

Standards and Guidelines for Counselling Services in the Colleges, Institutes & Universities of British Columbia

Adopted at the Annual General Meeting October 18, 1995

Amended 1997, 2018

Preamble

Within British Columbia the diversity of post-secondary institutions is considerable. Colleges, institutes, and universities serve communities ranging from densely populated urban landscapes at one extreme, to isolated small towns in sparsely populated areas at the other. The post-secondary institutions offer a wide variety of programs, ranging from developmental education, trades-vocational, career-technical and academic programs to the doctoral level. Institutions also vary as to whether they operate from several campuses or from one centralized facility.

Historically, each institution has undertaken to provide counselling services for students and prospective students as a part of fulfilling its educational mandate. Thus, the amount and type of counselling service in a given institution is determined by the perceived needs within that particular institution. Province-wide standards by which to guide the development and practice of such services have never been articulated, leaving the decision about what constitutes an adequate level of service to the discretion of individual institutions.

Establishing standards which apply to the broad range of counselling services provided within post-secondary institutions is difficult, because the unique circumstances of each institution and its particular community setting substantially affect the kind and quantity of services required of its counselling professionals. Nevertheless, comprehensive statements of standards for counselling services have been developed by the International Association of Counselling Services (2016), Council for the Advancement of Standards for Student Services (1988), and the Canadian College and University Counselling Association (1992).

Within British Columbia, post-secondary counsellors maintain professional links through the British Columbia Post-Secondary Counsellors Association (PSCA). This professional body, formerly called the British Columbia Colleges and Institutes Counsellors' Association (CICA), has adopted a Code of Ethics (1988), and a Statement of Roles and Functions of Counsellors (1981) to guide post-secondary counsellors in the performance of their duties. In addition to guidelines for counsellors themselves, however, standards are needed for Counselling Services (which include but are not limited to the practice of professional counsellors) to situate them within organizational frameworks, and to delineate their functions within B.C. post-secondary institutions.

This document was approved at the October, 1994 Annual General Meeting of the British Columbia Colleges and Institutes Counsellors' Association, and revisions thereto were adopted in 1995, 1997 and 2018. These standards are meant as a model for providing maximally effective support for post-secondary students and prospective students of colleges, institutes, and universities within the communities they serve.

Mission of counselling services

The mission of Counselling Services in British Columbia post-secondary institutions is to provide personal counselling, academic counselling, career counselling, and student development services for both prospective and enrolled students, so that they may be effective in making choices, and may fully participate in and benefit from their educational experience.

Purposes of counselling services

Counselling Services exist to support students in their post-secondary educational experience. Deriving their mandates from individual institutions, Counselling Services mirror the diversity of institutional structures and priorities, and emphasize different combinations of personal counselling, academic counselling and student development services.

In general, Counselling Services in British Columbia public post-secondary institutions have the following purposes:

1. To facilitate people's access to post-secondary education.
 2. To encourage the personal, career, and social development of post-secondary students.
 3. To promote student success.
 4. To stimulate development of students' skills and attitudes in preparation for continued success in their lives after post-secondary.
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Functions of counselling services

The PSCA description of Counsellor roles and functions designates five types of intervention which are normally part of Counselling Services within post-secondary educational settings. They are:

1. To foster students' realistic self-appraisal, appropriate career exploration, and decision-making;
 2. To encourage students' personal growth and development, including encouragement and skills instruction for establishing and maintaining effective relationships and effective social roles;
 3. To provide remedial support for students at risk, including assistance to manage current specific personal and educational problems, and assistance to learn strategies to cope with academic skill deficiencies;
 4. To help students to manage obstacles and deal with crises;
 5. To create positive practices within the institution which will support student development.
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Responsibilities of counselling services

There are basic similarities in the overall goals of public post-secondary institutions in BC; however, differences in student populations and in institutional priorities and structures will affect the service emphasis of individual Counselling departments. The following items therefore represent, but do not limit, the responsibilities of Counselling Services:

1. Provision of individual and group counselling to students and prospective students of diverse backgrounds in the areas of career and lifestyle choices, education and training alternatives, and personal and social development;
2. Referral of students who require counselling beyond the scope of the institutional counselling service;
3. Provision of instructional programming focused on the social/emotional, educational/ career and developmental needs of students in order to maximize the benefits to them of their educational experience;
4. Provision of information and support to facilitate students' ability to make informed educational and career decisions;
5. Assistance to students who are experiencing conflict with institutional personnel or policy by delineating their rights, helping them to consider options and assisting to communicate appropriately with institutional representatives;
6. Liaison with secondary schools and community agencies and organizations;
7. Participation on institutional committees to contribute towards making the environment beneficial for the intellectual and emotional development of students, including membership on educational councils or other such committees with overriding decision-making responsibilities;
8. Integration of counsellors-in-training into professional practice in post-secondary settings;
9. Commitment to Counselling Services staff professional development such as training and consultation opportunities;
10. Educating others within the institution about the appropriate utilization of Counselling Services;
11. Research and evaluation activities to determine the effectiveness of Counselling in post-secondary educational settings.

