



COUNSELING CENTER

Missouri State University-West Plains Counseling Center Operating Procedure Manual

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Updated June 2024

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Introduction

This document includes the current guidelines for operating procedures regarding the operation of the Counseling Center at Missouri State University-West Plains. The purpose of this manual is to guide staff members and counselors in making the best and ethical decision for the students that receive services from the Counseling Center. Due to the unique needs and circumstances a student might bring to the Counseling Center, these policies and procedures are subject to exceptions. Staff will be expected to seek consultation with the Director of Counseling Services before deciding on an action that would require an exception of policies and procedures. Staff and counselors may apply exception to operating procedures after consulting with the Counseling Center Director or Vice Chancellor of Student Services. In this document, licensed professional counselors, social workers, marriage and family therapists, or other credentialed mental health professionals will be called “counselors.” All other supporting staff, including case managers, or administrative assistants will be called “staff.” Staff will not be providing mental health services but may assist in administrative duties like scheduling, answering the phone, assisting with paperwork, etc. Students attending Missouri State University- West Plains and receiving counseling services at the Counseling Center will be called “clients.”

Mission

Missouri State University-West Plains (MSU-WP) Counseling Center is guided by the university’s mission, “Missouri State University-West Plains empowers students to achieve personal success and to enrich their local and global communities. As a two-year public institution, we provide accessible, affordable, and quality educational opportunities.” The Counseling Center strives to support that mission by fostering personal success, positive development, and continued learning for clients through assessments, individualized, person-centered support, and campus outreach. The Counseling Center is responsible for providing accessible and quality support services to students enrolled at MSU-WP.

Goals

The goals of the Counseling Center are as follows:

- Support client wellness through short-term, individualized mental health support.
- Aid clients in personal success by providing support that helps them meet their own goals.
- Foster proactivity in mental wellness that strengthens the emotional resiliency in clients.
- Promote positive mental health on campus through outreach events and learning opportunities.
- Support the changing and unique needs of each client and referring to appropriate mental healthcare in the community when the Counseling Center is unable to offer the needed support.

Counseling Center goals and policies will be reviewed and evaluated yearly, making revisions as needed. A focus group containing students, faculty, staff, and community mental health professionals will meet in order to assess program progress towards goals and to create action plans to help the program meet the set goals. These assessments and plans will maintain standards that are culturally responsive, inclusive, and equitable. The focus group will collect data for assessment through various methods including, but not limited to, surveys, information gathered from clients, and feedback opportunities. The Counseling Center will publish a yearly report that displays the ability to adequately meet student mental health needs, as required by Missouri Statute 173.2530.

Counseling Ethical Standards

Code of Ethics

MSU-WP Counseling Center sets ethical behavior as a foundational guideline. All Counseling Center staff is responsible for adhering to and being familiar with the ethical principles of practice as outlined by the American Psychological Association Code of Ethics. The ethical code can be found at <https://www.apa.org/ethics/code>.

All Counseling Center counselors are required to abide by their specific state or national licensure credentialing requirements. The Counseling Center will support any continued education and training on an annual basis through budget funds or release time for all Counseling Center counselors.

Cultural and Diversity Inclusion

The Missouri State University- West Plains Counseling Center strives to remain culturally conscious and inclusive of all diverse individuals. All Counseling Center counselors and staff seek to provide equal opportunity of mental health support for all clients. The Counseling Center shares the university's efforts to create an environment that is inclusive and free of discrimination and harassment. Cultural and diversity inclusion will be continuously pursued and reevaluated through data collection, assessments, surveys, and program goals. If additional information is needed regarding student grievances, visit <https://wp.missouristate.edu/Equity/discrimination-complaint-procedures.htm>.

Student/Client Rights to Treatment

Accessibility to treatment

All students at Missouri State University-West Plains (MSU-WP) are eligible to receive short-term mental health therapy at the Counseling Center. Due to the short-term nature of treatment, if a student requires further treatment beyond the Center's resources and scope of practice, Counseling Center staff will ensure adequate referral resources in the community that are appropriate for the student's needs. Counseling services will only be provided to students enrolled in the current academic semester unless otherwise approved due to obstacles leading to late enrollment. During the summer semester, any student who completed the spring semester and are enrolled in the upcoming fall semester are still eligible for counseling services, even if they are not enrolled in summer courses. Counseling services are funded through student fees and will not require additional payment at time of service.

