

*Sul Ross State University*  
**Rio Grande College**  
**Counseling Program**  
*Department of Education*

# **GROUP COUNSELING**

EDUC 7315

3 semester credit hours

Fall Semester 2015

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Available to meet with students by appointment in Uvalde on Mondays and Wednesdays 4:00 – 6:00 pm and 8:45 – 10:00 pm.

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## **Course Purpose**

This course will provide students with an experiential and interactive opportunity to develop awareness and competence in counseling diverse groups of individuals through exploration of group dynamics, processes, and therapeutic interventions.

**Prerequisite:** *Student must have earned a grade of B or higher in EDUC 5314 or have permission of the instructor.*

## **Course Objectives**

Upon successfully completing this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify and explain small group dynamics and stages of group development. *Assessment of this objective will be conducted by the Mindful Observation Blog, instructor observation of classroom group participation, Blackboard activities, the Group Experience Curriculum, the Objective Final Examination, and the Take-Home Final Examination.*
2. State and describe the major ethical issues in group counseling and psychotherapy. *Assessment of this objective will be conducted by the Mindful Observation Blog, instructor observation of classroom group participation, Blackboard activities, the Objective Final Examination, and the Take-Home Final Examination.*
3. Demonstrate and discuss the essential group leadership skills and facilitation styles. *Assessment of this objective will be conducted by the Mindful Observation Blog, instructor observation of classroom group participation, the Group Experience Curriculum, the Objective Final Examination, and the Take-Home Final Examination.*
4. Recognize and apply theoretically specific techniques for group counseling and psychotherapy. *Assessment of this objective will be conducted by instructor observation of classroom group participation, the Group Experience Curriculum, the Objective Final Examination, and the Take-Home Final Examination.*
5. Demonstrate personal growth, increased self-awareness, and heightened insight as the result of authentic and genuine group participation. *Assessment of this objective will be conducted by the Mindful Observation Blog, instructor observation of classroom group participation, and the Take-Home Final Examination.*

## **Class Sessions**

This class will meet on Wednesday evenings, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:45 p.m., in Uvalde in B108. Class sessions are entirely experiential, with skill demonstration, modeling, discussion, and interpersonal group experiences. All students are group members and the instructors are co-facilitators. The group will be charged with choosing one of two different course formats. The traditional format consists of an integration of experiential and academic requirements with regular sessions every week through December 9, 2015. The encounter format consists of a total experiential emphasis through the final session on October 28, 2015, with one Saturday (or Sunday), chosen through group consensus, for the day-long Encounter Group Marathon in San Antonio. This alternative format would devote November and December to the academic endeavors, class tasks and tests occurring online with no quizzes (replaced with marathon investment). The traditional format would require the group to meet each Wednesday until the termination session on December 9, 2015 with all academic requirements (readings, quizzes, assignments, tests) interwoven throughout the semester. The encounter format would focus solely on the experiential elements through the termination session on October 28, 2015 with one full-day of Encounter Group Marathon. Then the course focus would shift to solely academic for the remainder of the semester. All academic endeavors (readings, assignments and exams) would take place in the virtual world on Blackboard during November and December, through the completion of the final examination on December 9, 2015. Selection of the format structure is the responsibility of the group with minor input from the co-facilitators. Additionally, if the group unanimously chooses the encounter format, then the group must select the day/date of the Encounter Group Marathon in San Antonio.

## Readings

Required readings will come from the following two texts:

### 1. Title: ***School Based Group Counseling***

Author: Christopher A. Sink, Cher Edwards, and Christie Eppler

Edition: First Edition (2012)

Publisher: Brooks/Cole (Cengage)

ISBN-10: 0618574476

ISBN-13: 9780618574476

Required/Optional: **Required**

*Note: You can rent this book for \$72 on Amazon, purchase a new copy of this book for \$96 from the publisher ([www.cengage.com](http://www.cengage.com)), rent an eTextbook for \$33 at Amazon or the publisher, or purchase the Kindle Edition bundle for \$94. Undoubtedly there are used copies available at even lower prices on HPBMarketPlace.com and other sites on the Internet, as well as from advanced counseling students and alumni of the RGC Counseling Program.*

### 2. Title: ***Groups: A Counseling Specialty***

Author: Samuel T. Gladding

Edition: 6<sup>th</sup> (2011) ***Don't purchase the brand new 7<sup>th</sup> edition. It is different and more costly.***

