

THE USE OF SUPPORT GROUPS TO SERVE UNDERREPRESENTED POPULATIONS

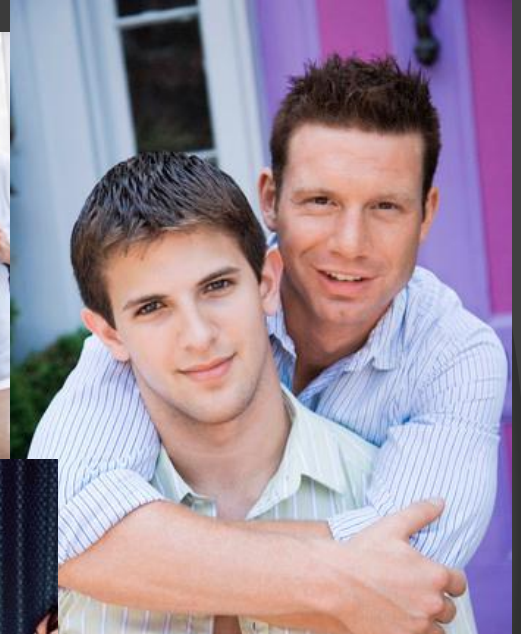
Presenters

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Presentation Agenda

- ◎ **Provide 3 examples** of support groups as a method of reaching students that underutilize traditional counseling services.
- ◎ **Engage in a discussion about:**
 - The use of support groups
 - Ways to target underserved students
 - Servicing students in need with limited resources

Who are Underserved Students?



Why do these students underutilize services?



- ◉ Incongruent help-seeking behaviors/attitudes
- ◉ Cultural mistrust
- ◉ Stigma



What are the Recommendations for Addressing Underutilization?

- ◎ Methods consistent with the help-seeking behaviors of the target population.
- ◎ Methods that increase students' trust in the counseling center and clinicians
- ◎ Methods that minimize stigma

Appealing Characteristics of Support Groups



- Can be either preventative or reactive
- Group format consistent with help-seeking behavior and even developmental level of students
- Not usually associated with “therapy” but provides therapeutic elements (reduces stigma)
- Strength-based (everyone has something to offer in terms of support)
- Can be provided outside the counseling center setting
- Serves more students with fewer resources

NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS SUPPORT GROUP

Getting Started: Our Process

⦿ What do we want to do?

- Mark: Interested in support group
- Mona: Experience with non-traditional group at Ball State University

⦿ “What gives us the right?”

- Can we relate to the “non-traditional” experience?
- Are we the best people to lead this group?

⦿ Who are we?

- Reflecting on our own experiences in college and in life
- Sharing our sense of ourselves and our “qualifications” with each other and group members

Identifying our Membership

- What does “Non-Traditional” even mean?
 - Our Thoughts and Goals:
 - Wanted to keep the definition very broad
 - Wanted students to be able to self-define
 - Wanted to be inclusive but not so general that the intention of the group would be unclear
 - Develop a description, rather than a definition, of non-traditional
 - Provide examples

Initial Description: Fall 2011

⦿ Are you a student that is also...

- a parent
- a transfer student
- entering school later in life
- holding a job
- coping with a disability
- OR see yourself as a non-traditional student in some other way?

Modified Description: Fall 2011

- ◎ **Title:** Non-Traditional Student Support Group
“I am more than the college experience”
- ◎ **Possible Referrals Include (but not limited to):**
 - Transfer students
 - Students that took time off before attending college
 - Students with jobs
 - First generation college students
 - Students with disabilities
 - Students of color
 - Students with veteran status
 - Students who are in long-term committed relationship
 - Students married/divorced
 - Students with children
 - Older students
 - Students who identify as sexual minority

Current Description: Spring 2012

◎ **Students who could benefit include:**

- Transfer students
- Students that took time off before attending college
- Students with jobs
- First generation college students
- Students with disabilities
- Students of color
- Students with veteran status
- Students who are in long-term committed relationships
- Married or divorced students
- Students with children or who are pregnant
- Older students
- Students who are members of LGBTQA communities
- Students who feel isolated based on faith/religious beliefs
- And students with other non-traditional experiences

Current Description: Spring 2012

● **Included:**

In this group, participants will be able to learn from and connect with other students on a variety topics such as:

- juggling multiple life and academic responsibilities
- navigating the UT system and campus culture
- finding life balance
- managing professional and personal relationships
- career decisions/challenges
- and much more!

