



University Counseling Services Handbook

Introduction

University Counseling Services is integral to the mission of the American University of Sharjah (AUS). The center exists to support the university's mission by enhancing and promoting the psychological well-being of all students, faculty, staff, and their families.

Mission Statement

The primary purpose of the American University of Sharjah's University Counseling Services is to provide psychological support to students, faculty, university staff, and their families as they pursue their academic and personal goals, and to enhance the quality of each community member's experience at AUS. We aim to support the learning environment of the university by promoting positive mental health for the community through counseling, crisis intervention, consulting, assessments, and referrals that are responsive to the individual, cultural, and demographic diversity of our community.

Vision Statement

University Counseling Services aspires to become an exemplary counseling center that enhances the self-understanding and well-being of all members of the AUS community. UCS is dedicated to providing evidence-based best practices in prevention and intervention services and programs in a supportive, safe, and welcoming environment for students, faculty, staff, and their families. We believe that fostering self-understanding and mental health wellness is at the heart of a vibrant, healthy, creative, and engaged campus, and hence consider it a priority to enhance the mental health and the overall well-being of the AUS community. We are committed to the practice of counseling as determined by the ethical codes of the American Psychological Association and the Emirates Psychological Association.

Strategic Goals

1. To operate as an exemplary university counseling center, taking into account the International Association of Counseling Services (IACS) mandate of the center's administrative neutrality and independence.
2. To ensure compliance with International Association of Counseling Services (IACS) standards towards becoming an accredited university counseling center.

Roles and Functions

The University Counseling Services (UCS) fulfills its mission by providing the following:

- in-house counseling to AUS students, faculty, staff, and their families
- an environment of personal safety and respect
- information regarding professional resources to assist community members in making self-referrals
- workshops and promotion of mental health awareness through psycho-educational forums
- collaboration with faculty and staff to promote student well-being through outreach, prevention, and educational efforts

Provision of Services

UCS Accessibility

Registered students, faculty, staff, and dependent family members of faculty and staff are eligible to use UCS services.

Fees

The UCS services are free of charge. Clients are responsible for the cost of any external services that may be required in cases of referral by an AUS counselor.

Hours of Operation

The UCS is open Monday through Thursday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

The UCS is closed during public holidays; however, the UCS is open during fall break, spring break and summer sessions.

For details on emergencies, see the section Crisis Management.

Appointments

Appointments can be made using the booking system (ucsappointments.youcanbook.me) or via email (ucs@aus.edu). Please be aware that the staff of the UCS cannot guarantee 100 percent privacy of email communications.

At the initial appointment clinical forms will be completed:

- Client's rights, confidentiality, consent, and practice information form, which discusses your rights to our services and the responsibilities of the counselor.
- Client information form that asks for relevant personal and background information.

Cancellations

If you are unable to attend your appointment, please give a minimum of four hours' notice so that the time can be opened up with a sufficient notice to others. Cancellations/no-show appointments will be rescheduled at a mutually convenient time.

Crisis Management

The UCS facilitates the provision of crisis intervention in emergencies through collaboration with university departments.

A crisis is defined as when a person:

- has conveyed verbally or behaviorally that he/she is in crisis
- is disoriented and confused or lacks contact with reality
- is in imminent danger of hurting himself/herself or others

In case of an emergency, the appropriate personnel should make an initial evaluation and contact the appropriate emergency services, medical, and/or security staff. Once the immediate crisis has been stabilized, should counseling be seen as appropriate to the client's needs, the client should be advised of the services, and should the client wish to avail themselves of the services, an urgent appointment can be provided by the UCS.

UHC Reception: **06 515 2675**

Medical Emergency: **06 515 2100 option 1**

To make an appointment for the client please email: **ucs@aus.edu**

If the university is presented with a credible report that a student has threatened or attempted suicide, engaged in efforts to prepare to commit suicide, or expressed a preoccupation with suicide, that student will be required to be assessed in person by a qualified medical professional.

