

Washington Community and Technical Colleges Counselors' Association

Position Paper: *On Professional Staffing Standards of Counselors in Community and Technical Colleges*

May 30, 2000

Abstract

This paper lists and describes some of the documentation that proves the *intent* of Washington State's Community & Technical College Act is to provide an adequate, sound, and professionally staffed counseling program. Yet statistics clearly demonstrate a significant loss of counselors in the system throughout the past several years. The Washington Community and Technical College Counselor Association (WCTCCA) interpretation of the Act's intent relating to counseling programs are described through the following interrelated issues:

Staffing Standards

Washington State will provide counseling services at or above nationally recommended standards. These standards include comprehensive counseling programs which are staffed by faculty counselors holding at least a Master's Degree in a counseling-related field with a supervised practicum. Comprehensive counseling programs must also provide students with adequate access to those services through defined counselor to student ratios and funding guidelines.

Standards are the Responsibility of the State Board for Community & Technical Colleges

WCTCCA will demonstrate that state law and state-published documents show the State Board for Community & Technical Colleges is responsible for ensuring minimum counseling program criteria through personnel qualifications, and other guidelines and standards. Washington State, as mandated by the Community & Technical College Act and Master Plan, should be held accountable for counseling programs and staffing standards at the district and campus level, thus avoiding the need to safeguard and defend sound counseling programs on individual campuses. Staffing and program guidelines naturally include the need for adequate funding, which again should be addressed at the state level.

Fair Labor Practices and Collective Bargaining Agreements

WCTCCA will show that counseling functions must be performed by professional counseling faculty, and not by classified staff, para-professionals, managerial or other non-faculty positions. The demonstrated loss of counseling positions around the state is a reduction in force. Coupled with the clearly related trend of retitling faculty counseling duties under different job classifications, WCTCCA intends to demonstrate a violation of fair labor practices and collective bargaining agreements.

Position Paper:
***On Professional Staffing Standards of Counselors
in Community and Technical Colleges***

"Nowhere, perhaps, in the entire program of public education will the counseling function be more important than at this [the community college] level of educational experience...."

(Washington State Board of Education, 1961, p. 36)

The Washington Community and Technical College Counselor Association (WCTCCA) exists to promote professional and personal development of its membership (WCTCCA, n.d.). To accomplish these goals, WCTCCA holds conferences and workshops, provides opportunities for networking and consultation, and advocates on issues related to the counseling profession. WCTCCA identifies and initiates solutions for issues and concerns arising out of the counseling functions at community and technical college campuses. This role leads WCTCCA to assess, clarify, and promote professional standards for community and technical college counselors, as well as to promote statewide and institutional support. WCTCCA acts as spokesperson for professional standards and political issues affecting community and technical college counseling services.

Counseling Programs and Services

According to the *Washington State Student Services Manual* (Washington State Student Services Commission, 1998), "The mission of Washington state community and technical college Counseling Services is to maximize the potential of students to benefit from the educational environment by facilitating access, promoting student learning and teaching student success strategies" (p. 16). The manual defines counselors as "faculty members who have a minimum of a Master's Degree in counseling or a counseling-related field that includes a supervised practicum and internship in counseling" (p. 16), and further defines the role of a community and technical college counselor by the following: "Grounded in knowledge and theories of human development, counselors teach students how to identify and successfully achieve their academic, career and personal goals; and advocate for enhancement of the teaching and learning environment" (p. 15). Moreover, the student services manual describes the services and functions of counseling programs in Washington state community and technical colleges:

Counselors' primary goal is the teaching of strategies whereby students can develop critical thinking skills, set academic goals, engage in lifelong learning, develop skills for employment and personal wellness, and learn to interact in a diverse environment. Counseling is a catalyst for the continuous improvement of the institution by providing consultative services to faculty, staff and community....

Counselors work in partnership with all college staff to support student success. They collaborate with instruction, consulting and advocating for students with instructors regarding learning style, address complaints, handle complex situations, intervene in crises, and negotiate students' and instructors' rights....

Students benefit from counseling programs throughout their college experience.... The counseling process promotes individual and community well-being...." (p. 15-16).

Specific counseling duties are listed including: individual and group counseling; career counseling; interpreting tests that measure interests, skills, aptitudes and values; providing intervention through specific institutional systems; teaching Human Development courses; participating in committees; developing linkages with four-year colleges, K-12, federal, state, and local social service agencies; and other comprehensive functions.

