

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC

**COUNSELLING SERVICE
CODE OF ETHICS AND PRACTICE**

Approved by the University Senate

USP COUNSELLING SERVICE - CODE OF ETHICS AND PRACTICE

1.0 RATIONALE

The purpose of this document is to outline the policy and Code of Practice of the Counselling Centre at the USP Laucala Campus and to provide, in the absence of a professional association in Fiji and/or the region, a guideline which might be adopted for other USP campuses.

The service has recently expanded to two full-time Counsellors in response to the increasing demands made on it. This service is an integral part of the educational establishment and as such has a significant educative function. The conflict between these preventive and developmental functions and the demand for crisis/emergency interventions is explored and acknowledged in this document.

Furthermore, a unique feature of the USP Counselling Service is that it also deals with other wider welfare issues of students, which may not be professionally regarded as Counselling Service per-se in other counselling situations. This is due to the absence of immediate family support from the region such as caring for students who are hospitalised and providing advocacy services on behalf of those who breach the laws of the country. The Counselling Service extends itself to support students in these and other similar situations.

2.0 MISSION STATEMENT

To enhance the work of the University of the South Pacific (USP), the University Counselling Centre provides an approachable, professional and confidential service to students and staff. The Centre contributes to the personal, social and academic development of students helping them to achieve the greatest benefit and satisfaction from University life.

The University Counselling Centre is a resource for the psychological welfare and needs of the whole University community.

The service is an integral part of the educational establishment and, as such, has a significant educative function. Whilst recognising that the primary task is the counselling of individuals in need, the resources of the service are available to all members of the University. Thus group work, workshops and other training opportunities are provided in order to assist the University in one of its principal aims – that of encouraging the process of learning and self-development for all members of the community (both students and staff).

3.0 COUNSELLING SERVICE VALUES, CODE OF ETHICS AND PRACTICE

- 3.1** As the University Counselling Service is a resource for the psychological and welfare needs of the whole University community, it offers a specialist service. The therapeutic skills, which form the basis of the Counsellor's work, require considerable professional training. Job descriptions and advertisements should reflect international standards. Counsellors should monitor and develop their own competence.

3.2 The service holds a fundamental belief, that in a multi-cultural and multi-value society, each individual has the right to choose the way of life that is appropriate for him/her. The Counsellors offer a service, which, through a process of exploration, clarification and understanding, enable the client to become more effective in his/her life. Counselling aims to help clients take responsibility for their own decisions and become more aware of their personal relationships and social groupings. Students who feel more fulfilled in, and aim towards more autonomy in their personal lives tend to achieve more in their academic lives. Similarly, staff, given the opportunity to resolve personal and professional difficulties, will offer a better service to students and to the University generally. The Counsellor-Client relationship is the foremost ethical concern. However, counselling does not exist in social isolation.

3.3 There are occasions when tensions arise between the client's needs and those of the institution and the wider society.

4.0 COUNSELLING REMIT

The aim of Counsellors in their work with individual clients is to enable that person to find ways of living, that reflect his/her needs and values and to relieve psychological distress.

The Counsellors work with individual clients who have personal conflicts, relationship difficulties, psychological problems or academic concern through a therapeutic relationship. This relationship facilitates personal exploration of the difficulties and takes into account development needs and the special needs of particular student groups, for example, mature students.

5.0 TYPES OF COUNSELLING OFFERED

The scope of counselling includes:

- Problems of transition to University
- Relationship difficulties
- Bereavement
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Eating disorders
- Sexual abuse
- Sexual identity
- Suicidal ideas
- Academic problems and poor academic performance
- Self-image and self-concept problems
- Health issues
- Alcohol and substance abuse
- Peer tutorial assistance
- Family conflict

- Financial and scholarship issues
- Career planning and job search skills

The Counselling Service also holds a small information base on health and mental health issues, which includes books, brochures, leaflets, audio and videotapes, and relevant articles. A list of current publications produced by the Counsellors is available from the Secretary.

6.0 WHO ARE OUR CLIENTS

- Registered students at the University
- Staff of the University
- Those pre-entry students who intend to enroll at the university who need academic guidance.

7.0 CONFIDENTIALITY AND CODE OF CONDUCT

Our credibility and effectiveness as professional Counsellors depends on our ability to maintain a strict code of practice on confidentiality and other ethical principles.

Confidentiality is a means of providing the client with safety and privacy. Counsellors treat with confidence personal information about clients, whether obtained directly or indirectly or by inference. That information will not be disclosed without the client's permission.

7.1 Case Notes and Record

Records of counselling sessions are established and updated after each client visit. Records of the client's identity are safeguarded and kept confidentially at the Counselling Center.

When case material is used for case studies, reports or publications **the client's informed consent** must be obtained wherever possible and their identity must be effectively disguised.

Respecting confidentiality, whilst working in an open and collaborative way within the University is central to the Counsellors' work.

7.2 Exemptions to Confidentiality

In practice, Counsellors currently offer the students/staff verbal and written assurance of confidentiality. Certain exemptions will apply –

7.2.1 Self-Harm and Harm to Others

By law, if the client divulges during counselling intended or implied harm to themselves or to others, Counselors **may break confidentiality**, in consultation with professional colleagues.

