

Notice of Privacy Practices/Informed Consent Initial Assessment

Counseling Center (CC)

Effective Date: July 1, 2016

THIS NOTICE DESCRIBES HOW PSYCHOLOGICAL INFORMATION ABOUT YOU MAY BE USED AND DISCLOSED AND HOW YOU CAN GET ACCESS TO THIS INFORMATION. PLEASE REVIEW IT CAREFULLY.

Confidentiality: How Your Privacy Is Protected

We will use and protect your information in compliance with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Code of Virginia.

CC records are kept separate from academic, disciplinary, and medical records to ensure your privacy and confidentiality. CC records are maintained in an electronic database that is stored in a secured, password protected environment and accessible only to CC staff. Further, all CC staff sign a binding confidentiality agreement that prohibits the unauthorized release of client information. To further protect your confidentiality, CC staff members do not acknowledge that they are familiar with clients while outside the Center, unless the client acknowledges the staff member first.

Information obtained during CC sessions will not be disclosed to anyone outside the Center without your knowledge and written consent. If you sign a written authorization allowing us to disclose information, you can later cancel your authorization in writing, and we will not disclose any further information after we receive your cancellation.

The only exceptions to these strict confidentiality rules are rare instances where clinicians are required to reveal particular information by federal or state laws. Such exceptions include when:

- We believe that there is a substantial likelihood that a client will cause serious physical harm to her/himself or another person unless protective measures are taken. In these cases, Virginia law mandates that the parents of dependent students must be notified of the situation.
- We have reasonable cause to believe that a child is being abused or neglected or an aged or incapacitated adult is being subject to abuse, neglect, or exploitation.
- We receive a court order upon good cause shown or in compliance with a subpoena.
- We receive a request for information after a threat assessment team at a public institution of higher education has determined that you pose a threat of violence to yourself and/or others, or exhibit significantly disruptive behavior or need for assistance.
- We are approached by authorized federal officials for information related to national security and intelligence activities. By law, we may not be able to reveal to the client when we have disclosed such information to the government.
- We need to seek legal advice from JMU's University Legal Services.
- The parents of a minor (i.e., a student who is under the age of 18) request information.

Individual client files may also be reviewed by the CC's accrediting agency during scheduled site visits.

Use of Electronic Mail

Because of the high value we place on the privacy of those utilizing our services, staff members of the CC use email only to address scheduling issues. Further, we cannot guarantee that e-mail messages will be read regularly or within an appropriate period of time, especially in emergency situations. If you have a need to communicate about matters other than scheduling, please contact us either in-person (3rd floor, Student Success Center) or by phone (540-568-6552).

Social Networking

Because online relationships can compromise client confidentiality and the respective privacy of both clients and staff, CC staff will not accept clients or students with whom they have professional relationships as friends or contacts on social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.).

Faxing of Confidential Information

With your consent, the CC may fax confidential information to other professionals to facilitate your care. When faxing confidential information, CC staff complete a cover sheet which states that the information contained in the fax is confidential, attempt to fax the document at a time when it will be immediately retrieved by the recipient, and request confirmation from the recipient that the fax was received.

Training and Employment at the CC

To avoid ethical issues that may occur when the CC staff relate to an individual in a role other than as a client, all current and former CC clients will be excluded from training and employment opportunities at the CC.

Requests for Confidential Information by Non-Treatment Agencies

Acceptance into certain academic programs and/or fields of employment (e.g., law, government, Peace Corp, military) may be contingent upon a student's willingness to permit the release of confidential psychological information. To protect the privacy of students, it is the general policy of the CC to not release information gained in therapeutic work to non-treatment agencies. Further, we decline to make judgments about the suitability of a former client for a position, whether s/he is a security risk, or similar evaluations.

Court-Mandated Services

The CC does not provide services to students who are required to receive pre-adjudication and/or court-mandated mental health treatment or assessment. Students seeking such services will be provided referrals to professionals in the Harrisonburg community.

CC Involvement in Office of Student Accountability & Restorative Practices (OSARP) Proceedings

To avoid ethical issues that may occur when the CC staff relate to an individual in a role other than as a client, CC staff will not participate as witnesses or as support persons in OSARP proceedings. CC involvement will be limited to a form letter indicating only the dates of attended appointments.

Research

The CC collects client information for our own internal planning, quality assurance, and accreditation efforts and to educate the University's faculty and staff about the issues and needs confronting JMU's students. All data is presented in group form, and to maintain confidentiality, no information about individual students is provided.

Questions or Complaints about Confidentiality

If you are concerned that we have violated your privacy rights or disagree with a decision we made about access to your records, you may contact the Director of the CC at (540) 568-6552. All complaints must be submitted in writing. If you file a complaint, we will not take action against you or change our treatment of you in any way.

Contacting the CC in an Emergency

During regular office hours, emergency appointments can be scheduled by phone (540-568-6552) or in person. Emergency appointments are handled on a first-come, first-serve basis, according to counselor availability and the urgency of the request. After working hours and on weekends, contact the Campus Police and Public Safety Office (540-568-6911) and ask them to contact the counselor on call.

If you are dealing with a crisis situation that demands an immediate response, please proceed to the Emergency Department at Sentara RMH Medical Center, 2010 Health Campus Drive (540-689-1414).