**Satellite Counselors at Georgia Tech**

**Background:**

In support of mental health and wellbeing for our students, in 2018 President Peterson funded three new mental health clinician positions for the Counseling Center. Office space at the Counseling Center had reached maximum capacity, so it was necessary to consider creative options for housing the new counselors. A developing trend in higher education mental health services nationally is placement of a counselor within an academic department. There are two models for this, although it can be confusing as the relevant terms (embedded and satellite) are often used interchangeably. In an “embedded” model the counselor works within and for a particular department. Embedded counselors are paid by their departments and are fully separate from the Counseling Center.

**Our model:**

The model we use at Georgia Tech is a **Satellite** model which retains some aspects of the embedded model. A satellite model is protective of the host department, and of campus mental health services in general, because satellite counselors work for the Counseling Center and must follow Counseling Center policies and procedures. Satellite counselors are situated within the Counseling Center’s organizational structure and are members of a team of mental health professional colleagues. Satellite counselors utilize the specially-designed electronic record-keeping system which protects client confidentiality and meets professional and legal standards. In our view, these are important benefits which were primary factors in our decision to utilize a satellite model.

The Division of Student Life is funding the positions, and the specific departments are funding office start-up costs (computer, printer, furniture etc). Any student from any department can access the counselors. The counselors are staff of the Counseling Center and will be assigned to satellite locations on what will likely be a rotating basis of at least one year. The College of Engineering and the College of Computing were chosen as our pilot locations since the utilization rate of the Counseling Center is higher in these schools. The counselors are housed in accessible locations that also allow for privacy. Currently, the offices are located in MRDC 3111, Whitaker 1236, and 149C in the College of Computing. We have hired three licensed mental health clinicians, Shiraz Karaa, LPC (MRDC) Melissa Massey, LPC (Whitaker) and Scott LaSalle, LCSW (CoC).

We have been approved for funding through the Comprehensive Administrative Review (CAR) for four additional Satellite positions, beginning July 1, 2021. Our hope is to place one counselor in each of the four remaining Colleges that are not currently hosting a counselor. This includes Scheller College of Business, Ivan Allen College, College of Sciences, and College of Design.

**Benefits:**

This program has many benefits for students. For example, satellite locations improve accessibility by providing counseling in places where students spend most of their time. Placing a counselor in an academic department helps to destigmatize mental health and may serve those who might hesitate to go to our central location for counseling. We hope to reach students who might not have otherwise sought out services. Additionally, faculty and staff will have convenient access to counselors for consultation about a student of concern.

**Function of the counselor:**

Counselors’ schedules include a variety of functions such as brief walk-in consultations to students, walk-in consultations for faculty and staff regarding a student, psychoeducational workshops and outreach, individual counseling, and group counseling. Students who are wishing to formally access mental health services as clients will need to go through CARE (Center for Assessment, Referral and Education)\*\*.

**Students wishing to access the Satellite counselor and Mental Health Services:**

Walk-in consultation hours for students (approximately 5-6 hours/week) will be posted and typically last approximately 15 minutes. The consultation can be used to learn more about counseling services or briefly address a concern. If after the consultation ongoing counseling services are deemed appropriate, the student will be referred to CARE \*\* for an initial assessment.  After the assessment, services which could be recommended may include psycho-educational workshops, group counseling, off-campus referrals, or brief individual counseling.  If on-campus brief counseling is recommended, the student will be assigned to the next available counselor (and not necessarily the Satellite counselor, although the student can make the request).

\*\* At CARE students are seen on a walk-in basis during office hours. CARE is located on the first floor of the Smithgall Student Services (Flag) Building, off of the main atrium.  For more information, call 404-894-3498 or visit [care.gatech.edu](http://care.gatech.edu/)

**Departmental Requests**:

Satellite counselors will provide psychoeducational workshops for students as part of their duties. Departments can request a specific workshop and counselor through the outreach portal:

<https://counseling.gatech.edu/workshop-request-list>

Satellite counselors may be available to speak to classes in your department about mental health services, or offer support following a death or other critical incident. Please keep in mind that the counselor’s availability varies throughout the semester.

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