

Where the Healing Begins

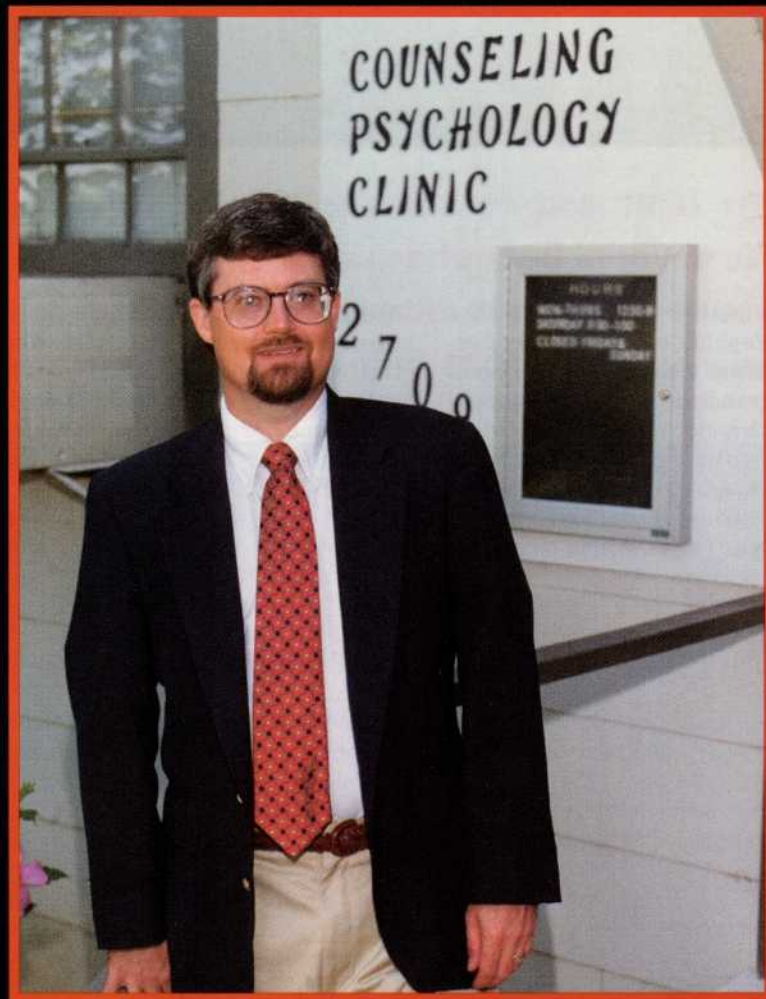
BY ROBERT FERRIER
PHOTOS BY ROBERT TAYLOR

Its makeshift facility is no thing of beauty, but to the people it serves, the OU Counseling Psychology Clinic is a teaching and treatment jewel.

Picture a wood-frame, south campus building of World War II vintage. Creaking wood floors, humming window air conditioners and a sagging sofa greet troubled clients with nowhere else to go.

In remodeled rooms where Naval personnel shared confidences a half-century ago, children, adolescents, adults, couples and families un-clothe wounds of heart and mind. Their battle scars take a different form, wrought not by warfare, but by society's weaponry: divorce, abuse, neglect, despair, depression, stress.

Inside the old building, graduate student counselors at the University of Oklahoma Counseling Psychology Clinic wait to offer healing. Faculty mentors, all licensed counseling psychologists, monitor each session with outdated audio/video equipment resembling pawn shop rejects. Rising above their surroundings, students learn here while helping others. *continued*



Tucked away in a nondescript frame building on south campus, the OU Counseling Psychology Clinic, directed by Educational Psychology Professor Terry Pace, is known for the quality of its client care and the caliber of the graduate students who complete the program.



Graduate students often employ role-playing to simulate the counseling situations they may encounter with their clinic clients. Here Becky Lorinesque, center, assumes the counselor's role, while John Hurley, left, and Julie Barton take the part of the couple seeking her help.

colors to draw herself and her father, smiling and holding hands. Her mother's grave was not in the picture; the girl had conquered her depression.

"Although children tug at my heart strings, I worked most with low-income, non-insured adults who are not severely mentally ill, and thus can't receive medication or treatment at state-run facilities. If they can't afford a therapist, the Counseling Psychology Clinic offers the only option in Norman."

