

Personal Counseling Service offers help

College life presents many types of problems

By KATHY O'CONNELL
Battalion Staff

Has there ever been a time when nothing goes right? Classes are bogging you down, you feel like your parents don't care and you're roommate is driving you up a wall. All you need right now is someone who will listen.

If these "I-can't-take-it-anymore" blues get the better of you then maybe a visit to the Personal Counseling Service can be just what the doctor ordered.

The Personal Counseling Service, located in the basement of the YMCA Building, offers Texas A&M University students a variety of counseling services ranging from personal to group counseling. Counselors at the center are there to help, even if it's just to listen.

PCS Director Dr. Wade G. Birch said, "What we do the most at the PCS is more what we call personal-social counseling. It's a great big broad area where we talk to students having difficulties with their parents, boyfriend or girlfriend, roommate or professor."

Although most of the counseling offered deals with general problems occurring in everyday life, counselors do get involved in crisis or suicide prevention.

Since the center opened in 1974, Birch said there has been a yearly average of 20 Texas A&M students who have attempted suicide. He added that this figure applies only to the students the counseling center knows about, because there are cases the University Police or the A.P. Beutel Health Center may have on record that the PCS doesn't.

He said sometimes a student will make an appointment at the center because they're feeling depressed or have even contemplated suicide. "If we suspect that that might be a possibility as a way of solving problems," he said, "our staff will ask directly if they (the students) are contemplating suicide."

"It's an old wives tale that you shouldn't bring something like that up — that it might cause somebody to actually do something. Legally, as professionals, we would be remiss in our duties if we had any reason to suspect that someone might be contemplating suicide and we didn't ask," Birch said.

A lot of students will talk about harming themselves, he said, but there are measures on how to gauge how probable it is that someone will actually commit suicide. Getting concrete answers to the questions why, how and when are good indicators that the person is serious about harming himself.

"For instance," he said, "if a student says, 'I've got a shot gun, and there's a barn outside of College Station and sometimes when I drive by I think about killing

"What we do the most at the Personal Counseling Service is more what we call personal-social counseling," said Dr. Wade Birch, PCS director.

myself. If things don't clear up pretty soon with my girlfriend, I'm going out there," that's when the problem is serious.

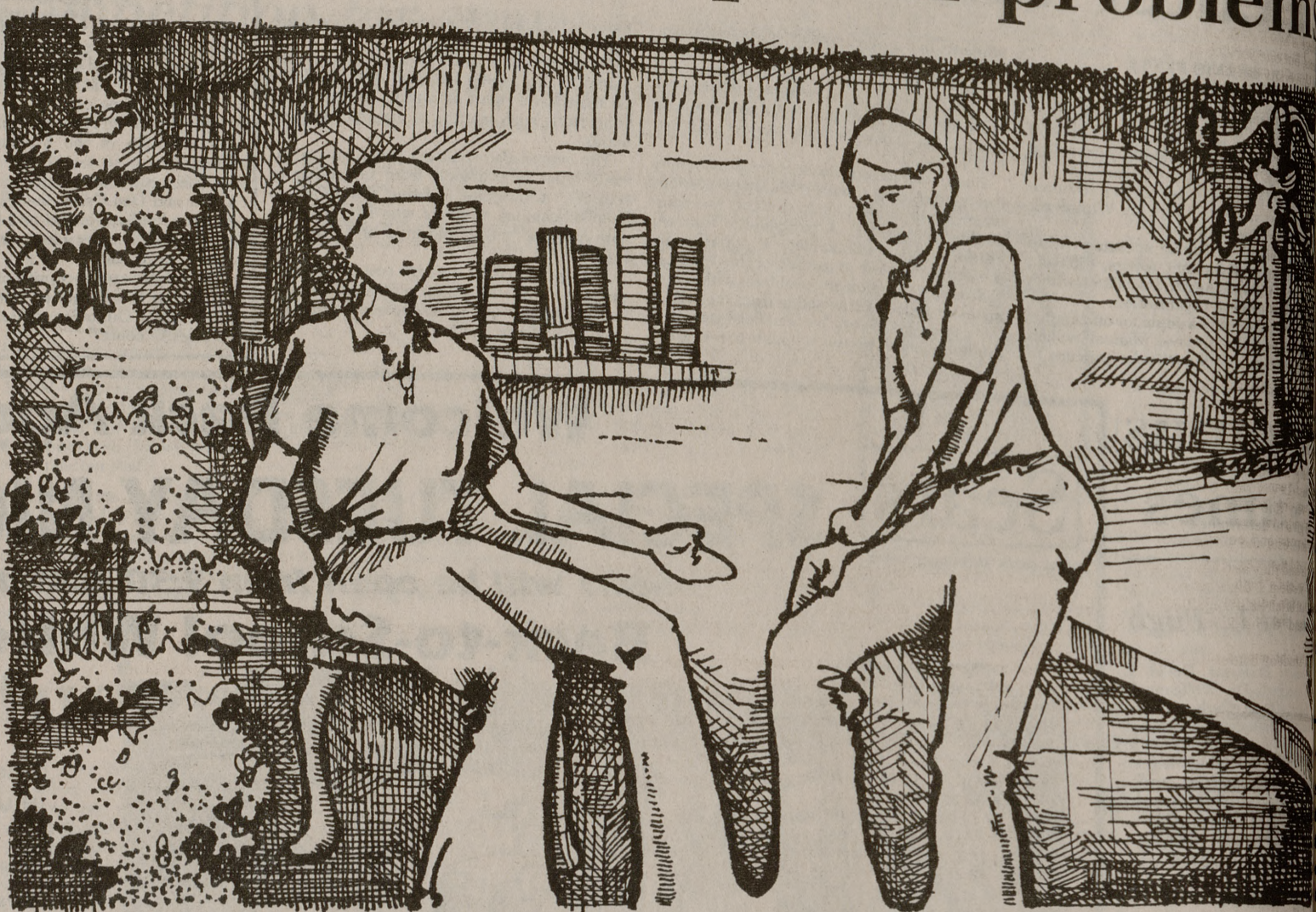
When a student has attempted suicide, Birch said, an appointment is set up with one of the two consulting psychiatrists who visit the center on a weekly basis. Both are local practicing psychiatrists. On rare occasions, he said, a student who has attempted suicide may have to leave the University for intense counseling.

