**ACCA Community College Survey 2023**

**Title:**

Gathering our Collective Voices in Describing What We Do: Results from a 2023 Survey of Community College Counseling Centers

**Purpose:**

The American College Counseling Association (ACCA) has re-instituted and completed its sixth national survey after an eight-year break. The purpose of this survey continues to assemble a foundation of knowledge about community/2-year college counseling centers and services, particularly regarding personal/mental health.

**Background:**

Community/2-year colleges offer a unique opportunity for many students to learn a trade or begin their undergraduate education at a more affordable option. Students face many barriers to completing their education, most notably mental health concerns (NAMI, 2012). Colleges can offer much needed support for students to overcome these barriers, especially through professional counseling efforts by qualified counselors (Schwitzer et al., 2018).

Historically, community/2-year colleges have operated differently than their four-year counterparts. Counselors may have addressed the mental health needs of its students through personal counseling alongside many other duties such as academic advising (Edwards, 2015). Counselors were not necessarily licensed, nor supervised by licensed clinicians. Fewer counselors were tasked with meeting the rising needs of increasing numbers of students (Eisenberg et al., 2016).

**Method:**

The 2023 survey was revised from earlier ACCA surveys, with input from the ACCA Community College Committee. It was designed and implemented through the primary researcher’s Qualtrics survey account; permission was granted through an Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. Committee members revised a database of schools and contacts by reviewing each website of community/2-year colleges across the nation (N=869). Email addresses were compiled from counseling centers and/or individual counselors at schools that supplied personal/mental health counseling services. For schools without counselor contacts or these services, information was collected for appropriate vice presidents and deans. Email contacts were established for 805 schools.

Survey invitations were emailed to every counseling center, counselor, vice president, and dean in the database, which held informed consent and a link to the survey. Respondents could enter their names into a raffle drawing; three winners were selected, and each received a $50 gift card. Two reminders to complete the survey were emailed about a week apart, and an additional request was sent through the ACCA listserv. The survey closed on 4/19/23. Fifteen hundred and three (1,503) emails were successfully delivered to 805 community colleges. Surveys were received from 343 respondents (22.8% response rate) representing 229 colleges (26.4% of total number of colleges in the U.S.).

**Results:**

This year 2023 had the highest response rate with 343 returned surveys. It also showed other record highs. For example, this year’s percentage of community colleges providing personal/mental health counseling is the highest yet (90%), representing a continuous upward trend from 68% in 2011 and 82% in 2015. Nearly every college (91%) now has a threat assessment/behavioral intervention team, which has increased in the past several years from 71% in 2011. Most colleges (90%) currently have suicide prevention resources and programming, which also has increased each year from 65% in 2011. Colleges with a designated staff member for case management are also on the rise (44%), up from 15% in 2014 and double the percent (22%) from 2015.

More colleges require counselors to be licensed (63%) compared to previous years at around 53%. The amount of work that counselors do in addition to personal/mental health counseling has decreased over the years. In 2011 almost every counselor surveyed (97%) performed additional duties, now that number is only 57%. Academic advising was part of 70% of counselor duties in 2011, down to around 60% in 2013-2015, to 40% currently. Career counseling services have increased from 68% in 2011 to 94% in 2023. Psychiatry resources on campus have only slightly increased from 13% in 2011 to 16% currently.

While counselors are not necessarily seeing a higher intensity of need from students as compared to the past year (47%), their caseloads vary. Most counselors see around 15 students a week and 22% spend an average of 16-20 hours per week on personal/mental health counseling. The average wait time for a student to get a counseling appointment is 2 to 3 days (28%), and centers are mostly staffed by 2-3 full-time counselors/therapists (33%). Thirty-eight percent of respondents think the size of the college counseling department is “somewhat adequate” in meeting students’ needs. A new question this year included virtual counseling services. Nearly all centers (95%) provide a combination of in-person and virtual services, with the majority (76%) continuing to see a greater proportion of in-person visits.

