

**External Reviewer's Report on the
Counseling Center at University of La Verne**

Jeanne M. Walker, Ph.D.,
Director of Student Psychological Counseling Services
(1984 to present)
Director of the Chapman University Frances L. Smith Community Clinic
(now Center for Individual and Family Therapy, training facility
for M.F.T. program)
(2003 to 2009)
Chapman University, Orange, CA

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Introduction

At the request of University of La Verne's Counseling Center director, a site review of the program was completed on November 15, 2011, preceded by a written program review prepared by Richard R. Rogers, Ph.D., Director and Associate Professor of Psychology. In addition, the Counseling Center Staff Handbook, organizational charts, the Center's budget, brochures, and clinical chart materials were provided. The site review consisted of meeting with the Counseling Center director, clinical supervisors, Counseling Center staff trainees and administrative assistant, as well as the Dean of Students, the Director of Health and Disabled Students Services, the Interim Dean of the Faculty for the College of Arts and Sciences, the chairs of both the Psy.D program and of the Psychology Department, the Fieldwork Coordinator of the M.S. program, the founding director of the Counseling Center and with a group of undergraduate student leaders. The specific framework for the program review of the ULV Counseling Center was in the form of questions to be answered at the end of this report.

The time spent on the campus of ULV was delightful and very informative. The individuals and groups interviewed were genuinely committed to providing quality services, and responded candidly to the many questions and observations made throughout the day. In understanding the unique situation of the Counseling Center at ULV, it became clear that responses to the questions posed cannot be answered easily. As addressed in the program review, almost all university and college counseling centers are organizationally located within the division of Student Affairs and are evaluated by such associations as the Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), or the International Association of Counseling Services (IACS). Although many educational institutions have training programs such as the one in the Psychology Department at ULV, they typically do not serve as the only counseling service for students at that institution. Therefore, answering the questions necessitates a program review which includes portions of the departmental training program, as well as a review of the counseling services provided to the student body of the university.

There is no question that the quality of both the provision of counseling services and graduate training is of utmost importance to the Counseling Center, both of which are consistently high. However there are serious considerations to be addressed in the current dual configuration of the Counseling Center.

This reviewer is to evaluate the Counseling Center, which is the training site for a number of trainees in the university's master's and doctoral programs and requires addressing aspects of the Psychology program's training operation in the Counseling Center. The standards of the Association of Directors of Psychology Training Clinics (ADPTC) are useful as a guide as they include such things as looking at the mission, the Director's role, supervision, trainee competencies, financial support, clinical operations, ethics, cultural competencies, treatment, documentation and record keeping. These standards are quite consistent with those of CAS and IACS, which are ordinarily utilized in self-studies and meeting standards for college and university counseling centers. This review incorporates some of the areas and standards important in program evaluation as recommended by these organizations.

Areas of Strength

Mission and Leadership The mission of the Counseling Center is consistent with the mission of the institution, and meets the standard requirements of providing quality individual and group counseling. In meetings with Psychology Department faculty and administration, it is very clear that providing high quality training and supervision is not only desired but delivered. The director provides consultation services to the institution through his connections with Student Affairs and with the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. Even though the Counseling Center is not organizationally located in the Division of Student Affairs, it operates as though it is and is even listed as such in the Student Affairs brochure. The current Director has made sure that he attends meetings including the Dean of Students management team, staff meetings, Counseling Network meetings and Disabled Student Services meetings. He is current in knowing and understanding what is happening with students on the campus at large and attempts to bring this information back to the Counseling Center to benefit the staff and the students served. The intention of the director to add these activities to the already full-time demands of overseeing the Counseling Center in addition to teaching classes is nothing short of remarkable. The current leadership of Dr. Richard Rogers is strong, positive and supportive, and he is clearly invested in the Counseling Center as a professional and caring resource for students requesting psychological services. He is highly qualified and has made significant strides in aligning the Counseling Center's purpose in helping the students at ULV within the Student Affairs division. It should be noted that the Director's concurrent roles as director of a counseling center as well as a professor teaching as many classes as he does is highly unusual.

Human Resources The current staff at the ULV Counseling Center is mostly composed of graduate students under close supervision by licensed psychologists in addition to a post-doctoral Fellow who is a clinician in training. Every indication is that they are providing very good counseling services to the students they see, and the evaluations which are done about their work support that they are truly making a difference in the lives of the student-clients. Evaluations done by clients demonstrate an overall very positive experience with both the counseling services and the counselors. Trainees are involved and clearly care about the important work they are doing. Supervision is provided by qualified professionals who are dedicated to the trainees and to meeting the ethical standards of the profession. There is supervision of supervision as well, thus allowing for a training opportunity only seen in the best of programs.

