

David Axelrod, Senior Advisor to President Obama and **Ari Fleischer**,
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COUNSELING CONTINUED

anxiety, stress and relationship issues are the four main reasons students request help.

"Typically, we try to get students in as soon as we can for an initial appointment to assess what their needs might be," Stachowiak said. "In the interest of time, sometimes we will stop other activities — like committee meetings — and use that time to provide services to students."

Bryce Durgin, statistics graduate student and member of the Graduate and Professional Student Council, has co-authored a proposal urging Texas A&M administration to support the hiring of new staff members for the SCS in order to efficiently accommodate students' needs. He said more than 50 percent of college students suffer from depression or anxiety and feels waiting weeks to meet with a counselor is unimaginable.

"When I was an undergrad, I was in really bad shape and without the help of my university's counseling services, I don't think I would have finished school," Durgin said. "Classes are hard and you probably know people suffering more than you. Without [SCS], capable students really can't reach their full potential to make a difference in this world."

The Graduate and Professional Student Council has requested that university end its hiring freeze with specific regard to staff for the SCS. In February, Interim A&M President Mark Hussey announced vacant non-faculty staff positions would be eliminated to save the university \$8.2 million annually.

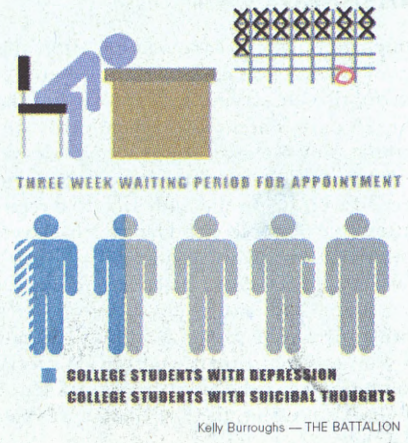
Gartner said the freeze is not gone, but exceptions for the SCS have been granted by administration.

"Dr. Hussey said the freeze would not affect health or safety, and it has not," Gartner said.

Matthew Fitzmaurice, Graduate and Professional Student Council president, said waiting for two to three weeks to see a counselor just isn't fair and every student's case is important. He said efficient care can help with student retention.

"[SCS] is one of the more evident places on campus that helps students and they're drastically understaffed," Fitzmaurice said. "The amount of students they have per staffer is almost double the national recommendation for university counseling programs."

As SCS makes moves to expand, Kari Keller, psychologist at the SCS, said it also works to maintain quality of service.



"We monitor the wait time for an initial appointment closely and do our best to make sure there is an initial appointment available within a couple weeks," Keller said. "Once a student meets with a counselor, the two of them together decide what level of treatment that student needs. Students also have the ability to utilize our crisis services if they are experiencing a crisis that requires immediate attention — no appointment needed."

Gartner said progress on the proposition has begun to kick into gear and she has begun the hiring process for two psychologists and a counselor. Gartner said assuming the applicant pool is good, the process will likely not finish until late May at the earliest.

"But for us to align with the national average of one staffer to 1,000 to 1,500 students, we would need almost 15 new hires," Gartner said.

Gartner's five-year plan is to request three new therapists each year, a number of personnel she believes can be reasonably incorporated into the SCS. Reaching the national goal will depend entirely on the budget.

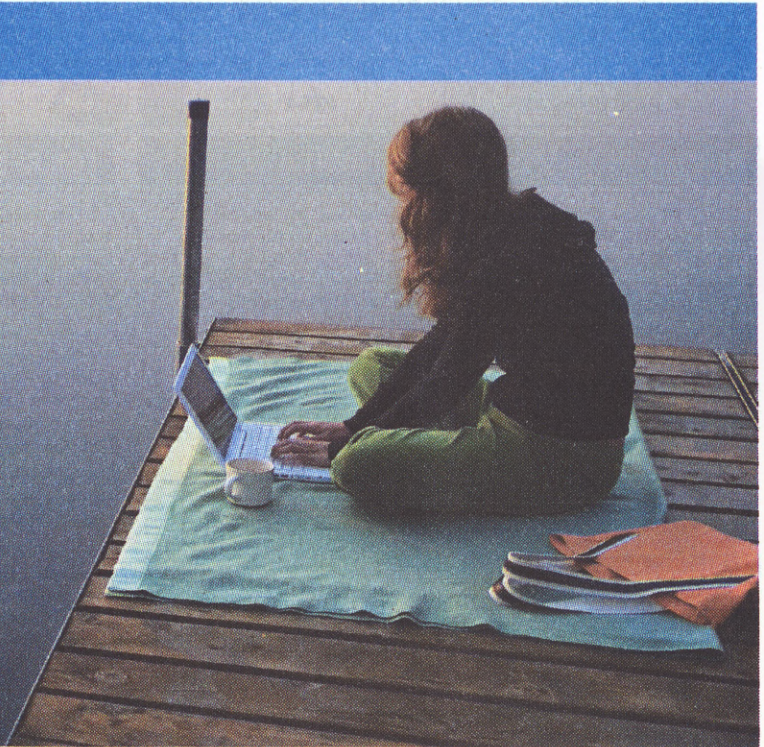
"The current state legislature ends in May and that is when state funding is known," Gartner said. "Sometimes, I have not found out what my budget is until August as the Board of Regents must also give their approval. Many layers above my position must approve the university's budget before I find out for sure how much is allocated to the SCS."

Students interested in making an appointment with SCS should visit scs.tamu.edu and register online. More immediate help is available for urgent needs or crisis intervention.

"In the interest of time, sometimes we will stop other activities — like committee meetings — and use that time to provide services to students."

Ted Stachowiak, associate director of counseling

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