AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE CURRENT PRACTICES OF GROUP COUNSELING INSTRUCTORS IN THE DELIVERY OF THE REQUIRED EXPERIENTIAL GROUP IN ACCREDITED INSTITUTIONS

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This study was designed to determine the diverse practices of group counseling instructors in the delivery of the required experiential group. A small group experience (experiential group) is required of all counseling students in accredited institutions. The accreditation body for counseling programs is the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP).

The experiential group has been considered to be a valuable and integral part of counselor training. However, the group has been controversial because of ethical issues involving dual relationships and the right to privacy.

The purpose of this study was to determine how group counseling instructors deliver the experiential group, compare current practices to recommended practices in the literature, and recommend changes based on disparities that may exist. The difference between this study and previous surveys of group counseling instructors is that the sample in this study involves CACREP institutions exclusively and the focus is on CACREP standards rather than the standards of the Association for Specialists in Group Work.

The results of the study showed that approximately one third of the instructors surveyed indicated that they also serve as leaders of the experiential group. Many of these

instructors who serve as group leaders also indicated that they use the group for gatekeeping. Instructors in this study also indicated that understanding group process was the most important goal of the required experiential group. Personal growth was not ranked highly as a goal of the experiential group.

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I gratefully acknowledge the group-counseling instructors at CACREP institutions who completed the surveys for this study.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Historically, counselor educators have recognized the importance of experiential components in the training of counselors. A personal group experience, or experiential group, has become widely accepted as an integral part of training programs (Conyne, Wilson, Kline, Morran, & Ward, 1993; M. S. Corey & Corey, 1992; G. Corey, 2000; Dies, 1974; Donigian, 1993; Huhn, Zimpfer, Waltman, & Williamson, 1985; Lechowicz & Gazda, 1975; Merta, Wolfgang, & McNeil, 1993; Yalom, 1975, 1985, 1995). Yalom (1995) stated that participation in an experiential group offers students many types of learning that are not available elsewhere.

Counselor educators have stated that the benefits of this kind of experiential learning include counselor trainees personally experiencing their own resistance and fears of self-disclosure (G. Corey, 2000; Kline, Falbaum, Pope, Hargraves, & Hundley, 1997; Yalom, 1995); developing more skill in giving and receiving feedback (G. Corey, 2000; Kline et al., 1997; Sklare, Keener, & Mas, 1990; Yalom, 1995); developing a better understanding of a client's experience (G. Corey, 2000; Kline et al., 1997; Yalom, 1995); and learning things at an emotional level that are introduced on a cognitive level (G. Corey, 2000; Dobson & Campbell, 1986; Kline et al., 1997; Sklare, Thomas, Williams, & Powers, 1996; Yalom, 1995).

The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational

programs (CACREP, 1994, 2001) has required all master's-level counseling students to have experience as group members in their training programs. This requirement has been considered an essential part of training for all counselors regardless of their interest in group work (Conyne et al., 1993; Wilson, Conyne, & Ward, 1994). Even though an experiential group has been considered an integral part of counselor training, the delivery of the group is still controversial (G. Corey, 2000; Donigian, 1993; Forester-Miller & Duncan, 1990; Merta & Sisson, 1991; Merta et al., 1993; Sklare et al., 1996). Much of the controversy concerns ethical issues such as dual relationships (G. Corey, 2000; Donigian, 1993; Herlihy & Corey, 1992, 1996; Kitchener, 1988; Kitchener & Harding, 1990; Lloyd, 1990; Merta & Sisson, 1991; Roberts, Murrell, Thomas, & Claxton, 1982; Sklare et al, 1996; Yalom, 1995) and voluntary versus mandatory participation (G. Corey, 2000; Forester-Miller & Duncan, 1990; Forester-Miller & Rubenstein, 1992; Merta & Sisson, 1991; Pierce & Baldwin, 1990; Sklare et al., 1996; Yalom; 1995).

Initially, CACREP stated that a group experience be provided for students (CACREP, 1988). In the 1988 standards, there were not a minimum number of hours required for the experience. However, the 1988 standards did specify (II-F) that the group needed to be led by a qualified professional. In addition, CACREP referenced the American Association for Counseling and Development (AACD) ethical standards regarding dual relationships. Certainly, the implication in the 1988 CACREP standards was that the leader of the group experience for students was not to be the instructor of the group counseling class.

In its updated procedures manual, CACREP (1994) changed its position on the

leader of the group. The 1994 standards specifically stated that the group requirement "may be met during the initial curricular experience in group work under the direction of the professor teaching the course" (p. 48). Then, in the 2001 standards, CACREP avoided the issue of the leader of the group experience by not even mentioning the issue (CACREP, 2001).

Counselor educators have recommended solutions to these controversial issues, such as having someone other than the group instructor lead the experiential group (G. Corey, 2000; Forester-Miller & Duncan, 1990; Lechowicz & Gazda, 1975; Merta & Sisson, 1991; Yalom, 1995); making the experiential group voluntary (Forester-Miller & Duncan, 1990; Small & Manthel, 1988); providing informed consent to counselor trainees prior to their enrollment in the program (G. Corey, 2000; Forester-Miller & Duncan, 1990; Pierce & Baldwin, 1990; Merta & Sisson, 1991); clarifying the nature of the self-disclosure that is expected in the experiential group (G. Corey, 1985; G. Corey, 2000; Forester-Miller & Duncan, 1990; Kline, 1986; Pierce & Baldwin, 1990); and addressing the issue of how students are evaluated (Forester-Miller & Duncan, 1990; Yalom, 1995).

The CACREP requirement that all counseling students participate in an experiential group has been fulfilled in many diverse ways by counselor education programs. In a national survey that included 65 CACREP schools, Merta et al. (1993) found that 39% of the counselor educators surveyed serve as the leaders of the required experiential groups. These counselor educators utilized a group counseling approach that involves combining the roles of instructor and experiential group leader. This practice of

combining roles has not been recommended by many experts in group counseling (Berg, Landreth, & Fall, 1998; G. Corey, 2000; Lechowicz & Gazda, 1975; Merta & Sisson, 1991; Yalom, 1995).

Merta et al. (1993) also found that many of the group counseling instructors surveyed observe groups that they do not lead (22%) or receive feedback from group leaders regarding student attendance or performance (19%). Other group counseling instructors received no feedback from group leaders (8%) or did not provide an experiential group for counselor trainees (12%). The above-mentioned survey certainly suggested that group counseling instructors have utilized a wide range of approaches regarding the leadership and evaluation of the experiential group.

The Merta et al. (1993) study referred to the experiential group as a component in the training of master's-level students in group counseling. CACREP (1994), however, was not as specific in its description of the small group activity in which all students were required to participate. CACREP did not even specify that the small group activity was an activity that was a component of the group work course. There was no mention in the CACREP standards that the required small group experience was a part of training as a group counselor. In the procedures manual, CACREP (1994) separated the requirement of the small group activity from the common-core area of group work.

In summary, counselor educators have viewed the experiential group as both an invaluable training tool for counselor trainees and a dilemma that has involved issues of dual relationships and potentially unfair evaluation practices. There is great diversity in how group counseling instructors utilize the experiential group in their training of

counselors. There is also ambiguity about whether the small group activity required by CACREP for all master's-level students is a part of group counselor training. In light of CACREP requirements for counselor trainees, it is important to implement sound practices regarding the experiential group.

Statement of the Problem

CACREP (1994, 2001) has required all master's-level counseling students to have experience as group members in their training programs. However, CACREP has been inconsistent in specifying who should lead the group experience. In 1988, CACREP stated that the leader should be someone other than the group counseling instructor (CACREP, 1988). In 1994, CACREP changed its position and specifically stated that the leader could be the professor teaching the course. In 2001, CACREP avoided the issue of group leader by not mentioning it in the requirement.

Many experts in the field of group counseling have agreed that participation in an experiential group is an essential and invaluable part of training for all counseling students. However, the purpose of the CACREP-required group has been unclear. In the literature, the CACREP group experience is included with groups that are a component of group counselor training. The experiential group has been controversial, and many of the practices of group counseling instructors that have been utilized in the implementation of the group experience are not recommended in the literature. Previous surveys of group counseling instructors have focused on the standards of the Association for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW). The literature did not reveal any studies on how the CACREP required group experience is met. Further, the literature failed to reveal any recent

surveys of group counseling instructors in CACREP institutions.

Synthesis of Related Literature

A review of the related literature involved the following areas: current and past CACREP standards regarding the requirement of the experiential group in master's-level programs; ethical concerns regarding the delivery of the experiential group; perceptions of counselor educators and counseling students regarding the importance and value of the group; and recommendations from counselor educators on the goals, structure, and preparation needed to maximize the impact of the experiential group.

CACREP Standards

The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) has established minimal criteria for the preparation of professional counselors in institutions applying to become accredited. Applicants seeking accreditation must document how their counseling programs meet each of the CACREP standards. According to Forster (1977), many of the CACREP standards "represent the culmination of an extensive amount of effort" (p. 595) by counselor educators during the sixties and seventies. The standards that eventually became the standards of CACREP were "developed during the early sixties when a committee of the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) conducted a five-year Planning Cooperative Study of Counselor Education Standards" (p. 595).

The CACREP standards have required master's-level students to have experience as group members since 1988. Apparently, this CACREP requirement evolved from the above-mentioned standards developed by ACES in the sixties and seventies. Specifically,

there were three standards that CACREP combined into one. The original ACES standards focused separately on self-understanding, self-analysis, and improvement in interpersonal relationships. The ACES standards (1977) stated that, "Opportunities for planned periodic self-evaluation and the development of greater self-understanding are provided for both students and faculty" (p. 598). Immediately following this standard were two standards that related to what eventually became the small group requirement. "Self-analysis is encouraged through such activities as laboratory experiences, including audio- and/or videotape recordings" (p. 598). "Opportunities for improvement of interpersonal relationships are provided through small-group activities" (p. 598).

The CACREP standards (1988) combined these standards into one and specified the purpose of the group experience for students.

> During their programs, students are provided the opportunity to participate in a planned and supervised small group activity designed to promote and improve students' self-understanding, self-analysis skills, and interpersonal skills. The activity is NOT used or intended to provide "counseling" or therapy for students. The activity is conducted by a qualified professional who has completed the activity or a similar experience and has had preparation in group skills. (Please note Section B-11, *Ethical Standards* of The American Association for Counseling and Development, 1981.) (p. 46)

In this section of the 1988 standards, CACREP also specified that the leader of the small group experience should be someone who is trained, but not a professional with a dual relationship with the students. The ethical standard referenced above, Section B-11 in the

1981 *Ethical Standards* of the American Association for Counseling and Development (AACD), directs members of the organization to avoid dual relationships.

> When the member has other relationships, particularly of an administrative, supervisory, and/or evaluative nature, with an individual seeking counseling services, the member must not serve as the counselor but should refer the individual to another professional. Only in instances where such an alternative is unavailable and where the individual's situation warrants counseling intervention should the member enter into and/or maintain a counseling relationship. Dual relationships with clients might impair the member's objectivity and professional judgment (for example, as with close friends or relatives, sexual intimacies with any client) must be avoided and/or the counseling relationship terminated through referral to another competent professional. (pp. 192-193)

In the 1988 standards, CACREP clearly did not want the leader of the small group to be the course instructor. However, in the subsequent revision of its standards, CACREP (1994) revised its position on the leader of the small group activity.

> Over the course of an academic term, students meet for a minimum of 10 clock hours, within the program, in a small-group activity. This planned group requirement is intended to provide direct experiences as a participant in a small group, and may be met during the initial curricular experience in group work under the direction of the professor teaching the course. (p. 48)

Finally, in another revision of the standards, CACREP (2001) omitted any reference to the issue of who should lead the group experience.

> Over the course of one academic term, students meet for a minimum of 10 clock hours in a small-group activity approved by the program. This planned group requirement is intended to provide direct experiences as a participant in a small group. (p. 6)

In this statement, CACREP placed responsibility on the local CACREP-accredited program to determine the appropriateness of the structure of the group, including the leadership issue.

Conyne et al. (1993), referring to CACREP standards, stated that the required group course provides the core competencies that all master's-level counseling students should possess. Conyne et al. also stated that these core competencies should include both cognitive and experiential components.

The CACREP standards (1994) stated that, "curricular experiences and demonstrated knowledge in each of the eight common-core areas are required of all students in the academic unit" (p. 49). One of the eight common-core areas that CACREP required all students to experience and demonstrate knowledge in was group work. Group work studies included an understanding of group development, dynamics, theory, methods, and skills.

A review of the literature, however, did not reveal specifically how group instructors in CACREP-accredited institutions implement this requirement. Several counseling research studies have surveyed group counseling instructors, but in the past several years they have not surveyed all of the CACREP master's-level programs, and all of the recent surveys in the literature have included programs that were not accredited by

CACREP (Huhn et al., 1985; Merta & Sisson, 1991; Merta et al., 1993).

