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**An Analysis of Counselling Services in Ontario Colleges**  
**Initial Report**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Counselling staff have been a key component of the Ontario College system since its inception in 1967, but their role, unlike that of teaching faculty, is framed in a fairly vague one page “Class Definition” at the end of the Academic Employees Collective Agreement. They are utilized across the province according to the wishes and needs of their respective colleges. Although it is understood and widely accepted that there is variability in the counsellor role across the system, the similarities and differences have never been comprehensively documented.

The study reported on here was designed to provide a comprehensive description of counsellor characteristics, determine how counselling is delivered in Ontario colleges, identify models/approaches to counselling delivery, identify strengths and weaknesses associated with each model and develop realistic service delivery guidelines/benchmarks that incorporate ethical practice, professional regulatory requirements and fiscal realities.

Information was gathered via questionnaires targeted at counsellors and managers of counselling departments and with focus groups and interviews. Essentially 100% of each of the two target groups participated in the data collection phase. Additional contextual information regarding student enrollment and counsellor complement by college and year as well as counselling services delivery statistics, where available, were obtained in order to aid in the interpretation of the findings summarized in the paragraphs that follow.

System growth has outpaced the increase in counselling complement by six times from 2007 to 2012. Full-time enrolment in the college system grew from 167,000 to 210,600, a 26% increase while the number of counsellors increased from 146 to 152.7, an increase of 4.6%. Growth was highest in the mid-sized colleges where the number of counsellors actually decreased by 7%, and the counsellor-student ratio increased at twice the rate of the provincial average (39% and 20.5% respectively). The combination of more students and fewer counselling resources has had a number of impacts. Medium-college counsellors for example do less outreach (most notably in the area of student workshops), report the most involvement in student appeals and are least likely to report they use all of their professional development days. In more general terms across the system, the increase in student population and the more complex and diversified personal needs which characterize them, has resulted in counsellors doing increasingly more personal counselling (60% as a percentage of time) and less academic (26%) and career (16%) counselling.

The narrowing of the counsellor role has also been accompanied by the proliferation of advisory roles within the system. Focus group discussions revealed 28 different titles (academic advisor, student success specialist, career consultant, etc.) across colleges and many counsellors indicated the roles had been largely established within the past five years. Criticisms that were expressed centred on the lack of role



clarity, role overlap and insufficient job definition within the system. These challenges were seen to run counter to the need for campus support services to meet student needs with a well-integrated system characterized by clear roles and succinct referral protocols to ensure that the appropriate service is provided by the most qualified service provider.

In addition to the traditional conceptualization of the college counsellor role (academic, career and personal) the study revealed over one quarter of counsellors reported doing 10+ cases of “student behaviour consultation with faculty/managers” a year with one third reporting the same frequency of “risk assessment” cases. Counsellors are seen as bringing skilled expertise to the table in assessing risk and putting reasonable measures in place to ensure student safety. Generally, the past decade has seen an increased expectation that colleges take all reasonable measures to ensure a safe and secure campus environment for students, staff and faculty. Not to do so may result in a college being found liable for negligence. A fear frequently expressed by counsellors in focus groups was that of “missing something” and being blamed for a student tragedy.

It is estimated that 18% of college students accessed counselling in 2010-11. This figure is based on service statistics obtained from thirteen colleges representing 142,862 students, or 68% of the provincial FTE. The range between colleges, however, was from 7.5% to 33.2%. The average number of visits per student was 2.36, based on 24,310 students accessing the counselling services of 103 counsellors 55,457 times.

Counsellors elaborated 32 different kinds of counselling approaches used across the system. The three leading approaches were Solution Focused Therapy, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Crisis Intervention.

Many counsellors described an active tension between pressures to specialize the counsellor role with a greater emphasis on more clinical practice versus a more “generalist” role that balances academic, career and personal counselling and places more emphasis on preventive work. Indeed, 43% of counsellors reported that the mental health issues of students consumed more than 60% of their time, and 90% reported that these demands had a “profound” or “very much” of an impact on the way they did their job. Many counsellors reported that their counselling departments had become “crisis centres” and that dealing with emergency situations was a much more frequent component of their role. Based on data from nine colleges, 840 crisis events were reported, averaging 11.1 per counsellor/year. There are increasing numbers of students attending college with mental health diagnoses or presenting with the symptoms of such for a number of reasons including reduced societal stigma, improvements in medication and treatment and more effective accommodation practices at college campuses. Indeed, attendance at a college is often a core part of a diagnosed student’s treatment plan. The pressures of academic life impact already vulnerable students making it all the more important to provide the supports necessary to help them cope and adapt. College counselling departments are recognized as providing high quality, accessible counselling services and this has also resulted in an increasing number of colleges experiencing “reverse referrals”; hospitals

and community agencies referring students back to college counselling departments because of much shorter waiting lists and no user fees.

Linkages to community-based counselling support are characterized by waitlists in small and large colleges alike, in fact larger colleges were the most likely to report it is “very difficult” to refer students to community counselling resources. This has resulted in the “bridging function”, where college counsellors see students during their time on a waitlist, being required for a broader range of more complex mental health issues.

The impact of student diversity was defined very broadly by counsellors and counselling managers alike. Besides those most commonly mentioned, culture/linguistic, age and sexual orientation, other dimensions included students coming from poverty, weak academic ability, students struggling with addiction issues, the wide range of mental health issues and Autism Spectrum Disorder. Counsellors all spoke about the demands and challenges of effectively accommodating an ever-increasing diversity of students in the college system, a key mandate of which is to promote access to postsecondary study. Notable in the conversations were the challenges of marketing counselling services to cultures unfamiliar with the counselling role, the increased level of violent trauma experienced by refugee students and the immense language and settlement issues faced by a growing number of international students who are becoming an essential revenue source for many colleges. A common criticism of the policy to improve access with programs such as Second Career and WSIB, was that often little thought was given to the services required to support the special challenges of adult students long out of school.

The provision of counselling services to Aboriginal students was described as being significantly different by Aboriginal counsellors, non-Aboriginal counsellors and counselling managers alike. Aboriginal counsellors are much more likely to work with external organizations, particularly dealing with issues related to student funding, and described attempts to balance the demand for community building with direct service delivery. Aboriginal counsellors were also more likely to see students on a drop-in basis (64.6%) rather than by appointment (35.4%) This is almost the inverse of what was reported by non-Aboriginal counsellors (32% and 68% respectively). All counsellors described the particular vulnerabilities of Aboriginal students such as generational oppression, culture shock and “complicated and traumatic” backgrounds.

Almost three quarters (70%) of college counsellors and 40% of counselling managers planned to register with the College of Registered Psychotherapists and Registered Mental Health Therapists. College counsellors generally saw the regulation of psychotherapy as increasing public safety, improving professional standards, providing more legitimacy for, and clarifying the counselling role within colleges. Fears regarding impending regulation generally derived from the potential inclusion of practitioners with lower than a Master’s level credential resulting in the hiring of less qualified counsellors and a reduction in service quality.

The study distinguished models of counselling delivery utilizing two approaches; “blended/non-blended” and “generalist-specialist”. Counsellors in colleges with the “blended” model, comprising one third of Ontario colleges, engage in both disability counselling and general counselling duties. In a “non-blended” model, the two functions are essentially split where some counsellors focus exclusively on general counselling and disability work is carried out by other counsellors (or staff who are not faculty counsellors) usually in a separate department. Strengths, weaknesses and complexities of these models were explored.

For a number of reasons, most notably the variations which existed within both the “blended” and “non-blended” models, another categorization was developed utilizing a “generalist-specialist” continuum that resulted in four models: most generalist, moderately generalist, moderately specialist and most specialist. Counsellor responses regarding the distribution of their time in each of the three classic areas of academic, career and personal were used to compute a “total deviation” from the case of the “pure generalist” practice where counsellors spend equal time on each of the three categories of service. This method showed that thirteen colleges could be classified in the “generalist” category, while ten were classified as colleges in the “specialist” category. The study engaged in a preliminary analysis to determine whether the four models were associated with meaningful differences in various dimensions that described service delivery and institutional characteristics. Information that is currently available, however, does not allow us to draw any definitive conclusions regarding the relative efficacy of the four models.

Both counsellors and counselling managers expressed a high degree of job satisfaction using a ten point scale (7.8 and 8.19 respectively). The results of managers’ ratings of their effectiveness in meeting student support needs (8.36) and those of counsellors (7.8) showed a somewhat larger difference.

The findings of this study suggested benchmarks or service delivery guidelines in six main areas: the need for timely access to counselling services by students; the importance of counsellors in behaviour management and risk assessment; the collection of counselling service delivery statistics across the Ontario college system; the use of brief therapies as methods used by college counsellors in their work; the need for an explicit and integrated policy framework to support counselling services in institutions as well as system-wide; and, accommodating the impact of regulation by the Ontario College of Registered Psychotherapists and Registered Mental Health Therapists.

## An Analysis of Counselling Services in Ontario Colleges

### INTRODUCTION

Counsellors have been a part of the Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (CAAT) system since its inception in 1967, but their role, unlike that of teaching faculty, is framed in a fairly vague one page “Class Definition” at the end of the Academic Employees Collective Agreement. Counsellors are members of the same bargaining unit as faculty, work on the basis of a 35 hour week, but unlike teaching faculty do not receive a Standard Workload Form documenting their work assignment for the semester. They are utilized across the province according to the wishes and needs of their respective colleges. Although it is understood and widely accepted that there is variance in the counsellor role across the system, the similarities and differences have never been comprehensively assessed and documented.

The role of the college counsellor has received increasing attention, in particular over the past five years, as colleges and universities across North America have witnessed an increase in demand by students on their counselling departments. Not only does there appear to be what some describe as “alarming” rates of mental health and addiction issues, students are presenting with more complex needs, more often require services in crisis situations and are more likely to expect service on a walk-in basis. This phenomenon is corroborated by counsellors and administrators across the entire postsecondary system in Canada. All of this is occurring within a context of budgetary constraints where college administrators have to make fundamental choices about how to organize and structure student services in order to meet the needs of the greatest number of students. Inherent in these choices is a consideration of the counsellor role and their deployment on campus.

### Background Context

There are a number of convergent factors that make an examination of the college counsellor role in Ontario colleges very timely. Among these are:

- ***Increasing recognition and acknowledgement across the province of the need to better meet the needs of students with mental health and addiction issues***

According to Dr. Bruce Ferguson, Director of Community Health Systems Resource Group, Hospital for Sick Children, one in four students in PSE will experience a serious mental health or addiction issue while in their program of study. Levels of “distress” experienced by students on Canadian campuses are generally perceived to be on the increase. On October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2010 representatives from every college and university in Ontario convened in Toronto for the first ever Mental Health and Addictions in Post-Secondary Education Summit. At the morning plenary, Dr. Ferguson simply summed up the “reason we are all here”;

- i. “Data from colleges and universities indicate what could be alarming rates of mental health and substance abuse problems among students
- ii. Reports suggest that the rates have increased over the past two decades
- iii. Mental health and addiction issues interfere with academic success and cause students to leave programs without graduating
- iv. Any student loss represents a societal, institutional and personal cost
- v. It’s our responsibility to give all students the best chance to succeed”

- ***Government policy aimed at improving access and success***

For some time, the Ontario government has focused policy on increasing access to postsecondary education for those who have not traditionally participated. In addition, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities has implemented a policy requiring colleges to increase their student graduation rates from the existing 65% to 70% by 2020. This has created an increased focus on student retention and an incentive for colleges to develop strategies to more effectively support student success.

- ***The impending regulation of "psychotherapy"***

In order to practice “psychotherapy” which was defined with the passage of the Psychotherapy Act in 2007, practitioners will have to register as of April, 2014 with the newly formed Ontario College of Registered Psychotherapists and Registered Mental Health Therapists (OCRPRMH). Counsellors across the province practice psychotherapy as a part of their role in college counselling departments according to the existing definition. The majority of college counsellors in the province are presently "unregulated". The Act has a number of implications not only for counsellors, but for the colleges as employers as well.

- ***Renewed interest in province-wide counselling information***

Counsellors in Ontario belong to a “networking group” called the Ontario College Counsellors (OCC). This association, established in 1972, promotes quality in college counselling. After many years of debate, the group voted in November 2011 to investigate developing a system/process to collect province-wide information on counselling staff and service delivery characteristics.

- ***Interest in documenting counselling services to students with mental health issues***

In 2011, Cambrian College conducted a HEQCO-funded study that examined the number of students with mental health issues receiving services from counselling departments across Ontario. The study examined the number of students being treated for mental health issues on campus, their demographic characteristics, and the types and severity of mental health issues that students presented. It also explored the ways in which mental health issues affected academic performance, and the types of

accommodations and strategies being used to lessen the adverse effects.” The study was published in the Spring, 2011 and is available via <http://www.heqco.ca/en-CA/Research/Funded%20Research/Pages/default.aspx>.

The factors described above argue for a comprehensive examination of counselling services in Ontario colleges including how these services are delivered, changes that might have resulted from policies focused on increased access and student diversity as well as potential issues arising from the impending regulation of psychotherapy.

## **Project Goals and Objectives**

The *Analysis of Counselling Services in Ontario Colleges* project was designed to improve our understanding of the current state of counselling services in Ontario colleges. The following research questions were addressed by the project.

1. How are counselling services being delivered across the Ontario college system?
2. What service guidelines or benchmarks should guide colleges in the effective utilization of counsellors?
3. What are the implications of 2007 Psychotherapy Act?

Anticipated outcomes for the project were:

1. A comprehensive description of counselling services in Ontario colleges
2. Identify models/approaches to counselling delivery
3. Identify strengths and weaknesses associated with each model
4. Develop realistic service delivery guidelines/benchmarks that incorporate ethical practices, professional regulatory requirements and fiscal realities.

## **Project management**

The project had two main groups of informants that assisted in its development and implementation. These were:

1. A College Contact Group comprised of counsellors at each college who acted as liaison and provided logistical support in setting up the counsellor focus groups and manager interviews.
2. An Advisory Committee consisting of counsellors from individual colleges, counsellors representing the OCC Executive, a manager of counselling services and an MTCU representative. The group provided ongoing advice and comprehensive feedback during the questionnaire development phase. The Advisory Committee also provided an initial response to the interim project results before they were made public.

## **METHODS**

### **Development of Data Collection Instruments**

Based on his extensive experience with counsellors and the delivery of counselling services in Ontario Colleges, Mr. Jim Lees created draft survey questionnaires targeted at counsellors and managers of counselling services that examined five major areas. This included the demographic and professional characteristics of college counsellors and managers, the work performed by counsellors on a day-to-day basis, characteristics of service delivery including treatment methods and modes, the impact of specific student attributes such as age, gender and ethnicity, Aboriginal status and mental health issues, and the institutional context in which they worked including the degree of collaboration with other stakeholders, perceived support by college administration and job satisfaction.

Following several revisions in consultation with Dr. Peter Dietsche, the drafts of both questionnaires were submitted to the Advisory Committee for review and comment. After further revisions the penultimate drafts were piloted with a sample of counsellors and managers of counselling departments to ensure clarity. The final versions of the questionnaires, provided in Appendix A, consisted of 70 questions for counsellors and 65 questions for managers of counselling services.

### **FIPPA Assurance**

In order to access the questionnaire, participants were provided a web address and a password. The home page provided a description of the project goals, a section that guaranteed the anonymity of respondents and that asked for their explicit consent to participate.

Before subjects participated in either focus groups or interviews, they were asked to read and sign a consent form which included a description of the goals of the study. All participants were assigned a numerical code that replaced the names of speakers in the transcript version of the focus groups and interviews. Verbatim quotes used in the body of the report are not attributed to specific individuals and no individual can be identified.

Participants were also guaranteed that the identity of individual colleges would not be disclosed unless approval to do so was obtained from a college representative.

### **Data Collection Methods**

Information from counsellors and managers of counselling departments was collected via web-based questionnaires in both French and English. The questionnaires contained both open and closed response items. The address/location of the survey site was circulated to all counsellors and counselling managers using both the OCC listserv and the Head of Student Affairs (HOSA) listserv. The questionnaires were posted for a

three-week period from October 26 to November 16, 2011. A series of emails was used to publicize the survey: two “teaser” emails were sent out before the three week window was open and four “gentle reminder” emails were utilized to maximize the response rate.

Focus groups were conducted at each of the 24 colleges with those counsellors who were interested in participating and lasted approximately 90 minutes. The groups, limited to a maximum of six participants, were held between November 7, 2011 and February 14, 2012 and followed an 11 question semi-structured protocol. Conversations were digitally recorded and transcribed for analysis. A total of 120 counsellors participated in 30 focus groups with six colleges requiring two sessions due to the large numbers of participants.

Managers of counselling departments at each college participated in interviews structured with a 13 question guide that largely paralleled the counsellor protocol and lasted approximately 60 minutes. These discussions were digitally recorded and transcribed for analysis. A total of 30 managers participated in 24 interviews. The interview and focus group protocols are available in Appendix A.

### **Additional Data Collected**

A number of additional data elements were obtained to provide contextual information for Ontario colleges during the period 2006-2011. This included a request to OCAS to provide full-time enrollment statistics for all years and fee categories by college for the period 2006-2011. The enrollment data were used to assess the potential demand for counselling by students at each Ontario College during this period.

Second, to assess the supply side of a supply-demand equation, the total counsellor complement for each year during the period 2007-2011 was provided by the counselling coordinator or manager at each college.

Lastly, an email was sent to all managers of counselling departments in February, 2012 asking that, if possible, they submit key statistics regarding their service delivery for the 2010-11 academic year. The request was accompanied by a set of interpretive notes provided in Appendix B. Seventeen colleges were able to provide some of the statistics requested. Of these, thirteen colleges were able to provide the number of students who saw counsellors and the total number of visits. The aggregate information from these institutions represents 68% (142,862/210,029) of the FTE student population for the Ontario college system in the academic year 2010-11.

### **Data Analysis**

Throughout the report, the survey results for counsellors and managers of counselling are examined by college size. For this analysis, small colleges were defined as those with less than 5,000 FTE in 2009-2010, medium sized colleges had an FTE between 5,000 and 9,999 and large colleges had 10,000 FTE or more. Categorizing all colleges in this way places nine in the small college group representing 22.9% of



counsellors, seven in the medium size category representing 27.6% of counsellors, and classifies eight as large colleges comprising almost half (49.4%) of all college counsellors.

Table 1 identifies where each of the twenty four Ontario colleges lies within this classification system.

Table 1: Classification of Colleges by Size

Small Colleges (under 5,000)	Medium Colleges (5,000 – 9,999)	Large Colleges (10,000 +)
Collège Boréal	Conestoga	Algonquin
Cambrian	Durham	Centennial
Canadore	Fleming	Fanshawe
Confederation	Georgian	George Brown
La Cité Collégiale	Niagara	Humber
Lambton	St. Clair	Mohawk
Loyalist	St. Lawrence	Seneca
Northern		Sheridan
Sault		

The data collected via the counsellor and manager surveys were analyzed using SPSS. Focus group and interview transcripts were reviewed by the researchers for recurring themes and were summarized for each question of the semi-structured counsellor focus groups and manager interviews.

## RESULTS

The findings from the surveys of counsellors and managers of counselling services are summarized in the section below.

### Results of the Counsellor Survey

The survey of counsellors resulted in 172 responses representing almost all counsellors either employed in a college full- or part-time, who were on leave in the survey year, or who were Aboriginal or disability counsellors. The number of respondents from each college is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Number of Counsellor Respondents by College

College	N	College	N	College	N
Algonquin	9	Fanshawe	13	Loyalist	3
Cambrian	1	Fleming	10	Mohawk	8

Canadore	5	George Brown	13	Niagara	6
Centennial	4	Georgian	10	Sault	7
Boreal	4	Fanshawe	13	Seneca	16
Conestoga	7	Humber	11	Sheridan	11
Confederation	6	La Cite	8	St. Clair	6
Durham	1	Lambton	6	St. Lawrence	7
				Total	172

### Demographic and Professional Profile of Ontario College Counsellors

There are twenty-four colleges in Ontario. All but one college employs counsellors as defined by the Academic Employees Collective Agreement.

The majority of respondents identified themselves as either full time (88.9%) or sessional (5.8%). A sessional counsellor typically works full time for a set contract period. A small percentage (5.3%) identified themselves as part time. The results also show that eight in ten college counsellors are women (80.5%).

As depicted in Table 3, the majority of respondents indicated their title was ‘counsellor’, followed by Aboriginal counsellor and Disability counsellor. The six who responded with “other” identified themselves as career counsellor, counsellor pedagogique, counselling coordinator, counsellor/learning strategist, education counsellor, psychologist and student life counsellor.

Table 3: Variation in Counsellor Title

Title	N	%
Counsellor	147	85.5
Disability Counsellor	7	4.1
Aboriginal Counsellor	11	6.4
International Counsellor	1	0.6
Other	6	3.5
Total	172	100

Table 4 shows the largest group of counsellors reported they were in their 40’s and 50’s (60.6%) and that only four respondents were under thirty years of age.

Table 4: Age Distribution of College Counsellors

Age	N	Percent
<30	4	2.4
30-39	35	20.6
40-49	51	30.0
50-59	52	30.6
60+	28	16.5
Total	170	100

The dominant age group also varies according to college size as shown in Table 5. The largest group in small colleges was counsellors in their 30's (28.2%). Medium size colleges were dominated by counsellors in their 40's (44.7%) while 31% of counsellors in large colleges were in their 50's. One in five counsellors in small colleges was 60 years plus, while this is true for 15% of counsellors in medium and large colleges.

Table 5: Counsellor Age by College Size

Age	College Size		
	Small	Medium	Large
< 30 (%)	2.6	0	3.6
(n)	(1)	(0)	(3)
30-39 (%)	28.2	6.4	25.0
(n)	(11)	(3)	(21)
40-49 (%)	23.1	44.7	25.0
(n)	(9)	(21)	(21)
50-59 (%)	25.6	34.0	31.0
(n)	(10)	(16)	(26)
60+ (%)	20.5	14.9	15.5
(n)	(8)	(7)	(13)

Consistent with the age distribution, almost one half (44.7%) of Ontario's college counsellors indicated they would retire within ten years, and 20% indicated they intended to retire within 1 to 4 years. Differences were also noted with college size. While roughly the same percentage of counsellors in small (23.1%) and medium (23.4%) size colleges reported they would retire within 1 to 4 years, the figure was somewhat lower (16.7%) for large colleges.

Overall, the largest proportion, one third of respondents, indicated they had less than five years of experience as a college counsellor perhaps reflecting recent hiring due to retirements. The next largest groups had either five to nine years of experience (21.4%) or twenty or more years of experience (22.6%). The smallest proportion (5.4%) of counsellors reported having fifteen to nineteen years of experience, likely reflecting the reduced hiring that occurred during the recessionary period of the early 1990s.

Table 6: Years of Experience as College Counsellor

Years	N	Percent
<5 years	56	33.3
5 - 9	36	21.4
10 - 14	29	17.3
15 - 19	9	5.4
20+	38	22.6
Total	168	100

An analysis by college size showed that while 41.0% of counsellors in small colleges reported less than five years of experience, a much smaller percentage of counsellors in medium (26.7%) and large colleges (33.3%) reported this amount of experience. As with the overall results, the proportion of counsellors with 15-19 years of experience was significantly lower for small (5.1%), medium (8.9%) and large colleges (3.6%).

The findings also showed the vast majority of college counsellors (87.6%) have had experience outside the college system. Almost 40% of college counsellors had ten or more years of counselling experience outside the college sector. So even though one-third of college counsellors presently practicing have less than five years of experience in colleges, they tend to have had a considerable amount of experience in community agencies, resulting in a more “middle aged” demographic.

Table 7: Counsellor Experience Outside Colleges

Years	N	Percent
0	21	12.4
<5 years	44	26.0
5 - 9	38	22.5
10 - 14	26	15.4
15 - 19	18	10.7
20+	22	13.0
Total	169	100
Missing	3	
Total	172	

In both small and large colleges, those with less than five years of external experience comprised the largest group, 30.8% and 31% respectively. In medium sized colleges, there was a much more even spread among the experience categories, with 10-14 years of experience being the most common (21.76%).

Somewhat more than one quarter (28.7%) of respondents reported they were either currently a coordinator of counselling or had held the role in the past. More than half (53.8%) of those who have served in the role had done so for three or more years. Interestingly, while male counsellors account for 19% of the overall population, they were more than twice as likely to be, or have been, a coordinator (51.5% of males versus 22.8% of females).

When asked to report all the academic credentials they had obtained, 14.5 % of respondents indicated they held a college diploma. Bachelor’s level preparation ranged from general B.A. (49.4%), B.S.W. (15.1%), B. Ed. (15.1%), and “other” Bachelors (13.4%). The “other” category consists of a varied mix of credentials including

Anthropology, Occupational Therapy, Science, DESS Adm. Publique, Human Kinetics, Biological Science and Enseignement.

Table 8 shows that the three most frequent Master's level credentials were the M.Ed. Counselling (36%), the M.S.W. (22.1%) and the M.A. Psychology/Clinical Psych/Psychotherapy (9.3%). The Masters "other" category was sorted into five sub-categories. Since the listing is non-exclusive and counsellors may have more than one Master's degree, it is estimated that perhaps 90% of Ontario college counsellors have Master's level preparation. This is consistent with the Ontario College Counsellor Registrar's listing of the 2010-11 membership that indicates 95% hold a Master's degree. Three quarters (75.9%) of those holding Master's degrees indicate that the degree involved a supervised clinical practicum. Nine respondents (5.2%) report attaining a doctoral degree.

Table 8: Master's Credentials Held by Ontario College Counsellors

Credential	N	Percent
M.Ed. Counselling	62	36.0
M.S.W.	41	23.8
M.A. Psychology/Clinical Psych/Psychotherapy	16	9.3
Master's (other)	38	22.1
Breakdown of Master's (other)		
Counselling/Counselling Psych./MFT	11	(6.4)
Academic disciplines	10	(5.8)
Divinity/Religious Studies	7	(4.0)
Education	7	(4.0)
Misc.	3	(1.7)
Total	38	22.1

The majority (60.2%) of counsellors reported they are not currently practicing under the auspices of a regulatory college. When asked about membership in the new College of Registered Psychotherapists and Registered Mental Health Therapists of Ontario, 70.6% said they intended to apply for registration. There was less certainty about the type of membership in that almost 40% of respondents had not decided whether to apply as Registered Psychotherapists or Registered Mental Health Therapists. Of those who had decided, almost half (49%) of respondents indicated their intention to apply for the Registered Psychotherapist level of membership.

### Scope of the Counsellor Role

The traditionally held and most basic definition of college counselling comprises three different but interrelated functions; academic advisement, career exploration and personal counselling. Counsellors were asked to indicate the percentage of time they typically devoted to each area. Personal counselling (59.9%) was reported by respondents

as the category of service to which they devoted the majority of their time, followed by academic advisement (24.0%) and career counselling (16.4%). The minimums and maximums shown in Table 9, however, indicate considerable variation occurs between counsellors.

Table 9: Mean Counsellor Time by Function (%)

Function	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Academic advisement	138	0	75	24.0	15.9
Career counselling	136	0	70	16.4	12.6
Personal counselling	140	10	100	59.9	22.2

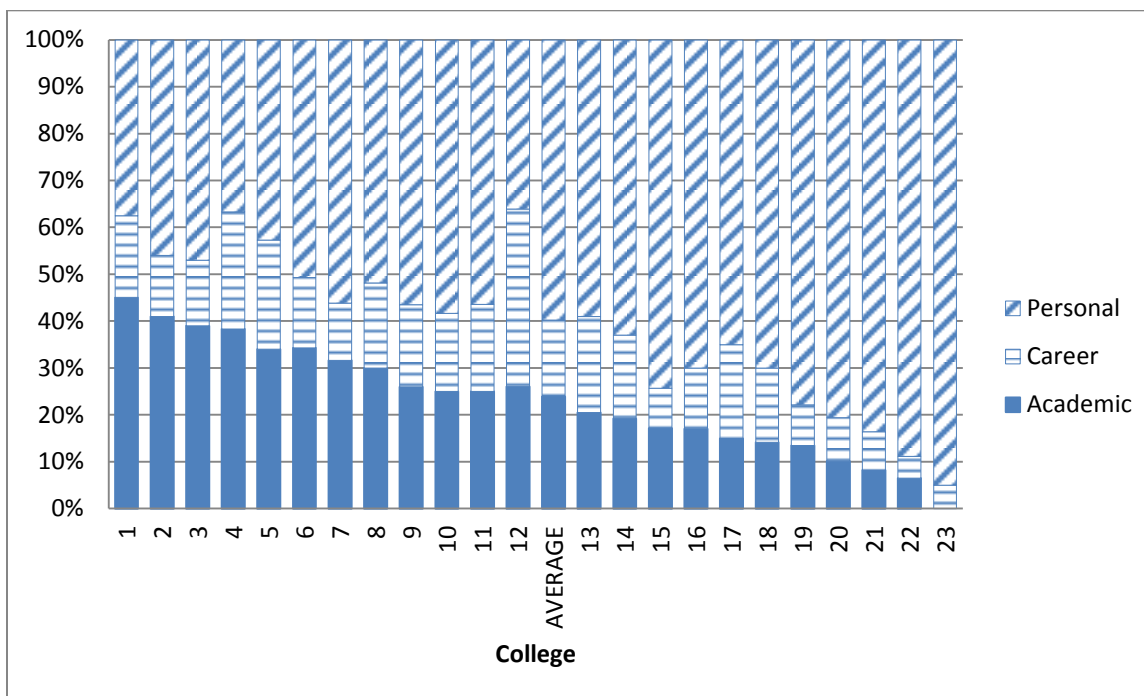
When analyzed by college size, counsellors from small colleges indicated that academic advisement constituted almost 30% of their time compared to 21.5% for those in large institutions. Table 10 also shows that counsellors in small colleges reported doing the highest percentage of career counselling (19.9%), relative to those in medium sized colleges who reported the lowest percentage (12.2%). While personal counselling consumed the largest percentage of counsellor time across all college sizes, counsellors in medium size colleges reported the highest percentage of time (66.3%) devoted to personal counselling.

Table 10: Mean Counsellor Time by Function and College Size

College Size	Function		
	Academic	Career	Personal
Small	28.6	19.9	50.4
Medium	24.3	12.2	66.3
Large	21.5	16.9	61.3
Total	24.1	16.4	59.9

An analysis of the distribution of counsellor time by college showed considerable inter-institutional variation. Figure 1 shows the average amount of time counsellors reported spending on their three roles by college ranked from highest to lowest using the value for academic advisement. The results for only 23 colleges are displayed since one college does not employ counselling staff. The range for academic advisement is quite broad, from almost half of counsellors' time at College 1 to no time spent on academic at College 23.

