

Benchmarking Summary: Student Counseling Services

The staff of Student Counseling Services chose to explore the practice of assessing student needs in planning for counseling center programs and services. It had been ten years since SCS had conducted a comprehensive student needs assessment, and we wanted to launch a project to do so. The benchmarking project fit in nicely with this goal, as it gave us an opportunity to see what other centers had done while planning our project.

A committee of two staff members and one student met to conduct the benchmarking assessment. Telephone contacts were made with the following university counseling centers:

- Ball State University
- Miami University of Ohio
- Bowling Green State University
- Virginia Commonwealth University

The following questions were posed to counseling center representatives:

- 1) Conceptual Issues
 - a) When you have conducted Needs Assessments of your student body, what questions have you asked/topics have you covered?
 - b) In conducting your needs assessments, what have you found didn't work?
- 2) Methodological Issues
 - a) What data collection procedures have you used?
 - b) What measures have you used to collect data?
 - c) How did you decide on the sampling method you utilized if you sampled your population?
 - d) Have you conducted your needs assessments as a single episode data collection or collected data as a longitudinal process?
- 3) Resource Issues
 - a) If you used methods other than paper/pen questionnaires, how have you trained your data collectors?
 - b) How much staff time was allocated for the needs assessment process?
- 4) Administrative Issues
 - a) Who were your collaborators on the needs assessment projects?
 - b) How have you used the data and findings generated?
 - c) May we have copies of the findings you generated?
 - d) Would you be willing to send us examples of the reports you developed and the measures you used?

Unfortunately, none of the schools contacted had done a student needs assessment. A follow-up posting to the counseling center directors' listserv yielded very little information either. Many directors responded, mostly to ask that we share whatever we got with the list, as they were hoping to develop similar assessments also. Essentially, student needs assessment is apparently an infrequent practice of counseling centers, but it is of significant interest to counseling center directors. Through the listserv posting, we did receive a couple of samples of needs assessment questionnaires used by other centers, which we used in designing our survey.

Our needs assessment survey was conducted during spring semester, and was a questionnaire administered on PDA's to 250 students on the Quad. We chose to focus on gathering general information about awareness and perceptions of the counseling center. The results of that study are being analyzed at this time.