



Information BRIEF

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Student Demand for Counselors Continues

March 2017

2015-16 HIGHLIGHTS

- More than 24,700 students received services from student counseling centers, approximately 55% more than the number served in 2008-09.
- More than 185,900 individual and group counseling sessions were provided, approximately 65% more than the number provided in 2008-09.
- There were more than 9,100 emergency and crisis visits and more than 440 Baker Act hospitalizations.
- More than 14,900 students were on psychiatric medication.
- More than 1,700 students reported having made a previous suicide attempt.
- Counseling centers served over 260 veterans.

Introduction

Since March 2015, the Board's Academic and Student Affairs Committee has repeatedly heard about the increasing demand for well-trained, professional counseling services to address the mental and behavioral health of students across the State University System (SUS). Numerous studies have shown that poor health – physical, mental, or behavioral – adversely affects all aspects of day-to-day life, including learning. The Committee has also learned that students with mental and behavioral health issues are more likely to remain enrolled in and graduate from college when they get the help they need.

However, the SUS counseling centers can no longer provide adequate levels of service for the increasing numbers of students with mental and behavioral health issues. SUS counseling centers have implemented numerous strategies in an attempt to manage not only the increasing demand but also the increasingly complex problems that students are experiencing. Some strategies include reducing the frequency of appointments for students with ongoing issues, reducing the length of appointments, implementing a maximum number of sessions per term or academic year, referring students to clinicians in the community, and using waiting lists. Others have hired temporary counselors due to a lack of permanent funds and some have hired less experienced or part-time counselors who put less strain on counseling center budgets. However, these strategies are only useful in the short-term. Over time, they will create additional problems

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such as student dissatisfaction, declining academic success of students, staff burnout, and saturation of community resources.

In response to the increasing demand and insufficient staffing levels, for the second year in a row the Board is requesting funds from the Legislature during the 2017 session to increase campus counseling services and expand student mental and behavioral health coverage across the system. To support that effort, this information brief provides more current information documenting the ongoing increases in demand for services and the increasing numbers of students in crisis. The brief also includes a comprehensive compilation of available information on counseling center utilization and impact, as well as information about students in crisis and the staffing levels of the SUS counseling centers.

Demand Continues to Grow

Data from the 2015-16 academic year shows that the number of students seeking services has continued to grow. The SUS counseling centers reported that more than 24,700 students received services, representing 6% of the system wide student population. This is an increase of approximately 55% over the number served in 2008-09 and approximately 20% over the number served in 2014-15.

In 2015-16, more than 185,200 individual and group counseling sessions were provided. This represents approximately 60% more than the number provided in 2008-09 and approximately 14% more than the number provided during 2014-15.

Table A: SUS Counseling Center Utilization

	2008-09	2014-15	2015-16
# of Students Served ¹	more than 15,000	more than 20,500	more than 24,700
# of Individual/Group Sessions ²	more than 112,500	more than 163,000	more than 185,900

Source: Data submitted by SUS institutions January 2015 & February 2017. Data from Florida Polytechnic University not available. Due to data system conversions and department reorganizations, the following numbers were estimated: the numbers of students served in 2008-09 for FAMU, UF, & USF; the numbers of sessions in 2008-09 for UF & USF; and the numbers of students served in 2014-15 for FAMU.

¹Does not include students who received psychiatric treatment through the student health center but did not use the counseling center.

²Does not include psychiatric appointments in student health centers.

Of the students served by SUS counseling centers in 2015-16, more than 260 were veterans. Veterans currently comprise only 1% of the students served. However, counseling center directors report that veterans are less likely to seek services from the centers even though many of them would benefit from doing so. Veterans who do seek counseling services for mental or behavioral issues may also be more likely to contact a Veterans Health Administration facility.

There are also a significant number of students taking medication to help with their mental and behavioral health issues. Some of the psychiatrists treating these students are located within the counseling centers and some are located in student health services. The total number of students

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receiving medication, regardless of where the psychiatrists are located on campus, exceeded 14,900 during the 2015-16 academic year.

