



Innovations in Counseling Center Staffing

Brief & Discussion Guide

Use this brief to understand learn how three institutions designed dynamic staffing models for their counseling centers to be responsive to student demand. Then, use the discussion guide to explore dynamic staffing models as a solution to fluctuating counseling center demand on your campus.

Exploring Dynamic Staffing Models

Finding Innovative Solutions to Keep Pace with Fluctuating Demand

Across the U.S. and Canada, counseling centers face stagnant budgets and staffing levels as well as fluctuating demand for service across the year. Most institutions cannot hire enough full-time staff to meet the demand for campus services, leading some counseling centers to explore dynamic staffing models.

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More Services Just Aren't Enough

“We've added staff. We've added services. But at some point, we maxed out on both staff and services. Now we are asking harder questions about our organizational structure and hiring practices to determine if there's a more effective way to build out our reach.”

*Counseling Center Director
Public Master's University*

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We Need Long-Term Solutions

“The way we staff our counseling unit hasn't really changed in decades. Sure, we have added a few new positions but we still hire the same types of people. Contrast that with today's students, who are in no way the same as they were even a decade ago. We've been static but we need an approach that's more flexible and gives us room to respond to changing circumstances in higher ed.”

*Vice Provost for Student Affairs
Private Research University*

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24/7 Support Is Hard To Do

After-Hours Crisis Care Strains Staff and Resources

Providing 24/7 support, or after-hours crisis care, is a significant challenge for many college and university counseling centers. Providing this type of care in-house can lead to staff burnout and strained clinical resources. It can also lead to capped utilization, as this service might be sparingly advertised to students and campus stakeholders in order to maintain a manageable call load.

However, institutions recognize that after-hours support that is in sync with campus resources is critical for ensuring student well-being, campus safety, and continuity of care. Many institutions have recently contracted with an after-hours call service or were currently pursuing such an option to alleviate the demand on campus staff.


The Impact of Providing After-Hours Care In-House...

 **Staff Burnout**
Expanded hours and responsibilities lead to exhaustion among staff




...Is Prompting Counseling Centers to Consider Outsourcing

"We outsourced our weekend on-call services just to give our overworked staff some relief."

 **Strained Clinical Resources**
Reduces availability of staff to provide direct service during standard operating hours



"When we have staff cover our on-call services, they're coming in late or leaving early the next day which leaves us short-handed for the daily rush of students."

 **Capped Utilization**
Sparingly advertised to campus to maintain a manageable call load



"We know that there's a need for late night support, but we just don't have the resources to manage more callers right now."

A Growing Trend?

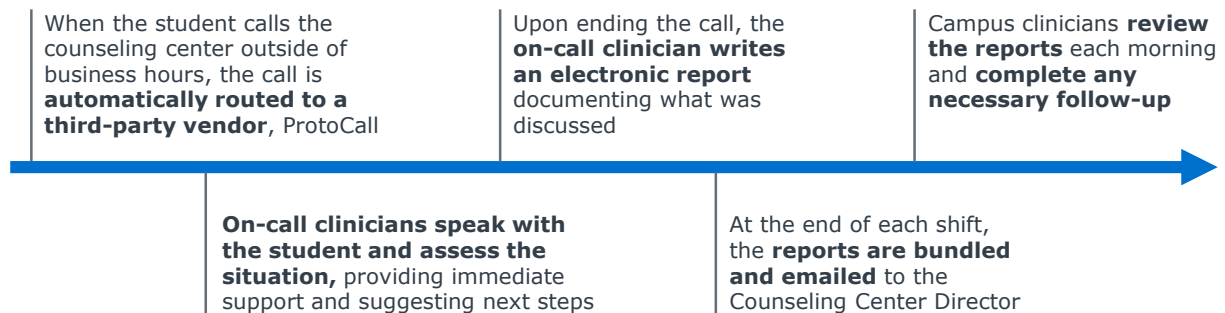
28% Of counseling centers **contract with an after-hours call service**

Outsourcing After-Hours Care

Wesleyan University Partners with ProtoCall to Offer After-Hours Support

Wesleyan University contracts with a third-party vendor, ProtoCall, to offer after-hours support. ProtoCall's services are integrated with Wesleyan's counseling center, which allows for a seamless care transition for students and the institution. Outsourcing after-hours care also alleviates the burden on overworked staff and can free up time for clinicians to spend with students.

