

Extract from:

**THE ROLE OF STUDENT COUNSELLING, CAREER AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES
IN HIGHER EDUCATION**
**Guidelines For Structuring and Developing Student Counselling and Development
Services**

**5 GUIDELINES, PRINCIPLES AND VALUES FOR AN EFFECTIVE
STUDENT COUNSELLING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICE**

Guidelines, principles and values based on the needs and the expressed choices of its stakeholders ensure a top quality and consistent service. The following guidelines, principles and values are critical success factors to fulfil an effective SCD Service:

5.1 Objectives

The major objectives of SCD Services related to the core business of the institutions are the following:

- To support the effective work and study of individuals and groups. Activities include:
 - Wellness promotion, including interpersonal effectiveness and growth;
 - Study, work and skills development; and
 - Guidance, counselling and therapy to support adjustment, problem solving and decision making with regard to personal, psychological and vocational issues.
- To support the effective operation of the institution as an organisation. Activities include:
 - Participation in the various boards, committees and other forums of the institution;
 - Providing feedback about students needs; and
 - Contribute to policy development and review.
- To maintain operational excellence. Activities relevant to this objective include:
 - In-service training;
 - Continuing professional development activities; and
 - Participation in professional activities.

5.2 Accessibility and Diversity

- SCD Services must be available to *all* stakeholders and particularly those who demonstrate the greatest need for assistance.
- SCD Services must be accessible through *personal and multimedia channels* to cater for residential, non-residential, and distance education students.

- Career guidance should specifically be available to prospective students, disabled students, disadvantaged groups, as well as mature students who qualify for Recognition of Prior Learning.

5.3 Learning and Development

- SCD services must be *responsive to the needs* of all stakeholders and to opportunities in the learning environment.
- The mission of SCD services must *complement the mission* of the institution as well as the outcomes of the national policy on higher education.
- SCD services should support students through the major *transitions* related to higher education: first, into higher education; the second, through their collegiate life; and finally, the move from higher education into the workplace and their careers. Activities should focus on *management of the learning environment* to enhance the learning process in and out of the traditional classroom as well as development of the student *holistically*.
- Career development should focus on *lifelong learning* and learning for life. In partnership with academic departments and other support services, students should be assisted in preparing for their life work, employment, and careers beyond higher education.
- Programmes delivered by student counsellors should be based on *critical values* that includes human dignity, diversity, inclusiveness, community, high expectations, a global view, citizenship, leadership, ethical living, and the idea that students must participate actively in their own development and building of a knowledge and skills portfolio.
- SCD Services should be rendered in *different forms and different media*. Information technology must be used as tools in the learning process to enable students to process and utilize information and not just as a means to an end.
- SCD services will be rendered with academic and personal *integrity* and responsible behaviour in the community.

5.4 Resource Management

- SCD services, as a professional service must adhere to *high standards*. An ethical code must guide practice; ongoing professional development for members must take place; registration for members by a professional body; internal and external evaluation of programmes and services; staff performance appraisal; and management practices to be accountable to stakeholders.
- A modern *technological infrastructure* must be made available to students and student counsellors in order to manage programmes and services effectively.
- *Physical facilities* should be accessible to all students, including the disabled. It should be physically separate from administrative offices, campus police, and judicial offices.

- Individual soundproofed *offices* should be provided for each professional staff member and intern. Each office should have a telephone, filing cabinet, furniture that create a relaxing environment for clients, and computer access.
 - There should be a *reception area* that provides a comfortable and private waiting area for clients.
 - A central space to *store* records. It should be locked with controlled access.
 - The counselling service should have *library resources* that include professional journals, books and other technical materials.
 - A *resource centre* of occupational and career information should be made available where career counselling services are provided.
 - An area suitable for individual and *group testing* should be available as well as space for group counselling sessions and staff meetings.
 - Counselling services with training components should have adequate *audio-visual recording facilities* and, where possible direct observation facilities.
- *Funding* of SCD services must ideally be multifaceted and must include significant institutional support. Support from outside sources and fund-raising may have to be employed to provide the level and array of services required of a particular institution.

5.5 Research

Student counselling professionals, along with lecturing staff, are generally considered experts on students, their development, and the learning environment. They gather information through qualitative and quantitative methods. They are closely linked to the academic mission of the institution.

5.6 Positioning

The organisational structure and relationship of the SCD Service to other departments within institutions will vary according to individual campus needs. The following guidelines are important:

a) Line of Report

The most direct line of report should be established to ensure that SCD Service personnel have access to top management and that their needs are heard, understood and addressed, and their contributions toward the goals of the institution, acknowledged.

