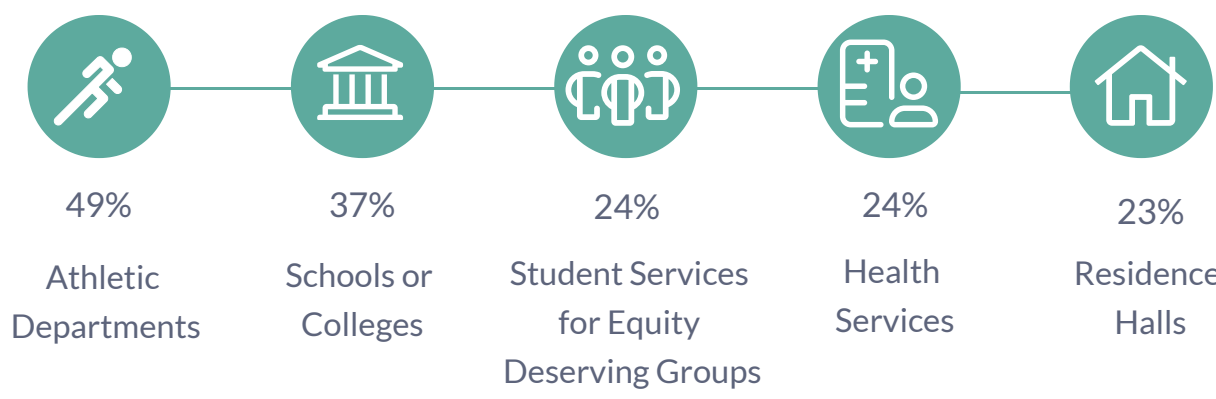


An Environmental Scan of Embedded Counselling Programs in Post-Secondary Settings: Lessons Learned and Promising Practices

An embedded counselling program is a model of service delivery where counsellors hold offices at sites on campus outside of the main counselling center. According to the Association for University and College Counseling Centre Directors, the following sites report having embedded counsellors (Gorman et al., 2020):



Environmental Scan

An environmental scan of 10 Canadian post-secondary embedded counselling programs was conducted by interviewing Directors of Student Wellness and Mental Health Services.

Based on the interviews, we identified **common drivers** for the development of embedded counselling programs, examined their **program structure**, identified **challenges and successes**, and gained insights into **lessons learned** across institutions.



Common Drivers

All participating institutions identified four main reasons for creating embedded counselling programs:

IMPROVE ACCESS

Multiple access points to mental health support can reduce demand and wait times.

TAILOR SERVICES

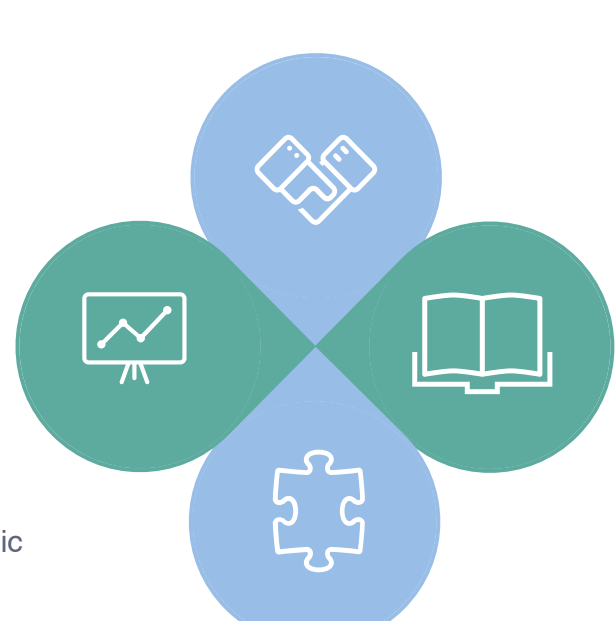
Collaborations with academic sites can provide more customized support to students, staff, and faculty based on the unique needs of the site.

REDUCE STIGMA

A familiar location can create a sense of comfort and security for students accessing services.

INCREASE MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY AND AWARENESS

On-site mental health services can increase opportunities for education, effective referrals, and consultations.



Program Structure

Target clientele, available services, and staffing structure varied across campuses depending on how the program was designed.

CLIENTELE	SERVICES	STAFFING
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exclusively students registered to the site (e.g., faculty, department)• All students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individual and group counselling• Wellness programming• Psychoeducational workshops• Crisis support• Career counselling• Early intervention• Systems navigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Single counsellor• Two counsellors• Multidisciplinary team

Promising Practices

Regardless of the unique features of each program, common "promising practices" emerged across the sites.

<h3>PROGRAM EXPECTATIONS</h3> <p>Establish clear expectations for the embedded service and the counsellor's role to prevent requests beyond the embedded service's scope.</p>	<h3>STAFF SUPPORT</h3> <p>Provide counsellors with regular clinical consultation, administrative support, and opportunities for team building.</p>
<h3>RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT</h3> <p>Build a collaborative partnership with the academic site and seek input at all stages of implementation.</p>	<h3>PROGRAM EVALUATION</h3> <p>Support program sustainability and budget requests through evaluation methods aimed towards quality improvement and program development.</p>

Successes and Challenges

Though institutions agreed on the value of the programs, there were common challenges associated with the model. Despite these challenges and regardless of the model features adopted, institutions saw similar common successes.

Common Challenges

- Counsellors can feel isolated and function as "one-person clinics";
- Maintaining counsellors' boundaries and scope of practice;
- Difficulty identifying office space that ensures confidentiality and privacy;
- Program support varies (coordination, supervision, reception, clerical);
- Faculty requesting support with their own concerns;
- Variability in fee structures and inequity between sites;
- Managed site leadership and management changes resulting in the loss of program champions.

Common Successes

- Students have greater access to resources;
- Increased ability to build student's mental health literacy;
- Counsellors develop a strong understanding of site culture
- Early intervention;
- Greater support for faculty and staff members;
- Stronger partnerships and opportunities for collaboration;
- Additional funding for mental health services from faculties and departments, rather than just centralized mental health services.

Recommended Metrics

Based on the current evaluation plans being used by the institutions to assess the programs, four key metrics are recommended:

<h3>PERCEIVED VALUE</h3> <p>Measure student, staff, faculty, and counsellor perceptions of the value of an embedded office.</p>	<h3>USAGE RATES</h3> <p>Evaluate service usage and the percentage of on-location services versus all mental health services.</p>
<h3>PRESENTING ISSUES & OUTCOMES</h3> <p>Collect presenting issues (clinician and student), learning outcomes, client satisfaction, and pre/post treatment outcomes.</p>	<h3>EMBEDDED COUNSELLOR EXPERIENCE</h3> <p>Evaluate site counsellors' experiences (e.g., if they are being asked to go beyond the scope of their role).</p>

Study Limitations

The review is based on a small sample of Canadian Universities and therefore may not be applicable to other contexts (e.g., other post-secondary environments or countries).

Interested in Learning More?

Read the full article: Yuen, S., Arasaratnam, G., & Washburn, C. (2023). Embedded Counseling Programs in Post-Secondary Settings. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy*, 1-16.

Visit our webpage: <https://bp-net.ca/program/embedded-counselling/>

References

1. Gorman, K. S., Bruns, C., Chin, C., Fitzpatrick, N. Y., Koenig, L., LeViness, P., & Sokolowski, K. (2020). The association for university and college counseling center directors annual survey. Association for University and College Counseling.