COUN 5358- Group Counseling
University of St. Thomas
Jeffrey A. Kottler, Ph.D.
Email: jkottler@fullerton.edu
Office Hours: Tuesday, 3:00-5:00, Wednesday, 3:00-5:00, and by appointment

Texts: Kottler & Englar-Carlson, Learning Group Leadership
Yalom, The Schopenhauer Cure (a novel)

Objectives:
1. Understand and explore the dynamics, processes, and stages of group work
2. Demonstrate a continuing ability to become aware of your own characteristic style of group functioning, including personal strengths and weaknesses
3. Understand the various approaches to group leadership, including theoretical models, leadership styles, and major strategies
4. Compare and contrast different styles of leadership, as well as understand the universal therapeutic features of successful group experiences
5. Practice leadership skills and strategies as part of a co-leadership team, receiving supervision and feedback to improve competence
6. Understand the various aspects of group dynamics and process, including member roles, coalitions, and critical incidents
7. Understand how member cultural differences and cultural identities impact and influence behavior in group and how to become more responsive to diversity issues in group
8. Learn self-processing strategies and skills through the use of a journal to increase awareness and understanding of one’s own behavior in groups
9. Complete systematic study of one’s own behavior in various groups throughout life
10. Observe group leadership in the field, including interviews with practitioners regarding their growth edge and advice
11. Learn how to formulate, plan, and conduct treatment plans for individual group members, as well as the group as a whole
12. Learn how to process constructive feedback from peers and instructor to improve leadership skills
13. Study the unique ethical issues inherent in groups including those related to confidentiality, peer pressure, and potential dangers
14. Understand ways to assess and evaluate progress in a group, as well as to make needed adjustments
15. Ultimately, the main objective of the course is to help each member to become a more effective professional group leader in a variety of settings and contexts

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
CLASS ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION. Because of the experiential nature of this course, students are expected to attend every class and participate in activities and exercises. You are also expected to come to class punctually. This norm is consistent with professional standards related to managing time effectively. Being late for an appointment with a client is unacceptable, especially for those who already have poor self-esteem and feelings of rejection. This conduct is consistent with what is expected from graduate students and professional counselors.

Your grade WILL be affected if you miss more than two class sessions or come late consistently to class. Please do not notify the instructor if you will be absent; it is understood there was some emergency or illness.

Because of some concerns related to dual relationships in this class, the following guidelines will be employed to protect your rights: 1) your participation will not be graded, either in terms of how much you talk or what you choose to reveal, 2) there will be no pressure for you to say or do anything for which you do not feel ready, 3) your grade in the class will only reflect your performance on the papers, and 4) the principle of informed consent will be followed to ensure that you know exactly what you are doing and why you are doing it—that is, how such activities are directly related to making you a skilled group leader.

Although the extent of your participation and sharing of yourself is voluntary, keep in mind that it is difficult, if not hypocritical, for you to expect your clients to do things that you are unwilling or unable to do yourself. You will have the opportunity to participate in several different roles during your journey of becoming a better group leader: 1) as a member working on personal issues, 2) as a co-leader in order to practice new skills and receive constructive feedback, and 3) as a process observer in order to apply concepts and knowledge to group sessions.

For those who volunteer to co-lead the group, you will have more material to include in your final paper related to that experience. You may wish to make notes after your leadership experience(s) to explore: 1) the challenges you faced during the leadership (including fears, frustrations, uncertainties, weaknesses identified), 2) the joys and benefits you experienced, 3) what you learned (both personally and professionally) that you imagine will stick with you for a long time.

A note on cell phones. Much of the action that takes place in this class, or any class, occurs during the breaks when there are opportunities to reflect on what occurred and talk to classmates about your different perceptions. This is how relationships are forged. You are encouraged and challenged to refrain from using cell phones during the three hour period that class takes place. This gives you the opportunity to fully immerse yourself in the growth and learning that occurs in such an enriched environment, one temporarily free of distractions (just the way counseling is structured).

BEING IN A GROUP VICARIOUSLY. You are to read Yalom’s novel, The Schopenhauer Cure. Read it critically and reflectively, looking for themes, issues, dynamics, and processes that are discussed in your main textbook. Talk about aspects of the group that you like and don’t like, especially focusing on leadership decisions,
skills, and interventions. Discuss new insights, points of confusion, and connections you make to other things you understand. Support your points with specific examples from the novel, as well as evidence from the text, class, and personal experience. In addition to this reflective discussion, create a section of the paper of several pages in which you write yourself into the group as a participant, imagining how you might respond and react to particular incidents or experiences that occur. The paper is due relatively early in the semester so you can really feel what a high functioning group is like and bring some of that into our group.

