



UPSA
UNIVERSITY OF PROFESSIONAL STUDIES, ACCRA
Scholarship with Professionalism

POLICY AND GUIDELINES OF COUNSELLING SERVICES FOR UNIVERSITY OF PROFESSIONAL STUDIES, ACCRA

I. INTRODUCTION

Counselling services have played a vital role on college and university campuses in Ghana for over two decades. The recent complex changes and education trends in the world of work and society call for proper implementation of guidance and counselling services in tertiary institutions. Some of these trends are unstable homes, poor academic performance, drug abuse, high risk sexual exploitation, occultism etc. Also some graduates of tertiary institutions no longer fit into the labour market because of unemployment and underemployment among others. To fulfill this mandate, counselling centres are generally built on a broad base of (1) career/life planning programs, (2) learning enhancement and academic support, and (3) personal/social development.

II. UNIVERSITY OF PROFESSIONAL STUDIES, ACCRA COUNSELLING SERVICES

In accordance with the University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA) Statutes (2009) Schedule B sub-section 20, a Guidance and Counselling Unit was established to provide counselling services for the University's community. Subsequently, a Counselling Advisory Committee was formed to determine and develop policies for career guidance and other educational advisory services for staff and students.

III. VISION OF THE GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING UNIT

It is our vision to be nationally recognized as a leader among counselling and psychological service units, providing helping services of the highest quality to enhance students and staff progress towards the completion of their education and the fulfillment of their total well-being.

IV. MISSION

The Unit's primary mission is to be an essential resource for stakeholders who seek assistance in dealing with personal matters ranging from transient concerns to major crises.

V. GOALS

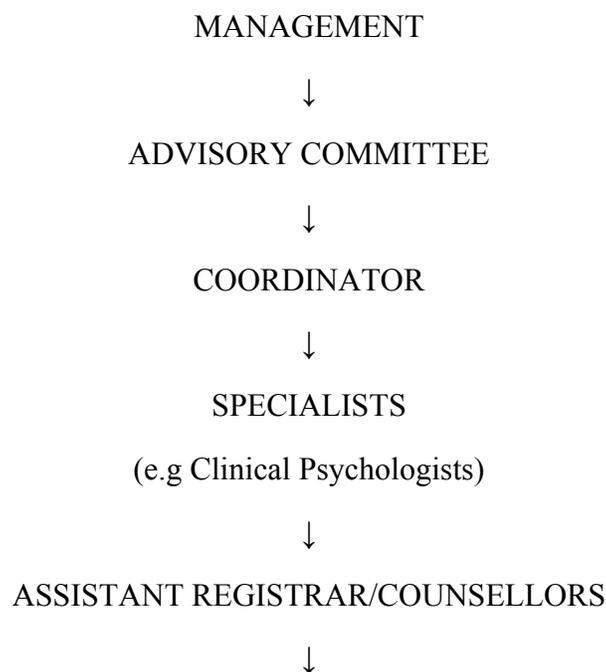
The following goals provide the structure through which the Unit serves students and the entire University community:

- To enhance students' and staff retention, academic performance, and satisfaction by providing professional resources to them with a variety of personal/psychological needs.
- To assist students and staff in crisis, and to intervene in potentially life threatening situations.
- To assist students and staff members with common interest and concerns through structured psycho-educational groups, programmes and outreach activities.
- To respond to the unique needs of special populations such as ethnic minorities, student athletes, adult learners, students with disabilities and international students.
- To establish and maintain collaborative relationships with faculties, staff and students.

VI. CONSULTATIONS

The Unit will establish consultative liaisons with faculty, staff, student organizations and other services through psychological research, and through the dissemination of information on students and their needs.

