University of Pittsburgh
University Counseling Center
Service Delivery Policy

August 12, 2016
The University Counseling Center (UCC) is staffed by mental health professionals who are committed to fostering the well-being, functioning, and success of all university students. The staff are guided by a spirit of respect, honesty, acceptance, and trust with every student they serve. All students are welcome. We respect, value, embrace, and celebrate diversity. We are fully supportive of each student's race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, cultural and religious background, gender, gender identity and expression, and abilities.

The Service Delivery Policy of the UCC has been determined by 1) mental health best practices and the highest standards of care, 2) professional ethical requirements, 3) legal requirements, and 4) responsible risk management principles.

The UCC is committed to doing what is in the best interest of our students, ensuring the safety of individuals and groups including the University community, and taking steps to protect people from harm. We appropriately respond to crisis or emergency mental health needs of students.

We work together with students in collaborative partnership to mutually identify how they may optimally meet their mental health needs. We respect the student's autonomy and self-determination: at all times, we respect the preferences and decisions of the student and do not mandate student participation. Unless there is imminent risk of harm, services are never involuntary or coercive.

At the same time, the mental health professional, by virtue of their specialized expertise, determines:

- the student's mental health needs,
- the mental health services appropriate to meeting those needs, including level of care,
- the conditions required for mental health interventions to be effective,
- interventions that are clinically inappropriate, not in the student's best interest, a violation of professional codes of conduct, or a violation of law,
- recommendations and requirements for the provision of services and the continuation of services.

The UCC will not offer interventions for our students which the UCC has determined in our professional discretion to be clinically inappropriate, not in the student's best interests, or harmful to the student; a violation of the mental health professional's code of conduct, or a violation of law; or which exceed organizational resources or capacity or are beyond the scope of practice or expertise in the UCC.

In the spirit of doing what is best for the student, the UCC will at times connect students to other resources that are more appropriate to meet the student's psychological and safety needs. If a student's noncompliance with essential treatment recommendations causes significant risk of harm to self or others or renders it impossible to meet the student's mental health needs, we must connect the student elsewhere to more intensive resources in order to responsibly meet the student's needs and to ensure the safety of individuals and groups. We do not participate in interventions which cannot be effective in meeting the student's needs, or which leave the student in an unsafe state.

The UCC only engages in activities consistent with promoting healing, growth and positive development, learning, mastery, positive relationships, prosocial and socially responsible behavior, productivity, reduction of emotional pain, well-being, health, and safety of the student, the student's family, and the community.

This policy is available on the UCC website (http://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/cc/). We reserve the right to update this policy at any time. If the policy is modified, information about the changes will be accessible through the UCC website.
Mission

Our primary mission is to promote student well-being and to optimize functioning so students can achieve their full potential.

Targeted Outcomes

We help students to:

- improve functioning
- remove barriers and obstacles to success
- reduce or eliminate conditions which compromise functioning
- identify and implement their "recipe for success" (conditions which bring out the best in them)
- identify and remove conditions which bring out the worst in them (their "recipe for failure")
- learn how to structure their world to maximize functioning and outcomes
- learn to identify choices that lead to the outcomes they desire
- learn to increase control over their world so that things go better for them
- learn to identify effective strategies for navigating the challenges of university life

These targeted outcomes help students feel better, function better, perform better, and achieve better outcomes.

Eligibility Requirements

All full or part-time students (undergraduate and graduate) enrolled at the University of Pittsburgh and registered for classes are eligible for all UCC services.

Students enrolled only at University of Pittsburgh Regional Campuses (Bradford, Greensburg, Johnstown, or Titusville) are not eligible for any UCC services at the Pittsburgh campus. Regional campus students should contact the appropriate mental health services at their Regional Campus.

Faculty and staff of the university are eligible for consultation and outreach services only, and will be referred as desired to outside providers or the employee assistance program.

Scope of Services

The UCC offers a variety of mental health services to students utilizing a short-term, time limited approach, including assessment for appropriate level of care, counseling services (individual, group, and couples), psychiatric services, and workshops. These services are available to students to assist in their educational, relational, vocational, and psychological pursuits.

In addition, the UCC provides crisis intervention, consultation, referral, and outreach services to students, as well as faculty and staff of the University of Pittsburgh. Specialized counseling, consultation, and outreach services are offered regarding issues related to sexual assault or other trauma, as well as issues related to alcohol and drug use.

