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# Counselor Education Beyond Our Borders: Promoting Mental Health Counseling in Romania Through a Service–Learning Project

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Article 18

**Counselor Education Beyond Our Borders: Promoting Mental Health Counseling in Romania Through a Service–Learning Project**

Paper based on a program presented at the 2011 ACES Conference, October 28-30, 2011, Nashville, TN.

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The purpose of this article is to provide readers an account of the challenges and opportunities presented in a multi-faceted service-learning program in Romania. Developed in 2010, this endeavor involved an exploratory visit to assess the needs of social service agencies in Romania, and partnership with an American non-profit agency providing services to at-risk children. The mission of this program was to expose students to counseling as an emerging field in a developing post-communist community. In collaboration with the National Board of Certified Counselors-International (NBCC-I) Mental Health Facilitator (MHF) program, the authors were trained as Master Trainers in order to better prepare themselves to interact with social service personnel in Romania. This paper will present our journey as counselor educators towards the development of a service-learning program in Romania over four stages: 1) pre-planning; 2) early implementation; 3) on the journey; and 4) findings and lessons learned. The authors describe an international service-learning project experience, share lessons learned for counselor educators who want to establish a similar program, and present an example of a student's reflection on the experience.

Over the past two decades, there has been an increase in the attention for multicultural counseling. Given this increase, counselor education programs must develop training programs that will meet the multicultural training needs and address the standards for multicultural training established by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP; 2009) and comply with the cultural competence ethical standards (American Counseling Association, 2005). According to Cordero and Rodriguez (2009), the number of ethnic and racial minorities has been drastically increasing and will continue to do so well into the future. Given this declaration, counselor educators have a responsibility to address diversity training within counselor preparation programs. Researchers (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Arthur & Januszkowski, 2001) have found that beginning counselors feel unprepared to work with diverse populations. Furthermore, counselor trainees have been found to possess both racial and gender biases, minimal self-awareness, and a general lack of multicultural counseling knowledge (Ancis & Sanchez-Hucles, 2000; Ponterotto, 1988).

The authors determined the need to incorporate an international service-learning project in the master's level mental health counseling program for three reasons. First, they wanted to address the multicultural and diversity standards for both CACREP (2009) and the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development's multicultural counseling competencies. This program was conceived as a way to contribute to our master's level mental health counseling students' development of multicultural awareness, knowledge, and cross-counseling skills. Second, they wanted to add an internationally-relevant component to the mental health counseling curriculum. Third, they sought to promote an international exchange of ideas on mental health between students and social service agencies in Romania.

### **Why Romania?**

Under the Communist regime led by Nicolae Ceausescu, policies to encourage big families made both birth control and abortion illegal in Romania (Johnson, Horga, & Andronache, 1996; Moskoff, 1980). Meanwhile, miserable economic measures in the late 1970s and 1980s created rampant national poverty, which contributed to the institutionalization of more than 170,000 children. The absence of community-based childcare alternatives led doctors to advise struggling families to place their children in institutions. By 1989, there were over 170,000 children in 700 institutions across Romania, warehousing children, from infants to young adults up to age 18, across the country.

In 1989, shortly after the "fall" of communism in Romania, tragic images of undernourished Romanian children, tied to steel cribs, rhythmically banging their heads against the walls, locked in dimly-lit rooms, supervised by custodial staff with little time to interact with them, attracted international attention. The Western press exposed the deplorable situation of institutionalized children in Romania, triggering a flood of international assistance. As a result, effort was made to improve the living conditions in the Romanian orphanages and reduce Romania's dependence on institutions. More and more social service programs were instituted to provide help to families who were at-risk of abandoning their children.

Though Romania's road to reform has shown progress over the past 20 or so years, the effects of such devastation on Romania's "forgotten children" are enormous. Their security and happiness were severely compromised by the negative impact of institutional life. Resultant is the social context that now lingers; a large population of abandoned, sick, and disabled children, many of whom have aged out of the system to adulthood, which complicates re-integration efforts and family preservation by child welfare organizations and advocates (Hogue et al., 2004).