One study that sampled CACREP group instructors was found in the literature (Wilson, et al., 1994). However, at the time of this survey, there were only 86 CACREP-accredited programs in the United States. Of the 86 programs surveyed, only 68 returned usable responses. In addition, the purpose of the above-mentioned CACREP "survey was to determine the extent to which a responding institution" (Wilson et al., 1994, p. 142) met the training standards of the Association for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW, 1991). The primary focus of the Wilson et al. study was on the status of group work training in counseling programs accredited by CACREP.

Ethical Concerns

Many counselor educators have expressed concern about the ethical dilemmas of requiring an experiential group as a part of the counseling program. Counselor educators have focused on issues such as who should lead the experiential group (G. Corey, 2000; Donigian, 1993; Forester-Miller, 1992; Forester-Miller & Duncan, 1990; Herlihy & Corey, 1992, 1996; Huhn et al., 1985; Lechowicz & Gazda, 1975; Lloyd, 1990; Merta & Sisson, 1991; Merta et al., 1993; Patrick, 1989; Sklare et al., 1996; Williams, 1990; Williams, 1992; Yalom, 1995); how counselor trainees should be evaluated, and by whom (Forester-Miller & Duncan, 1990; Lloyd, 1990; Merta & Sisson, 1991; Pierce & Baldwin, 1990; Pistole & Filer, 1991; Ritter, 1982; Sklare et al., 1996; Yalom, 1995); whether experiential groups should be required or voluntary (Capuzzi & Muffett, 1980; G. Corey, 2000; Forester-Miller & Duncan, 1990; Merta & Sisson, 1991; Pierce & Baldwin, 1990; Yalom, 1995); how much self-disclosure is appropriate in these groups

(G. Corey, 2000; Forester-Miller & Duncan, 1990; Merta & Sisson, 1991; Morran, 1982; Pierce & Baldwin, 1990; Sklare et al., 1996); and whether group counseling instructors should use issues that emerge in the experiential group for screening and gatekeeping purposes (Bernard, 1987; Donigian, 1993; Forester-Miller & Duncan, 1990; Merta & Sisson, 1991; Patrick, 1989; Pierce & Baldwin, 1990; Sklare et al., 1996).

The leader of the experiential group. There has been considerable disagreement in the literature about whether the group counseling instructor should lead the experiential group (Donigian, 1993). Donigian synthesized the thoughts and positions of a panel of distinguished ASGW counselor educators. The panel discussed the multiple roles, or dual relationships, that they hold while teaching courses that have experiential components. Donigian noted that instructors and students are caught in a dilemma in these courses. Students have a right to privacy and a need to feel safe enough to be themselves without a fear of being evaluated. Students cannot be forced to disclose personal material, but self-understanding and growth are necessary to become effective counselors (Donigian, 1993).

Many leaders in the field of group counseling have recommended that the instructor not be the leader of the group (Berg et al., 1998; Lechowicz & Gazda 1975; Merta & Sisson, 1991; Yalom, 1995). Berg et al. (1998) suggested that the leader of the experiential group should be a doctoral student under faculty supervision or that the group should be led and supervised off campus. The issue of being evaluated by the group leader was avoided altogether. Over 25 years ago, Lechowicz and Gazda (1975) recommended that experiential groups should be required and that the groups should be

led by trained group counselors (other than the instructors). Lechowicz and Gazda based their recommendations on the opinions of 150 group counseling experts whom they had questioned about proposed objectives for group counseling training and course curricula.

Merta and Sisson (1991) recommended that experiential groups should not be led by group counseling instructors nor should they be led by another faculty member. Merta and Sisson contended that if the leader of the group is the course instructor or another faculty member, it will impede group process and may result in unethical practices. Lloyd (1990) contended that the ethical dilemma that surrounds the experiential group might be resolved by requiring that the group be offered by a person unrelated to the counselor education program. Yalom (1995) stated that he had been placed in the dual role of instructor and group leader and that he found it to be a severe handicap. Yalom noted that the experiential group is a far more effective vehicle for personal growth and training if the leader is not affiliated with the institution. All of the above-mentioned leaders in the field of group counseling agreed that the experiential group should be led by either a well-trained doctoral student or a group counselor from outside of the institution.

In the American Counseling Association (ACA) *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice* (1995), counselors are cautioned about dual relationships.

> Counselors are aware of their influential positions with respect to clients, and they avoid exploiting the trust and dependency of clients. Counselors make every effort to avoid dual relationships with clients that could impair professional judgment or increase the risk of harm to clients… When a dual relationship cannot be avoided, counselors take appropriate professional precautions, such as

> informed consent, consultation, supervision, and documentation, to ensure that judgment is not impaired and no exploitation occurs. (Sect. A, ¶ 6)

In another section of the ACA code, counselor educators are cautioned about relationship boundaries with students and supervisees.

> Counselors clearly define and maintain ethical, professional, and social relationship boundaries with their students and supervisees. They are aware of the differential in power that exists and the student's or supervisee's possible incomprehension of that power differential. Counselors explain to students and supervisees the potential for the relationship to become exploitive. (Sect. F. 1, ¶ B)

Counselor educators are also alerted to be aware of the impact of self-growth experiences upon students.

> Counselors use professional judgment when designing training experiences conducted by the counselors themselves that require student and supervisee self-growth or self-disclosure. Safeguards are provided so that students and supervisees are aware of the ramifications their self-disclosure may have on counselors whose primary role as teacher, trainer, or supervisor requires acting on ethical obligations to the profession. Evaluative components of experiential training experiences explicitly delineate predetermined academic standards that are separate and do not depend on the student's level of self-disclosure. (ACA, 1995, Sect. F. 3, ¶ B)

The language of the next paragraph in the ACA (1995) code is even stronger.

> Supervisors or counselor educators do not serve as counselor to students or supervisees over whom they hold administrative, teaching, or evaluative roles unless this is a brief role associated with a training experience. (Sect. F. 3, ¶ C)

Ethically, counseling programs have avoided the above-mentioned dilemmas by having someone other than the instructor of the group course serve as the leader of the required experiential group.

However, many counselor educators have contended that only the course instructors can provide adequate supervision and guidance. Merta et al. (1993), in a national survey, found that almost 40% of the group instructors surveyed served as the leaders of the experiential group that were required in their courses. Sklare et al. (1996) proposed a "here-and-now" model whereby the course instructor leads the group. In this model, the students received significant guidance, feedback, and direction. In a study of the model, Sklare et al. found that 80% of the students who participated in this model believed that by having the instructor as the leader of the group it did not inhibit their participation in the group. Sklare et al. proposed a dual role for the group instructor, but they also provided a structure that attempts to optimize the experiential learning of students (G. Corey, 2000).

Evaluation. Sklare et al. (1996) also addressed the issue of evaluating students who participate in the experiential group in his instructor-led model. They proposed a blind grading method similar to the one proposed by Forester-Miller and Duncan (1990). In both of these grading systems, the students' anonymity is protected by a coding system. Students watch themselves on videotape and write a self-critique. They turn in

their critiques with only a letter or number code as identification. This safeguard was implemented to protect students from bias that might arise after self-disclosing in front of their course instructor. Limiting participation and self-disclosure to primarily the here-and-now experience of the group also has been suggested as a way to safeguard the privacy of students. Pierce and Baldwin (1990) proposed that if experiential group participants are encouraged in appropriate uses of self-disclosure, evaluation of their participation does not violate their right to privacy.

Grading procedures such as these are moot if the course instructor is not the group leader. Several counselor educators have recommended that the experiential group component of the group course either be a nonevaluative component or that evaluation should be limited to their attendance in the group (Berg et al., 1998; G. Corey, 2000; Yalom, 1995). As previously mentioned, Berg et al. recommended that the experiential group not be led by the instructor and that the group should not be evaluative. Berg et al. encouraged students to participate fully, but they were not required to do so. In this model, members were asked to keep detailed personal journals that focused on their own self-exploration and group process.

Yalom (1995) suggested that the experiential group be led by a professional outside of the institution "who will play no role in student evaluation" (p. 522). Yalom also noted that the leader of the experiential group should not contribute letters of reference for the members of the group. Similarly, Lloyd (1990) contended that students who participate in an experiential group should not be evaluated by the group leader.

Required participation. The CACREP requirement that all master's-level

counseling students participate in an experiential group has been criticized by some counselor educators in the literature. Some counselor educators have stated that participation should be voluntary. Forester-Miller and Duncan (1990) contended that students should have the right to choose not to participate in the experiential group. Small and Manthell (1988) also stated that the experiential group should be voluntary and not mandatory.

However, there was evidence in the literature that most counselor educators believe that the experiential group should be required. Merta and Sisson (1991) surveyed group instructors of master's-level counseling students and found that some programs did not require any students to participate in an experiential group outside of class. Most of the group instructors, however, did require their students to participate in an experiential group. In a national survey of group instructors, Merta et al. (1993) found that only 12% of the group instructors surveyed did not require counseling students to participate in an experiential group. Similarly, Huhn et al. (1985) found that 67% of the programs that they surveyed nationally required a personal growth group experience. Merta and Sisson also surveyed group counseling students and found that 91% of them preferred a required group component. Merta and Sisson recommended that the experiential group be required.

In a study involving 54 master's-level counseling students who were required to participate in a growth group, Dobson and Campbell (1986) found that the students increased self-awareness, self-mastery, and experienced personal growth in groups that lasted 7 weeks and 10 weeks. In another study of 23 master's-level counseling students

who were required to participate in an experiential group, Kline et al. (1997) found that the participants characterized their experience positively even though they experienced an uncomfortable level of anxiety at times in the group. Both of these researchers found that requiring counseling students to participate in personal growth groups can result in positive gains for participants.

Yalom (1995) not only has noted that counseling students should be required to participate in an experiential group, but he also recommended that if a student refuses to participate in a group, the reasons for the student's refusal should be explored with the student. In addition to Yalom, many other counselor educators have stated that the experiential group should be required of all master's-level students (Berg et al., 1998; G. Corey, 2000; Lechowicz & Gazda, 1975; Pierce & Baldwin, 1990; Ritter, 1982; Sklare et al., 1996).

Self-disclosure. If the experiential group is a required component of counselor training, students should not be forced to self-disclose issues that invade their privacy, according to several counselor educators in the literature. Therefore, many counselor educators have addressed the issue of self-disclosure. G. Corey (1985) clarified the kind of self-disclosure that is most appropriate in group counseling. He proposed that the most relevant self-disclosure in a group counseling setting is sharing one's reactions to what is happening in the group and revealing current struggles. Pierce and Baldwin (1990) proposed guidelines to follow for both counseling students and group leaders. These guidelines included informing students regarding the type of participation that is expected of them, clarifying the types of self-disclosure that are appropriate, and training students

about the risks of sharing intimate and highly personal material in the required experiential group. Others have concurred with Pierce and Baldwin's recommendations (Sklare et al., 1996; Yalom, 1995).

Merta and Sisson (1991) also agreed that training should be provided in self-disclosure as a way of minimizing potential harm that could result from participation in an experiential group. These authors offered this suggestion in the context of the experiential groups being led by someone other than the group counseling instructor. Forester-Miller and Duncan (1990) expressed similar concerns about expecting students to disclose students to disclose personal material in front of their instructors. Sklare et al. (1996) proposed that students could experience safety in an instructor-led group if the group participants are expected only to disclose here-and-now material. G. Corey (2000) supported the practice of encouraging the participants to focus on here-and-now interactions.

Gatekeeping. In the literature, the views on the role of the group instructor as a gatekeeper were polarized. Some counselor educators strongly supported the idea that the group instructor has the responsibility to protect the profession of counseling by monitoring students in the experiential group, screening students' mental health status, and determining whether certain students should continue in the counselor training program (Bernard, 1987; Donigian, 1993; Merta & Sisson, 1991; Pierce & Baldwin, 1990; Sklare et al., 1996). Merta and Sisson (1991) proposed that the course instructor should not lead the required experiential group, but that the instructor should remain involved in the evaluation process of the student's participation in the group. They

maintained that this practice is a necessity in order to fulfill the gatekeeping function of the department. Pierce and Baldwin (1990), referring to AACD (1988) ethical standards, stated that the course instructor must require students to possess sensitivities and skills that can only be acquired through participation in the experiential group.

