

# Recommendation Report

A ENGL 308-1 White Paper for Northern Illinois University

December 5 2017

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## Introduction

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### About us

We are a group of concerned NIU students who believe that good mental and emotional health are just as important to student success as physical wellness. Problems do not resolve themselves, and they cannot simply be put on hold to be dealt with at a more convenient time. They can affect every aspect of a student's life, and put serious strain on relationships while negatively affecting academic performance.

Students are particularly vulnerable because they are often far from home, where their social support network of family and friends is likely to be. Many students are living on their own for the first time, and will be struggling to adjust to a new environment, while finding themselves taking on new challenges and responsibilities. College is also a time of personal growth and self-definition. Habits formed while in college may last a lifetime. Because of this, a strong mental health support system is immensely important to have on any campus.

Our purpose is to improve access to mental health services at NIU. Currently it takes an inordinate amount of time to secure a counseling session on campus. We are writing to you, the CCHS, to offer our solution and petition to be granted a sum from the community health endowment in order to implement it. We decided to focus on the CCTC program, and determined that we need to expand it in order to give students better access to its services. In coming to our conclusions my group hypothesized underlying causes, conducted primary and secondary research, and evaluated hypotheses. We then formulated a solution based on our findings. My solution differs somewhat from that of my group in that though I also advocate for opening counseling training centers across campus, I want to open only two, strategically placed, which will oversee counselors embedded in each residence hall. This approach has already been successfully implemented by the University of Iowa, which, like NIU, only had 12 counselors on staff (1).

## Background

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### Standards

There are two different national standards as to the number of counselors that a university should have available. The first is by the CAS, which takes a holistic approach, accounting for the unique needs of different institutions (3). It recommends periodical reevaluations be conducted by the university in order to keep up to date on how many counselors are needed and make appropriate adjustments. This would be ideal. However, at this time it appears that NIU has not done such a review, so we have relied on the IACS standards, which were developed in reaction to what was perceived as the inadequacy of the CAS standards (2).

**IACS Standards**

Recommends a student to counselor ratio of 1,500:1. (2)

**CAS Standards**

CAS recommendations take a more holistic approach. "The level of CS staffing must be established and reviewed regularly with regard to service demands, enrollment, user surveys, diversity of services offered, institutional resources, and other mental health and student services that may be available on the campus and in the local community. The level of staffing and workloads must be adequate and appropriate for program and service demands. The student to counselor ratio should be determined locally in light of institutional size and type, student demographics, roles and responsibilities of professional staff members, scope of services provided, and unique features of CS." (3)

## Overview of existing programs

There are "four major counseling resources on the NIU campus. They each serve a unique purpose. Namely, these are the Community Counseling Training Center (CCTC), Counseling & Consultation Services (CSS), and the Couples and Family Clinic." (4)

### CCTC

#### General Info

- The Community Counseling Training Center, located at Graham Hall 416, is where graduate level counseling students enrolled in certain CAHC classes conduct their practicum. These classes are CAHC 550 and CAHC 750. Other counseling practicum and internship classes meet in the same building. It is unknown in though they may petition to intern for up to 200 clock-hours at the center (4).
- They are supervised by faculty member, adjunct staff, and Doctoral supervisors (4).
- The CCTC scheduling webpage says that an appointment can be made with CCTC practicum counselor any day of the week, but an analysis of the class schedules seems to indicate that it would be easiest to get an appointment on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday, and then during limited times in the afternoon (5). See appendix for tables
- Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday appears to be when their classes meet, during which master's student, at least, dedicate three hours to individual counseling. However, they must also spend 1- 1 ½ hours counseling on a day which their class does not meet on (4).
- Students enrolled in CAHC 586 or CAHC 786 may apply for an internship at the CCTC. They are required to serve seven hours (4)
- The tables in the appendix give the number of students enrolled in each class, sourced from the NIU online class listings. However, there seems to be a discrepancy between how many students should be at the center based on the listing, and how many were reported by the center itself when contacted. This is most likely due to students dropping out after the class has started, and the class seating number not being updated in the listing due to enrollment being closed. Still, it is possible that this data can still give us some insight, so it will be included in the appendix. Officially there are 12 student counselors at the CCTC center this semester. This would make them short staffed, according to one CCTC representative.
- **Purpose** - To provide counseling for free to those who need it (6).

