

When Help Is Limited: The Psychological Cost of Inadequate Guidance Services in State Universities

Rhea Jane L. Caynila

College of Arts and Sciences, Cebu Technological University- Argao Campus

Corresponding Email: rheajane.caynila@ctu.edu.ph

State universities play a critical role in providing affordable and accessible higher education, particularly for students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Beyond delivering academic instruction, these institutions are expected to promote students' personal, emotional, and career development. One of the primary mechanisms for achieving this goal is the provision of effective guidance and counseling services. Guidance offices assist students in addressing academic concerns, psychological challenges, interpersonal relationships, and career planning. However, many state universities continue to experience shortages of qualified counselors, limited financial resources, and increasing student populations, resulting in gaps in student support services. These limitations have important implications not only for students' psychological well-being but also for academic success, institutional effectiveness, and graduate employability.

The transition to university life often exposes students to numerous stressors that require significant psychological adjustment. Academic pressures, financial constraints, family expectations, social relationships, and uncertainty regarding future careers frequently contribute to emotional distress. While such experiences are common, prolonged psychological difficulties may negatively affect learning, motivation, and overall well-being. Research by Stallman (2010) demonstrated that university students experience substantially higher levels of psychological distress than the general population, emphasizing the importance of accessible mental health services within higher education institutions. This evidence suggests that universities must recognize student mental health as an essential component of educational quality rather than simply an individual concern.

Despite growing awareness of student mental health needs, many state universities continue to struggle with limited guidance and counseling resources. Counseling centers often serve thousands of students while employing only a small number of licensed guidance counselors or psychologists. Consequently, students may experience long waiting periods before receiving professional assistance, particularly during periods of increased academic stress. According to Watkins et al. (2012), university administrators acknowledge that the demand for counseling services frequently exceeds institutional capacity, creating significant challenges in providing timely and comprehensive psychological support. Limited staffing and financial constraints therefore reduce the ability of universities to respond effectively to students experiencing emotional or psychological difficulties.

Another important concern involves the increasing prevalence of mental health conditions among university students. Large international surveys have shown that anxiety disorders, depression, and other psychological conditions are common within higher education populations. Auerbach et al. (2016) reported that a considerable proportion of college students across multiple countries experience mental disorders that may interfere with academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and daily

functioning. These findings reinforce the need for universities to strengthen guidance services, expand mental health programs, and develop institutional policies that prioritize student well-being.

The psychological consequences of inadequate guidance services extend beyond emotional distress. Students who do not receive timely psychological support may experience declining academic performance, reduced motivation, absenteeism, poor concentration, and increased risk of withdrawing from their studies. Emotional difficulties may also affect self-confidence, decision-making, and interpersonal relationships, ultimately influencing students' educational experiences and future career opportunities. Guidance services therefore contribute not only to mental health but also to student retention, academic achievement, and institutional performance.

Career development represents another important function of university guidance programs. Many students enter higher education without clear career goals or sufficient understanding of labor market opportunities. Career uncertainty often contributes to anxiety regarding future employment and professional identity. Effective guidance services assist students in identifying their strengths, exploring career pathways, and making informed educational decisions. By integrating career counseling with psychological support, universities help students develop greater confidence in navigating both academic and professional challenges. Such services contribute directly to graduate preparedness and workforce development, which are central responsibilities of higher education institutions.

Another challenge is the growing utilization of counseling services among university students. Increasing awareness of mental health has encouraged more students to seek professional support for emotional and psychological concerns. While this reflects positive attitudes toward help-seeking, it also places additional pressure on already limited institutional resources. Lipson et al. (2019) observed a significant increase in mental health service utilization among college students over a ten-year period, indicating that universities must anticipate continued growth in demand for counseling and psychological support services. Without corresponding investments in guidance personnel and infrastructure, counseling centers may struggle to meet students' evolving needs.

Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive institutional strategies. Increasing the number of qualified guidance counselors should be a priority, particularly in public universities with large student populations. Institutions should also strengthen referral systems, establish partnerships with mental health professionals and healthcare providers, and improve access to specialized psychological services when necessary. Investment in digital counseling platforms, online appointment systems, and telepsychology services can further expand accessibility while complementing traditional face-to-face counseling.

Equally important is the development of preventive mental health programs. Rather than focusing solely on crisis intervention, universities should promote early identification of psychological concerns through wellness programs, peer support initiatives, stress management workshops, and mental health awareness campaigns. Reavley and Jorm (2010) emphasize that prevention and early intervention are among

the most effective approaches for improving student mental health outcomes within higher education. By identifying concerns before they become severe, universities can reduce psychological distress while supporting long-term academic success.

Faculty members also play an important role in strengthening student support systems. Although instructors are not mental health professionals, they often serve as the first point of contact for students experiencing academic or emotional difficulties. Providing faculty with training on recognizing warning signs, responding appropriately to distressed students, and referring individuals to professional services can enhance institutional capacity to support student well-being. Creating a campus culture where mental health is openly discussed and help-seeking is encouraged can further reduce stigma and improve access to available services.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of higher education should not be measured solely by graduation rates or academic achievements. Student well-being is equally important in determining institutional success and graduate readiness. When guidance services remain understaffed and under-resourced, universities risk overlooking one of the most important factors influencing student development. Investing in comprehensive counseling programs is therefore both an educational and institutional responsibility. Strengthening guidance services supports not only individual students but also the broader mission of higher education to develop resilient, competent, and socially responsible graduates. As state universities continue to address the evolving needs of diverse student populations, expanding access to high-quality guidance services will remain essential for fostering educational excellence and preparing graduates to succeed in an increasingly complex world.

References

Auerbach, R. P., Alonso, J., Axinn, W. G., Cuijpers, P., Ebert, D. D., Green, J. G., ... & Bruffaerts, R. (2016). Mental disorders among college students in the World Health Organization world mental health surveys. *Psychological medicine*, 46(14), 2955-2970.

Lipson, S. K., Lattie, E. G., & Eisenberg, D. (2019). Increased rates of mental health service utilization by US college students: 10-year population-level trends (2007–2017). *Psychiatric services*, 70(1), 60-63.

Reavley, N., & Jorm, A. F. (2010). Prevention and early intervention to improve mental health in higher education students: a review. *Early intervention in psychiatry*, 4(2), 132-142.

Stallman, H. M. (2010). Psychological distress in university students: A comparison with general population data. *Australian psychologist*, 45(4), 249-257.

Watkins, D. C., Hunt, J. B., & Eisenberg, D. (2012). Increased demand for mental health services on college campuses: Perspectives from administrators. *Qualitative Social Work*, 11(3), 319-337.

ARTICLE DETAILS

EIR-0000076; Received: June 09, 2026; Accepted: June 12, 2026; Published: June 16, 2026

CITATION:

Caynila, R. J. L. (2026). *When Help Is Limited: The Psychological Cost of Inadequate Guidance Services in State Universities: Essays and Critiques*. DOI: 10.62596/eir.xqtqbe27

COPYRIGHT

Copyright © 2026 by author(s). *Education and Industry Review: Essays and Critiques* is published by Stratworks Research Inc. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), allowing redistribution and reproduction in any format or medium, provided the original work is cited or recognized.