

Standards of Practice for California Community College Counseling Programs

The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges

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Counseling and Library Faculty Issues Committee 1995-96

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Introduction

Since their inception in mid-century, counseling programs in the California community colleges have played a key role in helping students succeed. Over the years, the functions counseling departments perform have increased significantly, while the pressure to serve more students in cost-effective ways has grown as well. As a result, the question has arisen as to what roles counseling faculty should play in the delivery of services to students. To clarify these roles, the Academic Senate for the California Community Colleges developed a policy paper, The Role of Counseling Faculty in the California Community Colleges, which was adopted at its Spring 1995 Plenary Session.

While the “Role Paper” described the range of activities of counseling faculty, it did not set out standards for how those roles were to be performed. Specific standards for counseling services have appeared piecemeal as Education Code sections, accreditation guidelines, and ethics statements; but nowhere had these standards been collected, reviewed, and presented systematically to the community college counseling field. This policy paper begins where the “Role Paper” ended, by addressing the issue of standards of practice for California community college counseling.

This paper asserts that there should be a set of universal standards of practice for all community college counseling programs, regardless of institutional or departmental size or fiscal constraints. These standards are set out in six areas:

- A. Core Functions;
- B. Ethical Standards;
- C. Organization and Administration;
- D. Human Resources;
- E. Physical Facilities; and
- F. New Technologies.

These standards have been developed by counseling and other faculty through review of current practice, policy, and legislation; study of national standards for the counseling discipline; and projection of needs for future practice. They are designed to be specific enough to be meaningful, yet general enough to allow flexibility in meeting local needs and constraints. They should be used in the design, development, and review of counseling department policies and practices.

CORE FUNCTIONS

To accomplish their mission in providing essential support to community college students, counseling programs perform a set of core functions through individual and group interactions including instruction. While differences in student populations and institutional priorities may affect the degree of emphases of functions within individual counseling programs, nevertheless, these functions are so fundamental to the mission of community college counseling that every program, whether general, categorical, or aimed at specific populations, should perform them. These functions are derived from The California Education Code and from materials from the American Counseling Association.

- 1) Academic counseling, in which the student is assisted in assessing, planning and implementing his or her immediate and long-range academic goals.
- 2) Career counseling, in which the student is assisted in assessing his or her aptitudes, abilities, and interests, and is advised concerning current and future employment trends.
- 3) Personal counseling, in which the student is assisted with personal, family or other social concerns, when that assistance is related to the student's education.
- 4) Crisis intervention, either directly or through cooperative arrangements with other resources on campus or in the community.
- 5) Multicultural counseling, in which students are counseled with a respect for their origins and cultural values.
- 6) Outreach to students and community to encourage them to avail themselves of services, focused on maximizing all students' potential to benefit from the academic experience.
- 7) Consultation to the college governance process and liaison to the college community to make the environment as beneficial to the intellectual, emotional, and physical development of students as possible.
- 8) Research and review of counseling programs and services with the goal of improving their effectiveness.
- 9) Training and professional development for counseling staff, interns, and others in the college community.

A detailed review of each function and its related standards follows. Although the first three core functions--academic, career, and personal counseling--are described below as separate and distinct functions, in practice they are often inextricably related. Community college counseling programs should recognize the student as a whole and complex human being with concerns and issues that are not completely distinct or separate; academic issues intertwine with career issues,

and with personal life-coping issues. In any given counseling session, counseling faculty should be prepared to provide the combination of services that addresses the student=s particular needs in an integrated fashion.