A Walk Along Washington State's Community College Timeline

Early 1900's

Washington's two-year colleges emerge and is best described by John W. Gardner, "The greatest American educational invention of the nineteenth century was the land-grant college. The greatest American educational invention of the twentieth century is the two-year community college" (as cited in Washington State Board for Community College Education, 1970, p. 2).

Late 50's - early 60's

Post WWII prosperity and GI educational opportunities spurred rapid growth of community colleges across the country (Arthur D. Little, Inc., 1966, p. 13). Four-year institutions adopted more stringent admissions policies - two-year colleges "opened the door," providing universal access to the nation's growing numbers of highly diversified student bodies. The 60's saw enrollment more than double and unprecedented research took place, as well as local, regional and national funding and legislation.

In 1957, the Washington State Board of Education published a report from the Washington State Junior College Study Committee which stated "that provisions for counseling in considering the loads of the staff will become more essential since the counseling service is one of the most important services of the junior college" (p. 35), and recommended that "there be an increased emphasis on the expansion of the number of professional counselors" (p. 36).

In 1965, the Washington State Board of Education published in its *Long-Range Development Plan for Community Colleges* that "A sound counseling program is a fundamental responsibility of the community college" (p. 16).

The Carnegie Report

The national push for research and reporting is exemplified by what is known as the Carnegie Report (National Committee for Appraisal and Development of Junior College Student Personnel Programs, 1965). Carnegie Corporation provided funding for a two-year study of two-year college student personnel programs. In cooperation with the American Association of Junior Colleges, an independent national committee of prominent educators was appointed. The findings of the Carnegie Report are succinctly put through the following quote from that report: "The ultimate success of the comprehensive concept of higher education rests upon adequate guidance" (p. 20). The conclusions and recommendations of this National Committee became the

model for Community College Student Personnel programs across the country. "The Committee has attempted to summarize the characteristics of an effective program of student personnel services for two-year institutions" (p. 3). The Carnegie Report recommendations are summarized below:

1. Counseling is central to community college success in fulfilling its mission of providing open admission and comprehensive educational and service programs.
2. The comprehensive nature of the counseling function is described, as well as students need for continuous appraisal through the counseling function.
3. Professional counseling qualifications are defined as a two-year graduate degree in a Behavioral Science field with a supervised practicum.
4. National ratio standards are defined as an ideal of 1:300, not to exceed one counselor for every 500 students. [These figures are based on a comprehensive counseling model, where counselors perform advising and other functions in addition to personal counseling].
5. The need to ensure adequate funding for counseling programs is described.
6. Recommendations include institutional support for professional development.

By opening the door ... community colleges, therefore, have assumed the enormously difficult task of educating highly diversified student bodies. It is obvious that these institutions must provide highly differentiated educational programs. It should be equally clear that if students are to choose wisely ... they must be assisted. The student is likely to do these things effectively only if the college recognizes the process of self discovery [career, personal, academic] as one of its principal purposes, and if [its] services are adequate in scope and quality to give the student necessary assistance. For this reason, counseling and instruction are equal partners in the education of junior college students, more than at any other level of education (p. 2).

Policy Plan for Community College Education in the State of Washington

In response to the rising demand for educational opportunities and growing body of research on community colleges (which includes symposiums and conferences in Washington State featuring members of the Carnegie Commission), the 39th Session of the Washington Legislature directed the state to prepare a comprehensive plan for the organization of Community College education (Arthur D. Little, Inc., 1966). A Policy Plan was written (the Student Service portion of which was based in large part upon the recommendations of the Carnegie Report). The Plan states that "the degree to which the community college system in the State will be successful...will depend, in important part, upon a considerable expansion of the guidance and counseling function" (p. 38), and "The community college which appears best suited for today's tasks accepts students of widely varying ages, interests and capabilities, has at its heart a strong counseling center..." (p. 14).

Five basic elements of the comprehensive community college

1. First two-years of four-year degree programs
2. General education courses
3. Occupational education courses
4. Community services and adult education
5. Counseling and Guidance (p. 14).

The State must ensure that comprehensive educational programs and services are available within each college, so that students of widely different capabilities and interests can find within

each college a broad range of program offerings from which to choose, and the skilled guidance and counseling which will enable them to make sound choices. (p. 3).