Conversely, Forester-Miller and Duncan (1990) cited ethical guidelines from ASGW (1989) that prohibited instructors from evaluating students based on their group participation and contended that the personal growth experience in the required group should in no way be related to the screening process for continuing in the counselor training program. Yalom (1995) and others concurred that students should not be judged professionally by personal comments that they make in a required experiential group (Berg et al., 1998; G. Corey, 2000). Donigian (1993), in an article that summarized the views of a distinguished panel of counselor educators, noted that counselor educators were put in a double bind on the issue of screening counselor trainees by conflicting ethical guidelines designed to protect both the privacy of the students and the integrity of the profession.

Herlihy and Corey (1992) stated that, if counselor educators chose to keep group experiences free from evaluation, they needed to develop other procedures to screen out unsuitable candidates. Herlihy and Corey also contended that group work experiences do not present the only opportunity for screening and evaluation of counselor trainees. Counselor educators must find ways to balance their responsibilities to their students and the profession.

In summary, the ethical concerns surrounding the required experiential group are

complex. Experienced counselor educators and many of the leaders in the field of group counseling have expressed strongly opposing views on the best ways to address ethical dilemmas involving dual relationships, the invasion of privacy, and effective training activities.

The Value of the Group

Despite the controversy surrounding the required experiential group, counselor educators continue to affirm the value of participation in the group. In their study of the experiential group, Merta and Sisson, (1991) referred to the group as an important, even essential component in the instruction of group counselors. Merta and Sisson also stated that elimination of this key component would place the counselor educator ethically "at risk." Several other counselor educators have referred to the experiential group as an invaluable component in counselor training (G. Corey, 2000; Kline et al., 1997; Yalom, 1995). When counselor trainees experience uncomfortable moments in the group, such as confrontation, they can experience what is needed to create a trusting environment in a group (G. Corey, 2000). G. Corey also acknowledged that in order for participants in an experiential group to benefit from the experience they must be willing to self-disclose and engage themselves on an emotional level.

According to Berg et al. (1998), participation in the experiential group afforded the counselor trainee an opportunity to continue the personal process of self-study. Berg et al. also noted that participation in the experiential group facilitated self-awareness and self-understanding. They contended that participants have the opportunity to develop sensitivity to the needs of other group members and the ability to respond to other

members' feelings. In questionnaires given to counseling students after graduation, graduates consistently rated the experiential groups highly (Berg et al., 1998).

Yalom (1995) stated that participating in an experiential group as a part of training has many benefits, including experiencing the power of the group, learning on an emotional level instead of a cognitive level, learning the importance of being accepted by the other group members, experiencing the difficulties of sharing one's true feelings with a group, and learning about one's own strengths and weaknesses. Yalom also noted that participation in an experiential group could facilitate relationships inside the classroom and enrich the training experience.

Yalom (1995) noted the value of the group experience for clients who participated in group counseling and therapy. Yalom studied the value of the group to clients in a research study that involved asking group therapists to select their most successful clients (Yalom, Tinkleberg, & Gilula, 1968). Yalom et al. asked these clients what was the most helpful to them in their previous group experience. Yalom et al. listed the top 10 items that clients chose as the most helpful. These items, in order of importance, were as follows:

1. Discovering and accepting previously unknown or unacceptable parts of myself.
2. Being able to say what was bothering me instead of holding it in.
3. Other members honestly telling me what they think of me.
4. Learning how to express my feelings.
5. The group's teaching me about the type of impression I make on others.
6. Expressing negative and/or positive feelings toward another member.

7. Learning that I must take ultimate responsibility for the way I live my life no matter how much guidance and support I get from others.
8. Learning how I come across to others.
9. Seeing that others could reveal embarrassing things and take other risks and benefit from it helped me to do the same.
10. Feeling more trustful of groups and of other people. (p. 73)

Kline et al. (1997) investigated the experiences and perceptions of students who participated in a required experiential group. The participants included 23 first-semester master's students. The students were divided into three groups: two groups with 8 members and one group with 7 members. The groups were led by doctoral students who had previous group work experience. The students participated in 15 weekly sessions that lasted 1½ hours each.

Using a naturalistic inquiry approach, Kline et al. (1997) asked students an initial question after the 8th session. The students were asked, "What impact has your participation in this group had on your development as a counselor?" (p. 159). The students' responses were analyzed by Kline et al., and categories and dimensions of categories were developed as a result. Kline et al. defined two categories through discussing and analyzing the responses to this initial question: interpersonal awareness and relational insight.

In the Kline et al. (1997) study "interpersonal awareness was defined as the development of awareness of the effect of interpersonal behaviors" (p. 160). An example of a student response in this category was, "I have gained insight into personal behaviors

that I need to be aware of" (p. 160). According to Kline et al., "Relational insight was defined as development of awareness of personal issues and their impact on interpersonal relationships." (p. 160) An example of a response in this category is "This process has helped me be more honest with myself" (p.160).

The students were then asked follow-up questions after the 15th session. One of the follow-up questions that Kline et al. (1997) developed was "What learnings about your interpersonal style and behaviors were gained in group that will affect your relationships with clients?" (p. 159). Kline et al. found that the students' responses to this follow-up questions were surprising. As the responses were discussed and conceptualized, several new categories emerged. One of the new categories that emerged was titled *behavioral awareness*. "Behavioral learning was defined as the process of learning about interpersonal behaviors and increasing and clarifying awareness of the effect of interpersonal style . . . on others" (p. 162). An example of a response in this category is " I think the most valuable learning I gained was regarding incongruent messages that I was unaware of sending" (p. 162).

Data obtained from the initial and follow-up questions led Kline et al. (1997) to hypotheses regarding the benefit of the experiential group in counselor education, three of which are phrased here:

1. The group process helps students develop comfort and skill in giving and receiving feedback.
2. The group can create an environment in which counseling trainees can develop interpersonal behaviors that are the basis of important counseling skills.

3. The cognitive and emotional awareness that is stimulated by the group experience develops a clearer understanding of a client's experience and an increased understanding of the emotional experiences of self and others.

As a result of this study, Kline et al. contended that experiential groups were invaluable to counselor training because they provide essential experiences for counseling students.

Results of two other studies that asked students to evaluate the usefulness of experiential groups in counselor training supported some of the findings in the Kline et al. study (1997). Pistole and Filer (1991) found that counseling students who participated in an experiential group reported that the experiential group was a useful strategy that helped them learn group counseling concepts on an emotional level. As previously mentioned, Dobson and Campbell (1986) found that students who participated in an experiential group increased self-awareness, self-mastery, and experienced personal growth.

Diversity in Experiential Group Models

The group counseling literature reflected considerable diversity in the content and delivery of the experiential group as a component in counselor training (Robison, Jones, & Berglund, 1996). Some of the differences involved (a) the structure of the group, (b) the goals of the group, and (c) the preparation of participants in the group. The CACREP (2001) requirement of 10 hours obviously applies only to programs that are accredited by that body. As one of the above-mentioned national surveys indicated, 12% of the group counselors surveyed do not offer an experiential group in their programs (Merta et al., 1993).

Group structure. In the literature, there were counseling programs that required students to participate in experiential groups for the minimum 10 hours (Pistole & Filer, 1991), 14 hours (Sklare et al., 1996), 20 hours (Dobson & Campbell, 1986), and 22 hours (Berg et al., 1998; Kline et al., 1997). Yalom (1995) recommended that students participate in an experiential group that met weekly for two semesters!

In a national survey that included CACREP and non-CACREP institutions, Merta et al. (1993) identified five different models for using the experiential group. The five models were (a) the no-group model in which an experiential group is not utilized at all; (b) the no-feedback model in which the experiential group is led by someone other than the course instructor and no feedback is given to the instructor regarding participant progress; (c) the feedback model in which the group is led by another professional but the instructor receives feedback on participant progress; (d) the instructor-observed model in which the experiential group is led by another professional and observed by the instructor; and (e) the instructor-led model in which the instructor serves as the facilitator of the group.

Obviously, as previously mentioned, the issue of who led the group had a tremendous impact on the dynamics between students and the group leader and on issues such as invasion of privacy. Sklare et al. (1996) were strong proponents of the instructor-led model. These authors recognized the weaknesses of the instructor-led model, but they took steps to address some of the troublesome issues that could arise, such as dual relationships.

Yalom (1995) recommended that the leader of the group should be chosen with

great care. The leader served as an important role model for the trainees. Therefore, according to Yalom, the leader of the experiential group should be someone with extensive clinical and group experience. Yalom also contended that the personal qualities of the leader were far more important than the leader's professional degree. The task of leading a group of counselor trainees is difficult.

Group goals. Merta, Johnson, and McNeil (1995) clarified some of the differences between experiential groups (also referred to as personal growth groups by Merta et al.) and what they call a training group. Merta et al. defined a training group as one in which students role-play simulated situations devoid of student disclosures. According to Merta et al., many of the "experiential groups" that were being utilized to meet CACREP requirements were actually training groups by this definition. These authors contended that training groups, by their definition, did not constitute a personal growth experience. By contrast, Merta et al. defined an experiential group as one in which students self-disclose and work on personal issues, but not at the expense of learning group process.

Gazda (1992) stated that self-disclosure was inconsistent with the objectives of training groups. He also contended that group leaders who trained counselors needed to be aware of the difference between therapy and training. Gazda stated that the training of group counselors should emphasize the development of sensitivities and social skills that increase personal effectiveness in group decision-making situations.

In response to Gazda's comments about self-disclosure in training groups, Herlihy and Corey (1992) contended that self-disclosure is not inconsistent with the objectives of

training groups. They stated that, because training groups were a microcosm of the outside world, self-disclosure and the working through of some personal concerns were part of the training group experience. Herlihy and Corey contended that counselor trainees who feel that it is inappropriate to self-disclose in a training group would feel stilted. They also stated that counselor trainees would have difficulty learning what they needed to learn about dealing with the personal concerns and self-disclosures of clients in groups.

Donigian (1993) noted that even experts in group counseling have trouble agreeing on the goals and purposes of different aspects of group counselor training. He stated that in the literature there has been much more focus on how to structure experiential components than on what the goal is for these activities. According to Donigian, the goals and purposes of the group counseling course are not clear.

Sklare et al. (1996) stated that, although self-awareness was an important goal of the required experiential group, self-disclosure in this group should be limited to here-and-now reactions and feelings. Sklare et al. taught counselor trainees appropriate types of self-disclosure to protect them from screening and gatekeeping procedures in the event that a trainee disclosed material that concerned the counselor educator. Other counselor educators agreed that self-disclosures in required experiential groups should be limited to the here-and-now (G. Corey, 2000; Pierce & Baldwin, 1990). Sklare et al. viewed the required group as primarily a training group in which participants could learn group leadership skills. In the Sklare et al. model, the group instructor served as the training group leader.

Yalom (1995) agreed that the best group model for counselor trainees is a training group model. However, Yalom contended that the training group should be therapeutic for the group members. Yalom's view was supported by a survey of group psychotherapists. In this survey, members indicated that they profited most from an atmosphere in which group leaders were supportive and facilitated an atmosphere in which members supported each other, revealed personal feelings, and took risks (Coche, Dies, & Goettelmann, 1991). Yalom's model of a training group included personal growth in addition to learning about group process and leadership. Yalom contended that if someone other than the course instructor served as the training group leader, the group members would experience significantly more personal growth.

Kline et al. (1997) proposed an unstructured group model for counselor trainees and studied the experience of the group members. In this model, the group leaders were doctoral students. The group used an intense here-and-now orientation that focused on interpersonal feedback and group process awareness. Kline et al. found that counselor trainees could experience an increase in self-awareness, in understanding and accepting the emotional experiences of others, and in the skill of giving and receiving feedback. This study supported the view that participation in a group experience can increase self-awareness, assertiveness, and acceptance of others.

Preparation for group participation. There is considerable research evidence that preparing prospective group counseling members for participation in group counseling or therapy is beneficial (Bednar & Kaul, 1994; Budman, Demby, Feldstein, & Gold, 1984; France & Dugo, 1985; Piper, Debbane, Bienvenu, & Garant, 1982). Bednar and Kaul

(1994) contended that "pregroup training may be one of the more potent factors involved in creating successful treatment groups." (p. 644) France and Dugo (1985) provided a structured experience for group members prior to the first group session and found that group members who had received the interview had better attendance in group sessions. Budman et al. (1985) used a 90-minute workshop as their pregroup treatment and found that the experimental group participants had a more positive attitude toward group treatment and experienced more change in group therapy. Other researchers have demonstrated that prepared participants expressed more emotion, assumed more personal responsibility, were more self-disclosing, and were better liked by other group members (Yalom, 1995).

Yalom (1995) noted that participants in group counseling experience considerable anxiety in the early sessions of the group experience. Yalom stated that an "optimal degree of anxiety enhances motivation and increased vigilance, but excessive anxiety will obstruct one's ability to cope with stress" (p. 290). Yalom placed anxiety related to counseling group participation into two categories: (a) anxiety that is intrinsic and unavoidable and (b) unnecessary anxiety. Yalom contended that unnecessary anxiety could be alleviated by adequately preparing group members for group participation.