- **Target population** - The center is open to NIU students and the surrounding community (6).
- **Services** - Provides free individual and group counseling services for a wide variety of issues. According to their webpage, they “utilize a variety of techniques to provide services that are personalized, collaborative, goal-oriented, and time-limited. Master’s and Doctoral students conduct intake interviews, screenings, assessments, and individual counseling. Additionally, couples and family counseling, child and play therapy, and group counseling are available on a limited basis.” (6)
- **Limitations** - Due to the fact that it is mainly staffed by inexperienced practicum students, the center can not deal with a number of issues. These include: eating problems, personality disorders, chronic/ persistent mental illness, long term substance dependence or abuse, domestic violence, severe trauma, and court ordered counseling (5).  
In addition, it seems that the most limiting factor is the number of administrators available to supervise not only practicum counselors, but also interns.

**Notes:** It appears that this Fall 2017 semester all but one seat out of all the sections listed was filled. With the four sections they normally have, this would give us 24 practicum students available to work at the CCTC. However, from a search for all CAHC 550 classes - both open and closed- listed for fall 2017, it appears that they only had two sections available this semester, so there are 11 practicum students from CAHC 550. Additionally, no supervisor practicum class was held. The exact reasons for this are unknown, but it can be reasonably surmised that it had something to do with instructor availability and/or funding. A lack of interest is also a possibility, but less likely in light of the recently resolved budget crisis. See appendix for full tables.

## NIU’s Counseling & Consultation Services

- **General info**  
This is The main counseling center on campus. Its staff consists of nine counselors, three doctoral interns, five practicum students (only one from NIU), one graduate assistant, and one administrative staff person (7).
- **Purpose**  
The purpose of the CSS is, to quote “to support the academic, emotional, social and cultural development of students. Our student-centered programs include counseling, assessment, psychiatric treatment, crisis response, outreach, consultation, training and educational services. We help students address personal challenges and develop the skills, abilities and knowledge to empower them to take full advantage of their college experience.” (8)
- **Target population**  
Students enrolled at NIU are the target population. (9)
- **Services**  
Services provided at the CCS are listed as follows: “Initial consultation, individual and group counseling, assessments, and crisis services”. (10)
- **Limitations**  
The CCS does not serve the wider DeKalb community, only NIU students. (9)

## Couples and Family Clinic

- **General info**  
Located at Wirtz hall. It is open Monday through Friday, from nine to nine Mondays through Thursdays, and from nine to five on Fridays. It is staffed by. It is partnered with the university’s “accredited [M.S. Specialization in Marriage and Family Therapy](#) program.” (11)
- **Purpose**  
This clinic is dedicated to resolving interpersonal conflicts, especially those of a familial nature.

- **Target population**

They serve “Individuals, couples and families” at NIU and the surrounding communit. (11)

- **Services** Conflict resolution and “assistance with challenges such as everyday stress from responsibilities and decisions; child and adolescent behavioral problems; more persistent difficulties such as physical, sexual, or psychological abuse; coping with addiction; feelings of despair, loneliness, anxiety or fear and thoughts of suicide.” (11)

- **Limitations**

It is not free, although they do charge on a sliding scale. (12)

## Psychological Service Center

### General info

#### Purpose

To offer treatment for various psychological conditions.

#### Target population

#### Services

They provide “evaluations in the form of psychological testing and diagnostic interviews... psychotherapies, including individual, couple, family and group therapy; parent education; and play-based therapy for children [, as well as] relaxation training, biofeedback and other methods for controlling stress and physical pain.” They deal with “psychotherapy and psychological evaluation. We work with problems such as interpersonal relationship difficulties, anxiety, depression, academic and adjustment problems, school problems, sexual difficulties and family/marital difficulties.” (13)

#### Limitations

Not free. By appointment only. They typically do not offer long term therapy. (13)

We decided to focus on the CCTC, due to its versatility and heavy use by the community.

## What is the problem?

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As stated before, it takes too long to get an appointment with a counselor at NIU. This is most likely due to either a shortage of counseling services, or inadequate access to those services.

Currently students have to wait an average of approximately two weeks for an appointment.