Typically, SCD Services are administratively housed in the student affairs/student services/student support unit of the institution with a Chief Director/Dean/Deputy Vice-chancellor. The structure will vary from one institution to the other.

b) Functional Independence and Neutrality

- The SCD Service must be *administratively neutral*. If it is perceived as being linked with units that are involved in making admissions, disciplinary, curricular, or other administrative decisions it can severely restrict the utilization of the service. Such perceptions may prevent students from seeking services for fear that information they disclose may negatively affect their college careers.
- The SCD Service should always have *functional independence and neutrality*. In case it is grouped with other services or campus units (i.e., health centre, advising offices, placement offices), the position of SCCD Services should be one of integration into the mission and not one of assimilation into another unit.

c) Partnerships

The SCD Service is *student centred* and in *partnership* with all other stakeholders in the broad sense of working with students and influencing the learning environment. The SCD Services must be delivered in a manner that is seamless and meaningful, and *compatibly integrated* into the overall academic mission of the institutions.

Partnerships with all the sectors within and immediately outside higher education and the institution must be established to promote student adaptation to the learning environment, successful graduation, work placement and lifelong learning. These partnerships include students, faculty, staff, alumni, parents, employers, social service agencies, primary and secondary education, government agencies, and local, national, regional, and global communities.

d) Institutional structure

A Student Development Council / Student Services Council should be established in higher education institutions to serve the purpose of a communication forum. This will allow coordination and cooperation of developmental, preventative and support services. Such cooperation will diminish duplication and overlapping of services and ensure integration of strategies and actions to the benefit of all the stakeholders and efficiency of the institution as a whole. The following illustration serves as an example:

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| STUDENT DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL OR STUDENT SERVICES COUNCIL |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SCD Services ○ Tutorial support services ○ Admissions/Student recruitment ○ Disability services ○ Financial Aid Service/employment ○ Student placement service ○ Peer Help Service ○ Sports/Recreation/Intramurals ○ Student Housing/Residential life ○ Health Service ○ Student Associations ○ Campus Bookshop |

e) Representation

The SCD Service should:

- Participate in institutional boards, committees and forums; and
- Has representation, either as full member or with observer status in Senate.

f) Classification of student counsellors

Student counsellors are professionals who have *advanced academic training*, many who are *registered* with Professional Councils (i.e., psychologists), and who are *academic practitioners* in the field of student counselling. The very nature of professional practice is embedded in applied research. Professional practice has as its foundation ongoing professional development and research in line with contemporary trends and new developments for academic practice. The theoretical fields that cover student-counselling practice include: psychology, sociology, education, industrial psychology, social welfare and community development.

The nature of student counsellor's practice and the level of training can only be sustained where the following conditions prevail:

- Access to a well equipped library and a modern technological infrastructure;
- Time for research and continuing professional development; and
- Opportunities to attend conferences, nationally and internationally.

Because of the nature of student counsellors' functions, it is necessary that a *career path* be created in which counsellors can be promoted according to criteria set for qualification and experience. Salaries, benefits, and career advancement opportunities should be commensurate with those of others in the institution with similar qualifications and responsibilities and comparable professionals in other institutions of higher education in the region.

Student counselling is *not an administrative function* and cannot be classified as such. The ideal is that student counsellors are classified as either *academic non-teaching or professional with the above conditions*.

g) Size of Staff Complement

The human resources necessary for the effective operation of a counselling service depend, to a large degree, on the size and nature of the institution and the extent to which other mental health and student support resources are available in the region. The complexity of the service offerings and training programmes also influences staffing needs. Staff levels should be continually monitored with regard to student enrolment, service demands, and staff diversity to ensure that service objectives are being met.

The International Association of Counselling Services (2000) set the following guidelines:

- Adequate support staff to assume responsibility for all receptionist and secretarial duties necessary for the effective functioning of the counselling service.
- A minimum staffing ratio in the range of one professional staff member (excluding trainees) to every 1,000 to 1,500 students, depending on services offered and other campus mental health services.
- Not less than two full-time equivalent professional staff members in any SCD Service.

Counselling services with subunits at different locations, for example satellite campuses or regional centres would be assessed as a single unit where all the subunits must meet the above requirements.

h) Workload

Student counsellors should have a balanced workload that affords time for all aspects of their professional functioning. Direct service responsibilities such as intake, individual and group counselling, crisis intervention, training and programme management should not exceed 65% of the workload on a continuing basis according to criteria set by the International Association of Counselling Services (2000).