Publisher: Pearson

ISBN-10: 0137051522

ISBN-13: 9780137051526

Required/Optional: **Required**

*Note: You can rent this book for \$35 on Amazon, purchase a used copy of this book for \$90 from Amazon, or rent an eTextbook for \$38 at Amazon. Undoubtedly there are used copies available at even lower prices on HPBMarketPlace.com and other sites on the Internet, as well as from advanced counseling students and alumni of the RGC Counseling Program.*

## Course Requirements and Grading

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| *regular attendance and participation                         | 50 points  |
| *group experience curriculum                                  | 50 points  |
| *mindful observation blog                                     | 50 points  |
| *traditional quizzes or marathon investment and participation | 50 points  |
| *objective final examination online                           | 100 points |
| *take-home final examination due via email                    | 100 points |

According to this scale, there are 400 total points possible on which your final course grade will be based. A final point total of 360 or greater will earn you a final grade of A, a total of 320-359 will be a final grade of B, and a total of 280-319 will be a C grade (*does not meet the prerequisite for Practicum*). **Regardless of the excuse, late assignments will be discounted in point value at 10% of the total points possible per day of lateness.**



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|-------------|---|
| October 7   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Group cohesion</li><li>*Power</li><li>*Humor in groups</li><li>*Using group exercises and experiences</li><li>***Read: G8, G9 &amp; SEE4</li></ul>   |
| October 14  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Final stage of group development</li><li>*Application of counseling theory to group counseling</li><li>***Read: G11, G12 &amp; SEE5</li></ul>  |
| October 21  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Process of therapy in groups</li><li>*Emotional intensity</li><li>*Common pitfalls of beginning group counselors</li><li>***Read: G13, G14 &amp; SEE6</li></ul>  |
| October 28  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Dealing with problem situations</li><li>*Counseling children in groups</li><li>*Groups for adolescents in groups</li><li>***Read: G15 &amp; SEE7</li></ul>   |
| November 4  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Groups for adults</li><li>*Groups for the elderly</li><li>*Special issues in group counseling</li><li>*Group counseling in the 21<sup>st</sup> century</li><li>*Group guidance activities</li><li>***<b>TCA 2015 Professional Growth Conference in Corpus Christi!</b></li><li>***Read: G16 &amp; SEE8</li></ul> |
| November 11 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Working with groups of parents</li><li>*Groups for special populations</li><li>***Read: G17 &amp; SEE9</li></ul>   |
| November 18 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Multicultural issues in group counseling</li><li>*Group counseling in school settings</li><li>*Identifying and sharing group counseling resources</li></ul>  |

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November 25     **\*\*Thanksgiving Holiday: No Group Session**

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December 2     \*Review of group processes and dynamics  
\*Review of stages of group development  
\*Review of theoretically specific group interventions  
\*Facilitating a group: From promotion/screening to termination/referral  
**\*\*Take-Home Final Exam is Disseminated**  
**\*\*Objective Final Exam Online (12/3-12/10)**

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December 9     \*Terminating the group experience  
\*Rituals for termination  
**\*\*Due 12/9: Take-Home Final Examination is Due via Email**  
**\*\*Due 12/10: Mindful Observation Blog is Completed**  
**\*\*Due 12/10: Objective Final Exam Online (12/4-12/10)**

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# **PROPOSED COURSE OUTLINE**

## **Encounter Marathon Format**

| <b>DATE</b>  | <b>TOPICS, ASSIGNMENTS DUE, and READINGS</b>  |
|--------------|---|
| August 26    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Introductions</li><li>*Course overview and expectations</li><li>*Group counseling and psychotherapy</li></ul> <hr/>  |
| September 2  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Grouping and ice breakers</li><li>*Observation skills: Debriefing and feedback</li><li>*Self-monitoring</li><li>*Consensus and task groups</li><li>*Group processes</li><li>*Group stages of development</li></ul> <hr/> |
| September 9  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Purposes of groups</li><li>*Planning groups</li><li>*Ethical issues in group counseling</li></ul> <hr/>  |
| September 16 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Initial stage of group development</li><li>*Trust and safety</li><li>*Beginning stage</li></ul> <hr/>  |
| September 23 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Transition stage of group development</li><li>*Basic skills of group leaders</li><li>*Dealing with conflict in groups</li><li>*Roles of group members</li></ul> <hr/>  |
| September 30 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Working stage of group development</li><li>*Leadership</li><li>*Group norms and behavior</li><li>*Decision-making</li><li>*Self-disclosure</li></ul> <hr/>   |
| October 7    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Group cohesion</li><li>*Power</li><li>*Humor in groups</li><li>*Using group exercises and experiences</li></ul> <hr/>  |