Although there was a body of evidence supporting the efficacy of preparing group members for counseling, there were no studies in the literature on preparing counselor trainees for the required experiential group. A few counselor educators have made suggestions about how to prepare counselor trainees for the required experiential group. Sklare et al. (1996) stated that they prepare counselor trainees for the experiential group

by clarifying appropriate self-disclosure and cautioning students about self-disclosing personal material. Pierce and Baldwin (1990) also prepared counselor trainees for participation in the required experiential group by clarifying the type of self-disclosure that is appropriate in the group. Interestingly, both of these articles suggested ways to prepare counselor trainees for participation in groups that were led by the course instructor.

By contrast, Yalom (1995) recommended that the leader of the required experiential group should be someone other than the course instructor. Yalom stated that he prepared trainees for the group by asking them to project themselves into the future. It was likely that mental health practitioners would be expected to spend time as group leaders. Therefore, it would be important for the trainees to learn how groups work. Yalom contended that group members would benefit the most from being in an experiential group if they viewed the group not only as a training exercise but also as an opportunity for personal growth. Yalom encouraged trainees to begin the group with a clear formulation of what they wanted to obtain from the group professionally and personally.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the practices and priorities of group counseling instructors in the delivery of the required experiential group in CACREP institutions and to make recommendations based on the literature review. The researcher intended to improve the delivery of the experiential group by identifying practices in CACREP institutions that conflict with the findings of previous research and the opinions

of experts in the counseling literature. The researcher also intended to clarify the purpose of the CACREP required group and to recommend strategies to address unsound practices.

Summary

Even though the required experiential group is considered to be an integral part of group counselor training, the delivery of the group by counselor educators is still a controversial issue. Many of the leaders in the field of group counseling disagree strongly about central issues such as whether or not the group counseling instructor should function as the experiential group leader. There is still a tremendous amount of diversity in the practices and opinions of group counseling instructors regarding issues such as the goals and purpose of the experiential group. There is an impressive body of evidence that preparing group participants for group counseling is beneficial, but there were no studies found on preparing counselor trainees for the experiential group.

CHAPTER II

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This chapter reports the research questions that were investigated in this study, the assumptions of this study, the definition of terms used in the study, a description of the research design, including participants, procedures that were used in the collection and analysis of data, and the limitations of the study.

Research Questions

This study proposed to answer the following research question.

What are the current practices and priorities of group counseling instructors in the delivery of the required master's-level experiential group in accredited institutions? Specifically, the following questions were asked.

1. Among these instructors, what are the purpose and goals of the required master's level experiential group?

2. How do these instructors prepare students for the experiential group?

3. How do these instructors structure the experiential group?

4. How do these instructors address ethical issues related to the experiential group?

This study was based on the following assumptions.

1. Group counseling instructors will rate some aspects of the experiential group as more important than others.

2. Group counseling instructors will rank some aspects of the experiential group as more important than others.

Definition of Terms

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP) was established in 1981 to accredit master's-level and doctoral-level preparation programs in counseling. Although CACREP considers itself to be the accrediting arm of the American Counseling Association (ACA), it is an independent 501C(3) corporation.

Dual relationships, for the purposes of this study, are the multiple roles that counselor educators may play while they teach courses that have an experiential component that requires counselor trainees to self-disclose.

The *experiential group*, for the purposes of this study, is a small group activity that involves self-disclosure and work on personal issues. The leader of the group is usually the instructor of the group course or an advanced student who is qualified in group work. Participation in this group is required of all master's-level students in CACREP institutions.

Gatekeeping, for the purposes of this study, is a responsibility that the counselor educator has to the community to ensure that incompetent counselor-trainees are not allowed to advance in the counseling program (Sklare et al., 1996).

Informed consent, for the purposes of this study, refers to the policy of counselor educators orienting prospective students, prior to admission, to the expectations of the counseling training program, including training components that encourage self-growth

or self-disclosure as part of the training process.

Self-disclosure, for the purposes of this study, involves sharing personal reactions to what is happening in the group and revealing current struggles, unresolved personal issues, and the meaning of certain personal experiences (Pierce & Baldwin, 1990).

Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative descriptive design. The researcher investigated the practices of group counseling instructors in the delivery of the required experiential group. The researcher developed a survey that was administered to group counseling instructors in every master's-level CACREP institution (see Appendix A). According to Heppner, Kivlighan, and Wampold (1999), the primary aim of survey research is to "document the nature or frequency of a particular variable" (p. 201) in a given population. Survey research is intended to describe, explain, or explore phenomena (Babbie, 1979; Heppner et al., 1999).

The purpose of this survey was to document the views and practices of group counseling instructors regarding the delivery of the required experiential group. This survey was developed in conjunction with another researcher, who investigated other aspects of the group counseling course. The participants included group counseling instructors in CACREP institutions. The researcher requested the voluntary participation of the group counseling instructors.

The researcher formulated survey items that answered the research questions. The researcher followed the guidelines for designing a questionnaire that were described by Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996). The researcher utilized Likert scale items, checklists, and

ranked items in the questionnaire. Once the initial questionnaire was designed, the researcher sought input from experts in the field of group counseling to evaluate the quality of the questionnaire.

Collection of Data

Prior to the collection of any data, the researcher submitted an application to the University of North Texas Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research. The researcher did not initiate any contact with human subjects until approval was obtained from the IRB. The researcher followed the guidelines and procedures developed by the university and fully complied with the letter and spirit of the university's policies. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed to each participant in the cover letter accompanying the survey. All data from individual participants were reported as group data.

Once IRB approval was obtained, the researcher consulted with group counseling professors and elicited feedback from them regarding the content of the survey items. In addition, the researcher pretested the survey questionnaire at the fall 2002 Rocky Mountain ACES conference. Group counseling instructors at this conference were asked if the questions were meaningful, clear, and appropriate (Heppner et al., 1999). After the pretesting was completed, the researcher revised the questionnaire.

Once the questionnaire was revised, the researcher contacted the participants before sending them the survey questionnaire to improve the response rate (Gall et al., 1996; Fink & Kosecoff, 1998). The researcher identified the instructor responsible for teaching the group counseling course at each of the accredited programs. The researcher

obtained the names of group counseling instructors by visiting the Web site of each CACREP institution and calling the departments. Then the researcher contacted each of the participants using electronic mail (e-mail) to inform them that they would be receiving a group counseling survey (see Appendix B). The e-mail included a brief description of the purpose of the survey and explained why each participant had been chosen.

Next, a cover letter explaining the purpose and importance of the study in greater detail was designed (see Appendix C). The cover letter addressed the issues of confidentiality and informed consent. The cover letter stated that this study included only CACREP institutions. Heppner et al. (1999) stated that a critical issue with survey research involves the adequacy of the sample. To increase the response rate, and thus to improve the adequacy of the sample, the researcher offered participants a ticket that entered the participant in a raffle if the questionnaire was returned by a reasonable date.

Several weeks after the initial surveys were returned, the researcher sent a follow-up e-mail (see Appendix D) to nonrespondents (Fink & Kosecoff, 1998). In a review of 98 studies, reviewers found that sending a follow-up letter to nonrespondents increased the response rate significantly (Gall et al., 1996). The initial survey was modified so that it could be completed as an e-mail attachment (see Appendix E).

Analysis of Data

The most commonly used statistics with survey data are descriptive statistics (Fink & Kosecoff, 1998). The descriptive statistics used in this study included: frequencies, proportions (percentages), and three measures of central tendency, the mean,

median, and the mode. Descriptive statistics were used to provide a picture of the practices of group counseling instructors. The quantitative data were analyzed to yield frequencies and percentages of respondents choosing each response category on the close-ended questions (Gall et al., 1996). Graphs depicting the distributions of important frequency distributions were created to provide visual representations of data. The purpose of this survey research was to explore and describe the practices of the instructors being studied (Babbie, 1979; Heppner et al., 1999).

Reliability and Validity of Study

Reliable and valid surveys are developed by making sure that the definitions, terms, and questions used are based on theory and experience (Fink & Kosecoff, 1998). Well- designed surveys contribute to reliability and validity. If respondents have trouble with the survey, bias will reduce the accuracy of the results (Fink & Kosecoff, 1998).

As previously mentioned, to ensure clarity, group counseling instructors were consulted prior to the development of the instrument used. In addition, a review of the literature revealed previous surveys that were administered to group counseling instructors. After questions were developed, group counseling instructors were consulted regarding the clarity and meaningfulness of the questions. The survey was modified as a result of feedback received from these instructors. The survey was then pretested at a conference of counselor educators, and more feedback was sought. More modifications were then made to the survey prior to the initial mailing to the participants of this study.

Another issue that is important in the validity of survey research is the degree to which the sample is representative of the population being studied (Heppner et al., 1999).

This issue was addressed by precontacting every CACREP institution. Surveys were then mailed to every CACREP institution except for five, which declined to participate. Thus, the sample was representative, not convenient. In addition, the above-mentioned measures that were taken to increase the return rate improved the validity of this study.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results of the analysis of the data collected to answer the research question. Also included are a discussion of the results, the limitations of the study, and recommendations for delivery of the required experiential group.

Results

Initially, survey questionnaires were mailed to group counseling instructors at 160 of the 165 CACREP institutions. Five institutions indicated when they were precontacted that they would not participate in the study. Of the 160 questionnaires mailed, 92 usable questionnaires were returned. This return was a 57.5% response to the initial mailing. As a result of a follow-up survey, 8 additional surveys were returned. In all, 100 usable questionnaires were returned, resulting in a 62.5% response rate. According to Babbie (1979), a 50% return is an adequate basis for findings. The rate of 62.5% was adequate, but an even higher rate would have strengthened the generalizability of the results (Babbie, 1979; Heppner et al., 1999).

Survey questionnaires were returned from 37 different states (including the District of Columbia). States from every region of the United States were represented. Therefore, based on the regional representation and the response rate, the sample would seem to be very representative of master's-level programs in counseling in accredited institutions.

Demographic Characteristics

Respondents were asked about their professional affiliations, their status as an instructor, and their experience as both a group counseling instructor and practitioner. Table 1 presents the percentages of respondents belonging to various professional organizations. As Table 1 indicates, the vast majority of the respondents indicated that they were members of the American Counseling Association (ACA) and the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES). Approximately one half of the respondents indicated that they were members of the Association for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW). As Table 1 indicates, only 24% of the respondents indicated that they were members of the American Psychological Association (APA).

Table 1

Percentage of Group Counseling Instructors Belonging to Professional Organizations

Professional organizations	Percentage
American Counseling Association (ACA)*	91
American Psychological Association (APA)	24
Association for Specialists in Group Work ASGW)	49
Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES)	74

*n = 100.

Participants were also asked to indicate their status as instructors and the years of experience that they had as group counseling instructors and practitioners. Table 2 presents the percentage of instructors at various levels of status in their positions. Table 2

also indicates the percentage of participants with different levels of experience. As Table 2 indicates, the proportion of professors at the three basic status levels is fairly evenly distributed. The vast majority of instructors (93%) indicated that they were either tenured or tenure-track professors.

In addition, the majority of instructors indicated that they had been teaching group counseling for 7 years or more. The levels of experience as practitioners among respondents revealed an even more experienced group. Approximately, three fourths of the instructors stated that they had 7 years or more experience as group counseling practitioners. Almost half of the respondents indicated that they had 13 or more years of experience as a group practitioner. Only 13% of the instructors indicated that they had 3 years or less experience as group counseling practitioners. Even though many of the group instructors in CACREP institutions who were surveyed have been teaching group counseling for 3 years or less, some of these inexperienced group instructors have more experience as practitioners than they do as instructors.

Table 3 presents the percentage of instructors who belong to different professional organizations at various levels of experience as group instructors and group practitioners. As Table 3 indicates, a higher percentage of instructors who belong to APA and ASGW stated that they had more experience as instructors and practitioners. The highest percentage of instructors in all of the professional organizations had 13 years or more as instructors and practitioners.

Table 2

Percentage of Group Instructors With Different Status and Years of Experience

Status	Percentage
Assistant professor[a]	34
Associate professor	25
Professor	34
Other	7
Years of experience	
Group instructor[b]	
0-3	20
4-6	15
7-9	15
10-12	7
13+	42
Group practitioner[c]	
0-3	13
4-6	11
7-9	16
10-12	11
13+	48

Note. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

[a]$n = 100$. [b]$n = 99$. [c]$n = 98$.