Academic Counseling

- 1) Counseling services should include assessment of students' academic abilities, disabilities, strengths and weaknesses; help in clarifying academic goals and selecting a major; educational planning for transfer, associate degrees and certificate programs; referral to other support services when indicated; intervention when students' academic performance is at risk; and follow-up (e.g. academic mentoring, early alert processes, and probation counseling).
- 2) Counseling faculty should ensure that their knowledge of the nature and requirements of the various disciplines offered at their college is accurate and current by establishing strong links with other faculty, in order to effectively provide educational planning services for transfer, associate degree, and certificate programs.
- 3) Counseling services should include assisting students in transitioning to college through pre-enrollment advising during high school, and through re-entry and community outreach.
- 4) Counseling services should include assisting students in transitioning to university through such programs as transfer workshops, university application workshops, university representative visitations, and "college day" events. These transfer services should be offered through regular counseling departmental activities as well as through transfer centers. It is important that transfer counseling be an integral part of the counseling program services and not relegated solely to a transfer center on each college campus.
- 5) Counseling programs should work closely with articulation officers to ensure that their college's articulation reflects the needs of students. Counseling programs should ensure that articulation officers are given enough release time to perform their function. Counseling faculty should have ready access to accurate, up-to-date articulation agreements established between their college and neighboring four-year colleges and universities.
- 6) Counseling faculty should stay current on transfer requirements, including admission, general education, and major requirements, for the transfer institutions in their region. Counseling faculty should regularly attend transfer conferences and workshops, such as those conducted by the University of California, California State University, and the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities.
- 7) Counseling programs should work closely with their college's matriculation program, especially in the areas of assessment interpretation, application of multiple measures, orientation program development, academic counseling and advising services and follow-up.
- 8) Counseling faculty should assist students through the processes of pre and co-requisite implementation, transcript evaluation, and general education transfer certification.

9) Counseling programs should develop curriculum and offer courses and workshops that teach the skills needed for academic success, such as study skills, note taking, and time management.

Career Counseling

- 1) Counseling faculty should teach the career development process and its importance in setting and achieving academic and life goals.
- 2) The career development process should be taught as holistic and lifelong. Counseling faculty should assist students in examining their lives as a whole--values, interests, aptitudes, and life circumstances. Students should be made aware that career skills learned now, such as career search and decision-making methods, may be useful throughout a lifetime.
- 3) Career counseling services should be delivered in a variety of ways, including individual and group counseling, workshops, and college courses.
- 4) Career counseling services should include assisting students in clarifying career goals, through: intake interviews and administration and interpretation of career assessment instruments; instruction in career exploration using the latest technology and methods; and instruction in career goal setting and decision making.
- 5) Counseling programs should provide a career center that houses up-to-date information on career research, labor market, educational programs, and all aspects of the career development process. Technical assistance should also be available to help students access this information.
- 6) Services should include assistance with job placement and the job search process, including instruction in resume preparation and interviewing skills.
- 7) Career counseling services should reach out to undeclared students and assist them in setting academic and career goals.
- 8) Counseling faculty should serve on vocational program advisory committees for the purpose of staying current on local labor market trends and employment demands.
- 9) Counseling programs should establish liaison relationships with other career-related programs, such as regional occupational programs, work experience programs, GAIN, JTPA, and private industry councils.

Personal Counseling

- 1) Personal counseling services should be available to students whose personal life issues interfere with their academic success. These should include, but need not be limited to:

individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, support groups, and courses or workshops on personal life issues (e.g., self-esteem, stress management, and substance abuse prevention). While all counseling faculty should be prepared to provide these services, referrals to other mental health professionals should be made for more severe problems.

- 2) Counseling programs should develop curriculum and offer courses and workshops that encourage the holistic development of the student as a functioning member of society (e.g. courses in personal development and life-coping skills).
- 3) Counseling programs should maintain up-to-date information on community resources and should refer students to appropriate services as needed.

Crisis Intervention

- 1) As part of their mission to provide personal counseling, programs should have a system that assists students in acute emotional distress, including an intervention plan for students in personal crisis who require immediate attention.
- 2) For situations when a student is a potential danger to self or others, districts should have a clear policy of who has authority to make such determinations, and specific procedures to be followed.
- 3) Counseling programs should work closely with administration and outside agencies to ensure that the needs of students in crisis are met and that personnel appropriate to such situations are available.
- 4) Counseling programs should take leadership in creating and participating in campus-wide crisis intervention teams.
- 5) Counseling programs should be familiar with district disaster plans, and be prepared to assist students in the event of a disaster on campus.

