

## Counselor-in-Residence Program Ohio University, Athens, OH

The Counselor-in-Residence (CR) program at Ohio University was developed as a collaborative and cooperative effort between the Department of Residence Life and the Counseling and Psychological Services in order to extend mental health consultation services as a cost-effective and collaborative strategy within the division of Student Affairs. In making a mental health professional more accessible to students and available for a greater range of “student-friendly” hours, CR program was designed to make accessing psychological care a bit less intimidating for students. Through such a preventative and proactive approach, it is hoped that the CR program will serve to address student concerns before they escalate into crises, and provide students with the support, feedback, and avenues for self-exploration and expression that encourage personal growth and development.

The CR program is staffed by doctoral student clinicians from the Department of Psychology or the Department of Counselor Education, who have completed their Masters degree. Preference is given to doctoral students who have completed (or are completing) training at the counseling center (practicum or traineeship). The CRs live in “faculty-apartments” within residence halls, and conduct brief interventions and consultations in an office that was created for the CRs within a centrally located residence hall. The CR’s have a solid support from the Counselor-on-Call for consultation and disposition. As such, the CR’s value this experience as a great additional training opportunity, particularly working with college student population.

In developing this program, the direct-service-delivery model for a CR program originally developed by Rawls and colleagues (2004) was adapted to not only include direct-service-delivery, but also consultation services to Residence Life staff. Importantly, our program also encourages the utilization of brief counseling services by the undergraduate Residence Life staff, in order to address the multiple roles and often stressful position that many undergraduate resident assistants experience. The services provided by the CRs include the broad domains of 1) brief counseling, 2) consultation, 3) emergency intervention and crisis care; 4) after-hours/on-call services, and 5) psychoeducational outreach programming. These services are provided to all students, including Residence Life staff, free of charge.

The CR program offers student-friendly walk-in office-hours from 5pm to 10pm. The number of days a week would depend on the number of CRs in the program (3 days a week of office hours for 2 CRs, and 5 days a week for 3 CRs). It is important to clarify that the CRs do not provide ongoing therapy/counseling or carry a caseload. If a student needs ongoing mental health treatment, CRs refer the student to the counseling center or other mental health agencies in the community. On rare occasions, they may encourage students to follow up with them for one or more sessions to ensure continuity of care. The CRs are also available to consult with Residence Life staff about their concerns regarding situations within the community or personal concerns; this includes attending Residence Life staff meetings to discuss referral resources and provide consultation on mental health care issues within the residential community. These consultations can occur during after-hours via phone, email or face-to-face communication.

The CRs may also meet with a student within their residence hall when requested by a Residence Life staff (“house call”). The CR will meet with the student only after the student has expressed a willingness to meet. For the CR to meet with a resident within their residence hall, a Residence Life staff must be present and/or provide a safe place, such as a staff office, for the CR to meet with the resident privately. The goal of the “house-call” service is to take a proactive and preventative approach to addressing student concerns within the residence halls, and to intervene within potential crisis situations before they escalate into a more serious mental-health related situation.

A major component of the CR program is presenting workshops on various mental health and academic stress related topics. The CRs take a proactive stance with the residence hall staff in identifying and presenting various psycho-educational workshops ranging from stress management, body image issues to study skills. The CRs also participate in the training and orientation of Residence Life staff prior to the academic year, and are often invited to attend or facilitate relevant continuing education opportunities throughout the year.