UCC services are provided by a multidisciplinary staff of mental health professionals that includes psychologists, social workers, counselors, psychiatrists, and advanced graduate trainees in various mental health disciplines.
Primary Functions:

- Provide quality individual, couples, and group counseling - informed by mental health best practices - to students regarding their concerns and desired outcomes
- Provide crisis response services for students in need of immediate mental health intervention
- Provide outreach and educational programming and workshops on topics which promote student well-being and functioning
- Provide consultation services to students, staff, faculty, and families of students regarding issues relevant to student mental health, well-being, safety and functioning
- Provide appropriate, quality referrals for services outside the scope of UCC resources
- Provide quality training opportunities for future mental health professionals

Services and Interventions Beyond the Scope of Practice of the UCC

Intensive Levels of Care:

Services such as inpatient psychiatric hospitalization, partial psychiatric hospitalization, intensive outpatient treatment, detoxification, medical stabilization, recent discharge from inpatient care or inpatient rehabilitation, residential services, other types of chronic, intensive care or intervention, or interventions that are required at a frequency or duration greater than offered by the UCC, are beyond the scope of our practice. While we do not have the capacity to meet ongoing intensive mental health needs, we will always respond to crisis or emergency mental health needs and assist in connecting students to the supports and services they require (see limitations below).

Students that have been recently admitted and discharged from an inpatient psychiatric unit or partial hospital program require a higher level of care than is available at the UCC, and therefore will be connected to an appropriate community provider for follow-up. They will be able to access our emergency services. A prior history of psychiatric hospitalization is not a barrier to receiving services provided that the needed level of care can be provided within the parameters of this scope of practice.

Long-term Goals as the Focus of Treatment:

The UCC refers students requiring long-term individual counseling to off-campus providers. Targeted outcomes identified at intake which are the focus and purpose of the individual counseling offered, must be plausibly attainable in four to eight treatment sessions. Students with more ambitious outcomes in mind will be connected to mental health professionals who can help them tackle longer-range goals. The scope of goals undertaken must be consistent with a short-term intervention model, and treatment which clearly exceeds those parameters will be transitioned to an outside mental health professional.

Chronic Mental Health Conditions:

Individuals with chronic mental health conditions will be assessed, but rather than providing ongoing treatment at the UCC, such individuals will be connected to appropriate resources in the community. Transitional, case management, crisis and psychiatric services may be made available as appropriate.

Non-Mental Health Services:

Mental health professionals only provide mental health services, whose purpose or intended outcome is an improvement in the student’s mental health, well-being, and/or functioning. Our mental health professionals do not perform services that are sought as a means or tool to accomplish an outcome unrelated to the mental health of the recipient.
This means, in part, that we will not provide disability services eligibility assessment, assessments for social security benefits eligibility, fitness for duty assessments, abilities testing, assessments of need for service animals or emotional support animals, evaluations connected with litigation or custody, court ordered assessment and intervention, or other forensic evaluations. This constraint does not preclude recommending services or accommodations for an ongoing student that may improve their functioning or mental health, or provide assessments requested to provide recommendations designed to improve the student’s well-being or functioning.

Privacy and Confidentiality:

The effectiveness of counseling derives from the fact that it is a sacrosanct sanctuary of privacy. The safe haven of counseling would be compromised by the perception that what is shared in the privacy of counseling could become public, for whatever reason. This would reduce the likelihood that individuals will access counseling who need it. To preserve the safe haven of counseling for our students, we will not disclose the contents of counseling sessions, unless consistent with our ethical and legal obligations. (See UCC Confidentiality Policy and Notice of Privacy Practices at http://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/cc/).

Professional Role Boundaries:

We will not engage in activities that involve dual roles or role conflicts that may interfere with the counseling process, such as, for example, socializing with students, counseling relatives, taking sides in custody battles, or becoming involved in a process which is adversarial, as this is incompatible with a therapeutic role and our professional ethics.

Services Which Are Redundant:

We do not duplicate services already being provided elsewhere, such as providing individual counseling to students who are receiving concurrent individual counseling from another provider, or medication management for students already receiving psychiatric services from another provider.

The UCC is committed to connecting students with services that maximally meet their needs with the highest possible quality. It is therefore in the best interest of the student that we connect them directly with those services most appropriate to the student’s clinical needs. Service providers in the community can sometimes better meet these service criteria. In such instances, the UCC will provide students with referrals to community providers and offer students the option to connect with case management services to support the bridging of care.

The UCC is committed to meeting the needs of all university students who access our services. We therefore consider one of our most important services to be that of connecting them directly with a service provider that best meets their needs in the timeliest manner.

Rights and Responsibilities of Students and Counselors

Students have the right to:

- Receive considerate and respectful care that acknowledges, affirms, and is responsive to their human dignity and unique personal histories, including, but not limited to, religious identity, cultural and ethnic identity, disability, gender identity, and sexual orientation
- Know the names and credentials of their treatment providers, relevant supervising staff, UCC administrators, and other people responsible for their care
- Receive services of high quality from clinicians that are competent in a service delivery system that does not entail barriers which prevent quality care
- Obtain information about their diagnosis and treatment in terms that they can reasonably be expected to understand
• Know the UCC expectations that apply to their conduct as students

• Have an individually-identified plan for treatment, based on their individual needs, and which they are part of developing. Plans of services should reflect goals that students have agreed to work toward, and might involve referrals to agencies and providers outside of the UCC in order to connect students to the most appropriate form of treatment