In 2016 the ratio of counselors to students at NIU Counseling and Consultation Services was reported to be “2,061:1, compared to the recommended national ratio of 1,500:1” (14)

## What is the cause of the problem?

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Two possible underlying causes were hypothesized, and further subdivided by their exact nature:

1. Inefficient use of resources
  - a. Inefficient use of funds (eg. spending too much in one area)
  - b. Inefficient direction of students to resources

- c. Inefficient structuring of staff (Not delegating staff responsibilities efficiently, or not hiring appropriate number of support staff)
2. Insufficient resources
  - a. Insufficient budget (eg. insufficient funds to hire enough staff, regardless of interest in various programs)
  - b. Insufficient resources (eg. eligible student pool to draw interns from is too small)

In order to evaluate these hypotheses, we conducted the following research.

## Preliminary Research: methods and conclusions

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### Primary Research

#### Survey of NIU general student population over Facebook

A survey of the general NIU student population was conducted over Facebook. Out of 38 people polled, it was found that a full **64%** of students feel like they could use counseling services at least once a month, if not more often. **73%** feel stressed at school. **63%** feel that this stress negatively affects their academic performance, and **49%** said they had considered dropping out of school because of it. **39%** said they use drugs or some other unhealthy coping mechanism in response to their problems. **78%** would use counseling services if offered, and the type of counseling they would use most is regular counseling. Obviously this is a serious long-term problem that requires persistent support and treatment.

#### Phone interview conducted with CCTC Counselor Rachel

The following was learned by conducting a phone interview with a counselor at the CCTC:

- They see up to 100 clients on any given day.
- The number of clients that can be seen is limited by the number of counselors available.
- Students may be put on a waiting list if no appointment times are available.
- As a general rule, the people who come to see them are coming there on a regular basis.
- Each counselor has three clients assigned to them at a time.
- This semester they are short staffed, with only 12 counselors. They cannot take on more counselors because they are limited to hiring qualified NIU students, suggesting a shortage. It remains to be determined whether this is so, or whether they are limited in some other way in how many qualified counselors they can take on at a time.
- The majority of students they received have been referred there.
- She expressed the opinion that an increased budget would allow them to take on more clients, given they had enough qualified post-graduate level counselors to help them.

#### Email correspondence with Kimberly Hart, Director of The CCTC

From Ms. Hart, we learned that the CCTC is part of an academic unit, and serves as a training center for students enrolled in CAHC classes.

### Secondary Research

NIU web pages were referenced, along with various articles and other sources. The sources and our findings were listed below. This included the CCTC handbook, and various NIU webpages, along with articles on relevant topics.

## Tertiary Research

No tertiary research was conducted.

## Evaluating Possible Causes and Proposing Potential Solutions

In this section we will evaluate each hypothesized cause in light of our preliminary findings. It is important to keep in mind that a problem of this nature may have a number of underlying causes. However, we are seeking to evaluate each possible factor in turn and identify the one which most contributes to the problem, and which can most immediately be addressed at this time. This is where we will focus our efforts in proposing an approach to mitigating the problem.

### Inefficient use of resources

1. Inefficient use of funds (eg. spending too much in one area): It was possible that available funds could be redistributed to better reflect the needs of the CCTC.

**Solution Proposed:** We could have broken down the budget and found areas that could have funding redirected from them to the CCTC center.

**Evaluation:** Finding an exact breakdown of how funds distributed to the college of health and human sciences, down to the amount dedicated to the CCTC center, has proved very difficult.

2. Inefficient direction of students to resources It is possible that students are simply having a difficult time navigating the vast network of mental health resources at NIU and determining which is best suited to their needs.

**Solutions proposed:** One possible solution to this would be to create an online survey similar to the one used for the mentor matching program. It asks students a number of questions about their interests and concerns, and then matches them with the mentor program that would be the best fit for them.

**Evaluation of cause and solution:** This is unlikely. Any student coming into the CSS is given an initial evaluative session, and they are directed onto either individual or group counseling. There is a set number of sessions that a student can see a counselor individually for, and then they must either finish their counseling, or move on to group counseling. A plan is developed for them, setting goals, which, once met, will signal the completion of their therapy (10) (15). There is a link to a diagnostic test, which will automatically refer the student to appropriate resources if any problem is diagnosed. The only caveat with this option is that students cannot choose NIU as their university, and must take a general screening instead. This means that students will not be referred to NIU resources specifically. There are also links to additional self-help resources available on the CCS page.

