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ABSTRACT

This report describes the design, implementation, and subjective evaluation of a pilot program, in which graduate practicum students offered short-term counseling to 13 high-risk (academic probation) undergraduate students at Marywood College (Pennsylvania). The counselors-in-training were expected to provide direct counseling services and instruct the clients in the use of the college's academic support services. Counselors-in-training received direct, live supervision of each counseling session. The use of a one-way mirror and an audio system allowed the supervisor to instruct immediately the counselor-in-training via an earphone. The counselors-in-training observed one another and provided feedback concerning counseling skills, techniques, and goals and directions. Counselors-in-training further reviewed their sessions through videotape recordings. The program seemed to provide a highly successful experience for both the counselors-in-training and the undergraduate students who received the counseling services. With rising costs, and faculty and staff work load demands, many graduate and undergraduate clinical programs are not able to establish or maintain "clinics" for students to receive "hands-on" experience in a supervised setting. This pilot program appeared to offer a viable alternative to the traditional "clinic" model. In most cases, academic probation was symptomatic to personal and familial problems for the clients in this program. Eleven of the 13 students were retained by the college following the counseling. The campus-wide support for this pilot program from students, graduate and undergraduate, faculty and administration was extremely positive.  
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**AN INTERVENTION PROGRAM FOR HIGH RISK UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS:  
A UNIQUE COLLABORATIVE PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE**

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**ABSTRACT**

**A unique, collaborative pilot program offered short term counseling to undergraduates of Marywood College who were experiencing academic difficulties. Graduate students in the Counseling Practicum provided counseling services to the undergraduates in a highly structured, supervised learning environment. The program was evaluated utilizing summative methods. The results indicated a highly successful experience for both the counselors-in-training and the undergraduate students who received the counseling services. Discussion focused on benefits derived from the pilot project, applicability to other academic institutions offering clinical practice courses, graduate and/or undergraduate, and considerations for future research.**

**AN INTERVENTION PROGRAM FOR HIGH RISK UNDERGRADUATE  
STUDENTS: A UNIQUE COLLABORATIVE PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE**

**Introduction**

This collaborative intervention program was designed by the Graduate Department of Counseling and Psychology and the Undergraduate Department of Student Development Services of Marywood College in response to three specific needs: (1) The Graduate Counseling Department was researching various methods of providing a more academically-sound, controlled and professional experience for its campus based practicum students. (2) The undergraduate area of Student Development Services, which provides on-going support programs for high-risk students, was investigating new intervention strategies for this specific population. (3) The College was encouraging collaboration between the graduate and undergraduate schools in both support services and academics.

While much has been written on the topic of Counseling Practicum, a review of the literature failed to evidence documentation of a practicum that incorporated high risk undergraduate clients as the client pool for graduate counseling practicum students with live, in-process supervision by the practicum instructor. However, the literature did appear to substantiate key aspects of the pilot program. Rawlins and Lenihan (1982) reported a successful experience wherein graduate Counseling Techniques students assisted non-traditional students in re-entry into a four year university. Subsequent to training on principles of adult learning, effective counseling of adults, and the unique needs of adults returning to formal learning, the graduate counseling techniques students were employed as

group facilitators for returning adult students. The authors reported that the graduate students expressed gains in the program: (1) assisted graduate students to confront fears of leading a group, (2) boosted their self confidence about giving workshops, (3) aided them in personal and professional growth.

Berger and Dammann (1982) reported the advantage of live-in-process supervision in training and treatment, particularly for structural and strategic therapy. Furthermore, the authors indicated a predictable progression of counselor-in-training reactions to supervision.

Goodman (1985) presented a model of live supervision for therapy training. The author stipulated how the clinical supervisor functions as both a trainer and consultant in the therapy process. He concluded that live supervision has distinct advantages over traditional methods because the immediacy of the process allows the supervisor to train, intervene and evaluate immediately. The author further stated that another feature of this model is that the clinical supervisor becomes a part of the strategic intervention.

Based on the review of the literature and the stated needs, a pilot program in which graduate practicum (counselors-in-training) were assigned as primary counselors to high-risk students was initiated. High-risk was defined as academic probation. This program was piloted during the Fall '90 semester.

## **Method**

### **Selection of the Client Population**

Undergraduate students falling below a 2.0 QPA are referred to the Grade and Honors Committee of the College. The Academic Dean sent letters advising them of their difficulty and placed them on official warning or academic probation.

From an existing group totalling 25 undergraduate students on probation, twenty were contacted at random and invited to participate in a pilot support program. Thirteen participated during the fall semester. The five students randomly excluded from this program were afforded routine support services via the Counseling Center.

