

State University System
Counselor and Advisor Staffing Levels
January 2018

Counseling Center Staffing Projections

The International Association of Counseling Services (IACS) recommends that “every effort should be made to maintain minimum staffing ratios in the range of one FTE professional staff member (excluding trainees) to every 1,000 to 1,500 students, *depending on services offered and other campus mental health agencies*” (<http://www.iacsinc.org/staff-to-student-ratios.html>). As of February 2017, all but four SUS institutions fell considerably below minimum mental health counselor staffing levels recommended by IACS. Only the University of North Florida (UNF), Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU), New College of Florida, and Florida Polytechnic University met the minimum staffing requirements. However, UNF and FGCU barely met the minimum. When Florida Polytechnic University is enrolled at full capacity, current staffing levels will not be sufficient.

New College of Florida, which also serves the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee campus (USF-SM), met 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. In 2015-16 New College served 12% and as of fall 2017 the center at New College had served 40 to 45% of the student body. The utilization rate at New College is important to consider because most state university counseling centers serve only 4 to 7% of the student body. Due to the demand, New College’s counseling center is unable to increase the number of sessions or expand other services in order to adequately serve all student clients.

By the end of 2017-18, the SUS institutions expect to hire an additional 12 staff, interns, and post-docs into full- and part-time positions. After that, an additional 32 staff, interns, and post-docs will be hired into full- and part-time positions by the end of academic year 2020-2021. The positions to be filled include psychologists, counselors, case managers, health and wellness coaches, and others depending on the needs of each institution. Positions such as doctoral interns and practicum students, which require training and supervision by other professional staff, are not included in the ratio. Part-time professional staff are included in the ratio, as long as they function independently.

The funding sources for these additional positions vary by institution. Some institutions are reallocating recurring funds, some are reallocating student health fees with the support of the students, and others will use non-recurring funds until recurring funding sources can be identified. In cases where non-recurring funds are used, the continuation of some staff will be contingent on finding a more permanent and recurring source of funding.

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Table 1 below shows the counselor to student ratios from the SUS institutions as reported to Board staff in February 2017 and the projected ratios based on the plans submitted to the Board in fall 2017. The first projected ratio is for the end of the current fiscal year, 2017-2018. The second projected ratio is for the final academic year of each institution's plan, which varies by institution and is also noted in the table. The projected ratios assume the following.

1. Staff hired initially with non-recurring funds are eventually funded through a recurring source.
2. All positions are successfully filled and any positions vacated during the plan period are refilled.

The projected ratios also take into account any expected changes in enrollment during the timeframe covered by plans.

Table 1				
SUS Counselor : Student Ratios				
Actual & Projected[^]				
SUS Institution	2016-17*	2017-18[^]	Final Year of Plan[~]	Projected Ratio[~]
Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University	1:1,923	1:1,633	2018-19	1:1,400
Florida Atlantic University	1:2,014	1:1,564	2019-20	1:1,017
Florida Gulf Coast University	1:1,324	1:1,326	2018-19	1:1,316
Florida International University	1:2,449	1:2,216	2018-19	1:2,162
Florida Polytechnic University	1:618	1:1,373	2018-19	1:1,373
Florida State University	1:1,908	1:1,550	2020-21	1:951
New College of Florida¹	1:1,182	1:1,219	2018-19	1:908
University of Central Florida	1:1,828	1:1,669	2018-19	1:1,626
University of Florida	1:1,660	1:1,475	2019-20	1:1,204
University of North Florida	1:1,508	1:1,330	2020-21	1:1,348
University of South Florida	1:2,044	1:1,471	2018-19	1:1,338
University of South Florida - St. Petersburg	1:1,900	1:1,117	2018-19	1:1,021
University of West Florida	1:2,166	1:1,857	2020-21	1:1,000
[^] Assumes recurring funding is or will be available to support positions initially funded by non-recurring funding sources. ¹ New College also serves students enrolled at USF-Sarasota-Manatee *As submitted by SUS institutions (February 2017) ~Based on hiring plans submitted to BOG (Fall 2017)				

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Academic Advising Capacity

The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) is the professional association for academic advisors. While NACADA provides a wide array of resources, guidance, and support for academic advisors, NACADA does not issue official recommendations regarding caseloads for full-time professional advisors. NACADA cites several factors for why it does not issue official recommendations. One key factor is the variation in advisor responsibilities. Even full-time professional advisors have other obligations such as teaching seminars, holding workshops, serving on committees, working institutional events, and other activities where direct advising does not take place. A second factor is mode of delivery. While most advising generally takes place face-to-face with individual students, some advising may also take place in a group setting (e.g., seminar or workshop) or with the assistance of technology (e.g., websites, podcasts, texting). A third factor is described as “advising approach.” The most common and time-intensive “advising approach” is referred to as developmental advising. Another approach is prescriptive, which is less time-intensive but may not be appropriate for all students or all academic programs. A fourth factor is the needs of the students themselves, which vary widely depending on where they are in their education pathway (e.g., first year vs. junior year; a student who is on track vs. a student who has failed one or more required courses).

There are other challenges associated with developing a recommendation for ratios for student-advisor caseloads, and also in tracking and reporting caseloads. For instance, not all academic advising is provided by full-time professional academic advisors. Faculty, graduate assistants, and other university staff may also be responsible for academic advising as part of their official responsibilities to the institution. In addition, the structure of advising varies. For example, several SUS institutions have one advising center for first-year students as well as professional advisors within a college or department. At New College, all advising is done by tenured and tenure-track faculty who use an intensive development advising model that also includes developing a senior thesis project. Florida Polytechnic University also relies primarily on faculty to provide academic advising. Several institutions use both professional advisors and faculty. For example, Florida State University primarily relies upon professional academic advisors and college life coaches, with some faculty and other staff also providing academic advising. Many institutions also have advisors for sub-populations of students, such as first generation students, honor students, pre-law or pre-health students, and student athletes.

The best information available on academic advising capacity is provided in Table 2 below. Given the complexities of academic advising and the tracking challenges

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described above, direct comparisons cannot be made between institutions nor can meaningful caseload information be derived from the information provided.

Table 2		
Undergraduate Academic Advising Capacity		
State University System		
Fall 2017*		
SUS Institution	Estimated Advising Capacity (FTE)	Undergraduate Students (headcount)
Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University	45.00	7,552
Florida Atlantic University	125.75	24,045
Florida Gulf Coast University	49.00	13,885
Florida International University	109.00	41,869
Florida Polytechnic University	69.00	1,427
Florida State University	153.50	32,812
New College of Florida	11.43	834
University of Central Florida	193.00	56,458
University of Florida	142.00	33,662
University of North Florida	39.75	13,963
University of South Florida	130.63	30,918
University of South Florida - Sarasota/Manatee	9.00	1,868
University of South Florida - St. Petersburg	11.93	4,162
University of West Florida	48.00	9,372
*As submitted by SUS institutions (December 2017)		