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| October 14 | *Final stage of group development<br>*Application of counseling theory to group counseling |
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| October 21 | *Process of therapy in groups<br>*Emotional intensity<br>*Common pitfalls of beginning group counselors |
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|            |   |
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| October 28 | *Dealing with problem situations<br>*Counseling children and adolescents in groups<br>*Terminating the group experience<br>*Rituals for termination<br>*Saying good-bye |
|------------|---|

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| November 4<br>(Blackboard) | *Groups for adults<br>*Special issues in group counseling<br>*Group guidance activities<br><b>**TCA 2015 Professional Growth Conference in Corpus Christi!</b> |
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| November 11<br>(Blackboard) | *Working with groups of parents<br>*Groups for special populations |
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| November 18<br>(Blackboard) | *Multicultural issues in group counseling<br>*Group counseling in school settings |
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|             |   |
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| November 25 | <b>**Thanksgiving Holiday: No Group Session</b> |
|-------------|---|

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|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| December 2<br>(Blackboard) | <b>**Take-Home Final Exam is Disseminated</b><br><b>**Objective Final Exam Online (12/2-12/10)</b> |
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| December 9<br>(Blackboard) | <b>**Due 12/9: Take-Home Final Examination is Due via Email</b><br><b>**Due 12/10: Mindful Observation Blog is Completed</b><br><b>**Due 12/10: Objective Final Exam Online (12/4-12/10)</b> |
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## **Course Format Decision**

The Encounter Marathon Format centers around a day-long (10:00 am – 6:00 pm) group experience in San Antonio on a selected Saturday or Sunday. The group will be charged with choosing one of two different course formats. The traditional format (refer to first Proposed Course Outline) consists of an integration of experiential and academic requirements with regular sessions every week through December 9, 2015. The encounter format (refer to the second Proposed Course Outline) consists of a total experiential emphasis through the final session on October 28, 2015, with one Saturday or Sunday, chosen through group consensus, for the day-long Encounter Group Marathon in San Antonio.

This alternative format would devote November and December to the academic endeavors, class tasks and tests occurring online with no quizzes (replaced with marathon investment). The traditional format would require the group to meet each Wednesday until the termination session on December 9, 2015 with all academic requirements (readings, quizzes, assignments, tests) interwoven throughout the semester. The encounter format would focus solely on the experiential elements through the termination session on October 28, 2015 with one full-day of Encounter Group Marathon. Then the course focus would shift to solely academic for the remainder of the semester. All academic endeavors (readings, assignments and exams) would take place in the virtual world on Blackboard during November and December, through the completion of the final examination on December 9, 2015. Selection of the format structure is the responsibility of the group with minor input from the co-facilitators. Additionally, if the group unanimously chooses the encounter format, then the group must select the day/date of the Encounter Group Marathon in San Antonio. The co-facilitators will share the possible weekend dates from which the group can choose.

## **Remember these important dates:**

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| <b>August 24</b>      | Class begins and last day to add EDUC 6321 and/or EDUC 7315. |
| <b>August 27</b>      | Last day for late registration and schedule changes.         |
| <b>September 7</b>    | Labor Day Holiday.   |
| <b>October 19</b>     | Mid-Semester.  |
| <b>November 13</b>    | Last day to drop a course or withdraw from the University.   |
| <b>November 12-15</b> | TCA 2014 Conference in Dallas.                               |
| <b>November 25-27</b> | Thanksgiving Holiday.  |
| <b>December 2</b>     | Group Experience Curriculum is due.                          |
| <b>December 10</b>    | Group Observation Blog is due.                               |
| <b>December 3-10</b>  | Objective Final Exam is available online.                    |
| <b>December 10</b>    | Take-Home Final Exam is due via email.                       |
| <b>December 12</b>    | Fall Commencement in Uvalde at 7:30 p.m.                     |