VII. STRUCTURE OF THE GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING UNIT



ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT STAFF



NATIONAL SERVICE PERSONNEL

VIII. COUNSELLING CENTRE PERSONNEL

A. Types of staff employed

The counselling function will be performed by Senior Members with knowledge in counselling appointed by the University. The Unit will engage competent specialists when necessary to assist students, faculty and staff with diverse problems including emotional, psychological and educational problems. Referral clinics will be contacted from time to time to assist them with serious psychological and emotional problems. Adequate support and clerical staff are also necessary for the effective functioning of the counselling service.

IX. COUNSELLING UNIT FUNCTIONS

A. Primary Functions

These include individual and/or group counselling in the following areas:

- Personal/Social Development issues such as: stress management, self-confidence, loneliness, depression, vocational uncertainty, relationships, family problems, eating disorders, addictive behaviours, etc
- Career/Life planning issues such as: self assessment, goal clarification, occupational and education information, occupational testing, job search techniques
- Learning Enhancement and Academic issues such as: learning skills, learning style, reading effectiveness, organization of ideas, presentations, time management, test anxiety management, procrastination
- To create and update students and staff records and database relevant to Guidance and Counselling purposes.

B. Secondary Functions

These include:

- Provision of consultation services to faculty members and administrators in their dealings with students
- Consultation with public and/or private agencies which provide services to students
- Professional development for faculty advisors, residence hall staff who offer assistance to students

- Participation in committee and institutional programme development, with particular reference to admissions, orientation, etc.
- Assessment of students as an aid to academic decisions

C. Training/Supervision

The training/supervision component of the counselling centre for staff and students includes:

- Peer counselling programmes
- Seminars for staff and students
- Students and staff Orientation programmes

D. Research

An integral responsibility of the counselling service is to conduct ongoing evaluation and accountability research to determine the effectiveness of its services and to improve the practice of counselling. Research done by counselling services typically include research relating to student development, student counselling needs assessment and evaluation of services to students. Counselling services shall abide by the Ethical Standards for research by the University for Professional Studies.

X. COUNSELLING SERVICES

A. What to Expect

Students and staff who visit the Counselling Unit will be asked to complete a relevant document designed to help the Counselor better understand his needs and give him more information about the services of the Unit. After completing the document, the person will be given an appointment to meet with one of the counselors. Typically, this appointment will take about 30 minutes, and the two will discuss the students' immediate concerns as well as what type of services may be most helpful to him/her. The goal is to get the student connected with the most appropriate services as soon as possible. Some of the options for services students may be discussing are described below. As a reminder, all services rendered by the Unit are free and confidential.

B. Group Counselling

The Unit will provide a group counselling of young peers who are having similar concerns. Group members will be encouraged to discuss their difficulties, changes they want to make in life, and how to make those changes. The huge benefit of group counselling is that one can get input from a variety of people, as well as get to hear other people's experiences and learn from them. Groups

often provide a kind of support and experience that is not possible in other settings. All group members shall be required to sign an agreement to maintain confidentiality and not disclose anything someone else has said outside the group.

C. Individual Counselling

The Unit will provide individual counselling where the student will meet with a counselor one-on-one to address his/her concerns. During the first meeting, the student and his/her counselor will set goals and talk about the meeting schedule. In individual counselling, people will often discuss relationship concerns, family difficulties, feelings of depression or anxiety, academic issues, recovery from traumatic events, or hopes of wanting to better one's life.

D. Couples Counselling

Where the above case exists, the student and his/her partner would meet with a counselor to address relationship concerns. It can be used to gain more insight into each other, to learn new and more effective ways of communication, rebuild emotional security, and to learn how to solve problems. At least one partner of each couple needs to be a UPSA student to be eligible for such services.

E. Orientation for Fresh Students

The Counselling Unit will organize an orientation every year for all fresh students of the University. Topics to be included in the orientation are as follows:

- Life on campus
- Transition to higher academic life
- Time management
- How to study effectively
- Stress management
- How to prepare for examinations
- How to comport themselves during examinations
- Financial management
- Drugs and alcohol related issues
- Interpersonal Relationship

XI. COUNSELLING SEMINARS

A. First Semester Seminars

During the First Semester, seminars on the above topics will be held for all freshers as follows:

- Every other Friday
- Time 2:30 - 3:30 p.m.