Multicultural Counseling

- 1) Counseling faculty should become aware of how their own cultural backgrounds and experiences may influence their attitudes, values, and biases about students= psychological processes.
- 2) Counseling faculty should develop knowledge about how oppression, discrimination, and stereotyping affect them personally and influence their work; and how these problems impinge upon the lives of their students.
- 3) Counseling faculty should acquire specific knowledge about the characteristics of the groups with which they work. They should develop an understanding of how race, culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status and the like affect personality formation, career choices, learning styles, help-seeking behavior, and the appropriateness of counseling approaches.
- 4) Counseling faculty should actively seek out educational and life experiences that enrich their cross-cultural knowledge, understanding, and skills in order to provide more effective counseling.

Outreach

Counseling programs should make a special effort to reach out to potential students, and to students who may otherwise not avail themselves of needed services, or who might be better served by nontraditional methods. Such outreach should respond to the diversity of race, culture, ethnicity, and sexual orientation among students, and to any groups in need that can be identified. In particular, students from cultural backgrounds different from the majority of the student body should be sought out, as should undeclared, basic skills, and probationary students.

Consultation and Advocacy

- 1) Consultation regarding students should be provided as needed to other faculty and other appropriate campus staff, within the limits of confidentiality.
- 2) Consultation with parents, spouses, and agencies that bear some responsibility for particular students should be provided within the limits of confidentiality.

- 3) Counseling programs should play an active role in interpreting and advocating the needs of students to administrators, faculty, and staff. Such advocacy should include, but not be limited to curriculum, academic policies and practices, and student rights and responsibilities. Counseling faculty should participate actively in local and state governance processes to carry out such advocacy.
- 4) Counseling programs should provide leadership in articulation and curriculum development through consultation with other faculty.

Program Review and Research

- 1) Counseling programs should undergo regularly scheduled reviews. Each review should be performed a minimum of once per accreditation cycle, and should be linked to the college program review process.
- 2) Data for the review process should be gathered from students, faculty, classified staff and administration. At a minimum, data should include numbers of students served per year; types of services delivered and perceived quality of services; timeliness of student access to counseling; counseling curriculum; counseling faculty participation in campus decision making; and clarity and accuracy of counseling information.
- 3) Assistance in determining the appropriate methods for collecting, compiling and analyzing the data should be sought from campus research professionals.
- 4) After being collected and analyzed, counseling program data should be reviewed by all counseling personnel.
- 5) Counseling program strengths and weaknesses should be documented. A plan for program improvements to address weaknesses should be developed.
- 6) Plans should be reviewed annually to encourage progress toward program goals.
- 7) Other research, whether to improve local programs or to further the goals of the profession, should be encouraged and supported.

Training and Professional Development

- 1) Counseling faculty and counseling programs share a responsibility to provide competent academic, career, personal, and crisis intervention counseling services to students. Therefore, programs should require a minimum of twenty hours per year of professional development activity by all counseling faculty; and should encourage further professional development beyond that minimum.
- 2) Each program should assess its counseling faculty's knowledge and skills in the core functions, particularly academic, career, personal counseling and crisis intervention, as well as in multicultural awareness. The program should provide opportunities to enhance knowledge and skills in each of those areas that need strengthening.
- 3) Counseling programs should provide formal orientation and training for all new counseling faculty, full or part-time, temporary or permanent, to ensure that they possess the essential knowledge to perform their jobs.
- 4) If a counseling program utilizes paraprofessionals, it should follow the guidelines listed in the paper The Role of Counseling Faculty in the California Community Colleges:

“First, that the competencies expected of paraprofessional be defined explicitly, with the full participation of the counseling faculty; second, that paraprofessionals need to be trained and supervised carefully with full participation of the counseling staff; and last that paraprofessionals not be expected to perform tasks beyond their qualifications.”

- 5) If a counseling program accepts graduate interns, they should be provided training and close supervision during their internship to ensure quality service to students. Interns should be closely screened to determine their knowledge and readiness before they see students outside the presence of a counseling faculty member.
- 6) If a counseling program utilizes student workers, the same precautions listed in items c, d, and e above should apply to an even greater degree. Students should be selected carefully, provided intensive training as to their role and limitations, and continuously supervised.
- 7) When programs utilize interns, paraprofessionals, or student workers in the delivery of services, all staff should wear identification or otherwise indicate their positions, in order to avoid confusion on the part of students.
- 8) Where colleges use instructor advisors, counseling programs should provide training and maintain a close linkage with these faculty members in order to assure a high quality in information dissemination to students, and to clarify the differing roles of counseling and advising.
- 9) Counseling programs should offer training and development opportunities for classified staff, to improve their skills and knowledge in providing quality services to students.