# **ASSIGNMENTS AND ACTIVITIES**

## **Attendance and Participation**

All students are expected to attend all group sessions regularly and on time. Tardiness and absenteeism have extreme detrimental effects on small group processes. Missing a group session (class meeting) for any reason will result in the deduction of 20 points from the attendance and participation score, **regardless of the excuse**. All group members are expected to fully participate in all group experiences and activities. Participation is evaluated by the instructors on a subjective basis. Attendance and participation are worth a total of **50 points**. All students are required to turn off electronic devices such as cell phones, iPhones, and laptop computers. Any student who uses such electronic devices in class, or allows such instruments to make any sound during the class time frame, will be asked to leave class for that evening and will lose 20 points from the attendance and participation score. If a student's job requires him/her to be "on call for emergencies" then such arrangements should be discussed and planned in advance with the instructors.

## **Traditional Quizzes or Marathon Investment**

The group will be charged with choosing the course format: Traditional or Encounter. If the group unanimously selects the traditional course format, then there will be three quizzes administered at "random" times throughout the semester. These quizzes will focus on the required readings, and will be worth a total (all quizzes combined) of 50 points toward your final grade in this course. If the group unanimously selects the encounter marathon format, then there will be no academic quizzes but rather a score that reflects the student's level of investment and participation in the Encounter Group Marathon. The investment/participation score will also be based on 50 point possible.

## **Objective Final Examination**

All students are expected to satisfactorily complete a 100-point objective final examination that is based on the readings (two texts and posted articles/handouts). The examination items will expect you to integrate course content with the readings, and will consist of one hundred objective items (multiple-choice and true/false). The final examination will be available on Blackboard, **December 3-10, 2015**, and is worth a total of **100 points** toward your final grade in the course.

## **Take-Home Final Examination**

All students are expected to satisfactorily complete a take-home final examination that will be based on the discussions, readings and experiences during the semester. The examination items will expect you to integrate course content and experiences with the readings, and will consist of ten essay items chosen by you from a list of options. The take-home final examination, worth a total of **100 points**, will be disseminated on December 2 and will be due via email to the instructors no later than 11:59 pm of **December 10, 2015**.

## **Group Experience Curriculum**

One of the most important qualities of an effective group counselor is spontaneous creativity. Group counselors are continuously required to “invent” therapeutic experiences in the moment. All students are expected to create a ten-session (1 hour sessions) curriculum for group counseling. This curriculum should consist of ten therapeutic experiences for a specific group. Each of the ten experiences should be prepared much like a standard lesson plan, each reflecting the therapeutic goals of the counseling group and developmentally appropriate for the specific target population. You will determine both the focus of the group (common counseling concern) and the target population. Each “lesson” (experience or activity) must include the following information:

### **GOALS**

*Concise statements of the specific goals of this activity as related to the overall therapeutic goals of the group.*

### **OBJECTIVES**

*Action-oriented statements of the specific behavioral objectives of this activity as related to the overall therapeutic goals of the group.*

### **MATERIALS**

*Clear listing of all materials required for this experience or activity.*

### **DIRECTIONS**

*Step by step procedures for effectively implementing this activity or experience. Instructions should be clear and specific so that the experience can be easily and accurately replicated by another professional.*

### **EVALUATION**

*Suggested procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of the experience with the group members.*

The Group Experience Curriculum must be in PowerPoint format to facilitate immediate posting on the Blackboard in order to disseminate to all students in the class. The PowerPoint must be self-contained and include all required information (audio narrative is important to include). The projects are due on or before **December 2, 2015** and are worth a total of **50 points** toward your final grade. The Group Experience Curriculum will be graded on originality, creativity, cohesiveness, potential effectiveness, and overall presentation. All Group Experience projects will be shared with the entire group after instructor evaluation.

## **Mindful Observation Blog**

All students are expected to maintain a Mindful Observation Blog on Blackboard which documents, in detail, their personal observations, experiences, reactions to the group sessions, information, discussions, readings, and interactions. Blog entries should be made at least twice a week (the more the merrier). The Blog must document the student's observations of the group processes and dynamics and their own personal reactions to the group experience. Students will observe and record in their blogs the interpersonal communication systems, leadership roles, member roles, stages of group growth, decision-making, conflict, and power as they have witnessed and experienced in the processes of the group experience. Additionally, students should record their own cognitive and affective responses to group events and interpersonal interactions with other group members. Blog entries must be of substantial quantity and graduate level quality.