UCS Services

1. Providing individual and group counseling for personal, developmental, and interpersonal issues.
 - Assessment tests and techniques are used as needed to help the community in self-understanding, decision-making, and determining the most effective intervention strategies within the limits of the available resources.
 - Short- and/or long-term counseling is used to address issues such as anxiety, depression, relationships, family issues, loss and grief, lifestyle issues, abuse, life decisions, homesickness, college-related transition, and mental health issues that affect academic concerns.
2. Providing crisis intervention, which is carried out either directly or through cooperative arrangements with other resources on campus.
3. Developing and providing preventive programs that would help the community to acquire new knowledge, skills, and self-confidence that would help them in their academic, career, and interpersonal choices.
4. Providing consultation intervention for individual cases as needed to faculty and other appropriate campus personnel. Specialized referrals may be provided to parents, spouses, and other members who might be involved within the community.
5. Clients who require more intensive or specialized services or those with long-term psychiatric conditions will be referred to the appropriate outside mental health providers.

- * **The UCS does not prescribe or monitor psychotropic or any other medications.**
- * **Counseling files are held until graduation and/or termination of service and then destroyed.**

6. Assistance with making a successful transition to the university.
This includes:
 - fostering a sense of belonging
 - introducing the academic and personal resources available on campus to support the community
 - giving time and priority to meet students with psychological challenges to provide them with the support needed to adjust and manage their personal goals
7. Group work and workshops can be designed according to any identified need that would benefit the community. Some examples of past and current workshops being offered are:
 - Selfcare
 - stress management and relaxation

UCS Assessment and Evaluation

Ongoing evaluation and accountability are an integral responsibility of the UCS to monitor and improve the services provided. This process will be carried out through:

- surveys completed by members of the campus community (https://surveys.aus.edu/jfe/form/SV_2aVXQVBZPpuyjwa)
- evaluation of workshops

Code of Conduct and Ethics

The UCS is a professional center responsible for supporting the well-being of the AUS community.

The center's practice is guided by the American Psychological Association's ethical principles and code of conduct. It creates a framework for ethical and best practices in the delivery of university counseling services. The code of ethics can be found at <http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/>.

All Counselors are required to hold an up to date Sharjah Social Services license.

After Hours Mental Health Emergency Protocol

Steps If Emergency Requires Hospitalization

This applies to cases where there is imminent danger of harm to self or others and when there is substance abuse.

Step 1 Call 0506357651 for the on-call medical emergency team and/or Security Office at 06 515-2100 /050 626 7818

Step 2 On-call medical emergency team will assess, triage, and arrange for transport by ambulance if necessary to be taken to another location.

When transporting the student to the facilities, the University Health Services or the individual/herself must inform the facility at admission that the person is suicidal or is thinking of hurting him/herself. Not doing so could cause delays and additional bureaucracy or confusion.

Step 3 University Health Services medical emergency team will inform:
1. University Counseling Services via ucs@aus.edu as soon as possible

Note: As a resource to doctors who are assessing the mental health situation with the nurses, an available counselor from University Counseling Services may be contacted by the doctor if necessary.

2. The Residence Hall Coordinator on duty will inform the Senior Manager of Student Residential Life by a call followed by an email as soon as possible that the student has been taken to the hospital. The Senior Manager will then inform the Executive Director of Student Experience accordingly.

3.

Information provided will be:

- Summary of situation
- Student's name and contact information.
- Contact Information of hospital where student taken

4. If student is a Study Abroad participant, the Office of Student Affairs will contact the Office of International Exchange office.

Step 4 The next business day, the assigned University Counseling Services counselor will reach out to the student with the objectives of:

- Discussing the mental health situation.
- Reviewing the requirements of the Clearance and Evaluation Report.
- Discussing the requirements of the Safety and Treatment Plan.