Governance of counselling service units

1. Service mandate: Individual institutions will establish the mandates for their counselling services, but generally, Counselling Services should be available and accessible across institutional divisions to the entire student body of the institution.
2. Status within institutions:
 - a. Counselling Services should be autonomous units with their own department heads and/or directors.

- b. Counselling Services should be positioned within the administrative structure so that its chief officer is able to interact effectively with other significant unit heads, as well as with the chief student affairs administrator, and the chief academic affairs administrator.
 - c. Ideally, Counsellors are involved in the selection of their Department Head or Director.
 - 3. Organizational relationships: Counselling Services should be placed within the organizational structure in such a way as to foster relationships across institutional divisions:
 - a. with instructors;
 - b. with educational and administrative councils;
 - c. with admissions offices and registrars;
 - d. with personnel providing other student services such as educational advising, experiential learning, health services, campus recreation, accessibility/disability services, international student services;
 - e. with student residence coordinators.
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Funding of counselling services

- 1. Level of funding
 - a. Counselling Services should be funded as a designated unit with sufficient funds to carry out its mandate within the institution.
 - b. The cost of providing Counselling Services should be funded from operating grants;
 - c. Funding should support staff salaries, program development costs, purchase and maintenance of office furnishings and supplies, and purchase and maintenance of equipment.
 - d. Funding should also provide for professional development, including institutional memberships in professional organizations, relevant professional journal subscriptions, and participation in professional association meetings, conferences and workshops.
- 2. Funding Formulae
 - a. Funding for Counselling Services should be based on numbers of enrolled students rather than on “full-time-equivalent” formulae, in recognition of the broader reach of counselling services to prospective students as well as to students who actually enroll, and in recognition that service to a part-time student is equally as time-consuming as service to a full-time student.
 - b. Funding formulae for Counselling Services should ensure that the student to counsellor ratio is no greater than 1000-1500 enrolled students to one professional counsellor.

- c. Formulae for funding to Counselling units should be based not only on actual student count, but also on factors unique to the setting within which the Counselling unit operates, such as:
 - i. the number of regional campuses, and the geographical reach of the institution;
 - ii. diversity of student population (i.e. students with disabilities, or with English as a second language, or from identified equity groups);
 - iii. the proximity of the Counselling unit to other student services offered by the institution (i.e. financial aid, disability services, international education support, services for Indigenous students, registration and admissions offices);
 - iv. the variety of programs within the institution;
 - v. the complexity of access to programs within the institution;
 - vi. the extent to which the counselling service is used as a resource within the community where the campus is located.
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Personnel: qualifications, competencies and workload

1. Staffing considerations

- a. While the number of staff that are necessary for the effective functioning of a Counselling service depends on the size and nature of the institution, and to the particular mandate assigned to the Counselling unit, adequate levels of staffing should allow for the following:
 - i. a minimum of one professional Counsellor to every 1000-1500 enrolled students or part thereof;
 - ii. opportunity for the participation of Counselling staff on institutional committees, including education councils, where applicable.
- b. The roles and responsibilities of different levels of staff in Counselling Services should be clear so that clients are aware of the expertise and service capability of each staff member.
- c. The principles of equal opportunity should apply to the hiring of Counselling staff.

2. Department Leadership

- a. Counselling Services should be administered by a first-line supervisor and has professional Counselling qualifications. It is essential that the administrator understand the client-centered focus of a Counselling Service, and support its unique role within the institution.
- b. The responsibilities of the first-line supervisor may include:

- i. overall administration and coordination of Counselling activities;
 - ii. coordination, recruitment, training, supervision, development and evaluation of professional, paraprofessional, and support personnel;
 - iii. education of staff regarding legal issues governing the delivery of Counselling services;
 - iv. preparation and administration of budget;
 - v. preparation of annual reports;
 - vi. consultation/leadership in policy formation and program development;
 - vii. ensuring that Counselling staff will be included as members of institutional committees and councils;
 - viii. active representation of Counselling interests within the institution.
3. Counsellors. A core of full-time, professional Counsellors is essential for the continuity of effective counselling services.
 - a. Professional Counsellors should be employed to provide individual and group Counselling services for prospective and enrolled students. Professional Counsellors act in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the professional associations to which they belong.
 - b. Post-secondary Counsellors should be qualified according to the definition of Counsellor stated in the Constitution of the British Columbia Post-Secondary Counsellors Association. They should be knowledgeable in psychological theory, developmental theory of the adolescent and the adult, learning theory, and career development theory. They should understand the principles of program development, organizational development and consultation, and of psychological assessment, and be effective communicators.
 - c. Professional Counsellors may provide the following services:
 - i. individual and group counselling;
 - ii. other professional services such as training and supervision, and assessment;
 - iii. non-counselling functions such as teaching, research, and planning;
 - iv. school and community liaison, including maintaining contacts for referral to community resources;
 - v. internal liaison with academic and other departments;
 - vi. participation in institutional planning, and in program and policy development;
 - d. Where service demands do not justify more than one Counselling staff member, a professional Counsellor should fill that position to ensure access to the range of services

a professional is able to offer, and to guarantee that the institution meets its responsibility to provide services grounded in professional ethics.

