

# Counseling and Academic Advising

An Overview of 4 Community Colleges (online  
edited version)

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## **Note to the Online Edited Version**

This report has been edited significantly for publication online.

The original, unabridged version of this report is available for review by contacting the author: Douglas Smyth.

## **Introduction**

In my sabbatical application I proposed visiting at least three community colleges to examine the relationship between counseling and academic advising services offered at each school. How do other schools align the work of counselors and advisors? What philosophical positions or “best practices” inform their work? What practical and budget considerations inform their processes? What is the future for counseling and academic advising in the community college setting?

I actually visited four community colleges and was rebuffed in an attempted visit to a fifth (see below). The colleges I visited were:

- *Glendale Community College (Maricopa System, Phoenix Arizona), June 2009*
- *Miami Dade College (Kendall Campus, Miami Florida), April 2010*
- *Hackney Community College (London, United Kingdom), May 2010*
- *Bunker Hill Community College (Boston Massachusetts), June 2010*

This report is based on these site visits. I report on each school individually with an attempt to address the above-cited questions. Naturally, some comparisons with Lane Community College (LCC) are drawn and will be evident in the narrative below.

## **Miami Dade College (Kendall Campus)**

### **Overview**

Miami Dade College (formerly Miami Dade Community College) is a large system of 8 campuses in and around Miami Florida. The name change (dropping “Community”) is reflective a recent move by the college to begin offering bachelors (as well as associate) degrees. This move is being embraced by other Florida community colleges as well.



While not the main campus, the Kendall Campus is one of the largest in the Miami-Dade system. It lies to the Southwest of downtown Miami and is approximately 3 times larger than LCC in terms of student population. It was the largest campus I visited.

### **Sources**

Meetings with Vanya Albury, Director of Student Retention and Transition Services; and Jose Rodriguez, Interim Director of the New Student Center. Both directors serve the Kendall Campus. Additionally, information was provided by another party (edited).

### **Counseling and Advising**

Miami Dade does not offer counseling and employs no counselors. It offers very limited academic advising services. It offers limited career services (no career counseling) and recently merged academic advising and career services into a single office secondary to budget considerations.

Initial academic advising (a single mandatory 2-hour orientation session) is provided by a team of academic advisors. All additional academic advising is provided by instructional faculty in the area of the student's major. If the student has not declared a major, no personal advising services are offered beyond the initial orientation session. The student is urged to choose a major in order to receive academic advising from appropriate department faculty. No counseling services are offered to help students select majors. Additionally, Miami Dade is in the process of developing an online orientation.

Students are encouraged to use existing online resources for ongoing academic advising and career resources. Miami Dade maintains a “Web-Portal” and students are instructed in its use during their orientation. The portal contains a degree-audit tool, though it was unclear to me if this was actually functioning properly during its demonstration. Among the touted abilities of the degree-audit online tool were its ability to cite prerequisite courses and direct/chart progress in particular required course sequences (e.g., writing development or a particular career-technical sequence).

In addition to academic advising, the online tool is also the vehicle employed by Miami Dade for career development. Mr. Rodriguez identified this as a tool for “career counseling,” though many in the counseling field would argue that it is an ethical breach to use a “counseling” citation and would insist instead that an online tool could be no more than an “advising” instrument. In any case, it is this tool (“Choices Planner”) that Miami Dade uses to provide students with career direction, and no career counselors are employed. Instead, advisors in the newly merged career and advising office instruct students in online “Choices Planner” use. They also use another online program (“Nace-Link”) as a vehicle for students to research job postings and get job advice such as “Dress for Success.”

### **Relevant History**

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### **Summary**

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# Hackney Community College

## Overview

Hackney Community College is the only non-US school I visited. It is located in the Shoreditch area of the Borough of Hackney. It is in Northeast London on the site of a former trade school. It was also the smallest school I visited, having an unduplicated FTE of approximately 9,000 students. For comparison, it is about one quarter the size of LCC. Additionally, Hackney is ethnically diverse. 58% of its students are drawn from ethnic minority groups.



Hackney's neighborhood is significantly working class and urban. Though in recent years younger, more trendy venues have appeared in the nearby neighborhoods. Still, at Hackney Community College itself, personal safety is a predominant concern. Outside of delivery entrances, there is a single, guarded entrance gate for students

and staff. This gate area is perhaps 25 feet wide and requires an electronic key-card for admittance. Visitors to the campus are held temporarily in a double lock-doored reception area until clearance is granted and a visitor's pass issued. Moreover, once inside the gate to the campus, it is apparent that one is inside a walled city, somewhat akin to a fortress.