Step 5 All students who are released by the hospital must attain a clearance and evaluation report by a mental health professional to return to university.

Students may go to any local Mental Health clinic for a Clearance And Evaluation Report to return.

- Step 6** The student receives a Mental Health Clearance And Evaluation Report from a psychiatrist and shares the report with the assigned University Counseling Services counselor so they can jointly discuss the Safety And Treatment Plan.
- Step 7** If a student decides not to continue with the counselor as part of the Safety and Treatment Plan, the counselor will then follow up with the student to check on the student's well-being and compliance with the Safety and Treatment Plan.
- Step 8** If the student is not compliant with the Safety and Treatment Plan, if needed, the counselor will notify the Executive Director of Student Experience.

Steps If DOES NOT Require Hospitalization

This applies to cases where there is no imminent danger of harm to self or others and when there is no substance abuse.

- Step 1** Call 0506357651 for the on-call medical emergency team and/or Security Office at 06 515-2100 /050 626 7818
- Step 2** On call medical emergency team will assess and triage the student. Treatment is administered if needed. The student is advised to schedule appointment with the counseling services.
- Step 3** **If the student agrees,** the nurse will then contact University Counseling Services via ucs@aus.edu as soon as possible so a counselor may follow-up with the student.
Note: As a resource to doctors who are assessing the mental health situation with the nurses, an available counselor from University Counseling Services may be contacted by the doctor if necessary. Each doctor will be provided the after hours contact information of each counselor.

The UHS will also contact the Executive Director of Student Experience or designee by email regarding the student/situation.

The Counsellor will directly liaise with the Executive Director of Student Experience /designee if needed.

- Step 4** The next working day, the counselor will connect with the student to assess the situation. Subject to the Counselors directive, the student may be asked to obtain a mental health evaluation report in order to proceed with further support.

Students may go to any local Mental Health clinic for an evaluation report to return.
- Step 5** The counselor will then follow-up with the student to check on the student's well being and compliance with Safety and Treatment Plan.

Student of Concern (SOCC) -Reporting a Client in Danger

At AUS, the safety and well-being of our students are primary concerns. In support of this, AUS has formed the Students of Concern Committee (SOCC), which provides a centralized process to coordinate the university's response to support students who are exhibiting concerning behavior. The committee coordinates efforts when a student's behavior could potentially be harmful to self or others and when student welfare is a concern. If necessary, the committee may meet with the student, but most of its communication is with the Executive Director of Student Experience.

The Chair of the committee - Lisa Moscaritolo 050 387 0013 lmoscaritolo@aus.edu

The members of the committee include Juliet Coutinho, Senior Manager for Student Conduct and Conflict Mediation; Rasha Tawfik, Director of the Academic Support Center; Issam Zaarob, Senior Manager for Student Residential Life; a representative from University Counseling Services.

**Within the confidentiality forms used by the Counsellors it states that "confidentiality may be broken if we (the clinician) assess that the client intends to take harmful acts or dangerous action against themselves or another human being" - this will be reported to the Student of Concern Committee if needed.*

Goals of the SOCC

To help a student who may be in distress and address the behaviors that may be causing a disturbance

To coordinate, as a committee of professionals from different departments on campus, efforts to strategize a plan of action for the student

To communicate with those on campus concerned about a student's wellbeing

To train community members to identify and refer students in distress

To review and revise policies and procedures related to student wellbeing

Dealing with Non-Compliant Clients

The Counseling Center's directive towards clients who do not see a Psychiatrist for further evaluation, despite being recommended and continuously encouraged will not be seen further due to the client being noncompliant.

To fully support clients where we can, we will encourage clients to seek support from a Psychiatrist and will let them know both verbally and via email. We will also where possible, advise of local clinics that we can recommend.

Wellbeing checks can be carried out from time to time but will refrain from taking on the client for continuous sessions until he/she has provided a psychiatric evaluation where needed.

This applies to all clients.