Pertinent information regarding each of the undergraduate students was given to the graduate practicum students. This included academic data such a QPA, class schedule, study skills guides, time management calenders, brochures on stress management and college success, as well as suggested intervention strategies i.e. consistent contact with their academic advisor, review of their choice of major, and utilization of campus resource services and personnel. Undergraduate client progress was monitored by the Director of the Counseling Center.

### **Selection of the Counselor-in-Training Population**

Practicum, conducted by the Graduate Counseling/Psychology Department, is designed to be the on-campus culminating experience of the graduate counseling student's training. It is a requirement of the Department that this course be taken prior to their off-campus, three credit internship. All counselors-in-training selected for this pilot program had a minimum of thirty-nine (39) of the program's required forty-five (45) credits.

### **The Practicum Experience**

Prior to the beginning of the fall semester, the Director of the Counseling Center and the faculty instructor for practicum met with the counselors-in-training. The students were acquainted with the creation of the pilot program and were informed of the expectations of the program. Counselors-in-training were made

aware of the critical importance of their service to the high-risk undergraduates. The counselors-in-training were to provide direct counseling services and were to instruct the clients in the utilization of the College's academic support services. It was expected that this combination would assist the undergraduate clients in achieving higher grades, thus potentially eliminating their probation status or renewing their probation for one additional semester.

The counselors-in-training received direct, live supervision of each counseling session. The use of a one-way mirror and an audio system allowed the supervisor to instruct immediately the counselor-in-training via an earphone. The counselors-in-training observed one another and provided substantial feedback to one another in a professional manner concerning the conduct of the counseling session, counseling skills, techniques, and goals and directions.

The counselors-in-training assumed full case management responsibilities for the client (s) assigned to them. The counselors-in-training made initial contact with their clients to schedule counseling sessions. Upon client agreement, they obtained appropriate release of information forms during the initial session. The first release form advised the clients of their participation in a practicum program, the use of one-way mirrors and practicum student observation of their counseling session. The second release of information form provided consent from the client for the counselor-in-training to inform the Director of the Counseling Center regarding client participation in and cooperation with the counseling program.

The counselor-in-training, upon obtaining release of information, informed the Director of the Counseling Center, in writing, that initial contact was made with the client and that the client agreed to on-going counseling. The counselors-in-



training maintained confidential case records which were reviewed by the faculty instructor and maintained in a locked file in the faculty supervisor's office.

The counselors-in-training reviewed a video tape of their counseling session, and documented (1) their perception of their strengths and weaknesses in each session, (2) their observation of the client and the client's difficulties and (3) the establishment of goals and directions for the next session.

At the end of the semester, the counselors-in-training presented, after extracting confidential information, a synopsis of their counseling to the Director of the Counseling Center, and made a recommendation concerning the student's retention or dismissal. The Director of the Counseling Center reported this recommendation during the January 1991 meeting of the Grades and Honors Committee, designated to monitor and evaluate students academic progress.

Finally, the counselors-in-training were well-informed that participation in this pilot program required a significant time commitment, and that the course would exceed the normal thirty-six clock hours required by the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences.

The practicum class was conducted on Saturdays, 8:45 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Counseling sessions were conducted from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. The afternoon session of the class afforded the students the opportunity (1) to obtain peer feedback, (2) to obtain instructor evaluation, (3) to obtain guidance on their skills and (4) to obtain supervision of goals and direction. Client sessions were limited to thirty minute sessions, and each client was seen a minimum of seven sessions. All client sessions were supervised live in-process by the faculty instructor.



The practicum students maintained clear and reasonable goals and were exposed to a wide range of client problems and issues. Undergraduate clients were aware of the time-limited nature of their counseling.

The termination session reviewed progress made by each client. Several students reported an increase in grades and gains in personal relationships or family situations. In certain cases, continued counseling was recommended and provided through the Counseling Center. The pilot project required fifty-four (54) clock hours of class time. The project was subjected to summative evaluations.

### Results

QPAs plus academic standing were examined pre and post intervention as a summative evaluation to ascertain program effectiveness.

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Table 1 compared the QPAs of each participant from Spring '90 to Fall '90. As indicated, the client group experience a mean gain of +0.31 in their QPAs, or an 11% overall gain.

From this group, eight were removed from probation, two were dismissed, one received a letter of warning and two with counselor recommendations were continued on probation.