Table 3

Percentage of Instructors Belonging to Different Professional Organizations at Various Levels of Experience

Years of experience	Percentage			
	ACA[a]	APA[b]	ASGW[c]	ACES[d]
Group instructor				
0-3	21	13	13	19
4-6	16	17	15	12
7-9	13	8	13	18
10-12	7	8	8	7
13+	43	54	52	45
Group practitioner				
0-3	15	0	10	15
4-6	12	13	10	11
7-9	16	13	8	14
10-12	11	21	15	12
13+	46	54	56	48

Note. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

[a]$n = 91$. [b]$n = 24$. [c]$n = 49$. [d]$n = 74$.

Table 4 presents the mean, median, and mode of the experience levels of the instructors as both group counseling instructors and group counseling practitioners. The median of the instructors' years of experience is probably the best single indicator because it is not influenced by extremes as much as the mean. As Table 4 indicates, the

median years of experience as practitioners indicated by the respondents was 10 to 12 years.

Table 4

Means, Medians, and Modes of Group Counseling Instructors' Years of Experience as Instructors and Practitioners.

	Years of experience		
Role	*M*	Median	Mode
Instructor[a]	7-9	7-9	13+
Practitioner[b]	7-9	10-12	13+

[a] $n = 99$. [b] $n = 98$.

Figure 1 is a line graph that presents a visual depiction of the distribution of the percentage of instructors at various levels of experience as group practitioners that are presented in Table 2. As Figure 1 demonstrates, the majority of respondents indicated that they have 10 years or more experience as group practitioners.

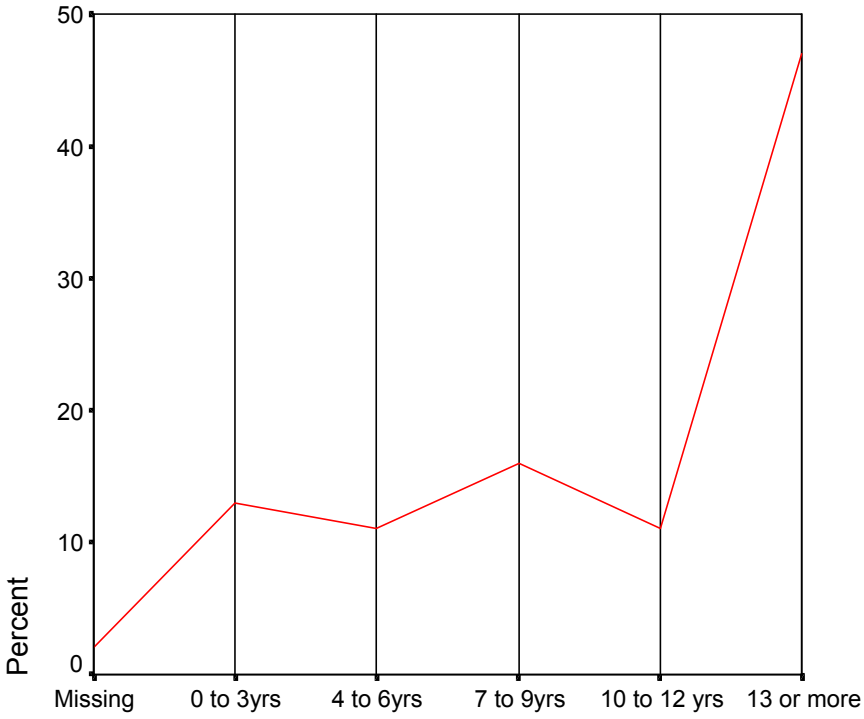

Figure 1. Percentage of Group Instructors and Corresponding Years of Experience as Group Practitioners

Note. Two respondents did not indicate their years of experience as a group practitioner. *n = 98.

Experiential Group

Group counseling instructors were asked about their practices regarding the delivery of the CACREP required experiential group. Table 5 presents the percentage of respondents and their use of different practices in delivering the group experience for master's level counseling students.

Table 5

Percentage of Group Counseling Instructors Utilizing Various Practices in the Delivery of the Experiential Group

Practice	Percentage		
	Always	Sometimes	Never
Students required to participate[a]	88	6	6
Students informed about requirement[b] prior to admission into program	73	16	11
Group used for gatekeeping[c]	5	23	72
Experiential activities used in class to prepare students for participation[d]	59	32	9
Students have opportunity to observe a group prior to participation[d]	25	71	4
Students encouraged to work on personal growth in group[d]	61	31	8

[a] $n = 98$. [b] $n = 91$. [c] $n = 93$. [d] $n = 95$.

As Table 5 indicates, the vast majority of group instructors required their counseling students to participate in the experiential group. In addition, most instructors indicated that they are involved in counseling programs that inform their students prior to admission into the program. Most instructors also stated that they provide experiential activities for their students in class and encourage their students to work on personal issues in the experiential group. The picture from the data is less clear regarding having students observe a group prior to participating in the experiential group. When asked about the practice of having students observe a group prior to participation, most

instructors chose the *sometimes* answer. Finally, the majority of instructors indicated that they never use the experiential group for the purpose of gatekeeping. Almost one fourth of the instructors, however, sometimes use the experiential group for gatekeeping.

Table 6 presents the percentage of group counseling instructors who utilized different people as leaders of the experiential group. As Table 6 indicates, a higher percentage of respondents stated that someone other than the instructor, doctoral students, or advanced master's students led the experiential group. Respondents were asked to specify who the leader was if they chose the *other* category. Leaders included practitioners not affiliated with the counseling program, adjunct professors, counselors in different departments in the university, and fellow students.

Table 6

Percentage of Leaders of the Experiential Group

Leader	Percentage
Group counseling instructor*	34
Doctoral students	23
Advanced master's level students	20
Other	47

Note. Percentages are greater than 100 because some respondents checked more than one category.

*$n = 94$.

As Table 6 indicates, approximately one third (34%) of the respondents indicated that they led the group themselves. This percentage was higher than the percentage for

doctoral students or advanced master's students.

Table 7 presents the percentage of instructors at different levels of tenure and years of experience who indicated that they served as leaders of the experiential group. As Table 7 indicates, the percentage of full professors serving as leaders of the experiential group was considerably higher than the percentage of assistant professors or associate professors. At least half of the instructors who indicated that they lead the experiential group have 13 or more years of experience as group counseling instructors and practitioners.

When group counseling instructors serve as the leaders of the required experiential groups, issues of dual relationships emerge. Table 8 presents the percentage of instructors serving as group leaders who required students to participate in an experiential group and encouraged their students to work on personal growth in the group. Table 8 also includes the percentage of these instructors who use the experiential group for gatekeeping.

Table 7

Percentage of Instructors at Different Levels of Tenure and Years of Experience as Instructors and Practitioners Who also Served as Leaders of the Experiential Group

Level of tenure of instructors	Percentage
Assistant professor	28
Associate professor	25
Professor	41
Other	6
Experience as instructor	
0-3 years	16
4-6 years	6
7-9 years	16
10-12 years	13
13+ years	50
Experience as practitioner	
0-3 years	13
4-6 years	6
7-9 years	9
10-12 years	16
13+ years	56

Note. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

$n = 32$.

Table 8

Percentage of Instructors Serving as Group Leaders Who Required Participation, Encouraged Students to Work on Personal Growth, and Used the Group for Gatekeeping

Practices of instructors as group leaders	Percentage	
	Always	Sometimes
Require students to participate[a]	91	3
Encourage students to work on personal growth in group[a]	72	25
Group used for gatekeeping[b]	6	39

[a]$n = 32$. [b]$n = 31$.

Table 9 presents the percentage of group counseling instructors who provided different types of experiential groups for their students. As Table 9 reflects, the vast majority of instructors indicated that their students participated in a group that involved self-disclosure. The most popular type of group was the unstructured here-and-now group, closely followed by the structured here-and-now group. Very few instructors stated that their students participate in role-play groups. As Table 8 reflects, some of the instructors have developed experiential groups designs for students who do not fit into the categories that were provided.

Table 9

Percentage of Group Counseling Instructors Who Provided Various Types of Experiential Groups

Type of experiential group	Percentage
Unstructured here-and-now group* involving self-disclosure	49
Structured here-and-now group involving self-disclosure	38
Outside of class role-play group	1
Inside class role-play group	2
Other	10

*n = 92.

Table 10 presents the various pregroup preparations that instructors have utilized with their students. The majority of group counseling instructors indicated that they utilize all of the preparations listed below except for exploring personal issues in class. The two most popular pregroup preparations utilized were teaching students about the value and purpose of feedback and clarifying students' expectations about what they may encounter in the group. Almost all of the instructors utilized both of these preparations. The majority of instructors also stated that they teach students about self-disclosure, provide instructions about anxiety and anger in the group, and encourage students to explore personal issues in the group.

Table 10

Percentage of Group Counseling Instructors Utilizing Various Pregroup Preparations for the Experiential Group

Pregroup preparations utilized	Percentage
Teaching students about self-disclosure*	70
Teaching students about value and purpose of feedback	95
Clarifying students' expectations about nature of group	87
Giving instructions about responding to anxiety/anger	69
Exploration of personal issues in class	39
Encouraging students to explore personal issues in group	59
Other	26

*$n = 94$.

As Table 11 indicates, when the respondents were asked to rank the most important goals of the group experience for their students, their answers varied widely. However, the majority of the instructors agreed that the most important goal of the group was for students to understand group process. In addition, only a small percentage of instructors (5%) ranked this goal as below average or low. The other rankings of the most important goal of the group experience are evenly spread out among personal growth, understanding the client's experience, and acquisition of leadership skills. Almost half of the respondents ranked personal growth the lowest of the five goals of the group experience.

Table 11

Percentage of Group Counseling Instructors Ranking the Importance of Goals of the Experiential Group

Goals	Importance	Percentage
Understanding group process*	High	55
	Above avg.	24
	Average	15
	Below avg.	4
	Low	1
Personal growth	High	16
	Above avg.	14
	Average	11
	Below avg.	10
	Low	49
Understanding the client's experience	High	15
	Above avg.	25
	Average	25
	Below avg.	23
	Low	12
Acquisition of group member skills	High	2
	Above avg.	23
	Average	34
	Below avg.	30
	Low	11
Acquisition of group leadership skills	High	17
	Above avg.	18
	Average	16
	Below avg.	29
	Low	21

Note. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Avg. = Average

*n = 92.

If the high, above average, and average rankings are combined, the second most important goal of the experiential group, according to the respondents, was the goal of understanding the client's experience. Even though only 2% of the respondents ranked the goal of acquisition of group member skills as the most important, the majority of the respondents ranked this goal as average or above average. The goal of personal growth not only had the lowest combined ranking of the top three, but it also had the highest percentage of low rankings, with almost half of the respondents ranking it as the least important.

Table 12 presents the means, medians, and modes of the above-mentioned ranked items. The means and medians of the five goals also demonstrate that respondents clearly ranked understanding group process the highest or most important. There is some ambiguity concerning the importance of understanding the client's experience. The mean was lower, indicating the second highest ranking, but the median was the same as the acquisition of group member skills. The modes, which are used less often, indicate that understanding the client's experience was more important to respondents than the acquisition of group member skills. Clearly, personal growth was viewed as the least important goal of the experiential group.

Table 12

Means, Medians, and Modes for Rankings of the Importance of Goals in the Experiential Group

Goals	*M*	Median	Mode
Understanding group process*	1.71	1.00	1.00
Personal growth	3.61	4.00	5.00
Understanding the client's experience	2.91	3.00	2.00
Acquisition of group member skills	3.25	3.00	3.00
Acquisition of leadership skills	3.20	3.50	4.00

Note. Respondents indicated the most important goal with a ranking of one. Therefore, the lower the number, the more important the goal.

*$n = 92$.

In the current study, the only group that seemed to rank personal growth more highly was full professors. More than one third (38%) of the full professors ranked the importance of personal growth in the experiential group as either high or above average. This compared with 27% of the assistant professors and 24% of the associate professors.

Only 15 instructors ranked personal growth as the most important goal of the group experience for students. Table 13 presents the percentage of these 15 instructors, with different levels of tenure and years of experience as practitioners, who ranked personal growth as the most important goal of the group. As Table 13 indicates, almost half of the instructors who ranked personal growth as the most important goal of the group experience were full professors. Table 13 also indicates that the majority of

instructors who ranked personal growth as the most important goal of the experiential group had 13 years or more of experience as practitioners.

Table 13

Percentage of Instructors With Different Levels of Tenure and Years of Experience as Practitioners Who Ranked the Personal Growth as the Most Important Goal

Level of tenure	Percentage
Assistant professor	33
Associate professor	13
Professor	47
Other	7

Experience as practitioner	Percentage
0-3 years	7
4-6 years	0
7-9 years	20
10-12 years	13
13+ years	60

*n = 15.