The authors chose Romania because of the country's recent move towards trying to establish counseling as a profession and the extreme level of need for social services. According to researchers (Szilagyi, 2005; Watts, 1997), following the collapse of communism in Romania, the country's need for counseling as a profession has been heightened by the needs for social, educational, and career support services. During the initial planning phase of this project, the authors made several contacts with counseling organizations and non-profit agencies in Romania as a way to establish a relationship to build the program upon. The remainder of this article will focus on the process the authors experienced from early implementation of the program to the post trip follow-up and implications for counselor educators and supervisors. Throughout this paper the terms 'authors' and 'trip leaders' will be used interchangeably.

### **Our Process**

The need for integrating an international service-learning project in to the mental health counseling program curriculum was determined due to the paucity of diversity within the counseling program. The counseling program discussed throughout this paper is part of Lindsey Wilson College a four-year liberal-arts college located in the Appalachian region of the southern United States. Of the student population, 85% are first-generation college students, many of whom have very little experience outside of their county, let alone the country. With this in mind, the authors wanted to bring the inaugural international immersion experience to the program. The following will be a narrative of the authors' experiences during the stages of our project: pre-planning, early-implementation, on the journey, and findings and lessons learned.

#### **Pre Planning-Stage**

The pre-planning phase of our project included the initial program proposal to the college; making contacts with Romanian social-service agencies and the National Board of Certified Counselors-International (NBCC-I) and; an exploratory trip to Braila, Romania, to assess interest and need.

**Initial program proposal.** The initial exploration of a service-learning project began in December 2009. Two of the authors initiated this effort with the support of the Dean of the Counseling Program. After obtaining support from the college to develop the program, the two authors then met with an American non-profit foundation, which supports and operates two group homes for orphans in Romania. The non-profit foundation is partnered with a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Romania, which oversees the operations of the homes in Romania.

**Making contacts.** The planning started with several discussions with the NBCC-I and an American NGO, based in Romania. The discussions with the NBCC-I were centered on how the authors would go about partnering with the NBCC-I and the NGO in

Romania to provide Mental Health Facilitator Training in Braila, Romania. Braila, Romania, is located in the Eastern part of the country and has experienced extreme devastation as a result of the fall of communism. Prior to the communist takeover in 1947, Romania was a thriving country rich in natural resources. In contrast, after the fall of communism, Romania is now considered among the poorest nations of Eastern Europe.

Once the partnership was made with the NGO, two of the authors were invited to attend the Master Training for the NBCC-International Mental Health Facilitator (MHF) Train the Trainers program. This program was developed to train a select group of experts with the MHF curriculum, as Master Trainers, who would then be able to deliver the curriculum to service providers in partnering countries. The authors' intentions were to partner with the NGO in Romania and NBCC-I to deliver the training to a select group of local service providers.

**Exploratory trip.** Once a partnership had been formed between the counseling program and the NGO in Romania, two of the authors journeyed to meet with key Romanian contacts. The purpose of this trip was two-fold: 1) we wanted to assess the current human-services needs within the area and the desire for the MHF program, and 2) we wanted to identify particular agencies we would be able to partner with for our students' service-learning trip. All of the contacts were arranged through the American partner. The contacts were comprised of service providers at social service agencies working with several clinical populations; specifically adults with developmental disabilities, children with autism-spectrum disorders, an after-school program for at-risk children, and a residential setting for elderly adults. During the trip, service providers consistently requested input from the authors for training opportunities and communicated their desire to partner with our counseling program.

### **Early Implementation Stage**

Following the exploratory trip, the authors had enough information to proceed with advertising the project to students. The early implementation stage refers to efforts to: a) gain institutional approval; b) recruit students; and c) schedule service-learning opportunities with appropriate outcomes for counselor education students.

**Institutional approval.** Initially, the authors hoped to provide the service-learning opportunity within the context of an elective course; however, restrictions on curricular flexibility precluded this option. As students reside among an approximate 500 mile geographic radius, opportunities for seated classroom time also presented challenges for offering the course as part of a CACREP core course. As the initiative developed, the authors and administrators decided jointly that providing the course separate of credit hours—with the exception of the potential for some practicum or internship hours—was most feasible. The program was scheduled to fall in the 11-day interim between Spring and Summer trimesters.

