

# The Practical Path of Integrating Peer Psychological Counseling Into College Mental Health Education

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## Abstract

Mental health education in higher education institutions is transitioning from basic universalization to systematic refinement, as single-service approaches can no longer meet the increasingly complex psychological support needs of student populations. Peer counseling, an intervention method rooted in student agency and characterized by emotional engagement, has gradually become central to educational systems. This article analyzes three key dimensions—organizational development, channel integration, and practical mechanisms—to clarify implementation pathways, expand collaborative education frameworks, and address operational challenges while exploring developmental potential in real-world contexts.

## Keywords

Peer psychology; higher education; mental health.

## 1. Introduction

Mental health challenges are increasingly prevalent and concealed on university campuses, with traditional support systems facing growing pressures in both response efficiency and intervention effectiveness. Meanwhile, students' natural empathy and interactive networks have created new fertile ground for psychological support. Peer counseling has thus been reevaluated— It is no longer merely a marginalized form of emotional comfort but rather a practical model that bridges academic rigor with daily life. How to integrate this approach into the psychological education framework of higher education institutions has become an urgent practical challenge requiring immediate attention.

## 2. Strengthen Organizational Construction and Consolidate The Foundation of Peer Counseling

In the comprehensive framework of mental health education at universities, peer counseling is not merely a supplementary measure. It serves as a support mechanism deeply rooted in humanistic care, embodying the unique value of fostering both student self-reliance and mutual assistance. To genuinely integrate this approach into daily educational systems, we must address institutional foundations and organizational structures, remove obstacles, address shortcomings, and strengthen the foundation of every practical component.<sup>[1]</sup>

When establishing peer counseling systems, universities often face challenges such as unclear responsibilities and inefficient processes. Therefore, creating specialized organizations with clear functions becomes crucial. These organizations should not be nominal affiliations but must possess practical coordination capabilities and resource integration functions. For instance, a cross-departmental collaboration mechanism led by the Mental Health Education Center, involving the Student Affairs Office and Youth League Committee, can ensure peer counseling is not marginalized but integrated into the core of the educational system. Internal roles such as project management, training coordination, and evaluation feedback should be

established to enhance professional and systematic operations. Personnel selection requires balancing "accurate identification" with "effective cultivation." Peer counselors are not just listeners among peers but also disseminators of psychological support. Their role extends beyond technical tasks to encompass the cultivation of interpersonal trust networks. Thus, universities should prioritize psychological stability, emotional regulation skills, and empathy in candidate evaluations rather than relying solely on academic performance or student leadership experience. Introducing scenario simulations and case studies can more realistically demonstrate candidates' responses to complex interpersonal situations, thereby improving selection scientific rigor. Institutional development must avoid superficiality. An effective peer counseling mechanism requires a framework that balances standardization and flexibility. Universities should establish detailed implementation guidelines covering counseling procedures, information confidentiality, crisis management, and evaluation feedback, with regular revisions based on operational experiences. Simultaneously, a supervision system led by professional psychological counselors should be established. This system should not only provide professional support during the implementation of counseling services, but also organize a closed-loop reflection process post-counseling that includes case reviews, emotional guidance, and capacity-building. Only through this approach can we truly safeguard the psychological safety baseline of "counselors" themselves.<sup>[2]</sup>

### **3. Expand Integration Channels and Enhance The Effectiveness of Collaborative Education**

As mental health education in universities transitions from fragmented approaches to systematic development, peer counseling has evolved beyond being merely supplementary. Its unique emotional intimacy and role congruence have elevated it to a pivotal position within psychological support systems. However, without expanding channels and integrating mechanisms, the strengths of peer counseling risk being underutilized while potentially becoming marginalized due to functional isolation. Therefore, establishing a multi-dimensional collaborative education network has become crucial for enhancing educational effectiveness.