Table 14 indicates the percentage of group counseling instructors who indicated various numbers of hours that their students spent in the experiential group. The most common amount of time for students to spend in the experiential group was 11 to 15 hours. As Table 14 indicates, few respondents stated that their students spent less than the

required 10 hours in the group. Over 20% of the group counseling instructors indicated that their students spend more than 20 hours, which is double the CACREP requirement.

Table 14

Percentage of Instructors Who Indicated Various Numbers of Hours Students Spent in Experiential Group

Number of hours	Percentage
Less than 10*	5
10 hours	15
11-15 hours	38
16-20 hours	22
21-25 hours	9
26+ hours	12

Note. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

*n = 96.

Figure 2 presents the data in Table 13 as a visual representation of the distribution of numbers of hours spent by students in the groups. The distribution resembles a normal distribution. As Figure 2 demonstrates, the majority of students spend between 10 and 20 hours in the group. Figure 2 indicates that the majority of instructors' students exceeded the CACREP requirement of 10 hours.

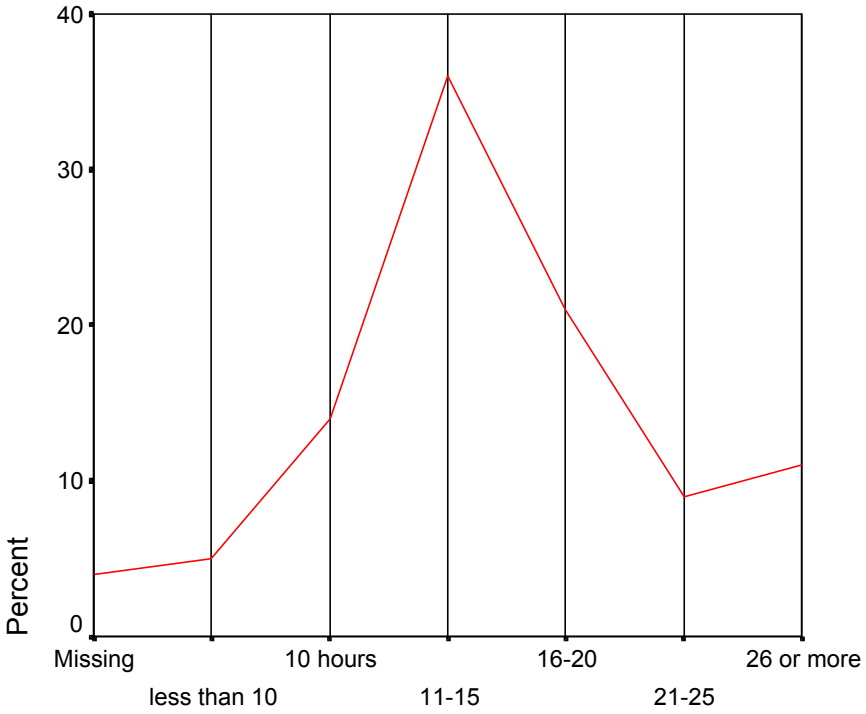

Figure 2. Distribution of percentage of instructors who indicated various numbers of hours spent by students in experiential group.

Discussion of the Results

This section includes a discussion of the results and how these results answer the research questions. In addition, the results of this study are contrasted to recommendations of counselor educators in the literature. Finally, recommendations are made based on any disparities between recommended practices and those practices revealed in the study.

Professional Affiliations and Experience of Instructors

The American Counseling Association (ACA) was the professional organization of choice among these group counseling instructors; 91% of the instructors indicated that they belong to ACA. This percentage was higher than the percentage of group counseling

instructors (81%) who belonged to AACD in the Merta et al. (1993) study. In the Merta et al. study, a much higher percentage of the instructors (47%) belonged to APA. Only 24% of the instructors in the current study indicated that they are members of APA. This difference of 23% may be attributed to the fact that only 25% of the institutions surveyed in the Merta et al. study were CACREP institutions. A noticeable difference also was found between the Merta et al. study and the current study in the percentage of instructors belonging to the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES); the Merta et al. study found that 60% belonged to ACES, while 74% of the instructors in the current study belong to ACES. The instructors who indicated that they belong to ASGW were similar in the two studies: 49% in the current study, 45% in the Merta et al. study.

In summary, more of the instructors in the current study (compared to Merta et al., 1993) indicated that they belong to ACA and ACES. The number belonging to ASGW was similar, but slightly higher than in the Merta et al. (1993) study. In the current study, only about half as many instructors indicated that they belong to APA. This profile may be indicative of a tendency in CACREP programs.

It is interesting that only 49% of the respondents indicated that they were members of ASGW. Apparently, although respondents were very experienced as both group counseling instructors and practitioners, many of them have chosen not to belong to ASGW. It is interesting that they would not belong to the division that is specifically for professionals interested in group counseling. This disparity may be a concern to CACREP, because instructors are not affiliating with the professional organization specifically committed to addressing issues related to group counseling.

The majority of respondents in this study indicated that they were tenured (59%), which is lower than the percentage of tenured instructors (69%) found in the Merta et al. (1993) study. In the current study, the majority of instructors (65%) surveyed indicated that they had 7 years or more experience as group counseling instructors. In the Merta et al. study, they found a mean of 12.3 years of experience as group counseling instructors. Merta et al. did not ask about years experience as a group practitioner. In the current study, 76% of the respondents indicated that they had 7 years or more experience as group counseling practitioners. In fact, the median years of experience for respondents as group counseling practitioners was 10 to 12 years. Almost half of the instructors (48%) stated that they had 13 or more years of experience as group practitioners.

Ethical Considerations

Required participation. The vast majority of instructors (88%) surveyed indicated that they required students to participate in an experiential group. This finding, unfortunately, is identical to the Merta et al. (1993) survey, which included CACREP and non-CACREP institutions. One might have expected that the CACREP institutions would have a higher percentage of programs that require the small group experience. One factor that may have lowered the percentage in this study is that the item on the survey questionnaire in the current study gave respondents the choice of answering that they required the group sometimes. However, 6% indicated that they never require students to participate in an experiential group. This practice of *not* requiring participation in an experiential group is inconsistent with CACREP standards.

Gatekeeping. The vast majority of respondents (72%) indicated that they do not

use the experiential group for gatekeeping. This practice was supported in the literature (Berg et al., 1998; G. Corey, 2000; Forester-Miller & Duncan, 1990; Yalom, 1995). Herlihy and Corey (1992) noted that counselor educators have other opportunities to screen and evaluate counselor trainees.

However, many counselor educators support the practice of those respondents who indicated that they did use the group for gatekeeping (Bernard, 1987; Merta & Sisson, 1991; Merta et al., 1993; Pierce & Baldwin, 1990; Sklare et al., 1996). Citing ethical standards that require counselor educators to act on obligations to the profession, these counselor educators have maintained that the gatekeeping obligation is more of a priority than other ethical concerns. Counselor educators in the literature were sharply divided on whether the experiential group should be used for gatekeeping.

Merta et al. (1993) noted that "counselor educators are responsible for . . . the gatekeeping function of protecting the public and the profession from incompetent or ill-suited group counselors (p. 206). For Merta et al., gatekeeping includes monitoring the participants in the experiential group to see if they are "incompetent or ill-suited" to be group counselors. Certainly, gatekeeping is a responsibility of counselor educators. However, it does not necessarily follow that every activity in which a counselor trainee is involved has to be scrutinized or evaluated. As the ACA standard reads, "Counselor educators do not serve as counselor to students or supervisees over whom they hold administrative, teaching, or evaluative roles… (Sect. F. 3, . C)

The tone of the CACREP standard focuses on self-growth. Merta et al. (1993) may have been focusing solely on group counselor training rather than a required

personal growth opportunity even though 25% of the participants in the Merta et al. study were from CACREP institutions. If one views the purpose of the experiential group as a step in the training process as a group practitioner, then a focus on an evaluation of the participants logically follows. One of the values of accreditation (CACREP, 1994) is "an improvement in the professional services available to the public" (p. 3). Gatekeeping in CACREP institutions is an important function of counselor educators. However, in the course of students' studies, there are more appropriate opportunities to evaluate their competence.

Yalom et al. (1968) asked group participants who had successfully completed group counseling what they found to be the most helpful. The group participants stated (in order of importance):

1. Discovering and accepting previously unknown or unacceptable parts of myself.
2. Being able to say what was bothering me instead of holding it in.
3. Other members honestly telling me what they think of me.
4. Other members honestly telling me what they think of me.
5. The group's teaching me about the type of impression I make on others.
6. Expressing negative and/or positive feelings toward another member.
7. Learning that I must take ultimate responsibility for the way I live my life no matter how much guidance and support I get from others.
8. Learning how I come across to others.
9. Seeing that others could reveal embarrassing things and take other risks and benefit from it helped me to do the same.

10. Feeling more trustful of groups and of other people. (p. 73)

Clients in counseling groups generated this list of helpful things that they learned. CACREP (1988) specifically stated that the small group experience was not counseling or therapy. However, the list above has many of the elements that were in the 1988 CACREP statement about the purpose of the experiential group: self-understanding, self-analysis skills, and interpersonal skills. It is hard to imagine that students will feel safe enough to have an experience of this quality if they are concerned about being evaluated for what they disclose.

Group leader. In the literature, counselor educators have expressed very different views on who should lead the group. In the current study, 34% of the respondents indicated that they served as the leaders of the experiential group. Historically, CACREP has been ambiguous on this issue. Initially, the CACREP (1988) standard implied that someone other than the instructor should lead the group. This standard was consistent with ACA ethical standards regarding dual relationships, protecting boundaries with students, and the power differentials between instructors and students.

Then, CACREP (1994) changed its position and specifically stated that the instructor could also serve as the leader of the group experience. This revision may have been in response to professors' complaints that the 1988 standard had been impractical. In the latest standards, CACREP (2001) avoided the issue of the group leader by omitting the 1994 wording from the standard. Therefore, it is not surprising that there is considerable diversity regarding the actual practice of group instructors.

In the current study, one concern related to instructors leading the group is that

most of these instructors indicated that they encourage their students to work on personal growth in the group and many of these instructors (45%) use the group for gatekeeping. This practice puts students in a double bind; they are encouraged to work on personal growth issues, and these issues can be used against them. Thus, many students in groups with their instructors as the leaders are required to participate, encouraged to work on personal growth in the group, and scrutinized for their suitability as future counselors.

Yalom (1995) stated that he had been placed in the dual role of instructor and group leader and he found it to be a severe handicap. Yalom also noted that the experiential group was a far more effective vehicle for personal growth and training if the leader was not affiliated with the institution. Berg et al. (1998) suggested that the leader of the experiential group could be a doctoral student under faculty supervision or that the group could be led and supervised off campus. Obviously, many CACREP institutions do not have doctoral programs, and many do not have easy access to qualified professionals who could serve as group leaders. However, it is possible that these dual relationships could be harmful to students.

One of the reasons that many counselor educators have recommended that the leader of the required experiential group be someone other than the instructor is to avoid dual relationship issues such as these (Berg et al., 1998; Lechowicz & Gazda 1975; Merta & Sisson, 1991; Yalom, 1995). There is a general consensus that counselor trainees benefit from participation in experiential groups, but this benefit may be compromised if dual relationship issues hinder the safety of the group.

At least half of the instructors who also lead the experiential group are

experienced as instructors and practitioners. This finding may suggest that these instructors believe that they are more competent to serve as leaders than another faculty member, a doctoral student, or a community practitioner. These experienced instructors may provide students with a safe, therapeutic group experience due to their skill and expertise as practitioners. However, the practice of the instructor leading a group of students required to participate, encouraged to do personal work, and screened for suitability is ethically unacceptable, regardless of the expertise of the instructor.

Sklare et al. (1996) proposed a model with instructors who served as leaders of the experiential group. In this model, ethical concerns involving dual relationships were addressed. Sklare et al. explained the potential for the relationship to become exploitive, which is consistent with ACA ethical standards. Students in this model were encouraged to stay in the here-and-now. The rationale was that if students stayed in the here-and-now, they would not risk self-disclosing personal material that could raise concerns about their suitability as future practitioners. However, seeing here-and-now responses from personal material in a therapeutic environment is not as simple as it sounds (Herlihy & Corey, 1992). It is difficult to understand how students can feel safe to do real therapeutic work in a setting where what they say can be used against them.

The finding that only 23% of the instructors indicated that doctoral students served as group leaders may be somewhat misleading. Obviously, most of the institutions with CACREP accreditation do not have doctoral programs. This factor also may have inflated the percentage of instructors who indicated that advanced master's students led the groups. If doctoral students were more widely available, they would possibly be used

instead of advanced master's students.

