

**IACS SITE VISIT  
COUNSELING CENTER  
SUFFOLK UNIVERSITY**

**INTRODUCTION**

Dr. Spencer Deakin conducted an International Association of Counseling Services (IACS) field visit of the Suffolk University Counseling Center on May 5 and 6, 2005. Dr. Ken Garni submitted application materials, printed materials and pamphlets and arranged the site visit schedule with Dr. Deakin. The evaluation report is based on the information from Dr. Garni and the site visitation.

The field visitor met initially with Dr. Garni at the Counseling Center to review the schedule, discuss background information about the Center, and issues identified by the first board reviewers. During the visit, Dr. Deakin individually met with each of the Center's psychologists, including Dr. Paul Korn, Dr. Kathryn Jackson, Dr. Lynda Field, Dr. Wilma Busse, and Mrs. Sheila McCarthy, the Center's secretary.

Dr. Deakin interviewed Dr. David Sargent, President of Suffolk University, and Dr. Kenneth Greenberg, Dean of Arts and Sciences. He also met with several staff from student service areas. These included Dr. Nancy Stoll, Dean of Students, Ms. Maureen Wark, Director of Residence Life, Ms. Sharon Yardley, Director of Health Services, and Ms. Daphne Durham, Director of International Services. In addition, Dr. Deakin interviewed the Center's three pre-doctoral interns, Mr. Marco Gemignani, Ms. Sara Morelli Miller, and Ms. Tonja Hinterstoisser. Dr. Deakin also met briefly with Dr. Linda Gross, consulting psychiatrist.

At the end of the visit, Dr. Deakin reviewed with Dr. Garni the information gathered during the site visit, asked follow-up questions and sought additional information needed for the report and several recommendations. The Suffolk University Counseling Center staff and other members of the University cooperated fully during the visit.

**BACKGROUND AND HISTORY**

Suffolk University is a comprehensive private university located on Boston's historic Beacon Hill. The University has 70 areas of study and has two international campuses located in Madrid, Spain and Dakar, Senegal. The University's fifteen buildings are located among the private residences and office buildings of this downtown Boston area. The University recently opened two small residence halls with capacity for 771 students. During the Spring 2005 semester, the University had 8,332 students. The current enrollment consists of 4,617 undergraduate students, 2,043 graduate students and 1,672 law students. The University is divided into the College of Arts and Sciences, the School of Management and the Law School.

Dr. Ken Garni has been the Counseling Center director since 1973. The Center has four full-time licensed psychologists in addition to the director. Each staff member has faculty rank at the University. Dr. Paul Korn, professor, has been a staff member since 1975 and has primary responsibility for coordinating outreach activities. Dr. Lynda Field, associate professor, joined the staff in 1998, and has responsibility for the ADAPT program, a depression awareness

initiative. Dr. Wilma Busse, associate professor, is the training director, and has been a staff member since 1988. Dr. Kathryn Jackson is an assistant professor who joined the staff in 2002. Dr. Linda Gross and Dr. Richard Barnum are part-time consulting psychiatrists at the Center. Each year, the Counseling Center has three full-time pre-doctoral interns in its APA approved training program. Mr. Marco Gemignani, Ms. Sara Morelli-Miller, and Ms. Tanja Hinterstoisser, will complete their full year in August 2005. Ms. Sheila McCarthy has been the full-time secretary for the past four years. There are also three part-time graduate assistants who provide administrative support to the staff.

The Counseling Center is located on the third floor of the Ridgeway building. The renovated multi-purpose building conforms to the architectural requirements of this historic Boston neighborhood. The four story building includes a gymnasium in the below ground level, a fitness center on the second floor, an academic department and classroom space on the fourth floor. The third floor includes the Counseling Center, the Dean of Students suite and related offices, a computer services lab and offices.

The Suffolk University Counseling Center "assists clients to effectively define and attain personal, academic and career goals." The services include individual and group counseling, psychological assessments, consultation, outreach, training, supervision, teaching and research. All undergraduate and graduate students are eligible for this no-fee student service. Faculty and staff can access assessment and referral services. The University provides 97% of funding for the Center with grants monies providing the balance of funds.