**Recruitment of students.** Students were recruited primarily through email due to the geographic structure of our program. The inaugural trip was decidedly available only to graduate students within the Clinical Mental Health Counseling graduate program. Authors sent an initial email to all program faculty, instructors, and support personnel announcing an impending Service-Learning Trip to Romania. The initial email generated significant interest and was followed by a trip announcement, frequently asked questions (FAQ) section, and contact information. The FAQ section was intended to anticipate the

questions of students, particularly those who had never travelled outside of the United States. Most students who responded to the original announcement had questions regarding cost and time commitment. Less than half of the original respondents had ever travelled outside of the continental United States, and approximately one-fourth had never travelled on an airplane. Care was spent detailing information for obtaining a passport. This was a faculty-led program; therefore, the application process for the trip was based upon supervisor referral. Faculty corresponded with the student's respective faculty supervisor to determine goodness of fit for the trip. Students were notified that they had to obtain a physical examination to determine fitness to travel. Once the trip leaders spoke with supervisors and students had provided a medical clearance, they were offered a secure placement for the trip.

Given the geographic distance between participating students, it was not feasible to meet face-to-face with the students prior to travel. However, trip leaders connected the participating students through Facebook, Skype, and a trip blog set up by the trip leaders. Along with several emails that detailed travel considerations, two pre-trip Skype orientations were scheduled as a means to discuss all the trip expectations, make introductions, and to address any student questions/concerns. During the orientations the students were presented with the opportunity to participate in a research and program assessment component. Student were notified they would be sent an informed consent to participate in pre and post focus group experiences, pre and post measures of multicultural competency and awareness, mindfulness training, and video journaling. All signed forms were received by mail prior to the trip departure.

**Scheduling service-learning opportunities.** The trip leaders scheduled service-learning opportunities by maintaining contact with the service-providers introduced during the exploratory trip. Service-learning opportunities were operationally defined as those activities that would a) supply some (no more than 20) hours suitable for the indirect portion of students' internship requirements; b) transcend language obstacles (as access to interpreters was limited); and c) engage students in hands-on engagement with service-providers.

### **On the Journey**

The journey commenced in late-April through mid-May, 2011. Students and faculty leaders travelled for 12 days total; approximately one day was spent in transit from and to the United States. Of the approximately 17 students who initially made inquiries regarding the trip, a total of 5 students participated. None of the students knew one another before the trip; however, some introductions were made using technology (e.g., Skype and Facebook). This section will outline the service-learning activities completed while in Romania: specifically, the section will describe a) training provided by trip leaders and students; b) training received by students; c) activities performed at NGOs; and d) video journals.

**Training provided.** Input received from partner NGOs prior to the trip informed the training provided during the trip. As the service providers indicated a sparse understanding of counseling as a profession, trip leaders developed a training to provide a succinct overview of the profession, including: definition, history, accreditation/licensure, employment settings, and goals of counseling. The outcome was a 6-hour training provided to 36 Romanian service-providers from Braila, Romania, and the surrounding area. Translation was provided in "real-time" by a bilingual Romanian-English NGO

employee; it is estimated that the process of translation resulted in 4 hours of content delivery in total. Audience members appeared particularly receptive to discussions regarding stigmatization of mental health concerns within Romanian culture. Participants were also eager to understand the structure of third-party reimbursement and allocation of services in the United States. Throughout the training, trip leaders and students provided role-plays of specific counseling micro skills including open-ended questions, reflection of feeling, and content and attending skills. The capstone experience of the training involved participants practicing the skills in small groups. Participants repeatedly stated that “Romanians need to learn to listen!” and the skill-set provided a useful framework for practicing this skill.

**Training received.** It was expected that, during the trip, students would experience cognitive dissonance as they observed and interacted with a culture different than their own. Trip leaders created a mindfulness training curriculum with the end goal of raising students’ awareness of judgments while returning their awareness to ‘just the current moment.’ Each morning, prior to engaging with service-providers and clients, students were lead through a simple mindfulness activity that included a) focused breathing with concentration on inhaling and exhaling; b) awareness on just one part of an experience (e.g., one sound, one sight, one thought); c) noticing, without naming, describing, or judging, thoughts and sensations as they entered awareness; and d) turning the mind back to non-judgmental awareness when intrusive or ruminating thoughts entered awareness.

**Activities at NGOs.** Each day, students and trip leaders arrived at an NGO service-provider. Students were briefed by employees on the clientele served at the agency, how services are provided, what clinical and funding challenges the agency encounters, and how students might be of assistance. Volunteer translators were recruited in advance and provided translation services on a 2-to-1 ratio. The NGO providers included the following: two residential programs for children and young-adult survivors of orphanages; one day program for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities; one day program for children and young adults with autism-spectrum disorders; one community-based outreach program for adult survivors of the state orphanages; and one after-school program for low-income children. Prior to visits, students brainstormed to create culturally and developmentally appropriate activities for use with each group. These activities included simple psychoeducational information for service-providers and parents, creative arts and recreational activities, and modified experiential group training.

