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?
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 LGBTQ+ communities
  - Students who feel isolated based on faith/religious beliefs
  - And students with other non-traditional experiences
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

- What is the role of facilitators?
- Are topics generated by leaders or members?
- How much “process” should there be in a support group?
- 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
- 11/11—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
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
  - Monoculutural/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 biculutral 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

- Develop good working relationship with Black Student Association
- Find appropriate group time
- 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?