Additionally, staff requirements, position descriptions and specifications of qualified personnel are mandated. Furthermore, the Policy Plan outlines how Washington State is responsible to ensure minimum standards. While individual districts are granted substantial independence, it is Washington State's responsibility to ensure that the intent of the law is carried out at each campus.

The State must ensure that whatever the desirable variations between and among community colleges may be, there is a satisfactory level of community college educational services being provided by every institution in the system...In addition to seeing that community college services and facilities are available to all its citizens, the State also has a responsibility to ensure that the programs being offered satisfy certain basic standards of quality and comprehensiveness. In other words, the range of programs offered in any college and the quality of the instruction and services being provided should not be fortuitous matters wholly dependent either upon local resources or local policies...The State therefore has an obligation ... to set guidelines, standards and criteria for defining what community college education should be so as to measure the adequacy of the programs and services being offered (p. 117-118).

The Community College Act of 1967 (and The Community & Technical College Act of 1991)

Based upon the Policy Plan (and the recommended model as reported by the Carnegie Commission), Washington state's Community College Act became law in 1967 (State Board for Community College Education, n.d.). Community colleges will "offer an open door to every citizen, regardless of his academic background or experience...and offer thoroughly comprehensive education, training and service programs" (p. 6). The supporting documentation upon which the Community College Act was based clearly shows that to achieve success in its mission of providing "open-door" (p. 4) admissions and "thoroughly comprehensive" (p. 6) programs, community colleges must provide students with adequate access to a professionally staffed, sound counseling program, because

Inherent in the open-door policy is the responsibility of all community colleges to provide educational opportunities for students with various occupational aspirations and with a broad range of interests, needs, and levels of abilities and intelligence. To make the open-door policy a reality, the community college must make available competent counseling services (State Board of Education and The State Board for Vocational Education, 1966, p. 2).

Professional qualifications, faculty status, counselors' comprehensive role, and ratio information are clearly defined within the supporting documentation.

The Washington State Community College System Master Plan

As mandated by the 1967 Act, the State Board is responsible for minimum standards and quality assurance (State Board for Community College Education, n.d.). This document also spells out the responsibility of the State Board for ensuring that the mission of the community college

system is met, guaranteeing that the people of Washington State be served by its mission. In answering the question, How will this be accomplished?, the Master Plan outlines the following:

The State Board does so by proposing system-wide goals and then allocating resources to achieve those goals. The State Board defines the purposes of community college education in Washington as follows: 1. To Serve the Individual...the achievement of these purposes will be supported by guidance and counseling. 2. To Serve the Community...3. To Serve the State...These purposes are to be achieved through the offering of a wide range of vocational training opportunities and related guidance services... (p. 7).

The Master Plan includes the specific goal to provide "guidance and placement counseling at or above nationally recommended levels" (p. 16). As we have shown national recommendations include definitions of professional counselors (with specific training and faculty status), as well as ratio guidelines (National Committee for Appraisal and Development of Junior College Student Personnel Programs, 1965). The final draft of the Master Plan listed one counselor for each 300 students as the nationally recommended ratio (Canfield, n.d., p. 23). The document further specifies that "The State Board asked the...Legislature for special funds to bring student services, especially guidance and counseling, up to standards. It is hoped that the implementation of budgeting formulas in future years will make this need more clearly identifiable" (p. 16).

Washington's Open Door Colleges

Comparing the State's Community Colleges with Recommendations by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education

In 1970, the State Board for Community & Technical Colleges published a report entitled *WASHINGTON'S OPEN DOOR COLLEGES: Comparing the State's Community Colleges with Recommendations by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education*. This report provides further evidence that the Carnegie Commission's findings were the model upon which Washington state's community college system was based. Of the comparison to Carnegie Commission findings, the State Board reports that

the influential body recommended directions for development of community college education in the United States. The Board approved for publication a report compiled by the staff to compare the system's performance against the Carnegie Commission recommendations. In general, the staff indicated that the state system was so much in line with the commission's recommendations that it could have served as their model (Washington State Board for Community College Education, 1970, p. 1).