## SUMMARY OF FIELD VISIT

The accreditation application and interviews with the center staff and other administrators at the University provided information for the report. It will be presented in a format consistent with the IACS accreditation standards.

### A. RELATIONSHIP TO THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

The Counseling Center is a highly valued student service at Suffolk University. The Director reports to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. As faculty members, each counseling center staff member teaches one course each semester. The Counseling Center is one of several traditional student service departments that report to the academic dean. Other student services report to the Dean of Students. Dr. Garni meets regularly with Dr. Ken Greenberg, Dean of Arts and Sciences. They appear to have a positive, collegial relationship. Dr. Garni also consults regularly with the University president and other administrators concerning student development issues.

President David Sargent, Dr. Greenberg and other administrators commented positively on the individual and collective skills, commitment, involvement and expertise of the Counseling Center staff. Frequently, the interviewees commented on the competencies and responsiveness of the staff. The University administrators recognize that the staff members are actively involved in many aspects of the University through extensive outreach, consultation, teaching and committee functions. Dr. Garni has provided effective leadership to the Counseling Center. President Sargent stated Dr. Garni is "one of the most respected members of the University community." The staff appears to anticipate student needs and collaborates with other faculty and staff to address

issues. The Center has a well-developed outreach program and has strong relationships with many departments and program areas on this urban campus. The Center is a credible, viable department within the University.

The Counseling Center staff maintains neutrality and professional independence on campus. The Center is not administratively linked with any other unit that makes disciplinary, academic or administrative decisions. Privacy and client confidentiality are maintained in all consultative roles. Campus administrators acknowledge and understand the confidentiality of student clients within this urban University community.

Dr. Greenberg believes the current administrative and budget support for the Center will continue in the future. Both he and President Sargent expressed a commitment to relocate the Center into a newly purchased building closer to the geographic center of the campus. Both administrators recognize the strength of the counseling service and its positive influence upon the diverse and multi-cultural student body.

The IACS site visitor met with four student life directors during the visit. They discussed their impressions, attitudes and relationship with the Counseling Center. All expressed genuine respect for the professionalism and skills of the staff and the Center's positive impact upon the campus. They commented that the staff has the credentials, training, and experience to deal with many complex issues presented by students. The staff is accessible to them for consultation, referral, crisis and outreach activities. They believe the staff is responsive and committed to addressing student needs. They collaborate with the staff on several student affairs projects. Each interviewee acknowledged that the counseling staff protects the confidentiality and privacy of student clients. They also commented on the Director's efforts to provide information through e-mail and other means concerning student development or psychological issues. They believe the Center has a "very positive image with students, faculty and staff."

## B. FUNCTIONS AND ROLES

The Suffolk University Counseling Center provides a range of services and programs to the campus community. The staff primarily provides individual counseling services to students. The current staff to student ratio is 1:1674 based on enrollment figures listed on the University website. The ratio is higher than the figure listed in the accreditation application and discussed during the field visit. The Center also has three pre-doctoral interns. The trainees provide approximately 35% of the counseling sessions at the Center. There is no waiting list or session limit policy at the Center. Last year, 399 students received individual counseling. The average number of individual counseling sessions is 4.3. Approximately 30% of clients are minority students, 12% are international students and 25% are graduate students.

There are no assigned intake appointment slots. Students are assigned to the first available staff member. Almost all students receive their initial appointment within a few days. Rarely does a student wait more than a week for an intake appointment. Usually student clients are assigned to the intake counselor's caseload. Daily walk-in hours are available for students requesting immediate contact with a counselor. As necessary, cases are assigned to staff based upon time availability, caseload size, specific issue or requested counselor. Requests for specific counselors are honored and interns are closely supervised to ensure the appropriateness of client issues in their caseload. All staff members, including the secretary believe the system provides efficient, effective service to students.