Figure 1: Distribution of Counsellor Function by College (%)



Across the college system, counsellors spend the least amount of their time with students focusing on career exploration. It was noted that four of the six colleges reporting the least amount of career exploration (mean less than 10%) are medium-sized colleges with one each in the small and large college categories. Of the five colleges reporting the most activity in career exploration (20% or greater), three are small colleges. There is only one medium college and one large college reporting this level of activity focused on career exploration. The college with the most time dedicated to career exploration reported 36% of counsellor time spent on this role, substantially higher than the 25% reported by the two second place colleges.

The results clearly show that counsellors in Ontario colleges reported spending the majority of their time engaged in personal counselling. Counsellors at seven colleges reported an average of 70% or more of their time in personal counselling. The seven are quite evenly distributed across the three college sizes with two being large, three medium and two small colleges. The three colleges with the highest percentage of counsellor time devoted to personal counselling all reported averages in excess of 85%. The three colleges with the lowest average time dedicated to personal counselling were still reporting spending more than 1/3 of their time in this area.

In order to gain a more comprehensive picture of the scope of the counsellor role, respondents were asked to assess the amount of “outreach activity” they did in an academic year under four broad categories outlined in Tables 11 to 14: student workshops, guest speaking in professor’s classes, training student leaders/student employees and providing training for faculty/staff. About half of the respondents

indicated that they do “a little” (less than 5 times per year) guest speaking in professor’s classes and training staff/faculty. The highest rate of participation was reported in the student workshop category with 85.4% of respondents participating at some level, followed by guest speaking (73.2%), training staff and faculty (59.4%) and training student leaders/employees (48.1%). Respondents were also asked to document in detail the outreach activities they were engaged in and these are summarized in Appendix C.

Table 11: Delivering Student Workshops Outside of Class

Frequency	N	Percent
I do not participate in this	23	14.6
I do a little of this (under 5 sessions per year)	60	38
I do a moderate amount of this (5 to 9 sessions per year)	35	22.2
I do a lot of this (10 + cases per year)	40	25.3
Total	158	100
Missing	14	
Total	172	

Table 12: Guest Speaking in Professor’s Classes

Frequency	N	Percent
I do not participate in this	42	26.8
I do a little of this (under 5 sessions per year)	82	52.2
I do a moderate amount of this (5 to 9 sessions per year)	21	13.4
I do a lot of this (10 + cases per year)	12	7.6
Total	157	100
Missing	15	
Total	172	

Table 13: Training Student Leaders/Student Employees

Frequency	N	Percent
I do not participate in this	82	51.9
I do a little of this (under 5 sessions per year)	54	34.2
I do a moderate amount of this (5 to 9 sessions per year)	10	6.3
I do a lot of this (10 + cases per year)	12	7.6
Total	158	100
Missing	14	
Total	172	



Table 14: Training Staff/Faculty

Frequency	N	Percent
I do not participate in this	63	40.6
I do a little of this (under 5 sessions per year)	75	48.4
I do a moderate amount of this (5 to 9 sessions per year)	17	11
Total	155	100
Missing	17	
Total	172	

Figures 2 to 5 provide a breakdown of the four categories of outreach activity by college size. Counsellors were much more likely to conduct student workshops at large and small colleges than at medium sized colleges. Over one half (57.7%) of counsellors in large colleges reported doing moderate/a lot of this activity with almost half (47.2%) from small colleges reporting the same. In contrast, only 22.7% of counsellors in medium size colleges reported this level of activity.

Those in large colleges were also most likely (26%) to report guest speaking in professors' classes either "a moderate amount" or "a lot". The figures for small and medium size colleges were 18% and 13.7%, respectively. Counsellors in small colleges were the most likely to train student leaders and student staff "a moderate amount/a lot" (27.7%), with much less of this reported by those in medium (4.4%) and large colleges (13%). Counsellors in small colleges were also most likely to report training staff/faculty "a moderate amount/a lot" (17.1%) compared to those from medium (4.5%) and large colleges (11.8%). Overall, counsellors from medium sized colleges report the least amount of outreach activity.

Figure 2: Time Devoted to Student Workshops by College Size

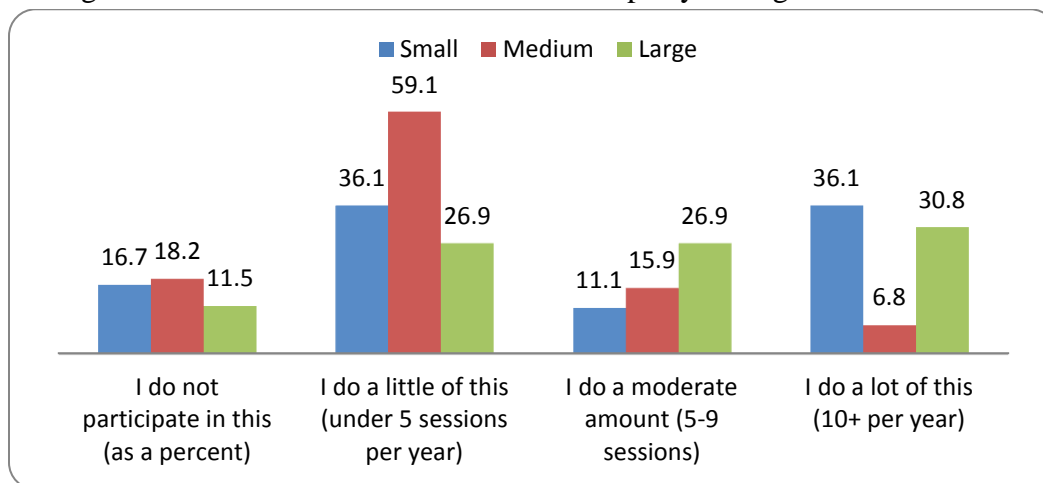


Figure 3: Time Devoted to Guest Speaking by College Size

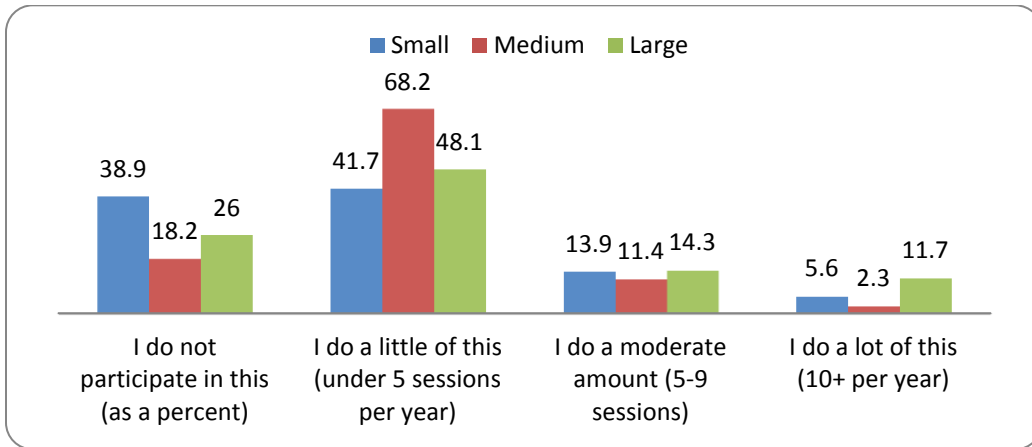


Figure 4: Time Devoted to Training Student Leaders by College Size

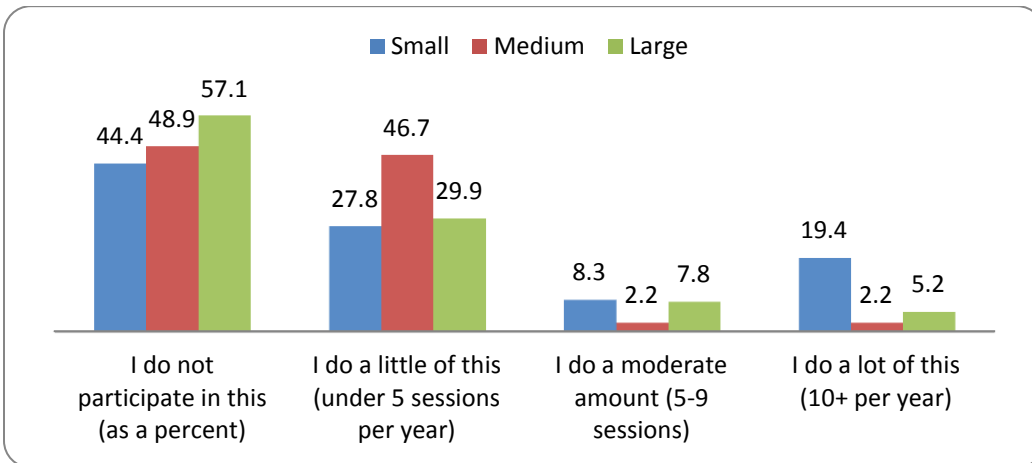
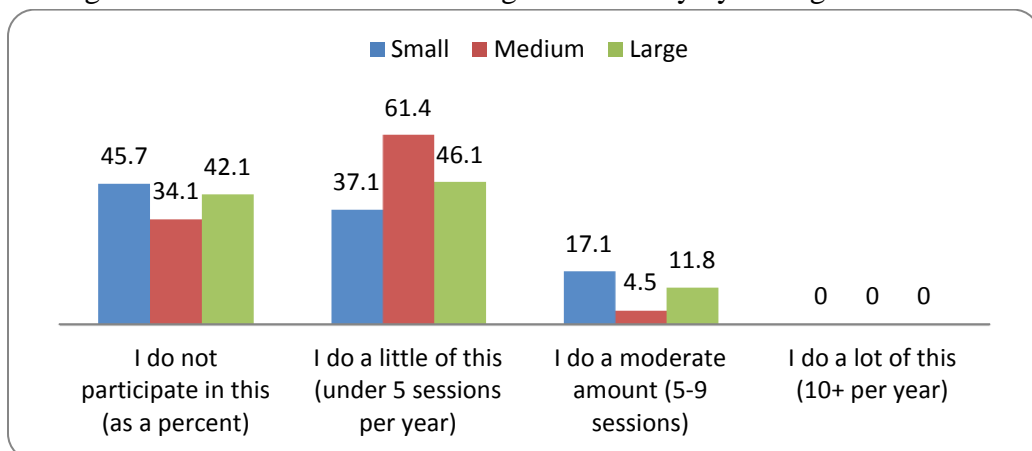


Figure 5: Time Devoted to Training Staff/Faculty by College Size



A second part of this question asked counsellors to provide a detailed description of the outreach activities they engaged in. The submissions ranged in specificity from very general (“I deliver study skills.”), to detailed information about the title and content of the session and the target audience. Significant effort was made to ensure the 577 activities that were provided in detail were categorized appropriately. The results show that student workshops delivered outside of a designated class time, in contrast with guest speaking during scheduled class time, constituted almost half of this outreach activity. In further analyses, workshops were sorted into four categories: stress management (28 counsellors at 16 colleges); time management (16 counsellors at 9 colleges); study skills (52 workshops at 10 colleges) and; a miscellaneous category containing a wide variety of 179 workshops documented in Appendix C.

Guest speaking in professor’s classes was the second broad category of outreach activity. Activities were placed in this category if the information provided by the counsellor indicated delivery to a specific program and/or that they would deliver this as a part of a professor’s class time. The total of 153 activities covered a wide range including: class presentations on services, assertiveness/communication skills, conflict management, cultural awareness/sensitivity, MBTI/Personality Dimensions/safeTALK, stress management/self-care, study skills/test anxiety, team work skills and time management.

Training student employees/leaders was the category with the fewest number of detailed activities including; dealing with “boundary issues”, conflict resolution/crisis intervention/dealing with aggressive behaviour, mental health topics, Personality Dimensions and suicide prevention. Residence advisors/dons were the most frequently mentioned target group, followed by tutors, peer mentors, members of student government, peer ambassadors, and peer coaches.

The last category, providing training for staff and faculty, constituted 15% of all outreach activity. The 85 activities included understanding the duty to accommodate, crisis management/emergency response, cultural awareness/safety, dealing with difficult/aggressive people/students, a wide variety of mental health topics and safeTALK/suicide prevention. Mental health and suicide prevention sessions were the most common comprising 28% of this category.

In addition to the outreach categories, counsellors were asked to assess their involvement in eight broad categories of service; consultation with faculty/managers re: student behaviour, resolving harassment issues, mediation, assisting with appeal, risk assessment, tragic events response, staff/faculty counselling and participation in early warning systems.

The results in this area number are best summarized by focusing on the service categories with higher combined percentages of “moderate amount” (5-9 sessions/year) and “a lot” of case involvement (10+ sessions/year) as shown in Table 16. The two highest categories of activity reported were engaging in discussion/consultation with

faculty and managers about student behaviour issues (51.6%) and risk assessment (61.0%). One third of counsellors indicated they did “a lot” (10+ cases per year) of risk assessment. There is often significant overlap in these two categories, and it is no doubt a manifestation of the increased attention being paid by colleges and universities to ensuring safety on campus.

Although counsellors were much less likely to develop or write behaviour contracts (13.7%), they reported a significant amount of mandated counselling (21.3%), meaning counselling that a student must agree to in order to remain in a program or as a part of a behavioural contract. Participation rates in assisting students with formal academic (28.4%) and non-academic (31.4%) appeal were quite high.

Table 15: Distribution of Counsellor Service Activities

Type of Service Activity	Sessions per Year (%)			
	10+	5-9	below 5	do not participate
<b>Student Behavior Consultation</b>				
<b>with Faculty/Managers</b>				
Discussion/coaching/strategy develop	24.5	27.1	32.9	15.5
Developing/writing Behavior contracts	0.7	6.7	37.3	55.3
Provide mandated counselling	9.0	12.3	43.2	35.5
<b>Resolving Instances of Harassment</b>				
Student to student	1.9	9.7	49.4	39.0
Student to staff	2.0	4.6	41.1	52.3
Staff to student	2.0	3.9	38.6	55.6
Staff to staff	0.0	2.0	4.7	93.3
<b>Mediation</b>				
Student to student	1.3	9.6	41	48.1
Staff to student	2.6	9.1	33.1	55.2
Staff to staff	0.7	1.3	3.4	94.6
Assisting students: formal academic appeal	10.3	18.1	56.8	14.8
Assisting students: formal non-academic appeal	9.8	21.6	47.1	21.6
Risk assessment	33.1	27.9	28.6	10.4
Tragic events response	4.5	8.4	64.5	22.6
Counselling for staff/faculty	2.6	4.6	32.7	60.1
Use of an early warning system	9.3	10.0	26.7	54.0

An analysis of service categories by college size showed a number of interesting differences as displayed in Figures 6-9. Counsellors in small colleges were the most likely to report being heavily involved in both consulting with faculty and staff about

student behavioural issues and risk assessment. A little over one third (36%) of respondents from small colleges indicate that they are involved in behavioural consultations “a lot”. The respective rates for medium and large colleges was 31.1% and 14.9% respectively.

Respondents from all colleges, regardless of size, appear to be significantly involved in risk assessment. Almost half (41.2%) of small college counsellors reported being involved in risk assessment “a lot”, followed by large college counsellors at 32.9% and medium college counsellors at 27.3%.

Of particular note is the amount of time spent assisting students with appeals of both an academic and non-academic nature. Counsellors from medium sized colleges report the most involvement in appeals. In terms of academic appeal, 95.5% of medium college counsellors report some kind of involvement (compared to 67% and 86.9% from small and large colleges respectively). In non-academic appeals, medium college counsellors report 81.4% involvement, equivalent to large-college counsellors (80%) but exceeding those in small colleges (71.5%).

Figure 6: Student Behaviour Consultation by College Size

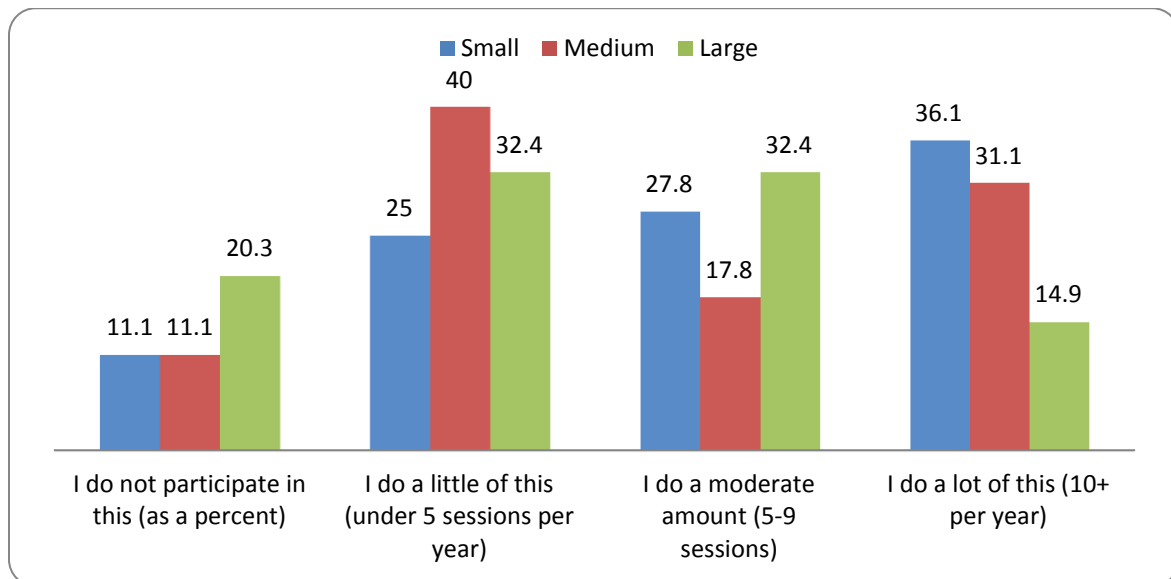


Figure 7: Risk Assessment by College Size

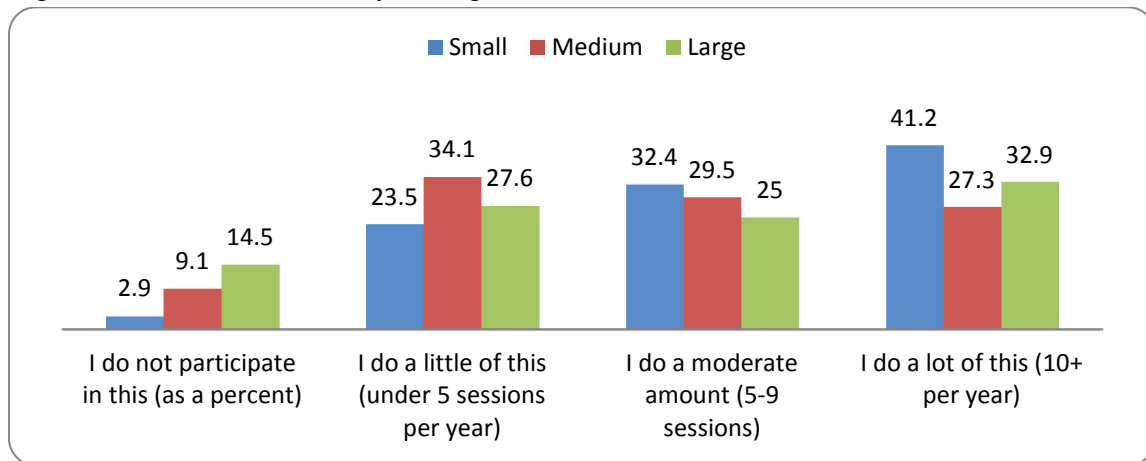


Figure 8: Formal Academic Appeal by College Size

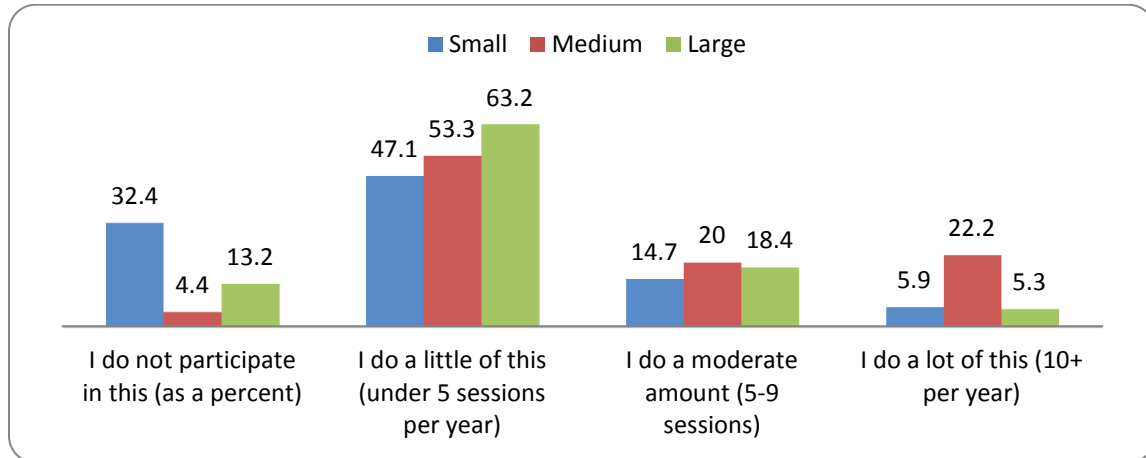
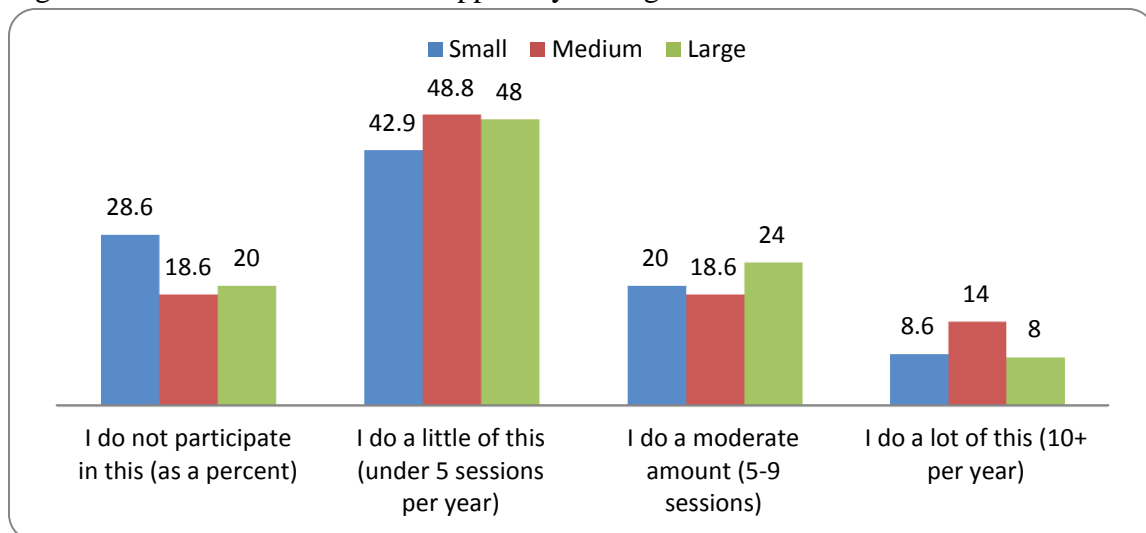


Figure 9: Non Formal Academic Appeal by College Size



Counsellors were asked about other “ancillary” activities that they have been involved in at some time in their college counselling career. One third of respondents indicated they taught credit courses. Small college counsellors were more likely to have taught (44%) compared to those in either medium (33%) or large (27%) colleges. Almost 15% reported union involvement, defined as executive, union steward or committee work. Counsellors in small colleges (22%) were roughly twice as likely to participate in union work compared to those in medium size colleges (11%) and large colleges (13%).

Close to two thirds (63.5%) of respondents reported involvement in community organizations defined as being within the community external to college, such as service on Boards and volunteer organizations. Community involvement was more likely to be reported by counsellors in large colleges (68%) compared to those in medium (62%) or small colleges (55%). Participation in community organizations also varies by age and was greatest for those in their 50’s, with 78.7% reporting involvement. The comparable figures are 51.7% of those in their 30’s, 61.2% of those in their 40’s and 52% of those in their 60’s. In response to “how many organizations are you involved with”, 15.5% indicated one, 41.2% indicated two, 22.7% indicated three and 20.7% indicated 4 or more.

Slightly more than one quarter (27.4%) of respondents indicated involvement with professional associations. The Ontario College Counsellors (OCC) was the most frequently mentioned organization, followed by the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA-ACCP) and the Ontario Association of Professional Social Workers/Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OASW and OCSWSSW). Counsellors in large colleges were most likely (34%) to report involvement in professional associations followed by those in medium (24%) and small colleges (17%).

One third of respondents had supervised student counsellors at a Master’s level. Again, this was most likely to be the case for counsellors in large colleges (40%) followed by those in medium (33%) and small colleges (20%). Overall, one quarter had supervised one student, one third had supervised two, 17.6% had supervised three and 23.6% have supervised four or more. Significantly fewer (10.3%) had supervised Bachelor’s level students.

Fully one third (34%) of respondents indicated they had engaged in research or writing during their counselling career. Counsellors in large (39%) and medium size colleges (36%) were roughly twice as likely to report involvement in research as those in small colleges (19%). The research included published scholarly articles, engaging in internal college research, contributions to association newsletters, policy development, developing training modules/programs and the development and evaluation of assessment tools.

About one third (35%) of respondents indicated that they typically utilize the ten professional development days to which they are entitled under the collective agreement.

Interestingly counsellors in medium size colleges (16%) were least likely to use their ten professional development days compared to their colleagues at small (36%) and large (46%) colleges.

### Counselling Methods and Modes of Delivery

Given the nature of the profession it is not surprising that college counsellors described themselves as eclectic in their use of counselling methods. While there were some preferred approaches, counsellors described about 35 distinct counselling methods that they utilized in their work. Tables 16 and 17 show that the most frequently cited approach was solution focused therapy. Nineteen counsellors indicated they “always” used this approach, while sixty-five indicated they “most often” used it. In percent terms, this represents 57.1% of respondents using solution focused all/most of the time. This is a very significant finding, though not a surprising one. Solution focused is characterized as a “brief therapy model”, is very pragmatic and underemphasizes historical context/root causes or intra-psychic struggle; a very amenable approach in a school setting with a 15 week semester.

Table 16: Counselling Methods Used (%)

Counselling Method	Always	Most Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)	3.5	44.8	42.7	7.0	2.1
Crisis Intervention	5.0	20.1	65.5	8.6	0.7
Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT)	0.0	1.6	23.4	27.3	47.7
Emotion Focused Therapy (EFT)	1.6	8.1	28.2	21.0	41.0
Eye Movement Desensitization Restructuring (EMDR)	0.8	0.8	5.4	5.4	87.6
Mindfulness	6.5	15.8	51.1	12.2	14.4
Motivational Interviewing	3.7	11.0	55.1	16.9	13.2
Narrative Therapy	2.3	15.2	38.6	20.5	23.5
Solution Focused Therapy	12.9	44.2	36.7	2.7	3.4
Rogerian/Client Centered Therapy	23.4	26.6	20.3	9.4	20.3

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy was the second most common approach cited. Sixty-nine counsellors indicated they used it “all/most of the time”. Crisis intervention was cited by 35 counsellors as being used “always” or “most of the time”. Another telling component of this result was the 91 counsellors who chose “sometimes” which makes crisis intervention the third most utilized therapeutic method. As will be noted



below, the increased demand for counsellors to manage crisis situations was a dominant theme in the focus group consultations and is consistent with this result.

Finally, the sixty four counsellors who reported using Rogerian/Client Centred Therapy were twice as likely to use this method “all the time” (23.4%) compared to counsellors using any other approach. It appears that adherents to the Rogerian approach were the least eclectic of the college counsellors in their choice of method.

Table 17: Counselling Methods Used (N)

Counselling Method	Always	Most Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total/ Missing
Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)	5	64	61	10	3	143/29
Crisis Intervention	7	28	91	12	1	139/33
Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT)	0	2	30	35	61	128/44
Emotion Focused Therapy (EFT)	2	10	35	26	51	124/48
Eye Movement Desensitization Restructuring (EMDR)	1	1	7	7	113	129/43
Mindfulness	9	22	71	17	20	139/33
Motivational Interviewing	5	15	75	23	18	136/36
Narrative Therapy	3	20	51	27	31	132/40
Solution Focused Therapy	19	65	54	4	5	147/25
Rogerian/Client Centered Therapy	15	17	13	6	13	64/108

An analysis of counselling method usage by sex revealed several subtle differences. To simplify the analysis, the usage categories were reduced from five to three: “always/often”, “sometimes” and “rarely/never”. The results shown in Figures 10 and 11 indicate that the frequency of use for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Solution Focused Therapy, those most commonly used in college counselling, was very similar for men and women. The third most common method, Crisis Intervention, tends to be used somewhat more often by female counsellors as men are more likely to report using Crisis Intervention “rarely/never” (26%) compared to women (6%).

While the most decided Rogerians were male, usage patterns were very similar for men and women for DBT, EFT and Narrative Therapy. Very few counsellors in the college system reported practicing EMDR. Of the eight who used EMDR “always/often” and “sometimes”, all were female. Mindfulness appears to be practiced more by female counsellors as only one quarter of women reported they “rarely” or “never” practiced this method compared to almost one half of men (41%).