Additional data on student demand for counseling center services is available in Appendix A.

Increasing Numbers of Students in Crisis

Not only have the numbers of students facing mental and behavioral health issues increased, but the numbers of students in crisis have also increased. In 2014-15, the number of visits classified as emergency or crisis visits was approximately 4,200. In just one year, that number more than doubled with more than 9,100 visits reported during 2015-16. These numbers understate the extent of the problem as they do not include emergency or crisis visits to psychiatrists located in the student health centers.

In addition to the increasing numbers of crisis and emergency visits, the number of students involuntarily hospitalized under Florida's Baker Act has also increased significantly. In 2013-14, just over 300 students were hospitalized. In 2015-16, the number of students hospitalized involuntarily was more than 440. These numbers also do not represent the full extent of the issue, as they do not include instances where students were hospitalized involuntarily by family members without the involvement of campus staff or the numbers of students who were voluntarily hospitalized.

Unfortunately, some students choose to commit suicide and are able to do so. In 2015-16, less than ten suicides occurred on a state university campus. However, an unknown number of suicides took place beyond campus boundaries. Campus officials are not always involved in these incidents since they take place off-campus. In addition, some off-campus student deaths are reported as accidents rather than suicides. Regardless of the actual numbers, the death of even one student due to suicide is tragic.

Additional data on students in crisis is available in Appendix A.

Students Face Serious Issues

Over time, the most common issues appear to remain constant. The five issues most reported by students who use counseling center services are anxiety, relationship issues, depression, suicide, and academic stress. Other issues reported include a fear of losing control and acting violently, thoughts of hurting others, alcohol and drug usage, and post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD). Less common during the 2015-16 academic year, but quite serious, are the more than 1,700 students who indicated that they had previously made one or more attempts to end their lives. The majority of the students seeking assistance from the counseling centers are facing very real and very serious problems that well-trained counselors can successfully address.

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Counselors Make a Difference

The SUS counseling centers provide critical services to students facing a wide range of mental and behavioral issues. Students who use their services report high levels of satisfaction with the counselors and the services. The majority of students indicate that they would use the services again and would refer others to use them as well. Surveys at Florida Gulf Coast University since fall 2013 show that, on average, 95% of clients would recommend the counseling center to others. Students who receive services report reduced risk and distress levels after just a few appointments. For example, Florida Atlantic University reports that the majority of students (88% or more) who were at risk to themselves or others at their first counseling session in early fall 2016 were no longer a risk after five sessions.

Students who take advantage of the services offered benefit from improved mental and behavioral health, which impacts their academic success. University-based studies show that students who received support from the counseling centers performed as well as or better than students who did not use counseling center's services. Surveys from Florida State University show that approximately two-thirds of clients treated in the 2015-2016 academic year indicate that counseling center services helped them to do better academically and to remain enrolled.

For additional details on how counseling makes a positive impact on students, refer to the data tables in Appendix B and the January 2017 Information Brief titled "The Impact of Counseling Services on the Academic Success of Students" (available at www.flbog.edu).

Demand Outstrips Capacity

As of February 2017, all but four SUS institutions fall considerably below minimum staffing levels recommended by the International Association of Counseling Services (IACS) (see Table B below). IACS recommends colleges and universities provide 1 counselor for every 1,000 to 1,500 students enrolled. Only the University of North Florida (UNF), Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU), New College of Florida, and Florida Polytechnic University meet the minimum staffing requirements. However, UNF and FGCU barely meet the minimum. When Florida Polytechnic University is enrolled at full capacity, its current staffing levels will not be sufficient.

New College of Florida, which also serves the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee campus (USF-SM), does meet recommended staffing levels primarily because the combined enrollment of New College and USF-SM is just under 3,000 students. However, the New College counseling center served 10% of its student population in 2008-09 and in 2015-16 it served 12%. Unlike New College, most state university counseling centers serve only 4 to 7% of their student populations. With only 2.5 FTE staff available, the New College counseling center is unable to increase the number of sessions or expand other services in order to adequately serve all student clients.