The Mindful Observation Blogs will be posted on Blackboard. Blog space is located within the content area entitled, **Group Counseling Blog**. Keep the same thread (i.e., blog space) for your blog throughout the entire semester since you can edit and modify your own postings. Do not create new blogs for additional entries. Do not use the "Comment" button to post additional entries to your own blog. Only use the "Comment" button when you are responding to someone else's blog entry. Always start your blog entry with the date and time of the journal entry. Post your most recent entries first before your older entries. Therefore, when we open your blog we will always see your latest and most recent entry first followed by everything else you have written. Continuously throughout the semester, the instructors will provide feedback to individuals regarding the content and depth of the blog entries.

All students are required to read and comment on other students' blogs. In your initial blog entry, please share some information about yourself so that we can get somewhat acquainted with one another. Please tell us your name, and then something about your various roles in life (family, work, social, leisure). Also, please tell us why you are in the Counseling Program and what you would like to do with your degree and/or training in the Counseling field. Finally, please share with us what you expect to get from this class.

When observing the group processes and recording your observations in your journal blog, use the following prompts to guide the writing of your entries:

- How would you describe the patterns of participation in the group? Did all have opportunities to participate? Were some excluded? Did a few dominate? Was an effort made to draw people out? If some members did not participate, how might you account for this? What needs to happen in the group in order for everyone to participate?
- How would you describe the patterns and styles of leadership behavior that emerged during the group? Did a leader, as such, emerge? Was a leader designated? Was leadership shared? Was there any structuring of the group? Were facilitation skills demonstrated? If so, by whom? If not, why not?
- How would you describe the structures that emerged to govern the behavior of the group members? What were the rules on which the group functioned? Did you notice any new or emerging rules or norms? Which rules seem to be present but unspoken? How was power manifested? Where and how did power flow during the group experience? Did group seem to be avoiding something? If so, what? How did the group deal with member anxiety? Where is your group developmentally? What needs to happen for your group to develop further?
- How would you describe the individual roles and responsibilities that developed and emerged in the group? Who initiated ideas? Who supported them? Did anyone block? Who helped push for decisions? Was there any attempt to summarize and pull together ideas? Do some

members tend to assume “care-taking” roles and responsibilities? Does someone seem to be the protagonist? Does someone seem to be the antagonist?

- How would you describe the decision-making processes employed by the group? Did the group get a lot of ideas suggested before beginning to decide, or did it begin deciding on only a single idea? Did everyone agree to the decisions made? Who helped influence the decisions of others? What issues did the group seem to (not) resolve? Did the group experience conflict? If so, why? If not, why not?
- How would you describe the patterns of communication utilized in the group? Did people feel free to talk? Were there any interrupting or cutting people off? Did people really listen to others? Was there clarification of points made? Who did people look at when they talked?
- How would you describe the affective qualities of trust and safety in the group? Were members sensitive to the needs and concerns of each other? What feelings did you see being expressed either verbally or nonverbally? What level of trust do you currently feel for the group? In which situations would you still not feel safe with your group? What needs to happen for group members to feel greater levels of trust and safety within the group?

Journal blog entries can include:

- Personal thoughts, feelings, insights, and reflections.
- Questions or concerns that arise as a result of various group experiences or course readings.
- Primary lessons learned.
- Applications of concepts and strategies to future group experiences.
- Thoughts that aren't yet fully formed, but that you want to refine later. This could include your feelings about the course and your progress in it, and theories that are developing in your mind.

The Mindful Observation Blog is worth a total of **50 points** toward your final grade in this course. Your initial blog entries must be posted by ***Sunday, August 30, 2015***. Students are graded on both the content and caliber of their own entries as well as the comments and interactions with other students' entries.

## **Professional Counseling Identity and Behavior**

The Counseling Program of Rio Grande College is a professional graduate program designed to meet the standards for Texas school counselor certification and professional state licensure. The Counseling Program does not train students for specific job descriptions, but rather provides a comprehensive preparation meeting the national and state standards of professional knowledge and skill in Counseling. The Counseling Program has specific policies and procedures which provide students with a sequential, growth-oriented progression of courses to take; students are fully responsible for knowing and following these policies and procedures. This is not a singular academic program to prepare students for advanced levels of teaching or beginning levels of administration, but rather a distinctly different profession entirely. Counseling is not an appropriate career field for all students. In the process of pursuing professional training in Counseling, some students discover (or faculty may advise) that they are not appropriate for the Counseling field, nor is the field of Counseling appropriate for them. Faculty of the Counseling Program will provide continuous, honest and pragmatic feedback to each student regarding progress and suitability in this program.