B. Career Seminar Topics for Continuing Students

The Unit will plan special career seminars for continuing students to prepare them for the world of work. Resource persons from selected organisations will be invited to do presentations where necessary. Some of the topics to be discussed include but not limited to:

- Importance of Career Planning
- Knowing your personality traits
- How to research for a job
- Current occupational trends
- Writing your CVs and Resume
- How to write Application Letters
- Preparing for an Interview
- Time Management
- Leadership
- Decision making
- Entrepreneurship

C. Career Counselling

The Unit can help staff and students with

- * Career Planning
- * Assessments
- * Information on UPSA's course selection to assist in career planning

XII. FACILITIES OF THE COUNSELLING UNIT

It is desirable that counselling services be centrally located and readily accessible to all students. The Counselling Unit should have a telephone, inter-office communication system, audio/video-recording equipments, and lockable storage facilities for clients' records and materials, as needed. There should be a reception room that provides a comfortable and private waiting area for clients. The Unit should have a reading room that includes institutional calendars, program requirements and career information for use by students and staff. There should also be an area designated as a testing room for individual and group testing procedures.

XIII. FUNDING FOR THE COUNSELLING CENTRE

Counselling Services must have sufficient funding to carry out its mission. Where applicable, funding should include institutional memberships in appropriate professional organizations; relevant professional journal subscriptions; attendance at professional association meetings, conferences and workshops; and other professional development activities. In addition to institutional funding commitment through general funds, other funding sources may be considered. As noted by Preston (1978), "the university's budgetary allocation to counselling is, therefore, the best measure of the sincerity of its concern for student development"

XIV. CONFIDENTIALITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

The Counselling Unit at the University of Professional Studies, Accra is committed to providing a professional service with a high degree of confidentiality. Consequently, nothing disclosed to Counsellors will be passed on to anyone outside the Service without the client's permission.

Confidentiality covers not only what is said in a session, but also the fact that a client has used the Service. Students are often referred to the Service by a concerned Lecturer or Head of Department. The Counsellors do not routinely report back in such cases. If asked by the person who made the referral whether a student has attended counselling, a brief acknowledgement may be made, particularly if it is viewed to be in the interest of the student (and/or the University).

a.Limits to Confidentiality

In exceptional circumstances Counsellors may need to break confidentiality if they believe there is a real intent of serious harm or danger to either their client or another individual. Such circumstances may pertain to issues relating to sexual abuse, rape, self-harm, suicidal ideation or criminal activity.

In as far as possible, in such cases, a full explanation will be given regarding the necessary procedures that may need to be taken.

b.Sensitive Personal Data

Counselling Service records may contain sensitive personal data and therefore the client's permission is requested for records to be made. Ideally this happens before counselling commences, but it may take place at the end of the first session, especially if the client arrives in a state of emotional distress.

c.Eligibility for Services

All currently enrolled students and staff, as well as their eligible dependants in UPSA irrespective of their sexual orientation, race, gender, age, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, disability, language, and socio-economic status are eligible to come for counselling services.

d.Cost

There are no costs for the counselling services provided by the Unit. However, there may be a small fee for certain assessment and referral cases where necessary, and for some seminars.

e.Making a Referral

When talking with a student in distress, you may find that the problem or situation would require services or intervention beyond what you can provide. As a member of faculty or staff, you can work with the student to determine what sort of assistance would best meet the student's needs. You may also find that some problems or situations are just not appropriate for you to deal with and/or would warrant professional intervention. If at any point you would like some assistance in determining how to be helpful to a student, please feel free to speak with a counselor at the Counselling Unit.