**Video journals.** At the end of each day, students and the trip leaders met and debriefed the activities of the day. Students were reminded of the day’s mindfulness training activity. The leaders then provided students with a specific question to process in the form of a video journal. A flip-style video camera was set up in a private room. Students were asked to answer the specific question asked by the leaders either individually or in a group in front of the video camera. Video journals were saved for post-trip analysis.

### **Findings and Lessons Learned**

The authors leading this service learning project felt it was important to evaluate the experience of student participants for at least three reasons: a) to determine what was gained from the learner’s perspective; b) to discover what suggestions students have

based on their experiences (how they would like the program to be different); and c) provide a basis for making changes to improve the program in the future.

The program evaluation consisted of five assessment components, two pre-trip, two post-trip, and one during the journey data gathering activity. Student participants were asked to complete a “Pre-Service Learning Questionnaire” and participate in a “Pre-Participant Focus Group.” Likewise, upon their return, students were to participate in a “Post-Participant Focus Group” (and debriefing), and a “Post-Service Learning Questionnaire.” The pre-participant service learning questionnaire consisted primarily of inquiries that were associated with expectations related to the trip, potential concerns associated with anticipated experiences, perceived personal value of the trip, and level of cultural competency going into the trip (see Appendix A – *Student Pre/Post-Service Learning Questionnaires*). The post-participant questionnaire focused primarily upon reflections of the personal value of the experience, the trip’s perceived relevance to counselor preparation, the trip’s value in facilitating a broader understanding of multicultural issues, the importance of the trip in terms of professional identity, and a post experience level of cultural competency. Both questionnaires utilized the same 6 point Likert scale delineating participant levels of agreement or disagreement with a series of 20 statements. Some questions in the questionnaires related to multicultural awareness were adapted from Arredondo et al.’s (1996) work, *Multicultural Counseling Competencies and Standards*.

The pre-participant focus group followed a protocol that focused primarily upon exploring student pre-trip experiences related to considering going on such a service learning adventure, and inquiring of student concerns, fears, and expectations for the trip. The post-participant focus group protocol inquiries were primarily associated with participant’s first and final impressions related to the trip, perceived personal gains and group contributions, greatest actual fears and positive experiences occurring during the trip, regrets, surprises, disappointments, and what was learned from the experience. (see Appendix B – *Pre/Post Romania Participant Focus Group Protocols*).

As mentioned previously, during the journey, student participants were asked to make entries in a recorded video journal each evening in order to discuss and process their experiences during the trip. A flip camera was provided for students to document the content and affect of their experiences.

Unfortunately, due to the flurry of activity involved in getting the program operational, the evaluation components of the program were not emphasized or discussed with participants until shortly before departure. It appears that because the students were not informed about this component early in the process, they had a limited level of “buy-in” to the data gathering activities leading to less than full and enthusiastic participation. This provided the trip leaders with a “lesson learned” to take forward in the next such experience. It was also learned that early discussions of program evaluation activities and providing some type of incentives would be helpful in garnering greater participation. Although the data gathered from this trip does not represent a comprehensive collection of all student perspectives, and thus cannot be considered a valid representation, it does provide useful data and insights for future planning.

Despite the limitations of the assessments noted above, the general findings from the student participant perspective are summarized as follows:

- Generally, students had a sense that this was going to be a “special trip” even in the midst of any fears and concerns they might have of the unknown.
- Students trusted the faculty leading the trip and were willing to put themselves “out there” and see what would happen.
- At the end of the trip, most students wished they could have stayed longer and contributed more to the people in Romania.
- Most students were inspired by the ability to interact with people who spoke a “different language” and found being in the minority for once was “humbling and provided a lot of growth.”
- Some students felt it enhanced their professional identity as a counselor and helped clarify their future aspirations in the field.
- Students were impressed with how impactful just “being there with” the orphans and Romanian service workers seemed to be, and how open the locals were to learning all they could.
- Students gained an understanding that we are all more alike than different and that there is “only one race, the human race.”
- Students were inspired by their observation that the Romanians seemed more engaged in “living in the moment” and experiencing all that is around them.
- Students were challenged to become more mindful each day as they wished to embrace the experiences before them.
- Students suggested that prior to future trips, a better understanding of what will be experienced should be discussed with students in more detail and that this will allow some students to better self-select to participate or not participate.
- Students expressed a high level of gratefulness for the caring and leadership shown by the faculty leaders on the trip.

