

A Comprehensive Counseling Model Promoting Student Resilience and Success by the Association of Minnesota Community and Technical College Counselors

The purpose of this paper is to define the role of the counseling discipline and services within the Minnesota State Community and Technical College system. The paper defines the important work of counseling faculty and their essential contributions to student success, particularly in this time of increased student demand and diminishing resources.

Counseling faculty are professionally trained to identify the difficulties students face in pursuing and achieving their educational goals. Crucial to providing effective assistance and support is the counselor's understanding of the students' stated goals within the context of human development and the inevitable changes that occur as students progress through a college education. Even when students articulate clear initial goals, counseling faculty understand that students' lives and goals change as a result of their unfolding educational experiences or personal situations.

The professional education and training required of community and technical college counseling faculty, who hold at a minimum a Master's degree in counseling or counseling psychology, enables them to play a variety of roles and offer a range of activities to meet students' counseling needs. Graduate programs in counseling have standardized competencies expected of degree recipients. Although not meant to be an exhaustive list, the following competencies help to define the specialized skills of counseling professionals and continue to be emphasized in present day counseling programs:

- knowledge of human development, both normal and abnormal
- understanding of the theories of counseling and personality development
- knowledge of and sensitivity to social, cultural, and ethnic issues
- knowledge of ethical and legal aspects of counseling
- knowledge of the learning process
- knowledge of decision making and transition models
- ability to diagnose student problems
- ability to help students form and clarify their educational values and goals
- ability to help students learn problem-solving and decision-making skills
- ability to facilitate groups and workshops
- knowledge of effective instructional methods and strategies
- ability to provide crisis intervention and support
- ability to identify the need for mental health counseling and referral to community resources
- knowledge of career development methods, techniques, and instruments
- knowledge of changes taking place in the economy and the job market
- knowledge of the use and misuse of assessment instruments and test data
- knowledge of educational programs and their requirements
- knowledge of the structure and institutional relationships of higher education
- ability to develop and coordinate service programs
- ability to provide effective consultation to students, faculty, staff, administrators, and community members

This list reiterates the critical responsibility of the counselor to support student success in such areas as student self-assessment, decision-making, goal setting, and goal implementation.

A . Core Functions of Counseling Faculty

To accomplish the mission of providing essential support to community and technical college students, faculty counselors perform a set of core functions through individual and group interactions, as well as classroom instruction. These functions are fundamental to the mission of community and technical college counseling and are derived partially from materials from the American Counseling Association.

1. Academic counseling, in which the student is assisted in assessing, planning, and implementing his or her immediate and long-range academic goals. *
2. Career counseling, in which the student is assisted in assessing his or her aptitudes, abilities, and interests and is advised concerning the current and future employment trends. **
3. Personal counseling, in which the student is assisted with personal, family or other social concerns, when that assistance is related to the student's education. ***
4. Coordination with the counseling aspects of other services to students which may exist on the campus, including, but not limited to, those provided in programs for students with special needs, skills testing programs, financial assistance programs, and job placement services. This includes participation in the creation and implementation of campus-wide crisis intervention efforts with a Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT).
5. The development and implementation of face-to-face and online curriculum for First Year Experience and Career Planning/Development courses require many of the specialized skills and knowledge of counseling professionals; therefore, counselors are integral to the coordination of these courses. Faculty counselors teaching online courses must be knowledgeable and competent in online teaching and learning. It is strongly recommended that faculty counselors teaching online classes receive training in this area, such as the Quality Matters training.
6. As the internet has become interwoven with daily life, distance/online counseling has become increasingly accessed by students at community and technical colleges. These communications may be facilitated by any number of internet and online-based technologies that will allow transmission of information used by students in making decisions related to academics, careers, and, on occasion, minor personal concerns or issues. Faculty counselors conducting distance/online counseling must be knowledgeable and competent in the delivery of online services. It is strongly recommended that faculty counselors providing online student support services receives training in this area, such as the Distance Credentialed Counselor training offered by the National Board of Certified Counselors.