Legal and Ethical Responsibilities There have been no reported legal or ethical concerns involving the Counseling Center. The staff is trained in legal and ethical issues of the psychology profession as part of their required coursework, and supervisors and administrators are kept current in this area through their individual licensing requirements. An orientation for new staff trainees is done annually and emphasizes the policies and procedures regarding the operation of the center. The Staff Handbook is well written and up-to-date, providing excellent information regarding confidentiality and how to handle crises. Examples of clinical documentation at intake, regular sessions, crisis evaluations, and assessments are well-done and appear thorough.

Diversity The Counseling Center and ULV demonstrate an admirable adherence to the mission of diversity within the university. This is evidenced by not only the diversity of the students seen, but by the supervisory staff and trainees. Discussions with both a group of students and the trainees in the program reveal an environment where identity, culture and heritage are respected and nurtured. The characteristics and needs of diverse populations are not only part of the curricula, they are in evidence in the programs offered and the relationships and conversations witnessed during the site visit.

Assessment and Evaluation Regular program assessment and evaluation which employs both qualitative and quantitative methodologies are essential in determining the strengths and weaknesses in any department. A significant amount of information was available in reviewing not only the quality of care felt by the students who received counseling, but the quality of training and supervision perceived by the trainees in the Counseling Center and of the outreach services provided by trainees to students at ULV. The supervisors at the Counseling Center are seen in a very positive light as well. Evaluations are specific to the academic levels of the trainees, are thorough and provide great feedback to the supervisors about not only their overall experience but about what they are learning.

Areas of Concern

Organization and Administration As indicated before, the organizational structure under which the Counseling Center operates is very unique. The mission is both to provide high quality training for master's and doctoral students and also to provide high quality counseling services to the students at ULV. There is effective management of the Counseling Center; however there are constraints on the growth of a student-centered counseling service that reports to an academic department. It appears that the support for the Center is more focused on the academic training component without equal support for the mental health needs of the student body at large. The Center has taken on an identity as a student counseling service without the kind of support for facilities, materials, technology, staff or space that is usually present for counseling centers under Student Affairs divisions. Discussions with administration from both the academic and student services areas seem to indicate an agreement that it may be time to re-organize. The ubiquitous space problem inherent at many universities today appears to be the main obstacle to possible changes, as well as budget considerations. Both the Psychology Department and the Dean of Students agree that the Counseling Center should move organizationally under the Division of Student Affairs, aligning with the structure most common and most beneficial at universities and colleges around the nation. The Psychology Department considers the space in Hoover as academic space and if a move under Student Affairs was to take place, the Counseling Center would need to be relocated. The Dean of Students is fully supportive of the Counseling Center being an official student service department along with Health and Disabled Students, International Students, Multicultural Students, Residential Life, etc., but has no space currently to make available to the Counseling Center.

Human Resources Although the staff trainees are provided with excellent supervision and are highly regarded by their clients, the fact remains that the population of students at ULV are not seen by degreed or licensed professionals. Supervisors report that most of the trainees come in every year quite "green" – well-educated but inexperienced and for some psychological disorders ill-prepared to treat some clients. Both trainees and supervisors advocated for more training in the kinds of issues college students bring to the center. Evaluations by student clients show slightly lower scores on the helpfulness of counseling in three areas of sexual harassment/abuse concerns, eating disorders and substance abuse, all of which are common in the college population. In addition, the fact that the trainee staff are only there for a short period of time affects the consistency that a professional staff brings and who acquire the experience needed to fully appreciate and treat the specialized mental health needs of the college community. The majority of counseling centers across the nation have permanent, degreed and licensed clinical staff who provide services to students. Many centers also have a training program for both masters and doctoral students and/or interns, much like that at La Verne, however the permanent staff do the preponderance of both the therapy and outreach programming in addition to supervision. According to the recommended staff proposed by IACS

(International Association of Counseling Services), which accredits university counseling centers, an appropriate staff for La Verne's 8300 students should be a minimum of five full-time degreed and licensed staff members.

Support personnel is also critical for the operation of a quality Counseling Center, and the current administrative assistant is doing an outstanding job. In addition to managing the day-to-day operations of phones, inquiries, scheduling, supplies, data entry, and a multitude of requests from up to 20 individuals, this position also evaluates and handles immediate crisis situations until a counselor can be located. In many ways, this individual is the most important person the Counseling Center has for both new clients and the busy staff. Yet this is not a full-time benefitted position. Records show that the request for this position to be upgraded to full-time has been made repeatedly for over ten years.

There is also a need for more available psychiatric resources for students needing evaluations for medications or for more severe diagnoses which are out of scope of practice for the Counseling Center. Adding a part-time psychiatrist for even a few hours per week would expedite appropriate treatment for some students and possibly prevent escalation of symptoms and behavior problems. Discussion with the Director of Health also indicated a need and desire for psychiatric help.

