



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #638

Student Mental and Behavioral Health Support (UW System)

[LFB 2021-23 Budget Summary: Page 607, #8]

CURRENT LAW

The UW System offers student counseling services at each campus, including a range of programs and services by licensed behavior health clinicians, psychiatrists, psychologists, case managers, and nurses. The goal of these providers is to offer a safe and confidential environment to help students be successful.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. In its agency budget submission for the 2021-23 biennium, the UW System requested \$2.5 million GPR in 2021-22 and \$7.5 million GPR in 2022-23 to provide additional or improved student health services related to mental and behavioral health, including additional staffing, training, operations, assessment, and prevention. This level of funding would be provided in the Governor's 2021-23 budget recommendations.

2. According to an April, 2019, presentation on student behavioral and mental health by UW System faculty, students are reporting increased behavioral health issues and seeking help in record numbers; anxiety and depression are the most common student behavioral health concerns and are increasing and suicide is also on the rise; and behavioral health issues significantly impact the academic success and retention of students. The 2019-20 UW Counseling Impact Assessment Report (CIAR) cites data from the Center for Collegiate Mental Health from 2016 stating that counseling centers nationwide experienced a 30 to 40% increase in counseling utilization between 2009 and 2015. UW System counseling centers experienced a 41% increase during that time period despite relatively flat enrollment, according to the April, 2019, Board of Regents presentation. From 2015-16 to 2019-20, UW System counseling utilization increased by an additional 15%, according to the 2019-20 UW CIAR. The report notes that utilization decreased slightly in 2019-20,

likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic when students left campus during the spring semester and there was a small pause while counseling centers pivoted to providing counseling via telehealth services.

3. Counseling utilization has risen by over 60% since 2010, according to UW System, which System notes outpaced enrollment significantly. This has resulted in longer wait times at counseling centers and a reduced level of service for students. As demand for counseling has risen, the ratio of available counselors to students remains below the recommended level at many of the 13 UW System institutions. International Association of Counseling Services (IACS) Standards for University and College Counseling Services recommend minimum staffing ratios in the range of one FTE professional staff member (excluding trainees) for every 1,000 to 1,500 students, depending on services offered and other campus mental health agencies. As shown in the table, while most institutions have improved their counselor to student ratio from 2015 to 2019, with eight institutions where data was presented now meeting the 1:1,500 ratio, only two of the campuses currently meet the 1:1,000 ratio.

Ratio of Counselors to Students by Institution 2015 to 2019

	<u>2015</u>	<u>2016</u>	<u>2017</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>2019</u>
Eau Claire	1,599	1,526	1,312	1,544	1,100
La Crosse	1,706	1,573	1,566	1,568	1,229
Madison	1,636	981	951	830	708
Milwaukee	2,952	2,252	2,187	2,134	1,991
Oshkosh	1,441	1,356	1,349	1,403	1,105
Parkside	2,224	2,138	2,084	2,045	2,150
Platteville	2,543	2,177	1,739	1,616	1,474
River Falls	1,554	1,598	1,595	1,344	1,291
Stevens Point	1,434	1,443	1,212	1,145	1,512
Stout	1,558	1,697	1,364	1,270	949
Superior	1,321	1,577	947	918	1,339
Whitewater	1,737	1,626	1,855	1,558	1,751

Source: UW Counseling Impact Assessment Report 2019-20

4. According to UW System, of the \$10 million requested over the 2021-23 biennium, \$5.4 million of the annual funding would be utilized for salary and fringe benefits to fund 47 counselor positions across UW System to help each institution meet the 1:1,000 ratio standard. These positions would fill staffing gaps in the ability to serve under-represented and higher-risk student populations and staff skilled in providing campus outreach and education on mental health and well-being. According to UW System, providing this funding for counselors would increase student access, decrease wait-times, and improve overall quality of student care.

5. In addition to counseling utilization increases, campus health centers have also experienced increased demand for behavioral health services. According to the April, 2019, presentation to the Board of Regents, student behavioral health issues account for almost one-half of visits to a UW health services center. The presentation also noted that due to limited access to

psychiatric services, students are increasingly relying on health services for support. UW System indicates that \$3.45 million of the \$10 million in the 2021-23 biennium would be utilized to increase psychiatric staffing at UW-Madison and UW-Milwaukee, where psychiatric practitioners are available, as well as contract with a national telepsychiatry organization to provide remote psychiatric services for the other 11 institutions. According to UW System, increasing student access to psychiatric care would ensure students with more complex mental health needs receive the highest quality medical interventions and appropriate medication management and reduce the workload placed on primary care providers.

6. In addition to increased counseling and psychiatric staff, UW System indicates \$900,000 of the proposed funding would be utilized to provide additional case manager staff to ensure one case manager for each institution. Higher education case managers coordinate intervention and support efforts across campus and community systems to assist at-risk students, those who are facing crises, experiencing life stressors, and encountering barriers that impede success. Campus case managers triage reports of student concern from faculty, staff, students, and the outside community, manage crises, help concerned others to respond, refer students to on- and off-campus treatment resources, and monitor the impact of interventions on student success. According to UW System, providing additional case managers would increase campuses' ability to intervene early in high-risk situations, thereby reducing risks to the safety of an at-risk student to themselves and others.

7. UW indicates the remaining \$250,000 in proposed funding would be used for suicide prevention training and behavioral health grants. Approximately \$200,000 would be used to fund evidence-based suicide awareness/prevention training available online to all students, faculty, and staff. The final \$50,000 of proposed funding would be utilized to create an annual fund for grants to support campus-level development of unique and targeted programs to address particular behavioral health issues to promote innovation and help identify new approaches that could be considered for implementation at other campuses.

8. If the Committee wishes to provide additional funding for student behavioral and mental health, but at a lower level, \$7.65 million GPR in the 2021-23 biennium would fund 26.5 counselor positions and other related services, which would attain an estimated 1:1,250 counselor to student ratio. Alternatively, \$6.0 million GPR would fund 12.0 counselor positions and other related services, which would result in an estimated 1:1,500 counselor to student ratio.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Provide \$2,500,000 in 2021-22 and \$7,500,000 in 2022-23 in a new, annual appropriation to provide additional or improved student health services related to mental and behavioral health, including additional or improved staffing, training, operations, assessment, and prevention.

ALT 1	Change to Base
GPR	\$10,000,000

2. Provide \$2,000,000 in 2021-22 and \$5,650,000 in 2022-23 for increased student mental and behavioral health services, which would fund 26.5 counselor positions and related services consistent with a 1:1,250 counselor to student ratio.

ALT 2	Change to Base
GPR	\$7,650,000

3. Provide \$2,000,000 in 2021-22 and \$4,000,000 in 2022-23 for increased mental and behavioral health services, which would fund 12 counselor positions and related services consistent with a 1:1,500 counselor to student ratio.

ALT 3	Change to Base
GPR	\$6,000,000

4. Take no action.

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