Our Counseling Approach

What is the OCPD’s counseling philosophy?
The OCPD’s counseling approach is an action oriented, time-limited style of counseling. Additionally, staff believe that UCSF students and postdocs are resilient and capable of engaging thoughtfully to make their own career decisions that are inline with their skills, interests and values. Finally, staff have designed programs and services with an eye towards independence; the goal is to teach students and postdocs the information and skills they need to competently manage their own careers after separating from UCSF.

Based on these beliefs, and depending on the topic and client's need, staff engage in one of four different roles in appointments, which the office refers to as ?CARE?: Counsel, Advise, Refer and Educate:

1. Counsel:
Staff provide private space for students and postdocs to reflect on their values, clarify their goals, and create actionable steps to achieve them. The OCPD seeks to provide a non-judgmental place for students and postdocs to think through and take charge of their career and professional development, and make decisions in line with their values and goals.

2. Advise:
The OCPD works with the four schools and Graduate Division to identify best practices, design career and professional development resources, and offer referrals to meet a students' and postdocs' career development goals. For example, if a student or postdoc has been encouraged by their advisor to find a mentor, the OCPD staff directs them towards resources on identifying, establishing and managing a mentor/mentee relationship.
3. Refer:
Many of the career issues that students and postdocs face are multifaceted, and can at times, be stressful. The OCPD works closely with several support services to appropriately refer when a career issue is beyond the scope of the office. We refer whenever we identify a student or postdoc who has a non-career related issue that is adversely affecting their ability to manage their career effectively. This includes offices such as Student Health [1], the Faculty Staff Assistance Program [2], the Office of the Ombuds, [3] the Confidential Care Advocate [4], or Student Financial Aid [5], which has a financial educator on staff.

4. Educate:
Appointments often focus skill development, identifying and supporting students and postdocs in developing the competencies required to achieve their career goals. E.g., a CV review appointment can include both a document critique and a lesson regarding the steps to develop and criteria to assess strong application materials. Several of the professional skills students and postdocs currently seek to develop retain their value in later years, as they take on mentoring roles.

How many appointments can students and postdocs access each year?
Students and postdocs can access an unlimited number of 20-minute "Mini" appointments and five 50-minute appointments each academic year. In the staff's experience, this is sufficient for students and postdocs in job search strategy stage, but might be limiting for trainees in career exploration stage. Those trainees often need 1:1 appointments to reflect, brainstorm and plan, and it can be a more organic progress. Therefore, staff do extend beyond five appointments on a case by case basis.

When considering extensions, staff review the demand for 1:1 services and take guidance from the Handbook for Brief Psychotherapies [6], and "...consider extensions 1) when the client explicitly expresses and interest in continuing, 2) where are are unrealized but reachable goals, and 3) when the client has been making progress toward those goals".

Are appointments confidential?
Appointments are confidential, with a few exceptions [7].

For more information and resources on OCPD’s counseling approach, please visit our Counseling Theory and Practice Resources [8] page.

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Topics of interest

- Appointment, Counseling, Confidentiality, Counseling Framework, Legal Aspects, Time-limited Appointments