The central question this report sought to answer was "*How has the state of Washington done in meeting the spirit of the Community College Act?*" and they did so by comparing the state's community college system to recommendations of the Carnegie Commission. "In supporting the goals of the system as outlined in *Design for Excellence* [the Master Plan] one of the objectives is 'to provide guidance and placement counseling at or above nationally recommended levels' " (p. 14). In working toward the recommended levels of guidance and placement counseling (which the state defines as one of the 5 basic elements of comprehensive colleges), "the state board...has developed a budget model for student personnel services...greater financial effort is

required to provide for adequate guidance services...and the real need for qualified guidance specialists" (p. 14). This study specifically lists each recommendation of the Carnegie Report followed by a report on the status of Washington's community colleges relative to the recommendations. The Carnegie Commission concludes (and the Washington study emphasizes) that "guidance is particularly critical for students who attend community colleges because many have not developed clear educational or vocational goals and a great many face the interrelated problems of financial, academic and personal pressures" (p. 14).

The Washington State Student Services Manual (for Community & Technical Colleges)

The Washington State Student Services Manual once routinely listed counselor to student ratio standards of 1:500. The current edition reports "The institution and the state must provide adequate financial resources to ensure the provision of a broad range of counseling services. This requires strong institutional commitment to provide necessary facilities, staffing, and operational funding" (Washington State Student Services Commission, 1998, p. 17). The Manual provides a description of the comprehensive nature of counseling, counselor qualifications and faculty status, and well-defined roles and functions.

Additional Documentation

Numerous additional research studies, reports, and recent legislation on educational reform support the counselor role in community colleges and significance of a sound counseling program in regard to institutional effectiveness and student success.

The International Association of Counseling Services

A national accrediting body for College and University Counseling Services, which gives further support to the standards as delineated above and are important in that Washington Community Colleges publishes its goal to meet or exceed national standards. (Morgan, 1992; Kiracofe, et al., 1994).

Educational Reform

Successful enrollment in appropriate educational programs, retention, program completion, and meaningful employment are directly related to the counseling function in the community college setting. These issues are also the focus of legislated educational reform; through national and state funding, institutions are beginning to be held accountable to outcomes in these areas. Still, counseling programs are not adequately funded to provide the services for which they were created. Can students who fail in the system hold the state and individual community colleges accountable for their failure if they can prove they did not have adequate access to those counseling services, which may have provided them with success? Further discussion of educational reform appears below.

Washington State Guidelines for Comprehensive Counseling and Career Guidance Programs K-14

The Washington State Guidelines for Comprehensive Counseling and Career Guidance Programs From Kindergarten Through Community and Technical College (Coats, Ash, & Dorsey, 1998) provides additional support to the central figure counselors are meant to play in Community Colleges. This document and others (National Committee for Appraisal and Development of Junior College Student Personnel Programs, 1965; Washington State Student Services Commission, 1998; State Board for Community College Education, n.d.) echo those cited above: counselors are defined through the comprehensive service they provide to students and the educational environment, professional status, ratio guidelines, adequate funding, facilities and professional development opportunities.

A Confidential Report on the Finance and Operation of Washington's Community-Junior Colleges

The community colleges in meeting enrollment increases have been consistently understaffed and the faculty overloaded, as measured by appropriate college standards. The operating districts in many instances have been slow to make provision for auxiliary services, such as librarians, counselors...reluctant to find reason for admitting the necessity of providing the level of services for which the college students are paying and for which funds have been provided in the apportionment formula (Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1961, p. 7-8).

As we have shown, the state has the obligation to set guidelines and maintain standards for staffing and service. We have demonstrated the intent of the Community College Act in regard to counselor staffing standards. There was once an allocation procedure to ensure adequate staffing of librarians and counselors. Is it still being used? If not, why not? If not through a specific allocation procedure, how does the state now ensure adequate staffing standards and quality assurance of comprehensive counseling services?

Community College Counselors are defined by law

We do not need to win this argument. Community College Counselors are faculty members with at least a Master's Degree in counseling (or closely related field) and a supervised practicum (Washington Administrative Code 131-16-080; 131-16-091, 1998). Counselors have full faculty rank and privilege, and inclusion in the same academic bargaining unit as other faculty (Revised Code of Washington, 28B.50.051, 1998). WCTCCA stipulates that districts cannot violate fair labor practices or collective bargaining agreements by hiring non-faculty to perform counseling duties.

Summary

On the whole, WCTCCA views the loss of counseling positions around the state as a direct violation of state law, contract agreements, fair labor practices, professional standards, Student Services Commissions standards, accreditation standards, research indications, ethical considerations, student rights, and the intention of educational reform.

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