- 10) All faculty and staff, including interns, student workers, and paraprofessionals, should receive training about confidentiality and the proper maintenance of records.
- 11) Counseling programs should offer inservice training to the larger college community where the expertise of the department would be useful.

ETHICAL STANDARDS

Professional ethical practice forms the cornerstone of high quality counseling services. As ethical and legal issues arise in the course of providing counseling services, it is no easy task to determine the laws that pertain to each situation, to interpret those laws, or operationalize them within a counseling program. Thus, it is important that there be regular communication among the counseling faculty, the program administrator, and the district's legal counsel about these matters.

Counseling faculty should know the laws relevant to their work, and should follow scrupulously the obligations and limitations these laws create. The counseling administrator, in particular, is responsible to see that the policies and procedures of a program follow both the law and the ethical standards of the profession.

Counseling faculty and staff should maintain strict adherence to the ethical code of the American Counseling Association, as adopted in April 1995. The full text of the code has been reproduced as an appendix to this document. The ACA document lists fifty-one standards in eight areas of practice:

- A. The Counseling Relationship
- B. Confidentiality
- C. Professional Responsibility
- D. Relationship with Other Professionals
- E. Evaluation, Assessment, and Interpretation
- F. Teaching, Training, and Supervision
- G. Research and Publication
- H. Resolving Ethical Issues

The following highlights some of the standards that have particular applicability to community college counseling practice.

The Counseling Relationship

One of the great strengths of the community colleges is the diversity of populations that they serve. Counseling faculty should be mindful of the individuality and value of each person who seeks educational services. Therefore, counseling faculty should not condone or engage in discrimination based on age, color, culture, disability, ethnic group, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, marital status or socioeconomic status.

Counselors should actively attempt to understand the diverse cultural backgrounds of the students with whom they work. This should include, but not be limited to, learning how the counselor's own cultural/ethnic, racial identity impacts her/his values and beliefs about the counseling process.

Counseling faculty should be mindful of their professional limitations, and the limitations of their counseling program's services. If they determine that they, or their program, are unable to be of professional service, they should not abandon or neglect their students. Counseling faculty should make appropriate, informed referrals to alternative resources.

Counseling faculty should not engage in any type of sexual activity with their counselees. They should be cognizant of their positions of power over their counselees, and thus should avoid dual relationships, such as business, personal, or familial relationships, that might impair their judgment or increase the risk of harm to their counselees.

Confidentiality

Counseling faculty should keep confidential any information related to a student's use of counseling services, avoiding unwarranted disclosure of information. However, there are exceptions. The rule of confidentiality does not apply when "disclosure is required to prevent clear and imminent danger to the counselee or others, or when legal requirements demand that confidential information be revealed. To the extent possible, students should be informed before confidential information is disclosed." Counseling faculty should consult with other professionals, the counseling manager, and legal counsel when in doubt as to the validity of an exception. Counseling faculty have the obligation to ensure that confidentiality is maintained by all support staff as well. The counseling program's procedures should provide for confidentiality in creating, securing, accessing, transferring and disposing of all counseling records.

Professional Responsibility

Counseling faculty have the responsibility of maintaining their professional competence by engaging in continuing education activities. Counseling faculty must not use their place of employment in the community college as a means of recruiting clients for their private practice. They must not use their professional positions to seek unjustified personal gain, sexual favor, or unearned goods and services.

Relationship With Other Professionals

Counseling faculty should establish working agreements with supervisors, colleagues, and subordinates regarding counseling relationships, confidentiality, and adherence to professional standards. Counseling faculty should not engage in practices that are illegal or unethical.

Evaluation, Assessment, and Interpretation

Counseling faculty should provide only those assessment services for which they are competent.
-In particular, psychological testing should be conducted only by qualified personnel.
Counseling faculty should apply professional standards in the selection of test instruments, administration of the tests, security of the tests, scoring, and interpretation. Before assessment is conducted, counselees should be apprised about its nature and purpose and use of the results. Accurate interpretation should be provided to the client after every assessment and accompany the release of assessment results.

