

Student Counselling Policy

1. Background

The welfare of its student cohort is one of the key priorities of Gateway Business College (GBC). Crucial to student welfare is the effective provision of mental health and wellbeing counselling services developed to support and assist students if the need arises, in addition to GBC's academic support and channels for students seeking medical attention. The provision of freely available and effective mental health and counselling services is an integral part of student welfare services and vital to ensuring students are given every opportunity to complete their program of study.

2. Purpose

This policy outlines the scope of GBC's counselling services, and will outline the processes through which students can utilise counselling services. Specifically, the policy will outline under what circumstances students can obtain a referral to GBC's counselling services and the limits of the services available throughout the counselling service. The policy will also outline the review processes that will be utilised to ensure all practices are up to date and applicable to GBC itself.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the *Student Welfare Policy* and the *Information to Students Policy*.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all students currently enrolled at GBC, as well as all staff members in student-facing or student service roles.

4. Definitions

Academic Board: the board responsible for academic governance at GBC. The Academic Board reports and advises the Corporate Governance Board on academic activity. This board oversees academic activities such as teaching, learning, scholarship, research, course approval, student outcomes, academic standards and academic policy.

Academic staff: staff engaged in higher education teaching, learning and research as employees of GBC.

At risk: A student who fails to meet the minimum academic requirements of a course of study and is at risk of making unsatisfactory progress.

Corporate Governance Board: the formally constituted governing body accountable for the governance of GBC as a higher education operation.

Counsellor: An individual trained to give guidance on personal or psychological problems.

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Student Support Services: Services offered to students at GBC that provide academic and non-academic assistance.

5. Principles

5.1 Student rights

All students have the right to a safe and supportive learning environment.

All students must be treated fairly and equally regardless of their background.

All students must have access to reasonable support when they are going through difficult or disadvantageous circumstances.

Students must have access to welfare counselling from a dedicated, professional and independent counsellor.

All welfare counselling sessions must be private and confidential.

Students must not be disadvantaged in their studies due to any information they provide during any official counselling sessions.

5.2 GBC responsibilities

GBC must take all claims of difficult or disadvantageous circumstances seriously.

All GBC teaching staff are required to proactively identify any disadvantaged individuals who are in need of additional support mechanisms.

Counselling services form part of the overall framework that supports student welfare at GBC, for which the Corporate Governance Board holds ultimate responsibility.

Providers of student counselling at GBC will pay attention to the specific individual circumstances of all students undergoing counselling sessions. Counselling will address the personal, mental and physical health of students with the aim of improving the student's academic experience, their personal wellbeing, and encouraging the fulfilment of their potential.

5.3 Diversity and equitable access

GBC is committed to ensuring equitable access to higher education and will develop a teaching and learning environment that caters to students from groups who are under-represented in the student population, and to students who face extenuating circumstances that may affect their learning. This may include students who:

- have a disability or long-term illness
- experience difficult family circumstances
- have been unduly affected by socio-economic circumstances
- completed secondary school in a regional or isolated area
- identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

GBC greatly values diversity and recognizes that providing adequate support services is key to promoting diversity.

6. Procedures

6.1 Providing information to students about counselling services

GBC's counselling services, including the availability of external counselling services to which students can be referred for problems that require additional professional intervention. This will be clearly advertised throughout GBC's campus as well as on its website.

Additionally, information regarding GBC's counselling services will be effectively communicated to students upon enrolment, in the Student Handbook issued to each student.

Information about student support services, including counselling, will also be communicated to new students during the Orientation Program (refer to the *Orientation Policy*.)

All Student Administration staff must have current contact information for students to access support services upon request.

6.2 Student referrals to counselling services

Students may be referred to GBC's counselling services through the following avenues:

Self-referral

Students may refer themselves to counselling services. GBC will clearly advertise the processes through which students can contact student support and counselling services in order to initiate counselling sessions.

Referral by members of GBC's academic teaching staff

Any member of academic staff may refer a student to counselling services after direct consultation with the student in question.

Referral by members of Gateway's non-academic staff

Any member of general staff may refer a student to counselling services after direct consultation with the student in question.

Additionally, any member of GBC staff may encourage a student to access counselling services without a direct referral themselves, as long as this is done sensitively and confidentially.

6.3 Academic staff intervention

Academic staff will be available for consultation with students in relation to course progression and study load advice. Information about how to schedule a consultation with GBC's academic staff will be made clear on the GBC website and through the Learning Management System.

Should academic staff believe that a student is dealing with issues not purely academic, they will refer the student to the certified counsellors employed at GBC.

The principal aim of this intervention is to improve the likelihood of satisfactory academic and/or personal outcomes.

6.4 Counselling sessions

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All counselling sessions will be conducted within regular working hours (Monday to Friday, 9:00am – 5:00pm, excluding public holidays and periods where the campus is closed). However, in an emergency, counselling sessions may take place outside regular working hours.

GBC requires that counsellors be available during all work hours, and, in cases of emergency, on-call during non-work hours.

Counselling sessions will be provided free of charge to students enrolled at GBC.

The length and frequency of counselling sessions will be determined by the counsellor, informed by the individual needs of the student undergoing counselling.

6.5 Confidentiality

Students may be required to disclose personal information to the counsellor before counselling so that the counsellor may get a better grasp of the student's circumstances, and better assist the student in overcoming his/her problems.

It is imperative that all counselling sessions are conducted in a professional, ethical and tactful manner. Counsellors must maintain strict student confidentiality throughout all counselling sessions, except in the event a counsellor believes a student poses a threat to themselves or others.

In the event a counsellor cannot maintain a student's confidentiality, they will inform the student of their intent to share details of the counselling session with relevant GBC personnel, or in extreme cases external crisis intervention authorities.

6.6 External referral

Any student who displays behaviour or feels that their well-being and physical and/or mental health requires the advice of a professional with expertise beyond that of the GBC counsellor will be referred to an appropriate external expert. GBC will ensure that any such external referral does not place an unnecessary financial burden on the student.

Should a counsellor employed at GBC believe a student to require external aid such as a general practitioner or psychiatrist, the counsellor may make the referral without permission from GBC.

Students will still be able to utilise GBC's counselling services if they are receiving external aid at the same time.

6.7 Record-keeping

Professional records of counselling sessions will be confidential and will identify the student's name, the date of the session, and a brief account of the issues discussed. The counsellor will keep all records in locked filing cabinet, to which only they have access.

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7. Review

This policy will be reviewed by the Academic Board every three years, or more frequently should the Board deem it necessary.

Document History			
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1.	6.1 Clarification of availability of external counselling if required 6.6 Clarification of the process of external referral		