Counseling services through the Counseling Center are not available for MSU-WP faculty and staff. Faculty and staff are encouraged to gain support from the University's EAP Program. The EAP Program offers a set number of free mental health services to all full time and part-time MSU-WP employees. More information can be found at <https://www.missouristate.edu/Human?employee-assistance-program.htm> .

Scope of Practice

MSU-WP Counseling Center is structured to provide short-term mental health therapy using therapeutic models and guidelines from Solution-Focused therapy. If a student's mental health condition requires long-term therapy, involves crises that extend beyond the Counseling Center's hours of operation or available counselors, or is beyond the counselor's level of experience, the student will be supported while Counseling Center counselors or staff take adequate steps to ensure the student is referred to appropriate mental health support in the community.

Counseling services available to clients include individual sessions, couples and group sessions. If availability allows, clients may participate in the available sessions to address concern areas including psychological issues, interpersonal relationships, social challenges, and educational or career development. Group sessions may be facilitated to offer support to clients with similar problem areas when appropriate. A group session may provide interventions that are unique and more impactful in a group setting compared to an individual setting. Group sessions will be available according to counselor availability and student participation.

Number of Sessions

Clients are offered up to 8 free sessions per Spring and Fall semester, and 4 free sessions during the Summer semester. If availability interferes with the Counseling Center's ability to offer the requested sessions of a client, an appropriate referral to community mental health support will be made. Counselors will guide their treatment with the brief, solution-focused model of therapy to accommodate the session limit and student need. Referrals are made into the community if long-term services are needed, or if needed services are not available in the Missouri State University-West Plains Counseling Center.

Clinical Procedures

Missed Appointments

Due to the limited availability of Counseling Center personnel and the needed client's commitment to therapy, the client's file will be closed after three cancelled appointments or no-shows. Counseling Center staff will notify the client of the missed appointment policy during the intake session or beginning appointments. Staff will also notify the client over appropriate communication after the client's file has been closed due to missed appointments. Clients shall be marked as "no-show" for the appointment if they are more than 20 minutes late for their appointment.

Communication

Clients and Counseling Center staff will communicate through appropriate methods of communication, including over the phone or email if approved by student. Communicating with these methods will not be used as a therapeutic conversation but will remain limited to conversation about scheduling and other administrative tasks. Counseling Center staff will make every attempt to ensure client confidentiality when communicating.

Treatment Goals and Plans

The client will collaboratively create therapeutic goals with Counseling Center counselors in order to guide the short-term therapeutic process. The counselor will then develop a treatment plan that will be used to help the client make progress towards their therapeutic goals. The counselor will complete the treatment plan to be reviewed with and signed by the student. Treatment plans will be reviewed and revised at least once per academic semester and as needed.

Telehealth

Under certain circumstances, telehealth counseling services are available to clients. Students will be encouraged to attend counseling services in the available offices on campus but will have telehealth services available if they are unable to attend services in-person. The client must reside in Missouri while receiving telehealth services due to the licensure requirements of Counselors. Counselors should communicate with clients as securely as possible with telehealth clients to maximize confidentiality. Phone calls or secure emails should be used when possible.

To send a secure email, include the word "secure" in brackets in the email's subject line: [Secure]. Other words may be included in the subject line following. Recipients of secure emails will be required to provide authentication before accessing the secure email.

Counselors utilize Zoom, a live video conferencing platform, for telehealth services. Under certain circumstances, it may not be appropriate to use Zoom for telehealth services with clients, such as if a student does not have adequate Wi-Fi coverage or cellular data for video conferencing. In such, or other circumstances, telehealth via phone may be acceptable. If a phone call is to be used in place of a video conference, the client's level of risk and need should be considered and continually monitored. If a counselor determines the client's level of risk is too great for phone counseling services, the counselor will offer the client appropriate referral information in their area.

During the first telehealth session, counselors should review the Informed Consent document with the client and create a plan of action in the event that technological difficulties halt or impede a telehealth session and include that in the documentation.

Documentation

Counselors should document all communication with clients that happens before or between sessions. Email communications should be saved and uploaded to clients' files as Clinical Contact Notes.