The Center has an underdeveloped group counseling program. There are no current general counseling groups. The staff historically has had difficulty initiating group counseling on this largely commuter campus whose students have limited available time outside of the class schedule. The staff appears oriented toward individual counseling. Short term, structured workshops in classroom settings have been more successful. This year, a pre-doctoral intern conducted a general counseling and support group for international students at another campus location. There was also a "women in business" group that had some success. Few Suffolk students respond to general group counseling advertising. The staff has had limited success offering group activities to pre-established cohorts of students who experience various needs. It appears that the staff could build upon their network of positive campus relationships to meet various student needs amenable to group intervention.

The Counseling Center does not emphasize psychological testing. The staff administers very few psychological instruments beyond the intake session. At intake, each student completes the College Adjustment Scale. The instrument is scored immediately and the results are provided to the intake counselor for review. The staff administers the Myers Briggs Type Indicator, Strong Campbell Interest Inventory and the Kuder DD for personal awareness and career decision-making. The staff refers students for learning disability assessment to a specialized program at nearby New England Medical Center or other referral agencies.

Suffolk counseling staff involvement in traditional off-hour crisis intervention is limited due to the urban commuter nature of the University. The staff does not have rotating after hour crisis intervention responsibilities. The Director assumes rotating emergency consultation responsibilities with other student affairs administrators. The majority of students experiencing emergency psychological crises seek services through their neighborhood or community mental health resources. After hour psychiatric emergencies that occur among the small number of resident hall students are transported by campus security to a nearby hospital. The Center has policies and procedures for addressing psychological emergencies. The Center has daily walk-in hours for students seeking immediate service. The experienced staff has demonstrated skills in meeting emergency service requests during regular center hours. The Center's consulting psychiatrists are available for evaluation, consultation and for emergency hospitalization.

The Center has an impressive list of professional referral resources in the Boston area. The Director stated the staff generally uses a relatively small number of referral sources due to cost limitations, insurance issues, and knowledge of the service providers. The list is periodically updated for accuracy. The staff has the advantage of a variety of high quality medical and psychological resources within this major metropolitan area. However, the staff must also match student financial and insurance limitations, as well as, cultural differences in using these resources.

The Center has an extensive and well-developed outreach program. The Center is committed to maintaining this service area. The staff offers a variety of psycho-educational programs and activities to students that address important student development issues. The comprehensive outreach program appears to be an outcome of positive counseling staff relationships with faculty, staff and students. The application lists an impressive number and variety of presentations and brief workshops presented to students in classes, student organizations and residence halls. The programs appear to reflect the staff's commitment to diversity and the needs of the diverse student population. The staff sponsors a variety of mental health screening days and participates in campus health fairs and activities fairs. Student

participation numbers are large and the outreach program extends the Center's impact across the campus.

The ADAPT program, a comprehensive depression awareness initiative, is an impressive center sponsored prevention program. The staff collaborates with students and other student life staff to provide educational information and activities to students. In addition, the project sponsors mini-grants to students to implement depression awareness and intervention activities. The project has sponsored a student theater effort, a stress management initiative called the Oasis, and a cross-cultural poster session from an academic department. The annual award ceremony includes a campus celebration of the student projects. The program appears to have campus wide impact and is acknowledged by the University president and other staff.

The Counseling Center staff provides valuable and appropriate consultation services to faculty, staff, students and parents concerning relevant student development and behavioral issues. The staff respects the privacy and confidentiality of clients in individual consultation. There is substantial amount of consultation between the counseling staff with both faculty and student service staff. Each staff psychologist, as a result of faculty status participates on appropriate faculty committees and teaches courses within various departments. These experiences contribute to on-going contact with faculty colleagues that facilitate consultation and referrals to the Center. It appears to have a direct impact on the number of consultation contacts at the Center.

The Suffolk counseling staff evaluates their counseling services, workshops, and clients referred to the consulting psychiatrists. The staff has administered a center evaluation and client satisfaction survey since 2002. The survey was administered to new and ongoing clients between February and April 2005. The survey assesses client experiences with office practices, counselor interactions and self-reported counseling outcomes. The results indicate strong positive client satisfaction with the center, and self-reported progress in well being and benefiting from the counseling contact. The size of the sample for each of the past four years appears to be small. It is uncertain if the sample size is adequate and representative of the client population. The Center's new record and data system should allow for statistical comparison between the survey sample and the overall client population to determine if changes in the sampling technique is necessary.