Financial Resources Reports indicate that the funding of the Counseling Center has actually decreased over the last few years. With the number of clients, trainees and supervisors involved in the program, the budget is inadequate to provide anything but the bare essentials required to run the operation. A review of the operating budget which should enable purchase of adequate office supplies, educational and testing materials, postage, equipment, furniture and computers, as well as funds for conferences and travel is very low.

Facilities, Technology and Equipment The Counseling Center functions in an area not designed for this operation although there have been creative attempts to create a comfortable atmosphere in counseling rooms. Furniture is second-hand, and there are desks in each room, although actual desk chairs are lacking. Since the rooms are not sound-proof, white noise machines are available to mask conversations and provide limited protection for confidentiality. The computers that are available to trainees are very slow, poorly maintained, and interfere with the ability to do research on disorders or write case notes in a timely manner. This is one of the most often-mentioned complaints of the Counseling Center staff. There is not suitable space for group therapy, and the AV equipment which ideally should be utilized for supervision of cases is either outdated or non-functional. Inactive client charts in file cabinets (although locked) are located in the waiting area rather than in a secure area for storage. One inadvertent misstep in forgetting to lock a file cabinet could result in serious breaches of confidential records. Some concerns were raised by supervisors about the lack of panic buttons in the counseling rooms.

Office equipment for the Administrative Assistant include a computer, monitor, laser printer, copy machine and fax machine. Supplies must be stored in cabinets which take up valuable space in the main office. Scheduling of clients and sessions are done by hand and data collection is done using an Excel program that does not adequately track the information that would be useful in the operation of a fully functioning counseling center. It is difficult to access statistical information on antiquated programs, and requires far more time than if an appropriate system such as Titanium or other counseling services database were in place. It also appears that information collected for research which is not clearly connected to the functions of the counseling center is the responsibility of the

administrative assistant, which further impacts her ability to perform the daily functions required of a service with close to twenty staff members with ease.

Ethical and Legal Concerns From the perspective of reviewing the Counseling Center through the lens of accrediting bodies mentioned earlier (CAS, IACS) the liability of not having licensed therapists and counselors treating students is of crucial concern. At this time, if there were to be a crisis that led to legal action on the part of a student or student's family, the liability would be actionable against not only the trainee, but the university, the department, the individual supervisors and the director. Given that the age range of most college students is 18 – 25, a period of high stress as well as behavioral concerns such as drug and alcohol problems, initial diagnosis of serious mental disorders and suicidal ideation, primary care by only unlicensed graduate students is seen as problematic. This was raised as a concern by the supervisors, who are aware of the range of potentially serious issues brought to the Counseling Center by students, and who carry the supervisory responsibility of up to 30 clients. The director, who supervises 6 trainees, could have supervisory responsibility for up to 60 clients, which is extremely high. Counseling centers at most colleges and universities adhere to the requirement that counseling and psychotherapy functions for college-aged students be performed by professionals with at minimum a master's degree from an appropriate discipline. IACS states under the heading Professional Staff: Qualifications and Competencies, "Professional staff members should have a terminal degree. The minimum qualification for a staff member is a master's degree in a relevant discipline from a regionally accredited institution of higher education."

Program and Evaluation The program at the Counseling Center is almost entirely remedial care. All of the therapeutic offerings (counseling, groups, assessment, crisis intervention, and training for staff) are of high quality, however programs that promote student learning through the experiences in counseling are not identified and there is no mention of specific learning outcomes that can be measured in areas such as intellectual growth, effective communication, healthy behavior, meaningful relationships, etc. This does not mean these things do not occur in the experiences of students at the Counseling Center, but they are not identified or measured as criteria as important in student learning and development. The program does offer outreach programs, the topics which are chosen by the trainee facilitator and evaluated for how helpful and informative the programs were, if they were presented well, if they increased the students' knowledge etc. They did not identify or measure specific learning outcomes, although it was clear that they were positive experiences for the majority of students who attended. Student-centered counseling services should address more than just remedial therapy and offer a developmental perspective that includes prevention and outreach to students as well as the development of learning outcomes so important to the business of Student Affairs.

As indicated above, the center does an excellent job of providing evaluations of the trainee staff and the counseling offered. Trainees also utilize two rating scales to assess change in their clients – the BPRS (Brief Psychiatric Rating Scale) and the GAF (Global Assessment of Functioning). Although these are helpful, they are not actual client-reported measures which can be used to assess change. Examples which could be used are the OQ-45, the BHM-20, or the CCAPS, which is part of Titanium, a database system especially designed for college counseling centers. These are more objective measures which are given to clients pre- and post- therapy, and would be a valuable addition to providing measures of change.