All documentation will maintain strict security standards. All sessions must be documented in the client's file. The progress note narrative should include a brief summary of the session content, the counselor's analyses of the process and any change in treatment strategy. Each scheduled session must have documentation as to whether the client attended, cancelled, no showed or was rescheduled.

Documentation Requirements

All materials regarding clients are the property of the Missouri State University- West Plains Counseling Center and are kept in an electronic documentation software. Clinical records are maintained by the Counseling Center for seven years since last known contact (two additional years beyond the five required by state law). All records are destroyed after seven years since the last known contact. Counselors may receive messages from clients regarding cancelled or rescheduled appointments. These messages will be entered into the client's file.

Documentation is to be kept current concerning all clinical activities. All client notes should be completed and signed as soon as practical in order to meet the care of the client. Completed files should include the following:

- Client Demographics
- Consent for Treatment
- Initial Consultation Note
- Intake Note
- Progress Notes
- Clinical Contact Notes
- Staffing Note
- Other information as appropriate (i.e. Receipt letters, Authorization to release information)

Confidentiality

The Counseling Center strictly follows the guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA), the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), American Counseling Association (ACA), the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (AAMFT), and the laws of the State of Missouri concerning confidentiality and the practice of counseling.

Confidential information may not be released or discussed with anyone other than Missouri State University Counseling Center staff without a signed *Authorization to Release/Exchange Information* form in the file of the client involved (except as required by law or noted in the section on exceptions to confidentiality). The form is attached on page 10. A release must be obtained whenever confidential information is to be released to a person or agency outside the Missouri State University- West Plains Counseling Center, including other college offices, staff and faculty, family/friends, etc. A release must be signed by the client in front of a Missouri State University- West Plains Counseling Center staff member.

The Counseling Center provides confidential counseling and referral services to survivors of sexual assault as well as those students charged with sexual assault. Because the MSU-WP Title IX policy exempts counselors from being mandated reporters of sexual assault, only anonymous, aggregate sexual assault data will be reported to Public Safety annually.

A client may request to read/have a copy of their file. It should be understood that the file is the property of the Missouri State University-West Plains Counseling Center, but the information in the file belongs to the client. Typically, the client will be requested to meet with the treating counselor and review the file, so that questions may be addressed. In the absence of the treating counselor, the client shall meet with the Director. The client may be given a copy of the contents of the file, unless it is deemed that doing so would be harmful to the client.

Given the nature of the Counseling Center and the services provided, the Counseling Center cannot provide letters of support for Emotional Support Animals (ESA). Clients who are in the process of applying for an ESA and have a therapeutic relationship with the Counseling Center are welcome to request a treatment summary and/or proof of attendance of counseling services if they are so inclined but said documentation will merely report the summary of the sessions and/or sessions attended.

At the beginning of intake sessions, clients are to be informed of the Missouri State University-West Plains Counseling Center's policy regarding confidentiality. Confidentiality means that all that is shared by the client during session will not be divulged outside the Counseling Center. The only exceptions to this confidentiality are the following:

1. There is expressed intent to take one's life.
2. The expression or knowledge of the intent to harm another.
3. Reported abuse in which the counselor is required by law to report such abuse.
4. Court order.
5. A signed release by the client that permits the sharing of confidential information.

The Counseling Center staff includes our campus, non-clinical, Case Manager that serves on the Behavioral Intervention Team, also called the Grizzly Care Team. The Case Manager does not have access to client files or documentation beyond scheduling appointments. The Case Manager may assist the Counseling Center by assisting clients with intake documentation, scheduling new appointments, rescheduling, and cancelling appointments as requested by clients, and therefore will have knowledge of your attendance of counseling. The Case Manager maintains confidentiality and will not disclose your attendance to the Counseling Center to any outside parties without your permission. If you have concerns about the Case Manager's knowledge of your attendance in counseling, you can discuss with your counselor further options that can provide confidentiality of your counseling session attendance from the Case Manager.

Clinical Procedures

Students may contact the Counseling Center over the phone (417-255-7290), email (WPCounseling@MissouriState.edu), walking into the Counseling Center and speaking with a staff member, or by completing an online form. Making an appointment is strongly encouraged due to limited staffing available. Clients with an appointment will take priority and walk-ins will be encouraged to schedule an appointment for the next available opening. Walk-ins will be handled on a first come, first-serve basis.

