

Resolution Number: RS20-397

April, 2020

Whereas:

RATIONALE A mental health crisis exists at U.S. universities, and it is worsening. Campuses and their counseling centers are seeing increased, unmet demand from students (American Council on Education, 2019). Reflecting national trends, SF State's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) has seen an increase of students seeking counseling to address urgent mental health needs. SF State's students face a wide range of stressors – among the many challenges are pervasive housing and food insecurities, financial hardships, competing demands between family, work and academics, interpersonal conflicts, discrimination, alcohol and other drug (AOD) issues, and the effects of sexual violence. Recognizing the need for stronger infrastructure, in 2017, the SF State Academic Senate passed resolution RS17-363 "In Support of and Commitment to Counseling and Psychological Services to provide Quality Mental Health Services to SF State Students." Since that time, this situation has only been made more urgent by the COVID-19 public health crisis, and has left students feeling overwhelmed, increasingly anxious, depressed, and at risk of suicide. To better address SF State students' mental health needs and to ensure ethical practice in the delivery of quality services, we must strive not only to meet, but also to exceed relevant professional mental health service standards. To accomplish this, it is important to recognize the equity issue with respect to counselor-per-student ratios, and the need for strengthening CAPS' infrastructure by committing to employ more counselors (Counselor Faculty), including tenure-track positions.

Whereas:

while over the past three years, SF State has begun to move toward meeting the International Accreditation of Counseling Services (IACS) standards for counselor to student ratios, SF State CAPS still has not reached the IACS minimum standards for staffing ratios of 1 counselor per 1000-1500 students. To this end, counseling centers at some universities with comparable numbers of enrolled students maintain two to four times the number of licensed Counselors to serve their students' needs. (For example, CAPS has approximately 14 counselors and 28,000 students, while the University of Pennsylvania has approximately 48 counselors with 26,000 students.) Although our respective budgets are not comparable, CAPS with a fraction of the number of staff, strives to provide the same range of counseling services as counseling centers with greater budgets. In July 2019, the IACS Board of Accreditation encouraged CAPS to "continue to advocate for the addition of clinical staff members, which is in line with CAPS' long term plan."; and

Whereas:

CAPS is a highly utilized service on campus. Students are encouraged to seek support sooner than later and the campus community is encouraged to refer struggling students who need support. At times each semester when demand greatly exceeds the number of appointment slots available, unless students report that they are in crisis or seeking a brief consultation, they may need to wait 2-5 weeks for an appointment. Especially toward the end of each semester, this poses an ethical dilemma for CAPS Counselor Faculty who want to serve students but are unable to do so due to demand greatly exceeding capacity; and

Whereas:

since 2016, SF State CAPS has seen a 61% increase in the number of new student intakes (1189 to 1919) and a 39% increase in the number of total student appointments (2700 to 3748). In addition, in the past 2 years, CAPS has seen an average of 306 students each academic year seeking crisis appointments (including those at risk for self-harm), requiring a system of triage and consultation appointments to manage the increasing number of students who request to be seen immediately; and

Whereas:

according to SF State's Student Success Plan (2017), "Faculty and staff across campus report that students' mental health is affecting their learning, and that improved counseling resources are needed to meet students' needs." The report called for additional mental health professionals; and

Whereas:

students greatly benefit from counseling services support. In Spring 2019, ninety-nine percent of students who filled out CAPS' Client Satisfaction Questionnaire agreed or strongly agreed that "seeing a counselor has had a positive impact on my academic success." And ninety-nine percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I regard CAPS as a necessary part of the university and I would return if I needed help in the future."; and

Whereas:

Graduation Initiative 2025 is the CSU's commitment to remove the obstacles to student success. One of the Initiative's six strategies includes "Effective targeted support services to achieve educational equity (directed

specifically at our first-generation, low-income and underrepresented students, with special attention to men of color”); and

Whereas:

Counselor Faculty diversity matters, especially to students of color, who are more likely to open up to counselors who are of the same race/ethnicity (Brummit, 1975; Camacho, 2016; Kim, 2006). Students have requested to see Counselor Faculty who reflect their racial, ethnic, cultural, sexual, and gender diversity. CAPS continues to make this a priority and given additional resources, will continue to hire Counselor Faculty that represent the diverse identities of the SF State community; and