3. Inefficient structuring of staff

For example, the counseling center may not be delegating staff responsibilities efficiently, or not hiring appropriate number of support staff. Could they be hiring more counselors with less education, paying them less and thus increasing hiring within current budget, rather than taking on fewer, those who hold PhD's?

**Solutions:** One proposed solution, in this case, was to allow Physician's Assistants (or Nurse Practitioners) to complete their required practicum hours at the NIU counseling center. They would, most likely, be enrolled in a graduate level program. They may wish to specialize in mental health, and work in



a mental health facility would be valuable to them. If hired on later, they may not have to be paid as much as someone with a Phd. or even someone with a MS.Ed in counseling.

**Evaluation:** It seems that tasks for everyone involved are clearly delineated, with no signs of mismanagement; there is no task assigned to a counselor that could be done by an assistant (16). The hiring of nurse practitioners was dropped as a potential option because it is likely that even a nurse practitioner interested in specializing in mental health would be administering medication and sedatives, which is working more in the area of Psychiatry. This is beyond the mission of the NIU counseling center.

## Insufficient resources

### 1. Insufficient budget (eg. insufficient funds to hire enough staff, regardless of interest in various programs)

Due to the well known state budget crisis, which was only recently resolved, it is possible that a severely limited budget resulted in the inability to either retain staff, or grow staff with increasing demand for services.

#### **Solutions:**

- Asking for more money to be set aside for on campus mental health counseling.
- Seeking a grant to facilitate the hiring and maintenance of an additional number of counselors.

**Evaluation:** This is inconclusive. A student working at the CCTC was interviewed, and did express the opinion that the center is short-staffed, and that increased funding would help alleviate the problem.

### 2. Insufficient hiring pool or programs to facilitate hiring of students

It is possible that the eligible student pool to draw interns from is too small. Internship programs may need to be created or expanded to allow a greater number of students to be hired.

#### **Solutions:**

- introducing a peer counseling program
- expanding the existing counseling center training program so that students from a wider variety of majors can take part in it.

**Evaluation:** Because this was a concern expressed by one of the staff members interviewed, this possibility holds more weight. The question then is whether this shortage stems from a lack of qualifications or interest on the part of the graduate students. Considering that two sections of the practicum class were cut this semester, and the large number of interns were available, even if some may have dropped out, it seems that there are other limiting factors at work here, such as money, space, or supervisor availability, putting a cap on how many counselors they can take on. The Doctoral Supervisors class, which was not held at all this Fall 2017 semester, only has 3 students enrolled for the spring 2018 semester, out of 25 seats. See appendix. Although they likely do not rely on doctoral supervisors, faculty is mainly responsible for supervision, this does suggest that their only non-fixed source of supervisor expansion is seeing a slowing participation rate. Whether this is due to a lack of funds or interest is ultimately irrelevant, as we will be asking for funds to hire on permanent faculty to act as supervisors to facilitate our proposed expansion of counseling services.

The peer counseling program is an interesting solution, and there is a way to petition for the creation of a new peer mentoring program for a specific group. However, it seems that the needs being seen to are more serious than even trained undergraduate students can deal with. This program has its place in offering a support network, but it has its limitations in the types of matters it can deal with.

## Preliminary conclusions

The most pertinent underlying problem which can most realistically be addressed at this time is that of not being able to hire enough qualified students to work at the CCTC. It is clear that the center is a bastion for not only NIU students, but the entire DeKalb community. Due to its services being free, and offering a wide variety of services, it is likely to be the service that people rely the most on. Twelve

counselors working at the center is simply not enough. This shortage is likely due to a number of limiting factors, namely space and instructor/supervisor availability. Another thing which may prevent students from getting the help they need is the inherent scheduling limitations set forth by relying mainly on students in a class to staff the center. This is bound to create times where counselors are more scarce. The cancellation of class sections suggests that they need more faculty members anyway. As mentioned before, it is dubious, though possible, that this cancellation was due to a lack of interest on the part of students. However, all but one of the seats in the sections that were available were filled, and we are seeing a healthy level of enrollment for the four sections being held this upcoming semester. Twenty out of twenty-four seats have been filled thus far. See appendix.