The staff also surveys all students referred to the Center's consulting psychiatrists and participants in workshops and trainings. The psychiatric service evaluation form assesses student satisfaction with the referral process, the psychiatric evaluation and follow-up. The results show positive student experiences with the psychiatric service. Workshop evaluation data also indicates overall positive experiences with the presenter and informational outcomes. The presenters have used the evaluation data to revise the programs. The Director writes regular evaluation summary reports and distributes the information to key administrators to "share what we are doing".

The Counseling Center has an American Psychological Association (APA) accredited pre-doctoral training program. In March 2005 the Center hosted a field visitor team and the Center has recently received notice of re-accreditation. The Director and staff are committed to maintaining a strong training program. Trainees provide approximately 35% of all client contact. Cases are assigned in an appropriate manner. The training program has clear and appropriate goals and training philosophy. All trainees are students in APA programs and are selected

following written application and on campus interviews. The trainees receive two hours of individual supervision, one hour of group supervision, and one hour of peer supervision. Each trainee has a designated supervisor but also has regular contact with other staff for consultation. The trainees videotape some of their sessions for supervision and participate in topic specific training seminars. The program provides clinical and academic training opportunities. The interns are actively involved in the Center's outreach program and have established relationships with other University programs. The interns report being very satisfied with their training experience at Suffolk. They state the Center's organized training program, professionalism, multi-cultural emphasis, and collaborative working relationships are highlights of their experience. Ideally, they would prefer to have more opportunity for group counseling and crisis intervention experiences. However, they report being very pleased with their internship and would recommend the Center to future trainees.

The counseling staff meets weekly to address both administrative and clinical issues. The senior staff does not receive formal supervision of their clinical work, although they regularly consult with each other. The Director reviews case notes and treatment plans. He also signs off on treatment summaries and indicates completion of the file. The staff meetings allow for case presentations and address appropriate student development topics through presentations and workshops. The listed topics for the past year are relevant and help staff members to update their knowledge and skills. The staff participates in appropriate regional and national conferences and maintains membership in professional organizations.

### C. ETHICAL STANDARDS

The Counseling staff knows and adheres to relevant state and federal statutes and appropriate professional ethical codes and standards. Staff members participate in ongoing training related to ethical standards and professional practice. The Center has a comprehensive and very detailed policy and procedures manual. The manual appears to reflect current center practice and appears consistent with appropriate professional standards and state laws. The Center's procedures regarding the use and distribution of psychological tests are consistent with professional standards. Also, research practices regarding human subjects must be approved by the Director and monitored by him. It is unclear if the University has an institutional research review board that would become involved in the research approval process.

The Center is also compliant with the HIPAA statute requirements for the maintenance and dissemination of protected health information. The policy manual details the practices and contains appropriate release and referral forms. Clients receive at intake extensive information regarding their rights of privileged information and sign the appropriate acknowledgements. The Center's intake forms describe the confidentiality and imminent danger policies to students. The exceptions to confidentiality are outlined in a clear manner.

Ms. Sheila McCarthy is the secretary in the Counseling Center. She appears to be caring, skilled and responsive to both students and staff. She is the front office person who schedules appointments, greets incoming students and provides them with the Center's paperwork and forms. Ms. McCarthy is fully aware of the issues regarding confidentiality and the other functions of the Center.

At intake, a student client completes client intake data sheets and the College Adjustment Scale (CAS). The student reads and signs an informed consent that describes privacy, confidentiality, HIPAA requirements and release of information policies. The clinician enters an intake summary, session notes, treatment plans and case termination summary into the case folder. Other relevant release forms or correspondence are added to the client folder. The Director reviews the records for completeness on a regular basis.