Intake Appointments

Clients will first be scheduled with an intake appointment before beginning services. This appointment will be scheduled with a counselor for 45-50 minutes. Counselors will use this appointment to determine that the MSU-WP Counseling Center is an appropriate place of support for the client, will discuss goals the client would like to work towards, limits of confidentiality, and policies and procedures the Counseling Center operates with. Clients will be instructed to complete the necessary intake paperwork before their appointment or arrive 10-15 minutes early to complete the paperwork. This will also include the appropriate assessments to establish a further understanding of the client's condition and needed mental health supports. Assessments may be repeated throughout the client's time in services to help document progress towards goals. Clients will complete an intake appointment once per academic year (June 1st to May 31st of the following year) and update any new information and goals.

Clients in Crisis

The Counseling Center is committed to assisting clients in receiving the mental health support that they need. Due to the Center's limited amount of staff and availability, Counseling Center counselors are only able to offer short-term therapy. Overcoming a mental health crisis often requires more long-term work than the Counseling Center is equipped to provide. Despite this limitation, Counseling Center staff will take the appropriate steps to help the client receive the support they need. Counseling Center staff can assist the client in receiving services from Ozarks Healthcare Crisis Stabilization Center by contacting (417)505-7878 or the crisis hotline of 1-800-356-5395. Counseling Center staff can also assist the client in finding adequate transportation to visit with the Crisis Stabilization Center at 1100 N. Kentucky Avenue, in West Plains. After being connected with crisis services, the University's Case Manager will conduct follow-up communication to ensure they are continuing to receive the services they need until the crisis has been resolved.

In some clinical situations, the counselor may schedule a "check-in" or follow-up session with a client who presented in crisis (general suicidal thoughts, depression, etc.). If such a follow-up session is scheduled, the counselor should inform the client that if they fail to present for the scheduled follow-up, other professionals may be notified to check on the client.

If the client lives on campus, this would include appropriate personnel in the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Student Services, Behavioral Intervention Team, Residence Life, or Student Life. If the client lives off campus, this would include the local police department. Other individuals may also be contacted if the concern warrants such action.

Referrals

Referrals to the Missouri State University- West Plains Counseling Center typically involve a student being sent to the Center by a third party. The Counseling Center staff understand that often the referring party may be interested in the progress of the referred individual. However, due to the confidential nature of counseling, the Counseling Center cannot release information about clients without written authorization signed by the client. Exceptions to this policy occur when the counselor believes there is a clear and imminent danger to the client or others.

Referrals may also be made when, in the counselor's professional judgment, the client's interests are best served by first receiving an evaluation outside the Missouri State University- West Plains Counseling Center prior to establishing and/or continuing an ongoing therapeutic relationship. Referrals are made collaboratively with the client so they can receive appropriate and effective treatment for the client's presenting problem. A referral will not compromise the allotted sessions with the Missouri State University- West Plains Counseling Center, but it is in the client's best interest to receive services in a setting that provides the needed care for their presenting problem.

When the results of these evaluations are made available to the Counseling Center, it may be determined that the services of the Missouri State University- West Plains Counseling Center may not be appropriate for a particular client. A referral may be made in this situation, or when the client requests/requires long-term therapy that is beyond the scope of the services provided by the Counseling Center. In all cases, the decision to make a referral is discussed with the client and the counselor will facilitate the referral process. Referrals are typically made to agencies in the community. Reasons for a referral outside the Missouri State University- West Plains Counseling Center for therapeutic services may include but are not limited to:

1. Ongoing treatment for a client who presents an imminent danger to self or others (e.g., a client who is determined to kill self, and has a feasible plan to do so; or a client who is experiencing hallucinations and is unable to care for self).
2. Court-ordered or forensically-oriented treatment (e.g., treatment for criminal behaviors, such as rape or pedophilia).
3. Treatment for disorders of severity that the Counseling Center cannot provide adequate care (e.g., treatment for a severe eating disorder or chemical dependency issue that requires closely coordinated medical, nutritional, psychiatric, and psychological care).
4. Treatment that falls beyond areas of expertise (e.g., medical evaluations by a physician).
5. Treatment for a client whose behavior creates a hostile working environment at the Missouri State University- West Plains Counseling Center, affecting staff and/or other students (e.g., a client who is grossly verbally abusive towards and/or threatens staff).