Figure 10: Use of Counselling Method by Sex 1

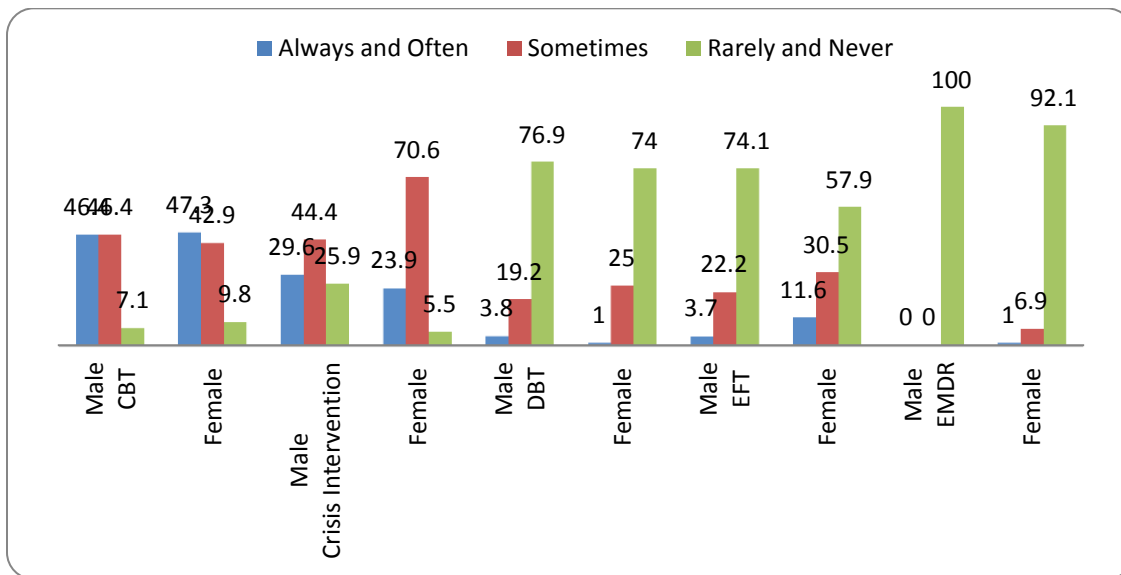
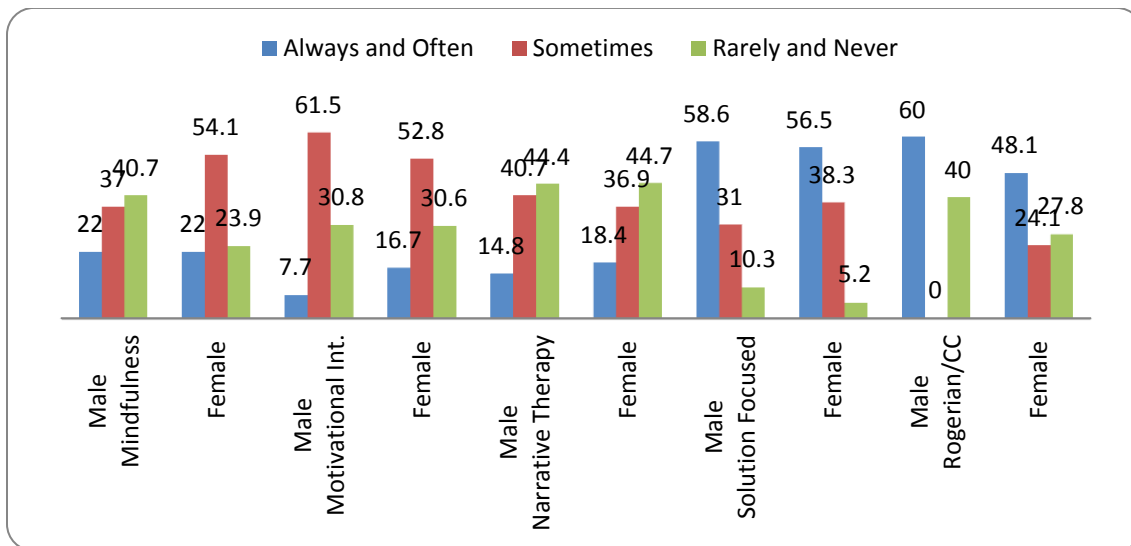


Figure 11: Use of Counselling Method by Sex 2



Finally, it is instructive to review the twenty-three other counselling approaches that were listed in the “other” category by thirty-one counsellors. In alphabetical order they were:

Aboriginal cultural approaches/  
guidance healing /Indigenous Practices  
(4 responses)

Accelerated Experiential Dynamic  
Psychotherapy (AEDP)

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)	Imago Relationship Therapy (2)
Attachment Based Theories	Interpersonal Therapy (IPT)
Behavioural Counselling	Jungian Therapy
Biofeedback	
Brain Gym	Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) (2)
Cross-Cultural	Psychodynamic Approaches (4)
Eclectic (5 responses)	Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy
Emotional Freedom Technique	Recovery and Resilience Approaches
Existential	
Experiential	Strength Perspective
Expressive Arts	Structural/Strategic
Family System	Thought Field Therapy (TFP)
Gestalt	Trauma Informed Approaches
Humanist	

### Counselling Delivery Modes

An analysis of how counsellors provide their service indicates there is little variation in modality. Table 19 shows that the vast majority of counsellors (99.3%) reported they primarily met with students in-person and individually. Over half (52.3%) of respondents indicated that they utilized telephone counselling “sometimes”. About one quarter of respondents conducted group counselling “sometimes”, and the same percentage (23.6%) delivered e-counselling asynchronously. Overall, the results suggest that the adoption of technological approaches or tools by counsellors in Ontario colleges has been minimal at best.

Table 18: Counselling Delivery Modes

Counselling Modality	Frequency of Use (%)				
	Always	Most Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Individually in person	54.2	45.1	0.7	0.0	0.0
Couple	0.0	0.0	10.5	40.6	49.0
Group counselling	0.0	1.3	24.8	36.9	36.9
E-counselling (synchronous)	0.0	0.0	3.5	12.6	83.9
E-counselling (asynchronous)	0.0	1.4	23.6	31.3	43.8
Video-counselling (web cam)	0.0		1.4	2.8	95.8
Telephone counselling	0.0	0.7	52.3	34.4	12.6
Web-based approaches	0.0	0.0	4.1	9.0	86.9
Texting	0.0	0.0	4.8	4.1	91.0
Social media	0.0	0.0	2.1	4.1	93.8

This study examined an additional dimension of counselling function that some have termed “complexity”. Counsellors were asked to provide an estimate of the percentage of time they spent working within each of four functional categories along a “complexity” of intervention continuum; advising, coaching, counselling and psychotherapy. Brief definitions drawn from the literature were provided for each position on the continuum. These were:

**Advising** helps students negotiate the college system re: admissions, course selection, policy, process.

**Coaching** focuses specific personal projects and transitions by methodically helping students choose a course of action.

**Counselling** involves a variety of intervention techniques based typically on a more comprehensive, psychosocial assessment of student difficulties.

**Psychotherapy** is the assessment and treatment of cognitive, emotional or behavioural disturbances by psychotherapeutic means.

Table 19 shows that, in their current practice, counsellors reported they spent almost half (46.6%) of their time counselling and one quarter of their time engaged in psychotherapy. Lower and almost equal percentages of their time were dedicated to advising (17.7%) and coaching (16.2%). A second component of this question asked respondents to circle a number along the continuum of “1” to “12” corresponding to where they “primary functioned as a counsellor” in their current practice. The values “1”, “2” and “3” corresponded to “Advising”; “4”, “5”, and “6” represented “Coaching”; “7”, “8” and “9” were “Counselling”; and “10”, “11” and “12” defined “Psychotherapy”. The results showed that in their current practice, counsellors reported they primarily functioned in a counselling mode ( $M = 7.8$ ) on the continuum.

Table 19: Distribution of Counselling Time by Function: Current and Initial Practice

Practice	Time Spent (%)				Primary Role
	Advising	Coaching	Counselling	Psychotherapy	
Current	17.7	16.2	46.6	24.6	7.8
Initial	22.7	19.0	45.2	21.3	7.0

Using the same question format, counsellors were asked to describe their activity when they first began counselling in a college setting. Table 19 shows that counsellors reported spending almost one quarter of their time in the advising (22.7%) and one fifth coaching (19%) when they first began college counselling. While they spent the majority of their time counselling (45.2%), they devoted somewhat less time to psychotherapy (21.3%). The difference translates into 21.6% less advising, 15% less coaching, a marginal 3% increase in counselling and a 15.6% increase in psychotherapy between current and initial practice. Counsellor perceptions of their primary function on the

continuum also showed an increase of 10.9% from an “initial practice” mean of 7.0 to 7.8 for their “current practice”. The means for both periods, however, remain within the “counselling” category on the complexity continuum.

An analysis of these results according to respondents’ years of experience in college counselling further highlighted the change over time. Table 20 shows the “initial practice” distributions for three levels of experience; counsellors who had worked 9 years or less, 10-14 years and 15 or more years. Perceived changes in time spent coaching and counselling vary much less by years of experience than for advising and psychotherapy. There is a clear reduction in the amount of time counsellors say they dedicated to psychotherapy as years of experience increased. Counsellors with 15 or more years of experience reported doing 67% more advising and 87% less psychotherapy in their initial practice compared to those with 9 or less years of experience.

The most experienced counsellors also exhibited a mean score for their “primary function” of 6.3 the lowest of the three experience levels and corresponding to the “Coaching” category. In contrast, the mean scores for those with 10-14 and 9 or less years of experience correspond to the “Counselling” category.

Table 20: Distribution of Time by Function and Years of Experience: Initial Practice

Years of Experience	Time Spent (%)				Mean Function
	Advising	Coaching	Counselling	Psychotherapy	
9 or less	17.8	19.2	44.9	25.1	7.2
10 - 14	25.2	16.1	46.7	23.0	7.5
15 or more	29.7	20.0	43.6	13.4	6.3

Analysis of the complexity continuum by college size showed that advising and coaching constituted higher percentages of counsellor intervention the smaller the college. Table 21 also shows that counsellors in medium size colleges reported the highest percentage of time within the counselling realm. The most significant differences exist in the psychotherapy realm where counsellors in large colleges reported doing psychotherapy at almost 2.5 times the rate of those in small colleges. Nonetheless, regardless of college size, the greatest amount of counsellor work lies within the counselling realm.

Table 21: Distribution of Counselling Time by Function and College Size

College Size	Time Spent (%)				Mean Function
	Advising	Coaching	Counselling	Psychotherapy	
Small	22.0	19.8	47.9	13.7	7.3
Medium	17.9	16.5	50.4	21.2	7.7
Large	11.2	14.3	43.7	30.8	8.1

The results of an analysis by sex in Table 22 shows that female counsellors were more likely to report spending a higher percentage of their time engaged in psychotherapy than male counsellors. The observed difference represents spending 34.3% more of their time doing psychotherapy than their male counterparts.

Table 22: Distribution of Counsellor Function by Sex

Sex	Time Spent (%)				Mean Function
	Advising	Coaching	Counselling	Psychotherapy	
Male	19.83	13.5	49.17	19.46	7.9
Female	17.12	16.97	45.55	26.15	7.81

### Impact of Student Characteristics

The impact of various student characteristics on counselling work was explored in this section. Three areas were examined; student diversity (cultural, linguistic, age, LGBTQ, etc.), mental health issues (diagnosed, undiagnosed) and serving the needs of Aboriginal students.

Table 23: Impact of Student Diversity on Counselling Work

Impact of student diversity	N	Percent
Profound impact on the way I do my job	18	14.0
Very much of an impact	51	39.5
Somewhat of an impact	43	33.3
Very little impact	14	10.9
No impact	3	2.3
Total	129	100
Missing	43	
Total	172	

Table 23 shows that 14% of counsellors reported diversity in age, culture, linguistic background or sexual orientation had a profound impact on the way they did their job. An additional 40% reported that this diversity had “very much” of an impact. Counsellors were also asked to provide written comments about their response and 108 did so. Most of these (60%) referred to the impact of culture, international students and language. About 10% of the comments related to providing services to mature students, and 5% related to issues of sexuality. Dominant themes in the comments related to cultural diversity were the need to suspend assumptions in order to be “client centered in

the truest sense”, the need to “uncover problems more deeply”, and that “such diversity required meticulous interviewing.”

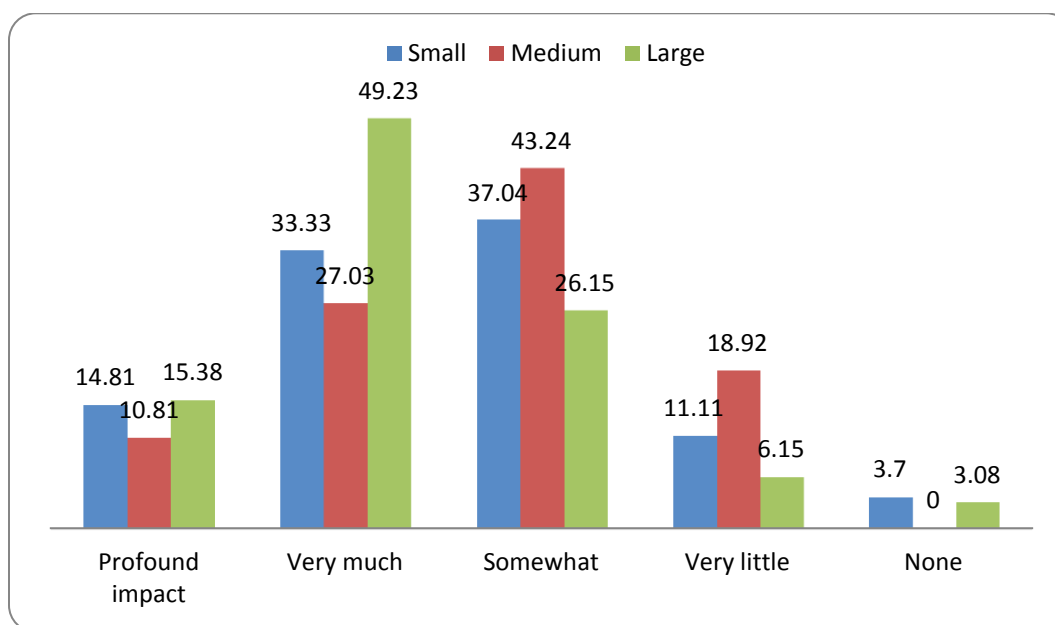
Counsellors were also asked to estimate the amount of time they spent engaged in “cross-cultural” counselling. This was defined as including interaction with international students and domestic students with “English as a Second Language” issues and other “cultural” issues in their lives. Table 24 indicates that counsellors reported a substantial percentage of their time devoted to dealing with cross-cultural issues.

Table 24: Distribution of Time Devoted to Cross-Cultural Counselling

		Percentage of Time Spent in “Cross Cultural” Counselling (%)										
% time		0	1-5	6-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71-80	81+
% of counsellors		2.2	19.7	16.8	17.5	17.5	8.8	2.9	3.6	0.7	2.2	8.0

The impact of student diversity was also analyzed by college size as shown in Figure 12.

Figure 12: Impact of Student Diversity by College Size



Not surprisingly, counsellors in large colleges were most likely (64.6%) to indicate diversity had a “profound” or “very much” of an impact on their work, compared to counsellors in small (48.1%) or medium size colleges (37.8%). What is somewhat surprising is the high average for the small colleges. The question was framed to incorporate more than cultural/linguistic diversity. Many small colleges are located in the Northern Region and therefore tend to have a higher concentration of Aboriginal

students and a substantial number of non-direct entrants. The results may, therefore, be reflective of the diversity of providing services to an Aboriginal population and a multi-generational student demographic (i.e., Second Career).

### *Counselling Services for Students with Mental Health Issues*

Table 25 shows that almost half (47.3%) of Ontario college counsellors indicated students' mental health issues had a "profound impact" on the way they did their job. When combined with the "very much of an impact" category, the figure jumps to almost 90%.

Table 25: Impact of Student Mental Health Issues across System

Impact of student mental health issues	N	Percent
Profound impact on the way I do my job	71	47.3
Very much of an impact	61	40.7
Somewhat of an impact	16	10.7
Very little impact	2	1.3
No impact	0	0.0
Total	71	100.0

In addition, over half of respondents indicated they spent more than half of their time working with students with mental health issues. The mean for all respondents was 54.2%. An analysis by college size showed that counsellors in large colleges spent the largest amount of time (59.6%) on student mental health issues, compared to those in medium (51.4%) or small (46.1%) colleges. Detailed comments from 108 respondents related to themes about the pervasiveness of depression and anxiety, the increasing "crisis" orientation of the role and the lack of psychiatric consultation, the increased volume and complexity of the issues presented, the resulting time-consuming nature of these cases and the lack of community resources available to students for referral. As well, the increased demand for involvement in "risk assessment" was becoming a much more frequent event.

Table 26: Impact of Student Mental Health Issues by College Size

Degree of Impact	College Size		
	Small	Medium	Large
Profound impact	39.4	47.7	50.7
Very much	45.5	40.9	38.4
Somewhat	15.2	9.1	9.6
Very little	0.0	2.3	1.4
None	0.0	0.0	0.0



Table 26 shows that the impact of student mental health issues on the work of counsellors varied somewhat across college size. Large college counsellors were more likely (51%) to report it had a “profound impact” on their work than those in medium (48%) or small colleges (39.4%). However, summing the “profound” and “very much” of an impact responses showed counsellors in the three college sizes reported similar degrees of impact; the lowest percentage was for small colleges (84.9%), followed by medium (88.6%) and large size colleges (89.1%). None of the 150 respondents indicated “no impact” and only two counsellors indicated “very little.” A quote from one focus group member is instructive in this regard.

“[There are] liability and accountability issues in terms of risk assessments for harm to self/others and safety planning. Assessment skills need to be sharper for undiagnosed mental health issues as we need to do a proper assessment to then decide on appropriate interventions and referral for diagnosis, medication and treatment. More and more students are presenting with existing diagnoses and on medications so this involves understanding and being up-to-date with current medications and therapeutic modalities for treatment of mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders, personality disorders, etc.”

Many counsellors described an ongoing struggle to provide services as illustrated by the following quote: “[providing counselling for] individuals needing intense, long-term support, which I cannot provide, but find myself in the position of being pressured to provide.”

The mental health needs of students have presented colleges with a significant challenge; to define the role colleges must play in supporting students within an educational institution. As one counsellor mentioned,

“I constantly have to keep reminding myself that I am not working in a mental health agency and set limits on myself. I have to be more focused about the realities of the time I can realistically spend and be more focused about linking students with community resources.”

### *Counselling Services for Aboriginal Students*

Many colleges have implemented specific supports for Aboriginal learners such as dedicated counselling staff and Aboriginal Centres on campus, especially in light of recent targeted funding by MTCU. The delivery of counselling services for this group of learners was examined in two ways. First, if a respondent identified themselves as an Aboriginal Counsellor, a series of questions asked for information about how counselling was provided to these students. Eight Aboriginal counsellors completed the questions from six colleges. Somewhat more than one third (37%) of these respondents indicated that Aboriginal students register for the “support services” provided within the college.

Counsellors were also asked whether their approach to practice with Aboriginal students was passive or “responsive” as opposed to proactive or “outreach” using a scale of 1-10, where “1” means only meeting with registered Aboriginal students when they visit the department, and “10” means counsellors reach out and connect/meet with every Aboriginal student before they even arrive at school. The results showed a mean response of 4.6, only slightly biased toward the “responsive approach” side of the continuum.

When asked to indicate the manner in which Aboriginal students access counselling services, almost two thirds of respondents (64.6%) reported that access was on a drop-in basis rather than by appointment (35.4%). The results obtained from counsellors working with the non-Aboriginal student population were almost the inverse of this in that almost one third (32%) reported students accessed services on a drop-in basis while over two thirds (68%) did so by appointment.

Where Aboriginal counsellors were located on campus was also explored. One half of the Aboriginal counsellors indicated Aboriginal services were located outside the main counselling office area and 37.5% said they were within the department. In spite of the variation in location, the results showed considerable collaboration between counsellors for Aboriginal students and those servicing the general population. Half of the Aboriginal counsellors saw themselves as working “somewhat closely” with general counsellors within their college, while 37.5% described working “very closely.”

The majority (62.5%) of Aboriginal counsellors indicated they spent “quite a bit” of time working with sponsoring agencies/bands and saw themselves as having a significantly different role from other counsellors at their college. The main themes from comments provided by the respondents in this regard related to the need to do outreach to community groups and funders, the need to understand the Aboriginal context, culture and world view which translates into a different approach, and working with a population that has experienced violence and oppression.

Among the largest work-related challenges cited by Aboriginal counsellors were:

- Getting students to self-identify
- Levels of Aboriginal literacy
- Balancing demand between direct service and community building
- Helping students deal with the disproportionate amount of health concerns, fatal accidents and suicides
- Working within an educational institution that doesn’t understand the connection between culture and retention issues
- The ongoing energy that is required to educate and advocate within a system that is often insensitive to the needs of Aboriginal peoples

The second approach to documenting the delivery of counselling services to Aboriginal students was to also ask counsellors who were not classified as Aboriginal counsellors questions specific to providing service to Aboriginal learners. Almost two

thirds (61.4%) indicated they provided counselling services to Aboriginal students and almost half (46.1%) indicated they worked “somewhat” or “very” closely with the Aboriginal counsellor(s) at their college. One fifth (20.5%) indicated not having an Aboriginal counsellor at their college. When asked whether they experienced challenges specific to Aboriginal students, almost one fifth (17.8%) reported they did. Twenty-one counsellors provided comments regarding these challenges which were similar to those of their Aboriginal colleagues. These were:

- The importance of cultural understanding in effectively supporting Aboriginal students
- Challenges related to funding
- Students experiencing difficulties due to generational oppression, culture shock and “complicated and traumatic” backgrounds
- Issues relating to academic under preparedness, particularly for “on-reserve” students

### Rules of Engagement

This section of the questionnaire examined the processes and institutional policies surrounding access to counselling services or how students learn about counselling, who can see a counsellor, when and under what circumstances.

Since the current literature on the delivery of student support services highlights the benefits of “proactive/intrusive” methods, counsellors were asked whether their college had an “early alert system” to identify “high risk” students. Two thirds of those who responded reported their college did not. Since the term “high risk” could be ambiguous, however, and may have been interpreted by counsellors as meaning “harm to self/others”, the topic was pursued further in the focus groups to obtain clarification and will be discussed when reporting on these findings.

When asked whether counsellors provided services to “community members”, people who were not registered as students, slightly less than one half (44.9%) of respondents indicated they did so. An additional 15.6% said they met with community members, but only during certain times of the year. Slightly more than one quarter (28.6%) stated they did not see community members at all. The one in ten respondents who responded with “other” were asked for additional comments for clarification. Three themes were evident in these comments:

- It happens “occasionally” upon request, special circumstance, where there is an urgent need for advisement, referred from another department within the college
- Will see the individual if they are going to be a student and need to make special arrangement and/or are investigating availability of counselling services
- For one session or on a walk-in basis or it is a specific part of one counsellor’s role (i.e. accommodations for the writing of a Mature Student Test)

Analysis by college size showed that counsellors in small colleges (75%) were much more likely to service community members than those in either medium (49%) or large colleges (29%). In terms of meeting with community members only during certain times of the year, rates across college size weren't significantly different (12.5%, 16.3% and 16.7% for small, medium and large colleges respectively). Large colleges were much more likely to report an unconditional "no" response to this question (41.5%) compared to small (6.3%) and medium (23.3%) colleges.

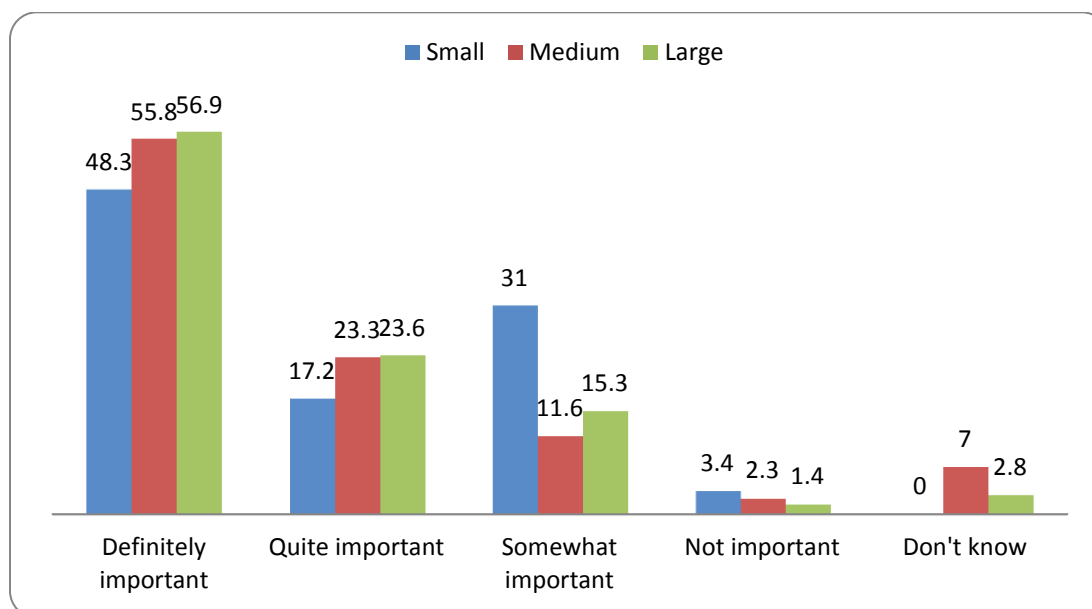
There has been considerable discussion about the use of web technologies to provide counselling services. The results show three in four respondents in this study reported a website presence was "definitely" (54.9%) or "quite important" (22.2%) for counselling services in their college. This finding contrasts with other results to be discussed later that show over eight in ten counsellors (86.9%) reported they "never" utilized web-based approaches in their work. The discrepancy may, however, be a product of the perceived difference on the part of counsellors in use of web tools for marketing services as opposed to service delivery.

Table 27: Importance of Website

Level of importance	N	Percent
Definitely important	79	54.9
Quite important	32	22.2
Somewhat important	25	17.4
Not important	3	2.1
Don't know	5	3.5
Total	144	100
Missing	28	
Total	172	

The perceived importance by counsellors of a web site presence was found to vary by college size although the differences were not large. Figure 2 shows that those in small colleges (48%) were somewhat less likely to say a web presence was "definitely important" compared with counsellors in medium (56%) or large colleges (57%). In contrast, almost one third (31%) of counsellors in small colleges felt that a web presence was "somewhat important" compared to those in medium (12%) and large (15%) colleges.

Figure 13 Importance of Web Site by College Size



Orientation is a common method of introducing counselling services to new college students. Indeed a significant proportion of respondents (83.6%) reported participating in orientation with virtually no difference across college size. However, slightly less than half (47.3%) of all counsellors indicated being involved in orientation planning. In this instance, however, college size appeared to have an impact since counsellors in small colleges were much more likely (61.3%) to report being involved in orientation planning compared to those in medium (46.5%) or large colleges (41.7%).

Table 28: Number of Programs Assigned

# of programs	N	Percent
<5	42	53.8
5-9	11	14.1
10-14	11	14.1
15+	14	17.9
Total	78	100
Missing	94	
Total	172	

Table 28 shows the deployment of college counsellors on a campus is often carried out by assigning each counsellor to specific set of programs. About half of respondents indicated having a specific group of programs they liaise with, and of these, slightly more than one half (53.8%) reported they were assigned to less than five programs.

The practice of assigning counsellors to a specific group of programs was somewhat more likely to be reported by those in large colleges (56.9%) as opposed to those in medium (44.2%) or small colleges (45.2%). For those counsellors who did liaise with a set of programs, over one half (58.2%) were also the “primary counsellor” for students of those programs.

Another common method of introducing new students to campus counselling services is to have counsellors visit classes at the beginning of the school year. This practice was reported by over two thirds (68.5%) of respondents and prompted forty six detailed written responses. The key themes were:

- We used to do this, but not anymore; Growth of student body made it unfeasible; not seen as a “good use of resources”; we use video presentations , mentors other advisors do the presentations; “due to traffic, we don’t advertise”; no time to schedule
- Outreach (16)
- We will do presentations when invited (12)
- Sometimes we do this/in some programs; SSW, International students, co-op and communications classes (8)
- Also try to get into classes week 3 and 4; worthwhile; essential way to build a practice; also speak to open houses (6)

Analysis by college size showed that counsellors in small colleges were much more likely (93.3%) to speak to classes at the beginning of the year compared to those in medium (55.8%) or large colleges (65.7%).

When asked to indicate how students accessed counselling services, over two thirds of counsellors (68.11%) reported that students access counselling services by appointment rather than via “walk in”. When asked if they believed they had an effective system to deal with “walk-in traffic”, two thirds responded in the affirmative. In addition, the majority of counsellors from small colleges (80%) indicated they had an effective system for walk-in compared to their medium (62.8%) or large college colleagues (62%).

Ninety eight counsellors posted comments about this question. When these were grouped by college, there appeared to be a consensus of opinion among the respondents at each college. Counsellors at ten colleges generally saw the demands of “walk in” traffic as not being adequately met, the most common reasons being:

- Need an intake person (5)
- Lack of resources/not enough counsellors to adequately meet need (5)
- Lack of clear definition of what constitutes an appropriate “case” for drop in (3); “the system is skewed in favour of crisis” and “we are becoming a crisis service”

At an additional ten colleges, comments suggested that the system in place at their college generally met student needs:

- Front desk/reception triages and takes appropriate action (5)
- Same day triage system staffed by counsellors; confidence expressed in the system (2)
- General comments indicating drop-in times available each day, students in crisis are seen immediately, system generally works

Comments made by respondents from the three remaining colleges were more ambivalent about the efficacy of their college approach to walk-ins. One theme that bears mentioning is well represented by the following quote:

“Although there are situations where immediate attention is needed and should be provided, most “walk in” traffic could be booked or at least wait till the next hour rather than being seen immediately as if a crisis. It gives the student unrealistic expectations regarding counsellors’ availability and the value of the service.”

Respondents from a number of colleges made comments concerning the issue of “effectiveness in assessing urgency”. One counsellor observed “...occasionally, it is best for a student to wait and attempt to access their own resources before being seen. Immediate access doesn’t allow for this.”

A minority of counsellors (41.5%) indicated they tracked the referral source of students who accessed counselling. The practice was related to college size, however, since counsellors in small colleges were twice as likely to do so (66.7%) than counsellors in medium (33%) or large colleges (30%). Sixty-four respondents offered an estimate of the percentage of students referred to them by faculty. While responses ranged from 0% to 75%, approximately one fifth of respondents (22.7%) cited rates that ranged between 15% and 35%. The single largest group of respondents (8.7%) reported 30% of their referrals came from faculty. The tracking of, and referral by faculty appears to occur infrequently in Ontario colleges.

A common practice to promote student retention is to have students meet with a counsellor prior to their dropping a course or program. Only a very small percentage (7.8%) of respondents indicated their students were required to visit a counsellor in order to drop a course. On the other hand, over one third of respondents (37.2%) indicated that students were encouraged to meet with them prior to dropping a program. Once again, college size was seen to have a significant impact. Almost half (48.4%) of those in small and medium (45.2%) size colleges reported this practice compared to slightly more than one quarter of those in large colleges (27.8%).

A minority of respondents (27.5%) reported having a system to deal with “on call/after-hours” emergencies. An even smaller group (9.3%) indicated they were expected to perform “on-call” duties. The comments provided indicated that the following, from most to least frequently mentioned, were to be accessed in an after-hours emergency: community resources, college security, counselling manager and the counselling coordinator. Less than one in five (18.1%) respondents indicated having regular evening hours.

In order to deal with the volume of student demand some colleges have instituted a limit to the number of times an individual can meet with a counsellor. When presented with this question, approximately one fifth (19.4%) of respondents, representing ten colleges, indicated their students were limited to the number of visits with counsellors. This estimate is tentative however, because staff from the same college did not always answer the question consistently. At four colleges, each with a minimum of six counsellors, only one of the counsellors indicated there was a limit. Perhaps this reflects the difference between policy and actual practice noted below.