One student was anxious to participate in the authors’ roundtable discussion of the program at the ACES 2011 Conference in Nashville, TN. In preparation for that discussion this student wrote a summary of her impressions. These overall observations of a student on the trip are presented in Appendix C.

### **Summary and Implications for Counselor Educators and Supervisors**

The authors believe that the service learning experience of counselor trainees from Lindsey Wilson College visiting Romania was successful on many fronts. As evidenced by student feedback, the multicultural experience was rich in meaning. From the perspective of the consumer and human service workers in Romania, the team provided an initial glimpse into the value of interaction with trained human service personnel. From the viewpoint of the faculty leading the trip, this was a robust learning experience for all involved—a win/win scenario. The authors, the students, and the Romanians were all stretched in new directions and subsequently gained a fresh perspective on the many possibilities that exist for human growth and development.

There has been a recent movement for the internationalization of counseling. It is becoming more important for counselor educators to start thinking like global citizens. The implications of international service-learning are far reaching. Although overwhelming to execute, an international service-learning project can contribute to a significant level of curricular diversity, while facilitating students to develop with regard

to multicultural competency. Offering students the opportunity to interrelate with cultures different from their own can be one of the best ways to realize one's own cultural identity, as well as the culture of others.

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**Appendix A**

**Romania—Student Pre-Service Learning Questionnaire**

Please read the ***Informed Consent*** agreement at the end of this questionnaire before participating.

**Instructions:** After determining a “YES” OR “NO” response to each question below, please indicate the strength of your agreement (YES) or disagreement (NO) by marking your opinion as High /Moderate /Low. Please comment freely on each question to provide more information regarding your thoughts and feelings.

<b>1. Choosing to make this trip was an easy decision to make.</b>  <u>Comments:</u>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	
<b>2. I expect this trip will be one of the most valuable experiences in my training to be a professional counselor.</b>  <u>What do you anticipate will make it valuable / Comments:</u>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	
<b>3. I expect this will provide me with a better understanding of “multicultural considerations” when counseling clients of varied backgrounds.</b>  <u>Comments:</u>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	

<p><b>4. I feel “anxious” about going on this trip to a country where I’ve never been before.</b></p> <p><u>Describe “anxious” as it relates to this trip / Comments:</u></p>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	
<p><b>5. I believe that I am aware of all I need and want to know prior to leaving on this trip.</b></p> <p><u>What is lacking? / Comments:</u></p>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	
<p><b>6. I believe this trip will be “successful.”</b></p> <p><u>Your definition of “successful” / Comments:</u></p>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	
<p><b>7. I believe I will learn something on this trip that will be extremely important to me as a counselor ... I imagine it will be _____.</b></p> <p><u>What do you expect to learn? / Comments:</u></p>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	

<p><b>8. I believe this trip will give me a greater sense of professional identity as a counselor.</b></p> <p><u>Example / Comments:</u></p>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	
<p><b>9. I believe this trip will provide me with a larger understanding of counseling as a profession ... BOTH in the U.S. and around the world.</b></p> <p><u>What do you expect to learn about the profession / Comments:</u></p>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	
<p><b>10. If necessary, I would be willing to pay more money to take a trip like this.</b></p> <p><u>How much more / Comments:</u></p>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	
<p><b>11. I can identify specific attitudes, beliefs, and values from my behaviors that demonstrate respect and valuing of differences and those that impede or hinder my respect for and valuing of differences.</b></p> <p><u>What can you identify?/Comments:</u></p>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	

<p><b>12. I actively engage in an ongoing process of challenging my own attitudes and beliefs that do not support respecting and valuing of differences.</b></p> <p><u>Comments:</u></p>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	
<p><b>13. I am able to recognize my sources of comfort and/or discomfort with respect to differences related to race, ethnicity, and culture.</b></p> <p><u>Comments:</u></p>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	
<p><b>14. I can specifically identify, name, and discuss privileges that I receive in society due to my race, socio-economic background, gender, physical abilities, sexual orientation, etc.</b></p> <p><u>Examples / Comments:</u></p>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	
<p><b>15. I identify my common emotional reactions regarding individuals and groups different from myself and observe my own reactions in such encounters.</b></p> <p><u>Emotional Reactions / Comments:</u></p>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	