Emphasis was placed on the feasibility and mechanics of implementation of this pilot program. "Consent to Participate in Research" forms were not obtained from either the 7 students who elected not to participate in the pilot program or the 5

randomly excluded. No descriptive or inferential statistics were performed regarding these two groups.

Subjective evaluations were obtained from both undergraduate clients and counselors-in-training. A Likert Type questionnaire was developed to identify the perceptions of the experience by the undergraduate clients.

Table 2 indicated the level of satisfaction with counseling as perceived by the undergraduate client population.

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INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

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The perceptions of the undergraduates were very positive. 70% of the students strongly agreed that they found the counseling helpful, while 70% would participate in this program again. 85% strongly agreed that they would recommend this program to fellow students. Similarly, Likert type evaluations were also obtained from counselors-in-training. Table 3 indicated the perceptions of the seven graduate students with the course experience.

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INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

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As indicated by their responses, the counselors-in-training reported very positive perceptions of the pilot program. Key points in this scale were: (1) 100% of the students strongly recommended that the pilot program be continued, (2) 100% believed they were well prepared for internship, (3) 100% did not view the additional class hours as a burden.

### **Anecdotal Data**

Additional comments from undergraduate students revealed satisfaction with the program and admiration for the counselors-in-training. "I feel that she (the counselor-in-training) helped me realize what my problems were and helped me to deal with them." "I found the counseling very helpful and would recommend it to other students." "I found the counselor to be a kind person - he listened to me and I felt very comfortable with him." "She (counselor-in-training) helped me out and I can't thank her enough."

Counselors-in-training reported the following additional comments: "It was really useful. I believe the 'togetherness' of the class is what made all the work truly worth it." "It was a wonderful experience. It prepared me well for internship." "The experience was enriching." "It made it easier to get accustomed to what it is like in our professional life." "Having the opportunity to truly practice my skills in this highly supervised, real setting enabled me to begin my internship with a great deal of confidence and to function at a much higher, more independent level."

The additional comments made by the undergraduate students and counselors-in-training appeared to confirm the positive perceptions both groups had regarding the pilot program.

### **Benefits Derived**

The original impetus for this program was to create an academically stronger, more controlled and professional experience for the Practicum Program. This program was also established as a means for the College to increase services to high-risk population and to make significant efforts in assisting undergraduate

students in realizing their goal of a college education. The final goal was to effect collaboration between the graduate and undergraduate schools in both support services and academics.

In addition to meeting and exceeding these goals, several significant benefits to the College and to the students were realized. The importance of their clients' future at Marywood gave a new dimension to the Practicum Program. It became a significant learning experience wherein the counselors-in-training integrated their academic training and utilized their knowledge and skills. The significance of this program shifted from a "class" mode to a professional learning experience where graduate students demonstrated motivation, enthusiasm and challenge.

Counselors-in-training bonded uniquely with each other. A commonality and unity of purpose emerged which stimulated the students to achieve excellence in their counseling and to seek the advice of their instructor and each other. Peer supervision was given freely and accepted professionally.

The counselors-in-training not only bonded to each other but also to the College. They were perceived by their undergraduate clients as a helping extension of the College. The professional growth and the professionalism exhibited by the counselors-in-training were exceptional. They extended this experience from a course in a curriculum to an opportunity for learning, growth and professional service.

The benefits derived by the undergraduate clients were numerous. They were afforded short term personal counseling which impacted on the overall QPAs and academic standing. The undergraduate clients viewed the counselors -in-training as a supportive dimension of the College. Through counseling, they

perceived the College as a caring institution, concerned with them personally and individually.

The undergraduates were made aware of the College's academic support services, and were directed in the utilization of these services, including discussion of their academic situation with professors, consultations with academic advisors, and instruction on library resources. Finally, while numerous intervening variables must be accounted for, eleven (11) of the thirteen (13) students were retained by the College.

### Discussion

The present study reported the design, implementation, and subjective evaluation of a pilot program. Practicum students offered short term counseling to high risks (academic probation) undergraduate students. This pilot program demonstrated that practicum students in the process of their training, can provide valuable counseling to undergraduate students experiencing difficulty.

The pilot program definitely demonstrated promise in terms of efficacy. However, numerous intervening variables were not controlled or accounted for in this pilot program and thus further research is necessary. Factors such as course load difficulty, maturation of learning strategies and halo effects must be factored in and analyzed. Future research need also address long term effects of such a program versus "one semester only" of academic progress. Finally, further research is necessary to examine differences between groups who elect to participate versus those who refuse to participate.

However, the program is suggested to other institutions with clinical practice courses, graduate and/or undergraduate, in order to develop similar

outreach to undergraduates, while providing a growth experience for their clinical practice students.