• Receive services in an environment that is safe, conducive to effective treatment, and that safeguards the privacy and confidentiality of student-staff interactions unless confidentiality is limited by law

• Be free of personal involvement with any UCC staff (no relationship outside counseling)

• Make a complaint about services and/or conditions at the UCC without retaliation

• Refuse treatment unless they are judged to be an immediate danger to themselves or others and require evaluation in an emergency room

• Control access to their mental health information in accordance with applicable laws

Students have the responsibility to:

• Provide UCC staff with an honest and accurate description of their mental health histories and inform staff about changes in their health status in a timely manner

• Actively participate in treatment (e.g., keep appointments, arrive on time, and meaningfully participate in dialogue with the clinicians involved in their treatment)

• Abide by all rules concerning their conduct at the UCC, e.g., the University of Pittsburgh's Student Code of Conduct, agreements for group counseling

• Be respectful to other students and staff

• Attend to and protect their personal belongings at all times while at the UCC

• Access emergency sources (e.g., after-hours crisis response services) as needed to maintain safety between appointments

Clinicians have a right to:

• Be treated with respect by students, colleagues, and administration

• Decline to provide services outside their licensed and ethical expertise

• Pursue ongoing professional development

• Feel safe during their work at the UCC

• Reschedule students who have arrived significantly late for appointments

• Decline to provide counseling or other services via e-mail

• Provide student services only during their scheduled work hours at the UCC unless emergency intervention is needed
• Decline to engage in activities that interface with students outside of counseling and that involve conflicting, dual roles

• Decline to engage in activities that involve potential jeopardy to their license

Clinicians have a responsibility to:

• Promote the safety of students under their care

• Treat students with respect and honor all other student rights

• Abide by the code of ethics for their profession and the university's policies regarding staff conduct

• Maintain competence in their profession and refrain from providing any form of service outside of their area of expertise

• Consult with colleagues as needed to provide the best possible care to students

• Make appropriate recommendations to students to facilitate their engagement in the form of treatment that is most likely to improve their well-being. This might entail making a connection to an outside agency or provider if treatment at the UCC would not adequately address a student's needs

• Ethically and responsibly end treatment when it is clear that students have achieved their goals or do not appear to be benefitting from services

**Conditions Under Which Services May Be Discontinued**

General: Services are only discontinued when doing so is in the best interest of the student, or required to ensure the health and safety of others. If services are discontinued, the student may be connected to other appropriate resources as needed. Services may be discontinued if:

• Services are requested that the UCC is unable to provide, that the UCC deems not to be in the student's best interest, which are in violation of professional codes of conduct, or which exceed organizational resources

• Clinician and student do not agree on goals or methods for intervention

• Service provision is not effective in achieving the goals that have been established

• Student being served endangers the health or safety of others or significantly compromises the quality of service to other students

• Student does not meet the terms of any agreed-upon contract regarding attendance, participation in recommended services or other conditions required for successful intervention

• Access to information required for appropriate intervention decisions is denied by the student, (e.g. student refuses access to recent evaluation in psychiatric emergency room)

• Student engages in behaviors which violate the student code of conduct on UCC premises

• Student makes false allegations about UCC staff

• Student provides false information or otherwise deceives the UCC where the information is essential to appropriate treatment decisions
Student Transfer Policy

From time to time, students will request a change in their UCC clinician. By definition, this entails a request to change their treatment plan. Consequently, a reassessment of the student's current needs, methods that appear to work and methods that do not work, and characteristics and approach of the clinician providing services that may be helpful or unhelpful, must take place. This reassessment should always involve the clinician that the student wishes to discontinue work with, as well as the new clinician, and based upon clinical discretion, possibly the director, clinical director, or supervisor of the current clinician. A decision will be made by the director or clinical director regarding assignment to the clinician best suited to help the student continue to improve with respect to identified goals, which may or may not result in re-assignment to a different clinician.

Parameters of After Hours Service Delivery

The UCC provides access to an on-call clinician who may be reached after hours on workdays and on weekends only by University of Pittsburgh students experiencing distress or faculty, staff, or parents with urgent concerns about a student's safety and well-being. The clinician on-call, available through an outside, contracted service provider, is equipped to respond to acute mental health crises via telephone. This service is not a venue for non-emergent counseling and consists of brief crisis intervention and problem solving followed by an appropriate referral for follow-up care.

Non-emergent calls will be referred for follow-up during regular UCC hours. In the case of imminent harm to the caller's self or others in their community, the on-call clinician may facilitate an evaluation at Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic Diagnostic Evaluation Center for a higher level of care and/or involve emergency response entities such as Resolve or the police to intervene as needed.

Students with medical or substance use concerns should be sent immediately to the hospital for medical evaluation. Students who are inebriated should be connected to medical care facilities until sober, before talking with the on-call clinician, since effective assessment or intervention is not possible when a student is inebriated.