The facility's Assessment Clinic tests for most psychological and psychoeducational problems. Doctoral student Doug Wright says accurate assessment of the client's problem plays a critical role in case management. The Assessment Clinic operates within the Psychology Clinic each Thursday morning.

"We assess our potential clients—as well as those referred to us for other purposes such as psychological testing—to help direct educational, vocational or treatment decisions by other professionals," Wright says. "School systems don't have three weeks to conduct such tests. Administering these tests not only trains our students but also reveals client problems such as dyslexia and attention deficit disorder. A parent may ask us to determine why their child doesn't perform well in school. If we discover a problem treatable by our clinic, we refer here. Otherwise we refer elsewhere."

Terry Pace, Counseling Psychology Clinic director, says the counselors meet with clients in weekly 50-minute sessions. Fees are low (\$15 to \$60 per session), based on ability to pay. Clients must explain their problems honestly for the counselor to

"A mother shocked us with a frantic telephone call, saying her *five-year-old child* held a knife and had told his grandmother he was going to cut his throat," doctoral candidate Becky Lorinesque recalls. "His mother brought him in immediately. First we stabilized the situation. After assessing the client, we counseled him, his parents and grandparents. We discovered that one parent suffered depression and had neglected the child. As happens increasingly, a grandparent gave some care, but the child still lived in an emotional vacuum. We addressed all factors causing the situation. The child improved, then unfortunately regressed until we referred him to an inpatient facility where he could receive 24-hour supervision and psychotherapy to ensure his safety."

Doctoral candidate Lisa Petersen says teenagers sometime threaten suicide as a way of seeking parental attention. Many young parents never learned parenting skills because their parents lacked them. Thus begins a vicious circle resulting from the

breakup of the nuclear family structure starting decades ago in this country. Everyone in the family goes his or her own way. When working singles lack time for parenting, too often grandparents find themselves thrust back into the role.

How can families break the cycle?

"We help the young person to develop an 'alternative plan,' Petersen says. "They should talk to their parents when they feel depressed or angry. Problems can stem from a lack of parent/child communication."

Doctoral student Schelle Cody remembers the children she counseled. "An eight-year-old girl presented with clinical depression," she recalls. "Her mother had committed suicide, and the girl was being raised by her father, who loved her but lacked nurturing skills. The girl wanted to die so she could be with her mother. At the beginning of therapy, I asked her to draw a picture of her family. She drew herself beside her mother's grave in gray pencil. She drew her father in color, but standing away. After eight months of therapy, she used bright

help them; the process requires dedication and work from both sides. Clients usually average 6 to 12 sessions, but staff will counsel them as long as necessary to serve their needs.

Pace says all counseling psychology students work at the clinic during their first two years, learning professional skills by practicing them in real-life situations. The students also take most of their counseling psychology courses at the clinic.

Because of the program's academic and clinical demands and the limited openings available, Pace and the faculty carefully screen the large number of student applicants.

"We conduct a rigorous, thorough admission process involving letters of recommendation, personal interviews, grade point, GRE scores and accomplishments in human services," Pace says. "We seek students who combine academic excellence with an ethical, moral sense of wanting to be helpful, open and understanding with people. At least two faculty members and one graduate student interview each applicant. Each letter of recommendation receives a rating. Reliability or trust issues raise a red flag."

Professors Al Smouse, Robert Ragland and Wayne Rowe established the clinic in the mid-1960s when the College of Education founded the counseling psychology program. For years the facility operated as a small laboratory in Hester Hall. By the mid-1980s expanding academic requirements and community demand required the move to a larger clinic building on south campus. From its small beginnings, the clinic now provides psychological counseling for more than 1,000 persons annually.

Cal Stoltenberg, professor of educational psychology, joined the clinic in 1986 as director of academic programs. He sees a mutually beneficial

relationship between the clinic's academic and community service goals.

"We use the scientist/professional training model," Stoltenberg says. "Students employ the latest professional counseling and research techniques under faculty supervision. Our program provides an advantage over others in that we keep the students at the clinic during their formative training—thus maintaining quality control in their counseling effectiveness—rather than sending them to internships in outside hospitals or clinics right away. In addition, most of the community agencies don't have video tape capability, a training tool available at the clinic."