Training and Supervision

Counseling faculty should be knowledgeable about the ethical, legal, and regulatory aspects of their profession and should be skilled in applying that knowledge in their training of others. They should serve as role models of professional behavior. Counseling faculty who supervise the counseling services of others, such as interns, should take reasonable steps to ensure that the services provided are professional. They should clearly state in advance to the individuals they train, the levels of competency and responsibility expected, the appraisal methods, and the timing of evaluations.

Research and Publication

Counseling faculty should seek consultation and observe stringent safeguards to protect the rights of students and research participants. Information obtained from students or other research participants should be kept strictly confidential.

Resolving Ethical Issues

Counseling faculty have the responsibility of upholding the standards of their profession. As part of that responsibility, when counseling faculty possess reasonable cause to believe that a fellow counseling faculty member may not be acting in an ethical manner, they should take appropriate action, which may include consultation with the counseling faculty member, with others knowledgeable about ethics, with administrators, legal advisors, and professional organizations.

ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION

The organization and administration of a counseling program has great impact on its effectiveness. Therefore, the following standards should be applied:

- 1) A specific individual should be designated by the institution to administer the counseling program. This administrator should possess the minimum qualifications of the counseling discipline.
- 2) This administrator should be skilled in leadership, fiscal management, interpersonal relations, cultural sensitivity, staff selection and training, planning, and evaluation. The administrator should also possess a thorough knowledge of student development theory and practice, as well as of the community college system.
- 3) The counseling department should have a major role in developing the job description and in the hiring of the administrator.
- 4) The administrator of the counseling program should be positioned in the administrative structure to effectively interact with other administrators, as well as with the chief student services administrator and chief instruction administrator.
- 5) Specific responsibilities of the counseling program should be clearly delineated, published, and disseminated to the entire college community.
- 6) Counseling services should be defined and structured primarily by the counseling faculty who provide these services, to ensure that those who are most knowledgeable about these issues will have the major role in making decisions that directly affect service delivery to students.
- 7) Counseling program services should be organized in a way that provides for the direct and ongoing interaction of counseling faculty with other faculty, staff, and administrators.

- 8) Counseling services should be scheduled funded adequately in order to accommodate the needs of students, including evening and weekend students. Services should also be scheduled to meet fluctuations in student demand. Accommodation should be made, however, to allow counseling faculty to participate in staff development activities offered to other faculty and staff.
- 9) Counseling sessions should be of appropriate length to allow students to fully discuss plans, programs, courses, academic progress, and other subjects related to their educational progress.
- 10) Counseling services should be delivered by a variety of methods, including individual sessions, group sessions, workshops, and curriculum.
- 11) Adequate and equitable resources should be made available to counseling programs in order to implement quality services.

HUMAN RESOURCES

The quality of a counseling program is dependent upon the level of staffing and the qualifications of the professionals providing services. Districts should hire an adequate number of counseling faculty who are trained to handle the wide variety of concerns that affect community college students; as well as sufficient support staff to operate the program efficiently.

- 1) Counseling faculty must meet the minimum qualifications of the California community college counseling discipline. Their education and abilities should be those that are described in detail in the Academic Senate document, The Role of Counseling Faculty in the California Community Colleges.
- 2) Sufficient counseling faculty should be available to meet student needs and state mandates. Students should have access to non-emergency counseling services within one week of requesting such services. In addition, students should have access for brief questions within one day.
- 3) In concert with other appropriate campus personnel, counseling faculty trained in crisis management should be available to respond to crisis situations within one hour.
- 4) Counseling programs should, whenever possible, ensure that the counseling faculty reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of the local community. Whenever possible, counseling faculty and classified staff should be available who speak the major languages of local immigrant populations.

- 5) There should be sufficient numbers of full time counseling faculty to allow for active counseling faculty participation in college governance, as well as in professional development activities, without disruption of a program's services to students.
- 6) There should be standardized and consistent hiring and training for all counseling faculty, regardless of full or part-time status or specific program (e.g. EOP&S, DSP&S, athletic counseling). This training should include familiarization of all counseling faculty with all programs and services, issues of student equity, and specific campus populations.
- 7) Sufficient support staff should be available to maintain student records, organize resource materials, receive students, make appointments, and handle other operational needs. Technical and computer support staff should be available for research, data collection, systems development, and maintenance of electronic equipment and software.