Counseling Center staff will assist clients in scheduling appointments with appropriate mental health supports in the community when the Center is unable to provide mental health services. Staff will offer more than one available option of service to the client, as community availability allows.

Wait List

When all the Counselors' caseloads are full, a waiting list is kept by the Missouri State University- West Plains Counseling Center, which includes the names of students seeking services, along with their M number, date of birth, email address, and phone number. If students are unlikely to be seen within two weeks (or the end of the semester if that comes first) they will be informed. Outside referrals and alternative resources will also be provided for students who are added to the waiting list.

Termination

Termination occurs when a decision is made to discontinue counseling services. Termination from the counseling process will likely occur by one of the following ways:

1. Referral out of the Missouri State University- West Plains Counseling Center.
2. The Client and Counselor together plan on ending counseling sessions.
3. Client fails to return to the Missouri State University- West Plains Counseling Center.

Termination is a step in therapy with its own unique characteristics and is as crucial as the assessment process. In the event a client fails to return to therapy, or terminates in an unplanned manner, it may be prudent to initiate contact with the client to assess the client's well-being and offer them additional services at the Counseling Center.

Staff Expectations

The Counseling Center's hours of operation are Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm. Clients will be asked to exit the Counseling Center if present outside of operation hours.

The Missouri State University- West Plains Counseling Center will pay fees associated with state licensure, the membership in one professional organization, and may offer partial or full reimbursement for relevant workshops and Continuing Education Units (CEU's), depending upon funds available. The Counseling Center is dedicated to the need for continued professional development in order to meet the ever-changing needs of clients. These benefits are available to full-time staff only. The availability of these benefits will be on a year-to-year basis depending on the budget and may change with minimal notice. The Director will decide what the best use of funds will be to meet developmental and licensing needs.

Outreach

Special programs and workshops designed to define and/or prevent problems and improve the quality of university life are presented for students on a regular basis as well as by request. Topics such as stress management, relationships, effective communication, time management, and anger management are typically scheduled and the presentations provide cognitive, behavioral and affective information about the chosen topic. Requested outreach programs will be discussed with Counseling Center staff and will be assigned if a staff member has the availability and expertise.

Student Grievance Procedures

The therapeutic relationship is crucial to the therapeutic process. There may be times when a counselor challenges a client's thought patterns, brings about emotional distress, or addresses difficult topics with a client as part of the therapeutic process to create positive change. However, if a client feels their counselor has treated them unjustly, or sexually harassed them, they may file a complaint to the Director of Counseling Services or the Vice Chancellor of Student Services. They may contact either one directly or complete a Concern/Incident Report Form (<https://wp.missouristate.edu/GrizzlyCareTeam/grizzly-care-report.htm>) and the Director or Vice Chancellor will follow up in a timely manner. The Missouri State University- West Plains policies regarding discrimination and harassment can be found at <https://wp.missouristate.edu/Equity/discrimination-complaint-procedures.htm>.



Authorization to Release/Exchange Information

Name of Client

Date of Birth

I, _____, hereby authorize Missouri State University-West Plains Counseling Center to disclose/exchange mental health information and records obtained in the course of counseling treatment of the client listed above to:

Name or Organization

Phone

Address

City State Zip

I am authorizing the following information to be released:

- Information regarding attendance at scheduled appointments
Status with the Counseling Center- (for example: if clients are scheduling and attending appointments, if clients are not attending appointments as scheduled, if the client chose to end counseling sessions, etc.)
Treatment progress
Other (specify):

- 1. I understand that, unless withdrawn, this authorization will expire on
2. By signing this release, I understand that the information disclosed is professional and confidential and may be communicated in written and/or oral form.
3. I understand that I may revoke this authorization at any time by notifying the Missouri State University-West Plains Counseling Center in writing, and this authorization will cease to be effective on the date notified except to the extent action has already been taken in reliance upon it.
4. I understand that information used or disclosed pursuant to this authorization may be subject to re-disclosure by the recipient and no longer protected by confidentiality.
5. I understand that my refusal to sign this authorization will not jeopardize my right to obtain present or future counseling treatment except where disclosure of the information is necessary.
6. I understand that I can request a copy of this form after I sign it.

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read and understand this authorization.

Signature of Client Date

OR

Signature of Parent/Legal Guardian Date

Relationship to Client