

Counseling Center for Students at the University of Athens: Function, Services and Activities

<http://en.skf.psych.uoa.gr/>



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Introduction

- ▶ University students constitute a group with special characteristics and needs associated to their developmental stage
- ▶ Greek university students in particular were found to be 1,5 to 2 times more likely to develop a psychological disorder comparing to the general population according to a large epidemiological study.
- ▶ Psychological difficulties can have a profound impact on academic performance and on the quality of students' lives in general.
- ▶ They also more often result in the prolongation of the study duration with many financial and social implications



Introduction

- ▶ There is a political consensus both at the International and at the European level regarding the need to develop psychological counseling services within an effective and coherent student support system which will enable students to deal with difficulties interfering with successful completion of their studies.
- ▶ This has led to the development of student psychological services across universities
- ▶ European Higher Education Area- EUA, 2010



The goal of student psychological counseling: *The successful adaptation to the new learning environment*

Successful adaptation includes :

- ▶ Study duration and graduation at a reasonable time period
- ▶ Satisfaction from the studies
- ▶ Maintenance of well being
- ✓ Critical restriction: discontinuation of the studies as a mature personal, carefully thought decision in order to maintain psychological health/ well being

“a new ideal is being cultivated:, the technocrat student with decreased critical thinking and resistances” (Ackermann & Schumann, 2009),

“The original cultural goals were replaced by a spirit of competition that mirrors the world of business and trade”

- ▶ The social / professional role of the psychologists/student counselors within current economical and social conditions



