

# Ensure Students Are Learning: Faculty Descriptions of Innovative Teaching Practices

## Group Therapy Session Simulation in Psychology Course

### Innovative Teaching Practice Description:

This psychology instructor assesses learning through a summative research project requiring students to apply their knowledge of counseling techniques by facilitating a mock group therapy session. This project is broken into three parts that each correlate with a chapter of their final project paper: research, facilitation, and reflection.

During the research portion of the project, students work individually to create a group therapy treatment proposal. First, they use a combination of academic sources and demographic data to identify needs, issues, and problems within their community. Once they identify an issue of interest to them, like child behavior problems or major life transitions, students choose a specific topic within that issue on which to center their group therapy session. Common topics are bullying, depression, and substance abuse.

After choosing a specific topic, students write a group therapy treatment proposal as the first chapter of their research project paper. Students must include the following: (1) a research-based justification using four to five scholarly sources explicating why group therapy is an appropriate treatment for the chosen topic, (2) objectives for the group sessions, (3) recruitment procedures, (4) participant selection and screening processes, (5) frequency and duration of the group sessions, (6) applicable counseling techniques and group activities, and (7) a limited confidentiality

statement and informed consent procedures.

Prior to starting the second phase of the project, the instructor recruits five to six college faculty members and staff to participate in mock group therapy sessions. Each volunteer is assigned a specific role, including common behaviors and a back story. To illustrate, a faculty member participating in a bullying group might role play a previously bullied adolescent boy engaging in the same behavior to fit in with the popular crowd at school. In this role, the group member is instructed to dominate the conversation, giving student facilitators opportunities to practice counseling techniques like redirecting behavior and active listening.

Students sign up for a 15-minute mock group therapy session held during class time. To ensure fairness, students other than the student facilitator are not allowed in the classroom. The student facilitator leads the mock group through a structured set of pre-planned activities, aligned to an accompanying rubric, including (1) completing a limited confidentiality statement, (2) informed consent procedures, (3) an ice-breaker, (4) research-based group therapy techniques, and (5) a closing activity. In the second chapter of their final research project paper, students write a pre-group facilitation plan including a list of questions, techniques, and activities. After the mock group session, students modify their pre-group plan to reflect the real experience.

The final phase of the project requires students to reflect on their practice: Students assess their own performance, suggest improvements for themselves, and record takeaways from the experience.

### Notes From the Instructor About This Innovative Teaching Practice:

The instructor noted that this project increases student engagement because learners pose multiple solutions to real-world problems, challenge themselves to implement research-based best practices, and actively lead group facilitation sessions. Engaged students are not content to just absorb knowledge, but rather seek to apply course content to the best of their abilities.