

Student Mental Health Program

Training and Technical Assistance for California Community Colleges



Making the Case: County Mental Health, Community Providers, and Santa Monica College Student Mental Health Program

Of California's 112 community colleges, Santa Monica College (SMC) is one of the largest, with a highly diverse student body that includes 3,300 students from over 100 countries.

SMC has a Psychological Services Department staffed by two full-time psychologists, part-time pre-doctoral interns, and full-time post-doctoral interns who provide mental health services on campus. SMC also has two community partner agencies that provide direct services on campus weekly to provide alcohol and drug use assessments and referral to treatment, as well as mental health assessment, counseling, and referrals for social services. SMC's intern-based student mental health services were built after SMC realized it was unable to meet the demand for mental health services on campus. In 2008, SMC Psychological Services became an independent department from Health Services. With only two staff and a significant waitlist, the department quickly realized the need to identify and establish relationships with community partners to meet the demand for services.



Through grant funding, the California Community Colleges Student Mental Health Program (CCC SMHP) provided funding for Santa Monica College to hire a part-time grant manager who also coordinated collaboration-building meetings with new community mental health provider partners. In addition to fostering new partnerships, CCC SMHP funding also enabled the SMC Psychological Services staff to solidify their existing community partnerships. They also used the funding to develop a mental health referral tracking system to collect data on referral needs and outcomes. This enhanced their ability to link students successfully to services off campus. SMC's new collaboration with the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (DMH) client navigator, assigned to SMC's service area, enables its staff to consult with the navigator by phone and arrange for her to come on campus to meet with students to help link them directly to DMH services. Other community partners provide mental health education, early intervention, and wellness promotion activities on campus for students, faculty, and staff.

The County of Los Angeles Department of Mental Health Stakeholder group unanimously supported the creation of Service Area Navigator Teams that would, across age groups, assist individuals and families in accessing mental health and other supportive services and network with community-based organizations in order to strengthen the array of services available to clients of the mental health system. For more information, visit <http://tinyurl.com/LACDMH-Navigator>.

Regional Strategizing Forums

The long-term goal of the CCC SMHP is to increase student success and retention. This is done through the development and enhancement of quality student mental health support services at all of California's community colleges. A key strategy to reach this goal was for campuses that received campus based grants (CBGs) to convene Regional Strategizing Forums (RSFs). These were designed to increase dialogue and foster relationships between relevant community mental health resources and partners. The RSFs share best practices, models, and strategies with campuses that share geographic proximity and do not receive grant funding. Participants included campus health and mental health providers, county and community mental health, campus safety, counseling, disabled students programs and services (DSPS), as well as stakeholders, including students and other individuals with lived experience.

SMC facilitated three forums between March 2013 and June 2014. Prior to the first RSF, the college identified their desired outcomes and referral needs. The first RSF brought together provider participants who were eager to learn more about SMC's student mental health needs. Providers shared that their services were free or sliding scale, and offered suggestions for how to connect with their agencies more successfully. SMC has a large international student population, with Latinos making up 22% of students requesting mental health services. Therefore, SMC was also pleased to learn that several participating agencies offered services in Spanish and a few had additional languages such as Hebrew and Japanese.

The participants at the October 2013 forum held a common agenda. That was to create an effective referral system for supporting student mental health and enhancing SMC's capacity to build mental health awareness and reduce mental health stigma. They aimed to do this via training, awareness activities, outreach events, and ongoing media messages via various media formats. Participants agreed that the development of strong and reciprocal linkages between SMC and its community partners were critical to achieving these goals, as were the creation of mechanisms for ongoing, timely, and meaningful communication.

Staff, Faculty, and Student Outreach and Education

SMC's faculty identified a need to become better equipped to recognize, appropriately respond to, and refer students of concern. Therefore, SMC Psychological Services staff secured flextime (required non-work hours for job improvement activities) approval for faculty that completed the CCC SMHP [*At-Risk for Faculty and Staff*](#) online training developed by Kognito Interactive for CCC SMHP. After the training, SMC Psychological Services staff was able to persuade several faculty members to give students extra credit for attending mental health Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) activities on campus. SMC Psychological Services staff further increased student interest and attendance at mental health and wellness related activities by working directly with student groups. The Psychology Club, the Black Collegians, and the Latino Center were among the groups that helped promote these events.

Lessons Learned

SMC's Psychological Services staff agreed that good planning and continuous quality improvement were essential to their success in building sustainable collaborations with community agencies and within the college. More information about these is described below.

Essential Planning and Quality Improvement Elements

Data Collection: SMC Psychological Services staff was able to build a stronger case for the support they needed by collecting data on the impact of student mental health on student retention and academic success. This enabled them to gain support from key administrators, staff, and faculty to expand their services and referral capabilities. As a result, they were able to bring more outside resources on campus to provide assessments, linkages to care, and PEI activities. SMC Psychological Services obtains its data by reviewing records that document students' presenting problems, treatment plans, and post-counseling student satisfaction surveys and learning plans. The learning plan is part of the satisfaction survey and asks students to describe what they learned from their counseling sessions and how they will apply that knowledge after their counseling sessions have ended.

