



Application of Synergistic Supervision for Counseling Center Professionals

CCAPS Newsletter
May 2008

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Psychologists/counselors at University/College Counseling Centers are certainly not at a loss for relevant and applicable supervision research. Over the past few decades, the psychotherapy supervision literature has expanded dramatically, with clinical supervisors learning to consider multiple supervision process and outcome variables (e.g., parallel process factors, critical incidents, response modes, working alliance components, satisfaction assessments, identity stages, etc.). However, little, if any, research considers counseling trainees in the context of a greater culture of Student Affairs. For instance, outcome measures related to psychotherapy supervision rarely consider satisfaction with overall work environment or retention issues. Also, although there is a growing amount of supervision literature specifically addressing early career Student Affairs professionals, these data rarely, address the unique identity of counseling center psychologists and counselors. Our objectives for this article are two-fold. First, we sought to present a model of supervision that has been shown to be effective for early career student affairs professionals. Second, we considered the relevance and applicability of this model for early career counseling center counselors. Parts of this article were presented at the 2008 ACPA conference.

Synergistic supervision is defined as a supervision style that incorporates discussion of exemplary performance, discussion of long-term career goals, discussion of inadequate performance, frequency of informal performance appraisals, and discussion of personal attitudes. Tull's (2006) research demonstrated a positive significant correlation between perceived levels of synergistic supervision received and job satisfaction for new professionals in Student Affairs. In other words, the more one perceived he or she was getting synergistic supervision, the more satisfied he or she was with his or her student affairs position. Further, a significant negative correlation was shown between perceived level of synergistic supervision received and intention to turnover. Thus, the more one perceived he or she was getting synergistic supervision, the less likely he or she was to look for a new job or consider leaving his or her current position.

During the predoctoral internship and the postdoctoral year, the supervision provided to early career counseling center professionals focuses on further development of clinical skills. In preparing individuals for careers in student affairs, it would be helpful for directors and associate/assistant directors to incorporate tenets of synergistic supervision into their repertoire of administrative skills in order to promote the retention and job satisfaction of early career counseling center professionals in higher education. Discussions involving exemplary and inadequate performances could focus on functional areas of individual/ couples/ group counseling, outreach and consultation, training and crisis management. In addition, performance evaluation can be extended to cover areas including administrative tasks and interpersonal skills. The opportunity for informal performance appraisals could occur during weekly staff meetings when colleagues can provide spontaneous acknowledgement, recognition, or feedback to each other, thus improving the overall morale of the center. Winston and

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Creamer (1998) suggest that informal feedback could transpire in private between a supervisor and supervisee immediately after a performance since "praise and correction are most effective when given immediately after the activity's occurrence" (p. 33). This type of dialogue could also be effective between staff members, especially when the counseling center maintains an open-door policy. Conversations about long-term career goals would be a natural addition to a planning retreat held at the beginning, middle, and/or end of an academic term to ensure that early career professionals are allotted the time and space to reflect upon their occupational values and aspirations as well as to shape their future work experiences. For example, early career counseling center professionals often entertain/juggle interests in engaging in research, teaching courses, and/or pursuing a private practice. Finally, discussions of personal attitudes with early career professionals may invite an open and authentic dialogue about the congruency between their expectations and the reality of developing an identity and fit as a counseling center staff member. Because of the collaborative relationships that counseling center professionals strive to have with members across the division of student affairs, synergistic supervision could occur within informal relationships with mentors and colleagues from other offices, such as the Office of the Dean of Students and the Health Center.

In conclusion, supervisors may benefit from seeing their early career counseling center psychologists and counselors more holistically in terms of their professional development. It is important not only to consider specifically honed clinical skills but also to appreciate the broad big picture of one's identity development into the field of Counseling Center work.

Tull, A. (2006). Synergistic supervision, job satisfaction, and intention to turnover of new professionals in student affairs. *Journal of College Student Development*, 47 (4), 465-480.

Winston, R. B., & Creamer, D. G. (1998). Staff supervision and professional development: An integrated approach. In W. A. Bryan & R. A. Schwartz (Eds.), *Strategies for staff development: Personal and professional education in the 21st century* (New Directions for Student Services No. 84, pp. 29-42).