



Graduate and Professional Student Senate
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**Graduate and Professional Student Senate
 GPSS Resolution 2021-22V
 Resolution for Secure Equitable Funding for Cook Counseling**

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|--------------------------------------|---------------|
| First Reading by GPSS: | date |
| Second Reading by GPSS: | date |
| First Reading by Commission | date |
| Staff Senate Review: | date |
| Faculty Senate Review: | date |
| Undergraduate Student Senate Review: | date |
| Approved by Commission | date |
| First Reading by University Council: | date |
| Approved by University Council: | date |
| Approval by University President: | date |
| Approved by Board of Visitors: | date |
| Effective: | upon approval |

WHEREAS, Cook Counseling is an necessary part of the Virginia Tech community and is absolutely essential for students mental health and well being; and

WHEREAS, while Cook Counseling provides numerous resources to both graduate and undergraduate students in the form of individual and group counseling, there is still a large need for more access to mental health services as evidenced by the growing demand that has forced Cook to prioritize group counseling over other options; and

WHEREAS, the benefits of counseling are numerous and include greater self-acceptance and self-esteem, better management of emotions, increased confidence and decision making skills, ability to manage stress better, greater sense of self purpose and many more (Appendix 1); and

WHEREAS, the increased need for counseling and mental health services has been made more apparent by Covid-19 with approximately 43% of college aged individuals concerned about their mental health (see Appendix 2); and

WHEREAS, Cook Counseling has made an effort to increase services to serve more students through group counseling, but many students may not feel comfortable in a group setting nor may their treatment for mental health be appropriate for group therapy and yet because of demand and lack of funding they are unable to secure alternative modes of therapy; and

WHEREAS, most students who access Cook Counseling attend 5 or 6 individual sessions throughout the school year (Appendix 3) and often have to wait several weeks before being admitted to see a therapist; and

WHEREAS, a proposition to charge students who utilize more than 10 individual therapy sessions to be charged \$20 per session and \$15 for psychiatric session to keep up with the financial needs of Cook Counseling was met with opposition and (Appendix 3) coupled with that, approximately 60% of college aged students reported difficulties accessing mental health services during the pandemic (Appendix 2); and

WHEREAS, Virginia Tech's student population continues to increase, so there is a need for resources including those for mental health services; and

WHEREAS, the pandemic has exacerbated many preexisting mental health needs and has generated significantly higher need while the university has not increased Cook's funding concurrent with that need; and

WHEREAS, while the university is competitive with other universities and the therapy services they provide (by hovering at around 1 therapist per 1000 students), being competitive with other universities who are likewise not meeting the needs of their students is an insufficient justification for not increasing the funding for Cook and other essential services (see Appendix 2); and

WHEREAS, despite relying on these services for their wellbeing, graduate students have historically had very little input into the decision-making process for allocating resource to Cook and other essential student services like Schiffert; and

WHEREAS, the spirit of this resolution should be taken as both expanding an essential service for graduate and undergraduate students as well as increasing the opportunities for students to voice input into the funding of these vital resources (see, also, GPSS Resolution 2021-2022W); and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that greater financial priority be given to Cook Counseling to support staffing more counselors and allow Cook Counseling to continue to serve the graduate and undergraduate student population through both individual session and group session over other uses of fees, such as athletics; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a task force be charged, made up of undergraduate and graduate students as the stakeholder portion alongside Cook representatives, budget office representatives, and other decision-makers, to audit the current Cook practices in light of growing demand and the need created by COVID-19 and make financial recommendations to ensure students are supported fully. This charge should go beyond maintaining our competitiveness with other institutions and instead be focused on meeting student needs and being a leader in how universities grapple with mental health on campus. It should also be used

to develop further mechanisms for voicing input into fee structures at the university and how students and graduate students can advocate for fee changes in line with their priorities.

Appendix 1: Benefits of Counseling for College Students:

Benefits of counseling as detailed by colleges and universities.

<https://www.coe.edu/student-life/student-life-resources/health-wellness/mental-health-counseling/potential-benefits-counseling>

<https://campus.plymouth.edu/counseling/for-students/benefits-of-counseling/>

There are many additional resources for the benefits of counseling and strategies for improving mental health provided by our very own counseling center that we recommend looking at as well: https://ucc.vt.edu/self_help_support_strategies.html

Appendix 2: Covid-19 and the Toll on Mental Health

Data from Aetna, VT graduate student's insurance provider, regarding the impact of Covid-19 on people's mental health:

<https://cvshealth.com/sites/default/files/cvs-health-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-mental-well-being-in-the-us.pdf>

<https://www.benefitnews.com/advisers/news/the-pandemic-is-taking-a-toll-on-gen-zs-mental-health-cvs-survey-finds>

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/coronavirus-turmoil-raises-depression-risks-in-young-adults-11597066200>

There are also challenges facing access to healthcare across universities as denoted here:

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/07/13/survey-finds-higher-prevalence-depression-among-students-and-difficulties-accessing>

Appendix 3: Cook Counseling Proposed Fees

http://www.collegiatetimes.com/opinion/reversal-of-cook-counseling-fees-does-not-represent-progress/article_e12dadb4-e891-11ea-a74c-af88ea88b24f.html

We take this resistance among the students to be a dissatisfaction at forcing users of Cook to bear the brunt of expanding their services and instead arguing that this cost should be distributed across the university or even privileged over other prominent fees such as the athletics fee. Mental health resources, much like healthcare, ought to be a public right and should be prioritized in university financial decision-making as well as have the cost distributed across all hokies and not just users of the service in the spirit of *Ut Prosim*.