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Table B: SUS Counselor : Student Ratio
2016-17

Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University	1:1,923
Florida Atlantic University	1:2,014
Florida Gulf Coast University	1:1,324
Florida International University	1:2,449
Florida Polytechnic University	1:618
Florida State University	1:1,908
New College of Florida ¹	1:1,182
University of Central Florida	1:1,828
University of Florida	1:1,660
University of North Florida	1:1,508
University of South Florida	1:2,044
University of South Florida - St. Petersburg	1:1,900
University of West Florida	1:1,625

Source: Data as submitted by SUS institutions (February 2017)

¹ New College also serves students enrolled at USF-Sarasota-Manatee

Summary

Given the surge in the numbers of students seeking counseling center services as well as the increasing severity and complexity of the mental health issues that students face, the SUS needs a substantial influx of resources in the short-term. The solutions implemented by the counseling centers in recent years cannot and should not take the place of sufficient staffing. A significant increase in the number of permanent counselors is needed in order for the SUS counseling centers to meet the staffing level recommended by IACS.

Students with more severe issues also need access to experienced counselors. The SUS counseling centers need additional resources in order to recruit and retain the best counselors. SUS counseling centers risk losing existing staff because of excessive workloads. Potential counselors may be deterred from working on an SUS campus if the salaries are too low and the workload too high. The SUS Mental Health Counseling Services Legislative Budget Request (LBR) is designed to increase campus counseling services in order to address the critical need for student mental and behavioral health coverage in a State University System that is steadily expanding in size, scope, and complexity.

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**APPENDIX A
SUPPLEMENTAL DATA TABLES**

Student Demand

Table 1A: Students Served by SUS Counseling Centers 2014-15 and 2015-16

Table 1B: Table 1B: Number of Individual & Group Sessions Provided by SUS Counseling Centers 2014-15 and 2015-16

Table 1C: Number of Students on Medication & Number of Veterans Served by SUS Counseling Centers 2015-16

Students in Crisis

Table 2: Number of Emergency / Crisis Visits and Number of Baker Act Hospitalizations 2014-15 and 2015-16

APPENDIX A (continued)

Table 1B: Number of Individual & Group Sessions Provided by SUS Counseling Centers¹
2014-15 and 2015-16

	# of Sessions 2014-15	# of Sessions 2015-16	% Increase from 2014-15 to 2015-16
Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University	2,704	2,531	-6%
Florida Atlantic University	11,631	11,205	-4%
Florida Gulf Coast University	13,689	14,424	5%
Florida International University	19,208	23,537	23%
Florida State University	15,669	19,249	23%
New College of Florida ²	3,389	3,545	5%
University of Central Florida	23,945	28,455	19%
University of Florida	39,527	41,886	6%
University of North Florida	6,620	11,488	74%
University of South Florida	15,898	17,565	10%
University of South Florida - St. Petersburg	1,674	1,737	4%
University of West Florida	9,121	10,280	13%
System Total	163,075	185,902	14%

Source: Data as submitted by SUS institutions (January 2015 & February 2017)

¹ Does not include psychiatric appointments in student health centers

² Includes students enrolled at USF-Sarasota-Manatee served by New College

Table 1C: Number of Students on Medication¹ & Number of Veterans Served by SUS
Counseling Centers
2015-16

	# Students on Medication 2015-16 ¹	# of Veterans Served 2015-16
Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University	93	15
Florida Atlantic University	534	30
Florida Gulf Coast University	321	14
Florida International University	380	20
Florida State University	2,295	*
New College of Florida ²	155	*
University of Central Florida	5,500	40
University of Florida	1,855	41
University of North Florida	397	20
University of South Florida	2,747	42
University of South Florida - St. Petersburg	59	*
University of West Florida	589	30
System Total	14,925	252

Source: Data as submitted by SUS institutions (January 2015 & February 2017)

¹ Includes students who were prescribed medication by psychiatrists in counseling and student health centers

² Includes students enrolled at USF-Sarasota-Manatee served by New College

APPENDIX A (continued)