XV. ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR THE COUNSELLING UNIT

Strict adherence by staff members to the ethical standard codes of their profession must be maintained. Unit's operating procedures should be congruent with these standards and should in no way abridge or contravene individual staff members' ethical obligations and privileges. The confidential nature of the counselling relationship should be consistent with professional ethical standards and with local, regional and international guidelines as should be the procedures regarding the preparation, use and distribution of psychological tests.

Careful review procedures for proposed research should be established to ensure that research efforts do not interfere unduly with service delivery responsibilities of the counselling service. Systematic case records shall be maintained as required by professional standards. Confidentiality and appropriate handling of information and records shall be reflected in the collection of the data, classification and maintenance of the data, administration of security, and in dissemination of information regarding clients. Procedures for the disposition of staff and student records should be consistent with professional and university guidelines.

APPENDIX

RESOURCES FOR FACULTY & STAFF

As a University faculty or staff member, you may at some time encounter a student in distress. Your role as helper is not only valuable, but crucial. Often you will be able to respond effectively to the student's needs; however, there will be occasions when you will want to refer the student to a professional for assistance. This information is designed to help you recognize the signs of distress and provide you with the basic knowledge and skills necessary to intervene effectively.

a) SOURCES OF STRESS FOR STUDENTS:

1. Academic/Vocational

- Tests and grades: competition and performance anxiety
- Difficulties with instructors and class environment/participation
- Procrastination and poor time management
- Lack of motivation
- Inadequate study skills
- Problems in major selection and course choices
- Uncertain vocational goals and career direction
- Concerns about employment skills and opportunities
- Perfectionism

2. Personal/Family

- Separation from family, homesickness
- Parental pressures and expectations
- Financial concerns
- Interpersonal conflicts, including peer pressure and peer approval
- Concerns about intimate relationships and sexuality
- Perfectionistic standards, unrealistic expectations
- Indefinite or conflicting goals and values
- Personal identity and self-esteem issues
- Loneliness, lack of support system
- Difficulties in adjusting to change
- Unsatisfactory living conditions
- Concerns about personal appearance
- Unbalanced life style (work, school, leisure)
- Substance abuse (alcohol, drugs, food)

3. Crises/Unexpected Events

- Death of significant other
- Divorce or marital separation (incl. parental)
- Breakup of relationship
- Academic disappointment or failure
- Unexpected pregnancy
- Major injury or illness
- Change in financial situation
- Loss of job
- Sexual assault
- Physical, emotional isolation

b) Signs of Distress

It is important to note that any single symptom by itself may not indicate the presence of unmanageable stress. Assessment involves the total picture of the individual's functioning. Look for combinations of symptoms, overall patterns.

1. Change

- in sleep patterns (insomnia or extreme sleepiness, nightmares)
- in appetite (overeating or loss of appetite)
- in weight (notable gain or loss)
- in energy level (hyperactivity or exhaustion)
- in mood (more irritable, more excitable, or more depressed)
- in performance or activity (compulsive, erratic, or diminished)
- in personal appearance (lapse in grooming or hygiene)

2. Physical Complaints of Unknown Origin

- headaches, skeletal pain, gastrointestinal disturbances, cardiovascular problems, frequent illness or accidental injury, dizziness, extreme weakness

3. Withdrawal

- from activities and social interaction
- from emotional involvement with others
- from academic work and classroom participation

4. Emotional Overreaction

- spells of crying
- hypersensitivity

- outbursts of anger inappropriate to the situation
- violent behaviour
- displacement of aggression

5. Carelessness

- reckless driving
- excessive risk-taking
- sexual acting-out
- general impulsivity

6. Substance Abuse

- overuse or regular use of illicit drugs, alcohol, and/or medication (without medical monitoring)

7. Distraction

- inability to concentrate or focus
- persistent memory lapses
- restlessness
- preoccupation

8. Depression

- sense of pessimism and helplessness
- feeling out of control
- anxiety
- self-preoccupation
- negative self-evaluation
- references to suicide