More interesting were the comments which suggested the “limits” were interpreted more as guidelines, easily exceeded with counsellor discretion and rarely enforced. Of the forty comments made by respondents, twenty-two indicated the limit was more of a guideline; was flexible/negotiable; a suggestion; not officially stated. The limits ranged from four per semester to ten per year. The most common limit was six sessions.

Almost all respondents (98.6%) reported that enrolled students had access to counsellors during “intercession times”, when there are no classes. Almost as many (88.4%) indicated that “non-enrolled” students have access during intercession (i.e., a student drops out of a program with the intention to start another).

Approximately 60% of respondents reported they attended graduation. Counsellors in small colleges were much more likely to do so (82.8%) compared to those in medium (51.2%) or large colleges (54.9%).

Given that most counsellors reported restricted access by students to community resources, it was interesting that “transitional” support by college counsellors for students who have graduated was relatively common. Two-thirds of respondents indicated that they saw students after they graduated and the same percentage (67.3%) reported doing so “by practice only”, as compared to “by policy” (32.4%).

An analysis by college size showed that contact with students after graduation is somewhat more likely to occur in small (73.3%) and large colleges (69%) compared to medium size colleges (58.1%). Forty counsellors provided written comments on this topic. These indicated that thirteen colleges provide counselling services to graduates for varying periods of time as indicated below:

- One visit to 2 months (5 colleges)



- 3 months (5 colleges)
- 6 months (2 colleges)
- No restriction (1 college)

The majority of responses also indicated that post-graduation interaction is not for personal counselling but is used for “bridging the student to a community resource”

### Collaboration with Other Stakeholders

A section of the questionnaire asked college counsellors about the degree to which they collaborated with other staff on campus to promote student development and success. Respondents were asked to rate their level of collaboration with various groups on a ten point scale, with “1” = “no contact” to “10” = “extensive collaboration”. The results are summarized in Table 29 and show the highest levels of collaboration were with disability services and with faculty.

Table 29: Mean Collaboration Score by Group

Group	N	Mean	Min	Max	STD
Faculty	140	6.06	2	10	2.09
Disability services	102	7.07	1	10	2.44
Career advisors	94	3.80	1	10	2.54
Academic advisors	99	4.41	1	10	2.66
Student success advisors	82	5.21	1	10	2.47
Health centre	120	5.11	1	10	2.59
Ombudsperson	51	3.53	1	8	2.48
Psychiatric/psychological consultation	56	4.86	1	10	3.06
Registrar’s office	139	5.12	1	10	2.40

Respondents were asked to assess their degree of collaboration with each group only if they indicated the group was present on their campus. Some confusion was evident in the responses for three of the staff categories, career advisors, academic advisors and student success advisors. An examination of the results by college showed that in some cases members of the same counselling department gave contradictory responses (i.e., some saying they had career advisors and some saying they didn’t). It appears there may have been at least three reasons for this:

- First it became apparent that respondents were defining career advisor, academic advisor and student success advisor in different ways;
- Second, in some colleges the “function” is played by faculty and coordinators, so in acknowledging the presence of an “advisor”, it could potentially be describing a faculty role instead of a discrete “advisor” position and;

- Third, the list provided in Table 30 shows the variety of titles, gleaned from the focus group transcripts, used for advisor roles in various colleges. Counsellors, therefore, may have responded “no” to whether they had career advisors if they had “career consultants”, “career planning and academic advisors” or “student employment officers”.

Table 30: “Advisor” Titles in Ontario Colleges

Title		
Aboriginal advisor	Career service consultant	Student advisor
Academic coach	Disability service advisor	Student employment officer
Academic advisor	Disability consultant	Student life advisor
Access advisor	First year experience advisor	Student success advisor
Accessibility advisor	International student advisor	Student success facilitator
Aboriginal advisor	International academic advisor	Student success mentor
Academic coach	Learning coach	Student success specialist
Academic advisor	Learning skills advisor	Student support advisor
Career advisor	Mental health worker	Success coach
Career planning & academic advisor	Peer advisor	
Career consultant	Preadmission advisor	

It was possible to clarify the interaction between counsellors and advisors during the field visit focus groups and manager interviews by using targeted emails asking for clarification and by scanning the interview and focus group transcripts. A full discussion of this topic is provided in the focus group summary in Appendix D. Counsellors reported a proliferation of these roles, over the last five years in particular, and it appears they have had a significant impact on the evolving role of the counsellor in Ontario colleges.

College counselling departments typically work closely with services provided in the community and counsellors were asked to rate their level of difficulty in “effectively” connecting students with community resources specific to counselling. A small percentage of the respondents (13.7%) reported that connecting with community services was “very easy”, one quarter (25.9%) said it was “somewhat easy”, one third (33.8%) indicated it was “a little difficult” and another quarter (26.6%) said it was “very difficult”. Overall, therefore, there was a 40/60 split between those perceiving referrals to be easy versus difficult to arrange.

Table 31 presents the results of an analysis of this question by college size. Contrary to what might be expected, the larger colleges which tend to be located in larger urban centres with presumably more plentiful resources, did not report easier access to resources. Indeed, counsellors in large colleges reported more difficulty (65.7%) in accessing community resources for their students relative to those in medium (60%) and especially small colleges (48.3%).

Table 31: Difficulty in Accessing Community Resources by College Size

Level of difficulty	College size		
	Small	Medium	Large
Very easy	20.7	17.5	8.6
Somewhat easy	31.0	22.5	25.7
Little difficult	34.5	30.0	35.7
Very difficult	13.8	30.0	30.0

Sixty counsellors commented on this topic and three overlapping themes were evident:

- Wait lists for services are extensive and common, even in large urban areas with plentiful resources generally related to the second point below (41)
- Affordable services (free, sliding scale, etc.) are limited, if students can afford to pay, there are usually counselling supports on demand, but few have the resources to pay (16)
- In smaller centres, or perhaps more accurately, communities further from the Toronto and Ottawa metropolitan areas, there is a general lack of services, especially in the North (18)
- One other interesting observation of counsellors from four colleges was that students are referred back to college counselling departments because college services are more accessible. This experience was recounted a number of times during focus group discussions to be discussed later.

Consulting with one's peers or a manager on difficult or complex cases is not uncommon within the counselling profession. Table 32 shows the results for these two behaviours in Ontario college counsellors. When asked about the frequency of consulting with their peers, only a very small percentage (1.5%) said they did not do so. The largest percentage (30.9%) reported they consulted with peers once per month. Slightly more than one quarter (28.6%) indicated they consulted 3-5 times per month and few (11%) indicated they did so six or more times per month.

In comparison, counsellors were much less likely to consult with their managers on cases. Approximately one fifth (19.5%) of counsellors indicated they did not typically consult with their manager compared to the less than 2% who did not consult their peers. In addition, of those counsellors who did consult with their managers, most did so once or twice per month (54.6%), and a smaller proportion did so three to five times (22.5%) per month.

Table 32: Frequency of Case Consultation

Times per month	Peer		Manager	
	N	%	N	%
0	2	1.5	26	19.5
1	42	30.9	48	36.1
2	28	20.6	26	19.5
3	17	12.5	12	9.0
4	8	5.9	10	7.5
5	24	17.6	8	6.0
6	7	5.1	2	1.5
7	4	2.9	1	0.8
8	4	2.9	0	0.0
Total	136	100	133	100
Missing	36		39	
Total	172		172	

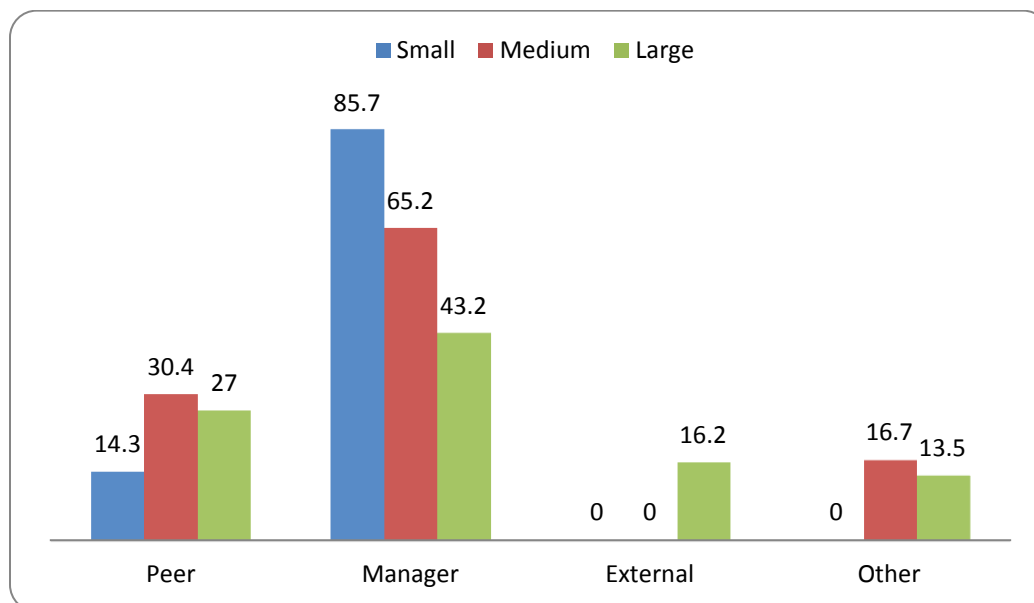
An analysis of the mean frequency for consulting with peers by college size showed that this tended to occur somewhat more frequently in medium ( $M = 3.05$ ) and large colleges ( $M = 3.09$ ) compared to those in small colleges ( $M = 2.54$ ) although the difference was not great.

As discussed earlier, the description of the college counsellor role in the relevant collective agreement is minimal at best. The survey sought to explore whether institutions had attempted to further elucidate the counselling role. A little over one third (35.8%) of counsellors reported they had a written job description beyond what was within the collective agreement. An analysis by college size showed that this was twice as likely to be true for those in large colleges (48.5%) compared to those in small (24.1%) and medium (21.6%) sized colleges.

A little more than one half (52.9%) of all respondents indicated that they were subject to supervision. When asked about the type of supervision they received, roughly equal percentages reported receiving administrative (34.8%), case-related supervision (33.3%) or both (31.9%). An additional question asked who conducted the supervision. The largest group of counsellors indicated this was done by a manager (58.1%), followed by a peer (25.7%), an external supervisor (8.1%) and other (8.1%). Comments describing the “other” category included psychologists (4), Dean/Director (3) and counselling coordinator/peer/corporate counselling. The largest group of counsellors (73) indicated that the most common supervision interval was “as needed” (47.9%) followed by bi-weekly (26%), monthly (11.0%), weekly (6.8%) and yearly (5.5%).

An analysis by college size showed that while approximately equal proportions of counsellors in small (48.3%) and large colleges (50.7%) reported they were supervised, a somewhat greater proportion of counsellors in medium size colleges (60%) did so. Counsellors in small colleges were twice as likely to report that a manager conducted their supervision (85.7%) compared to those in large colleges (43.2%). Figure 14 shows that in large colleges a greater proportion of the supervision was conducted by an external agent or “other” individual.

Figure 14: Agent of Supervision



As shown in Table 33, two fifths (40%) of the respondents reported having a performance appraisal in the previous five years. For almost one sixth (14.2%) this had occurred within the last ten years and for somewhat more than one in ten (12.6%) it had been over ten years ago. In addition, nearly a third of counsellors reported they could not remember when their last appraisal occurred.

Table 33: Time of Last Performance Appraisal

Time of appraisal	N	Percent
Last year	18	14.2
Within the last 5 years	34	26.8
Within the last ten years	18	14.2
Over 10 years	16	12.6
Can't remember	41	32.3
Total	127	100
Missing	45	
Total	172	

The majority of counsellors (87.1%) indicated they had regular counsellor staff meetings with the most frequent interval being weekly (40.2%), followed by bi-weekly (34.4%), monthly (17.2%) and once per semester (8.2%). Meeting regularly appeared to be consistent across college sizes.

## Perceived Support, Satisfaction and Effectiveness

Counsellor perceptions of institutional support for their role were examined at three levels, the overall institution, the manager, and senior administration. Respondents generally perceived that the “counsellor role” was supported by their college. Almost half indicated the role was supported either “very much” (17.1%) or “quite a lot” (32.1%). Almost as many, however, reported that the role was “somewhat” supported (42.1%) while only a small proportion (8.6%) answered “not at all”.

Counsellor responses were significantly more positive when asked specifically about the degree to which they were supported by their manager. The majority saw their manager as an advocate for the counsellor role within their respective college. Almost half (43.4%) responded with “very much”, approximately one quarter (25.7%) said “quite a lot”, or “somewhat” (26.5%) and only a very small percentage (4.4%) felt they were “not at all” supported.

Counsellor perceptions of support by senior management were somewhat less enthusiastic. Relative to perceived support by their managers, only one third as many counsellors (16.2%) reported senior administration supported their role “very much”, and approximately one quarter (26.5%) answered with “quite a lot”. The largest percentage (36.8%) reported they were “somewhat” supported. Counsellors were almost five times as likely to say they were “not at all” supported (20.6%) in their role by senior management as by their manager.

Table 34: Perceived Support for Role by College Size

Level of Support	College size		
	Small	Medium	Large
<b>By college (%)</b>			
Very much + quite a lot	64	62	36
Somewhat + not at all	36	38	64
<b>By manager (%)</b>			
Very much + quite a lot	82	68	64
Somewhat + not at all	18	32	36
<b>By senior administration (%)</b>			
Very much + quite a lot	48	60	30
Somewhat + not at all	52	40	70

Analysis of institutional support by college size shows that as college size increases, perceived support at the overall college level tended to decrease. Table 34 shows that when aggregating responses into two levels of support corresponding to “very much” and “quite a lot” versus “somewhat” and “not at all”, almost two thirds of counsellors in small (64%) and medium sized colleges (62%) perceived the counsellor role received a high level of support by their college. Just over one third (36%) of respondents in large colleges, on the other hand, reported they received a high level of support.

When asked about support by their manager, however, the same pattern emerged; lower levels of support were perceived by counsellors as college size increased. The majority of respondents from small, medium and large colleges, however, reported a high level of support by their manager.

The results for perceived support by senior management were more complex. Almost two thirds (60%) of counsellors in medium sized colleges reported a high level of support by their senior administration and almost one half in small colleges (48%) did so. However, slightly less than one third (30%) in large colleges reported they received a high level of support from their senior administration.

The final two questions examining institutional context measured job satisfaction and perceived effectiveness in meeting student needs, with both measures using a ten point scale. The results for job satisfaction show that while the average score ( $M = 7.8$ ) was quite high, scores ranged from a low of “2” to a high of “10” where a score of “1” represented “very low satisfaction” and “10” represented “very high satisfaction”.

Counsellors were also asked to report how effectively they felt they were meeting the support needs of students in their college with a score of “1” representing “very poorly” and “10” representing “very well”. The relatively high overall mean score ( $M = 7.8$ ) suggests that counsellors, on average, felt they were meeting student needs. However, once again the results show a wide range of scores from a low of “4” to a high of “10” suggesting there is considerable variation across colleges.

An analysis of job satisfaction and effectiveness in meeting student needs by college size showed little variation. In the first instance, the mean scores for small ( $M = 7.9$ ) and medium sized colleges ( $M = 8.0$ ) were very similar and the mean score for respondents from large colleges ( $M = 7.6$ ) was not dramatically different. Responses to the perceived effectiveness question were similar but with a trend toward decreasing effectiveness from small to large sized colleges. The mean score for respondents from small colleges was 8.1, in medium size colleges it was 7.8 and in large colleges it was 7.7.

### Best Practices

Counsellors were asked to list up to three “best practices” they thought their college counselling department was engaged in. There were 99 responses to “best practice #1”, 86 responses for #2 and 73 responses for #3.

The most common themes in the “best practices #1” list were:

- 26 responses dealt with prompt access to services, either through established walk-in hours, a triage system, providing immediate access to students in crisis, having a walk-in counsellor designated each day
- 15 responses cited close collaboration with peers, citing regular meetings, team work and regular consultation with peers

- 11 responses focused on the quality of the counselling offered; focus on counsellor competency, use of a certain modality, partnering with students, focus on skill/dedication of counsellors
- 8 responses cited a proactive approach; involvement in orientation, effective advertisement/marketing services
- 5 responses emphasized a student focused approach
- 4 responses each mentioned clinical supervision and early intervention with “at risk” students

The responses for “best practice #2” were wider in range. The three most common themes were:

- 22 responses focused collaboration amongst peers, faculty, staff
- 9 responses focused on workshop delivery with regard to study methods, personal management, the development of on-line workshops
- 4 responses cited the “student centred” approach

The responses to “best practice #3” covered a wide range of themes as well. The three most common were:

- 20 responses described collaboration amongst peers, faculty and staff, through regular consultation, proactive outreach to other departments/community resources
- 6 responses cited initiatives targeting the special needs of higher risk groups including Aboriginal, first generation students and students with disabilities
- 6 responses focused on the development/formalization of protocol/processes; electronic note taking, on line appointments, protocols re: confidentiality, developing more formalized early warning systems

All of the best practices are listed in Appendix E.

## Results of the Counselling Managers Survey

The section that follows summarizes the findings derived from the survey of those who managed counselling departments in the 24 Ontario colleges. Many of the questions contained within the manager’s survey paralleled those asked of counsellors in order to compare the views of both groups. The results of this comparison are provided in a later section of the report.



## Sample Profile

Managers of counselling services were invited to complete a questionnaire describing various aspects of their services. A total of 32 individuals responded to the online survey and Table 36 shows the distribution of participants by college.

Table 35: Respondents by College

College name	N	College name	N
Algonquin	1	La Cité Collégiale	1
Cambrian	1	Lambton	1
Canadore	2	Loyalist	1
Centennial	1	Mohawk	1
Collège Boreal	2	Niagara	1
Conestoga	1	Sault	2
Confederation	1	Seneca	3
Durham	1	Sheridan	3
Fanshawe	1	St. Clair	1
Fleming	1	St. Lawrence	1
George Brown	2		
Georgian	3	Total	32

## Demographic and Professional Profile of College Counselling Managers

Not surprisingly, the majority (81%) of respondents were female. Few of the managers were young as only 20% were less than forty years of age. The largest group (52%) was 50 years of age or more, and 29% were between 40 and 49 years old. Correspondingly, almost one third reported they would retire in four years or less and one in five indicated they would do so in five to ten years.

Administrative experience was extensive as 42% had been in the role between 10 and 19 years and one quarter had 20 or more years of experience. One third had been a counsellor in the college system and almost half (44%) had experience being a counsellor in the community. One quarter reported they were currently “regulated” by a regulatory college associated with counselling, the majority being with the Ontario College of Social Workers or the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers. Two fifths indicated they intended to register with the Ontario College of Registered Psychotherapists and Registered Mental Health Therapists, the majority as a Registered Therapist. In addition, one half reported that the upcoming regulation by the College of Registered Psychotherapists and Registered Mental Health Therapists would have a “very” or “quite” significant impact on their counselling department.

## Scope of the Role

The concept of maintaining service delivery statistics within counselling departments has been discussed by OCC members for some time. When asked whether these statistics were kept by their department, over four in five counselling managers (88%) indicated they did so and for over one half (52%) this was accomplished with software such as ClockWork. Another third utilized other software programs such as Microsoft Access and for almost one fifth service statistics were paper based. Table 36 shows the percentage of respondents who indicated that specific statistics on service delivery for 2010-2011 could be provided to the researchers.

Table 36: Service Delivery Statistics - Managers

Statistic	%
Number of students who saw counsellors	82
Number of student visits to counsellors	89
Number of students who presented with mental health issues	67
Top five “presenting situation” factors	59
Most frequent referral sources to counselling	48
Number of students referred to community resources	37
Number of crisis situations (e.g. threat to self and/or others)	59

When asked whether or not they had an expectation of how many students a counsellor should see in a given time one half said “yes”. Of these, the majority reported the expectation was that counsellors would see 5 students in a seven hour day. Two mentioned a limit of 6 per day and many commented that the number varied depending on other demands on their time such as community outreach, documentation, and the nature of the issues presented by students in a given day and time of the year.

There are the three traditional components of the college counsellor role as per the Class Definition in the Ontario College Academic Employees Collective Agreement. When asked to provide an estimate of the percentage of time their counselling staff as a whole spent providing these three “broad service categories”, managers reported that, on average, 60% of counsellor time was devoted to personal counselling, 26% was for academic advising and 16% focused on career counselling. The range reported for each category also varied considerably between managers indicating inter-institutional differences. For personal counselling the range was 21% to 100%, for academic advising it was 5% to 60% and for career counselling the range was from 0% to 30%.

In addition to department-based counselling for students, counsellors engage in a variety of “outreach” activities on college campuses. Table 37 shows the percentage of counselling managers reporting the relative frequency with which their counselling staff was involved in

various activities with students and staff. Out-of-class student workshops and guest speaking in classes were the most frequently reported activities.

Table 37: Frequency of Counsellor Activities

Type of Service Activity	Sessions per Year (%)			
	10+	5-9	below 5	do not participate
Student workshops (outside of class)	37	26	30	7
Guest speaking in professor's classes	30	22	44	4
Training student leaders/student employees	11	22	52	15
Training for staff/faculty	19	37	41	4

Additional activities performed by counselling staff are listed in Table 38. The results show the percentage of counselling managers who reported the frequency with which their staff participated in each activity in a typical year.

Table 38: Frequency of Activities

Type of Service Activity	Sessions per Year (%)			
	10+	5-9	below 5	do not participate
<b>Student Behavior Consultation</b>				
Discussion/coaching/strategy develop	52	11	37	0
Developing/writing Behavior contracts	22	15	33	30
Provide mandated counselling	19	15	37	30
<b>Resolving Instances of Harassment</b>				
Student to student	19	19	37	26
Student to staff	4	26	37	33
Staff to student	4	15	41	41
Staff to staff	4	4	12	81
<b>Mediation</b>				
Student to student	7	30	33	30
Staff to student	7	26	30	37
Staff to staff	4	7	11	78
Assisting students: formal academic appeal	15	22	52	11
Assisting students: formal non-academic appeal	19	26	37	19
Risk assessment	50	27	19	4
Tragic events response	12	31	54	4
Counselling for staff/faculty	0	7	30	63
Use of an early warning system	30	15	33	22

From the perspective of managers, counsellors were engaged most frequently in student behaviour consultation with faculty or managers, risk assessment, writing behaviour contracts and formal academic and non-academic appeals.

Managers were also asked about the degree to which they believed counsellor participation in various activities added value to the delivery of counselling services in their college. Table 39 shows the percentage of managers rating each activity as “very much” to “not at all”.

Table 39: Perceived Value-Added by Activity

Activity	Very much	Quite a bit	Very little	Not at all
Teaching credit courses	11	19	41	30
Union involvement	7	15	41	37
Community involvement	14	64	21	0
Professional Association work	41	33	26	0
Supervision of student counsellors at Master’s level	32	29	36	4
Supervision of student counsellors at a Bachelor’s level	14	25	32	29
Research/Writing	14	46	32	7

Managers clearly perceived the involvement of counsellors in professional associations and the supervision of student counsellors at the bachelor’s level and community involvement as being of greatest value to the delivery of counselling services.

A final question in this section asked managers how many of their counsellors typically utilized the ten days of professional development they are entitled to each year. Almost one fifth (14%) indicated that all their counsellors utilized their professional development days, one third said most did and two in five indicated that ‘some’ did. A very small percentage (7%) suggested that none of their counsellors made use of their professional development time.

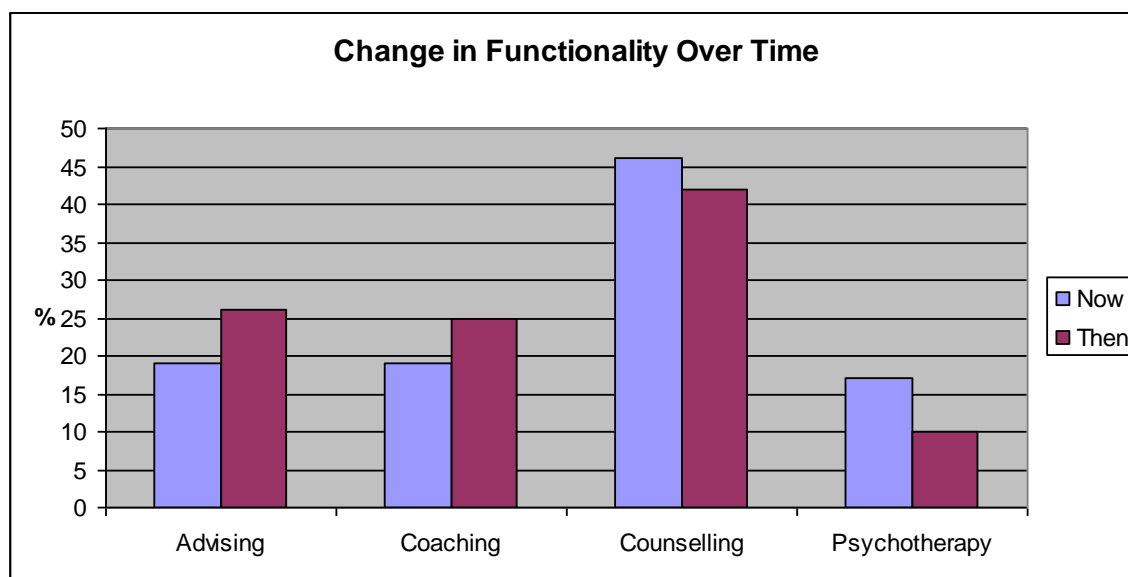
### Characteristics of Service Delivery

Counselling can be delivered in an eclectic fashion where diverse methods are utilized depending on the situation, or where emphasis is placed on the use of a single approach (prescriptive). Managers were asked to indicate where their department would fall on a scale of 1 to 10, with “1” being “eclectic” and “10” being “prescriptive”. While scores ranged from 1 to 8, the average was 3.5, biased toward an eclectic approach to delivery. When asked if their college endorsed a particular method of counselling as the preferred way of delivering service, the majority (73%) reported they did not. Those who reported a preferred method indicated this was a ‘brief’ or short term “solution focused” method.

Some have suggested that working with students can represent a spectrum or continuum that represents a “complexity” of involvement with students. The continuum, from least to most “complex”, progresses from advising, through coaching and counselling to psychotherapy. When managers were asked to estimate the percentage distribution of time their counsellors currently functioned in each category on the continuum, they reported counsellors functioned as advisors and coaches one fifth (19%) of the time, that almost half the time (45%) they functioned as counsellors and that 17% of the time they were engaged in psychotherapy. In a similar vein, when asked to indicate where their counselling staff primarily functioned in their current practice on a scale of “1” to “12” with values of “1- 3” indicating advising, “4-6” corresponding to coaching, “7-9” aligned with counselling and “10-12” associated with psychotherapy, the mean score reported by managers was 7.9, the mid-point of the counselling range.

Many counsellors have suggested that their “complexity” of involvement with students has changed over the years. Managers, therefore, were asked to think about when they first started their role in college counselling and respond to the same set of questions as above. Figure 15 shows that the anecdotal evidence from counsellors is supported by a more quantitative analysis.

Figure 15: Change in Functional "Complexity" Over Time



While counselling managers reported that the largest percentage of counsellor time was spent counselling and that they primarily functioned in a counselling mode, the distribution has changed over time. A larger percentage of counsellors’ time was currently dedicated to psychotherapy than was the case in the past. This was borne out by the finding that managers reported a mean score of 6.3 for their past practice, a point at the top of the ‘coaching’ range. The implication is that the role of the counsellor has become more “complex” over time.

There has been some discussion in the student affairs literature regarding the utility of web-based technologies in delivering counselling services (e.g, Erickson, Trerise, VanLooy, Lee

and Bruyère, 2009). The views of counselling managers on this topic were assessed with two questions. When asked whether they saw a web presence as important to promoting the use of counselling services within their college, almost one half (46%) reported the technology was “very important” and over one third (38%) said it was “quite important”. In addition, when asked whether they considered web technologies (i.e., mental health websites, e-counselling, use of social media) to be a way of improving the delivery of counselling services at their college, over two thirds of managers (68%) said “definitely” with the remaining 32% saying “maybe”. Overall, Ontario college counselling managers appear to see web technologies as a vehicle for promoting the delivery and increased use of counselling services.

Dealing with walk-in traffic and wait times are typically a challenge for many counselling departments. When counselling managers were asked whether they believed they had an effective system for dealing with walk-in traffic, only a small number (10%) said they did not. Strategies most frequently reported to accommodate walk-in traffic involved triage and scheduling staff for specific periods that focused on walk-in traffic only. Managers also emphasized that while anyone “in crisis” would be seen immediately, some students could not be seen for considerable time, especially during peak periods.

The latter issue was explored with a question that asked managers whether they kept track of “wait times”. Over one half (55%) said they did not, and of those who did, most did so using a client tracking software system such as Clockwork, Outlook Calendar or other in-house tool. A few used manual systems that involved creating wait lists or reviewing counsellors’ appointment schedules.

Other aspects of service delivery explored with managers included mechanisms to deal with emergencies, and providing service in the evening and on weekends. In the first instance, only a small number of managers (14%) indicated they provided “on-call” service. A somewhat higher percentage (24%) reported they had regular evening service hours, and of the six who did so, the average number of evenings was 2.8. Only one college reported they provided weekend service and this was for a total of four hours.

### **Dealing with Diversity**

A number of questions assessed the impact of student diversity on the delivery of counselling services. Aspects of diversity examined included cultural, linguistic, age, sexual orientation, mental health issues and aboriginal ancestry. Results showed that the largest percentage of managers (32%) said diversity had “very much” or “somewhat” of an impact, one fifth reported this had a “profound” impact on the delivery of counselling services, 9% indicated this had “very little” impact and a small percentage (4.5%) said it had no impact.

When asked to describe the most profound way that student diversity affected their work as a manager, the majority of comments focused on a need for multicultural and cross cultural understanding, ensuring that the cultural diversity training needs of staff are met, and responding to unique student needs to deliver consistent service levels. While there was substantial variation

between colleges in the percentage of time managers perceived their counsellors spent doing “cross cultural counselling”, the mean for the group was 25%.

Much discussion has occurred recently regarding the mental health issues (diagnosed or undiagnosed) of students in the Ontario college system. When managers of counselling were asked how much these issues impacted their counselling department, almost two thirds (61%) reported it had a “profound impact” and one third (35%) said ‘very much of an impact’. The nature of the impact was described as requiring additional time to deal with complex cases often accompanied by liaison with community agencies, and the impact on counsellor workload and stress levels. Issues of policy development and liability were also mentioned. On average, respondents reported that 56% of counsellor time was spent dealing with mental health issues on campus.