It is the personal and professional responsibility of each and every graduate student in the **Counseling Program** of Rio Grande College to be familiar with the most current issue of the **Counseling Program Handbook**. This document details and describes all aspects of the Counseling Program, from taking the first courses to passing the Comprehensive Oral Examination and graduating with the Master's in Counseling.

Unethical behavior (as defined by the *Code of Ethics* and *Standards of Practice* of the American Counseling Association) by a student enrolled in any counseling course will result in the exclusion of that student from the Counseling Program of Rio Grande College, and may subject the student to civil penalties as well. Professional behavior is expected of each and every student at all times across all Counseling courses. Failure to maintain professionalism is considered unethical behavior.

## **Distance Education Statement**

Although **Group Counseling** (EDUC 7315) is an experiential in-person course, a large portion of the full experience of this course will take place on Blackboard. Required readings, assignments, blogs, presentations, and videos will be posted on Blackboard. All students are expected to regularly access the class site on Blackboard and participate fully in the virtual aspect of this course.

**The policy on Distance Education at Rio Grande College is as follows:** Students enrolled in distance education courses have equal access to the university's academic support services, library resources, and instructional technology support. For more information about accessing these resources, visit the SRSU website. Students should submit online assignments through Blackboard or SRSU email, which require secure login information to verify students' identities and to protect students' information. The procedures for filing a student complaint are included in the student handbook. Students enrolled in distance education courses at Sul Ross are expected to adhere to all policies pertaining to academic honesty and appropriate student conduct, as described in the student handbook. Students in web-based courses must maintain appropriate equipment and software, according to the needs and requirements of the course, as outlined on the SRSU website.

## **Accessibility, Accommodations, and Modifications**

The Counseling Program of Rio Grande College is committed to equal access in compliance with the **Americans with Disabilities Act** of 1973 (as amended in 1990 and 2008). It is the student's responsibility to initiate a request for accessibility or modification services. Students seeking accessibilities, accommodations, and/or modification services must contact the Student Support Specialist on their campus, as well as inform the instructor of this course.

## **GROUP PROCESS: Debriefing Guidelines**

### **Participation**

Did all have opportunities to participate? Were some excluded? Did a few dominate? Was an effort made to draw people out? If some members did not participate, how might you account for this? What needs to happen in the group in order for everyone to participate?

### **Leadership**

Did a leader, as such, emerge? Was a leader designated? Was leadership shared? Was there any structuring of the group? Were facilitation skills demonstrated? If so, by whom? If not, why not?

### **Structures**

What were the rules on which the group functioned? Did you notice any new or emerging rules or norms? Which rules seem to be present but unspoken? How was power manifested? Where and how did power flow during the group experience? Did group seem to be avoiding something? If so, what? How did the group deal with member anxiety? Where is your group developmentally? What needs to happen for your group to develop further?

### **Roles**

Who initiated ideas? Who supported them? Did anyone block? Who helped push for decisions? Was there any attempt to summarize and pull together ideas? Do some members tend to assume “care-taking” roles and responsibilities? Does someone seem to be the protagonist? Does someone seem to be the antagonist?

### **Decision-Making**

Did group get a lot of ideas suggested before beginning to decide, or did it begin deciding on only a single idea? Did everyone agree to the decisions made? Who helped influence the decisions of others? What issues did the group seem to (not) resolve? Did the group experience conflict? If so, why? If not, why not?

### **Communication**

Did people feel free to talk? Were there any interrupting or cutting people off? Did people really listen to others? Was there clarification of points made? Who did people look at when they talked?

### **Trust and Safety**

Were members sensitive to the needs and concerns of each other? What feelings did you see being expressed either verbally or nonverbally? What level of trust do you currently feel for the group? In which situations would you still not feel safe with your group? What needs to happen for group members to feel greater levels of trust and safety within the group?

# **FAQ'S ON GROUP COUNSELING**

## **What is Group Counseling?**

In group therapy, six to twelve people meet face-to-face with one or more trained group counselors and talk about what is troubling them. Members also give feedback to each other by expressing their own feelings about what someone says or does. This interaction gives group members an opportunity to try out new ways of behaving and to learn more about the way they interact with others. What makes the situation unique is that it is a closed and safe system. The content of the group sessions is confidential; what members talk about or disclose is not discussed outside the group.

