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ABSTRACT

University counseling centers are being asked to demonstrate their effectiveness and, at the same time, to meet the needs of a growing number of students desiring their services. To help centers meet these demands, researchers have begun to examine student needs and to evaluate counseling services. University freshmen (N=2180) interested in different types of counseling or no counseling were compared on attitudinal and demographic items. Students interested in personal-social counseling expected that getting to know others would be difficult. These students were more likely to live in residence halls, advocated more student participation in campus decisions, and were likely to attribute low enrollment of blacks to racism. Students interested in educational-vocational counseling were more likely to have fathers who had college degrees; they were more undecided about majors and considered selection of a major to be a problem. Students interested in reading and study skills counseling cited earning satisfactory grades as their hardest adjustment to school. They were quite sure of their vocational goals and were more likely to attend the university for its academic program. The results suggest that this type of information is useful in establishing optimal student services.
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INITIAL STUDENT INTEREST IN COUNSELING: A
COMPARISON OF TYPES

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University counseling centers have recently been challenged by administrators, legislators, and tax-payers to demonstrate their effectiveness in and relevance to the college educational process. At the same time, these counseling centers are striving to develop their services to meet the needs of as many students as possible in a time of large student demand for such services. In order to meet both of these demands for accountability, researchers have begun to examine student needs and to evaluate counseling services.

One approach to such evaluation has been to investigate differences between students who sought counseling and those who did not. In one of the earliest of such studies, Volsky, Magoon, Norman, and Hoyt (1965) found that while there were no differences in scholastic aptitude between the two groups at college admission, the counseled students had a higher graduation rate than the non-counseled ones. In 1966, Kirk and her colleagues at the University of California, Berkeley, began a series of studies examining counseled versus non-counseled students over the course of their college careers. These studies (Rossmann and Kirk, 1970; Kirk, 1973; Frank and Kirk, 1975) again found very few initial differences in scholastic abilities, interests, and backgrounds, but found that counseled students tended to have a higher graduation rate within four years. It was concluded that the studies demonstrate accountability for counseling services regarding their positive effect on the educational process.

While counseled versus non-counseled students have been rather extensively studied, there has been little effort to identify troubled or counseling-interested students before they actually sought counseling or began having academic difficulties. The University of Maryland, College Park, regularly polls incoming freshmen on a number of issues, including their interest in various types of counseling services. These data could serve as a valuable basis on which to build preventive counseling services. Do these initial counseling interests demonstrate any other differences among students? Do such interests have implications for the type of

college experience in which the students engage? Does receipt of or failure to receive services affect a college career? Since the answers to such questions would have real implications for counseling center and administrative planning, a series of studies was planned to address these issues. The present study deals with the first question, that of whether there are initial differences between students interested in receiving various types of counseling and students not interested in counseling. Later studies will examine whether incoming freshmen in other years had such initial differences and whether counseling interests and receipt of counseling affected students' academic careers.

Method

The participants in this study were undergraduate students at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP). Students were asked about their interest in seeking counseling in various areas, and were categorized as potential educational-vocational clients (EV), potential personal-social clients (PS), potential reading and study skills clients (RSS), or not interested persons (NI). The smallest cell frequency of the four groups of students was used as the sample size for each of the groups, in order to equalize cell sizes; thus, since the PS group had the smallest frequency (N=545), subjects were randomly chosen from each of the other three groups so that each group had N=545, or a total sample size of 2180. The original sample included 5982 incoming freshmen, 34% of whom were in the EV category (N=2037), 9% in the PS category (N=545), 40% in the RSS category (N=2382), and 12% in the NI category (N=686). Data were analyzed by analysis of variance and chi square; all differences discussed below are significant at the .05 level.

Results

Students Interested in Personal- Social Counseling (PS). While all categories of incoming freshmen tended to expect budgeting time and studying to be among the hardest parts of adjusting to college, the incoming freshmen who had an interest



in personal-social counseling expected that getting to know others would also be difficult. These students tended to live in residence halls during their first college semester. Many of their attitudes were more liberal than those of students in other counseling categories, including attitudes on student participation in campus decisions, provision of contraception, provision of campus counseling services (crisis, legal and drug counseling), recruiting blacks, and the use of referendums on campus. They tended, more than the other groups, to believe that the reason that there are few blacks at UMCP was because of racist practices. Such campus practices as holding small colloquies for solving problems, cancelling classes the week before November elections to allow more political involvement, and holding late afternoon and evening classes and Saturday classes were favored by these PS students. They did not believe that students had the opportunity for University policy making, and did not think that the University should suspend disruptive students.