Many colleges have hired staff to work specifically with Aboriginal learners. Of the 23 managers who responded, almost half (48%) indicated they supervised an Aboriginal counsellor. To gain a sense of the Aboriginal Counsellor’s practice, managers were asked to indicate on a scale of 1-10 where “1” meant only meeting with registered Aboriginal students when they come to counselling and “10” meant the counsellor reaches out and connects/meets with every Aboriginal student before they even arrive at school. The average score for the group was “5” with variation between respondents ranging from “1” to “10”. Two thirds of the group also reported that the Aboriginal counsellor role was ‘significantly different’ from that of other college counsellors with the remainder reporting that it was “somewhat different”. Comments regarding these differences focused on understanding the culture of Aboriginal students, differing expectations and the importance of being connected to the Aboriginal community.

## **The College Environment**

Questions in this section were designed to describe the college context within which counselling services were delivered. Aspects included the degree of collaboration with others on campus, level of monitoring/supervision, perceived level of institutional support for the counselling role, job satisfaction and perceived effectiveness of counselling services in meeting student support needs.

### **Collaboration**

Several questions assessed the degree to which counselling managers believed their staff collaborated with various individuals and groups both internally and externally. While almost three quarters (73%) said their department was involved in planning orientation activities, all indicated that they participated in the event. In addition, managers were asked whether their counsellors were encouraged to speak to classes at the beginning of the year to introduce themselves and explain the services available. Slightly more than one quarter (27%) indicated their counsellors met all classes, almost two thirds (64%) reported their counsellors met some classes and approximately one tenth (9%) indicated they did not meet classes at all.

When these results were analyzed by college size determined by FTE enrolment in 2010, managers in all small ( less than 5,000) and medium sized (5,000-9,999) colleges reported they were involved in planning orientation whereas only a small proportion of those at large (10,000 or above) colleges (14%) reported this was true. Participating in orientation, however, was independent of college size as all managers indicated their counsellors did so. Outreach activities such as having counsellors speak to classes at the beginning of the year to introduce themselves and explain services available, however, were again influenced by college size. Table 40 shows that as college size increases the likelihood of counsellors meeting with all classes declines significantly.

Table 40: Meeting Classes by College Size

College Size	Classes Met		
	All	Some	None
Small	43	57	0
Medium	25	75	0
Large	14	57	27

A number of questions asked managers to indicate whether certain groups or individuals were present on their campus and, if so, to rate the level of involvement their staff had with each. The rating scale varied from “1” = “No contact”, to “10” = “Extensive collaboration”. Table 41 shows the percentage of managers who indicated a specific group was present on campus, where faculty, Disability Services and the Registrar’s Office are present in all colleges, and the mean Collaboration Score for each group. The results show that the greatest collaboration was reported to be with Disability Services and Psychiatric Services while the lowest was with Career Advisors and Academic Advisors.

Table 41: Degree of Collaboration with Campus Groups

Group	Present on Campus (%)	Mean Collaboration Score
Faculty	100	7.2
Disability services	100	8.3
Career advisors	77	4.2
Academic advisors	64	5.8
Student success advisors	68	7.0
Health center	82	6.6
Ombudsperson	27	7.0
Psychiatric/psychological consultation	48	7.6
Registrar’s office	100	6.5



An exploration of the influence of college size on the level of collaboration with the campus groups listed above showed a number of interesting patterns. Table 42 shows that collaboration between counsellors and faculty, Disability Services, the Registrar's Office and the Health Center tended to be greater in small as compared to large colleges. On the other hand, collaboration between counselling staff and Career Advisors, Academic Advisors and an Ombudsperson was greater in large as compared to small colleges.

Table 42: Mean Collaboration Score by College Size

Group	College Size		
	Small	Medium	Large
Faculty	8.14	7.00	6.57
Disability services	8.67	8.83	7.57
Career advisors	3.00	4.20	5.20
Academic advisors	5.00	5.75	6.14
Student success advisors	7.25	6.50	7.17
Health center	7.00	6.71	5.75
Ombudsperson	6.00	7.50	7.50
Psychiatric/psychological consultation	7.00	8.25	7.00
Registrar's office	7.17	6.62	5.86

The influence of college size on the presence of certain support groups and services such as Career and Academic Advisors, a Health Center and access to psychiatric/psychological consultation was also explored. Table 43 shows that blended disability services, the case where counsellors provide services to students with disabilities as well as those who have academic, career or personal issues, appears to be more prevalent in small and medium colleges. Career, Academic and Student Success Advisors in contrast tend to be present with greater frequency in large colleges.

The blended disability services model was found to be present in eight colleges. Not surprisingly, the level of collaboration in the delivery of disability services with the blended model was higher ( $M = 9.60$ ) than the non-blended model ( $M = 7.86$ ).

The degree of collaboration within counselling departments was also examined. Two questions asked managers to indicate whether regular staff meetings were held and the frequency with which counsellors consulted with the manager. In the first instance, the vast majority of managers (96%) reported that regular staff meetings were held. The frequency of requests by counsellors for consultation with their manager on a monthly basis varied from a low of twice to a high of 50 times with the largest percentage (24%) reporting this occurred approximately 20 times per month.

Table 43: Presence of Support Groups by College Size

Group	College Size		
	Small	Medium	Large
Blended disability services	42.9%	50.0%	14.3%
Career advisors	71.4%	75.0%	85.7%
Academic advisors	42.9%	62.5%	85.7%
Student success advisors	66.7%	42.9%	100.0%
Health center	100.0%	87.5%	57.1%
Ombudsperson	28.6%	25.0%	28.6%
Psychiatric/psychological consultation	42.9%	62.5%	33.3%

### Monitoring/Supervision

Those who perform professional roles within institutions tend to be subject to less supervision and control over how they do their work. Three items on the manager questionnaire asked them to indicate the degree of oversight on counsellors' work. Slightly more than one third (38%) reported that performance appraisals were conducted with counsellors, with the largest percentage (44%) saying this took place once every 2-4 years. One third reported appraisals took place every year and for slightly more than one fifth (22%) the frequency was once every 5 years. In addition, slightly less than two thirds (64%) indicated that their counsellors did not have a written job description that went beyond contained within their collective agreement.

### Perceived Support, Satisfaction and Effectiveness

The final section of the closed-response questionnaire items examined the degree to which counselling managers felt the counselling role was supported within their institution, whether they saw themselves as advocates for counselling and the degree of support provided by senior management. Three questions also examined overall job satisfaction, the perceived effectiveness of their counselling department in meeting student support needs and the challenges they faced in managing a counselling department.

The majority of managers (63%) reported that the counselling role was supported "very much" within their college and a further one third said "quite a lot". In addition, four fifths indicated they "very much" saw themselves as advocates for counselling and a further 20% said "quite a lot". At the level of senior management, however, the results were less strong. Almost one half of the managers (48%) felt the counselling role was supported by this group "very much" with 43% saying "quite a lot". Only a small percentage said "somewhat".

Managers' satisfaction with their job was quite high. On a scale of "1" = "very low" to "10" = "very high", the mean score was 8.19 although the range of scores extended from 3 to 10. Managers' overall assessment of their effectiveness in meeting the support needs of their students was also high. On a scale of "1" = "very poorly" to "10" = "very well", the mean score was 8.36 with a range of scores from 6 to 10. An analysis of the two items by college size showed that small colleges were slightly less satisfied ( $M = 7.86$ ) with their job than in medium ( $M = 8.38$ ) and large ( $M = 8.33$ ) colleges. A similar analysis of perceived effectiveness, suggests that on average managers of small colleges feel they are more effective ( $M = 9.00$ ) than medium ( $M = 7.63$ ) or large ( $M = 8.57$ ) colleges.

An open-ended text item asked respondents about the biggest challenge(s) they faced in managing their counselling department. A scan of the comments received showed the most common challenge related to meeting the complex mental health needs of students. This was followed by difficulties related to inadequate resources, particularly the number of counsellors available.

### Best Practices

Managers of counselling departments were asked to suggest up to three policies, programs, practices or initiatives they believed constituted "best practices". Respondents provided a total of 46 practices representing a great variety of tactics and strategies believed to be effective in the delivery of counselling services. Appendix F provides the complete list of these.

A search for common themes showed that a few respondents mentioned the advantages of peer supervision and self-management of the counselling team. Other topics included the advantages of triage models and scheduled walk-in times so students could be served in a timely fashion.

### Results of Focus Groups with Counsellors

The section that follows summarizes the basic themes derived from the 30 on-campus focus groups with 120 counsellors in all Ontario colleges. Key themes/comments are identified for each question.

*Question 1. Does your college have multiple campuses? What effect does a multi-campus environment have on the delivery of services? Do all campuses have equivalent levels of service? If not, why?*

#### 1. The definition of a campus

Many counsellors specified the difference between a "campus" and other kinds of settings, such as "storefronts", "centres" and other rented facilities.

#### 2. Small is beautiful and sometimes not

A number of counsellors described the smaller campus as having distinct advantages in terms of service delivery, flexibility and connection with faculty. In contrast, there were counsellors who described working at smaller campuses as isolating and lacking opportunities for consultation.

### **3. The challenge of distance**

This theme was more prevalent in discussions with the Northern Ontario college counsellors. Distances are prohibitive and travel during the winter is often dangerous contributing to the perception that satellite campuses tend to be underserved.

### **4. Sometimes the satellite campus program mix/gender/cultural make-up determines demand**

A number of factors will influence the demand for counselling services. When describing the particularities of a campus, counsellors would often indicate that the program mix, dominant gender or cultural make-up of a campus would have differential impacts on service demand.

### **5. Difference between service and availability/do it a different way**

Many counsellors distinguished service availability/level of service and the form that those services took. On paper, students typically have access to the same service, but how accessible the service is or the format/modality that service takes will vary between the main campus and the satellite campuses.

### **6. Trying to use technology to improve access**

Some discussion centred on the use of “technology” (ranging from the use of the phone for discussion and texting, email and web-camming) to improve access to students in satellite campuses.

### **7. Some of the other challenges**

Counsellors mentioned a number of challenges in providing service within multi-campus environments including: the increasing number of complex cases at smaller campuses without on-site counselling capacity; difficulty in providing proactive/pre-emptive support; not having relationships with staff/faculty at campuses and the limits this can have on providing effective service on an itinerant basis and; the difficulty in coordinating service between campuses and utilizing consultation amongst counsellors.

*Question 2. Would you say the counselling department is meeting the support needs of students in your college?*

#### **1. Depends on the time of year**

A number of counsellors described the “cyclic nature” of demand on the counselling department and that increased demand for career advisement/program selection, academic advisement and personal counselling fluctuate fairly reliably by the time of the semester.

#### **2. Meeting the needs within the new context of advisory roles**

A number of counsellors described how their ability to meet student need has been impacted by the growth of advisory roles within their colleges. Generally the theme was that the

proliferation of roles had caused confusion about what the advisor role was and how it would impact counsellor workload.

### **3. We meet the needs of students we see**

The most common response to this question was essentially that counsellors do a good job of meeting the needs of students that make it into their offices. This usually led to a proviso that it was unknown how many students weren't seen and could have benefited by seeing a counsellor.

### **4. Waitlists and what is a reasonable amount of time for students to wait**

The subject of waitlists, as a measure of service effectiveness/accessibility, was highlighted in many of the focus groups. Whether colleges had a waitlist, at what time of year and what was deemed a "reasonable" amount of time to wait for an appointment were the key issues explored.

### **5. Providing for "harder to serve" populations... International Students, Aboriginal and those with Mental Health Issues**

Discussions often revolved around the challenges of providing counselling to three "harder to serve" populations; International Students, Aboriginal Students, Students with mental health issues.

### **6. No one is saying that we aren't meeting the needs!**

A number of counsellors measured success by a "lack of complaints", some quoted client satisfaction measures and one quoted KPIs. Many counsellors also observed that they had little hard data to justify their responses.

### **7. Outsourcing to meet student needs**

There were some interesting observations about utilizing the services of EAP providers. EAP providers tend to favour phone intakes, which many students don't find personalized enough. Limits to visits can also be an issue. For outsourcing which involves accessing services in the local community, success for students depends ultimately on the length of the waitlist for that service and most community services (non-fee paying) are stretched beyond limits and often suggest that students will get faster service from their college student services.

### **8. Structural elements of the system**

This is a catch-all theme which summarized a number of "structural" elements that counsellors saw impacting the delivery of service: structure of the semester; lack of integration with the "academic" side of the house; not enough contact with faculty; physical characteristics of the counselling venue itself; management philosophy and practice; counsellor complement not keeping up to the growth in the system and; the exponential growth of a select number of colleges.

## ***Question 2b. If not, what policies, processes and resources would be required to do so?***

### **1. More counsellors/designated to handle crisis/do proactive work/establish a standard**

A number of counsellors predictably saw an increase in complement as necessary, but in retrospect it was surprising that it wasn't a more commonly expressed remedy. Frequently the proposed additional hire was seen to play a specific role (i.e. handling crisis, doing more

proactive work). A few counsellors called for the need to establish standards of practice to ensure service quality for students across the system.

## **2. Need to clarify the counsellor role**

The need to clarify the counsellor role was very commonly discussed: the need to distinguish it from the advisory roles which have proliferated over the past few years; removing functions from the role which are no longer relevant and; particularly in light of the burgeoning demand to support students with mental health issues, considering what limits should we put on the service we provide?

## **3. The capacity for clinical supervision**

A call for more regular, clinically-focused supervision was commonly expressed.

## **4. Developing working partnerships within college/with community agencies**

More effective partnerships within the college and with community agencies, was mentioned by a few counsellors as a way to better meet student need.

## **5. Policy development**

The most prevalent theme in the focus group discussions surrounded the need to address what most see as a distinct lack of formalized policies and procedures governing the practice of counselling in their respective colleges. Comments covered a broad range of sub-topics, including: the need to counsellors to be involved in policy development; policies that need to address the complexity of providing mental health services within a postsecondary environment; the need for consistency in providing services to students; risk assessment protocol and; accommodation processes.

## **6. Service philosophy/physical layout/service organization and process**

Comments within this theme concentrated on various “structural aspects” of counselling delivery including: service philosophy; the physical layout of offices/waiting rooms; discussions advocating the blended versus unblended models of service delivery and; the “one stop shop” structure.

### ***Question 2c. Who are the key individuals necessary to implement these changes?***

This question was not addressed directly in all of the focus groups; the flow of conversation, which was often passionate and fast-paced, sometimes blurred boundaries between questions and some, like this one, tended to receive less attention as a result. The responses were wide ranging, but tended to focus on the senior management level.

### ***Question 3. Counsellors are seen as providing support to students for academic, career and personal issues. Which of these three areas do you believe has the greatest demand?***

With few exceptions, counsellors identified personal as presenting the greatest demand in their work. Although some distinguished the intensity of the work from the volume (a few counsellors indicated that volume wise, academic met or exceeded the demand for personal

counselling, but that personal was much more intense and took more time), the vast majority of counsellors indicated that personal counselling now constitutes the majority of their day to day work. Academic was seen by most to be in second place, and the demand for it had much to do with the time of year, the campus location/program mix and whether the students were international or Aboriginal. Across the board, career is characterized as a distant third by most counsellors. Although there were a few counsellors that indicated that career is somewhat of a specialty, the amount of career counselling, even at colleges when it was advertised that counsellors provided that service, is perceived to be “way down” from what it used to be. Three large themes can be teased out of the focus group discussions: proliferation of advisor roles, time of year/academic cycle and the “holistic nature” of college counselling.

### **1. Proliferation of Advisor Roles**

Depending on the college, the “advisement role” is fulfilled by a myriad of players, with a variety of job titles, across support, administration and faculty lines. In some cases, advisory capacity is also entrusted to students in their roles as “peer mentors” or “peer advisors”. The advisement function will be explored later in more detail, but the point to be made here is that at most colleges in the system, aspects of academic advisement have been “carved” from the counsellor role particularly over the past five years at least partially in response to the upswing in demand for personal counselling.

### **2. Academic Cycle/Particularities of Student and Program**

A number of counsellors responded to the question by observing that there are shifts in demand for the different core services depending on the time of year.

Counsellors that work with ESL students and those enrolled in General Arts and Science programs indicated that they are more likely to experience a higher demand for career counselling. Some counsellors suggested that with international students specifically, that the legitimacy of seeking “career coaching” enables them to see a counsellor for what turns out to be more personal issues. Counsellors proffered a number of thoughts on why career is becoming such a small part of the job for most; at some colleges students don’t have access, or full access to counsellors until they have enrolled in a program; there are a number of free, on-line resources available that students independently consult; the career advisement role, like the academic advisement role, has grown at some colleges with pieces of the career exploration process “carved off” similar to that experienced with academic advisement; that college bound students are not “as likely to explore options” as university students would for example and; for some students who come from a more “collective family style”, more notably some international students, abiding by a parent’s wishes would preclude the need for any kind of career exploration.

### **3. The “holistic” nature of problem definition**

By far, the most common comment from counsellors related to the “co-morbidity with a spectrum of issues” that impacts academic success, and the corresponding difficulty “teasing out” academic from career and from personal. It was very common during the focus groups at

almost every college to describe that students will often access counselling based on a simple declaration that they are “having trouble in school.”

***Question 3b. If you have seen an increase in the incidence of mental health issues on campus, can you explain why?***

Discussions in the initial focus groups prompted the addition of this question to the focus group protocol for the remaining college visits.

**1. Less stigma/more openness in society in general**

Generally, there appears to be less stigma in society towards mental health issues, and this has resulted in more open disclosure, less reluctance to seek help from counsellors, more self-diagnosis and self-referral and better medication and treatment.

**2. The college is a more accessible place**

Many students with mental health issues wouldn't have considered postsecondary as an option even a decade ago. Improvement in accommodations, seeing attendance at school as a “normalizing” part of a treatment plan and an ambient improvement in the “student centeredness” of most colleges, has provided more opportunities for those with disabilities, including mental disabilities, to attend school.

**3. Students are coming to us with more complex lives**

Counsellors reported that students “just appear to have more on their plates”; working almost full time hours, more serious financial, mature students trying to meet the demands of school while balancing family responsibilities or dealing with chronic pain issues. For many counsellors there appeared to be a “whole different population in school” essentially trying to deal with all sorts of issues at once. For most counsellors, gone are the days of helping students through simple developmental issues. Far more common is helping refugees deal with complicated settlement issues and brutal histories of trauma.

**4. College counselling departments are viewed by the community to be more accessible points of access for students to receive mental health services.**

Most counsellors emphasized that students get easier access to counselling services in the college compared to community resources with massive waiting lists; students get solid support in the college system and they don't have to pay for it.

**5. This generation of students seems to lack resilience, has fewer coping skills and has more difficulty dealing with the stresses of postsecondary education.**

Counsellors noted that the younger generation of students struggles with the stress of school. Mature students (supported through third party funders such as WSIB and Second Career) often arrive underprepared, having experienced a hurried and insufficient preparatory program and/or lacking a suitable career assessment and appropriate program placement.

**6. What is happening in the college is simply a reflection of socio-economic conditions**

There is a lot of anxiety, unemployment, uncertainty, families struggling with the highest levels of indebtedness we've ever seen in Canada and a fairly gloomy economic forecast for the immediate future. And for young people in postsecondary, the high unemployment rate looms



outside the doors of the college after graduation quite possibly with a student loan to repay... the perception is that there are increasingly fewer jobs for them, and there is incredible competition for the few opportunities that exist.

***Question 4. On a scale of 1-5, 1 being low and 5 being high, how diverse (cultural/linguistic, age, LGBTQ) would you say your student population is? How does this diversity impact the delivery of counselling services?***

### **1. Different campuses have different constituencies**

Most colleges have multiple campuses and almost without exception, the campuses had unique characteristics when it came to describing diversity. Some counsellors described large ranges between their main campus (that may be assessed at a 4-5) and smaller, more rural campuses (assessed at a 1-2).

### **2. A smattering of diversities... socioeconomic conditions, academic ability, drug use, mental health, autism**

In order to promote the broadest possible discussion, we were open-ended in our “definition” of what comprised diversity. Culture/linguistic, age and sexual orientation were the three most commonly mentioned. Less often mentioned but no less important aspects of diversity were: students who come from poverty where financial issues have a huge impact on academic success; a higher range of academic abilities than you’d probably find in university; the variety and ubiquitous nature of substance abuse; the wide spectrum of mental health issues and; students in the higher end of the autism spectrum.

### **3. Knowledge of/Forming partnerships with community resources essential**

“Settlement issues” experienced by new Canadians is not a new phenomenon. But for some colleges experiencing a sharp rise in the number of international students bringing with them a host of “cultural issues” makes community partnerships with organizations with years of culturally sensitive experience an important component of cross-cultural counselling.

### **4. Having or not having diversity on staff**

Four in five counsellors in Ontario colleges are female and, broadly speaking, the vast majority are Caucasian. A number of counsellors mentioned the ongoing challenge of meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse student population with a fairly homogenous staff complement.

### **5. Small/medium colleges coping with changes in diversity**

It was interesting to hear counsellors of small and medium sized colleges recount their experiences counselling in an increasingly diverse student population. Unlike the large college counsellors who were more likely to describe having a decade or more of experience working within a more diverse student demographic, the counsellors in the medium colleges (which have experienced the most growth in the past five years) describe an increase in diversity that has largely accompanied this growth.

### **6. LGBTQ**

Counsellors at every college mentioned the needs of LGBTQ students, but there wasn’t a great deal of elaboration of programs or approaches specific to this population. Although a

number of counsellors mentioned positive space campaigns and training for faculty and staff and students at their respective colleges, counsellors tended to focus more on the cultural/linguistic and age dimensions of diversity. Sexual orientation and gender was discussed a number of times within the context of culture featured in other sections below.

### **7. The diversity of age**

Besides cultural/linguistic diversity, age was the second most frequently discussed kind diversity within the college system.

### **8. Challenge of Second Career**

Somewhat related to “age” were the particular challenges of working with students sponsored under the provincial “Second Career” program.

### **9. The diversity of the Aboriginal students**

A number of counsellors described the broad diversity of Aboriginal students beyond the basic “on reserve”/“off reserve” duality. This is discussed more fully below in question #6.

### **10. The respectful environment that can result from the diversity**

Two interesting themes were evident in this section; the cultural influence of respect for elders and the relatively advanced educational level attained by many international students previous to immigrating to Canada.

### **11. Cultural/linguistic diversity**

There were frequent comments highlighting the characteristics and needs of different “sub groups” within the term “international student”. There are for example international students whose intention is to learn and live in a different culture; recent immigrants attempting to make a foothold in their new home through earning college/university credentials and; children of first and generation Canadian families who are often wrestling with “competing values” to name but three.

### **12. The need to use language carefully**

Paying careful attention to the use of language is critical to ensuring the most effective communication with international students. Concepts that we take for granted, like “stress” and “depression”, aren’t clearly understood in certain cultures, so again not making assumptions is an important aspect of accommodating diversity.

### **13. The challenge of functioning in a second/third/fourth language**

It was noted that students themselves often are frustrated with their level of fluency and are discouraged at the prospect of not being hired outside of the college upon graduation because of “not so good language”, even though many of these students are doing quite well. The opposite was also expressed, that over-confident students underestimate the difficulty they will have with “higher level” concepts and the technical language in textbooks

### **14. Ongoing p/d to stay on top of the demands to offer culturally congruent support**

Providing counselling services to students with the breadth of diversities (cultural, transgendered, Asperger’s Spectrum Disorder, etc.) we routinely meet in college requires ongoing professional development and personal growth. Many spoke of the enriching nature of this journey both personally and professionally.

### **15. Challenge of marketing to students who see great stigma in coming to a counsellor.**

Marketing services to students from cultures where counsellors don't exist is a challenge. Some students can be convinced to come in for "academic advisement" or "career coaching" but the stigma of needing personal counselling may prevent them from even considering a visit to a counsellor. Students from some cultures seek advice from "counsellors as experts" rather than willingly engage in more "insight oriented" discussion.

### **16. Situations outside of mainstream Canadian experience**

Students from other countries are bringing stories of unspeakable violence and trauma they have suffered into counselling departments in increasing numbers. Students describe kidnappings, death threats, torture, murder of family members, threats of honour killings... all beyond the experience of most Canadians.

### **17. International students mean big money to college budgets... and their lives in Canada present incredible obstacles**

Many colleges have prioritized the recruitment of international students as an important revenue source but contrary to public perception, not all international students come from rich families. Students coming from more modest means can find life in Canada extremely stressful (six or seven students living in a two room apartment to save money). Other issues raised during discussions included students receiving incomplete information during the "recruitment process" (oftentimes from recruiters who didn't necessarily work for the college) resulting in expectations that weren't accurate and the stress associated with not meeting the expectations of family back home.

### **18. Accommodating academic performance**

This was a controversial area discussed at a focus group; that students learning the language should be "accommodated". Some counsellors argue that we should be testing knowledge of the subject, not reading speed, and a compelling argument can be made to provide "extra time."

### **19. Family systems/parental control/responsibility for family/free choice**

It was very common for counsellors to describe supporting students negotiating the values, control and demands placed on them within their families, while living in a culture that promotes and celebrates freedom, self-expression and individualization.

### **20. The need to suspend judgment, to be innately curious about others**

Some of the most insightful, passionate and lyrical comments were made by counsellors when talking about the "purity" of cross-cultural counselling. This very "client centered" interaction requires the practitioner to suspend judgment, to truly listen to the client and to express a genuine and innate curiosity about another's life journey. Making assumptions and having an underdeveloped self-awareness, particularly of our own cultural biases, will impair effectiveness when working with people from divergent backgrounds and experiences.

*Question 5. How do student mental health issues impact the delivery of counselling services at your college?*

#### **1. Characteristics of the Students We are Seeing/What characterizes the cases**

Across the colleges, counsellors are almost unanimous in their perception that students are presenting with more mental health issues; that situations students present are more complex and serious and; much of what we are seeing relates to de-stigmatization of mental health, resilience issues in today's youth and as a natural reflection of significant structural change in our economy and communities.

The notion that college counselling essentially involves coaching adolescents through predictable transitional issues like a break-up with a boy or girlfriend has reached the status of a cliché. Many counsellors reflected on what seems to be a generalized increase in the vulnerability of today's student. It is speculated by many that for a number of reasons, there are students in college who wouldn't have been ten years ago.

Many counsellors see the increase in students presenting with mental health issues as a reflection of many societal factors that have contributed to lowering the stigma associated with mental illness. As one counsellor put it, "society has changed, we are more aware as to what mental illness is" and that we have developed "general comfort in naming things, people say 'I'm depressed' or 'I'm anxious'... it has entered the common lexicon."

Students appear to many counsellors to have more complicated lives. Some are almost working full time hours, there appear to be more serious financial issues and we're more likely to see students supported by "third party funders" (WSIB, Second Career, etc.) who bring with them significant loss issues and often experience chronic pain which significantly impacts success in school. Many of the larger colleges particularly have experienced upswings in international/new Canadian enrolment, and many of those students present with complex "settlement issues", histories of severe trauma and being unable to find work in their field. Generally speaking, students come from communities, many of which have not fared well in the post-industrial economy. The huge structural changes we have seen in the economy have an impact on people's mental health.

The level of expectation for service appears to be higher, which probably stems from both the generational tendency to want 24/7 response and college sector's efforts over the past decade to be more student-centered. One counsellor expressed this elegantly: "We have developed an infrastructure that is welcoming and accommodates people."

## **2. Departments becoming Crisis/Mental Health Centres**

In addition to most counsellors seeing an increase in the intensity and complexity of mental health issues presented by students, many described the increasing need to manage crisis situations and that their counselling departments were turning into "crisis centres". One counsellor indicated that "crisis trumps everything else... now the system is biased in favour of crisis."

Counsellors also described an increase in the number of students presenting with either mental health diagnoses, or presenting with symptoms indicative of such. Some indicated that it is as if they need to function more like a mental health facility, without the infrastructure, support and resourcing that community agencies are structured to have.

A number of counsellors shared concerns about what they saw as a shift to primarily managing crisis at the expense of providing broad-based service to all students. At a few colleges, some were also questioning how a crisis is defined.

### **3. Connection with other departments in the college/shows up in classrooms**

Mental health issues manifest throughout the college, and often the first point of contact with a student experiencing difficulties is in the classroom. Comments ranged from describing teacher's complaints about how much more difficult it is to meet student needs to teachers being more aware and more prone to refer or directly bring them down to the counselling office for support. (It is speculated whether the current increasing number of part-time teachers in the system creates less "relationship" focus with students than 10 years ago with the result of more referrals to counselling.)

### **4. Relationship/connection with Community Resources**

The most uniform response across the colleges was in reference to the accessibility of community resources; students were generally able to get access to urgent/emergency care in a timely, responsive manner. This was also true in many communities for students with a specific/focused need. But pretty much across the board, referrals for non-emergency, supportive counselling had anywhere from a few months to more than a year waiting list, a critical period of time when a semester is four months long.

Referrals to college counselling departments from community agencies are becoming more common across the colleges.

Because of the waitlists for access to community programs, the "bridging function", namely providing supportive counselling until the student can access the service in the community, is placing demands on counsellors to be able to provide service to a broader spectrum of mental health difficulties.

The reality in many Ontario communities is a shortage of family physicians, so it isn't unusual for a student, particularly from out of town, to only have access to a physician through a drop-in clinic; which means that students may not be adequately monitored.

Related somewhat to the observation that students with mental health difficulties who a mere ten years ago may have been actively dissuaded from attending postsecondary, students are now being encouraged to attend school as a part of the treatment plan. This can make a counselling department an important part of the support strategy for a student. Although no one characterized college counselling as a "formal" arm of the mental health treatment system in Ontario, there were many who observed that many college counselling departments were seen as credible, professional and very accessible resources to students requiring psychotherapy.

### **5. The role of the college counsellor**

A number of counsellors spoke of the demands becoming more similar to those in a community mental health counselling role. Many described taking on more of the case management role, ensuring follow up and emphasizing the "time consuming" nature of these files. Many spoke of the need for their assessment and clinical skills to be "sharper". The "newer" area of risk assessment (to self and others) and the stress involved in these cases was

elaborated by many. Clinical supervision was often mentioned as more necessary and desirable as the demands for personal counselling increase.

### **6. Impact on Counsellors**

Some counsellors talked about the fear of being blamed for not informing/involving others, particularly in light of recent campus events that resulted in student tragedy and death. Three other themes came out of the discussion: coping with student expectations that are high, sometimes unrealistically so and the commensurate stress of weathering a complaint; dealing with the stress of situations in which counsellors are required to assess and document risk and feeling conflicted about students being unable to access community resources and feeling pressured to providing services in a way that we aren't qualified/competent/ confident... "but if we don't, they won't have any support..."

*Question 6. Do you provide counselling service to aboriginal students? If so, what are your thoughts regarding having counsellors dedicated solely to aboriginal learners?*

One hundred and twenty counsellors participated in the focus group segment of this study which included ten Aboriginal counsellors at eight colleges.