Getting the Word Out

- ◉ Counseling and Mental Health Center staff
- ◉ Division of Diversity and Community Engagement
 - ACE Meeting
- ◉ Gender and Sexuality Center
- ◉ Services for Students with Disabilities
- ◉ Student Veteran Services
- ◉ Multicultural Engagement Center
- ◉ Listservs:
 - Academic advisors
 - Non-traditional student social workers

Balancing Needs of Students with Available Resources

◎ Location

- Concerns about confidentiality
- No access to crisis intervention
- Would an off-site location be preferable?

◎ Time of sessions

- Mid-afternoon sessions
- Limited student access to center after 5pm
- Lack of staff for crisis intervention
- Limitations of co-leaders' schedules

Balancing Needs of Students with Available Resources

- ◎ Center's need for efficiency in services
 - High demand for individual services
 - Groups are effective and efficient service
 - Efficiency of group services is higher with larger group rosters
 - Can we attract enough members?
 - Center also greatly values
 - Reaching students who might otherwise not seek out our services
 - Providing clinical opportunities for trainees
 - Supporting staff creativity and professional growth

Group Structure

- ④ What is the role of facilitators?
- ④ Are topics generated by leaders or members?
- ④ How much “process” should there be in a support group?
- ④ How do you develop cohesion with a very diverse student group?

What Happened?

- ◎ Membership in Fall: 4
- ◎ Members represented the following groups:
 - international students
 - married students
 - students with children
 - students returning to school later in life
 - economically disadvantaged students
 - first-generation students
 - transfer students
 - graduate students

What Happened?

- ◎ Topics of discussion included:
 - the stress of feeling
 - “out of place” at UT
 - transition to college issues
 - family of origin concerns
 - distress resulting from conflicts with faculty and peers
 - desire for connection and understanding

What's next?

- ⦿ Continuing to reach out to campus groups
 - Continued talks with serving students through DDCE
- ⦿ Have 5-6 referrals this semester
- ⦿ Planning to focus on adding some structure (e.g., more defined check-in and check-out)
- ⦿ Intending to be more active in terms of ensuring that all members have adequate “air time”

University of Texas at Austin

**SURVIVAL STRATEGIES
WORKSHOP SERIES FOR
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT GROUPS AT UT IN THE PAST 5 YEARS

- 2007-2008: International Student Group
- 2008-2009: International Student Discussion Forum
- 2009-2011: International Student Support Group
- 2011-2012: Survival Strategies Workshop Series for International Students

GROUP DESCRIPTION

- ⦿ Are you an *international student at UT* and also feeling:
 - Homesick?
 - Worried about your English speaking/writing skills?
 - Unsure of how to make American friends?
 - Angry or confused about the American culture?
 - Feeling alone and like no one understands?
 - Eager to learn about how to succeed in your classes?

- ⦿ If you answered YES to any of these questions... join us for the International Student Workshop Series! The workshop series is a place to come learn how to improve your life and academics. It also gives students an opportunity to meet other international students with similar experiences. Each meeting will discuss a different topic. You may come to 1 or ALL of the group meetings. It's up to you!

GROUP DESCRIPTION

- ◎ The following is a list of topics and meeting dates:
 - 10/14—Navigating the Classroom, Working with Professors, and Campus Resources
 - 10/21—Working through the Challenges of Communicating in English
 - 10/28—Dealing with Loneliness, Homesickness, and Culture Shock
 - 11/04—Maintaining Relationships in Home Country and Making New Friends
 - 11/11—Asserting Yourself with Professors, Friends, and Strangers
 - 11/18—Minimizing Stress, Goal-Setting, and Identifying Expectations

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN DEVELOPING THIS GROUP

- ⦿ Identifying factors that are important to international students
 - Academic achievement
 - Time management
 - Career outlook
- ⦿ Connect the benefit of the group to these factors
- ⦿ Location
- ⦿ Time