The first few sessions of a group usually focus on the establishment of trust. During this time, members work to establish a level of trust that allows them to talk personally and honestly. Group trust is achieved when all members make a commitment to the group.

## **Why does Group Counseling work?**

When people come into a group and interact freely with other group members, they usually recreate those difficulties that brought them to group counseling in the first place. Under the skilled direction of a group counselor, the group is able to give support, offer alternatives, or gently confront the person. In this way the difficulty becomes resolved, alternative behaviors are learned, and the person develops new social techniques or ways of relating to people. During group counseling, people begin to see that they are not alone. Many people feel they are unique because of their problems, and it is encouraging to hear that other people have similar difficulties. In the climate of trust provided by the group, people feel free to care about and help each other.

## **What are the goals of Group Counseling?**

- Exploring issues in an interpersonal context more accurately reflects real life.
- Group counseling provides an opportunity to observe and reflect on your own and others' interpersonal skills.
- Group counseling provides an opportunity to benefit both through active participation and through observation.
- Group counseling offers an opportunity to give and get immediate feedback about concerns, issues and problems affecting one's life.
- Group counseling members benefit by working through personal issues in a supportive, confidential atmosphere and by helping others to work through theirs.

## **What are the benefits of Group Counseling?**

- ✓ An increased sense of support and connectedness
- ✓ A decrease in self-criticism and negativity
- ✓ Renewed hope in one's own abilities
- ✓ Increased resourcefulness in finding solutions
- ✓ Greater ease in identifying feelings and self-disclosure
- ✓ A deepened trust for oneself and one's instincts
- ✓ More confidence in trying out possible solutions

## **What can I talk about in Group Counseling?**

Talk about what brought you to the session in the first place. Tell the group members what is bothering you. If you need support, let the group know. If you think you need confrontation, let them know this also. It is important to tell people what you expect of them. Unexpressed feelings are a major reason why people experience difficulties. Revealing your feelings (self-disclosure) is an important part of group counseling and affects how much you will be helped. The appropriate disclosures will be those that relate directly to your present difficulty. How much you talk about yourself depends upon what you are comfortable with. If you have any questions about what might or might not be helpful, you can always ask the group.

## **What are the common misperceptions about Group Counseling?**

1. "I will be forced to tell all of my deepest thoughts, feelings and secrets to the group."  
You control what, how much, and when you share with the group. Most people find that when they feel safe enough to share what is troubling them, a group can be very helpful and affirming. You are encouraged to not share what you are not ready to disclose. You can also be helped by listening to others and thinking about how what they are saying might apply to you.
2. "Group counseling will take longer than individual counseling because I will have to share the time with others."  
Actually, group therapy is often more efficient than individual counseling for two reasons. First, you can benefit from the group even during sessions when you say very little but listen carefully to others. You will find that you have much in common with other group members, and as they work on a concern, you can learn more about yourself. Secondly, group members

will often bring up issues that strike a chord with you, but that you might not have been aware of or brought up yourself.

3. “I will be verbally attacked by the leaders and by other group members.”  
It is very important that group members feel safe. Group leaders are there to help develop a safe environment. Feedback is often difficult to hear. As group members come to trust and accept one another, they generally experience feedback and even confrontation as positive, as if it were coming from their best friend. One of the benefits of group counseling is the opportunity to receive feedback from others in a supportive environment. It is rare to find friends who will gently point out how you might be behaving in ways that hurt yourself or others, but this is precisely what the group can offer. This will be done in a respectful, gentle way, so that you can hear it and make use of it.
4. “Group counseling is second-best to individual counseling and psychotherapy.”  
If group counseling is being recommended for a client it is because a counseling professional believes that it is the best way to address your concerns. Group counseling is recommended when it is the most effective method to help clients.
5. “I have so much trouble talking with people; I’ll never be able to share in a group.”  
Most people are anxious about being able to talk in group. Almost without exception, within a few sessions people find that they do begin to talk in the group. Group members remember what it is like to be new to the group, so you will most likely get a lot of support for beginning to talk in the group.