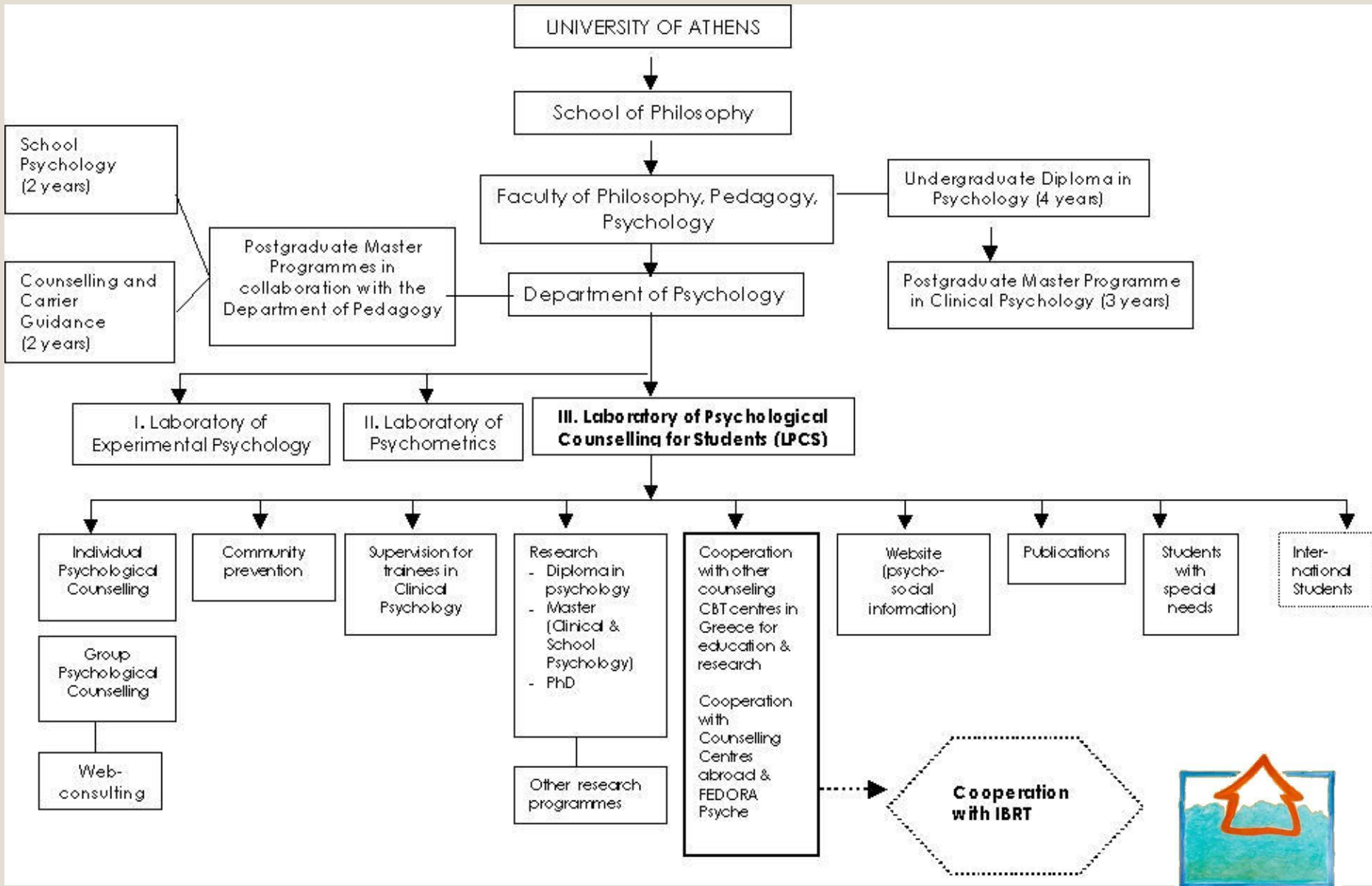
Introduction



- ▶ The Counseling Centre for Students at the University of Athens was established in 1990 and is officially a part of the Department of Psychology of Athens University. The major goal of the Centre is to offer psychological counseling namely, to help and support the students from all departments of Athens University to effectively face the problems that they may encounter during university life.



Counseling Center for Students



STAFF

- ▶ Director: Prof. Kalantzi- Azizi, A.
- ▶ Psychologist: Dr. Charila, D.
- ▶ Secretary: Papaioanou, O.
- ▶ 10 volunteers
- ▶ 2-3 trainees (postgraduate Clinical Psychology students)



Remarks:

- ▶ The status of the center has changed since 2000: The Center has been renamed as “Laboratory of Psychological Counseling” so as to be more autonomous and flexible in obtaining funding from other resources (e.g. European Programs, sponsorships)
- ▶ The annual funding that the Center obtains from University is 2000 Euros per year!!!
- ▶ 1 psychologist / 120.000 students!!!!



Introduction



- ▶ The Director of the Center is a member of the European Forum for Student Guidance (FEDORA) and a founding member of FEDORA - PSYCHE (the division of FEDORA for Psychological Counseling).
- ▶ The Center's staff regularly attends all the activities of FEDORA and has organized the **2007 Fedora-Psyche Conference in Crete**



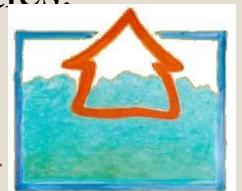


Counseling-Education –Supervision- Research-Publications

*A Service designed according to the principles
of scientist –practitioner model*

The main purposes and activities of the Centre are as follows:

- ▶ Counseling Services
 - ❑ Individual counseling (Charila: The Laboratory of Psychological Counseling for students, Athens University, 17.06.11, Session 3, 14:30-16:14)
 - ❑ Peer counseling, (Daliana & Theologis: www.mpes.uoa.gr)
 - ❑ Students with special needs (Sofianopoulou: Accessibility Unit for Students with Disabilities: mission, services and the 3-year experience from the psychological counseling service)
 - ❑ Web-counseling: a brief interaction with a mental health professional via written electronic communication
 - ❑ Group counseling (e.g. test anxiety, communication skills, relationship matters, confidence, etc.).
- ▶ The conduct of scientific lectures, meetings, seminars, symposium, congresses, scientific events, publications, and editions and the invitation of Greek and foreign recognized scientists.
- ▶ The cooperation of any type with Research Centers and Local and Foreign Academic Institutions, if the scientific aims coincide, fit and interrelate with those of the laboratory.
- ▶ The coverage in undergraduate and postgraduate level of teaching and research needs on subjects falling within the objectives of the laboratory's activities.



Counseling Services



'There's really no need for confusion. Page 95, section 33, paragraph L in this scholarship application instructions quite clearly says ... '

