

FRM: VSA Council
TO: Catherine Bond Hill, President
Eve Dunbar, Acting Dean of the College
Chris Roellke, Dean of the College
Bob Walton, Vice President for Finance and Administration
David D.B. Brown, Dean of Students
CC: Wendy Freedman, Director of Counseling Services
RE: Post-Doctoral Fellow Request for Metcalf Counseling Center
DTE: January 26, 2014

VSA Council held a forum with Wendy Freedman, on November 24, 2013, during which councilmembers expressed concern with the limited number of staff members at Metcalf. Students are particularly concerned with the difficulties they have faced in booking appointments within a reasonable time period. Some have reported having to wait over two weeks for an initial appointment. Current clients already need to wait two weeks in between appointments, which is particularly concerning for students at high risk. Wendy expressed concern with the current situation, because according to the staff's ethical code, it is quite clear more staff members are needed to accommodate the number of students being seen. Wendy also indicated that Metcalf is more highly utilized than many other colleges that participated in the Association of University College Counseling Center survey. Finding these facts concerning, the VSA council researched the resources and practices of counseling centers at peer institutions.

Using the school size and counseling staff information, a psychologist to student ratio was calculated for 16 peer institutions. While Vassar ranked 9th out of 16 in this analysis, when mental health professionals besides psychologists (postgrad interns, doctoral students, postdoctoral fellows and counseling clinicians) were included, Vassar's ranking drops to 14th out of the 16 schools. Because of these additional resources, three schools, Barnard, Williams and Amherst, are even able to offer Drop-In Hours, multiple times a week. According to Smith website, students at their school are able to schedule an appointment within 2-3 days of their initial phone call. Ten of the 16 institutions are already utilizing doctoral students or post-doctoral fellows in their counseling centers.

The VSA Council feels hiring a post-doctoral fellow is necessary not just to remain in line with our peers, but most importantly, to satisfy a growing need in our community. Compared to the 2012 fall semester, this past semester has seen a 27% increase in crisis calls and a 375% increase in on call/weekend contacts. As mental health affects all aspects of student life, VSA Council feels adequately staffing our counseling center should be a top priority.