Peer counseling and curriculum education are not parallel entities but should form an interpenetrating relationship. When advancing mental health curriculum reforms, universities can integrate peer experiences into instructional design. By leveraging students' authentic personal circumstances and reflective practices, this approach breaks down the abstract barriers of theoretical concepts, making psychological knowledge more relevant to real-life scenarios. Some institutions have experimented with incorporating peer counselors into classroom project groups or discussion sessions, guiding them to incorporate personal growth experiences while encouraging dialogue through group interviews and role-playing exercises with instructors. This "student-involving-student-education" model enhances participation engagement and intrinsic motivation in mental health courses, while promoting flexible adaptation of educational content. The integration of peer support within psychological service systems also holds practical significance. Given the limited human resources of full-time university psychologists and the increasing diversity and frequency of student psychological issues, finding a balance between professional services and daily companionship remains a major challenge in current mental health education. Peer counselors, serving as bridges between formal support systems and informal networks, possess inherent advantages in information acquisition and interpersonal sensitivity. When properly trained and assigned clear responsibilities, guiding them to participate in preliminary psychological screening interviews, individual support referrals, and crisis signal feedback can effectively alleviate workload burdens on professional staff while extending

service reach. However, it's crucial to note that peer counseling should maintain boundaries—avoiding overstepping into professional judgment domains—and ethical boundaries and operational standards must be consistently reinforced. Within student affairs management systems, the potential of peer counseling has yet to be fully realized. The academic life of most students is closely intertwined through college, counselors, and class organizations. Introducing peer support at this level can bridge the gap between administrative management and psychological education. Establishing peer counseling points within classes, leveraging peer counselors' observations and feedback to inject psychological perspectives into daily management, helps create a more compassionate student affairs ecosystem. Meanwhile, self-management platforms like student clubs, volunteer organizations, and dormitory self-governance systems can extend peer counseling's reach. By integrating mental health elements into daily activities and organizational culture, psychological support transforms from being a "helped" state into an integral part of everyday life.<sup>[3]</sup>

#### 4. Deepen Practical Exploration to Promote Mental Health Growth

As mental health education in universities transitions from conceptual frameworks to practical implementation, peer counseling programs are receiving heightened attention for their effectiveness. Their value should extend beyond symbolic roles or promotional slogans, requiring concrete pathways and sustained momentum in practice. Three key pillars determine their educational impact: the organizational logic of activities, the depth of professional guidance, and the systematic feedback mechanisms.

The essence of activity design lies not in dazzling forms but in precise engagement. Universities can leverage students' developmental patterns and individual psychological traits to integrate peer psychological activities into authentic student contexts. Initiatives like "Stress Resonance Circles," "Dormitory Emotion Calendars," and "Vacation Readiness Bootcamps" often guide students to express inner feelings, accept others, and self-awareness through low-pressure, high-participation methods. Compared to grand themes and ceremonial settings, these micro-activities with gentle infiltration and natural integration more effectively build trust and establish stable psychological connections. Meanwhile, universities can organize phased deep programs aligned with seasonal milestones and campus events—such as exam anxiety workshops, freshman adaptation camps, and peer support training sessions—to provide structured support during stressful transitions. Merely laying out activity plans cannot ensure professional quality. The operational logic of peer counseling should be framed by standardized guidance mechanisms—not temporary "task assignments," but systematic, rhythmic continuous guidance. From planning and execution to post-event reflection, clear processes and feedback loops must be established. Psychological counselors shouldn't remain mere observers but should provide targeted guidance at critical junctures: offering theoretical support during theme conception, acting as risk-controlled "invisible gatekeepers" during interactions, and leading case reviews and methodological instruction after events. This "subtle embedded" approach ensures professional standards while avoiding excessive intervention that might stifle student expression. The establishment of feedback mechanisms signifies the transition of peer counseling practices from pilot testing to sustained implementation. Universities should develop diversified feedback systems involving participating students, peer counselors, and faculty members, incorporating multiple dimensions such as quantitative questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and process observations. This approach avoids substituting genuine progress tracking with superficial satisfaction surveys. More importantly, feedback shouldn't end with data archiving but should inform methodological adjustments and content redesigns. For instance, if research shows students show strong engagement with emotional regulation topics while showing low

acceptance of interpersonal communication modules, subsequent topic proportions and activity methods should be adjusted accordingly. By periodically updating practice frameworks and refining operational pathways, peer counseling can move beyond empirical approaches toward structural development.

## 5. Summary

The effective integration of peer psychological counseling hinges on both the scientific design of mechanisms and the warmth and dynamism in practical implementation. When organizational structures, collaborative pathways, and feedback systems achieve organic synergy, students' psychological growth will no longer rely on one-way interventions but will naturally emerge through coexistence, empathy, and co-construction. Future development should focus not on superficial expansion but on internalizing core mechanisms and cultivating enduring momentum – a crucial step for university psychological education to mature.

## Reference Documentation

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