#### **1. How counselling Aboriginal students is different than mainstream counselling**

The role of an Aboriginal counsellor is seen to be qualitatively different than that of a "mainstream" counsellor by virtually all counsellors who shared their thoughts. Comments focused various aspects of the role, including higher degrees of involvement in advocacy, community outreach, band funding arrangements and a cultural understanding inextricably woven into a controversial and traumatic socio-political context spanning centuries. Working with Aboriginal students is often described as highly "politicized" by its very nature and at points it was difficult for participants to "concretize" what made the counselling interaction with Aboriginal students unique.

#### **2. Does an Aboriginal person need to do the counselling?**

Most counsellors agreed that Aboriginal counsellors working with Aboriginal students was the method of delivery providing the best chance of meeting the needs of the diverse range of life experience presented by Aboriginal students. The most common proviso to this was the importance of choice; that all students should have a right to decide where and when they receive service.

#### **3. Office based versus drop in**

As our survey confirmed, Aboriginal counsellors are much more likely to meet student needs on a drop in basis.

#### **4. Aboriginal student centres**

Almost all colleges in the province have designated space where Aboriginal students can meet, study and seek support.

### **5. Having access to resources in the community**

Connections with community resources are essential given the “settlement issues that Aboriginal students frequently face in establishing themselves in the community.

### **6. Diversity of the Aboriginal population**

The issue of diversity within Aboriginal culture was elaborated by counsellors in response to this question and question four which specifically asked about the different kinds of diversity on campus.

### **7. Self-identification**

Aboriginal students are frequently reluctant to self-identify which can be an obstacle to providing timely support.

### **8. The complexity and depth of issues**

Counsellors described the challenges of supporting Aboriginal students who were dealing with complex issues. Many counsellors described the “volume and depth” of past trauma that interfered with success in college.

***Question 7. Do you have an “early alert” system to identify academically-at-risk students in your college? If so, what is it? Do you believe it is effective in connecting needy students with appropriate services?***

The vast majority of counsellors indicated that either there is not such a system at their college, or that there are certain programs/schools that do. Only one college in the system indicated that they have an early alert system that is run by the counselling department. A number of colleges have systems that are run by advisors and some that are purely faculty driven, i.e. if a student is “at risk” of failure, faculty are encouraged to make a direct referral to the appropriate student service.

***Question 8. What impact do you think the Ontario College of Registered Psychotherapists and Registered Mental Health Therapists have on your counselling department?***

The Psychotherapy Act was passed in Ontario in 2007. The law defined the “controlled act” of psychotherapy and outlined the broad strokes of the establishment of a regulatory college meant to register all those in the province practicing psychotherapy. A Transition Council (<http://www.collegeofpsychotherapists.on.ca/pages/Home>) was subsequently appointed to develop the details concerning registration/membership and practice standards and guidelines. The website currently indicates that the earliest the Ontario College of Registered Psychotherapists and Registered Mental Health Therapists (OCRPRMHT) will be accepting registrations is 2013. In order to fully understand the implications of the legislation for college counsellors, it is important to understand three key points:

- **The issue of regulating those practicing psychotherapy in Ontario has a long history dating back to the 1970’s.** The thrust to form the current OCRPRMHT began in the early 2000’s and one lobby organization, the Ontario Coalition of Mental Health

Professionals (OCMHP), was formed in 2003 with the Ontario College Counsellors being one of the 23 founding member organizations. Therefore the most current round of discussions, consultations, position papers, requests for letters of support etc. has been going on for almost a decade but the issue has been percolating in the background for close to 40 years.

- **The majority of members of the OCC (and the majority of counselling managers) are not regulated at present.** 71% of counsellors responded that they intend on registering with the OCRPRMHP. 75% of counselling managers indicated that they are not presently regulated, and 40.6% indicated their intention to register.
- **The Transition Council is proposing a “two tier” membership structure; registered psychotherapists and registered mental health therapists.** Although the intent is to ensure adequate access to psychotherapy by the citizens of the province by not being overly restrictive as to who can practice the controlled act, this structure has caused significant controversy. For one, the scopes of practice for both levels are virtually identical but the educational preparation required by each level differs significantly. Registered Mental Health Therapists require “successful completion of a minimum, 2-year coherent, structured postsecondary program in a field of training related to the scope of practice of psychotherapy.” By contrast, the Registered Psychotherapist level requires “successful completion of a structured, coherent program of education and training in psychotherapy which has as a pre-requisite an undergraduate degree.” The vast majority of college counsellors are trained at a Master’s level. The OCC has long advocated the counsellor role requires Master’s level academic preparation.

### **1. Unclear/Unsure about the Implications of Regulation**

Many indicated they knew little about the issues and had not kept up with the progress of the Transition Council. Some confused belonging to an association and being regulated by a college. A few already regulated counsellors didn’t realize that they were already able to practice the “controlled act of psychotherapy” by belonging to the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers.

Many had questions about writing examinations, having to demonstrate proof of clinical supervision when their supervisors were dead and long gone and international qualifications. Many had questions about the difference between porting and grandparenting. Older counsellors were skeptical that the college would be enacted before they retired despite the “carved in stone” April, 2013 implementation date.

### **2. Differential Staffing**

The strongest concern that was expressed by a significant number of counsellors related to the two-tiered structure of membership in the OCRPRMHT. The question many pondered was; if psychotherapy can be practiced by individuals with less formal education, will there be a financial incentive for colleges to hire Registered Mental Health Therapists rather than Master’s



level trained counsellors who would qualify for the Registered Psychotherapist membership level?

### **3. Impact on Standards/Quality of Service Delivery**

The majority of counsellors saw regulation as improving the quality of services. Although some equated the possible incentive for colleges to hire less qualified service providers with lower standards, the majority saw regulation as timely and having a positive impact on standards.

### **4. Clarification of the role of counsellor**

Somewhat related to the first two themes, many counsellors saw regulation as providing an opportunity to clarify the role of counsellor within the college system and to legitimate it.

### **5. The Issue of Case-Related Supervision**

Many counsellors indicated that the upswing in student mental health issues has served to highlight the issue of case-related supervision. Although the amount of supervision varies across colleges, generally speaking it is an issue most counsellors see as needing attention. About half of counsellors indicated receiving regular supervision. Of those, roughly one third receive case-related, a third receive administrative supervision and a third receive both.

### **6. Question of sanctions and more emphasis on public safety**

A number of counsellors saw regulation as having a positive impact on public safety, both in terms of increasing accountability to a legislated body and increasing the expectation for thoughtful, reflective practice. A number of counsellors also highlighted the need for members of the regulatory college to have adequate liability insurance, and questioned who would be responsible for the cost.

### **7. The exception for cultural counselling**

A number of questions were raised about exceptions in the regulations for “cultural counselling”. Exceptions for “aboriginal healers providing traditional healing services to Aboriginal persons or members of an Aboriginal community” are contained in the regulations.

## ***Question 9. What do you think your counselling department should look like in ten years?***

### **1. General musings on the future role of a college counsellor**

A number of counsellors generally addressed the question by pondering the current role of the counsellor and the challenge and the need to define what the role should be within the college system.

### **2. The continuing demand to support students with mental health problems.**

There was close to unanimous belief that the mental health needs of students will continue well into the future. Given this, many comments centered on what many saw as two gaps in the college system at present; the availability of psychological/psychiatric consultation and clinical supervision.

### **3. The need for policy/procedure development**

Many counsellors spoke to an anticipation that the college environment and the needs of students would continue to be complex and involve more players. A need for policy/procedure development was seen as an important focus in the development of counselling services in ten

years. Specific foci included crisis intervention policy, confidentiality policy between counselling and the health centres and more standardized accommodation practices across colleges.

#### **4. Future modalities of service delivery/characteristics of students/student access to services**

Some counsellors speculated on modalities of service delivery which should be a focus in ten years which included an increase in group work, virtual support groups, classroom presentations and an emphasis on psycho-educational approaches. Also included in this theme were student characteristics/needs that counsellors speculated would be increasing in the future. These included needs specific to the growing population of international students (i.e., settlement issues, reducing the stigma of seeking counselling, outreach programs in college residences), an increase in the number of Mild Intellectually Disabled (MID) students and students diagnosed with Asperger's Spectrum Disorder. Many counsellors speculated an increased need for "addiction counselling". The settlement issues experienced by First Nation's families moving to urban centres was seen by one counsellor as a core issue given the growing participation of First Nation's students in postsecondary education. A number of counsellors anticipated that counselling departments would have to be open longer and more flexible hours. At one college, it was suggested that college students should not wait any longer than a week to get an appointment with a counsellor and that counselling be deemed an essential service. A few counsellors indicated the need for more "diversity" amongst the counselling ranks.

#### **5. The generalist/specialist continuum**

Many of the discussions ultimately focused either a more "specialist" or a more "generalist" approach. Those advocating a more specialist model of delivery would typically discuss the need for more psychological/psychiatric consultative resources and the need for more clinical supervision. However, there appeared across the board to be a general resistance/reluctance to what many saw as a trend towards specializing in personal counselling to the exclusion of academic and career. Many saw this as inevitable. Those advocating a more generalist approach were also more likely to stress preventive-oriented, outreach programming.

#### **6. The differences between blended and unblended counsellor role**

Somewhat related to the previous section, some discussion centred on whether the future needs of students would be better met by "blended" or "non-blended" counsellor roles.

#### **7. Closer physical proximity/Closer ties with the health centre/closer ties with other internal services**

It was very common for discussion to focus on better collaboration amongst departments within colleges, and most often speculated on closer working relationships with the health centre/medical services.

#### **8. Collaboration with community agencies**

At most colleges, discussion about the future of counselling involved our relationship with community resources. A closer, more collaborative relationship was pretty well the unanimous

thrust of these discussions. Most described this as a critical need given what most to believe to be the continuing demand for mental health services for students within the college system.

### **9. Mental health money should flow amongst institutions providing service**

Related to the previous theme, a number of counsellors speculated on the blurred boundaries between agencies and college counselling departments providing mental health counselling and the compelling argument that the Ministry of Health should fund mental health services regardless of where they are provided.

### **10. A focus on prevention**

The most common theme of this section was the need to emphasize prevention. For some, it was a lament about the way their jobs used to be and a reaction that some counsellors are having to their counselling departments becoming “crisis centres”. For others, it was motivated by questioning whether meeting the needs of students one-on-one is even possible. For some, it is a reflection of recent literature in the field emphasizing that postsecondary institutions have to adopt a multi-pronged approach to create environments that promote mental health, rather than focusing only on the amelioration of mental illness and mental health issues through psychotherapy.

*Question 10. How is the work of career counsellors, academic advisors, etc. if present here, coordinated with that of counsellors?*

### **1. Advisory Titles within the College System**

What follows is a list of the 28 advisory roles that were mentioned during the focus groups. We also learned that the “advisement role” is often played by faculty/coordinators along with support and administrative staff as well as students.

Aboriginal advisor	Learning coach
Academic coach	Learning skills advisor
Academic advisor	Mental health worker
Access advisor	Peer advisor
Accessibility advisor	Preadmission advisor
Career advisor	Student advisor
Career planning and academic advisor	Student employment officer
Career consultant	Student life advisor
Career service consultant	Student success advisor
Disability service advisor	Student success facilitator
Disability consultant	Student success mentor
First year experience advisor	Student success specialist
International student advisor	Student support advisor
International academic advisor	Success coach

## **2. Advisory roles: Pathways in**

Counsellors at a number of colleges don't see "prospective students". This theme encompassed the varied routes that a community person can take to find support and advisement in choosing an appropriate college program. Some of the "pathways" vary according to the needs of the student: i.e., international, second career, those without a Grade 12 diploma.

## **3. Clarity of the advisory role**

Counsellors described a variety of experiences working with advisors at their respective colleges. The vast majority of colleges have advisors of some description. Discussion within this theme was wide reaching: what advisors are called; where are they located (i.e., attached to a program, in a central department, in the same service grouping as counselling or not); is the "advisement function" played by faculty/coordinators, support staff, administration; the specifics of their role relative to the role of the counsellor and; the impact on the counsellor's job.

## **4. The role played by Interns**

Although we asked about the supervision of students within the questionnaire, there was very little discussion about this within focus groups. One discussion of the rich and substantive contribution made by M.Ed. interns (the most common credential held by college counsellors) is worth mentioning.

## **5. Collaboration between counsellors and advisors**

Most counsellors described the advent of the "advisor" role to be within the last five years, so for most this is a fairly recent development. Some described "an evolving" attempt to develop a complimentary work style and many said that the initial years of co-existence were difficult; either because the role wasn't clearly defined or the advisors were hired/supervised in a different "silo" so there was little formal or informal contact. For the most part, counsellors were fairly positive about working with advisors: being able to refer a student for a specific piece of academic planning (course add, drops) or a specific kind of career assessment and receiving appropriate referrals when students they were working with experienced personal issues connected to their academics were two examples. For some, the existence of advisors didn't have much impact on their jobs and had little comment. It was common for these counsellors to be unsure of the actual title of the advisor or to know how many of them were employed by their college. This is definitely an area which could benefit from further study in that many of the forays into advisement are fairly new, the organization of the service is highly differentiated across colleges and providing advisement has significant implications for the quality of services students receive.

## **6. The reduced scope of the counsellor role**

Although addressed separately, this theme is clearly related to the previous theme. Many counsellors expressed concern about the inevitable, overlapping nature of "counselling" and "advisement" and that functions previously part of the counsellor role had been removed and given to advisors, specifically academic and career functions. Discussion typically concerned

two issues: are advisors functioning within their scopes of practice and making appropriate, timely referrals to counsellors and; is this a threat to job security for counsellors who have more training and hold higher paid, faculty positions.

#### **7. The case management role**

A number of counsellors describe a “case management” role to frame the professional relationship they have or want to have with the advisors working within their colleges.

#### **8. Faculty/coordinators may perform the “academic advisement” function**

To re-emphasize the point made above, in a number of colleges, advisement is a function rather than a discrete staff position. Although there is dedicated time provided on the Standard Workload Form (SWF) for contact with students for faculty/coordinators, the implementation of advisement appears to be highly differentiated across colleges and would be an excellent area for further research.

#### ***Question 11. Do you track referrals to counselling services? And if so, what percentage is referred by faculty?***

Most counsellors indicated that either they do not ask students about who referred them, or they do but the information isn't tabulated. The percentages were largely anecdotal and ranged from 5-50%. The original thinking behind this question was to use it as a proxy measure for how collaborative counsellors were with faculty at their specific college. The percentage of referrals from faculty was also asked of counsellors and managers in their respective on-line questionnaires.

### **Results of Interviews with Managers**

The section that follows summarizes the basic themes derived from the 24 on-campus interviews with 30 managers of counselling services in all Ontario colleges.

#### ***Question 1. Does your college have multiple campuses? What effect does a multi-campus environment have on the delivery of services? Do all campuses have equivalent levels of service? If not, why?***

Twenty-three colleges indicated they had multiple campuses. Of these, fourteen reported they did not have equivalent levels of service on all campuses, one said they did and eight did not answer the question directly. A variety of themes were drawn from the comments made by managers regarding the impact of a multi-campus environment have on the delivery of services and the challenge of delivering equivalent levels of service.

### Themes

- Where student numbers at a campus could not justify full-time counsellors, service was provided either with dedicated part-time staff or by full-time staff who travelled from the “main” campus to deliver partial service.
- When dedicated part-time counsellors were used, the provision of supervision and opportunity for peer-to-peer consultation was problematic.
- These arrangements were often not possible when smaller campuses were a considerable distance away. The cost of travel in time and money was said to be prohibitive.
- Some colleges, especially those in the North, solved this problem through the use of technology (Skype, videoconference, web services).
- Student demand at a particular campus was not strictly a function of student numbers. The profile of student body was often cited as a key determinant. Students enrolled in trades programs were characterized as low-demand students while those in health or community services programs were seen to exhibit higher levels of demand for services. Gender and age were also cited as drivers.
- Some commented that when planning for a new campus took place, the focus was often on the needs associated with academic programming with less consideration being given to the support services that would be required.

***Question 2. Would you say the counselling department is meeting the support needs of students in your college?***

***2b. If not, what policies, processes or resources would be required to do so?***

***2c. Who are the key individuals necessary to implement these changes?***

### Themes 2a.

- Ten colleges stated clearly that they were meeting the support needs of their students. Four said they were not, largely due to the fact that they did not have the data on which to make a decision. Another nine institutions answered with “yes, but” alluding to the fact that they were successful in meeting the demands of students “in crisis” but felt there were many others they could not service.
- Achieving success with the latter required additional resources to enable greater effort in being proactive and reaching out to students who might be reluctant to use or not be aware of the services available.
- Some distinguished between meeting the different types of need as opposed to the volume of demand. They argued they were successful in dealing with the former but less so with the latter.
- This was more likely to be true for the smaller colleges.

- A common comment was that colleges were required to move to greater specialization in the delivery of services with a much greater focus on coping with the demand from students with mental health issues.
- A few colleges mentioned that the increased incidence of mental health issues could be attributed to the fact that community mental health agencies were directly referring students to colleges so that they could more easily access support services.

#### Themes 2b

- The most frequent response to this question dealt with the need for clear policies and service guidelines to help managers clarify their mandate and allocation of resources.
- The need for greater communication, both with staff and students, was also a frequent comment. Some mentioned that in a few colleges there appeared to be a reluctance to acknowledge their students had mental health issues.
- Many cited the need for additional resources in the form of additional staff, data systems to collect service delivery statistics, new technologies to support alternate delivery modes such as e-counselling as well the training necessary to help counsellors become proficient in their use.

#### Themes 2c

- The majority of interviewees suggested that senior administration/vice-presidents, both student affairs and academic, were the key individuals necessary to implement the changes they felt were required.
- Two individuals suggested that while senior administrators were key to the change process, others at the director and co-ordinator level were also important since change would only be successful if conducted in a collaborative environment.

***Question 3. Counsellors are seen as providing support to students for academic, career and personal issues. Which of these 3 areas do you believe has the greatest demand?***

#### Themes

- Student personal issues generate the greatest amount of counsellor activity.
- This has increased over time and creates a demand for more personnel.
- Personal issues are more complex than in the past.
- There is typically an intersection of needs; personal, career and academic.
- Increased complexity requires a greater specialization in counselling delivery.
- Initial presenting issue is often not personal but often morphs into this.
- Generates a need for multiple service providers; specialists and co-ordinators.
- Funding pressures are to reduce costs and specialize.

***Question 3b. If you have seen an increase in the incidence of mental health issues on campus, can you explain why?***

Themes

- There is a lack of community treatment capacity especially for free public services.
- College rather than university is a preferred destination for students with mental health issues.
- An increase in more complex/severe issues e.g. ADHD, bipolar, PTSD.
- “Other “services (i.e. career, academic) have been displaced by increased demand for mental health services and this leads to a concentration of such activity in counselling services.
- This in turn leads to counselling services being “branded” as providers of mental health services.
- Increased demand for counselling services by students likely a product of:
  - Students are more comfortable with disclosure.
  - Increased access by needy students to PSE (e.g. WSIB, Second Career)
  - Greater promotion of services on campus
- Services for students with career and academic needs have been transferred to other staff.

***Question 4. On a scale of 1-5 with 1 being very low and 5 being very high, how diverse (cultural/linguistic, age, LGBTQ) would you say your student population is? How does this diversity impact the delivery of counselling services?***

Themes

- Diversity in students requires diversity in services on a campus-by-campus basis as students can differ dramatically.
- Need for professional development opportunities for counsellors particularly as it relates to understanding cultural diversity.
- Diversity is associated with broad range of issues and creates more complex issues (e.g. WSIB, Second Career, international, and immigrant students).

The following is a quote from one respondent:

“So when they roll out these programs ... Got to love them. When they roll out the second career programs and the WSIB programs and the CICE programs, they are never thinking about the services that need to be provided to these students and they ... you know, provincially they’re going “Oh, well. Let the colleges figure that all out.” So we have had to go back after the fact, after they roll out the program and say “Whoa, whoa. What about the services for these students?”

- Ideally, diversity in counsellors on staff matches student diversity.



- Requires promotion of services to groups who would not necessarily avail themselves of counselling services due to cultural norms.
- Requires awareness programs for staff to educate re: implications of student diversity.

***Question 5. How does student mental health issues impact the delivery of counselling services at your college?***

Themes

- More time due to greater complexity resulting in increased workload.
- Stress levels on counsellors has increased.
- More and greater variety of staff required to service needs (psychologist, psychiatrist, mental health nurse).
- Need for a timely response to these complex issues.
- Increased need for policy and procedures to guide practice and awareness of potential liability.
- Greater need for orientation of college staff to mental health issues.
- Increased need for counsellor training and experience.
- Connection/coordination with community services is important.
- Increased need for risk/threat assessment.
- Move to case management approach.
- Need for service activity/delivery data and typology of presenting issues.

***Question 6. Do you have counsellors that service only aboriginal students? If so, what is their personal and professional background and why have you adopted this model?***

Themes

- Most colleges had a staff member who was responsible for working with Aboriginal students.
- Credentials held by staff who worked with Aboriginal students were varied ranging from the diploma to Master's level. All, however, had extensive experience with Aboriginal environments and were of Aboriginal ancestry.
- The roles and titles varied considerably from "Advisor", "Aboriginal Student Success Mentor", "Aboriginal Counsellor" and "Elder".
- In some cases, Aboriginal "counsellors" worked exclusively with Aboriginal students, while in others they met with any student. Many argued that the latter was the better model. One interviewee emphasized the importance of "not creating another reserve on campus".

- Distinction was made between important differences between “urban Aboriginals” and Aboriginals from reserves and remote communities. The suggestion was that many of the former would not be comfortable working with an Aboriginal counsellor.
- A distinction was made between important differences in the approach of Aboriginal support staff, especially Elders, who might adopt a much more prescriptive approach to working with Aboriginal students as opposed to the more process oriented approach of counsellors.
- Most colleges had created an “Aboriginal Centre” acknowledging that government funding was the catalyst.
- Location of the Aboriginal counsellor was sometimes in counselling services department, in other cases within the Aboriginal Centre and in a few cases, was split between both locations.

***Question 7. Do you have an early alert system to identify high risk students at your college?***

***7b. If so, what is it?***

***7c. Do you believe it is effective in connecting needy students with appropriate services?***

Themes

- Only four institutions reported they did not have an “early alert” system that identifies students who might be at risk of not completing their studies for a variety of reason.
- The most common system was based on a student survey, formalized in five institutions and undergoing a pilot phase in four others.
- Faculty were also the key players in the alert systems developed by five colleges. Faculty typically flagged ‘at risk’ students and communicated this information to a variety of other staff such as deans, counsellors or student success advisors.
- In one small college, counsellors were the staff who identified relevant students and in two others student success specialists did so.
- In one college mid-term transcript reviews were used to identify students in trouble.
- None of the colleges had collected data on the effectiveness of their system but all felt that their system did have an impact.

***Question 8. What impact will the Ontario College of Registered Psychotherapists and Registered Mental Health Therapists have on your counselling department?***

Themes

- Many interviewees did not have a clear idea of what impact of regulation would be.

- Major impact on recruitment and hiring since new counsellors will have to be registered with a College
- Will have a positive impact on college counsellors as qualifications will be more clearly defined and help clarify role.
- Will promote credibility of counsellor role and increase perceived professionalism.
- Major issue to be dealt with is question of supervision; who will do it and how much time will it take?
- Supervision requires specific competencies. Current managers, if they can perform this role at all, do not have these skills and will need training.
- Question of who pays for liability insurance will need to be dealt with.
- One negative implication is that uncertainty and associated costs may influence more colleges to subcontract/outsource role.
- Requirements for registration of some current counsellors may cause many to leave colleges.
- Currently there is a lack of clarity regarding the term “psychotherapy” and regulation is likely to help clarify this for all college stakeholders.

***Question 9. What do you think your counselling department should “look like” in ten years?***

Themes

- The most frequent comment made described counselling services as being delivered by an integrated team using a case management approach with several suggesting this would be best accomplished via a “one-stop” organizational framework.
- Two comments tied for the second most frequent. The first suggested there would be increased specialization by counsellors within departments with increased professionalism and ongoing professional development. Only one interviewee felt that a generalist approach would prevail in the future.
- In addition, almost one third of interviewees indicated they would like to see counselling departments collaborating with other stakeholder groups on campus and engaged in more outreach with both staff and students.
- Two comments also tied for third most frequent. The first expressed the view that there would be more counsellors to both improve staff diversity and in order to service all campuses equally.
- A second comment related to a greater use of technology such as web sites and tele-counselling in order to deliver services to those who did not wish or were not comfortable

accessing on-campus services. It was also noted that these delivery methods would be far more appropriate for the greater numbers on online learners expected.

- Four interviewees expressed a desire for greater integration with community services in the future in order to create a more efficient and effective delivery of mental health services in particular.
- Two individuals identified that clearly articulated policy frameworks and data collection systems would be key features of future counselling departments.

***Question 10. How would you describe your professional background? (e.g. Academic sector: Student services, academics, educational administration, finance; private sector)***

Themes

- The majority of managers (13) of counselling services reported they had a background in administration playing various roles in colleges, universities and community agencies.
- A smaller number (9) had professional training in counselling either via an MSW or M.Ed. in counselling and had worked within colleges or community agencies.

***Question 11. Could you provide the following statistics for the 2010-11 year?***

- *Number of students who saw counsellors Y/N*
- *Number of student visits to counsellors Y/N*
- *Number of students who presented with mental health issues Y/N*
- *Top five “presenting situation” factors, (i.e. abuse issues, relationship issues, depression) Y/N*
- *Most frequent referral sources to counselling Y/N*
- *Number of students referred to community resources Y/N*
- *Number of crisis situations (threat of harm to self or others) Y/N*

A summary of the findings for this question is provided in the manager survey results section of the report.

***Question 12. Tracking “wait times” is one way of measuring service demand. Do you track this and, if so, what is the average time a student has to wait to see a counsellor?***

Themes

- Only one college indicated wait times were formally collected for their counselling services and four indicated they did so informally.
- The largest number (16) reported that they did not gather wait time statistics.
- The majority of institutions said that any student “in crisis” would be seen immediately. Those who were not would be able to access services following a period of time that

varied depending on institutional size, time of year and whether the student wished to meet with a specific counsellor. The period of time varied from 48 hours to three weeks.

- Several institutions believed they had dealt with the wait time problem by instituting a “drop-in” protocol. This most often consisted of either a specific assignment of blocks of time each day for drop-in only service, or a specific counsellor being assigned to drop-in duty.

## **Counsellor and Manager Findings Compared**

Many of the same questions were contained on the counsellor survey and the survey of counselling managers. The presence of commonalities in the responses of both groups increases the validity of the findings due to the converging evidence. The section that follows summarizes a comparison of the survey results for these two groups.

### ***Counsellor and Manager Surevy Results Compared***

From a demographic perspective, the manager gender mix is virtually identical to that of the counsellors (female, 80.6% and male, 19.4%). Similarly, the ranks of managers and counsellors are dominated by those in their 50’s (45.2% of managers and 52% of counsellors) with roughly the same percentage for both groups in their 40’s (29% of managers versus 30% of counsellors). Interestingly, counsellors are more heavily represented in the 30’s (35% versus 12.9%) and the 60’s (16.5% versus 6.5%). Managers are more likely to see themselves retiring within the next 4 years than those from the counsellor ranks (31.3% compared to 20%).

Twenty-five percent of managers are presently regulated (compared to 40% of counsellors) with 40.6% indicating that they intend on registering with the OCRPRMHT compared to 70.6% of counsellors. Uncertainty with what level of membership to apply for (Registered Psychotherapist of Registered Mental Health Therapist) is shared by both groups with 29.4% of managers and 28.5% of counsellors indicating that they had yet to decide.

When describing service delivery, managers and counsellors estimated almost identical percentages of counsellor activity spent in each of academic advisement (managers at 25.96% versus counsellor at 24%), career counselling (15.71% compared to 16.4%) and personal counselling (both at 60%). The results for frequency of outreach activities were not similar as managers consistently perceived that counsellors engaged in more outreach than counsellors reported. This disparity is not surprising, however, since managers would be assigning their ratings based on their cumulative experience with all counsellors in their department, and their results, therefore, would be higher.

Outreach activity consisted of four categories: student workshops; guest speaking in professor’s classes; training student leaders/employees and training for staff/faculty. If the “do a lot of this” and the “do a moderate amount” are combined, the findings show that both managers and counsellors reported the greatest amount of activity in the student workshop category.

Similar results were evident for survey items that examined the volume of counsellor activity in the areas of student behaviour consultation, harassment, mediation, involvement in student appeals, risk assessment, tragic events response, counselling for staff/faculty and use of an early warning system. There was considerable consistency in the results for managers and counsellors regarding involvement in these roles. Both managers and counsellors reported risk assessment, student behaviour discussion/coaching/strategy development and assisting students with non-academic appeal as the top three categories. Managers rated “use of an early warning system/proactive early intervention as fourth and tragic events response as fifth. Counsellors reported “assisting students with formal academic appeal” as fourth and “use of an early warning system” as fifth and involvement in tragic events was sixth.

Counsellors were asked to document the extent of their career involvement in teaching credit courses, union involvement, professional association work, supervision of Master’s level and Bachelor’s level and research/writing. Managers were asked to assess how much they saw each of these activities adding value to the delivery of services. The top four categories of involvement reported by counsellors were community involvement (64%), research/writing (34%), supervising Master’s level students (33%) and professional association work (33%). While not in exactly the same order, these were the four activities managers reported added the most value to the delivery of counselling services.

Although almost three quarters (72.7%) of counselling managers indicated their college did not endorse a particular method of counselling, most comments prompted by this question did mention “solution focused therapy” which was the most prevalent therapeutic method reported by counsellors in this study.

Managers and counsellors tended to be quite consistent as well in their responses to questions regarding counselling “complexity” both in terms of the current reality and how it has changed since they started working in the college system. Table 44, however, shows that while counsellors tended to see one quarter of their current time spent doing “psychotherapy”, the figure reported by the managers was somewhat less (17%). What is more interesting is that managers see a much larger increase in psychotherapy from when they started working in a college, a 70% increase compared to a 15% increase as perceived by counsellors. On a 12 point scale, managers ( $M = 7.91$ ) and counsellors ( $M = 7.79$ ) saw counsellors predominately functioning within the “counselling” portion of the continuum. Managers reported a 24% increase on the continuum since they started in the college system, moving from a mean “then rating” of 6.37, compared to an 11% increase for counsellors from a mean of 7.0.

When asked about whether student diversity had a “profound” or “very much” of an impact on their jobs, essentially equal proportions of managers (54.5%) and counsellors (53.5%) reported this level of impact. A similar question about mental health had the majority of managers (95.7%) and counsellors (90%) reporting that it had a “profound” or “very much” of an impact on their jobs.