Response and Recommendations

The following comments must be prefaced by this observation by this reviewer: It appears that both the Psychology Department and the Counseling Center would like to separate from each other so that each department can develop in the direction that would best suit their mission. It also appears that an immediate solution that requires space and money may not be on the horizon in the near future. Both the Psychology Department and the Counseling Center are currently providing quality services to both trainees and to student-clients, but each is limited in the current configuration, and to some extent vulnerable to future problems. It appears that the university must decide whether to offer the support needed to allow the Counseling Center to grow and become a full-fledged member of the Student Affairs division where it should be housed. Efforts should be put forward to the administration demonstrating the importance of addressing the mental health needs of the students at ULV at a different level.

1. Has the program clearly articulated its goals and objectives?

The initiatives and action plans outlined in the program review are clear and vary from changes that can be made in the near future to others that require long-range planning.

2. Are the goals and objectives realistic and appropriate?

All of the actions plans are appropriate; however the reality must be paired with annual planning and setting priorities. Some plans are actionable immediately (e.g. utilization of more objective measures at intake and termination), while others will require additional funds and/or decisions at higher administrative levels.

3. Does the program have adequate facilities, equipment, resources, and support services?

At present, the program has inadequate resources in all of these areas. Serious consideration should be made to increase the budget to levels which would allow purchase or upgrading of computers, database programs such as Titanium which would solve most of the issues regarding client assessment, upgrade to paperless records, and provide availability of a wide range of quick information and statistics. The administrative assistant position should be upgraded to full-time, benefitted, and funds need to be available for office supplies, instructional materials and professional development. Staff trainees expressed displeasure at inadequate supplies, small counseling rooms, slow and substandard computers, lack of some testing materials, non-working tape recorders for supervision, and having to change offices. They also stated that they would like receiving the staff manual before they attend the orientation so they have time to review it, since it is very comprehensive, and also better orientation to the main office, where to find materials, and better furniture. They also would like a voicemail system so that clients can leave them messages directly.

4. Are the staff well qualified to perform their duties?

Staff trainees have high ratings from their clients, receive excellent training and supervision, and communicated their admiration for their supervisors and their displeasure at the inadequate resources in the center. Given that they are beginning graduate trainees, the data provided indicates that they are doing a very good job. However, if the center were to be reviewed by the organizations that provide standards for counseling centers at colleges and universities such as IACS (International Association of Counseling Services) and CAS (Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education) the staff would be not considered qualified. The university should take a close look at the liability of treating the growing and complicated mental health needs of the student population with trainees who have not completed even a master's degree.

5. Has the program clearly articulated and applied its methods and procedures for assessing its goals, objective, and their effectiveness?

The program does a good job of evaluating how the center is perceived by both clients and trainees, and also does a great job of evaluating the supervisory experience. The information in the program review was outstanding and reflected a serious intent of accurately assessing all constituents of the center. It will be important in the future to develop more objective outcome measures to assess change in clients over the course of their treatment at the counseling center. As indicated earlier, an example is the OQ®-45.2 (Outcome Measures 45.2) which is a 45-item self report outcome/tracking instrument designed for repeated measurement of client progress through the course of therapy and following termination. It measures symptom distress, interpersonal relationships and social roles. Another example is CCAPS, an outcome measure from the Commission of Counseling and Psychological Services through the American College Personnel Association which is built into the Titanium intake database procedure and then can be administered during treatment and at termination.

6. Are recommendations appropriate for program and department needs?

The appropriateness of the recommendations for the program and department will depend on what course the Counseling Center will take in the future. Some recommendations will not be realized given the current limitations of space and budget, and others limited by the vision of the university. Almost all of the recommendations are possible with adequate funding. The larger and more difficult goals of administratively and physically moving the Counseling Center under Student Affairs would be a move in the direction of higher quality of services to the student population at ULV, and providing needed additional space for the Psychology Department. Both the Counseling Center and Psychology Department appear to have outgrown the relationship and can thrive if such goals are actualized. It doesn't necessarily mean the elimination of a trainee program in the Counseling Center; in fact that should be continued. The recommendation that the school-based counseling program, which is a wonderful program, be moved to the Psychology Department makes much more sense than being housed in the Counseling Center.

7. How could the program or department be improved over the next five years?

If adequate funding becomes possible, the program can complete many of the initiatives even if the recommended changes of departmental structure and physical moves do not occur in the near future. As an example, a new database such as Titanium would simplify all of Initiative 1, and allow major changes to the scheduling, record-keeping, and database system of the center as well as providing a quality outcome measure. Long-range planning along with consistent efforts to approach the university administration with information about the benefits of moving the Counseling Center must be implemented. To reiterate, these benefits include professional, degreed and licensed staff to treat the students at La Verne, including psychiatrists; updated technology in the form of computers and programs; adequate space and furnishings, and the support and affiliation with other student services through the division of Student Affairs. The most improvement will result from the individuation of the Counseling Center from the Psychology Department – a natural outcome of the successful growth of both.