With rising costs, and faculty and staff work load demands, many graduate and undergraduate clinical programs are not able to establish and/or maintain "clinics" wherein their students receive "hands on" experience in a supervised setting. This pilot program appeared to offer a viable alternative to the traditional "clinic" model.

A majority of the clients in this pilot program were experiencing personal and family difficulties in addition to academic concerns. In most cases, academic probation was symptomatic to personal and familial problems. This was consistent with the findings of Mrykalo (in press). Mrykalo (in press) reported that stress, and its' concomitant effects, experienced by traditional and non-traditional college students are key issues in student retention. Colleges are faced with the need to increase support services while funding for these services is declining (Rawlins and Lenihan, 1982). The concept of utilizing "clinical practice" students to assist fellow students experiencing difficulty appears to have significant potential for college retention efforts.

### **Additional Considerations**

There were several issues that surfaced during the pilot program which are believed important. (1) The cooperation and professional relationship between the Director of Student Development Services and the faculty instructor were critical to the success of this program. The program mandated continual communication between the two individuals, and required both to extend themselves beyond their routine duties. (2) The initial contact made by the Director of Student Development

Services with both the undergraduate client population and the counselors-in-training appeared to add much credibility to the program. It is recommended that this be an essential component of future programs. (3) The additional amount of class time required by both practicum students and the faculty instructor was far beyond what was anticipated. In addition, the 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. schedule was extremely exhausting for both faculty and students. In order to minimize these factors it is recommended that the counselors-in-training be required to carry one (1) case, and/or the maximum number of counselors-in-training be set at six (6) per section.

### **Summary**

The campus-wide support for this pilot program from students, graduate and undergraduate, faculty and administration was extremely positive. The benefits derived from this program made it particularly rewarding. It is highly recommended to other institutions offering clinical practicum courses.



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**Table 1 Client QPAs by Semester**

STUDENT	SPRING '90	FALL '90	QPA DIFFERENCE
#1	1.81	2.81	+1.00
#2	1.90	1.88	-0.02
#3	1.88	2.05	+0.17
#4	1.50	1.50	0.00
#5	1.90	1.29	-0.61
#6	1.50	1.20	-0.30
#7	1.80	2.06	+0.26
#8	1.81	2.38	+0.57
#9	1.90	2.38	+0.48
#10	1.38	2.08	+0.70
#11	1.80	2.00	+0.20
#12	1.85	2.88	+1.03
#13	1.88	2.40	+0.52
X	1.76	2.07	+0.31

**Table 2 Undergraduate Client Evaluation**

	<b>*SA</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Total Respondents = 13</b>					
1. I have found the experience of Counseling helpful.	9	4			
2. The counseling I received assisted me in improving academically.	5	6	2		
3. I became more informed about the support services on Marywood's campus.	5	7	1		
4. The counseling provided was personally enriching and/or helpful.	6	6	1		
5. I would participate in this program again.	9	3	1		
6. I would recommend this program to other students at Marywood College.	11	2			

\*SA = strongly agree

D = disagree

A = agree

SD = strongly disagree

N = neutral

**Table 3 Practicum Student Evaluation**

	*SA	A	N	D	SD
	Total Respondents = 7				
1. I believe the live-in process supervision enhanced my clinical skills.	7				
2. I believe that the undergraduate clients in practicum were representative of the clients I will work with in my counseling career.	4	3			
3. I believe the feedback from peers and the instructor increased my confidence in working with people in need.		6		1	
4. I would have preferred supervision of audio/visual tapes as opposed to live-in process supervision.	7				
5. I believe the counseling that I provided useful to my client.	5	2			
6. Other than academically, the counseling practicum was personally enriching and helpful.	7				
7. As a result of the practicum, I feel adequately prepared for internship.	7				

Table 3 Practicum Student Evaluation -Continued

	*SA	A	N	D	SD
Total Respondents = 7					
8. As a result of the practicum, I believe my knowledge and skills have been enhanced.	7				
9. As a part of the practicum, I felt a bond developed between me and my fellow classmates.	7				
10. As a result of practicum, I feel greater sense of identification with the GraduateSchool.	7				
11. As a result of practicum, I feel a greater sense of identification with Marywood College.	5		2		
12. I felt the extra hours spent in practicum were a significant burdem.					7
13. I would recommend that the Graduate Department of Counseling/Psychology continue to provide practicum in this Fashion	7*				

\*Two respondents Very Strongly Agree

\*SA = strongly agree

N = neutral

SD = strongly disagree

A = agree

D = disagree

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