9. Poor Contact with Reality

- irrational conversation
- obsessional ruminations or worrying
- exaggerated suspiciousness or fear
- apparent distortions of reality (auditory or visual hallucinations, inability to distinguish fantasy from reality), disorientation

10. Inappropriate Behaviour

- behaviour inappropriate to the setting or situation
- dangerous or threatening (to self or others) behaviours
- bizarre or strange behaviours
- antisocial acts (stealing, forcible sex, illegal pursuits)

11. Anxiety

- panic feelings
- physical shakiness
- obsessive and ruminating thoughts
- rapid heart rate
- shortness of breath

c) How to Help

As member of the UPSA community, you are often in a position to come in contact with a student in distress. Your care and concern could make all the difference. This student may show signs such as seeming sad, depressed, angry, unusually distracted, or have a sudden decline in academic performance. Keep in mind you may come across a distressed student in your own class, during office hours, or around campus. Please be aware that this is not an exhaustive guide and only a trained professional should take responsibility when a person's physical safety is in question.

1. Steps You Can Take To Be Helpful

If a student is actively threatening violence or suicide/self-destructive behaviour, call this number.... immediately to connect with UPSA Security or Madina police.

Look for signs that a student may be in distress

If a student appears to be in distress and is not in any immediate danger, you may wish to talk with them in order to get them to the proper resources.

Be aware of some students' need for privacy (e.g., pull them aside for a private conversation rather than trying to address the issue in class or a public place).

A student may be upset or crying

- Identify yourself as a faculty/staff member or peer and your intent to be helpful
- Attempt to talk with the student and learn about what is going on
- Express your genuine concern for the student's well-being
- If you discover that there is an emergency (such as the student being suicidal or homicidal) call this number..... immediately
- If there is no emergency and the student could benefit from professional help, call the Counseling Unit to speak with staff member about referral options

Be aware that the student may have other resources that could be helpful to engage first:

- Family

- Friends
- Spiritual leaders
- Teachers/professors
- Coaches
- Other community groups/leaders

Some students may accept a referral for professional help more easily than others. Be willing to be a support for student in terms of getting help for them, but also be clear about your limitations to help the student with their problem directly.

You may find that the student's needs are beyond the scope of what you can provide, or that both you and the student are uncomfortable discussing the issue, in which case you may want to refer the student to the proper resources.

d) Suicide Prevention

The key to preventing suicide on our campus is spreading education, awareness, and a stronger connected community. While these are not exhaustive lists, they may be helpful to you in recognizing a student in trouble and getting help, or maybe finding help for yourself. If you would like more in-depth training, please go to our Trainings Offered page for further information.

1. Warning Signs of Suicide

People who are considering suicide may sometimes do things that can be taken as signs or cues that they are in distress. It is important to note that these warning signs should not be taken lightly and may be a person's way of communicating that they are in danger.

- Say things that indicate they do not feel a reason to live (e.g., "I can't go on," "I can't live like this anymore," "I wish I was dead," "I won't be here much longer.")
- Express intense feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, and/or worthlessness
- Major changes in the person's typical behaviour (e.g., starts using drugs or alcohol, dramatic mood changes, sudden intense anxiety, sudden changes in sleeping too much or too little)
- Making end-of-life preparations (e.g., creating a will, giving away possessions)
- Suddenly acting restless or engaging in risky behaviours without thinking
- Withdrawing themselves from friends, family, and society
- Started drinking or using drugs

2. Facts and Statistics

- Most people have thoughts of suicide at some point in their life
- It is okay to talk about suicide with a person who you think might be at risk of attempting suicide. By being willing to talk about it, you open up an opportunity to get help, which may be a relief to that person
- Talking about suicide will NOT put the idea in the person's head

- You can get help and suicide can be preventable
- New Mexico has the 4th highest suicide rate in the nation
- Suicide is the 11th leading cause of death among adults in the U.S.
- Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among college students

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