Table 44: Perceived Distribution of Counsellor Activity by Time- Managers and Counsellors Compared

Respondent	Practice	Distribution of Time Spent (%)			
		Advising	Coaching	Counselling	Psycho-therapy
Counsellor	Current	17.7	16.2	46.6	24.6
Counsellor	Initial	22.7	19	45.2	21.3
Manager	Current	19	19	45	17
Manager	Initial	26	25	41	10

Almost half of the managers (47.8%) supervised an Aboriginal counsellor, and three quarters of those that did, indicated the role of the Aboriginal counsellor was “significantly different” from other counsellors. Sixty-two percent of Aboriginal counsellors indicated they spent significant periods of time working with sponsoring agencies/bands and, like managers, reported they had a significantly different role from other counsellors at their college. On a ten point intervention scale, from “1” representing a “responsive approach” to “10” representing an “outreach approach”, both managers (5.2) and Aboriginal counsellors (4.6) provided a very similar response.

Managers and counsellors differed significantly when asked whether their college had an effective system for dealing with “walk-in” traffic since 90.5% of counselling managers indicated they did compared to 66% of counsellors. This was also a contentious issue in focus group and manager interviews. One example concerned providing for the needs of “walk-ins” as synonymous with providing immediately for the needs of students in crisis. This often led to a debate about what really defines a “crisis” and the need to effectively “triage” so students who can wait for an appointment are scheduled to see a counsellor within a reasonable amount of time. Complaints from students that they had to wait may not only be a reflection of the effectiveness of the system, but may also reflect a generation of students who have come to expect immediate service.

Similar proportions of managers (81.9%) and counsellors (77%) perceived a website presence as either “very important” or “quite important”. More than two thirds of managers considered that web technologies could “definitely” provide a way of improving the delivery of counselling services. Counsellors were not asked the same question, but analysis of delivery modes revealed that the vast majority of work presently done with students is done individually, in person “one on one” with very little uptake of e-counselling (synchronous/asynchronous), video counselling, web-based approaches, texting and the use of social media.

Seventy-two percent of the managers reported that their counselling departments were involved in planning orientation and 100% said they participated in orientation. The comparable statistics for counsellors were 47.3% and 83.6% respectively. The differences here might be due

to the fact that managers could be more likely to be involved in the planning of orientation and that not all counsellors would necessarily be involved in orientation.

The results for the frequency of counsellors meeting with classes to introduce themselves and the services available tended to reflect college size. Both managers and counsellors in small colleges reported higher frequencies of classroom visits.

Table 45: Perception of Collaboration - Counsellors and Managers

Group	(N)	Mean Collaboration Score	
		Counsellors	Managers
Faculty	140	6.0	7.2
Disability Services	102	7.0	8.3
Career Advisors	94	3.8	4.2
Academic Advisors	99	4.4	5.8
Student Success Advisors	80	5.2	7.0
Health Centre	120	5.1	6.6
Ombudsperson	51	3.5	7.0
Pysch. Consultation	56	4.9	7.6
Registrar	139	5.1	6.5

Note: N = number of counsellors

Managers and counsellors were asked identical questions about the extent to which college counsellors interacted, collaborated or cooperated with other staff on campus to promote student development. There was also an opportunity to submit comments for each of the nine departments/services which were outlined. Table 45 shows the mean ratings on a ten point scale from 1 = “no contact” to 10 = “extensive collaboration” for counsellors and managers. For each campus group, managers submitted higher ratings. The two highest ratings for both counsellors and managers were collaboration with faculty ( $M = 6.0$  and  $M = 7.2$ ) and disability services ( $M = 7.0$  and  $M = 8.3$ ). Counsellors rated collaboration with student success advisors ( $M = 5.2$ ) in third place while managers rated psychiatric/psychological consultation ( $M = 7.6$ ) as third. Again, the higher ratings may be at least partially reflective of the managers’ overarching responsibility in supervising the work of all counsellors and being more likely to experience cases of collaboration due to this broader exposure than the experience of any one counsellor.

In terms of referral to community resources, managers were more likely than counsellors to see this as easier. If the four possible responses are collapsed into two categories “very easy and somewhat easy” and “little difficult” and “very difficult”, the manager results represent a 50/50 split. The results for counsellors represent a 40/60 split with most reporting that access to community resources was more difficult.



When asked if counsellors received regular supervision, a larger proportion of managers (70%) than of counsellors (52.9%) reported they did. When asked who provided the supervision, counsellors were slightly more likely than managers to indicate the manager provided supervision (58.1% versus 52.9%). Fairly similar rates were reported for peer (25.7% for counsellors and 29.4% for managers) and for “external/other” (16.2% and 17.7% respectively).

The most common supervision interval mentioned by counsellors (47.9%) was “as needed” whereas weekly supervision was the most common interval reported by managers (46.7%). Both managers and counsellors reported very similar rates of “case related” supervision (31.3% and 31.9% respectively), whereas managers and counsellors reported differential rates of administrative supervision (18.8% and 34.8% respectively) as well as differential rates for those who received both “administrative and case-related” supervision (50% and 31.9% respectively).

Managers and counsellors painted a similar picture when it came to formal evaluation. Sixty-two percent of managers indicated that performance appraisals were not conducted with counsellors. Although roughly 40% of counsellors reported having a performance appraisal either in the last year (14.2%) or within the last five years (34%), most counsellors either have had one in the last ten years (14.2%), over ten years ago (12.6%) or could not remember the last time an appraisal was completed (32.3%).

Discussion about supervision has become more prevalent as the OCRPRMHT is coming closer to being a reality. In the initial stages of formulating the details about regulation, the requirement that members of the College would have to practice under the supervision of another College member was debated. At this point, members of the College will be bound to consult with someone if they believe a case situation may be taking them outside their scope of practice/expertise. The mental health demands of students and the complexity of these cases was frequently discussed in focus groups and more than ever before, counsellors are seeing the desirability of more frequent supervision and to have access to psychiatric/psychological consultation.

The final section of the questionnaires examined “institutional support and climate”. Three questions were developed to examine the level of perceived institutional support for the counsellor role. First, counsellors and managers were asked whether they thought the counsellor role was “supported in your college”. The results showed that managers were much more likely to answer “very much” (61.9%) or “quite a lot” (33.3%) compared to counsellors (17.1% and 32.1 respectively). Second, when asked “do you see yourself as an advocate for the counsellor role within your college”, almost one half of managers (48%) answered “very much” and somewhat less (43%) said “quite a lot”. Counsellor perceptions of the degree to which their manager acted as an advocate for their role were slightly less enthusiastic since 43.4% responded with “very much” and 25.7% said “quite a lot”. Finally, a similar question was asked regarding the perceived support for the counselling role by senior management. This resulted in the lowest scores from the counsellor group with 16.2% reporting “very much” and 26.4% responding with

“quite a lot”. Managers, on the other hand, reported a higher degree of perceived support by senior management with 47.6% responding with “very much” and 42.9% reporting “quite a lot”.

Managers and counsellors reported similar job satisfaction ratings when assessed by a ten point scale ( $M = 8.19$  and  $M = 7.8$  respectively). However, the results of managers’ ratings of their effectiveness in meeting student support needs ( $M = 8.36$ ) and those of counsellors ( $M = 7.8$ ) showed a somewhat larger difference.

## Counsellor Focus Group and Manager Interview Results Compared

The protocols used for the counsellor focus groups and the counselling manager interviews were designed to seek the same information from both groups so that comparisons could be made. Any similarities in the responses of both groups could be seen as increasing the validity of the findings. The section that follows summarizes the comparison of findings from both groups under nine key themes.

### Multiple Campuses

Most counsellors and managers acknowledged that satellite campuses do not receive equivalent levels of service mainly due to student numbers not justifying an increase in counsellor complement; the difficulty of pulling full time staff away from the demands of the central campus to provide itinerant service and; the cost/time-prohibitive nature of travelling between campuses separated by a significant distance. There were also similar observations that student numbers alone do not account for the demand for services: that program mix/gender/cultural make-up are all variables that drive demand. The most frequent example cited was that of a satellite campus providing only trades programs whose students are typically low-users of counselling services. Counsellors were more likely to comment on the challenges of not having relationships with faculty at satellite campuses and the increasing complexity of cases that are difficult to handle from a distance. Managers alone mentioned the emphasis on academic programming that often dominates when planning for new campuses with less, and sometimes considerably less, attention given to the need for student services.

### Meeting Student Needs

The most common theme mentioned by both counsellors and managers was that “we meet the needs of students that we see very well”, in other words not necessarily keeping up with service demand, but providing high quality service for the students who were seen. Many counsellors and managers did equate meeting the needs of students in crisis with meeting student need which would often lead to a discussion about waitlists. A common observation was that a “not in crisis” student having to wait three weeks for an appointment wasn’t interpreted as having a waitlist. Interestingly, counsellors were far more likely to explore the impact that advisory roles have had on meeting student need (most were unclear whether advisors, most hired in the previous five years, had actually improved services to students). Related to this point, most managers did observe the pressure for counsellors to “specialize” in meeting the

needs of students with mental health issues. Policy improvement or development was almost universally described by counsellors and managers as necessary to improve service delivery, particularly around clarification of the counsellor role.

### **Which of academic, career and personal has the greatest demand?**

There was significant congruence among counsellors and managers that providing personal counselling was by far the highest demand on counsellor time and that students often cited the presenting issue as “not doing well academically” which morphs during the initial interview into a disclosure of underlying issues of a personal nature. Counsellors were far more likely to describe the existence and proliferation of advisory roles whereas managers were more likely to describe the necessity for multiple service providers and pressures to “specialize” services and reduce costs. Managers and counsellors alike were extremely consistent in their explanations for the rise in mental health needs on campus.

### **The Impact of Diversity**

Counsellors and managers did express a broad conceptualization of diversity in the discussions. While counsellors tended to describe the challenge of cross cultural communication and the specifics of meeting needs of a variety of groups (cultural/linguistic/age/sexual orientation), managers often described the need to tailor services on a “campus by campus” basis, tended to focus on the need for professional development for counsellors and described the challenge of marketing to groups who would not normally avail themselves of counselling services. As one would expect, the more “macro view” of the managers highlighted the challenges of providing services for students attending school through government sponsored programs that were developed with seemingly little thought given to the complexity of needs the students would bring to the college experience (Second Career was often mentioned as well as WSIB). Counsellors were most likely to mention the horrific trauma histories that an increasing number of refugee students disclosed, the special needs of first generation Canadians trying to bridge traditional and Canadian cultural values and the pure, client-centered approach and time consuming nature of effectively accommodating diversity.

### **The Impact of Mental Health**

This topic created the most discussion in the majority of focus groups and interviews and the views expressed showed significant congruence between counsellors and managers. Managers focused more on the need to clarify service roles, collect relevant data, provide better orientation for college staff and to develop policies and procedures that guide practice and address liability issues. Counsellors focused on describing the complexity and time consuming nature of the cases, the obstacles to timely referral of students to community resources and coping with the demands of a broader spectrum of mental health issues without sufficient clinical supervision or access to psychological/psychiatric consultation. Counsellors were more likely to mention the increasing phenomenon of “reverse referral”, where students are referred back to

college counselling departments because they are seen by community resources as credible, professional and very accessible resources for students requiring psychotherapy.

### **Providing for the Needs of Aboriginal Students**

This question was phrased differently for counsellors and managers so it is difficult to compare views. The former were asked about their thoughts on having counsellors dedicated solely to aboriginal learners, while managers were asked about the personal and professional backgrounds of Aboriginal counsellors. In addition, a number of managers were not responsible for overseeing the services provided to Aboriginal students so were unable to answer with much detail. Managers tended to see the provision of Aboriginal services as an important component of providing for the needs of a diverse range of students. Counsellors were essentially unanimous in seeing the role of an Aboriginal counsellor as qualitatively different than that played by a non-Aboriginal counsellor.

### **An Early Alert System**

Most managers described some kind of early alert system operating within their college. The systems most commonly involved faculty. Counsellors by contrast had little to share on the topic since very few had a specific role to play within the early alert other than accepting referrals from faculty or other service providers.

### **Impact of the Regulation of Psychotherapy**

Managers and counsellors commonly expressed uncertainty about certain provisions of the upcoming regulation, particularly concerning the credential required by managers to provide “clinical supervision” for their staff. Managers were more likely to focus on the costs associated with regulation: the costs and time required for supervision, the cost of liability insurance and the pressure some colleges may experience to lower costs by outsourcing services. However, the consensus across counsellors and managers was that regulation would improve clarification of the counsellor role, improve standards and promote public safety. Counsellors were far more likely to focus on the “two tiered” nature of the regulation which many feared would result in “differentiated staffing”, where counsellor jobs could be done by less qualified staff.

### **Counselling Department in Ten Years**

Managers tended to envision more linkages between other service providers within colleges (an integrated team with counsellors playing a case management role) while counsellors tended to emphasize more effective collaboration with community resources. Most counsellors did not foresee the demand for mental health counselling decreasing in the next decade; so much of their discussion debated whether the counsellor role should be more generalist (emphasizing more prevention) or more specialist (emphasizing increased need for clinical supervision and access to psychological/psychiatric consultation). Managers discussed the need to meet the needs of on-line learners in the future and wondered aloud about the need to develop web-based

resources. Counsellors were more likely to discuss the need to work with groups of students in “virtual settings” and in traditional group work. Counsellors also spoke about intra-college collaboration with specific reference to health services. Counsellors tended to speculate on better policies in regards to crisis intervention, confidentiality between counselling and health services and more standardized accommodation practices across colleges.

## Results for Contextual Data Collected

In addition to the information gathered via surveys, focus groups and interviews, this project sought to collect specific information to assist in contextualizing and interpreting the results. This included enrollment by college for the period 2006-2011, total counsellor complement for each college between 2007-08 and 2011-12, statistics on counselling services delivery for those colleges who were able to provide these and the results for selected items on the KPI Student Satisfaction Survey for each college during the period 2008-2011.

### Enrollment by College and Year

A request was submitted to the Ontario College Application Service to provide FTE enrollment by college for the period 2006 and 2011. A full report of this information is provided in Appendix G

Table 46 shows that the Ontario college system experienced almost 30% enrolment growth between 2006 and 2011. The growth, however, was distributed differentially according to college size. Table 46 also shows the enrollment growth between 2001 and 2011 according to college size as defined in this study. The medium sized colleges experienced the highest growth rates (36.4%), followed by the large colleges (29.3%). Small colleges experienced growth at about half the system average (15%) during this period.

Table 46: Enrollment Growth by College Size 2006-11

College Size	Year						% increase
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	
Small	22219	22303	23034	25785	26001	25559	15
Medium	40998	42994	45473	51748	55096	55911	36.4
Large	99920	101873	106697	120743	128932	129210	29.3
System	163,137	167,170	175,204	198,276	210,029	210,680	29.1

(Source: OCAS, Includes all years and fee categories)

### Counsellor Complement by College

The managers or coordinators of college counselling departments were asked to provide FTE staffing complement figures for a five year period from the 2007/08 academic year to 2011/12. All were able to do so permitting an examination of changes in counsellor complement during the period for large, medium and small colleges as defined in this study. Table 47 shows

the change in counsellor complement between 2007-08 and 2011-12 by college size, as well as for the entire Ontario college system. The table also shows that the college system grew 26% in enrolment between 2007-08 and 2011-12.

Table 47: College Counsellor Complement 2007-2011 by College Size

College Size	Academic Year					Change (FTE)	Change (%)
	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12		
Small	28	30.5	31.5	32.5	29	1	3.6
Medium	44.8	43	42.25	41.5	41.7	-3.1	-6.9
Large	73.2	73.2	75.2	80.5	82	8.8	12
System (N)	146	146.7	148.9	154.5	152.7	6.7	4.6
Student FTE ('000s)	167.1	175.2	198.2	210	210.6	43.5	26

As is evident in Table 47, counsellor complement increased in the Ontario college system by 4.6% between 2007 and 2011, with the highest rate of growth present in the large colleges (12%). Small colleges experienced a 3.6% growth rate while medium sized colleges, despite experiencing the highest rate of growth during this period, actually experienced a 6.9% decline in complement.

Table 48: Counsellor to Student Ratios 2007-2011 by College Size and Year

College Size	Year					% increase
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	
Small	796.5	755.2	818.6	800.0	881.3	10.6
Medium	959.7	1057.5	1224.8	1327.6	1340.8	39.7
Large	1391.7	1457.6	1605.6	1601.6	1575.7	13.2
System	1145.0	1194.3	1331.2	1359.4	1379.7	20.5

Significant differences in the counsellor-to-student ratios were observed across college size. Table 48 shows that small colleges exhibited a 10.6% increase in the number of students per counsellor over the five year period. In 2011, the counsellor-student ratio is one counsellor for every 881 students. In large colleges the ratio in 2011 was one counsellor for every 1,575 students and in medium colleges, one counsellor for every 1,340 students. The most significant finding was that medium size colleges exhibited a 40% increase in the counsellor-student ratio between 2007 and 2011. This is almost four times what was exhibited in small colleges and three times that for large colleges during the same period. The system average counsellor-student ratio

in 2011 was one counsellor for every 1,379 students and constituted a 20% increase over five years.

### Service Delivery Statistics

One objective embedded within this study was to investigate the possibility of establishing a template to collect province wide counselling services delivery statistics. During interviews, counselling managers were asked whether they were able to provide statistics on various aspects of their service delivery for the 2010-11 year. These included:

- i. Number of students who saw counsellors
- ii. Number of student visits to counsellors
- iii. Number of students who presented with mental health issues
- iv. Top five “presenting situation” factors, (i.e. abuse issues, relationship issues, depression)
- v. Most frequent referral sources to counselling
- vi. Number of students referred to community resources
- vii. Number of crisis situations (i.e., threat to self and/or others)

This question was also part of the on-line manager survey questionnaire. A follow-up email was sent to all managers in February, 2012 asking that they submit as much information as was available for the 2010-11 academic year. The request was accompanied by a set of interpretive notes provided in Appendix B. Seventeen colleges were able to provide data. Of these, thirteen colleges were able to provide data for the first two questions, namely number of students who met with counsellors and the total number of visits. The total enrollment of 142,862 students for these thirteen colleges represented 68% of the FTE for the Ontario college system during 2010-11.

Table 49: Counselling Services Statistics, 2010-11 (Data from 13 colleges)

College Size (n)	Total FTE	# students accessed counselling	% accessed counselling	# of visits	# of visits / student	# of counsellors 10/11	# of students / counsellor	# of visits / counsellor
Small (3)	10,527	1,941	18.4	3,799	1.9	10.0	194.1	379.9
Medium (4)	31,319	6,570	20.9	16,281	2.4	27.5	238.9	592.0
Large (6)	101,016	15,799	15.6	35,377	2.2	65.5	241.2	540.1
Total (13)	142,862	24,310	17.7	55,457	2.3	103.0	236.0	538.4

Table 49 shows that for the 13 colleges who could provide data, 24,310 students visited a counsellor, or almost 18% of the student body. The number of visits per student averaged 1.96 in small colleges, 2.48 in medium colleges and 2.24 in large colleges. The system average was

2.36. If these results were extrapolated to the college system for 2010-11, it is estimated that 37,196 students visited the 154 counsellors in the system for a total 87,782 visits. Eight colleges reported a total of 3,520 students visited counselling departments with mental health issues. This was 3.8% of the total FTE of 91,651 reported by these institutions. Two of the colleges reported numbers that appear to be quite low. When these are removed from the sample, the overall percentage increases to 4.3%. During the data collection phase, this question was the source of the most requests for clarification, i.e. diagnosed versus undiagnosed; demonstrating symptoms indicative of mental health issues; self-reported or determined by the counsellor. The term “mental health issue” is imprecise and appears to be an obstacle to collecting “uniform” data from each college.

Seven colleges reported the five leading “presenting” situation factors as shown in Table 50. The detail is provided in order to demonstrate the overlapping nature and definitional nuance of the categories used by different institutions.

Table 50: Top Five Presenting Situation Factors (7 colleges)

College	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
1	academic advising	family issues	L/D screening	anxiety	relationships
2	stress/ anxiety	Relationship /family issues	depressive symptoms	personal/social issues	self esteem
3	stress	interpersonal relationships	depression	anxiety	academic issues
4	anxiety	depression	relationship/ family	substance misuse abuse	life skills/ financial management
5	stress/ anxiety	depressive like illness	Relationship issues	SMI*	addictions
6	academic planning	academic failure	Academic problems	coping with stress	coping with anxiety
7	anxiety	depression/ suicide	interpersonal (relationships/ groups)	academic	addictions

\*Note: SMI = serious mental illness

As was found in the focus group discussions, most colleges collected, in some way, referral source information but few actually collated it. The key referral sources identified by five colleges who supplied this information are shown in Table 51. Only two colleges reported tracking referrals out of the counselling department. The results show, however, that the primary referral sources tended to be “self” or “faculty/staff”.



Table 51: Most Frequent Referral Sources to Counselling

College	Source 1	Source 2	Source 3	Source 4	Source 5
1	self	academic	disability services	health services	
2	self	friend	faculty		
3	faculty/teachers	friend/classmate	website	orientation	other college staff/ other
4	self	friend/family	faculty		
5	faculty/staff	self	family/friends		

Finally, nine colleges reported on the number of crisis events, framed as “threats to self and/or others”. Within the interpretive notes provided to participants, “crisis situation” was defined as: “where immediate intervention is required (i.e. taking a student to the hospital, involvement in a threat assessment process, calling police/security). A total of 840 events were reported for an FTE of 101,213 students. The average number of crisis situations per counsellor at the nine colleges was 11.1 (840 situations/75.4 counsellors), ranging from a high of 34.1 to a low of 1.9.

### Outcome Measures: KPI Data

At the present time we are asking all colleges to provide the ‘Usage’, ‘Importance’ and ‘Satisfaction’ KPI results for selected Student Satisfaction Survey items for the 2008-2011 period. The relevant questions are:

- Q30 Special Skills Services (e.g., math/writing/remedial assistance)
- Q32 Counselling/Native Counselling/Advising Services
- Q33 Special Needs/Disability Services
- Q37 Health Services

The intent is to explore possible relationships between models of service delivery identified from our analysis of the survey and focus group information and the usage, importance and satisfaction data for colleges collected via the Student Satisfaction KPI survey. The analysis will use “pooled KPI data” for the four clusters of colleges to discern whether the generalist versus specialist continuum is reflected in differential KPI results. Since not all of the KPI results have been received, the results of this analysis will be communicated in a subsequent report.

## **MODELS OF COUNSELLING DELIVERY**

The section that follows explores various methods to define models of counselling delivery in the 24 Ontario colleges. The first approach to defining models explored a “blended/non-blended” typology, probably the most traditional way of differentiating counselling service delivery across the Ontario college system. The second approach that was explored involved differentiating colleges using a “generalist-specialist” continuum based on a key theme that was heard repeatedly in counsellor focus groups and manager interviews, the pressure to become more specialized.

### **Approach 1: The “Blended” and “Non-Blended” Typology**

It originally seemed that a “blended” versus “non-blended” distinction was the most obvious way to differentiate counselling delivery in colleges; this difference is clearly understood by counsellors and with good consistency, counsellors and managers identified their college as one or the other in response to the related questionnaire item. Counsellors that work in a college with the “blended” model do both disability services work and general counselling work. In a “non-blended” model, the two functions are essentially split with counsellors doing general counselling and disability work is done by different counsellors (or staff who are not faculty counsellors) usually in a separate department. “Blended” and “non-blended” models occur across the college size continuum as shown in Table 52.

#### ***Strengths of the “Blended” Model***

Advocates of the “blended” model view it as holding the most potential for seeing the student holistically in terms of assessment, planning and intervention. A somewhat related advantage from the student’s perspective is the increased potential to experience the “one stop shop”. The counsellor can provide a wide spectrum of support and services so the student doesn’t have to talk to one service provider about their accommodations, another about their academic difficulties and another about their personal issues; essentially they describe a “generalist” perspective. Counsellors who advocate for the model passionately regard this as providing the best vehicle to “de-stigmatize” service delivery; that counselling is a service available to all students, regardless of ability or disability, and a “blended” model is the purest expression of providing the broadest access to post-secondary education.

#### ***Weaknesses of the “Blended” Model***

The most common criticism of this model stems from the expectation that counsellors working in “blended” models are “all things to all people”, and it was frequently described as a difficult and stressful role to play. A common comment from counsellors in “blended” models referred to the overwhelming amount “administrative paperwork” that accompanies the role.

Table 52: “Blended” and “Non-Blended” Models by College Size

College Size	Model	
	Blended	Non-Blended
Small	Canadore Sault	Collège Boreal
		Cambrian Confederation La Cité Collégiale Lambton Loyalist
Medium	Fleming Niagara St. Clair St. Lawrence	Conestoga Durham Georgian
		Algonquin Centennial Fanshawe George Brown Humber Mohawk

Many counsellors also indicated that the field of accessibility services has become more complex as the number of students with disabilities increases and the range of disabilities becomes broader; essentially becoming an amalgam of specialties counter to the “generalist” perspective that underlies the blended model. One often mentioned example were students with “pervasive developmental disorder”, most notably Asperger’s Syndrome, who are now attending college in increasing numbers. The knowledge base and time required to provide accommodation and support to these students, as well as the staff/faculty with whom they interact, is seen to be on the increase and there has been a subsequent pressure for counsellors to specialize. An interesting observation made by some within focus groups and manager interviews is that with increasing demands for service and fewer counsellor resources, “blended” models actually may mitigate against broad access to students in that the needs of students with disabilities take precedence. This may unintentionally discourage students in need of counselling services who do not have a disability from seeking service.

### ***Complexities of the “Blended” Model***

Not all “blended” models are created equal in that there is a continuum of how “blended” a college counselling department can be. At one end of the continuum, for lack of a better term, the counselling model is “totally blended”, where essentially all counsellors have the same responsibilities working with students regardless of their disability. This is the most “generalist”

role. Further down the continuum, there are other colleges where counsellors perform a “blended” role, but have different disability specialties combined with their general counselling role in that one counsellor may deal with exclusively learning disabilities and another with “physical disabilities”. One of the colleges in Ontario is a little further down the continuum in that some of the counsellors perform a “blended” role and some do not. Finally at the far end of the continuum, all of the counsellors in the department have the same but narrower “blended” role. For example, at one college specifically, the counsellors only deal with mental health disabilities. Students with any other disability receive service from their disability services staff.

### **The “Non-Blended” Model**

The majority of Ontario College counselling departments are “non-blended”. Since it is the dominant model and it doesn’t appear that many of these are considering moving to a “blended” model, there was little speculation on the part of counsellors or managers about the inherent strengths and weaknesses of organizing services this way. By comparison, counsellors and managers in “blended” models were more likely to be evaluating their service delivery and/or considering moving to a more “non-blended” structure which resulted in more discussion about the relative merits of each model.

#### ***Strengths of the “Non-Blended” Model***

Advocates of the “non-blended model” argued that the distinction between “disability services” and “general counselling services” allows the needs of students requiring accommodation to be dealt with efficiently. Similar to the argument posited by counsellors using the “blended” model, many counsellors suggested that the “non-blended” model as well facilitates a “generalist” practice that views the needs of students holistically. Many counsellors at a number of colleges indicated that although students go through the process of formal identification with disability services, students were more likely to receive “personal counselling” from the counselling department rather than disability services. This was seen to be an advantage since the expertise to deal with personal counselling, the dominant service provided by counsellors within the Ontario system, may best be provided by these individuals who more specialize in personal counselling. It could also be argued that a “non-blended” model provides better access for students who may not identify themselves as having a disability but who could benefit from counselling support.

#### ***Weaknesses of the “Non-Blended” Model***

Weaknesses of this model were usually highlighted in the context of what many counsellors saw as declining resources. The increasing demands placed on counselling departments to provide personal counselling, particularly for students dealing with mental health issues, means that there was a pressure to provide even less of a holistic service. Students may have to deal with “academic advisors” and “career consultants” for academic advisement and career exploration, services historically provided by counsellors within a “non-blended” model.

It can be argued that this model requires more collaboration with other service providers which some would call case management. The implication is that with declining resources, student needs would likely be met in a more fragmented way unless a concerted effort were made to integrate the members of the case management team.

### ***Complexities of the “Non-Blended” Model***

As was the case with the “blended” model, not all “non-blended” models across colleges are the same. Within the fifteen colleges that exhibited the “blended” model, there appeared to be five that were distinct variants; the “outsource model” and the “balanced” model. The “outsource” model was characterized by either not having a faculty counsellor on staff, or when the counsellor-to-student ratio was two and one half times the system average. The results showed that there were three “outsource” models in the province. The final subset were two colleges that provided particularly high rates of either career counselling and academic advisement combined with particularly low rates of personal counselling. The counsellor focus group and manager interviews at these colleges provided a different “feel” and on the face appeared to be categorically different in terms of counsellor definition of their roles, historical development and professional affiliation than the other “blended” and “non-blended” colleges. The colleges were grouped and were found to display significant differences in the amount of academic, career and personal counselling provided in each.

The “balanced” model engages in the most academic advisement and career counselling in the system. It must be pointed out there are individual colleges that do as much or more academic advisement, so what particularly characterizes this model is the significantly higher emphasis on career advisement and less personal counselling. The “outreach” model by contrast has the lowest rates of career, and in particular academic advisement, and the highest rate of personal counselling. Again, these two models only comprised five colleges. The “blended” and “non-blended” models constitute the vast majority of the colleges. Table 53 shows that colleges with the “blended” model, on average, do more academic advisement than “non-blended” colleges. Career counselling is essentially performed the same percentage of time and “non-blended” models show higher rates of personal counselling.

Table 53: Distribution of Counsellor Time by Model Type

Model	Counsellor Time Spent (%)		
	Academic	Career	Personal
Blended	28.0	14.6	58.7
Non-blended	20.8	15.0	64.2
Outsource	5.0	12.5	80.0
Balanced	34.8	26.8	33.9

### Challenges with using this typology

- Some models were based on so few counsellors that it limited the use of quantitative analysis
- One of the colleges in question doesn't employ faculty counsellors so there was no questionnaire data for comparison
- There are iterations within both "blended" and "unblended" models across colleges that were significant and it put to question whether this was a credible way to categorize colleges

### Approach 2: Utilizing the "Generalist – Specialist" Continuum

What became apparent during the initial analysis of models was that counsellors from colleges using either the "blended" or "non-blended" model described substantial variability in the allocation of their time for the three roles of academic, career and personal counselling. Some worked in all three areas while others were more focused on only one. This could be seen as describing a "generalist-specialist" continuum which provided another approach to distinguishing between service delivery models.

As noted earlier, both the manager and counsellor survey questionnaires asked about the percentage of time devoted to each of academic advisement, career counselling and personal counselling and the perceptions of these two groups were remarkably congruent. Positioning each college on the "generalist-specialist" continuum began with the assumption that a counsellor in the most "generalist" college would devote one-third of their time to each of the three counselling areas, academic, career and personal.