- e. The workload of professional Counsellors should have:
 - i. parity with instructional staff for annual vacation leave;
 - ii. parity with instructional staff for Professional Development leave.
 - 4. Other personnel
 - a. Support staff within Counselling Services may include secretaries, clerical assistants, and receptionists in sufficient numbers to free professional staff members for professional duties. Qualifications should be in keeping with job duties. Because front-line Counselling Service employees deal directly with the public and students, they should have sensitivity, good judgment and excellent communication skills. Clerical support staff may perform the following functions:
 - i. reception for counselling services, both across the desk and by phone;
 - ii. screening of and referral of inquirers;
 - iii. clerical support to professional staff.
 - b. Counsellors in training may be placed as interns, and may perform Counselling duties under the supervision of professional Counsellors. Professional trainees shall be students at the Masters level or above.
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Physical facilities of counselling centres

Counselling Services should be provided with adequate facilities to fulfill their mandate.

1. To maximize access by all members of the student body, counselling centres should be centrally located, and physically separate from administrative offices.
2. Counselling centres should meet and maintain safety and health requirements.
3. All areas should be accessible to persons with disabling conditions.
4. Counselling centres should include:
 - a. office, reception and storage space sufficient to accommodate assigned staff, supplies, equipment and hardware;
 - b. private offices large enough to accommodate the Counsellor and at least three clients, for counselling, interviewing, etc;
 - c. a reception area that provides comfortable and private waiting space;
 - d. special purpose rooms for conferences, testing, group meetings, etc.;
 - e. locked cabinets and rooms for storage of sensitive personal records;

- f. Appropriate data security procedures for all electronic records
 5. Counselling Services with training components should have adequate audio-visual recording facilities and direct observation facilities.
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School and community relations

Counselling Services located within institutions should be a resource to members of the community-at-large, as well as to enrolled students. In particular:

1. Counselling Services should be available to both prospective and enrolled students.
 2. Counselling Services may, as part of the institutional mandate, maintain relationships with secondary schools in their region. The focus of such relationships will be to facilitate secondary students' choices by keeping them informed about programs, course prerequisites, and admissions procedures.
 3. Where mental health resources are not available on campus, Counselling Services should establish and maintain close working relationships with community resources, so that referrals can be facilitated when required.
 4. Counselling Services should maintain good relationships with government employment services, and with local social service agencies, especially in small communities, in order to facilitate access to further educational opportunity by persons using these resources in the community.
 5. Counselling Services should develop and maintain links with other post-secondary institutions to ensure an effective liaison for the benefit of students.
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Ethical standards for counselling services

1. Staff members should observe the ethical standard codes of their professions. Individual staff members' ethical obligations and privileges should not be abridged or contravened by institutional operating procedures.
2. Confidentiality shall be reflected in the keeping of records, in the collection, classification and maintenance of data, in the administration of security, in the use and dissemination of information regarding clients, and in the disposition of records. All clients shall be given the right of access to and correction of information in their personal records, except where exceptions exist under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.
3. When the condition of a client is indicative of clear and imminent danger to the client or to others, Counselling Service professionals must take reasonable personal action, which may involve consulting with other professionals and informing responsible authorities. In such cases, Counselling professionals should act in accordance with existing ethical principles, provincial or federal statutes, and other guidelines that may stipulate the limits of confidentiality.

4. Review procedures should be established so as to ensure that any research or evaluation procedures do not interfere unduly with delivery of Counselling Services.
 5. Staff members should be knowledgeable about and responsive to relevant laws and should, if necessary, remind the institution of its legal obligations.
 6. Staff members should be aware of those obligations and limitations imposed on the institution by federal, provincial and local regulations, and by institutional policy, as they affect Counselling services.
 7. Counselling Services will comply with all relevant employment legislation, including the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.
 8. Professional staff members should request, from their institution, access to legal advice as needed to carry out assigned responsibilities.
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Evaluation of counselling services

1. An integral responsibility of Counselling Services is to conduct ongoing evaluation and accountability research to determine the effectiveness of its services and to improve the practice of counselling.
 2. Counselling Services shall abide by the ethical standards for research with human subjects, with standards developed by university or college groups responsible for overseeing such research with the provisions of section 35 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.
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References

- Canadian University and College Counselling Association (1992). *Guidelines for college and university counselling centres.*
- Council for the Advancement of Standards for Student Services (1988). *Standards and guidelines for counselling services.*
- International Association of Counselling Services (2016). *Standards for university and college counselling services.*
- The British Columbia Colleges and Institutes Counsellors' Association (1981). *A statement of roles and functions of counsellors in the colleges and institutes of British Columbia.*