Seamless Care Transition for Students and the Institution



Freeing Up Time and Resources

190 After-hours calls routed to ProtoCall between September 2016 and May 2017

100 Estimated **hours of direct contact saved** by contracting with ProtoCall



ProtoCall connects callers to clinicians 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. **Eighty-five percent** of institutions that outsource after-hours care use ProtoCall.

Investing in Seasonally Contracted Staff

Dynamic Staffing Structure Addresses Two Key Challenges

Progressive institutions are investing in seasonally contracted counseling center staff to overcome two key challenges: stagnant budgets and fluctuating demand across the year. First, on many college and university campuses, limited and stagnant resource allocations make it difficult to hire more full-time staff. Second, fluctuating levels of demand across the year is difficult to accommodate with a static staffing structure. Each calendar year brings periods of high and low demand. During busy times, such as midterms and final exams, counseling centers with static structures are unable to keep pace. Non-busy times, such as summer and winter breaks, can leave counseling centers with additional staff or extra clinical hours.

CHALLENGE 1: Stagnant Budgets

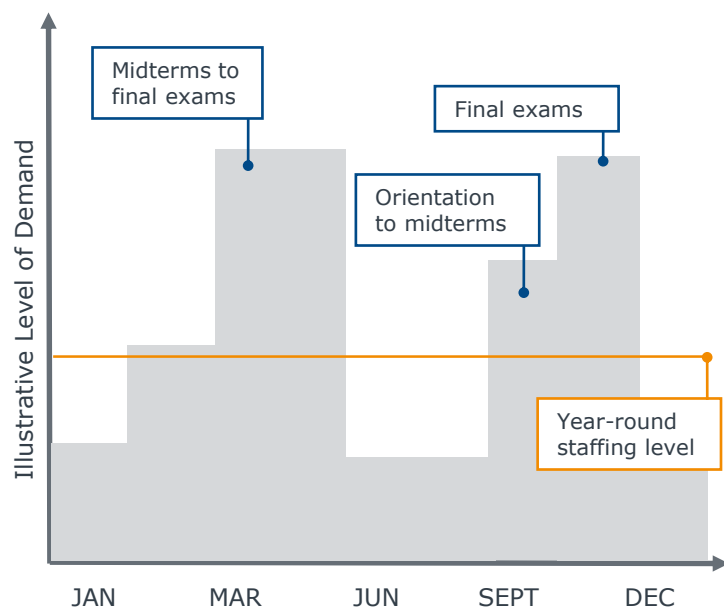
76%

Of counseling center **operating budgets** remained **unchanged** or **decreased** from 2015 to 2016

45%

Of counseling center **salary budgets** remained **unchanged** or **decreased** from 2015 to 2016

CHALLENGE 2: Fluctuating Demand Across the Year



Sources: The Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors, Annual Survey Monograph 2015, <https://go.ql/2s3gaX>; EAB interviews and analysis.

Preparing for the Busiest Times of Year

University of Maryland's Seasonal Contracting Model

The University of Maryland's seasonal contracting model uses a data-informed approach to maximizing clinical resources across the year. Each year, Maryland's counseling center analyzes data to isolate peak periods of demand and identifies local clinicians available to work part-time on campus for short-term engagements. Through this model, Maryland has been able to increase the capacity of the counseling center during high-demand periods.

A Data-Informed Approach to Maximizing Clinical Resources

Isolate Peak Periods

- Analyze utilization trends across the year to determine when staff time is most strained
- Analysis revealed that demand was **highest from October to May**



Find Local Clinicians

- Identify clinicians who are prepared to work with students and work part-time on campus
- Over time, **build a bench of clinicians who can return each year**



Increase Capacity at Peak Times

- Local clinicians support full-time staff during stressful, high-demand periods
- Increase capacity of the counseling center to see more students more quickly



University of Maryland's Approach: By the Numbers

3-4 Local clinicians are contracted each year

33 Weeks is the length of the contract, which covers the busiest times of year

14 Clinical hours per week from each contracted clinician

1,400-1,900
Estimated number of additional clinical hours each year, about **42-56 clinical hours per week**

Revolutionizing Counseling Center Staffing

Georgia State University Develops Innovative Hybrid Staffing Model

Facing stagnant staffing, limited flexibility, and increasing levels of student dissatisfaction, Georgia State University developed an innovative hybrid staffing model. This model dramatically changed Georgia State's approach to staffing, increasing the institution's capacity to see students and serve their evolving needs.