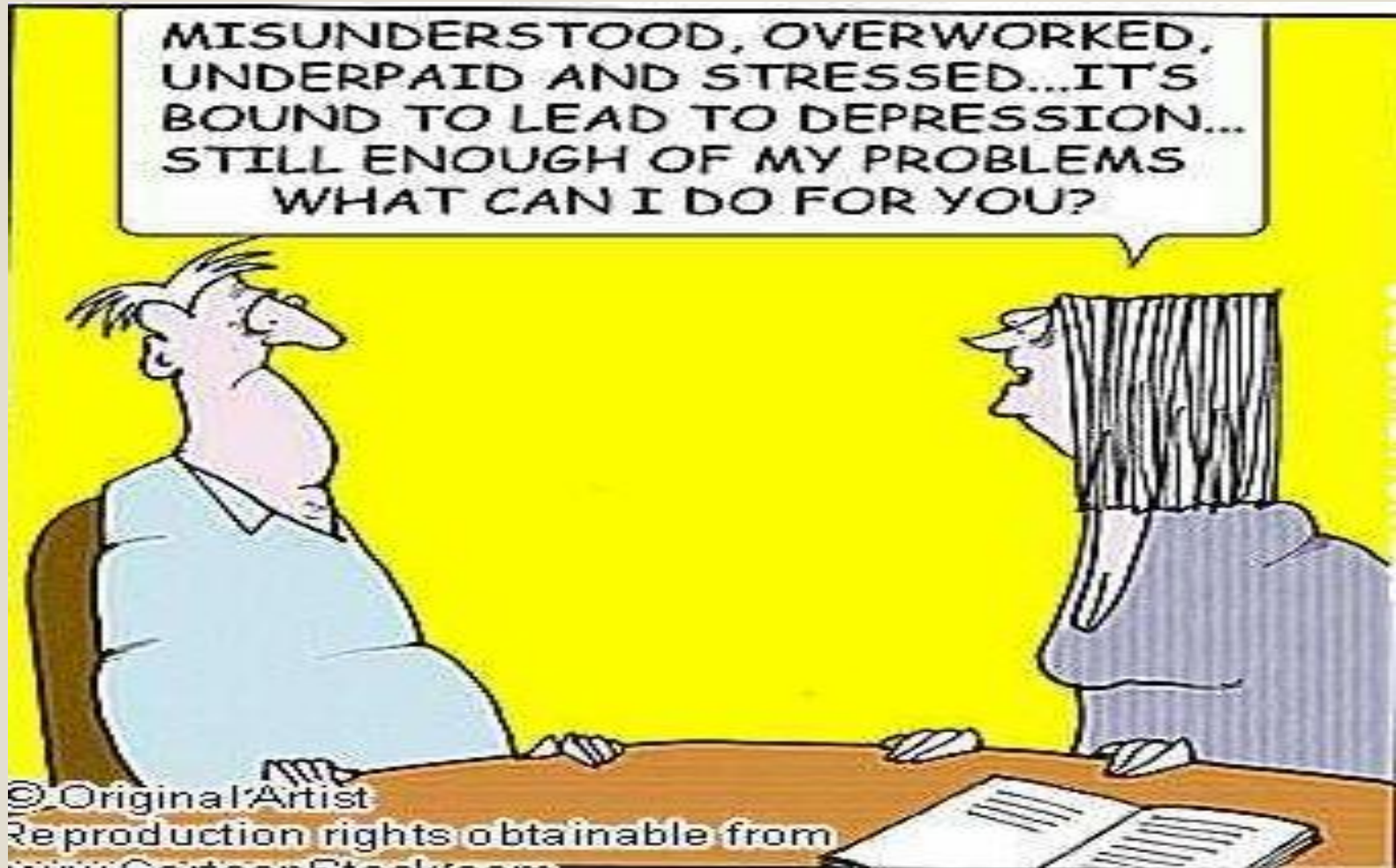


main functions are counseling and support

- ❑ Studies-Student life (e.g. test-anxiety, academic difficulties, adjustment to student life).
- ❑ Relationship problems (e.g. friends, fellow students, family, companion).
- ❑ Other personal problems and anxiety manifestations (e.g. under-achievement, lack of interest, bodily manifestations of psychological origin, isolation problems).
- ▶ Students can use the services provided by the Centre for a duration of 6 months after the completion of their studies.
- ▶ The Centre provides the students with the chance to discuss with an expert the matters that concern them. The meetings are of individual nature, fully confidential and free of charge.



Training -Supervision



Training of postgraduate students according to the principles of the **scientist–practitioner model**

- ▶ The **scientist–practitioner model**, also called the **Boulder model**, is a training model for graduate programs that focuses on creating a foundation of research and scientific practice.
- ▶ According to this model, a psychologist is a scientist and a competent researcher, and also a practitioner who applies knowledge and techniques to solve problems of clients.
- ▶ Some have questioned if it is possible, in today's climate, to continue to expect practicing clinical psychologists to be able to adhere to the ideals and tenets of the scientist–practitioner model. Many clinicians find it difficult to complete their practical duties let alone conduct research (which often goes unfunded) or to remain up-to-date with cutting edge science.



Training and supervision of postgraduate students in student counseling

- ▶ 2-3 Clinical and Counseling Psychology Postgraduate Students
- ▶ Clinical Practice (duration: 1 Academic year, short form: 3 days a week, long form: daily): Undertaking of 4-8 cases, participation in group counseling, training in psychological assessment, training in student population's special characteristic and needs as well as in cognitive behavioral therapy
- ▶ Training in the presentation and recording of clinical cases
- ▶ Group supervision (once a week)



Benefits of Group Supervision

- ▶ Trust and safety,
- ▶ learning from others,
- ▶ greater self-awareness,
- ▶ social support, and
- ▶ more professional identity.