In an attempt not to duplicate the local crisis-hotline, Birch said the PCS uses a 24-hour, on-call system where each of the eight counselors will take turns remaining on call every weekend during the fall and spring semesters.

If they receive a call from a student who is attempting suicide, Birch said they will try to convince the student to go to the health center.

Birch said the counselors won't actually go out and get the student. If it sounds like the student is in such bad shape that he can't make it there alone, then the counselor will contact the University Police.

"We don't do police work," he said. "We don't want to be seen as police-type of administrative-type people, because the student may pull away from us. We would rather be seen as the benevolent,



Graphics by Richard Delano

caring people."

Birch said as far as he knows there have been no suicide completions this year.

In addition to the crisis prevention activities, counselors will see students who are having difficulty adjusting to college life, or who are having family or other personal problems, on a weekly basis.

The counseling service is usually rendered for the duration of a semester, which is approximately 16 weeks. Birch added that this is not particularly short-term counseling.

There are two reasons for terminating the counseling after a semester. "First," Birch said,

"when I came to A&M it was made clear to me that what A&M didn't want in a counseling service was some kind of an in-patient mental health hospital. The feeling was that if the student was that emotionally distraught he should go outside for help."

"The other reason is that we have such a massive demand for counseling that we have a difficult time helping all the students, he said."

A counselor will see a student as quickly as possible, Birch said, "to make sure a suicide or homicide isn't involved." After the initial appointment the student can go

for more counseling if necessary.

The PCS also keeps a massive library with personal growth and self-help information. He said a few students occasionally stop by to read the literature, but usually it's a student who is already involved in counseling.

Group counseling is another

service offered by the center.

Birch said the groups are usually small, and discussion will range from how to be more assertive to how to ask for what you want. The discussions on assertiveness are usually popular with women, Birch said.

The center also keeps an up-to-

date and comprehensive library of educational, career and self-help information.

Students seeking help can make an appointment. Birch said counselors are available from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Fri-

Aggie Trivia

"It (Texas A&M University) was a colorful, if not always comfortable, atmosphere for gaining an education. Bathing facilities were only one of the unobtainable luxuries at A&M. Governor Coke and the A&M Board of Directors would have liked to open the school in the fall of 1875 but were forced to wait another year. There was simply too much to be done. There was no president or faculty, no resident or dining facilities. Merely a vast, unequipped main building in the middle of the prairie, four miles from a raw frontier town called Bryan. And if the site of this new institution of learning was close to primitive, its initial educa-

tional efforts were perhaps more primitive. While the school was authorized to teach agricultural and mechanical arts, such subjects had rarely if ever been taught anywhere else and never in Texas. Knowledge about these subjects was, at best, severely limited. A&M faculty shared very basic problems with faculty everywhere at that time and necessarily gave similar answers: stick to the tenets of a classical education and avoid the unknown." — A Picture History of Texas A&M University by Henry Dethloff



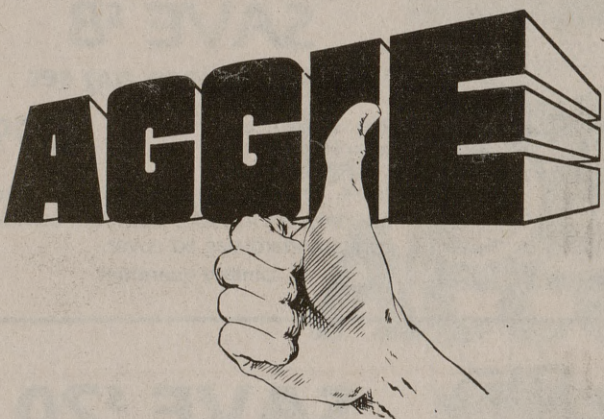
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