SMC Psychological Services staff noted that they could easily incorporate both quantitative and qualitative data collection into the intake and referral forms, treatment notes, and client satisfaction surveys upon discharge from services. Knowing what data would be useful to collect within Psychological Service's capabilities led to a more user-friendly and focused data collection process.

Annual Program Assessments: SMC Psychological Services conduct annual program assessments to inform their planning for the coming year. This process helps staff members prioritize and set specific, measurable, and achievable short-term goals that align with their long-term strategies. Annual program assessments also drive continuous quality improvement efforts and help expand and sustain constituent support for program changes, additional resources, and new collaboration opportunities.

The Keys to Develop and Sustain Collaborations

Identification of Potential Partners and Shared Benefits: At the March 2013 RSF, community mental health providers suggested SMC Psychological Services staff better prepare students they refer by giving them information about the provider's location, neighborhood, the intake and screening process, and how long it will take before they actually connect with a therapist.

To make the best use of their limited time, SMC Psychological Services staff had to strategically prioritize partners they would cultivate first. They based their decisions on which potential community partners provided the services most needed and most accessible to SMC students, which on-campus staff, student groups, and faculty would be the most receptive to partnering, and which were most influential with key constituent groups. It was equally important for SMC Psychological Services staff to identify mutual benefits that could result from collaborating with priority partners on specific issues.

Staff members – based on their availability, job duties, and current campus and provider relationships – took responsibility for building relationships with specific SMC individuals or groups. For example, one staff person focused on SMC's large and active Psychology Club and its faculty advisor, while another participated on strategically selected faculty committees. SMC Psychological Services mental health interns assisted with potential referral agency site visits, attended community mental health meetings, and ran mental health PEI activities on campus. This relationship building process was crucial to developing credibility and support from potential partners.

Setting Clear Expectations with Partners: SMC Psychological Services staff found it helpful to clarify their own expectations of on- and off-campus partners and to obtain understanding of a potential partner’s capabilities and interests before negotiating formal or informal agreements. SMC Psychological Services also developed a structured process to screen out agencies that were not reliable, or whose services were not a good fit with most SMC students’ mental health needs.

Since then, SMC has updated their community mental health referral roster and, with assistance from CCC SMHP, created fact sheets that provide this information for all of its referral agencies. SMC counselors can use the fact sheets to better match students to providers, and give students a copy of the fact sheets that describe where they are being referred.

Developed based on work directly with community colleges, CCC SMHP developed several worksheets for colleges to identify, develop, and sustain community referrals. Using these templates SMC developed fact sheets specific to their community. Download the worksheet templates, [*Developing and Sustaining Referrals*](#), from the [California Community College Programs, Practices, and Policies database](#).

Sustainability Measures: Two sustainability measures were particularly important to SMC Psychological Service’s long-term collaboration successes. The first was their ongoing maintenance of partner relationships. Informal connections were sometimes more difficult to maintain due to busy schedules, so it was helpful to attend relevant community and college meetings, share some meeting attendance responsibilities with interns, and stay on the most relevant electronic mail lists. Willingness to initiate contact to discuss new collaboration opportunities, emerging issues or problems, and provide support or just check in and reconnect was also important in sustaining partner relationships.

Succession planning was the second key sustainability measure. SMC Psychological Services staff noted the importance of the collaboration being between institutions rather than one or two individuals. When the collaboration is between organizations, especially if they formalize that relationship by a written agreement staff members from partner organizations are more likely to work on sustaining the collaboration. This is done by orienting new staff to collaboration expectations and facilitating their introductions to key individuals from partner organizations whenever there are staff and program changes.

To this end, MOUs were established between SMC and Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services and Family Service of Santa Monica to provide selected mental health services on the college site and/or in students’ families’ homes and/or at the agency site at no cost. The [*MOU to provide mental health services*](#) is available in the California Community College Programs, Practices, and Policies online resource database.

Overcoming Challenges

Because SMC Psychological Services staff were busy, it would have been easy to drop collaboration relationship-building efforts to address more pressing issues. Making collaboration an integral part of their job rather than an additional job duty prevented other job responsibilities from taking precedence over partnership development.

Although relationship building can be a slow process, especially when there is a history of silos and turf issues, SMC Psychological Services staff recognized the value of taking a long-term strategic approach. Their experience shows that the deeper and more trustworthy the partner connections, the easier it is to sustain a dynamic and durable collaboration.

If you would like to receive additional technical assistance or information about this subject or any other student mental health issues, please contact us.

California Community Colleges Student Mental Health Program (CCC SMHP)

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The California Community Colleges Student Mental Health Program (CCC SMHP) is dedicated to increasing the capacity of the CCC system to provide student mental health services. Funded by the California Mental Health Services Authority, this program offers cost-free training and technical assistance (TTA) to California's community college campuses.

The California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA) is an organization of county governments working to improve mental health outcomes for individuals, families, and communities. Prevention and Early Intervention programs implemented by CalMHSA are funded through the voter-approved Mental Health Services Act (Prop 63). Prop. 63 provides the funding and framework needed to expand mental health services to previously underserved populations and all of California's diverse communities. The California Community Colleges Student Mental Health Program (CCC SMHP) coordinates training and technical assistance to address mental health intervention and prevention services for students attending California community colleges. The long-term goal of the project is to increase student success and retention through the development and enhancement of quality student and student veteran mental health support services at all of California's community colleges.