Students Interested in Educational-Vocational Counseling (EV). Those incoming students who were interested in receiving educational or vocational counseling included selecting a major as one of the hardest parts of adjusting to college. They tended to be more undecided regarding their major than were students in the other categories, and those in this group that had decided on their major tended to have decided later in their high school careers than students in the other categories. They tended to live in residence halls, and more of their fathers had college degrees than those in the other categories. They were slightly less liberal than PS students, but more liberal than RSS or NI students, on issues of students voting in faculty decisions, provision of crisis counseling, legal counseling and drug counseling on campus, and use of campus referendums. They disagreed more than the students in other categories with the idea of campus provision of contraceptives and abortion information, canceling classes before

elections, and holding more Saturday classes.

Students Interested in Reading and Study Skills Counseling (RSS). The incoming freshmen interested in obtaining reading or study skills counseling believed that earning satisfactory grades would be one of the hardest parts of adjusting to college. They were quite certain of their vocational goals, and more of their fathers attended in-state colleges than students in other groups. They lived in residence halls or with their parents. They attended UMCP because of its academic reputation. They believed that the reason few blacks attend UMCP was because blacks prefer black colleges, and believed that the University should actively recruit blacks. These RSS students were the most or next-to-most conservative category of students regarding the political or campus issues mentioned in the above paragraphs.

Students Not Interested in Counseling (NI). Incoming students who were not interested in the above types of counseling were similar to the RSS students in terms of their concern about grades, place of residence, and certainty of vocational goals. These NI students thought the best way to provide higher education for blacks and whites was for integration to happen naturally, and tended to say they didn't know why there are few blacks at the University. This category was the least politically involved and the least interested in campus provision of all types of counseling services, but they had some interest in campus provision of contraceptives and abortion information, canceling classes before elections, having campus colloquies, holding Saturday classes, and holding late afternoon/evening classes, and they did not see students as having the opportunity for policy-making.

Discussion

The present study indicated that students who showed different counseling interests as incoming freshmen could be differentiated on many other variables such, as political involvement, campus involvement, college expectations, political and social attitudes, vocational decisiveness, residence, and father's education. Patterns characterizing each student category tended to be quite consistent across the different variables, and counseling interests were thus congruent with students' more general attitudinal and behavioral patterns.

Students interested in seeking personal-social counseling tended to be involved in political and social issues, and were quite liberal and service oriented. The educational-vocational counseling-interested students were somewhat less liberal and less politically involved, but more concerned about personal identity in terms of academic issues and career choices. Students interested in reading and study skills counseling tended to be quite goal-oriented, involved in studying, and conservative on most issues except those regarding blacks. While the students not interested in seeking counseling were somewhat similar to the RSS students, the NI students were generally less involved in political issues, campus activities and academics, tending to be "do-it-yourself" types in both their personal lives and on social change issues.

Consistent with such categorization, other writers have identified distinct student subcultures (e.g., Clark and Trow, 1966). The Clark and Trow typology differentiates between students by using dimensions of involvement with ideas, identification with college, and job/goal orientation. This model views students as having integrated their activities, interests and attitudes into cohesive patterns. Using items similar to those in the present study, Fiore and Sedlacek (1970) found that raters were able to agree on characteristics of

students within various subcultures. These subcultures overlap with the categories identified in the present study on the basis of counseling interests. Both the Fiore and Sedlacek study and the present one identified some of the important differentiating characteristics to be : criticism of the University, clarity of vocational plans, parents' education, involvement with the University, and concern with putting oneself through college.

The similarity of these categories and the consistency of student characteristics within each category are congruent with Perry's (1970) developmental model of the college years. Perry sees an underlying consistency in the way people perceive ideas and values at each stage in their lives; thus, interest in seeking counseling of a given type is indicative of a more general personal and world view of what things are important and how such things may be obtained. While individuals thus synthesize ideas and activities at each point in time, Perry believes that there are different developmental stages characterized by very different world views. Lower level stages consist of assuming without examination that the world is dualistic, and that hard work and conforming to the traditional way will bring personal rewards. The realization that there are many different points of view and answers reflects movement to more advanced stages, along with examination of and subsequent commitment to personal points of view. The different counseling interests, then, may reflect different developmental stages. The not-interested students may not yet have come to the point of struggling with a multiplicity of viewpoints and becoming committed to some personal values, and they might be expected to need counseling at later points in their college careers when they have been confronted by more diversity and ambiguity in their environments. The educational-vocational type students appear to be in the beginning or midst of such a confrontation, and are struggling to define their own vocations and beliefs from the wide variety of options. The

personal-social students appear to have gained some commitment to ideas, but not yet to have felt at ease in their interpersonal relationships and commitments. It is not clear where the RSS students lie on this developmental continuum: they seem to have strong commitments to pursuing personal goals and to have consistent attitudes, meaning either that they are still pursuing a dualistically perceived world through hard work, or that they have achieved commitment to personal views and goals after having sorted through the multiple possibilities. When viewed developmentally, the various interests in counseling have clear implications for the problems that might be expected during the college career and the goals in the counseling of each type of student. Such information could be used diagnostically and evaluatively in helping plan optimal student services.

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