Administrative and curricular issues have increased in complexity over time, Stoltenberg says. Mental health training and clinical counseling draw close scrutiny from several fronts.

"Accrediting agencies constantly increase standards," he says. "Part of

that represents 'gate keeping' to ensure quality training. Mental health deliverers must remain current in the latest techniques. Also, record keeping, paperwork and evaluation take more time. We deal with accreditations, too. The American Psychological Association rates us every five years. We're evaluated by state licensing boards governing both psychologists and licensed professional counselors."

Jody Newman, associate professor of educational psychology, joined the counseling psychology program in 1989 after holding positions at the University of North Dakota and Western Michigan University. She noticed an immediate difference in the demands placed on students.

"The quality and extent of practical training far exceeds anything I experienced in my previous jobs," she

"The quality and extent of practical training far exceeds anything I experienced in my previous jobs. Students receive a breadth of experience very unusual for an in-house training facility." — Jody Newman



Faculty mentors like Terry Pace, left, with doctoral candidate Scott Miller, carefully monitor the academic programs of graduate students as well as their counseling sessions with clients seeking help at the OU clinic.



Professor Cal Stoltenberg, who directs the clinic's academic programs, sits at the head of a seminar table full of earnest counseling psychology graduate students who have survived a rigorous screening process for admission to the highly rated program.

and director of the Pediatric Psychology Consultation and Liaison Service at Children's Hospital in Oklahoma City.

"When remembering the most valuable aspect of my training at OU, I think of the faculty," he says. "Not only are they professional and 'good people,' they promote a generalist counseling training philosophy firmly grounded in the scientist-practitioner model. That is, trainees tackle not just essential components of clinical practice, but also the scientific method behind competent practice. The result: effective, informed psychologists. Furthermore, I appreciated the freedom to explore my own clinical and research interests."

For more than three decades, the Counseling Psychology Clinic has helped the local community cope with psychological problems, training new professional counselors in the process. Counseling psychology graduates rank high when entering internships and residencies. Just as those World War II servicemen trained for battle, sharing their hopes and dreams in that south campus building, today's graduates embark well-prepared for another battle—healing hearts and minds.

Raymond H. McCaffrey Jr., psychologist with the Cleveland County Health Department Child Guidance Clinic, says, "OU's counseling psychology graduates enter our residency with greater breadth and depth of knowledge of clinically relevant material than those from any other program. When I walk the clinic's creaky floors, I often wonder if its builders could have imagined what their edifice would house, and how important it would prove for thousands of people."

says. "Students receive a breadth of experience very unusual for an in-house training facility."

Newman, one of seven counseling psychology faculty, has derived satisfaction from her clinic involvement.

"Watching the students develop personally and professionally makes the long hours worthwhile," she says. "From nervous stumbles at the start, they mature into confident clinicians. After graduation I share their sense of accomplishment as they advance professionally. They feel a bond toward the faculty and clinic staff, so they keep in touch."

Newman says lack of time challenges the faculty. Those teaching doctoral practica usually supervise eight students, an effort requiring two hours of group supervision and eight hours of individual supervision weekly, in addition to class preparation.

Considering the clinic's sub-standard physical facilities and equipment, accreditation visits present another challenge, Newman says. Small, black-and-white video monitors lack sufficient clarity for faculty to read facial expressions. Antiquated audio equipment often causes transcription losses during client inter-

views. Newman says clinic staff overcome the problem with people skills.

"While walking through the clinic lounge the other day, I observed the bottom of the couch about to fall out," she recalls. "I worried about our first impression on clients, that they will equate facilities with quality of service. When the American Psychological Association accreditation team visited, one of their members saw the building and said, 'Oh, no!' Later she pointed out that the building and equipment represent an introduction to the University of Oklahoma. She suggested that we consider changing that first impression. To update equipment alone would require \$100,000; that we receive accreditation speaks to the talent and dedication of people."

Many counseling psychology program graduates credit their clinic experience for recent success in their profession. Jim R. Keller recently completed a two-year post-doctoral fellowship in pediatric psychology at the OU Health Sciences Center. He has accepted appointments as clinical assistant professor, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at OUHSC