Minimum length of paper: 6 pages.
Due (via attached file on email): Feb. 25, 3:00 PM via email: jkottler@fullerton.edu

MY BEHAVIOR IN GROUPS. This final paper represents your attempt to integrate what you have learned in this class applied to your own life and behavior. You are to apply the principles, theories, experiences, readings, and ideas from class and text to an introspective analysis of your own behavior in groups. Given that you have already completed papers in other classes that ask you to review your prior history, this paper should focus only on new material related to group dynamics and group behavior. You should begin your paper with an exploration, in the present and past, of your behavior as a member of important groups throughout your life, including family, social, friendship, and work groups (approximately 3-4 pages).

The main focus of the paper, however, should be to process your experience in our group, in particular your own roles and behavior, as well as that of your other group members. Discuss in detail the dynamics of the group, the stages that evolved, the coalitions you observed, and especially the various leadership roles and responsibilities displayed by yourself and others. It is not necessary to merely report and describe what happened in the group (I was there). Instead explore the process in the room, supporting what you observed with specific examples. For instance if you say “there was a feeling of universality in the room when we talked about fears of failure,” then support this with some evidence and examples.

You focus should not be merely to describe what occurred, what you witnessed or observed, but to explore and analyze critically and reflectively what you experienced, supporting your points with evidence or examples. (approximately 3-4 pages).

Synthesize the results of this study into a coherent profile of your strengths and weaknesses as a group member and leader. Make certain that you cover sufficient territory and contexts and make certain to include conclusions and synthesis at the end (approximately 2-3 pages).

Although the minimum length for such a paper that covers such vast territory is 10 pages, those who wish to achieve a grade of A, signifying “excellence” beyond what is expected, may wish to write more.
Due: May 6, 3 PM via attached file on email: jkottler@fullerton.edu. All papers will be deleted after returning them with comments.
JOURNAL. This assignment will not be graded but will help you structure your paper above. You are to keep a Personal Log throughout the course of the semester writing several times per week about your reactions to what takes place in class, in the readings, and in your own mind and heart as a result of your experiences. You must write a minimum of 3 times per week for a minimum of 30 minutes each, but you are welcome to do more. In fact, you may find that this structure helps you to complete the last paper. In addition, there is substantial research to indicate that writing about personal experiences in a journal on a regular basis can provide the same or similar benefits of attending regular therapy sessions! Note: please put the day and time in which you made each log entry.

It is important that you be as honest as you can with yourself during this writing assignment. Because it might be an invasion of your privacy for the instructor to read what you have written, I will only check to see that you have completed the assignment, noting the number and length of your entries.

As far as what you write about, there are limitless possibilities including: 1) observations about the way group members and the leader function, 2) musings about your own strong reactions to what unfolds, 3) connections between things that occur, or you read about, to your own experience, 4) a catharsis or dumping of your present feelings and thoughts, 5) explorations of what pushes your buttons, 6) new insights you have about yourself and group behavior, 7) ideas you want to remember and access at a later time, 8) applications of ideas to your work, family, and friendships, 9) dialogues with the instructor, 10) a repository of creative expression, 11) setting goals for yourself in the future, 12) systematic practice of new counseling skills on yourself, 13) analysis of your dreams and fantasies, 14) documentation of your progress and growth, 15) a celebration of life. This is only a limited sample of possibilities. Due: April 29. Bring to class for review.

OPTIONAL ASSIGNMENT (to be eligible for an A)
In order to be eligible for a grade of A, you must complete the following assignment that is graded either Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory. Arrange to observe a minimum of two different therapeutic or support groups. Although it is far preferable to find groups led by professionally trained and qualified leaders, if that is not feasible, you may choose to visit support groups such as “12 step” programs. Observe the dynamics, stages, processes, and leadership behaviors in the group, paying particular attention to what you liked and didn’t like, discussing why you have those opinions. If it is possible, talk to the group leaders afterwards to get their reactions and impressions of what took place), what you notice works best and least, and demonstrate your understanding of group dynamics, group process, and therapeutic factors by noting process events and reactions in the room. Consider the following questions:

- Why do members come to this group?
- What do they get out of it?
- Why is it successful?
- What therapeutic factors are at work?
• How do you know a therapeutic factor is happening?
• What process shifts occurred in the group?
• What process shifts happened to you?
• How are therapeutic factors embedded in the structure of the group?

Look to provide examples to support your observations and statements. These can also be supported by your readings or other sources of scholarly literature. Please keep in mind that you are not so much describing what happened in the groups you observe but rather making sense as a critical observer of what happened and why. In spite of whatever you might see that does not seem ideal or consistent with effective practice, why do you think members return?

Write up the results of your investigations into a paper. It should be a minimum of 6 pages. **Due: April 15 by 3:00 PM via attached file on email.**

**Grading Criteria**

The difference between a grade of B and A is really best summarized in the question: Did you do what would be expected of a graduate student, or did you go beyond the call of duty? The following criteria are used to evaluate your work:

- How much time, work, and effort did you appear to put into your projects?
- How well did you organize your paper including setting the stage, synthesis, and integration?
- How much detail and comprehensiveness is included?
- Did you support your points with examples?
- Did you integrate readings and class materials to apply what you’ve learned?
- What is the depth of your analysis of your presentation?
- What is the overall quality of your presentation?