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN DEVELOPING THIS GROUP

- ⦿ Consultation with International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) staff
- ⦿ Format
 - Workshop series vs. support group
 - Psychoeducation vs. open discussions
 - Drop-in vs. semester-long commitment

GETTING THE WORD OUT

⦿ Direct contact

- ISSS listserv
- ISSS office
- Monthly Lunch Hour Seminars
- Other outreach events

GETTING THE WORD OUT

- ⦿ Indirect contact
 - Counseling center staff
 - ISSS student advisors
 - Email to other Student Affairs offices
 - Know Events listings
- ⦿ Results—Fall 2011

OBSERVATIONS AND EXAMPLES

- Students' needs for practical information
- Concerns regarding English proficiency
- General anxiety about interactions with American students and professors/supervisors
- Frustration about adjustment difficulties
- Helpful to provide facilitator's personal experiences and offer other students' examples

INTERESTING FINDINGS

- ⦿ Attendance of the sessions after Lunch Hour Seminars
- ⦿ Students represent a wide range of diversity
- ⦿ Students' reactions to different locations
- ⦿ Reported difficulties with other international students
- ⦿ Difficulty seeking support during the most difficult period

Baylor University

BLACK ACADEMIC SUPPORT GROUP

Brief Overview:

◎ Purpose:

- Provide supportive environment for Black students
- Opportunity to share frustrations and challenges experienced at PWI
- Improve academic, psychological and interpersonal functioning

Group Description

- ⦿ Support group format
- ⦿ Psychoeducational component:
 - Claude Steele “Stereotype Threat”
 - Cross’ Ethnic Identity development Model

Group Development Considerations

⦿ Logistical Barriers:

- Competition for space
- inflexible group time availability

⦿ Cultural Barriers

- Monocultural/inflexible group structure & process may not be seen as efficacious by Blacks
 - Corey (2004) suggests modifying strategies to meet unique group therapy needs of cultural groups

Group Development Considerations

⦿ Sue and Sue (2008):

- Black students & ethnic minorities may prefer
 - High-context communication/economical communication (perhaps more colloquial approach at times)
 - more active expressive skills (directions/advice giving, interpretation)
 - Introjection of values and opinions

Therapeutic Goals

- Experience universality, altruism, and direct advice in support group
- Lend credibility to emotional experience of attending PWI and coping with microaggressive behavior
- Increase knowledge of stereotype threat and fixed capacity vs. malleable conceptualization of intelligence
- Increase awareness of ethnic identity development process
- Increase academic and psychological help-seeking behavior, from development of bicultural competence

Initial Collaboration

- ◎ Paul L. Foster Success Center
 - Agreement with Academic Support Center
 - Due to time and space restraint Collaborative effort not possible
- ◎ Decision to host group in the Student Union Building and work collaboratively with Department of Multicultural Affairs

Advertisement

- Group Flyer displayed in Department of Multicultural Affairs

Failure

- ⦿ No success whatsoever

Collaboration/Consultation

- ⦿ Set up meeting with Multicultural Coordinator
 - Discussed utilization of office GA, and usage of Multicultural Affairs tweet and facebook page
 - Discussed potential times traditionally used for their programming
- ⦿ Emailed president of Black Student Association
 - Discussed with MA coordinator in terms of point person to contact of this organization

Future Hope

- ① Develop good working relationship with Black Student Association
- ① Find appropriate group time
- ① Successfully recruit members for participation in the Black Academic Support Group

Potential Discussion Questions

- ⦿ What are others' experiences with:
 - using support groups
 - targeting underserved populations
 - navigating limited counseling center resources
- ⦿ How do you demonstrate the efficiency of such a method to your counseling center? How much efficiency is “enough”? Can it be measured against the value of meeting the needs of underserved populations?
- ⦿ What elements of the counseling center (other than availability of resources) facilitate or stunt these types of endeavors?
- ⦿ How have you overcome barriers you've encountered?
- ⦿ Considering the support groups discussed today, what would you change or do differently?