants, a form will be completed to detail the presentation and the form will be filed in a designated area to provide documentation for statistical purposes and later inclusion in departmental and/or annual reports.

SECTION VI: STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

A. CLINICAL STAFF

A specific job description is included in the Appendix section of this manual to offer more detailed information about the responsibilities of clinical staff at the UCC. A selection of items from the formal job description is listed below.

- (1) Conduct individual, couple, group, and family counseling for the students, faculty, and staff of NSU.
- (2) Maintain an accurate and up to date copy of the Declaration of Practices and Procedures form as well as a current Curriculum Vitae.
- (3) Maintain awareness for appropriate referral sources.

- (4) Keep schedules accurate and up to date.
- (5) Complete case documentation in a timely manner and on UCC premises.
- (6) Attend clinical staff meetings and consult with colleagues as needed.
- (7) Maintain knowledge/skill base and license(s) via continuing education.
- (8) Participate in on-call rotation as scheduled.

E. CLERICAL STAFF & SUPPORT STAFF

A specific job description for the clerical and support staff positions is included in the Appendix section of this manual to provide more detailed information about the responsibilities of clerical and support staff at the UCC. A selection of items from formal job descriptions is listed below.

- (1) Manage telephone calls and messages.
- (2) Schedule client appointments.
- (3) Maintain professionalism in the office, making clients feel welcome, while limiting public self-disclosures.
- (4) Observe rules of confidentiality regarding client identities.
- (5) Operate office equipment and observe maintenance schedules for equipment.
- (6) Consult with the director regarding any questions.

F. MEETINGS

Clinical staff meetings are held once weekly at a time convenient for all counseling staff members. These meetings are facilitated by the director or a designated appointee. The purpose of these “staffing” meetings is to (a) discuss any business regarding assignments, activities, upcoming events, policy changes, etc., and (b) to provide an opportunity for counselors to engage in case discussion and consultation with colleagues. The goal of these meetings is to enhance the quality of services provided by the UCC and to promote team building among staff members.

The director will meet with clerical and support staff on an as needed basis. Classified personnel will meet with the director on an annual basis for the purpose of conducting a formal evaluation and to discuss progress according to guidelines that govern classified state employees.

The director attends Student Services staff meetings, Student Affairs staff meetings, as a department head in an effort to coordinate services provided to students and to assure quality in attempts to address concerns in the affairs of students.

SECTION VII: ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

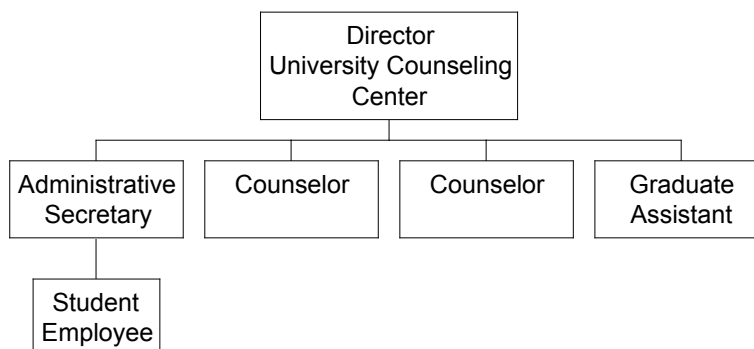
A. REPORTS

- (1) The UCC Annual Report is prepared by the director based in data compiled by the administrative secretary. The annual report is based on guidelines provided by the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs and include information related to the goals, needs, and projected plans of the UCC for the upcoming year.
- (2) Midway through the fiscal year, a Progress Report is prepared to evaluate the status of and progress on goals stated in the previous Annual Plan. This report is prepared by the director and is submitted to the Vice President for Student Affairs.

B. BUDGET AND FINANCIAL POLICIES

- (1) The UCC annual budget request is prepared each year and is submitted to the Vice President for Student Affairs who then meets with the Budgeting Committee to consider the request.
- (2) Any requests for new funds/equipment must be discussed with the director in advance of annual budget preparation/allocation of funds.
- (3) The administrative secretary maintains records or all expenditures through FRS- a computerized budget management system.
- (4) Specific university procedures are required in the event of work-related travel. Travel requests, trip insurance, vehicle reservations, registration fees, hotel and travel reservations, and any additional paperwork/funds are completed and applied for by the administrative secretary.

C. ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



SECTION VIII: GENERAL INFORMATION

- (1) The professional counseling staff at the UCC will treat each client as an individual and will not impose on any client stereotypes based on gender, race, sexual orientation, age, religion, or disability.
- (2) Cases which pose particular concerns of a clinical, ethical, or legal nature may be explored through consultation with clinical supervisors for licensure, administrative supervisors, and/or professionals in the legal field. Confidentiality will be maintained in accordance with ethical guidelines.

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