The **Traditional Model** of Campus Counseling Services



Stagnant staffing and hours of service, despite changing levels of need



Limited ability to evolve with students' changing demographics and needs



Students are increasingly dissatisfied with pace and quality of care

How do we match the **fluctuating demand** for services across the year?

How do we keep pace with **rapidly shifting student demographics**?

How do we ensure that our **students are getting what they need**?



Georgia State's **Hybrid Staffing Model**



Annually hire clinicians on flexible contracts to match shifting need



Hire clinicians based on diversity, expertise, and growing demand



Analyze clinician performance to ensure student satisfaction

Matching Resources with Demand

How Georgia State University Hires Clinical Staff Every Year

Georgia State University's hybrid staffing model strategically uses data to match resources with students' evolving demands for services. The bulk of Georgia State's workforce consists of contracted staff that are hired based on how their specialties, skills, and experience align with the institution's current needs. Below, you can see the logistics of how Georgia State uses data to identify potential clinicians, hire contracted staff, and monitor clinician performance across the year.

Hybrid Model Logistics

- Small core staff of 5 in-house clinicians with key campus responsibilities
- Contracted staff compose bulk of the workforce, with 15-20 multidisciplinary clinicians and 4 psychiatrists
- Contracted staff work on campus for 16-32 hours each week, primarily providing direct care to students
- Contracts can be terminated with 30 days' notice, based on need and student satisfaction



Outstanding Results

Dramatically Improved Center Efficiency and Care for Students

Since implementing the hybrid staffing model in 2012, Georgia State University has documented strong, positive results. Most notably, between 2012 and 2016, Georgia State saw a 228% total increase in the number of students seen, with \$0 additional budget allocation across the same time period.

Georgia State University's innovative approach is an excellent example of how dynamic staffing models can dramatically improve the efficiency and care provided to students on campus.

228%

Increase in total students seen (2012-2016)

\$0

Additional budget allocation (2012-2016)



I am most proud of the increased access to services that we can now provide to our students without getting a budget increase. Our circumstances forced us to innovate and stretch our resources."

2x

Of students now return for follow-up care (80% in 2016, up from 40% in 2010)

75%

Of contracted staff time is spent directly providing therapy to students

*Jill Lee Barber
Senior Director of Psychological
and Health Services
Georgia State University*

Dynamic Staffing Models for Counseling Centers

Discussion Guide

Model	My Institution Should Prioritize This Model	Notes and Next Steps
Outsourced After-Hours Support <i>Wesleyan University</i> Partnership with third-party vendor provides 24/7 support to campus callers and alleviates the burden of providing after-hours support in house	1 2 3 4 5 <i>Disagree</i> <i>Agree</i>	
Seasonally Contracted Staff <i>University of Maryland</i> Data-informed approach to hiring seasonal, part-time staff to extend the capacity of campus services during peak times of year	1 2 3 4 5	
Hybrid Staffing Model <i>Georgia State University</i> Bulk of the campus workforce is contracted staff that are strategically mapped to campus needs each year	1 2 3 4 5	

Questions

- 1 | How do we currently provide after-hours, or 24/7, support to students, faculty and staff, and others who call the counseling center for support outside of business hours?
- 2 | How do we utilize contracted staff or community practitioners to supplement the services that in-house staff offer on campus? What works well with this approach? What could be better?
- 3 | How is the increased demand for campus mental health services affecting campus counseling center staff? How do these impacts influence the ability of the center to care for students?
- 4 | How could we change our staffing model to be more flexible and adaptable to students' changing demographics and needs on campus?
- 5 | What campus or community data do we need to determine how we might pursue a dynamic staffing model on campus?