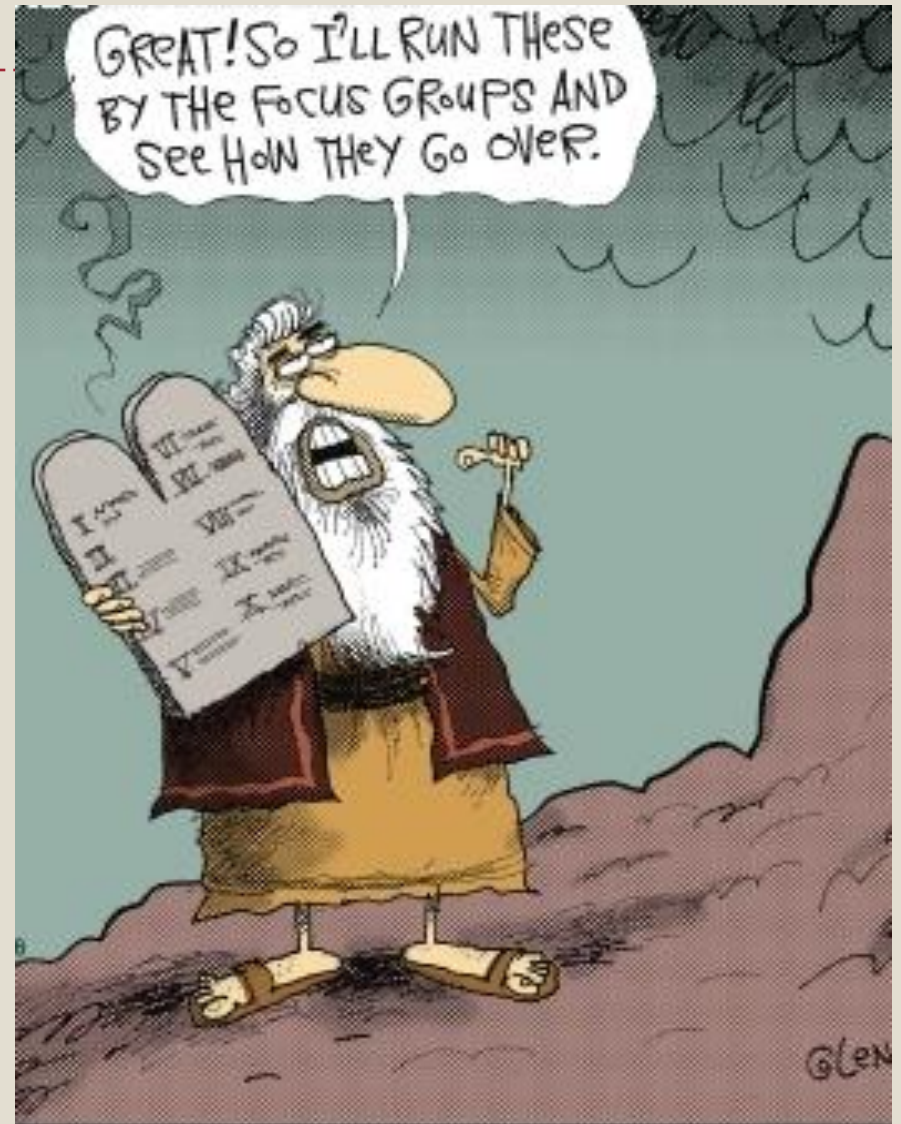
Research- Publications- Activities



"Contrary to popular opinion, most people's opinions aren't so popular."

Research

- ▶ Undergraduate & postgraduate theses
- ▶ Dissertations (PhD)
- ▶ Research programs in cooperation with national and international institutions, funded from EU or other Organisms



Research Projects

- ▶ Research interests: Student Psychological Counseling, Cognitive-behavioral psychotherapy for university students, development, implementation and qualitative assessment of intervention programs, university students issues, adjustment of assessment tools, epidemiological studies and so on

Examples of completed research projects:

- ▶ Panhellenic Epidemiological Study of Psychological Health in Student Population (2007)
- ▶ Development and evaluation of a student psychological Web-Counseling Service
- ▶ Development and evaluation of a web-based students peer counseling Service.
- ▶ The stress process, self-efficacy expectations, and psychological health



Current Research Projects

▶ **Doctoral Dissertations in progress:**

Sofianopoulou A.: Variables related to smoking behavior maintenance among students in Greece

Leontiadou, A. : Depression characteristics in university student population

Argiropoulou, M. : A study of academic procrastination



Publications

- ▶ Papers in national and international journals
- ▶ Oral presentations, symposiums, posters, workshops in national and international conferences
- ▶ Publication and dissemination of informative brochures, booklets, posters and so on
- ▶ Seminars, lectures, cooperation with national & international institutions



Discussion

- 1) Funding: Inadequate funding from University of Athens (2000 euros per year), insufficient number of staff (1 psychologist for 120.000 students)
- 2) Concerns regarding the future of psychological counseling within current financial situation
- 3) Law does not force Universities to create Counseling Services, “gap in the law”