Whereas:

CAPS is an essential resource. When any emergency, tragedy, or public safety crisis arises at SF State, CAPS is called upon by campus administrators to provide immediate counseling support, and where needed, sustained care to the campus community. This accentuates the urgent need to prioritize the capacity of counseling services, especially given increased challenges to safety and public health nationwide during the current COVID-19 crisis. Such crisis situations strain Counselor Faculty workload by squeezing in students beyond capacity; and

Whereas:

CAPS provides crucial support for faculty and staff who lack training as mental health professionals yet find themselves in the stressful, anxiety provoking position of advising students who struggle with a range of mental health issues. In such cases, CAPS receives requests for assistance. When CAPS has the capacity to accommodate students referred by faculty and staff, this provides support for students and the campus community; and

Whereas:

in the last 5 years, CAPS has experienced staffing changes resulting in a lower proportion of permanent, Tenured and Tenure-Track (T/TT) Counselor Faculty. In 2014, CAPS had approximately 13 Counselor Faculty (including the director of CAPS), of which nine held T/TT positions amounting to 69%. As compared to 2020, CAPS has approximately 14 Counselor Faculty with five holding T/TT positions amounting to 36%. During this period, CAPS has replaced nearly all vacated T/TT positions with temporary Counselor Faculty and emergency hires, or supplemented its staffing with two-month emergency hires. Despite dedicated and creative hiring practices to sustain services to students, the decrease in long term, T/TT positions has been substantial; and

Whereas:

while temporary Counselor Faculty contribute significantly to the mental health of SF State students, T/TT Counselor Faculty provide essential support to the overall infrastructure of CAPS with their institutional knowledge, integration into the university community, service on department and university committees, participation in shared governance, and carry a full caseload of student clients; and

Whereas:

in 2013, the statewide Academic Senate of the CSU system (ASCSU) expressed concerns about the “inadequate level of resources given to student mental health services and encouraged immediate action to not only sustain, but meet and exceed standards.” It also urged all CSU campuses to “give high priority to student mental health services and to allocate ongoing and sustainable budgetary support beyond student fees.” (AS-3123-13/AA); and

Whereas:

the 2019-2020 California state budget includes \$35 million in budget language for tenure-track hiring to “increase the number of tenure-track faculty pursuant to the graduation initiative. Funds shall be used to hire full-time tenure-track faculty above and beyond the universities’ current tenure-track faculty.” For example, Cal Poly Pomona has used these funds to hire three new tenure-track Counselor Faculty positions (Spring 2020); and

Whereas:

while SF State has increased CAPS funding over the past three years, more investments are needed in order to meet the demand for student mental health services needs and, as mentioned above, strengthen its infrastructure through permanent T/TT hires; and

Whereas:

while the need for funding may partially be addressed by a Student Health Fee increase (effective Fall 2020) championed by Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, the broader need for funding of CAPS must remain a priority of the University; be it therefore

Resolved:

that the SF State Academic Senate is in strong support of – at a minimum – maintaining the current level of funding for CAPS despite the impending COVID-19 financial exigency, and increased student access to services; and be it further

Resolved:

that the SF State administration is urged to address the long-term critical problem of CAPS needing additional staff and resources by seeking funding through state general funds or other sources, to supplement student fees; and be it further

Resolved:

that the Academic Senate calls upon the SF State administration to invest in CAPS infrastructure by converting five temporary Counselor Faculty positions to tenure-track Counselor Faculty positions over the next two fiscal years, pending availability of funding and continued progress toward meeting the IACS counselor to student ratio, as well as hiring additional temporary Counselor Faculty positions; and be it further

Resolved:

that the Academic Senate calls for annual follow up reports on CAPS resource needs [for the next four years], and be it further

Resolved:

that this resolution shall be distributed to the SF State Vice President for Student Affairs & Enrollment Management, the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, and the President, as well as the Academic Senate CSU.