# **HOW TO RECOGNIZE AN EFFECTIVE GROUP**

## ***1. Members do not ignore seriously intended contributions.***

Each member needs to know the effect of his/her remarks if s/he is to improve the way s/he participates in the group.

When other members do not respond, the speaker cannot know whether:

- a. They did not understand his/her remark
- b. They understood it and agreed with it
- c. They understood it but disagreed with it
- d. They understood it but thought it was irrelevant

When this principle is followed, the discussion is cumulative and the group moves together. When it is not followed, the discussion becomes scattered, the same points are made over and over, and members feel no progress occurring.

## ***2. Members check to make sure they know what a speaker means before they agree or disagree with his or her contribution.***

The question, “What is it?” should precede the question, “How do we feel about it?” For example, understanding is prior to evaluation. Thus, group members frequently use paraphrase, perception checks, and provisional summaries to clarify their assumptions of what others are saying and feeling.

## ***3. Each member speaks only for himself or herself and lets others speak for themselves.***

Each member states his/her reactions as his/her own. He or she does not attribute them to others or give the impression s/he is speaking for others. Each member reports his or her own reactions honestly. She or he recognizes that unless s/he is true to self, the group cannot take his/her feelings into account.

## ***4. All contributions are viewed as belonging to the group, to be used or not as the group decides.***

A member who makes a suggestion does not have to defend it as “his” or “her’s” against the others. Instead, all accept responsibility for evaluating it as the joint property of the group.

**5. All members participate but in different and complementary ways.**

When some members fulfill task functions, others carry out interpersonal functions. While some members are providing information, others are making sure it is understood and organized, or identifying points of agreement and disagreement. Each member does not participate always in the same way. Instead, s/he fulfills whatever function is appropriate to his/her interest in the task, his/her information and the behavior of other group members.

**6. Whenever the group senses it is having trouble getting work done, it tries to find the reason.**

Some symptoms of difficulty are excessive hair-splitting, points repeated over and over, suggestions that “plop” and are not considered, private conversations in subgroups, two or three people dominating the discussion, members taking sides and refusing to compromise, ideas being attacked before they are completely expressed and apathetic participation. When such symptoms occur, the group shifts easily from working on the task to discussing its own interpersonal process. Discussing interpersonal process prevents pluralistic ignorance. For example, each member of the group is confused but thinks she or he is the only one.

**7. The group recognizes what it does is what it has chosen to do. No group can avoid making decisions; it cannot choose whether to decide, only how to decide. Thus, an effective group makes decisions openly rather than by default.**

When a group faces an issue, it must make a decision. It may agree openly to take action. It may agree openly to take no action. It may decide by default to take no action. Deciding by default not to act has the same impact on the problem as openly agreeing not to act. However, decisions by default are felt as failures by group members and create tensions among them. A group grows more by openly agreeing not to act than by not acting because they could not agree.

The group views each decision as a provisional trial that can be carried out, evaluated and revised in light of experience. The group is aware each decision need not be everything or nothing and need not last forever. When the group makes a decision that it does not carry out, it recognizes the real decision was one not to act, although the apparent decision was to act. The group openly discussed why the apparent and real decisions were not the same. They try to learn why some members agreed with the decision although they felt no personal commitment to carry it out. The group makes decisions in different ways depending upon the kind of issue and the importance of the outcome. The group may vote, delegate the decision to a special subgroup, flip a coin or require complete consensus. The crucial factor is the group has agreement on the way it makes decisions.

**8. *The group brings conflict into the open and deals with it.***

The members recognize conflict as inevitable. They know the choice is theirs as to whether the conflict will be open (subject to group control) or disguised (out of control).

**9. *The group looks upon behavior that hinders its work as happening because the group allows or even wants it; not just as the result of a “problem member.”***

A person who continually introduces irrelevancies can change the topic only if other members follow his or her lead. Instead of labeling “him” or “her” as the problem, the group considers this tactic a group problem. They determine why they all let it happen. Perhaps the other members welcome his digressions as a way of avoiding the open conflict that would occur if they stayed on the topic. Likewise, the person who talks too much...jokes too much...continually attacks others...or never participates, is a sign of a problem shared by the total group. The group needs to discuss it openly as “our problem” to eliminate the disruption. The group gives helpful information to individuals about the impact of their actions on the group. It does not, however analyze, dissect and “work them over.”

**Adapted from:**

Thelen, H. A. (1963). *Dynamics of groups at work*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.