Table 2: Number of Emergency / Crisis Visits¹ and Number of Baker Act Hospitalizations²
2014-15 and 2015-16

	# of Emergency Visits		# of Hospitalizations	
	2014-15	2015-16	2014-15	2015-16
Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University	n/a	16	0	*
Florida Atlantic University	222	317	22	29
Florida Gulf Coast University	104	179	*	*
Florida International University	41	245	25	26
Florida State University	1,021	1,105	70	101
New College of Florida ³	42	43	16	*
University of Central Florida	1,636	2,598	40	139
University of Florida	220	3,135	57	62
University of North Florida	321	395	25	*
University of South Florida	392	891	22	51
University of South Florida - St. Petersburg	23	41	*	*
University of West Florida	176	232	11	12
System Total	4,198	9,197	304	446

Source: Data as submitted by SUS institutions (January 2015 & February 2017)

¹ Does not include emergency or crisis visits to student health center psychiatrists

² Does not include students who were voluntarily hospitalized or were involuntarily hospitalized without the involvement of university staff (i.e., by family member)

³ Includes students enrolled at USF-Sarasota-Manatee served by New College

*Number of students less than 10 not reported to protect student privacy

APPENDIX B SUS Counseling Center Effectiveness Supplemental Data

Table 1A provides average distress levels for students from institutions that use an assessment tool where higher scores indicate higher levels of distress, and lower scores indicate lower levels of distress. Therefore, the *negative* scores included in the “Change” column of Table 1A correspond to *improved* mental and behavioral health.

Table 1A: FAMU, FAU, FIU, FSU, NCF, UCF, UNF, USF-SP, & UWF
SUS Counseling Effectiveness Index:
Average Student Distress Levels Fall 2016

	First Appointment	Latest Appointment	Change (<i>negative = lower</i> distress)
Academic Distress	1.20	0.73	-0.47
Depression	0.95	0.29	-0.66
Distress Index	1.28	0.58	-0.70
Generalized Anxiety	1.12	0.51	-0.61
Hostility	1.25	0.37	-0.88

*Data from 2,036 clients treated at FAMU, FAU, FIU, FSU, NCF, UCF, UNF, USF-SP, & UWF between August 18, 2016 – November 18, 2016 for at least three sessions.

Table 1B includes results from three SUS counseling centers that use a different scale. High scores indicate lower distress and lower scores indicate higher distress levels. Table 1B shows that students benefited from counseling center services in all areas, especially the students dealing with suicide and anxiety. Therefore, the *positive* scores included in the “Change” column of Table 1B correspond to *improved* mental and behavioral health.

Table 1B: FGCU, UF, & USF
SUS Counseling Effectiveness Index:
Average Student Distress Levels Fall 2016

	First Appointment	Latest Appointment	Change (<i>positive = lower</i> distress)
Alcohol/Drugs	2.91	3.51	0.60
Anxiety	1.46	2.13	0.66
Depression	1.83	2.40	0.57
Global Mental Health	2.18	2.61	0.44
Life Functioning	1.80	2.17	0.38
Suicide	2.34	3.36	1.03
Symptoms	2.26	2.79	0.53
Well-Being	1.31	1.88	0.58

^Data from 1,211 clients treated at FGCU, UF, & USF between August 18, 2016 – November 18, 2016 for at least three sessions.

APPENDIX B (continued)

Table 2 below shows that researchers at the University of North Florida found that students who took advantage of the counseling center’s services were more likely to be retained after the first year than those who did not. These students were also more likely to graduate and to graduate with fewer excess credit hours.

Table 2: UNF First-Year Retention and 6-Year Graduation Rates
Counseling Center Students and Non-Center Students
Academic Years 2006 - 2015

	First-Year Retention Rates ¹	6-Year Graduation Rates ²
Center Students	93%	63%
Non-Center Students	79%	49%

¹N=19,649; ²N=18,334

Source: UNF Counseling Center Analysis of Student Usage and Metric-Related Correlations, November 30, 2016