

B. The Student Counseling Center

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Students in late adolescence are filled with hopes and intentions for their future, and also bursting with energy. Yet, at the same time, they are vulnerable to negative feelings of failure, loss, alienation, and inferiority. Many students share their problems with their friend(s), and are able to find solutions to them, or at least gain the strength to keep going on in their lives. There are also some who find ways to deal with their problems by talking with their advisors about personal issues, and not just academic ones.

The number of students who visit the Counseling Center has steadily increased in recent years. There seems to be less stigma attached to receiving counseling, and thus, students come for a visit more readily than they used to. Currently, approximately 10% of the students visit the Counseling Center year round. In actual numbers, there were 295 clients, including family members, and a total of 1845 interviews, in the 1999 academic year. Clients' problems varied, including academic and interpersonal problems, and symptoms of neurosis and depression.

1. Grappling with personal problems can lead students to identify lifetime goals and promote their human development.

When students have a certain problem, they tend to focus upon solving that specific problem. However, confronting one's own problems and struggling for solutions can often lead to identification of one's lifetime goals or tasks, and can also promote personal development. Those who interact with students should recognize this educational aspect of confronting problems.

2. Academic achievement is an index of students' life conditions.

The best opportunity for faculty members to learn more about individual students is registration day at the beginning of each term, when they can closely observe students' appearance and expressions as they hand students their grades. Academic achievement serves as an index of students' general life conditions. When there is a dramatic change in academic performance, such as receiving a low grade, the advisor should ask the student what may account for the situation. When there are psychological problems, advisors can refer the student to a counselor, which has often been the case. For example, in 1999, there were 14 referrals from advisors, and 10 referrals from other faculty, a total of 24 referrals. Many of them were referred because they had shown academic problems, such as repeatedly receiving low grades, or not being able to work on their senior theses. However, in other cases, academic problems were merely what had surfaced, and the real problems were more deeply rooted, such as depression, apathy, and social anxiety.

3. Judging the degree of students' problems.

While listening to a student's problem, you should try and make a judgment of whether the problems are concerns typical of adolescents, regarding career choices or interpersonal relations, or are more serious and accompanied by mental or physical symptoms. If they are simply concerns, it often helps to just listen to their problems and offer frank opinions or advice. If necessary, the student can be referred to a counselor as well.

When mental and/or physical symptoms can be observed, it would be best to refer the student to a

counselor right away. These symptoms can vary, including depressive tendencies, lack of motivation, anxiety, insomnia, loss of appetite, and eating disorders. To increase the likelihood of students actually visiting a counselor they are referred to, it seems best to call the Counseling Center and make an appointment with consent of the student and in the presence of the student. At the discretion of the counselor, students may be recommended to consult a psychiatrist.

4. Early reaction.

When students have a problem, it is most effective to react as soon as possible. For instance, there is a better chance of getting students back on the right track if something is done when they initially receive a low grade, rather than reacting after they receive low grades for two or three terms in a row. When providing support to a student receiving low grades, it may be necessary to gather more information about the student from other sources, instead of relying solely on the student's self-report, and perhaps meet sometimes with the student during the term to check on his/her progress.

5. Serious problems have underlying histories.

Students with serious problems often have had experiences of losing a significant other, or some other sort of strong anxiety or nervousness, prior to entering college, and have been struggling to keep these disruptive emotions under control. A loss of control over these emotions can be the cause of observable mental and physical symptoms, yet, it can also be understood that the freedom provided by a university context enabled the release of suppressed emotions for the first time and resulted in such symptoms. In other words, observable mental and physical symptoms may have the significance of being a starting point to resolve students' long-standing problems.

6. Take time with students who have difficulty expressing themselves.

There are some students who have difficulty expressing themselves. Expressing oneself is often difficult, but these students seem to get extremely nervous in interpersonal situations, and thus, find it particularly difficult to express their thoughts and emotions. For the listener, this may be frustrating, especially when time is pressing, because they cannot grasp what the student is trying to communicate. However, with these students, it is necessary not to pressure them, and to show them that you are "all ears." When the listener does not have much time, it might be even better to set up another appointment when more time would be available.

7. Students want attention and approval.

Almost any student wants attention and approval. It is very important in life to have someone close to you who tells you, "I'm always by your side, looking out for you, and I am always willing to listen." Many of the students who become apathetic or depressed after entering university seem to have never had such a significant other. These unfortunate students should realize that any one of the university faculty members can become such a person for them. Sometimes, out of respect for privacy issues, there may be hesitation to react toward students' behaviors that raise concern. Although caution is necessary, it should not be considered wrong to approach the student and tell them about your concerns for them.

8. Faculty cooperation and alliance as useful measures against faculty stress.

Most students should not require the assistance of their advisors beyond academic issues. However, a small proportion of students do bring up issues, academic and otherwise, which would require much time and energy for the advisor to take care of. Even when these efforts are invested, many times they do not

produce expected effects or improvements, and cause apathy or distress for the advisor. Because there are such cases, it is necessary to have stress-control measures for the faculty to maintain mental health. In this sense, cooperation and alliance among faculty would be a good first step.