## Recommended Solution

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My groups plan was to expand the CCTC training program so that students from a wider variety of majors within the college of human and health sciences could work there. Possible majors to recruit from were: Public health sciences B.S, Psychology B.S, Counseling and Higher Education M.S (17). A psychology undergrad could be a counselor's aid, for example, or a mentor (18). Someone from the Human development and Social Services MS. program could possibly intern as a military student counselor.

My plan consists of two main parts. The part first aims to emulate the example of other universities by embedding counselors in residence halls. This will partially address the need of on-campus students, who may be more at risk due to being removed from their social support networks. The second aims to expand access of commuter students and the wider community to counseling services by setting up satellite counseling offices at the four ends of campus. Additionally, in order to staff these satellite offices and potentially provide a wider diversity of services, it may be a good idea to expand the CCTC's partnership with the College of Health and Human Sciences.

### Plan description

#### Considerations

It is important that advisors encourage their graduate students to complete their counseling internship at the CCTC. We have to make sure that there are enough supervisors. There is the question of whether we should hire more faculty members, or rely more on doctoral supervisors. Doctoral supervisors have to be trained by a staff member as part of a course. They are overseen themselves. They may only be there for one semester, and then a new person will be trained to replace them. One faculty member is permanent and can not only train doctoral supervisors, but also teach practicum classes and give counseling services themselves. It is well worth it to hire on a few more faculty members to allow our expansion of the program. For my purposes, I will assume that we will be relying on doctoral supervisors.

#### Expansion of facilities:

**Part A:** Other universities have aimed to have a counselor in every dormitory, and this seems like a good goal for NIU. It has been noted by this author that the resident halls are roughly grouped into two clusters on the campus, and I propose finding a place in each area to setup a CCTC satellite office to operate counseling services from. On the West side of campus there is Douglas hall, Grant Tower N, Grant tower S, and Lincoln Hall. On the East side is Neptune Central, Neptune East, Neptune North, and

Neptune West. Stevenson towers North and south are somewhat separate from the first cluster, but will be grouped with them due to proximity. Grant Hall, which houses the CCTC, is somewhere in the middle of these two groups. The combined student population of all the halls combined is at approximately 3500 (19) I couldn't find more precise numbers for each hall. However in order to achieve a student to counselor ratio of 1500:1, we would only need two counselors to serve those 3500 students. I propose that these two counselors each be assigned to one of the two residence hall clusters, west and east, and then rotate every semester between residences. This would require, perhaps, two additional supervisors to oversee the satellite offices, along with support staff. This would at least relieve much of the burden on residence students. However, a large majority of NIU students do not live on campus, and we cannot forget the pressing needs of the surrounding community that the center serves. It must be noted that commuter students will not have access to the counselors embedded in the residence halls, due to access restrictions. These restrictions, of course, would mean that the residents who do not live in the building their group's counselor lives in would have difficulty gaining access to them. This is a trial run, and furthermore, the following part of my solution would relieve this dilemma.

**Part B:** If we wished to expand onwards from on this point, it would make sense to open small satellite counseling centers around campus. This extra space and widened presence would facilitate the internship and training of students from a wider variety of majors in the college of health and human sciences. This will likely require consultation with someone knowledgeable about the legal and educational requirements that must be observed when developing a new partnership with a department. Since counseling sessions are done in a room with a two-way mirror, potentially any open space on campus could be utilized in the future as a training center. We can assume that the mirror and monitors would be the greatest setup cost, along with permanent staff to oversee it.

## Plan to Implement Proposed Solution

### Part A.

To house one counselor in two residence halls for one school year:

#### Calculations

Averaging the cost of living at Gilbert Hall, Grant Towers, Stevenson Towers, and Neptune Hall: $6069+6069+6069+5521=23728/4 =5932 \times 2 = \$11,864$ per semester and 23,728 per year. (20)
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This assumes housing interns in single dorms to maintain the confidentiality of any students they may converse with. These would be PhD interns, who require less direct supervision. It would be an unpaid position to last for one semester, renewable up to two semesters, with a different hall of residence within each hall group every semester.

### Part B.

As for recruiting from other majors and building the satellite facilities across campus, we require \$1,184,420. To break this proposed amount down into a budget, we want to hire 100 CHHS post-graduate students to work at four satellite counseling centers, one center for each side of campus. 50 of them will be master's level, and will be interns and the centers. Another 50 will be doctoral supervisors. We will assume that they will be paid \$21.36 per hour and that Master's students will work ten hours a week, and PhD. students 20 (21).