## Sources

Meetings with Sharon McLean, Student Liaison Officer and Theresa Webb, Counselor (in photo).

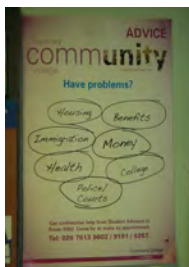


## Counseling and Advising

Counseling and academic advising are housed in separate offices and have little interface. Academic advising is provided through the Customer Service Unit and employs academic advisors for this purpose. All students have access to academic advising.

Hackney houses a small counseling office. It employs a full-time manager, a single full-time counselor, and two part-time counselors.

Counselors provide psychological services including mental health counseling. They provide psycho-educational tutorials on life skills, college success, addictions, sexuality, relationships, career/major choice, etc. They provide referral services for medical health needs as Hackney has no on-site medical facility.



Counselors also provide quasi-legal services and advice. Hackney has a large population of UK immigrants, and counselors frequently address immigration issues. Counselors need to keep current on visa and other immigration concerns as it relates to Hackney students.

Counselors provide limited career counseling. They assist students in selecting general career paths or majors, but for significant or extended career counseling they refer to an outside agency, "Connexions." A link to "Connexions" can be found on their website.

In the UK, counseling credentialing is more strict and controlled than in the US. In the US, credentialing is left to individual states. In the state of Oregon, "counselor" or "counseling" are not protected titles as they are in California, for instance. In the UK, they are protected titles. All Hackney counselors are required to participate in an annual reaccreditation process. The counseling center itself receives a reaccreditation review every four years (a process scheduled for the week following my interviews at Hackney).

## Summary

Of the four colleges I visited, Hackney is the smallest. It currently offers both individualized academic advising and counseling based student services. Unlike LCC, these services are split into two separate departments. Counselors do not offer academic advising, nor do advisors offer counseling. Credentialing is a significant issue for counselors who need to be recertified on an annual basis.

# Bunker Hill Community College

## Overview

Bunker Hill Community College is the community college that serves the Boston area. It is located in the Charlestown section of Boston, within short walking distance to the summit of Bunker Hill. It also maintains a minor claim to fame as the community college represented in the film, "Good Will Hunting." Charlestown is an historic residential neighborhood, though the college facility maintains none of the historic character of its surroundings. Most of the main campus is a series of interconnected buildings circa the mid 1970s.



Bunker Hill is a medium-sized community college, though less than half the size of LCC in terms of student population. It is a diverse community, with over 60% of its student population being people of color. Surprisingly, it draws most of its student body (65%) outside of Boston city limits.

## Sources

Meetings with Anne Brown, Director of Advising, Counseling, and Assessment; and with Susan Dole and Sara Satham, both of whom are counselors shown in the photo.



## Counseling and Advising

Like LCC, Bunker Hill employs both counselors and academic advisors to assist students in initial registration and course selection. Like Miami Dade (and unlike LCC), at Bunker Hill students are referred to departmental faculty for academic advising beyond the initial advising session. In addition to advising services, counselors also provide career counseling and limited personal services (see below).



Initial academic advising (a single mandatory 1¼ -hour orientation session) is provided by a team of counselors and academic advisors. Sessions are small group (10-15 students) and have a somewhat personal feel to them.

Beyond the initial session, additional academic advising is provided by instructional faculty in the area of the student's major. If the student has not declared a major, they may see a counselor or advisor beyond the initial orientation session. Additionally, the counselors reported that many students are sent back to them because they prematurely choose a major, an issue discovered after the fact by departmental faculty.

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### **Relevant History**

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### **Summary**

Bunker Hill Community College is a medium-sized college serving an urban population. Departmental faculty provide the lion's share of academic advising, though counselors and advisors also provide this service. Counselors' roles have shifted dramatically through the history of Bunker Hill.

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## Glendale Community College, Maricopa System

### Overview

Glendale Community College is part of the Maricopa System of Community Colleges. Maricopa houses 10 separate colleges and two “skills centers” in the Phoenix area. Unlike Miami Dade College, colleges in the Maricopa System retain their individual identity. Glendale itself has two separate campuses.



Glendale is a medium-large community college, approximately the same size as LCC in terms of student population. It also dates to the same era as LCC (mid 1960s). Though also a 2-year school, Glendale generally offers a wider variety of programs and degrees than does LCC.