The Counseling Center has a central filing system located in the general office area. The file cabinets are visible in the main office area but are accessible only to staff. The cabinets are locked at the end of each day. The field visitor reviewed several active client folders, as well as several closed records. Each record was complete and intact. The Center has a policy of maintaining client records for twelve years. This practice reflects the agency practice and exceeds the required time limit of Massachusetts's law. Old records have been stored in locked file cabinets located in a conference room adjacent to the main counseling office area. The room is locked when it is not used for meetings.

The Center is in a transition between a paper record system and an electronic record system. In February 2005, the center initiated the Titanium scheduling and record system. The secretary and professional staff are pleased and satisfied with the Titanium system and report experiencing very few transitional problems. Any concerns about the storage of old records in the conference room will be eliminated since the Center is currently scanning old records for conversion into the new electronic system.

The IACS application contains appropriate user and system security measures for the Center's computer records. The application outlines the appropriate use of fax machines and e-mail. The staff does not use cell phones during their center activities. The information provides assurance for the appropriate and ethical use of computerized records and adequate safeguards for the use of technology within the Center.

Each counselor has a PC and printer. All PCs are password protected. Every office has video equipment to tape sessions for supervision. Counseling records on Titanium are maintained on a dedicated network file server. The server contains a firewall and the data is encrypted to provide information security. The Director is the only staff person with full access authorization to the student database. The new system appears secure and effective for the Center.

Each staff person has access to the Internet from his or her PC. The Counseling Center has its own home page on the University's website. The staff does not generally communicate with clients through e-mail. Any e-mail contact has been initiated by the client and is limited to confirming appointments or in response to student contact. They avoid communicating any clinical information through the Internet.

## COUNSELING CENTER PERSONNEL

The Center has five full time professional staff. They are experienced, skilled and dedicated to providing quality services to students. There has been relatively little turnover in the department. The staff appears to have positive working relationships and express satisfaction

with their positions. The Director and the professional staff have doctoral degrees and are licensed as psychologists. Their duties are appropriate and consistent with IACS standards. The staff demonstrates a commitment to multiculturalism, diversity and acceptance. This value is imbedded in the agency's service delivery, committee involvement, university service and the Center's training program. As faculty members, staff teaches credit courses each semester and participates on important University committees. For example, Dr. Busse serves on the University's Curricular Committee that is revising the undergraduate core curriculum. Dr. Korn and other staff serve on committees that address the needs of underserved groups and minorities. Faculty status provides staff access to other faculty and university forums to advocate for student development issues. Faculty rank supports the professional role of the Counseling Center staff as well as supporting the Center's goal of enhancing the personal and academic development of students.

Dr. Garni has provided strong leadership since 1973 to the Center. He provides positive clinical and administrative leadership. Staff members describe him as a collaborative leader. He has long-term relationships with the University president and other top administrators. He advocates for Center and student needs through these relationships.

The three pre-doctoral trainees are important in the delivery of counseling services to Suffolk students. The APA training program is a valuable component of the counseling center. They are closely supervised. The well-developed training program has both didactic and experiential components. The percentage of counseling services provided by the trainees does not appear inappropriate due to the nature of the Center and the level of supervision. Also, cases are appropriately assigned to the trainees.

Ms. Sheila McCarthy has been the Counseling Center secretary for four years. The workload appears to be excessive for one full time position. Ms. McCarthy feels reluctant to take earned leave due to the center workload. She often does not get a lunch break or eats lunch at her desk. She provides more than full effort to meet her responsibilities with the Center.

There does not appear to be adequate support staff to meet the Center's service load. The Center employs three graduate assistants and other undergraduate student workers as office support workers. The graduate assistants provide staff support for outreach programs, such as ADAPT, or research support for the evaluation and assessment projects, or general administrative support. None of these students have access to client records or the appointment scheduling system. Procedures exist to prevent student worker access to confidential materials and maintain appropriate limits.

## E. RELATED GUIDELINES

The staff receives approximately \$800 per year for professional development activities. The Director seeks to provide additional money from the counseling budget or requests additional money from the administration to support conference presentations and activities. The staff uses the resources to attend workshops, conferences and other professional meetings to increase knowledge and skills. The staff holds memberships in several professional organizations, and the Director holds or has held leadership positions in professional associations.