B. Core Functions of Counseling Faculty Further Defined

***Academic Counseling**

1. Academic counseling services include assessment using multiple measures and diagnosis of students' academic abilities, disabilities, strengths and weaknesses; help in clarifying academic goals and selecting a program of study; assisting with clarifying choices and actions, as well as decision-making, planning, and transitioning; making referrals to other support services when a need is indicated; intervening when students' academic performance is at risk; assisting students who have been suspended and are returning on probation, and providing follow-up (e.g. early alert processes).
2. Counseling faculty must ensure that their knowledge of the nature and requirements of the various disciplines offered at their college is accurate and current. Through establishing strong partnerships with advisors and faculty, counselors effectively provide educational planning services for transfer, career preparation, degree completion, and certificate programs. Counseling is required when the student needs more than just specific information provided by those who advise. When goals are not yet set, when decisions are not yet made, or when the problem goes beyond a need for data, the student needs counseling.
3. Counseling faculty assist students in transitioning to college. These services may be provided to students before enrollment, possibly during high school, and/or through community outreach.
4. Counseling programs must work closely with their college's matriculation process, especially in the areas of assessment interpretation, orientation program development, and advising services.
5. Counseling faculty develop curriculum, teach courses, and implement workshops that teach the skills needed for student development and academic success, such as study skills, note taking, stress management, and time management. In addition, counseling faculty teach and/or coordinate a First Year Experience course for academic success.

****Career Counseling**

1. Counseling faculty teach the career development process and its importance in setting and achieving academic and life goals.
2. The career development process should be taught as holistic and lifelong. Counseling faculty teach students to examine their lives as a whole—values, interests, aptitudes, and life circumstances. Students need to be made aware that career skills learned now, such as career search and decision-making methods, may be useful throughout a lifetime.

3. Career counseling services should be delivered in a variety of ways, including online and face-to-face individual and group counseling, workshops, and college courses (such as Career Planning, Job Search, and Internships).
4. Career counseling services include assisting students in clarifying career goals, through intake interviews and administration and interpretation of career assessment instruments; instruction in career exploration using the latest technology and methods; and instruction in career goal-setting and decision-making.
5. Counseling departments provide up-to-date information on career research, the labor market, educational programs, and all aspects of the career development process, as well as collaborate with other departments on campus who provide this information. Technical assistance, electronic resources, and equipment need to be available to help students access this information. Counseling is required when the student needs more than just specific career-related information. When goals are not yet set, when decisions are not yet made, or when the problem goes beyond a need for data, the student needs counseling.
6. Comprehensive career counseling services often include assistance with the job search process, including instruction in resume preparation and interviewing skills.
7. Career counseling services include reaching out to students who have not declared a major to assist them in setting academic and career goals.
8. Counseling faculty create on-going partnerships with career technical education (CTE) faculty and may serve on CTE program advisory committees for the purpose of staying current on local labor market trends and employment demands.
9. Counseling programs should establish liaison relationships with other career-related programs, such as state Workforce Centers, work experience programs, job-training programs, school-to-work initiatives, and private industry councils.

*****Personal Counseling**

1. Personal counseling services must be available to students whose personal life issues interfere with their academic success. These include, but are not limited to individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, support groups, and courses or workshops on personal life issues (e.g., dealing with self-esteem issues, stress management, and substance abuse prevention). While counseling faculty should be prepared to provide some of these services, referrals to mental health professionals should be made as needed.
2. Counseling faculty develop and implement curriculum that encourage the holistic development of the student as a functioning member of society (e.g., personal development and life-coping skills).

3. Counseling programs maintain up-to-date information on, and develop partnerships with, college and community resources. Counselors refer students to appropriate services as needed.

Conclusion

From before even setting foot on campus to the day a student graduates, transfers, or fulfills his or her academic goals, more community and technical college students need professional counseling throughout their educational experience to achieve success. This need has been demonstrated by several researchers who have confirmed the important role of counselors in the retention process (Archer & Cooper, 1999; Coll & Stewart, 2008; Sharkin, 2004). As stated in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) report to the legislature in 2016, "Our student's lives are complex and many will fail to persist for non-academic reasons. In light of this, our [Comprehensive Completion] plan is designed to be holistic in nature, addressing student's academic, financial, and social needs". As previously mentioned, faculty counselors are positioned to provide essential, holistic support to students through individual and group interactions, as well as classroom instruction.

Therefore, concerns related to financial expediency must not lead colleges to assign a counselor's role to others less qualified to perform the work or to technology-based solutions secured to substitute for the professionals trained to assist students. In this time of increased student demand and diminishing resources, the unique skillset of faculty counselors allow for integrated instruction and student services designed to better serve all cohorts of students at the college. The integral role of faculty counselors in the Minnesota Community and Technical College system must be recognized and supported in order to achieve the shared goal of student success.

References

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