

# Breaking Down Barriers to Student Success

Dr. Nicole Ruzek & Dr. Michele Willingham  
Counseling and Psychological Services



The mission of Counseling and Psychological Services is to advance student success by removing psychological barriers, facilitating self-discovery, and cultivating the personal strengths of Cal Poly Pomona students.

## Targeted Outcome

To assess whether or not CAPS is fulfilling its mission, the following student learning outcome was identified: Having participated in counseling at CAPS, students will indicate a drop in their level of distress on 2 out of 3 self-identified major concerns.

## Assessment Method

The Student Concerns Checklist (SCC) includes 56 items related to a student's emotional, intellectual, cognitive, and physical well being. All students seeking counseling at CAPS during Fall/Winter/Spring 2006-2007 were asked to complete the SCC before their first intake interview.

The checklist asks students to indicate all of the concerns they are currently experiencing and then asks them to identify their three "greatest concerns" and rate the level of distress they cause as: minimal, mild, moderate, severe, or extreme.

California State Polytechnic University, Pomona  
Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)  
**INITIAL STUDENT CONCERNS CHECKLIST**

Bronco Number \_\_\_\_\_

Please checkmark only those issues you are **currently experiencing**:

<b>Emotional Concerns</b>	<b>Stress or Anxiety Concerns</b>
1 ___ Sad, depressed, hopeless	27 ___ Fearful or anxious
2 ___ Tired, lack of energy	28 ___ Panic attacks
3 ___ Decrease in drive or motivation	29 ___ Stress, worry
4 ___ Isolation or feelings of loneliness	30 ___ Unwanted persistent or intrusive thoughts
5 ___ Irritability, hostility, anger	31 ___ Restlessness or feeling keyed up or on edge
6 ___ Feelings of worthlessness	32 ___ Shyness/discomfort in social settings

<b>Thinking Concerns</b>	<b>Other Concerns</b>
22 ___ Problems remembering	48 ___ Spiritual questions
23 ___ Difficulty making decisions	49 ___ Gender/identity issues
24 ___ Hearing voices, seeing things others don't	50 ___ Experiencing prejudice or discrimination
25 ___ Told my behavior is odd/eccentric	51 ___ Concerns about parenting my kids
26 ___ Poor concentration or focus	52 ___ Adjustment to college/homesickness
	53 ___ Cultural conflict
	54 ___ Financial concerns
	55 ___ Sexual identity/orientation questions
	56 ___ Other: _____

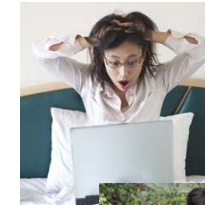
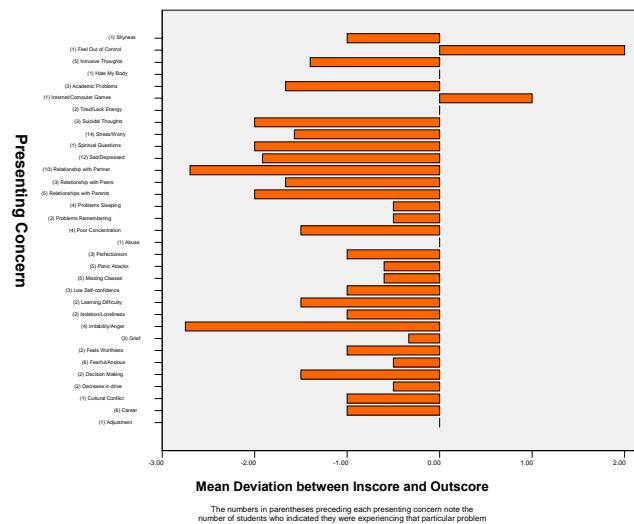
Of the items you checked, please choose the 3 that are of **greatest concern** to you, and rate the level of distress each is causing you:

	Item # or Description	___ Minimal	___ Mild	___ Moderate	___ Severe	___ Extreme
#1 Concern:	_____	___	___	___	___	___
#2 Concern:	_____	___	___	___	___	___
#3 Concern:	_____	___	___	___	___	___

Later in treatment and/or at termination, the SCC is re-administered to assess changes in reported symptoms and the severity of distress caused by the 3 greatest concerns noted by the student at intake.

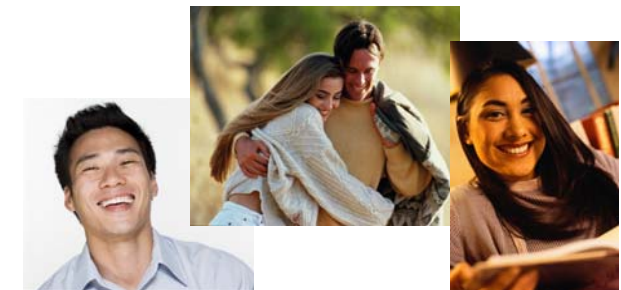
Data were collected for 120 students receiving therapy at CAPS, both at intake (inscore) and then either at a point later in treatment or at termination (outscore).

## Average Change in Level of Distress for "Most Pressing" Concerns



The average level of distress for all 33 greatest concerns identified at intake was 3.45. The average at the follow-up or termination point was 2.12. The average change in level of distress was -1.33.

A t-test comparing the mean deviation between distress level scores showed a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between students' scores of distress at intake and their scores of distress at termination or while therapy was in progress.



## Results

Students reported 33 different "greatest concerns." The most common major concerns were:

- Sad/Depressed
- Relationship with Romantic Partner
- Stress/Anxiety
- Career Decisions
- Missing Class

## Conclusion

This assessment makes it clear that seeking and receiving expert support for their most pressing concerns through a brief therapeutic encounter is effective in reducing student distress and removing psychological barriers to success.