<b>16. I can describe the behavioral impact and reaction of my communication style on individuals different from myself.</b>  <u>Reactions / Comments:</u>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	
<b>17. I can give examples of an incident in which communication broke down with a person from another cultural orientation and I can hypothesize about the causes.</b>  <u>Examples / Comments:</u>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	
<b>18. I can articulate how my personal reactions and assumptions are different for those who identify with a cultural orientation other than my own.</b>  <u>Example / Comments:</u>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	
<b>19. I can identify within-group differences and assess various aspects of each person to determine individual differences as well as cultural differences.</b>  <u>Example / Comments:</u>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	

\* Questions 11-20 excerpted and adapted from a previous adaptation from: Arredondo, Toporek, Brown, Jones, Locke, Sanchez, & Stadler. (1996). Multicultural Counseling Competencies and Standards. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 24(1). Rating Scale developed by Stephens, B. C., (2011).

## **Informed Consent**

This questionnaire is a “Pre-Assessment” related to your anticipated service learning experience in Romania. Upon returning from the trip, you will have a similar “Post-Assessment” questionnaire regarding your actual experiences. There are a total of 20 questions which should take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. The first 10 questions are related to what you believe/anticipate related to your trip; the final 10 questions relate to your current perception of your understanding of “multicultural considerations” as it relates to counseling. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers, only your current perceptions. The purpose of this “Pre-Trip” and “Post-Trip” assessment is to determine if there are any measurable changes that occurred as a result of your having participated in this service learning experience.

Although we hope that all trip participants will complete this questionnaire, it is not a requirement for your participating in the trip and will have no influence on your experiences in Romania. You are free not to participate or not to answer all of the questions, although we hope you will do so. Your anonymity will be maintained so that I will not know who completed each survey (see Procedure for Maintaining Anonymity below). When results of the survey are reported, they will be done in aggregate (collective) form so that no individual’s survey is singled out. If individual responses are noted, they will be presented in such a way that no one in the group could be identified.

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Your participation in this questionnaire is confirmation that you have read, understand, and agree with the procedures described in this informed consent and wish to freely participate. If you have any questions or concerns related to this questionnaire you may contact me ([Barry.Stephens@lindsey.edu](mailto:Barry.Stephens@lindsey.edu)) and/or Dr. Martin Wesley ([Martin.Wesley@lindsey.edu](mailto:Martin.Wesley@lindsey.edu)) at the LWC School of Professional Counseling.

Thank you for your Participation!

### **Barry Stephens**

Barry C. Stephens, Ph.D., Associate Professor  
School of Professional Counseling, Lindsey Wilson College  
(c) 205 516-9713

**Romania—Student Post-Service Learning Questionnaire**

Please read the ***Informed Consent*** Agreement at the end of this questionnaire before participating.

**Instructions:** After determining a “YES” OR “NO” response to each question below, please indicate the strength of your agreement (YES) or disagreement (NO) by marking your opinion as High/ Moderate/ Low. Please comment freely on each question to provide more information regarding your thoughts and feelings.

<b>1. Looking back, if I had the opportunity to decide over again, I would definitely choose to take this trip!</b>  <u>Why? / Comments:</u>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	
<b>2. I believe this trip is one of the most valuable experiences in my training as a professional counselor.</b>  <u>If “yes”, what made this trip so valuable / Comments:</u>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	
<b>3. After making this trip I feel that I have a better understanding of “multicultural considerations” when counseling clients with varied backgrounds.</b>  <u>Comments:</u>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	
<b>4. After going on this trip I feel less anxious about going to a country where I’ve never been before.</b>  <u>If “yes” describe in what way you would be “less anxious” / Comments:</u>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	