Purpose and Goals of the Experiential Group

The goal that is most clear from the results of this survey was that instructors wanted students who participated in the experiential group to better understand group process. When asked to rank the goals of the group, over half of the respondents ranked understanding group process as the most important goal of the group experience for students. Certainly, understanding and recognizing group process have been emphasized in the literature as crucial abilities for any group counselor or therapist (Kline et al., 1997; Sklare et al., 1996; Yalom, 1995). However, the experiential group that is required by CACREP is required for all counseling students, whether they are interested in becoming group practitioners or not.

In the sixties and seventies, ACES (1977) developed the standards that were to eventually become the CACREP standards. ACES stated that it was important for counseling students to develop self-understanding, self-analysis, and improved interpersonal relationships. Later, CACREP took these three concepts and combined them into the purpose of the required small group activity.

The 1988 CACREP standards stated, "Students are provided the opportunity to participate in a planned and supervised small group activity designed to promote and improve students' self-understanding, self-analysis skills, and interpersonal skills" (p. 46). CACREP (1988) placed this requirement to participate in a small group activity in the beginning of Section II rather than placing it in the group work common-core area. The placement of this activity in the procedures manual may be relevant in understanding

the intended purpose of the activity. Immediately before the requirement to participate in a small group activity, CACREP (1994) inserted, "students have the opportunity and are encouraged to participate in workshops, seminars, or other activities that contribute to personal and professional development" (p. 48).

In the CACREP (1988, 1994, 2001) procedures manual, the requirement to participate in a small group activity did not have any obvious connection to the curriculum of the group work common-core area. No mention was made by CACREP of acquiring skills that were important in becoming an effective group counselor. Certainly, the experiential group can provide students with insight, knowledge, and understanding that will help them if they choose to pursue further development as a group practitioner, but the intent of the CACREP requirement to participate in a small group activity appears to be focused on the development as a counselor in general. Somehow, the purpose of the activity has been mixed with the purpose of the group work common-core area. This mixture of purposes may be a result of the group counseling instructor being the one responsible for delivering the experiential group.

The finding in this study that the majority of instructors surveyed viewed understanding group process as the most important goal of the required experiential group and that group leadership skills were ranked higher by instructors than personal growth may reflect a lack of clarity from CACREP regarding the intended purpose of this group experience. In the 1994 standards and the 2001 standards, CACREP did not include the wording of the 1988 standard that provided the rationale for the purpose of the required group experience. Many of the instructors who are providing the group

experience for students may have been unaware of the original intent of CACREP in requiring the small group experience.

In the 1988 CACREP standards, participation in an experiential group was designed to promote the personal development of student counselors, not to develop their competencies as group counselors. In the Kline et al. study (1997), students who participated in the experiential group were asked, "What impact has your participation in this group had on your development as a counselor?" (p. 159). Kline et al. did not ask how participation helped their development as group counselors. As a follow-up question, students were asked, "What learnings about your interpersonal style and behaviors were gained in group that will affect your relationships with clients?" (p. 159). The focus of this question was on relationships with clients in general, not on group counseling relationships.

When Berg et al. (1998) stated that participation in the experiential group afforded the counselor trainee an opportunity to continue the personal process of self-study, Berg et al. were focused on the personal development of the counselor, not the development of group counseling competencies. Berg et al. also noted that participants in the experiential group have the opportunity to develop sensitivity to the needs of other group members and the ability to respond to other members' feelings.

Yalom (1995) noted that members of a here-and-now group have the opportunity to learn things about themselves that they cannot learn in other settings, including individual therapy. A group member can learn whether his or her reactions to another group member are unique through consensual validation—comparing one's interpersonal

evaluations with those of others.

Even though the CACREP-required experiential group is usually a part of a group counseling course, CACREP (1994) does not require that the group has to take place during enrollment in a group counseling course. In fact, as mentioned earlier, CACREP did not include the requirement to participate in a small group activity in the group work section of the common-core areas.

In the current study, the finding that personal growth was ranked as the least important goal of the instructors for their students was disappointing. In the CACREP (1988) standards, the experiential group was initially viewed as an activity that would promote "self-understanding." Yalom (1995) noted that even though the primary purpose of the experiential group was training, the group was meant to be therapeutic. Yalom also contended that counselor trainees would benefit the most from being in an experiential group if they viewed the group not only as a training exercise but also as an opportunity for personal growth. Yalom encouraged his trainees to formulate what they hoped to gain personally prior to participation in the group. Yalom also encouraged trainees to work on personal issues in the group.

Yalom's comments (1995) are interesting when the context of his comments is contrasted with the CACREP requirement of the small group activity. Yalom's comments referred to counselors who were training to be group counselors, not counselors who were required to take a group work course and participate in a small group for their personal and professional development. Even though Yalom was addressing a different issue than that of CACREP, he still appeared to rank the importance of personal growth

more highly than did the instructors in the current study.

Is the experiential group a training group or a personal growth experience that occurs in a small group? This question appears to be at the heart of the issue involving the purpose of the experiential group. The instructors surveyed appear to think that the group is a training group. This view of the group seems more consistent with ASGW standards than CACREP standards. ASGW expects an experiential group to be a part of the group course. It is implied that it is part of training as group counselors. Interestingly, instructors who did not indicate that they belong to ASGW ranked the goals of the experiential group similarly to those who did state that they were ASGW members.

In the current study, the only group that seemed to rank personal growth more highly was full professors. More than one third (38%) of the full professors ranked the importance of personal growth in the experiential group as either high or above average. Also, 47% of the instructors who ranked personal growth as the most important goal of the experiential group were full professors. This difference may be attributed to these professors working in the Zeitgeist of the 1970s and 1980s when personal growth was viewed as central to the development of effective counselors.

Bergin (1997) and Winslade, Monk, and Drewery (1997) have criticized the field of counseling for the training of skills over other important aspects of counselor training such as relationship quality and the person of the counselor (Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998). The finding of the current study that skills and knowledge were viewed as more important goals for students than personal growth appears to support the contention that skills are emphasized more than other aspects of counselor training.

Preparing Students for the Group

There is considerable evidence in the literature that preparing clients for group counseling or therapy is helpful (Bednar & Kaul, 1994; Budman et al., 1984; France & Dugo, 1985; Piper et al., 1982). Several counselor educators have proposed ways to prepare counselor trainees for participation in a training or personal growth group. However, there is a dearth of empirical studies on preparing counselor trainees for the CACREP experiential group.

Yalom (1995) noted that preparing participants for group counseling can lessen the considerable anxiety that they are likely to experience in the early sessions of the group experience. Though some anxiety is intrinsic to the group experience, Yalom stated that adequate preparation for group participation can substantially reduce unnecessary anxiety.

One advantage that counselor trainees have over participants in group therapy is that trainees have access to observation of clinical skills and modes of treatment. In the current study, group instructors were asked if they provided their students the opportunity of observing a group prior to their actual group experience. Twenty-five percent of the instructors surveyed indicated that they always provide this experience for their students. Only 4% of the instructors surveyed stated that they never provide this experience for their students. The other 71%, however, indicated that they sometimes provide this experience. It is not clear; therefore, how many CACREP instructors actually provide this experience for students. Given the obvious advantages to observing a real group, it is somewhat puzzling that more instructors do not provide this experience for their students

prior to participation in the group experience.

The vast majority of instructors indicated that they teach students about feedback prior to the group. The instructors also stated that the vast majority of them clarified students' expectations about the group prior to participation. The majority of instructors also indicated that they teach students about self-disclosure and give them instructions about responding to anger and anxiety.

Group Structure

Many counselor educators have advocated a here-and-now group as the best format for an experiential group for counselor trainees (G. Corey, 2000; Merta et al., 1993; Sklare et al., 1996; Yalom, 1995). The vast majority of instructors indicated that a here-and-now model is what they utilized. Almost 90% of the instructors surveyed indicated that they used a here-and-now model. Given that self-disclosure is expected, that the group is required, and that almost half of the instructors use the group for gatekeeping, it is consistent with the literature for the groups to emphasize the here-and-now. The rationale has been that if counseling students focus on the here-and-now rather than outside of the group situations and issues, fewer gatekeeping issues will surface.

The majority of instructors indicated that their students participate in an experiential group for more hours than the CACREP requirement. Approximately 4 out of 5 of the instructors stated that their students spent 11 or more hours in an experiential group. Over 2 out of 5 of the instructors indicated that their students spent 16 or more hours in a group. This finding suggests that the instructors may view the experience as valuable enough to warrant extra time spent in the group.

Limitations of the Study

There are two main limitations to this study. First, the form of measurement that was being used, self-report questionnaires, had lower validity than other measures that are standardized (Heppner et al., 1999). The researcher asked respondents for their true opinions, but the researcher cannot claim that the responses to questionnaire items were the respondents' true opinions. Looser validity and reliability standards are more acceptable with questionnaires than with tests because the researchers are collecting information that is highly structured and the data are reported at the group level (Gall et al., 1996).

Another limitation of this study is that a significant percentage of the surveys that were mailed were not returned, even after the follow-up. Any inferences that are made to all of the CACREP master's-level counseling programs, are limited by the response rate of the participants.

Recommendations

In this section, recommendations are made concerning the delivery of the group. Improvement in the delivery of the group involves clarifying the purpose of the experiential group, utilizing practices that fulfill that purpose, and avoiding practices that impinge upon a quality growth experience for counseling students.

CACREP needs to clarify the purpose of the group. The purpose has become training in group counseling skills rather than personal and professional development. Omitting the initial wording in the 1988 standards from the subsequent standards may have contributed to the lack of clarity that appears to exist today.

Counselor educators who serve as group leaders should not use the group for gatekeeping. In this study, 45% of instructors who lead the group use the group for gatekeeping. How can students feel safe enough to have a quality group experience and gain the kind of self-understanding that participation in this group can provide if they are concerned about being evaluated? The gatekeeping function can be fulfilled, by watching the counselor trainees in the counseling role.

The leader of the group needs to be someone other than the instructor. Unless there are no other qualified professionals available, many dual relationship issues can be avoided if the leader of the group is not the instructor.

Students need to be given a chance to observe a here-and-now group prior to participation. This can be done in class with volunteers. Students benefit from watching the instructors use their skills, and they can see how a here-and-now group works. This pregroup preparation can help alleviate unnecessary anxiety. Students will limit the depth of their self-disclosures in class in front of their peers.

Group instructors who teach a group course for more than a year would benefit from joining ASGW. ACES does not focus on or address many of the issues relevant to teaching group counseling.

Finally, the experiential group, despite the many controversies surrounding it, is a valuable component in the development of counselors. Many of the things that group members learn cannot be learned outside of a cohesive and safe group. Therefore, it is incumbent upon counselor educators who provide the small group experience to require the group for all counseling students.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY OF GROUP TRAINING

Code Number _____

Survey of Group Training Practices and Procedures

Section I - Demographic Information

1. Please check all memberships that apply:
   a.) ACA __ b.) APA __ c.) ASGW __ d.) ACES __ e.) Other (Please specify) _____

2. Please check your current status within your institution:
   a.) Assistant Professor ___
   b.) Associate Professor ___
   c.) Professor ___
   d.) Regents Professor ___
   e.) Other (Please Specify) _____

3. Experience:
   a.) Teaching a group counseling course:
   0-3 years ___ 4-6 years ___ 7-9 years ___ 10-12 years ___ 13 + years ___

   b.) As a group practitioner:
   0-3 years ___ 4-6 years ___ 7-9 years ___ 10-12 years ___ 13 + years ___

4. Please check your experience as a group member:
   0-3 hours ___ 4-6 hours ___ 7-9 hours ___ 10-12 hours ___13-15 hours ___ 16 + Hours ___

5. Do you currently lead a group outside of the academic setting? Yes ___ No ___

Section II – Didactic Component

6. Below is a list of methodologies that may be used in teaching the required group curriculum. Please <u>check</u> all that you utilize in the group course.

   a.) ___ Assigned readings
   b.) ___ Lecture
   c.) ___ Focused discussion
   d.) ___ Role-play demonstrations
   e.) ___ Guest lectures/demonstrations
   f.) ___ Films/videotapes of group demonstrations
   g.) ___ Other (Please specify) _____

7. Below is a list of concepts that may be lecture topics in a group course. Please <u>check</u> all the concepts that you address in the group course.

   a.) ___ Group process
   b.) ___ Leadership style
   c.) ___ Group dynamics
   d.) ___ Group ethics
   e.) ___ Selection of group members
   f.) ___ Problems encountered by groups
   g.) ___ Types of groups
   h.) ___ Group therapy
   i.) ___ Working with diverse populations
   j.) ___ Evaluation of groups
   k.) ___Practical considerations in setting up the group
   l.) Other (Please specify) _____

8. Below is a list of concepts that may be lecture topics in a group course. Please <u>rank</u> the concepts

in order of emphasis that each is given in your course. (1 + Most important, 10 + Least important)

a.) ___ Group process
b.) ___ Leadership styles
c.) ___ Group dynamics
d.) ___ Group ethics
e.) ___ Selection of group members
f.) ___ Working with diverse populations
g.) ___ Types of groups
h.) ___ Group theory
i.) ___ Evaluation of groups
j.) ___ Problems encountered by groups
k.) ___ Practical considerations in setting up a group

9. a.) How many group counseling courses are master's level students at your institution required to take? _____
b.) Are any of the CACREP core curricular experiences in group work assigned to other classes? Yes ___ No___

Section III- Experiential Component

Please circle the appropriate number: (1= always, 2= sometimes, 3= never).