The professional staff levels have remained stable and turnover is limited. The administrative and budgetary support appears to be adequate. The Director controls the budget and maintains authority to transfer monies within budget areas. Top administrators do not anticipate any significant changes in the immediate future. Staff salaries appear to be comparable with the regional averages.

The staff to student ratio remains very close to the recommended range by IACS. The University enrollment numbers on the website are larger than the enrollment figures in the IACS application. The website figures reveal a 1:1674 staff to student ratio. The IACS application ratio would be 1:1540. Both are very close to the recommended ratio range. The use of trainees allows the Center to avoid waiting lists or delays in providing intake or ongoing counseling, and to provide extensive outreach and consultation services.

The University has a large number of students who attend evening classes. The counseling staff offers limited weekday evening hours. Usually, staff members provide counseling sessions or complete administrative tasks during this evening. At times, an individual staff member remains alone in the center during these hours. This practice places the staff person and student at risk without adequate backup staff support. The Director does not believe personal safety is a serious concern due to the presence of security personnel at the building entrance. However, a psychological emergency or the presence of opposite gender clients and staff raise the potential for risk. This practice should be reviewed to provide the presence of two staff during the Center's operating hours.

The Center is located on the third floor of the renovated Ridgeway building. The central office has a professional atmosphere and appropriate decor. Brochures and university materials are available for student reading. All offices open into the central office area that includes the student reception area. The open space allows for easy interaction among staff. Individual offices have adequate size and are nicely decorated by each staff person. The sound proofing between offices appears to be adequate. However, the street noise and frequent ambulance and fire engine noise from a nearby firehouse and Massachusetts General Hospital was very apparent to the field visitor. Staff members appear immune to the outside distraction and deny that it interferes with the quality of counseling services.

Books, videos and professional materials are available in a staff conference room. The conference room is physically located down an outside hallway. The room is used for some meetings, library resources and old file storage. It is crowded and has a sterile appearance. It does not appear to offer adequate private space for group initiatives. The current counseling suite does not contain adequate office space for the consulting psychiatrists and graduate assistants. There is no visible workspace for the graduate assistants or student workers. The psychiatrists shuffle among open staff offices to meet with students. The office staff adapts to the very limited space as well as they can to complete their assignments.

The University recently acquired an additional building close to the geographic center of campus. The administration has tentatively planned to relocate the Counseling Center during the summer of 2006. This decision would provide additional square footage to the Center, an adequate number of individual offices, and a conference/group room. The proposed location would be adjacent to the student health center and closer to the two residence halls and other administrative offices. It is unclear if the new location would provide lower outside noise levels. Overall, the proposed change would substantially improve the physical facilities of the Counseling Center.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The University should increase the Center's physical space to accommodate office staff and all service functions. Currently, there is inadequate space for psychiatrists, graduate assistants, student support staff and group/conference room activities. The University's recent decision to move the Center to a recently acquired building is desirable and the new location should include adequate space to accommodate all of the essential Center functions. (E.6)
2. The current amount of clerical support for the center is inadequate to meet the needs of the office. The staff should be increased to provide adequate support to complete all required tasks and provide support during lunchtime, absences, vacation or scheduled leave. (D.5d)
3. The Center should establish a policy and practice to have two staff present during evening counseling sessions. This policy would provide protection for staff and students; provide staff back up for crisis contacts, and personal safety. (C.9)
4. The staff should continue to conduct regular client evaluations and to assess student needs. However, the number of students in the sample appears to be small. The staff should analyze if the evaluation sample size is adequate and representative of the client population through statistical comparison. If not, the staff should revise its evaluation sampling methods. (B.7a)
5. The Center staff has had difficulty historically developing a therapeutic group counseling program at this commuter campus. The staff could use their extensive and positive collaborative relationships with student programs and staff to enhance its group program. The staff should consider offering structured (or theme) groups with established core student groups to meet the developmental needs of Suffolk students. (B.1a)