



# 2008-2009 UW-Eau Claire Counseling Needs Assessment

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## Introduction

- Academic, mental health, behavioral, and social deficits in student adjustment are major causes of college attrition rates.<sup>1</sup>
- Moreover, recent tragedies involving mentally ill students have highlighted the urgency of addressing students' problems.<sup>2</sup>
- However, accurately assessing the extent of these deficits is crucial to providing balanced and affordable counseling services to address them.
- The need to accurately assess student counseling needs has been intensified by funding cutbacks that challenge all academic departments and services.
- In light of these considerations, the UWEC Counseling Center set about to determine the extent and severity of problems UWEC students report they are dealing with.
- Because students may or may not be inclined to resort to counseling services, also included in this study were students' ratings of the likelihood that they would seek help with the problems they have.
- While there are reports of needs assessment in the college counseling literature,<sup>3,4</sup> there does not seem to be a standard measure or procedure for doing a counseling needs assessment.
- Therefore, a secondary aim of our work was to develop a measure that other institutions might adopt to carry our similar assessments on their campuses.

## Method

- Participants were 356 college students (270 female) who responded to an invitation emailed to a 20% random sample of UWEC students. Table 1 displays sample demographics.
- We call our measure the 2008-2009 University Counseling Needs Assessment. A web survey, the instrument contained three parts.
- Part 1 includes 9 demographics questions.
- Part 2 ( $\alpha = .89$ ) contains 35 questions about problems student have experienced during the current school year. Students respond to 5 aspects of 7 major problems using the following scale:

- 1 – Not a Problem (never interferes or disrupts daily activities)
- 2 – Mild Problem (very rarely. . .)
- 3 – Problem (sometimes. . .)
- 4 – Considerable Problem (commonly. . .)
- 5 – Severe Problem (always or almost always. . .)

- Part 3 ( $\alpha = .97$ ) is 35 questions about whether the students believe they would seek help from counseling services for the problems indicated in Part 2. Students rate likelihood on a 5 point Likert scale (1 = very unlikely)
- The 7 problem areas are academic, assault/abuse, general skills, mental health, personal growth, relationships and substance abuse. For both parts, within problem scores could range from 5 to 25; combined scores of these ratings can range from 35 to 175. Within a problem area an average item score of "3" in Part 2 indicates that the area is "a problem." In Part 3 an average item score of "4" indicates that individuals believe they would seek counseling for help with the problem.
- After receiving an emailed invitation participants had 2 weeks to respond *ad lib* to the survey. We sent 1 reminder email after 1 week.

## Results

**Table 1**  
Selected Sample Characteristics

Descriptor	Descriptor Category	% Students in Category
Sex	Female	75.8
	Male	24.2
Class	Freshman	23.9
	Sophomore	19.1
	Junior	19.7
	Senior	32.0
	Graduate	1.4
Residence	Non-traditional	3.9
	On Campus	48.3
	Off Campus	49.2
	Off Campus Living with Parents	2.5
	Racial/Ethnic Identity	93.8
	White	93.8
	Other	6.2

- 24.4% of respondents report that they have used counseling services; 77.0% of these students agree that counseling improved their UWEC experience.

**Table 2**  
Percentage of Respondents Who Report that a Problem Category is a Problem (Score = 15 or Greater) and Percent of Individuals Who Might Seek Counseling for Those Problems (Score = 20 or Greater)

Problem Category	% of Sample Who Experience the Problem	% Who Might Seek Counseling for the Problem
General Life Skills	6.5	30.0
Personal Growth	5.9	38.0
Academic	5.3	5.3
Mental Health	2.5	33.3
Relationships	2.0	28.6
Assault/Abuse	0.8	0.0
Substance Abuse	0.3	100.00

**Table 3**  
Top 10 Specific Problems, % of Respondents Who Report Them, and % of Those Individuals Who Might Seek Counseling for Those Problems

Specific Problem	% of Sample Who Experience the Problem	% Who Might Seek Counseling for the Problem
Procrastination	41.6	25.7
Stress Management	35.8	44.9
Anxiety	30.6	58.7
Academic Distress	28.7	28.5
Test Anxiety	25.8	39.0
Time Management	25.6	29.7
Life Planning	22.5	45.0
Depression	22.2	64.5
Academic Motivation	22.2	25.4
Finance Management	21.1	30.7

## Discussion

- Our data indicate which types of problems students may seek counseling help to resolve.
  - The most widely experienced problems are life skills problems
    - The most frequent general category is "general life skills."
    - Serious, clinical disorders are comparatively much less cited.
- Closer examination of specific problems leads to the same conclusion.
  - The most frequently cited specific problem is "procrastination."
  - Only anxiety and depression, mental health issues, make the top 10 specific problems; all other issues relate to life skills and adjustment.
- However, the low rates of severe problems still are important indicators of the need for counseling services.
  - If we extrapolate from the 22.2% incidence of depression found in our sample (admittedly self-reported), a possible interpretation is that depression sometimes interferes with or disrupts the daily activities of .222 x 9947, or 2208 students at UWEC.
  - In a more dramatic example, our data indicate that 2.8%, or 279 students sometimes have suicidal thoughts that interfere with or disrupt their daily activities.
  - Just one student suicide would be a campus tragedy.
- Of course, these estimated rates of general and specific student problems must be qualified by the likelihood that students seek counseling for them, and benefit from counseling
  - Our data require deeper analyses to estimate this possibility.
  - However, 24.4% of our respondents report that they have used counseling services, and of these, 77.0% claim to have benefited.
- Our simple portrait of potential need is limited by our sample.
  - Women are overrepresented.
  - Only 18% of students invited to participate responded.
  - That 18% is about 3.6% of the UWEC student population.
  - The percentage of individuals who report having used counseling services is larger than that found in a typical year.
  - For example, during 2006-2007 the service saw 775 clients; our numbers, if projected to all students, indicate that 2427 have needed or will need services.
- Still, our survey provides a picture of the types of services that may be needed and will permit estimates of the likely need for those services.
- Our results encourage us to recommend that counseling personnel at other campuses use our Needs Assessment procedure to determine their own student counseling needs.

## References

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