	Always	Sometimes	Never
10. Are master's level counseling students at your institution required to participate in an experiential group?	1	2	3
11. If participation is required, are the students informed about the requirement to participate in the experiential group prior to admission into the program?	1	2	3
12. Are students required to self-disclose in the experiential group?	1	2	3
13. If students are required to self-disclose in the group, is appropriate self-disclosure clarified to the students?	1	2	3
14. Is the experiential group used for "gatekeeping"?	1	2	3
15. Are experiential activities utilized in class to prepare students for participation in the experiential group?	1	2	3
16. Do the group leaders utilize structured exercises/activities in the experiential group?	1	2	3
17. Do students have an opportunity in class to observe a group in action prior to participation in the group?	1	2	3
18. Do you encourage students to work on personal growth issues in the experiential group?	1	2	3

19. Please check the category that best describes the group in which counseling students participate.
a.) ___ Unstructured here-and-now group that involves self-disclosure
b.) ___ Structured here-and-now group that involves self-disclosure
c.) ___ Outside of class group that involves role-play
d.) ___ In-class group that involves role-play
e.) ___ Other (please specify) _____

20. Please check all pre-group preparations that are utilized with students participating in the required group. (You may check more than one).

a.) ___ Teaching students skills in self-disclosure
b.) ___ Teaching students about the value and purpose of feedback
c.) ___ Clarifying students expectations about issues that they may face in the group
d.) ___ Giving instructions about how to respond to resistance, anxiety, and/or anger
e.) ___ Exploration of personal issues in class
f.) ___ Encouraging students to explore personal issues in the group
g.) ___ Other (Please specify) _____

21. What do you view as the most important goals for counseling students who participate in the experiential group? Please rank the following from highest to lowest: (1= Highest, 5= Lowest)

a.) ___ Understanding group process
b.) ___ Personal growth
c.) ___ Understanding the client's experience in group counseling
d.) ___ Acquisition of group member skills such as giving and receiving feedback
e.) ___ Acquisition of group leadership skills

22. Who leads the experiential group? Please check the category that applies.

a.) ___ The group counseling instructor
b.) ___ Doctoral student(s)
c.) ___ Advanced master's level students
d.) ___ Other (Please specify) _____

23. How many hours do counseling trainees spend in the experiential group? Please check the category that applies.

a.) ___ less than 10 hours
b.) ___ 10 hours
c.) ___ 11-15 hours
d.) ___ 16-20 hours
e.) ___ 21-25 hours
f.) ___ 26+ hours

Section IV- Practicum Component

Circle the appropriate number below: (1= Always, 2= Sometimes, 3= Never)

	Always	Sometimes	Never
24. Are students in the group course required to lead a group? (If the answer is "Never", disregard questions 25 and 26.)	1	2	3
25. Are the group leaders supervised?	1	2	3
26. Are the supervised sessions recorded (Audiotape or videotape)?	1	2	3

Check the appropriate space below.

27. What type of group do students lead?

a.) ___ Psychoeducational
d.) ___ Task

b.) ___ Counseling
c.) ___ Support
e.) Other (Please specify) _____

Section V- Participant Comments

28. What specific concerns do you have regarding the CACREP requirement that master's level students participate in a small-group activity?

29. In conclusion, has the survey covered all content relevant to CACREP core curricular group experiences? (Please elaborate)

APPENDIX B

PRECONTACT LETTER

Dear

Approximately one week from today, we will be sending you a survey regarding the practices and procedures utilized by group instructors in CACREP institutions. It is our understanding that you have been responsible for teaching group counseling. We would appreciate your participation in completing the aforementioned survey when it arrives at your institution.

Thank You,

Michael Altekruse, Ed.D.
Professor and Chair
University of North Texas

Stephen Armstrong
Doctoral Student
University of North Texas

Chris Simpson
Doctoral Student
University of North Texas

APPENDIX C

COVER LETTER

Department of Counseling, Development,
and Higher Education
University of North Texas
Denton, Texas

February 9, 2002

Dr. A. B. Jones
Assistant Professor
University of Texas

Dear Mr. Jones:

The attached survey instrument concerned with teaching methods utilized by group counseling instructors in CACREP institutions is a study being conducted at the University of North Texas. This study is concerned specifically with the group counseling curricular experiences that are required of all master's level counseling students. This survey is being sent to group counseling instructors at every CACREP-accredited program. The results of this survey will assist in providing a view of practices and procedures utilized by group instructors at CACREP institutions.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. We are particularly interested in obtaining your input because you have facilitated the group counseling curricular experiences that we are examining. The enclosed instrument has been developed with the help of several counselor educators who have taught group counseling. We anticipate that it will take you approximately 10 minutes to complete the attached survey.

Your responses will be held in the strictest confidence and none of the results of the survey will reflect upon you or your institution. We have assigned a coding number to identify your institution for the purpose of follow-up. **As a special incentive for participating, all surveys received by March 6, 2002 will be entered into a drawing for a Digital Video Disc (DVD) player!** We appreciate your willingness to complete this survey and to return it in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope.

Your return of the completed survey will serve as an indication of your informed consent to participate. This research project has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (940/565-3940). If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us 940/565-2910. Thank you in advance for your help. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Michael Altekruse, Ed.D., NCC
Professor and Chair

Stephen A. Armstrong, M.Ed., LPCS
Doctoral Student

Christopher Simpson, M.Ed., LPCi
Doctoral Student

APPENDIX D

FOLLOW-UP LETTER

Dear

Recently, we sent a hard copy survey to you. Understandably, you may not have had the time to complete the survey. Because we value your input, we have chosen to follow-up the initial mailing with an emailed attachment. We hope that this method of following up the initial mailing will make completion of the survey more convenient for you. Your responses will be held in the strictest confidence and none of the results of the survey will reflect upon you or your institution.

Please find a copy of this survey in an attachment to this letter. Your return of the completed survey will serve as an indication of your informed consent to participate. This research project has been reviewed and approved by the University of North Texas Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (940/565-3940). If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us 940/565-2910. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Michael Altekruse, Ed.D., NCC
Professor and Chair

Stephen A. Armstrong, M.Ed., LPCS
Doctoral Student

Christopher Simpson, M.Ed., LPCi
Doctoral Student

APPENDIX E

MODIFIED SURVEY

Survey of Group Training Practices and Procedures

Section I - Demographic Information

1. Please mark the space of all memberships that apply:
   a.) ACA __ b.) APA __ c.) ASGW __ d.) ACES __ e.) Other (Please specify) _____

2. Please mark your current status within your institution:
   f.) Assistant Professor ___
   g.) Associate Professor ___
   h.) Professor ___
   i.) Regents Professor ___
   j.) Other (Please Specify) _____

3. Experience:
   a.) Teaching a group counseling course:
   0-3 years ___ 4-6 years ___ 7-9 years ___ 10-12 years ___ 13 + years ___

   b.) As a group practitioner:
   0-3 years ___ 4-6 years ___ 7-9 years ___ 10-12 years ___ 13 + years ___

4. Please mark your experience as a group member:
   0-3 hours ___ 4-6 hours ___ 7-9 hours ___ 10-12 hours ___13-15 hours ___ 16 + Hours ___

5. Do you currently lead a group outside of the academic setting? Yes ___ No ___

Section II – Didactic Component

6. Below is a list of methodologies that may be used in teaching the required group curriculum. Please mark all that you utilize in the group course.

   a.) ___ Assigned readings
   b.) ___ Lecture
   c.) ___ Focused discussion
   d.) ___ Role-play demonstrations
   e.) ___ Guest lectures/demonstrations
   f) ___ Films/videotapes of group demonstrations
   g.) ___ Other (Please specify) _____

7. Below is a list of concepts that may be lecture topics in a group course. Please mark all the concepts that you address in the group course.

   a.) ___ Group process
   b.) ___ Leadership style
   c.) ___ Group dynamics
   d.) ___ Group ethics
   e.) ___ Selection of group members
   f.) ___ Problems encountered by groups
   g.) ___ Types of groups
   h.) ___ Group therapy
   i.) ___ Working with diverse populations
   j.) ___ Evaluation of groups
   k.) ___Practical considerations in setting up the group
   l.) Other (Please specify) _____

8. Below is a list of concepts that may be lecture topics in a group course. Please rank the concepts in order of emphasis that each is given in your course. (1 + Most important, 10 + Least important)

a.) ___ Group process
b.) ___ Leadership styles
c.) ___ Group dynamics
d.) ___ Group ethics
e.) ___ Selection of group members
f.) ___ Working with diverse populations
g.) ___ Types of groups
h.) ___ Group theory
i.) ___ Evaluation of groups
j.) ___ Problems encountered by groups
k.) ___ Practical considerations in setting up a group

9. a.) How many group counseling courses are master's level students at your institution required to take? _____
b.) Are any of the CACREP core curricular experiences in group work assigned to other classes? Yes ___ No___

Section III- Experiential Component

Please underline the appropriate number: (1= always, 2= sometimes, 3= never).

	Always	Sometimes	Never
10. Are master's level counseling students at your institution required to participate in an experiential group?	1	2	3
11. If participation is required, are the students informed about the requirement to participate in the experiential group prior to admission into the program?	1	2	3
12. Are students required to self-disclose in the experiential group?	1	2	3
13. If students are required to self-disclose in the group, is appropriate self-disclosure clarified to the students?	1	2	3
14. Is the experiential group used for "gatekeeping"?	1	2	3
15. Are experiential activities utilized in class to prepare students for participation in the experiential group?	1	2	3
16. Do the group leaders utilize structured exercises/activities in the experiential group?	1	2	3
17. Do students have an opportunity in class to observe a group in action prior to participation in the group?	1	2	3
18. Do you encourage students to work on personal growth issues in the experiential group?	1	2	3

19. Please mark the category that best describes the group in which counseling students participate.
a.) ___ Unstructured here-and-now group that involves self-disclosure
b.) ___ Structured here-and-now group that involves self-disclosure

c.) ___ Outside of class group that involves role-play
d.) ___ In-class group that involves role-play
e.) ___ Other (please specify) _____

20. Please mark all pre-group preparations that are utilized with students participating in the required group. (You may check more than one).

a.) ___ Teaching students skills in self-disclosure
b.) ___ Teaching students about the value and purpose of feedback
c.) ___ Clarifying students expectations about issues that they may face in the group
d.) ___ Giving instructions about how to respond to resistance, anxiety, and/or anger
e.) ___ Exploration of personal issues in class
f.) ___ Encouraging students to explore personal issues in the group
g.) ___ Other (Please specify) _____

21. What do you view as the most important goals for counseling students who participate in the experiential group? Please rank the following from highest to lowest: (1= Highest, 5= Lowest)

a.) ___ Understanding group process
b.) ___ Personal growth
c.) ___ Understanding the client's experience in group counseling
d.) ___ Acquisition of group member skills such as giving and receiving feedback
e.) ___ Acquisition of group leadership skills

22. Who leads the experiential group? Please mark the category that applies.

a.) ___ The group counseling instructor
b.) ___ Doctoral student(s)
c.) ___ Advanced master's level students
d.) ___ Other (Please specify) _____

23. How many hours do counseling trainees spend in the experiential group? Please mark the category that applies.

a.) ___ less than 10 hours
b.) ___ 10 hours
c.) ___ 11-15 hours
d.) ___ 16-20 hours
e.) ___ 21-25 hours
f.) ___ 26+ hours

Section IV- Practicum Component

Please underline the appropriate number below: (1= Always, 2= Sometimes, 3= Never)

	Always	Sometimes	Never
24. Are students in the group course required to lead a group? (If the answer is "Never", disregard questions 25 and 26.)	1	2	3
25. Are the group leaders supervised?	1	2	3
26. Are the supervised sessions recorded (Audiotape or videotape)?	1	2	3

Check the appropriate space below.

27. What type of group do students lead?

a.) ___ Psychoeducational
b.) ___ Counseling
c.) ___ Support
d.) ___ Task
e.) Other (Please specify) _____

Section V- Participant Comments

28. What specific concerns do you have regarding the CACREP requirement that master's level students participate in a small-group activity?

29. In conclusion, has the survey covered all content relevant to CACREP core curricular group experiences? (Please elaborate)

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