PHYSICAL FACILITIES

Counseling services should be readily accessible and visible to all students, including those who are physically challenged. Counseling services should be physically separate from administrative offices, and campus police. Wherever counseling services are offered, including outreach centers, these minimum standards should be met:

- 1) Each full-time faculty member should be provided with a sound-proofed office, in order to assure student confidentiality. Part-time counseling faculty should be allowed use of sound-proofed offices when they are counseling students. Each office should have a telephone with messaging capabilities, a computer with access to student records and other pertinent information, and secure file storage. Overall, offices should create an inviting environment for students and a safe and functional work site for counselors.
- 2) Counseling services should have up-to-date computers, copiers, and other equipment to support record keeping, research, and publication activities. Technical resources for media presentations should also be available.
- 3) The reception area should provide a welcoming waiting area for students.
- 4) Student records should be maintained in a secure environment to ensure confidentiality.
- 5) Where district demographics warrant, information and assistance should be available, by phone and in print, in languages other than English.
- 6) The counseling area should have information resources that include appropriate professional journals and books.

- 7) A collection of current occupational and career information should be readily accessible to counseling personnel and students.
- 8) An area suitable for individual and group testing should be available. This space allocated should be sound-proofed to eliminate noise distractions.
- 9) The counseling service should maintain, or have ready access to, space suitable for group counseling sessions and staff meetings.
- 10) A written disaster plan should be displayed, outlining procedures for emergency evacuations for both crime and natural disasters. A personal security system should be in place where police can be notified immediately in case of emergencies.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES

It is important that counseling faculty take advantage of new technologies in doing their jobs. Counseling is by nature an interpersonal activity rather than an interaction between human and machine. While computers will never replace the skills of a counseling professional, nevertheless, computers have the capacity to dramatically improve access and accuracy in the delivery of information. Counseling programs that do not take advantage of emerging technologies will eventually be unable to meet the needs or expectations of students. Therefore, counseling faculty need to take the initiative to develop technology use plans that add to the counseling relationship, rather than detract from it. Counseling faculty should neither simply resist nor blindly accept technology use plans imposed upon them.

Technology use practices should incorporate the following principles:

- 1) Counseling programs should select only those technologies which enhance the delivery of services to students. Electronic access to student educational plans, articulation information, transcripts, petitions, and the like should be encouraged.
- 2) Counseling programs should use technologies to enhance communication within the counseling department, as well as to the college and to the community.
- 3) Counseling programs should use technologies to document accurately and efficiently the student use of services.

- 4) Counseling technology plans should be developed with significant input from users of the plans--counseling faculty and personnel, counseling administrators, and students--in addition to technology experts.
- 5) Counseling technology plans should be closely integrated with college and district technology plans.
- 6) There should be adequate technical support services for maintenance of current technologies and installation of new technologies.
- 7) Policies and procedures to maximize technology use and access, while ensuring safety of records and appropriate confidentiality, should be developed and implemented.
- 8) As programs begin to include greater use of technologies, adequate time and training for personnel to learn and maintain skills in using these technologies should be provided.
- 9) Many of the new technologies give college information directly to students (e.g. web home pages, kiosks). To prevent confusion and misinformation, counseling faculty should be involved in ensuring that the information provided is accurate and up-to-date.
- 10) All students should have access to counseling faculty when they need counseling, rather than mere information. Access to technology should not replace access to counseling.
- 11) Students enrolled through distance learning should be afforded the same level of counseling and support services made available to other students. The services made available should adhere to all the standards contained in this document.

REVIEW OF STANDARDS

Although these standards should stand for a number of years, they should be revisited periodically to address new developments in the field. Therefore, the Committee on Counseling and Library Faculty Issues of the Academic Senate should review these standards at least every six years.

REFERENCES

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APPENDIX:

American Counseling Association Code of Ethics and Standard of Practice

(Approved by the Governing Council, April 1995)