**References:**

Edwards, J. (2015). *Community Colleges: Meeting the Needs of Today’s Students in a Changing and Complex World.* https://www.collegecounseling.org/resources/Documents/ACCA- Community-College-Survey-2014-15-Final.pdf

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NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness (2012). *College Students Speak: A survey report on*  *mental health.* https://nami.org/getattachment/About-NAMI/Publications- Reports/Survey-Reports/College-Students-Speak\_A-Survey-Report-on-Mental-Health- NAMI-2012.pdf

Schwitzer, A. M., Moss, C. B., Pribesh, S. L., St. John, D. J., Burnett, D. D., Thompson, L. H., & Foss, J. J. (2018). Students with mental health needs: College counseling experiences and academic success. *Journal of College Student Development, 59*(1), 3-20. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2018.0001

**Other Highlights:**

* 343 respondents (22.8% response rate)
* 229 community/2-year colleges (26.4% of the total number (869) of community/2-year colleges across the United States)
* 90% of colleges provide personal/mental health counseling services to students
* 85% of personal/mental health counseling services are provided by counselors on staff; 42% refer to community mental health providers; 24% have therapists contracted by the college (note: responses do not add to 100% since choices were “check all that apply”)
* 57% of counseling centers provide personal/mental health counseling in addition to other services such as psychoeducational programming (73%), committee work (61%), academic counseling (48%), career counseling (46%), and academic advising (40%)
* 94% of colleges offer career counseling to students; 54% are provided by trained counselors on staff and 1% are contracted by community professionals
* 91% of colleges have a threat assessment/behavioral intervention/student care team; 88% of these teams have access to a mental health professional for treatment referrals (43%), case consultation (42%), and mandated assessment (3%)
* 44% of colleges have a designated staff member for student case management
* 16% of colleges have a contract with a psychiatric provider; 11% of these are contracted in the community and 5% are staffed at the college; 75% provide referrals for psychiatric care
* 90% of colleges provide suicide prevention resources and programming; 31% partner with external agencies
* 37% of colleges provide mandated assessments for suicidal or violent students; 18% prescribe mandated treatment; 65% would “often” or “almost always” involve the students’ parents, guardians or support others
* Mental health screenings are utilized for depression and other mood disorders (63%), suicide (61%), anxiety (59%), and others; 24% of respondents do not have screenings
* 77% of colleges require students to sign informed consent for counseling
* 85% of counseling centers track and document student clinical data; 79% evaluate effectiveness of personal/mental health counseling services, mostly through student satisfaction surveys (46%)
* 83% of counseling centers are not accredited; 2% are accredited by IACS and 6% follow the ASCA National Model
* 86% of counselors hold master’s degrees; 12% completed doctoral degrees
* 63% of counselors who provide personal/mental health counseling are required to hold independent State licensure; 55% of supervisors are not
* 49% of counseling centers welcome walk-ins; 42% only see walk-ins for crisis intervention; 9% do not allow them
* The average wait time for a student to get a counseling appointment is 2 to 3 days (28%), followed by 1 week (27%), the next day (20%), and 18% of counseling centers may see students the same day
* 95% of counseling services are a combination of in-person and virtual services; 76% seeing a higher percentage of in-person visits
* 37% of counseling centers see less than five percent of the student population for personal/mental health counseling in a given academic year; 41% see each student for an average number of 3-5 sessions; 54% do not place any limits
* 22% of counselors spend an average of 16-20 hours per week on personal/mental health counseling; an average weekly caseload is around 15 students
* 33% of counseling centers have 2-3 full-time counselors/therapists on staff, 20% have 4-6 and only 1, each; 58% do not employ part-time staff nor utilize interns (65%); 38% think the size of the college counseling department is “somewhat adequate” in meeting students’ needs (38%), 28% believe the size is “adequate”
* Counselors are either seeing an increase in acuity/severity of clinical symptoms compared to the past year (47%) or the same level (44%); top student concerns include anxiety disorders (85%), depression or other mood disorders (76%), academic performance stress (69%), family stress (49%), relationship issues (47%), trauma (43%), and social isolation/loneliness (38%)
* 27% of the respondents are currently members of ACCA, 17% were members in the past, 56% have never been a member

**See “ACCA 2023 Community College Survey Results” for complete results**

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