#### Further Calculations

$50(10)(21.63) = 10,815 + 50(20)(21.63) = 21,630$
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$10,815+21,630 = \$32,445 \times 36 \text{ weeks/yr (9 month school year)} = \$1,168,020$ to intern 100 Master's and
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PhD students

We estimate one 48x96 two-way mirror will cost \$1640 (22)

If we start with 10 more two-way mirrors= \$16,400

Adding together the grand total cost of hiring the interns and converting the rooms in the satellite centers, we get: \$16,400 + \$1,168,020 = **\$1,184,420**

We are asking for \$23,728 to trial run resident counselors, and \$1,184,420 To pay for the development and staffing of satellite counselor offices which will serve commuter students and the wider DeKalb county community. This comes to a total of:

**\$1,208,148 in endowment funds.**

## Appendix

### Tables

Tables of class sections and meeting information, as sourced from NIU class search.

Class	Location	Time	Level
CAHC 550	Graham Hall 416	We 6:00PM - 8:40PM	Master's Practicum
CAHC 750 - 00P1	Graham Hall 416	Th 3:00PM - 5:40PM 08/28/2017 - 12/16/2017	PhD. Practicum
CAHC 586 - 00P1	Graham Hall 339	Thu 6:00 pm -8:40 pm and Tu 12:00PM - 2:40PM 08/28/2017 - 12/16/2017	Master's. Internship.
CAHC 786- 00p1	Graham Hall 422		PhD. Internship.

Information in these tables was sourced from the online class registration tool.

#### M.S. Ed. Counseling Practicum

CAHC 550 FALL 2017	Capacity	Seats filled	Seats empty	Times	Location
Section 1 cap.	6	6	0	Tu 12:00PM - 2:40PM	

Section 2	6	5	1	We 6:00PM - 8:40PM	
Section3	None				
Section 4	None				
Total	12	11	1		

<b>CAHC 550 Spring 2018</b>	Capacity	Seats filled	Seats empty	Times	Location
Section 1 cap.	6	5	1	We 1:00PM - 5:40PM	Graham Hall 416
Section 2	6	5	1	Th 10:00AM - 2:40PM	Graham Hall 416
Section3	6	5	1	Tu 1:00PM - 5:40PM	Graham Hall 416
Section 4	6	5	1	Th 4:00PM - 8:40PM	Graham Hall 416
Total	24	20	4		

M.S. Ed. Counseling Internship

CAHC 586 - 00P1 Fall 2017	Capacity	Seats filled	Seats empty	Times	Location
Section 1 cap.	12	5	7	Th 3:00PM - 5:40PM Over 08/28/2017 - 12/16/2017	Graham Hall 339
Section 2	15	10	5		No location indicated
Section3	12	6	6		No location indicated
Section 4	12	9	3		No location indicated
Total	51	30	21		No location indicated

PhD Practicum

750 - 00P1 Fall 2017	Capacity	Seats filled	Seats empty	Times	Location
Section 1 cap.	6	5	1	Th 3:00PM - 5:40PM 08/28/2017 - 12/16/2017	Graham Hall 416
Section 2					
Section3					
Section 4					
Total	6	5	1		

750 - 00P1 Spring 2018	Capacity	Seats filled	Seats empty	Times	Location
Section 1 cap.	None				
Section 2	None				
Section3	None				
Section 4	None				
Total	Not held				

Ph.D. Counseling Internship

CAHC 786-00p1 PhD	Capacity	Seats filled	Seats empty	Times	Location
Section 1 cap.	12	5	7	We 4:00PM - 5:40PM over 08/30/2017 - 08/30/2017 And We 4:00PM - 6:40PM over 12/06/2017 - 12/06/2017	Graham Hall 422
Total	12	5	7		

Doctoral Supervisor Internship

752 - 00P1 Fall 2017	Capacity	Seats filled	Seats empty	Times	Location
Section 1	Void				
Section 2					
Section3					
Section 4					
Total					

752 - 00P1 Spring 2018	Capacity	Seats filled	Seats empty	Times	Location
Section 1 cap.	25	3	22		
Section 2					
Section3					
Section 4					
Total					

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