<p><b>5. I was aware of all I needed to know prior to leaving on this trip.</b></p>	<p><b>YES</b></p>			<p><b>NO</b></p>			
<p><u>If “no” what was lacking? / Comments:</u></p>	<p><b>High</b></p>	<p><b>Moderate</b></p>	<p><b>Low</b></p>	<p><b>Low</b></p>	<p><b>Moderate</b></p>	<p><b>High</b></p>	<p><b>No Opinion</b></p>
<p><b>6. I believe this trip was “successful.”</b></p>	<p><b>YES</b></p>			<p><b>NO</b></p>			
<p><u>If “yes”, define “successful” / Comments:</u></p>	<p><b>High</b></p>	<p><b>Moderate</b></p>	<p><b>Low</b></p>	<p><b>Low</b></p>	<p><b>Moderate</b></p>	<p><b>High</b></p>	<p><b>No Opinion</b></p>
<p><b>7. I believe I learned something on this trip that is extremely important to me as a counselor ... It is -</b></p>	<p><b>YES</b></p>			<p><b>NO</b></p>			
<p><u>What did you learn? / Comments:</u></p>	<p><b>High</b></p>	<p><b>Moderate</b></p>	<p><b>Low</b></p>	<p><b>Low</b></p>	<p><b>Moderate</b></p>	<p><b>High</b></p>	<p><b>No Opinion</b></p>
<p><b>8. I believe this trip gave me a greater sense of professional identity as a counselor.</b></p>	<p><b>YES</b></p>			<p><b>NO</b></p>			
<p><u>Example / In what way / Comments:</u></p>	<p><b>High</b></p>	<p><b>Moderate</b></p>	<p><b>Low</b></p>	<p><b>Low</b></p>	<p><b>Moderate</b></p>	<p><b>High</b></p>	<p><b>No Opinion</b></p>
<p><b>9. I believe this trip provided me with a greater understanding of counseling as a profession ... BOTH in the U.S. and around the world.</b></p>	<p><b>YES</b></p>			<p><b>NO</b></p>			
<p><u>What did you learn about the profession / Comments:</u></p>	<p><b>High</b></p>	<p><b>Moderate</b></p>	<p><b>Low</b></p>	<p><b>Low</b></p>	<p><b>Moderate</b></p>	<p><b>High</b></p>	<p><b>No Opinion</b></p>

<b>10. If necessary, I would be willing to pay more money to take a trip like this.</b>  <u>How much more / Comments:</u>	YES			NO			<b>No Opinion</b>
	<b>High</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>High</b>	

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Each of the following questions have 2 parts – Part-A and Part-B. Part-A should be answered from a “*Post Reflective*” perspective – reflecting how you feel you would have rated yourself PRIOR to going on the trip to Romania. Part-B should be answered from a “*Post Observation*” Perspective – reflecting how you currently feel you rate yourself following the trip.

<b>11-A. BEFORE THE TRIP - I could identify specific attitudes, beliefs, and values from my behaviors that demonstrate respect and valuing of differences and those that impede or hinder my respect for and valuing of differences.</b>  <u>What can you identify?/Comments:</u>	YES			NO			<b>No Opinion</b>
	<b>High</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>High</b>	

<b>11-B. AFTER THE TRIP - I can identify specific attitudes, beliefs, and values from my behaviors that demonstrate respect and valuing of differences and those that impede or hinder my respect for and valuing of differences.</b>  <u>What can you identify?/Comments:</u>	YES			NO			<b>No Opinion</b>
	<b>High</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>High</b>	

<b>12-A. BEFORE THE TRIP - I actively engaged in an ongoing process of challenging my own attitudes and beliefs that do not support respecting and valuing of differences.</b>  <u>Comments:</u>	YES			NO			<b>No Opinion</b>
	<b>High</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>High</b>	

<p><b>12-B. AFTER THE TRIP -</b>  <b>I actively engage in an ongoing process of challenging my own attitudes and beliefs that do not support respecting and valuing of differences.</b></p> <p><u>Comments:</u></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>YES</b></p>				<p style="text-align: center;"><b>NO</b></p>			<p style="text-align: center;"><b>No Opinion</b></p>
	High	Moderate	Low		Low	Moderate	High	
<p><b>13-A. BEFORE THE TRIP -</b>  <b>I was able to recognize my sources of comfort and/or discomfort with respect to differences related to race, ethnicity, and culture.</b></p> <p><u>Comments:</u></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>YES</b></p>				<p style="text-align: center;"><b>NO</b></p>			<p style="text-align: center;"><b>No Opinion</b></p>
	High	Moderate	Low		Low	Moderate	High	
<p><b>13-B. AFTER THE TRIP -</b>  <b>I am able to recognize my sources of comfort and/or discomfort with respect to differences related to race, ethnicity, and culture.</b></p> <p><u>Comments:</u></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>YES</b></p>				<p style="text-align: center;"><b>NO</b></p>			<p style="text-align: center;"><b>No Opinion</b></p>
	High	Moderate	Low		Low	Moderate	High	
<p><b>14-A. BEFORE THE TRIP -</b>  <b>I could specifically identify, name, and discuss privileges that I receive in society due to my race, socio-economic background, gender, physical abilities, sexual orientation, etc.</b></p> <p><u>Examples / Comments:</u></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>YES</b></p>				<p style="text-align: center;"><b>NO</b></p>			<p style="text-align: center;"><b>No Opinion</b></p>
	High	Moderate	Low		Low	Moderate	High	