Glendale (Main) is a physically attractive campus located on sizeable acreage Northeast of downtown Phoenix Arizona. A beautiful, palm-lined pedestrian parkway runs through the center of campus. Both the Enrollment Center (advising offices) and Counseling Department buildings abut this parkway.

### Source

Meeting with Bruce Thomas, Department Chair of the Counseling Department.

Mr. Thomas is also a counselor. The Counseling Department at Glendale employs a “Faculty Chair” model; there is no “Director” drawn from administrative ranks. At Glendale, Faculty Chairs rotate in/out of their positions every three years, unless there is agreement among the faculty for renewing the appointment.



### Counseling and Advising

Glendale offers significant counseling and academic advising services. Of the four schools I visited, Glendale was clearly the most robust in terms of services offered to students. Not surprisingly, counseling and advising staff morale appeared healthier than at the other visited colleges.

Initial and ongoing academic advising is offered by a team of specialized academic advisors. They are housed in their own building (The Enrollment Center), located at one of the main entrances to campus. All students participate in a mandatory orientation session in which advisors take the lead (though counselors are also present). Still, the main role of academic advisors is to offer individualized academic advising as students continue to advance in their coursework. Students are encouraged to keep regular contact with advisors, though they are especially directed to advisors for assistance with meeting specific program requirements, placement concerns, and assessing graduation requirements.

Counselors do not provide any academic advising. At Glendale, academic advising is viewed as a specialized area, quite separate from counseling. In fact, Mr. Thomas appeared stunned when I asked if counselors provide academic advising services. He responded in such a way as to make clear that counselors would never attempt to do so and would refer those kinds of inquiries to an academic advisor.

As with academic advising, counseling services also appeared robust at Glendale. Glendale employs 10 full-time counselors who are members of the faculty. Counselors teach and provide psycho-educational workshops for students. Course/group topics typically focus on issues such as student success, beginning college, multiculturalism, stress management, programs for athletes, overcoming aggressive behavior, etc.



Counselors also provide training for faculty on classroom management and behavior issues. Mr. Thomas noted student behavior issues have been a concern at Glendale. He estimated that since he has been department chair, he has dealt with 10 registered sex offenders, 300-400 gang members, and 40 restraining orders. From my observation in touring campus with Mr. Thomas, counselors appeared well received and significantly appreciated in every academic department we visited.

In addition to teaching/training responsibilities, counselors provide crisis intervention services for students and staff on campus, as well as ongoing mental health services to students. They offer individual services for treating mental health or mood concerns. Up to three individual sessions are offered to any student for stabilization and referral purposes, though often students continue beyond this limit with shortened sessions.

Counselors provide career consultation and counseling at Glendale. The front portion, waiting room section of the department is designed to encourage career exploration as well as waiting for an appointment. While CNN plays on one ceiling-mounted television in the corner of the waiting room, several computer stations are also available offering students access to online career search instruments. Counselors provide individual career counseling appointments to student to assist with the selection of major or career. Personality and career assessment instruments are employed to assist this effort.



In addition to standard counseling services, Glendale's Counseling Department also partners with a degree program (Behavioral Health Science Program) that offers a 2-year paraprofessional degree in mental health. Counselors serve as mentors to advanced students in this program.

### **Summary**

Glendale is a medium-large size college on a par with LCC in terms of student population. Counseling and academic advising are viewed as separate professions and located in separate offices (and buildings). Referrals are made between centers. The two departments coordinate their work, but services offered in each area remain distinct. Both departments are well staffed. Staff morale is high.

The Counseling Department is governed by a rotating faculty chair. Counseling services appear broad, varied and well appreciated by other faculty and staff.

## **Conclusion**

In my initial sabbatical proposal, I described a mission to investigate “best practices” as they relate to counseling and advising models in a few, somewhat prestigious community colleges.

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Of all the colleges in my study, Glendale Community College in the Maricopa System exemplified best practices. Glendale provides robust (though separate) academic advising and counseling services. The clear focus at Glendale was student success. The college appeared ready and willing to support significant student services with funding. Counseling and advising staffs were large, well funded, and creative in their approaches to addressing student needs. Staff morale was high. Glendale offers a model worth studying, if not outright emulating.

## **Thanks**

I thank the sabbatical committee of Faculty Professional Development for granting this sabbatical. The information gleaned, though not entirely heartening, has exceeded my expectations. I hope this report will be of use to the counselors at LCC, my department, and LCC administration as it continues to shape the services we provide students. Thank you, again. –Doug Smyth