

---

# GUIDELINES FOR COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY GRADUATE STUDENTS SEEKING COUNSELING

January 1, 2006

---

## I. OVERVIEW

All graduate students at the University of Notre Dame are eligible for medical benefits that provide for mental health services through the University Counseling Center (UCC). Providers on this policy are UCC staff or therapists in the South Bend community who are members of a contract panel. Community providers are only accessible via a referral from UCC. As a result, Notre Dame's graduate student mental health benefit is only accessible via the UCC, either as actual providers or as referrers to community providers.

Counseling psychology doctoral students take a significant portion of their clinical training at the UCC, so accessing the mental health benefit through the UCC in the ordinary manner would not be strictly confidential, could be uncomfortable both for students and for UCC personnel, and it could produce dual relationships that are professionally unethical.

In recognition of these complexities, the Counseling doctoral program faculty, students, and the UCC together have drafted this policy for accessing the ordinary graduate student mental health benefit in a way that protects confidentiality and avoids dual relationships. The main component of this plan is given in the next section (II) of this document. Section II was written by the UCC, after consulting related policies at other universities. Any changes to Section II must be approved by them. Section III was prepared by Counseling Psychology faculty and students to augment the UCC section. Therefore, Section III can be adjusted without securing UCC's approval.

Any effective system for administering counseling graduate student mental health benefits must accommodate a wide variety of student circumstances. More frequently than not, these accommodations conflict with each other, so a single procedure to be followed by every student is not likely to satisfy all students. Therefore, the system that has evolved is designed to provide options meeting as many needs as could be anticipated at the time this document was prepared. It accommodates unanticipated complexities by including an "ombudsperson" provision (described in Section III), which protects student anonymity while communicating idiosyncratic student needs to the Counseling Program. Hence, the system is designed to be flexible so that it can handle unanticipated issues. Nevertheless, we remain committed to solving any idiosyncratic problems that arise, so students are encouraged to make us aware of any circumstances requiring special consideration.

---

---

Before describing the special policies and procedures available to Counseling students, it is perhaps worth mentioning three points that exist independently of this document. Much of what follows entails refinements of these three points, so they are a useful background for what follows.

1. Counseling graduate students are presently able to use the mental health portion of their Notre Dame-subsidized medical benefit the same way any other graduate student can.
2. Counseling graduate students are able to access the panel of outside mental health providers by getting a referral from UCC.
3. Students wishing to use the outside panel without a UCC referral are able to do so if they are willing to pay the out-of-network rate.

## **II. THE UNIVERSITY COUNSELING CENTER**

Revised: November 4, 2005

Susan Steibe-Pasalich, PhD

*Director, University of Notre Dame University Counseling Center*

The University Counseling Center (UCC) has a two-fold mission at the University of Notre Dame: to provide counseling and psychoeducational services to the students at the University and to provide pre-doctoral training opportunities for practicum students in the Counseling Psychology Program at the University of Notre Dame and interns in the APA approved Pre-doctoral Internship at the UCC.

While the UCC staff strongly advocates the benefits of personal therapy for students interested in becoming therapists, its two-fold mission creates a significant potential for multiple role conflicts when a graduate student in the Counseling Psychology program seeks UCC services. UCC psychologists typically rotate responsibilities regarding supervision and training. Therefore, if staff were to provide counseling to doctoral level counseling psychology students, the risk for problematic dual relationships would be very high. Even if a dual relationship did not exist, uncomfortable circumstances would likely arise for all involved, particularly for the student seeking counseling. For this reason the UCC strongly encourages students interested in receiving counseling to do so privately in the South Bend community. However, if a graduate student enrolled in the Counseling Psychology program chooses to use UCC services the following guidelines will apply:

1. Since all counseling psychology students are currently assigned to the UCC for their first practicum, no first year or second year students will be eligible to receive on-going counseling at the UCC. Should a first or second year graduate student elect to use her/his university sponsored health insurance, s/he will be able to receive a referral from the UCC to therapists in the South Bend
-

---

community who are providers on the student's insurance policy. The referral will be conducted by UCC staff not directly involved in supervision, will involve brief contact and require only minimal self-disclosure of problem issues by the student seeking referral.