Table 54: Distribution of "Generalist-Specialist" Scores and Models

"Generalist – Specialist" Score		Models of Counselling Delivery
123.33		
110.99		
101.67	2 STD	Most Specialist - 5 Colleges
94.45	above	
88.99		
82.91		
73.33		
73.33	1 STD	Moderately Specialist - 5 Colleges
63.33	above	
60.32		
51.33		
49.99		
46.33		
46.19		

45.55	1 STD	Moderately Generalist - 10 Colleges
40.67	below	
38.67		
36.9		
36.67		
31.67		
<hr/>		
24.34		
16.67	2 STD	Most Generalist - 3 Colleges
12.17	below	
<hr/>		

Counsellor responses regarding the distribution of their time to each of the three areas were then averaged for all counsellors in each college. These mean scores were then subtracted from 33.33 and summed to produce a “total deviation” from the case of a “pure generalist practice” where counsellors spend equal time on each of the three categories of service. A counsellor in the most “specialist” college devoting 100% of their time to one of the three categories would produce the largest “total deviation” from the generalist case. These “total deviation” scores were calculated for each college to create a “generalist-specialist” distribution as shown in Table 54 ordered from highest to lowest. The distribution had a mean score of 58.69 and a standard deviation of 29.59. These values were used to divide the distribution into four categories defined by the number of standard deviations above and below the mean. Each of the four categories was considered to define a model of counselling delivery: Most Generalist, Moderately Generalist, Moderately Specialist and Most Specialist.

The next question was whether the four models identified above were associated with meaningful differences in various dimensions that described service delivery and institutional characteristics. Table 55 shows the seven dimensions that were assessed across the four models in terms of their definition and the related survey items used to calculate a score for each of the 24 colleges. These were: Accessibility, Internal Collaboration (within the counselling department), External Collaboration, Intervention Continuum, Intervention Type, Learning College and Institutional Character.

Table 55: Dimensions of Service Delivery

Dimension	Definition	Measures from Surveys
Accessibility	How accessible counsellors are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alternative delivery modes</li> <li>• % of “drop in” students</li> <li>• See community members</li> <li>• Effective walk in system</li> <li>• See counsellor to drop program</li> <li>• Absence of limits to visits</li> <li>• See Intercession students</li> <li>• See “non-enrolled” students</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access after graduation</li> </ul>
Internal Collaboration	Team approach versus working independently	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequency of peer consulting</li> <li>• Frequency of manager consulting</li> <li>• Meeting frequency</li> <li>• Meet how often</li> <li>• Subject to supervision and what kind</li> <li>• Who does supervision and how often</li> </ul>
External Collaboration	Collaborative versus self-contained	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Track referrals from faculty</li> <li>• Estimate of how much referral</li> <li>• Relationship with faculty</li> <li>• Relationship with registrar</li> <li>• Access to registrar's records</li> </ul>
Intervention Continuum	Position on the advising coaching, counselling and psychotherapy continuum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rating on a scale of one to twelve</li> </ul>
Intervention Type	Proactive versus reactive delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student workshops</li> <li>• Meet classes at beginning of year</li> <li>• In-class guest speaker on special topics</li> <li>• Train student leaders</li> <li>• Train staff/faculty</li> <li>• Early alert system present</li> <li>• Help plan orientation</li> <li>• Participate in orientation</li> <li>• Program liaison present</li> </ul>
Learning College	Breadth of learning opportunities engaged in by counsellors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have taught</li> <li>• Union involvement beyond meetings</li> <li>• Community involvement</li> <li>• Professional association work</li> <li>• Student supervision</li> <li>• Research/writing</li> <li>• Last performance appraisal</li> </ul>
Institutional Character	Institutional support for counsellor role, satisfaction with job and service effectiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role supported by college</li> <li>• Manager advocates for counselling role</li> <li>• Management supports counselling role</li> <li>• Perceived effectiveness in meeting needs</li> <li>• Level of satisfaction with job</li> </ul>

Table 56 displays the results of the analysis of service delivery dimensions and shows that specific patterns exist for some of these. The cumulative score of the two generalist models shows a slightly higher “accessibility” score than that of the two specialist models (47.4 versus 44.5 respectively). The intervention continuum is a measure of the “complexity” of counsellor work, from the lowest score representing the “advising” end of the continuum to the highest score at the “psychotherapy” end of the continuum. There is an association between intervention complexity and the degree of specialization; as the model becomes more “specialist”, the “intervention continuum” score increases. Internal collaboration, which takes



place within counselling departments, is generally higher in the two specialist models. There is little difference between cumulative scores in the generalist and specialist models in the “external collaboration”, “learning college” or “institutional character” dimensions.

Table 56: Dimension Scores by Model Type

Model Type	Accessibility	Internal Collaboration	External Collaboration	Intervention Continuum	Intervention Locus	Learning College	Institutional Character
Most Generalist	24.6	11.3	33.8	7.1	7.5	2.5	20.8
Moderately Generalist	22.8	12.4	41.2	7.5	10.6	3.2	20.2
Moderately Specialist	23.6	15.0	33.0	7.8	10.0	3.9	20.0
Most Specialist	20.9	12.9	41.6	8.8	9.0	3.2	21.7

The results of an examination of system-wide statistics such as counsellor-student ratios and the change in this ratio for the five year period 2006-2011 are shown in Table 57. Overall, generalist models exhibited significantly lower counsellor-student ratios. Specialist models, taken together, exhibited growth rates in counsellor-student ratios that were twice that of generalist models over the past five years.

Table 57: System Statistics by Model Type

	C/S <sup>^</sup> Ratio 11/12	mean G/S* C/S ratio	5 year growth rate %	G/S* overall mean 5 year growth rate	5 year % change in C/S <sup>^</sup> ratio	mean G/S* C/S ratio
Most Generalist	834.7		31		12.4	
Moderately Generalist	1263.6	1165.6	26.2	28.3	21.2	19.2
Moderately Specialist	1869.0		18		52	
Most Specialist	2818.2	2343.6	34.2	26.1	24.2	40.5

Note: <sup>^</sup> = counsellor-student ratio; \* = generalist-specialist

Table 57 also shows that the average counsellor-student ratio in 2011-12 for colleges with a “generalist” model was 1165.6 compared to an average of 2343.6 students per counsellor for colleges with a “specialist” model.

Table 58 displays the results of an analysis of models by college size and shows that small and large colleges are represented more frequently in the generalist model types. In the case of small colleges this isn’t surprising, given the previous discussion about how the size of college impacts the counselling role. Smaller colleges are characterized by smaller counsellor-

student ratios (1 counsellor to 881 students compared to medium (1340) and large (1575) college ratios respectively), tend to score higher on the survey items used in this study to estimate “accessibility” and are the most likely to engage in academic and career counselling. It would be logical to then assume that a certain amount of specialization would result with size and that larger colleges would be the most specialized but this is clearly not the case.

Table 58: Distribution of Models by College Size

Models	College Size			Total
	Small	Medium	Large	
Most Generalist	2	1	0	3
Moderately Generalist	3	2	5	10
Moderately Specialist	2	1	2	5
Most Specialist	1	3	1	5

Table 58 also shows that large colleges are clustered in the moderately generalist model type and none are represented in the most generalist category. Indeed, the moderately generalist model is the most common type within the college system. Medium size colleges are most evenly distributed across the spectrum, with a slight bias towards the specialist category. The findings suggest that increased size does not automatically translate into specialization. As mentioned earlier, it is speculated that the model of counselling adopted by a specific college may be more a function of enrolment growth than enrolment itself since the medium size colleges on average have experienced the most growth over the past six years.

An analysis of the number of visits per student by college size showed that small colleges, which are somewhat more likely to exhibit the generalist model, have the lowest ratio at 1.96. This is followed by large colleges, which tend to be moderately generalist, with a ratio of 2.24. The highest ratio (2.48) is for medium size colleges where the specialist model is somewhat more common. Because counsellors within institutions in the “generalist” category do less personal counselling, they engage in more academic and career advising, activities that tend to take less time. Unfortunately, it was not possible to provide visits per student ratios for all models since the 2010-11 data is based on only 13 colleges and excluded those in the “most generalist” category.

Table 59: Presence of Blended Services Model by College Size

Model Type	College Size			Total
	Small	Medium	Large	
Most Generalist	1	2	1	4
Moderately Generalist	1		1	2
Moderately Specialist		1		1
Most Specialist		1		1

As depicted in Table 59, “blended” counselling delivery, where counsellors do both disability services and general counselling work occurs more frequently within colleges that exhibit a “generalist” model.

## DISCUSSION

This study sought, in part, to answer the following fundamental questions: Who are Ontario college counsellors?; What do counsellors do?; How is their work carried out?; Has it changed over time and if so, how? (student diversity, increased enrollment & counsellor complement) and; What is the institutional context in which the work is conducted? (collaboration, support, satisfaction). Brief answers to these questions based on the study findings are provided below.

Twenty three of the twenty four Ontario colleges employ counsellors as defined by the relevant collective agreement with the majority being women engaged on a full-time basis. Almost one half are 50 years of age or older and an equal percentage say they will retire in ten years with an additional one fifth doing so in one to four years. Slightly more than one half have less than ten years of experience as a college counsellor while almost one third have fifteen or more years of experience. Nine in ten hold a Master`s degree predominately in counselling, psychology or social work. Most counsellors are not currently regulated but have indicated their intention to register with the Ontario College of Registered Psychotherapists and Registered Mental Health Therapists once enacted.

While considerable variation was observed between counsellors and between colleges, overall, counsellors spent the most time with students on personal counselling with the least amount focused on career counselling. This was particularly true of those working in medium and large colleges. In addition, counsellors deliver a significant number of workshops to students outside of classes, and somewhat less frequently, as a guest speaker in classes. Considerable time is also spent with faculty and managers discussing strategies to deal with student behaviour, risk management and assisting students with academic and non-academic appeals.

When working with students, counsellors predominantly employ Solution Focused Therapy or Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and do so with students individually and in person. Few counsellors deliver services to students in groups or with the use of internet technologies. Changes in the complexity of counsellor work were also noted over time due to increases in the number and diversity of students attending Ontario colleges. Both counsellors and managers of counselling services reported that a shift had occurred with a greater percentage of their time being spent engaged in “psychotherapy”. The change was most noticeable in large colleges and participants in focus groups commented that some counselling departments were becoming “mental health crisis centres”. Both counsellors and managers of counselling departments reported that formal monitoring and supervision of counsellor work occurred relatively infrequently.

Overall, counsellors and managers of counselling were very satisfied with their job and believed they were effective in meeting the support needs of their students. Counsellors also believed they were supported in their role by their college, their manager and by senior administration. Similar results were obtained for managers of counselling services although their perception of support for the counsellor role by senior administrators was higher.

## **IMPLICATIONS/ISSUES RAISED**

The findings of this study have a number of implications for the evolution of counselling services in Ontario colleges and also raise a number of issues for future discussion. These are highlighted below.

### **Implications of Enrollment Growth and Diversity**

From 2007 to 2011, full time enrolment in the Ontario college system grew from 167,137 to 210,680, an increase of 26%. During the same period the number of counsellors increased by 4.6%. This was experienced differentially according to college size; large college counselling departments increased in size by 12%, followed by small colleges at 3.6%. Medium colleges experienced a drop in counselling compliment (-6.9%) which is particularly significant since the highest rate of enrolment growth as a percentage of base was experienced by the medium sized colleges. This has resulted in a 20.5% increase in the counsellor/student ratios across the system. Counselling departments have not kept pace with system growth and are providing for the needs of larger groups of students.

There is ample evidence to conclude that the support that students need to be successful in college has increased. There are numerous factors contributing to this, a non-exclusive list includes: students (and their families) have higher expectations of quality in the postsecondary experience and the services that should be available; there is significant evidence that younger students evidence lower levels of resilience and cope less well with the stresses of school than previous generations; the mental health needs of students have increased in both number and complexity and; the college environment has become increasingly diverse (linguistic, cultural, age, gender). Essentially across the system, college counsellors describe having to provide for more student needs with fewer resources.

There has been a subsequent narrowing of the counselling function. Using the traditional elaboration of college counselling as consisting of academic, career and personal counselling services, 60% of counsellor time is now spent doing personal counselling. The system figures for academic and career are 24% and 16% respectively, which is particularly significant given the pre-eminent role that career counselling used to play in the college system. This has been accompanied by a proliferation of “advisory” roles in both the career and academic areas across the system. In many schools, counsellors share the student service terrain with a variety of service providers. In some colleges, the services of the respective service providers are well defined, mutually understood and coordinated well. In many others, this isn’t the case.

For many colleges, the increasing demand for service and the scarcity of funding in a cash strapped system, has forced colleges to rationalize services; trying to define specifically what a college counsellor should do as a highly trained human service professional and what should be “carved off” to be done by other service providers.

### Implications of Size

The results of this study show that the average age of counsellors increases with college size; the largest constituent of small college counsellors are in their 30’s. Medium college counsellors tend to be in their 40’s and large college counsellors in their 50’s.

The scope of the counselling role also varies with college size. Small colleges do the most academic advisement and career counselling and the smallest percentage of personal counselling. Medium sized colleges do the most personal counselling and the least career, while large colleges do the least amount of academic.

Small college counsellors are more likely to do a “broader range” of outreach activity which includes running workshops, being guest speakers in professor’s classes, training student leaders/employees and providing staff training and development. The most common kind of outreach activity practiced by large college counsellors is running workshops. Medium sized college counsellors report the least amount of outreach involvement.

Small college counsellors report “moderate”/“a lot” of involvement in risk assessment at higher rates (41.2%) than large college (32.9%) and medium college (27.3%) counsellors.

Small college counsellors are more likely to have teaching experience and are twice as likely to be engaged in union work. Large college counsellors are more likely to report supervising Master’s level students, more external “community involvement” and professional association work. Large and medium college counsellors are twice as likely to be involved in research as counsellors in small colleges.

In terms of “intervention” (advising/coaching/counselling/psychotherapy), the smaller the college the most likely “advisement” and “coaching” takes up a larger percentage. Large college counsellors report doing “psychotherapy” at 2/12 times the rate of small college counsellors. Although marginally different, the “overall” intervention rating lies within the “counselling” category for all college sizes.

Small college counsellors are much more likely to see “community members” (75%) than either their colleagues at medium (48.8%) or large (29.2%) colleges and are also more likely to indicate they speak to classes at the beginning of the year.

On most indices, small college counsellors describe the highest rates of “generalist” practice. Large college counselling departments also cluster in the generalist end of the spectrum. Medium colleges are the most evenly distributed across the “generalist-specialist” continuum, although they are more likely to identify in the specialist end of the spectrum, which will be elaborated in the discussion below. It is speculated that the enrolment growth may be a factor in explaining this.

## Impact of Community Mental Health Services

One of the most significant themes of this study was the impact of student mental health needs on counselling departments. Although there were different assessments of the amount of time spent serving students with mental health issues across college size (small 46%, medium 51% and large 60%), there was very little difference when asked about the impact on their jobs. Almost all (90%) counsellors indicated that mental health had a “profound/very much of an” impact on their jobs. This topic elicited the most comments on the survey and the most passionate discussion during the vast majority of focus groups.

Counsellors were almost unanimous in their perception that students are presenting with more and increasingly complex mental health issues and attributed this to a wide range of factors including: lowering of stigma associated with disclosure and a higher likelihood that students will self-identify; a generalized increase in the vulnerability of today’s student; an observation that there are many students in postsecondary who, for a variety of reasons, wouldn’t have been in college ten years ago and; that colleges are seen as an “accessible” system.

Meeting these demands has been a challenge to what many understood the role of the college counsellor to previously be: providing short-term, focused support to “promote functionality in school”. There is significant pressure to be more “clinically sharp”, to deal with crisis more frequently and to play what many describe as a “case management” role with a broader array of mental health issues and illnesses. Counsellors described these as “time consuming files”, requiring significant follow up and involving increased stress.

Although not formally a part of the mental health treatment system, most colleges have described that they are seen within their communities as being able to provide accessible, professional mental health services. Many counsellors reported receiving referrals from local hospitals/mental health agencies when it was discovered that the individual at their door was a college student. Essentially, an open, accessible service has been created without the wait list students often experience in the community.

It was particularly interesting to discover that counsellors in large colleges are more likely to report access to community resources “extremely/moderately” difficult, largely due to cost considerations. Counsellors in medium sized and small colleges were more likely to describe access to community resources as difficult due to a shortage of resources.

## Proliferation of `Support` Roles

Generally speaking, counsellors are either confused/uninformed about the role of advisors in their college, disinterested because advisors aren’t perceived to have much of an impact on their role as counsellors, or supportive because they have had positive experiences working in collaboration. Advisory roles have proliferated across the system largely within the last five years and counsellor opinions appear to vary according to how long the advisor role has existed and evolved and whether the advisors are centralized in the same division/department.

Confusion appeared to stem from a variety of sources, including: counsellors not being consulted when the positions were created; the advisory positions being de-centralized or supervised by another department or unit and what many described as an “amorphous character”

characterized by changes in role and process beyond the view, understanding or involvement of the counsellors. It was interesting to note that many counsellors were unable to accurately quote the title of the advisors in their college or provide a specific description of their role.

In some colleges, there is been significant growth in the number of advisors while counsellor/student ratios have lost ground. There has, therefore, been a natural fear and skepticism that the use of advisors is a way to hire fewer counsellors who are more extensively trained and command faculty salaries.

On the positive side, many counsellors saw benefit to collaboration with advisors. At one college as an example, as soon as the advisors were brought into the same administrative unit, counsellors saw the advising function as more credible and described an improvement in working relationship and quality of service provision to students. It was often in this context that counsellors described a “case management” role for themselves in coordinating and tracking the intervention of various service providers (i.e., academic advisors, career consultants, physicians) in order to facilitate effective planning for students.

For many, the proliferation of advisory roles has focused a question which has long been a part of the identity of a college counsellor... what specifically does a college counsellor do? And more specific to this theme, what is the difference between counselling and advisement? What are aspects of the counsellor role that can be divested without compromising the quality of the service? Most counsellors who spoke to this issue wanted assurance that advisors would be functioning within clear guidelines, would receive training, supervision and support to know when they were beyond their “scope of practice” in order that appropriate and timely referrals were made to counselling to meet the needs of vulnerable students.

### **Loss of the Holistic Student Development Model**

One of the most frequent discussions within focus groups was about how students typically present at the “intake phase” of seeking counselling services, and how the situation presented by the student essentially turns out to be the proverbial “tip of the iceberg”. It is very common for a student to initially indicate that “I’m not doing well in school”, which at most colleges is characterized as an academic issue requiring academic advisement. What typically happens is that the student’s subsequent interaction with the counsellor reveals root causes/factors which are clearly personal and at times the discussion involves all three of the foundational elements of the counsellor role (academic, career and personal). The ability to assess a student’s needs and develop a plan within this comprehensive framework is often called “holistic”.

Many counsellors reported that components of the counsellor role, namely academic advisement and career counselling, have been removed and assigned to “advisors”. In other words, the role of the counsellor has moved from a broader, more generalist role to one that is narrower and more specialized. Although debatable, most equate a “holistic approach” more with a generalist approach. The tension between providing for the needs of students in a more generalist, holistic manner versus creating narrower, more specialized student support roles where students have to deal with more people, is a core theme that underlies many of the results

of the study. In particular, this was an argument which was often made by counsellors who worked in “blended” colleges, where counsellors provided both disability and general counselling services and where student’s only have to deal with one person, essentially a “one stop shop”.

Many counsellors perceived this increased specialization and proliferation of roles as a threat to holistic practice. It is necessary to see the “whole picture” to help students adjust to school and segmenting the counsellor role will fragment service provision, create inefficiencies for students and lower service quality. Others saw specialization within the counselling role as inevitable.

What is of particular interest is whether students who are experiencing personal issues will be less likely to have access to a counsellor if academic advisement issues are exclusively dealt with by academic advisors. Again, the importance of collaboration and succinct guidelines outlining scope of practice for all personnel as well as effective referral processes are key to providing timely support to students.

### **Implications of 2007 Psychotherapy Act**

The majority of counsellors in the province are presently unregulated. Fully 70.6% of counsellors and 40.6% of managers intend on registering with the Ontario College of Registered Psychotherapists and Registered Mental Health Therapists (OCRPRMHT).

Most counsellors in the system saw regulation as a positive step in terms of the impact on standards, as providing a much needed opportunity to clarify and legitimate the counselling role with the college system, of increasing the emphasis on public safety, highlighting the need for liability insurance and for more regular case-related supervision.

The implementation of the Psychotherapy Act adds a “legal” layer to the concept of “scopes of practice” mentioned above. Colleges will have to ensure that only qualified staff are practicing the controlled act of “psychotherapy”. Initially, many were concerned that the standards set by the OCRPRMHT would be too high and that experienced counsellors either wouldn’t be grand-parented or would have to submit to rigorous testing and/or take qualifying courses. However, a minimum of a Master’s qualification has been advocated by the Ontario College Counsellors for many years as the benchmark for counsellors within Ontario colleges and almost all counsellors are qualified at this level. The Transition Council (creating the governance structure for the OCRPRMHT) has advocated a so-called “two tier model” which may end up having the opposite impact that many feared initially; that implementation of the act will actually lower standards allowing individuals with lower levels of education to belong to the OCRPRMHT and therefore practice psychotherapy. This has re-ignited the debate (or perhaps thrown more fuel on an already burning fire) that colleges will opt to hire less qualified Registered Mental Health Therapists (RMHT) over Registered Psychotherapists (RP).

Again, the journey to regulation has been a long one and many are waiting until the regulations are in their final form before deciding to which of the two levels of membership they will apply. The study showed that almost half of the counsellors intended to apply as Registered



Psychotherapists (48.8%), 12.6% as Registered Mental Health Therapists and close to one third were undecided (28.5%)

## **SERVICE DELIVERY GUIDELINES/BENCHMARKS**

The following is a preliminary discussion of the need for service delivery guidelines or benchmarks in six broad areas. Although the environmental scan conducted by this study was extensive and has succeeded in providing a comprehensive picture of counselling services, the lack of uniform system data, a paucity of outcome measures and several key issues that require further study, make definitive statements about benchmarks premature. It is hoped, however, that the initial formulation presented here will constitute an informed contribution to the current discourse in Ontario about the place of counselling services in a college environment characterized by increasing demand and complexity, constrained resources and impending regulation.

### **Benchmark Area 1: Student Access to Counselling Services.**

#### Rationale

The demand for counsellor expertise is increasing within the post-secondary environment.

The needs and service expectations of students (and their families) are increasing.

There is an increasing expectation that colleges are responsible for promoting the mental health and well-being of students.

There is an increasing expectation that colleges take all reasonable precautions to ensure a safe and secure learning environment.

It is argued that students in Ontario colleges have a right to access counselling services much like students with disabilities have a legal right to accommodations. To be more specific, counselling for students in need requires a broader definition of accommodation in order to provide the support necessary to facilitate access and improve student success.

#### **BENCHMARK ONE**

*College students require timely access to highly trained and qualified counsellors who work in concert with teaching faculty, other student services personnel and external service providers to ensure students experience a safe postsecondary environment that promotes their mental health and well-being and academic success.*

### Relevant Components

- Counsellor hiring standards
- Counsellor-student ratios
- Maximum waitlist times
- Effective walk-in service protocols
- Use of technology to improve access

## Benchmark Area 2: Behaviour Management and Risk Assessment

### Rationale

Counsellors are reporting increasing involvement in supporting staff, faculty and administration in strategically planning appropriate interventions for students whose behaviour is troublesome or problematic.

Counsellors are reporting increasing involvement in risk assessment, i.e. students who may be potentially at risk to themselves or others.

### **BENCHMARK TWO**

*Counsellors play a pivotal role in behaviour management and risk assessment processes within colleges and collaborate with other professionals to foster the conditions necessary to create a safe environment for all students and staff.*

### Relevant Components

- Professional development requirements in the area of risk/threat assessment needs to be measured across the college system
- A survey and assessment of available training to assist colleges in choosing best practices/models
- Counsellors have the specific/updated training to consult on these situations
- Counsellor membership/involvement on risk assessment team/processes

## Benchmark Area 3: Collection of Service Delivery Statistics

### Rationale

The collection of system-wide data is seen by the vast majority of counsellors and counselling managers to be critically important for a number of reasons including:

- i. in order to demonstrate that counselling services are necessary and being used;
- ii. to provide feedback to academic programs and administration;
- iii. to document demand relative to resources;

- iv. to identify needs for training and development;
- v. to establish service benchmarks;
- vi. to identify trends and needs for service changes;
- vii. to forecast needs.

(from Bryson, Jim **Data Collection Position Paper**, monograph, May 2006, p. 5)

### **BENCHMARK THREE**

*Implementation of a province-wide data collection template and process to gather service delivery statistics from counselling departments on an annual basis. A target of 80% participation in this initiative is set for the 2013-14 academic year.*

#### Relevant Components

- OCC, in collaboration with HOSA, develop a provincial data template and collection process for implementation in 2013-14
- Support from Colleges Ontario and MTCU to create the infrastructure necessary to implement the data collection process and reporting procedures. The process currently in place for CCDI could be used as a model
- Revision made to Student Satisfaction KPI survey items so that counselling services are differentiated from other campus support services

## **Benchmark Area 4: Dominance of Brief Therapies in Counselling Methods**

### Rationale

While it is recognized that college counsellors must utilize a diverse and eclectic array of therapies in their work, the three most utilized counselling approaches in the system are “solution focused”, “cognitive behavioural therapy” and “crisis intervention”.

### **BENCHMARK FOUR**

*Colleges, college counselling services, OCC and other relevant organizations responsible for developing training opportunities for counsellors recognize the dominance of Solution Focused, Cognitive Behavioural and Crisis Intervention Therapies in college counselling and work together to promote access to ongoing training to ensure professional currency.*

## **Benchmark Area 5: Explicit and Integrated Policy Framework**

### Rationale

The number of students living with mental illness has increased across the college system as has the demand on college counselling services to provide support for these students.

Access to community counselling resources in large and small communities alike are most often characterized by wait lists that are long enough comparative to the length of a semester, to jeopardize a student's success. Counsellors are playing a "bridging function" for students experiencing a broader range of more complex mental health issues.

Many colleges are reporting that they are receiving incoming referrals from community agencies with increasing frequency (i.e., hospital emergency departments, community counselling agencies) because students are able to access college counsellors with much shorter wait times at no cost. It can be argued that college counselling departments are a component of the mental health services delivery system and should be funded as such.

For many students living with mental illness, attendance at college is a critical part of their treatment plan and college counsellors are being increasingly called upon to provide support to promote student success.

## **BENCHMARK FIVE**

*Recognition of the importance of a multifaceted counsellor role in fostering student mental health and well-being within colleges including: outreach and other preventative activities that facilitate timely access to counsellor supports; wellness and health lifestyle promotion; psycho-education; group therapy; ready access to individual psychotherapy; and a "bridging role" for students/graduates awaiting service with a community agency.*

### Relevant Components

- Importance of the college role in providing for the mental health needs of students on campus
- Developing coordinated partnerships with community agencies to facilitate more timely access to services by students
- Developing a policy working group to examine provincial funding patterns for mental health counsellors to determine if college counsellor departments would qualify for funding support from other Ministries (i.e. Ministry of Health and Long Term Care)
- Legitimation of the "bridging role" counsellors play with students and the "transitional support" provided to new graduates
- Provincial survey to determine training needs for counsellors in meeting the broader range of mental health issues exhibited by college students
- That OCC Statement of Ethics and Standards of Practice be used to inform the implementation of policy and practice within Ontario college counselling departments

## Benchmark Area 6: Impact of the Regulation of Psychotherapy

### Rationale

The Psychotherapy Act will add a “legalistic” lens to the practice of counselling within colleges. Most counsellors and counselling managers across the college system see the institution of the OCRPRMHT as improving the quality of counselling services. This, along with the increased mental health needs of students, has drawn significant attention to the need for more clinical supervision and performance evaluation.

### **BENCHMARK SIX**

*Within the Ontario College system there is a clearly understood definition and interpretation of “psychotherapy” and how it is differentiated from advising in order to ensure that only regulated practitioners provide this service to students in order to ensure public safety and compliance with the law.*

### Relevant Components

- College senior administration, in concert with Student Services, prepare for the implementation of regulation by the OCRPRMHT especially as this relates to issues of membership, liability and standards of practice
- Provide education re: the definition of “psychotherapy” for college staff, faculty and administration
- Need for colleges to clearly elaborate the difference between the role of advisor and counsellor in order to ensure student safety, compliance with legislation and in preparation for the institution of the OCRPRMHT
- Determine methods of providing clinical supervision that would be particularly appropriate for the college counselling environment regarding policies, models, process
- Determine methods of providing regular performance evaluations for counsellors – policy, models, process including standardized form

## CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions are drawn from the information collected in this study via surveys, focus groups and interviews with all Ontario college counsellors and managers of counselling departments.

1. Over the past six years the increased number and diversity of students attending Ontario colleges has forced many college counselling departments to modify their service delivery model.

2. While a number of service delivery models have been adopted by colleges, insufficient information is available to establish the relative efficacy of these models. A variety of outcome measures should be adopted in the future in order to facilitate the identification of those that are most effective in delivering support to students.
3. While the increased demand for services by students has created some challenges for counselling departments, those interviewed in this study agreed that so long as colleges are admitting students with diverse needs, the appropriate services must be provided so that they can be accessed in a timely manner.
4. Indeed, both counsellors and managers of counselling departments were congruent in their description of effective walk-in protocols to maximize student access to services.
5. The increased specialization of counselling staff that has resulted, along with the proliferation of other support roles, has placed the concept of holistic student development at risk.
6. A lack of clarity exists regarding, not only the work of college counsellors, the nature of psychotherapy and what constitutes a mental health issue, but also the fundamental guidelines and policy frameworks necessary to support the role of counselling services on college campuses.
7. The implementation of regulation within college counselling services will help clarify the work of counselling staff, is seen as a positive development by counsellors specifically and is likely to help managers and senior administrators better organize and deliver support services to students.
8. The increased referral of those with mental health difficulties to college campuses by community mental health agencies requires improved liaison between service providers so that college counselling departments are not asked to provide services for which they are not adequately resourced.

## Resources

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## **Appendices**

The appendices can be accessed on the Ontario College Counsellor website at [www.occ-ccco.ca](http://www.occ-ccco.ca).

**Appendix A - Questionnaires, Focus Group Questions, Manager Interview Questions**

**Appendix B - System Data Request – Interpretive Notes**

**Appendix C - Outreach Activities**

**Appendix D - Focus Group Summaries**

**Appendix E - Counsellor Best Practices**

**Appendix F - Manager Best Practices**

**Appendix G – Enrollment by College by Year**