7.2.2 Illegal Activities – Drugs, Abortions etc

The Counsellor's professional judgment will need to be applied in consideration of how to balance confidentiality related to illegal activities. Again **consultation with counselling supervisor/colleagues before breaking confidentiality is required.**

7.2.3 Mental Illness and Other Medical Conditions

If information is disclosed about a student who the Counsellor believes will need to be passed on to other departments e.g. Halls, **permission from that student** should be sought. If this is not possible, Counsellors will confer with colleagues and apply their professional judgment. On the rare occasions when confidentiality will be breached, clients will be informed.

However the **primary focus** of our work must be the individual student who is our client and to whom we have offered confidentially.

7.3 Confidentiality in the University Context

7.3.1 Staff Enquiries re Individual Students

If a member of staff has referred a student they might want to know if that student has come for counselling and how work is progressing. Confidentiality prevents Counsellors from discussing details and various strategies might be used to reassure that member of staff and to acknowledge their concern.

7.3.2 Disclosure of Medical Information on Students

All medical information on students is confidential between the doctor and student. Disclosure of such information should primarily be the responsibility of the student, it is the responsibility of the person-in-charge, be it staff or student leader, to obtain relevant information from students. For example, when taking students on a picnic, field trip (diving exploration) or working in the laboratory.

7.3.3 We acknowledge that parents and other family members will be concerned at times about the welfare and progress of the student concerned and may contact the Counselling Center.

7.3.4 Liaison with Medical Centre, Halls of Residence and other Departments

In most cases, Counsellors will seek the student's permission before breaking confidence in order to confer with staff in the Halls or other departments. In exceptional circumstances (see above), information will need to be passed on to the relevant staff without the student's permission.

7.3.5 Government and other sponsors and Potential Employers of USP Graduates

We acknowledge that sponsors and potential employers will request information about students. All written references will be open to the individual student. Confidentiality to the client remains uppermost.

7.3.6 In Committees – Institutional Role and Confidentiality

The tension between our institutional role and the Confidentiality Policy we adopt may be difficult to sustain at times. Conferring with Counsellors/colleagues, the Provost and other appropriate colleagues may be necessary before deciding to

break confidentiality if pressure is exerted by University committees

8 CLIENT SAFETY

Counsellors must not exploit their clients financially, sexually, emotionally or in any other way. Suggesting or engaging in sexual activity with a client is unethical.

9 REFERRALS

9.1 Counsellors will from time to time, receive clients who are referred to them by University staff, other professionals, students or family members, or will refer students to others for further assistance. Referrals are carried out with the approval of the client.

9.2 For counselling to be effective it cannot be compulsory, e.g. part of the disciplinary system. However, Counsellors can offer personal support to students referred by the Discipline Committee. This could mean offering information to clarify University Regulations; training students in positive assertiveness rather than aggressive reactions; or alcohol and substance abuse awareness raising.

9.3 Internal Referrals

To complement our work or where further clarification/assistance is needed internal referral may be made to another department within the University e.g. Medical Centre, Student Learning Support.

9.4 External Referrals

In cases where assistance is beyond the professional scope of the Counsellors, referrals may be made externally e.g. legal advice.

10 EMERGENCY AND CRISIS COUNSELLING AND SAFETY ISSUES IN WORKING OFF CAMPUS

10.1 Working Off-Campus

The regional nature of USP places a heavy responsibility on its caregivers on Laucala Campus especially the Counsellors who are (in loco parentis). They may be required to accompany and support students during police investigation/court appearance, visit sick students in hospital or disabled students at home. They also support bereaved students who are away from home and assist in travel arrangements to visit the home country if necessary and attend funerals.

Sometimes Counsellors are required to visit homes, Halls of Residence, boarding houses, prisons and hospitals where students are confined due to the nature of their problems. For these reasons, the personal safety issues of the Counsellors and of the students are important to consider. Parents and relatives of students may request Counsellors to visit students at their homes in exceptional and difficult situations.

10.2 **Proposed Policy**

For these reasons, the following policy is proposed to address the safety issues of Counsellors and students.

- a) That male Counsellors work with male students, female Counsellors to work with female students when working off-campus (if circumstances allow).
- b) That Counsellors have the right to refuse to work with students who are
 - i) Violent
 - ii) Under the influence of liquor and other substances affecting their rationality

In these circumstances, Counsellors will arrange to see a student when he/she is in a more rational state of mind.

- c) That another member of staff is notified about off-campus visits.

11 **QUALIFICATION**

The recommended qualification is a Masters or Doctorate in Counselling, and extensive work experience in educational institutions at the tertiary level.

12 **ACCOUNTABILITY AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

12.1 Due to the current lack of professional body for Counsellors in this region Counsellors and members of and adhere to Codes of Ethics and Practices for Counsellors in Australia, UK and USA. We recommend the following Professional Code be adopted for USP purposes.

12.2 Quality and Evaluation

The Counsellors are committed to the concept of accountability. An Annual Report is submitted to the Community Services Committee. Meetings are held with the Provost and other members of the University Management. A high priority is given to liaison within the institution with sponsors and community agencies. An evaluation form will be given to users of the Counselling Centre.

12.3 Complaints and Grievance Procedures

In addition to the University procedures, the following procedure should be followed if allegations are made against any member of the Counselling Team.

12.4 Professional Development

The Counsellors meet together on a monthly basis for peer supervision and case discussions as a way of ensuring good practice and continuing development. The Counsellors attend professional conferences and courses and keep up to date with current issues by reading appropriate professional Journals and consulting colleagues via electronic communications systems.