2. Students who have completed their practicums at the UCC may request services at the UCC with the knowledge that they will not be eligible for future practicums or the pre-doctoral internship at the UCC. Therapists assigned to students agreeable to the above will not have participated directly in the supervision of the students during their practicum year. Also, issues related to a student's practicum would not be an appropriate focus for counseling work at the UCC and would necessitate a referral to providers in the South Bend community.
3. Students who choose to use their university sponsored health insurance may contact Valerie Staples, LCSW to schedule a brief intake session at the UCC in order to receive an insurance referral for therapists in the South Bend community who are listed as providers for the university sponsored health insurance. Should a student choose to use an out-of-network provider and be reimbursed at a lesser rate, no referral from the UCC is necessary. Students who have completed practica at the UCC and are requesting UCC services should also contact Valerie Staples. She will coordinate a referral to a therapist at the UCC who has not been directly involved in the supervision of the student during the student's practicum experience at the UCC.
4. Access to written or electronic intake, referral, and/or progress note information of counseling psychology graduate students seeking any UCC service will be limited to the referral provider and/or counselor, the director, the coordinator of clinical services, and the support staff members, all of whom sign confidentiality agreements.

### III. ADDITIONAL PROVISIONS

**Ombudspersons.** Program faculty recognize that unanticipated circumstances might make the UCC procedures described in Section II uncomfortable or even impossible. Rather than trying to anticipate every contingency, we recommend that students make use of an “ombudsperson.” The purpose of the ombudsperson is to provide an anonymous channel of communication between the student and Program. Students may contact an ombudsperson to describe the situation that makes Section II’s procedures untenable. The ombudsperson would then contact the Training Director, who would then make arrangements meeting the student’s needs. These arrangements would then be communicated back to the student via the chosen ombudsperson.

Ombudspersons are available through the Office of Student Affairs. At present there are three Vice Presidents responsible for Graduate and Professional Students. Because naming the present

---

---

occupants of these positions could put this document out of date relatively quickly, let us simply direct inquiries to the Office of Student Affairs and its website, which will have readily available and up-to-date information about which Vice Presidents are currently responsible for Graduate and Professional Students.

When you contact an ombudsperson, be prepared to give them the Training Director's contact information (viz., Dave Smith, 631-7763, [dsmith11@nd.edu](mailto:dsmith11@nd.edu)). The ombudsperson may need to speak with the Training Director before knowing how to proceed, so it may take a few contacts.

**Student Autonomy.** The counseling program faculty *encourages* use of community providers and *permits* use of UCC staff providers (subject to the constraints detailed in section II). Among the various faculty opinions on this topic was the view that there should be a “bright line” separating student therapy and training sites. On this view, permitting *any* UCC involvement was considered ethically risky. Nevertheless, faculty also want to respect and preserve student rights to services that are, after all, available to every other student on campus. And the faculty wants to acknowledge and encourage student maturity and professionalism by involving them in choices about their mental healthcare. This is a break from tradition in the program, however, and it will be subject to periodic reconsideration.

**Companion Documentation.** During the preparation of this document, students requested specific details about their mental health benefit (e.g., rate differential between UCC-referred community therapy and the same therapy without such a referral, dependent coverage, provider panel members, waiting periods, fees). In order to avoid conflicts between our characterization of these details and the authoritative documents available elsewhere, such details are not given in this document. Instead, students are referred to the health plan administration for correct and current information. The faculty were pleased to note, however, that the present plan is quite generous.

Students also requested information about UCC procedures (e.g., the nature and content of referral records, minimum information necessary to secure referral). As with health plan details, while it might be possible to characterize these in their current state, specific matters such as these are likely to change over time, we cannot anticipate every detail needing description, and it therefore seemed best to refer such questions directly to UCC. Students are invited to anonymously contact UCC to get their specific questions answered before deciding how best to proceed.

**Emendation.** This is the first iteration of a plan to manage a complex issue. Please let the Program Director know of any improvements that might be made. Anonymous or any other kinds of feedback are welcome.

January 1, 2006

---