<b>14-B. AFTER THE TRIP -</b> <b>I can specifically identify, name, and discuss privileges that I receive in society due to my race, socio-economic background, gender, physical abilities, sexual orientation, etc.</b>  <u>Examples / Comments:</u>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	
<b>15-A. BEFORE THE TRIP -</b> <b>I identified my common emotional reactions regarding individuals and groups different from myself and observed my own reactions in such encounters.</b>  <u>Emotional Reactions / Comments:</u>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	
<b>15-B. AFTER THE TRIP -</b> <b>I identify my common emotional reactions regarding individuals and groups different from myself and observe my own reactions in such encounters.</b>  <u>Emotional Reactions / Comments:</u>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	
<b>16-A. BEFORE THE TRIP -</b> <b>I could describe the behavioral impact and reaction of my communication style on individuals different from myself.</b>  <u>Reactions / Comments:</u>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	

<b>16-B. AFTER THE TRIP -</b> <b>I can describe the behavioral impact and reaction of my communication style on individuals different from myself.</b>  <u>Reactions / Comments:</u>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	
<b>17-A. BEFORE THE TRIP -</b> <b>I could give examples of an incident in which communication broke down with a person from another cultural orientation, and I can hypothesize about the causes.</b>  <u>Examples / Comments:</u>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	
<b>17-B. AFTER THE TRIP -</b> <b>I can give examples of an incident in which communication broke down with a person from another cultural orientation, and I can hypothesize about the causes.</b>  <u>Examples / Comments:</u>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	
<b>18-A. BEFORE THE TRIP -</b> <b>I identified my common emotional reactions about individuals and groups different from myself and observed my own reactions in such encounters.</b>  <u>Reactions / Comments:</u>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	
<b>18-B. AFTER THE TRIP -</b> <b>I identify my common emotional reactions about individuals and groups different from myself and observe my own reactions in such encounters.</b>  <u>Reactions / Comments:</u>	YES			NO			No Opinion
	High	Moderate	Low	Low	Moderate	High	

<b>19-A. BEFORE THE TRIP -</b> <b>I could articulate how my personal reactions and assumptions are different for those who identify with a cultural orientation other than my own.</b>  <u>Example / Comments:</u>	<b>YES</b>			<b>NO</b>			<b>No Opinion</b>
	<b>High</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>High</b>	
<b>19-B. AFTER THE TRIP -</b> <b>I can articulate how my personal reactions and assumptions are different for those who identify with a cultural orientation other than my own.</b>  <u>Example / Comments:</u>	<b>YES</b>			<b>NO</b>			<b>No Opinion</b>
	<b>High</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>High</b>	
<b>20-A. BEFORE THE TRIP -</b> <b>I could identify within-group differences and assess various aspects of each person to determine individual differences as well as cultural differences.</b>  <u>Example / Comments:</u>	<b>YES</b>			<b>NO</b>			<b>No Opinion</b>
	<b>High</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>High</b>	
<b>20-B. AFTER THE TRIP -</b> <b>I can identify within-group differences and assess various aspects of each person to determine individual differences as well as cultural differences.</b>  <u>Example / Comments:</u>	<b>YES</b>			<b>NO</b>			<b>No Opinion</b>
	<b>High</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>High</b>	

Questions 11-20 excerpted and adapted from a previous adaptation from: Arredondo, Toporek, Brown, Jones, Locke, Sanchez, & Stadler. (1996). Multicultural Counseling Competencies and Standards. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 24 (1). Rating Scale developed by Stephens, B. C., (2011).

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Thank you for your Participation!

### **Barry Stephens**

Barry C. Stephens, Ph.D., Associate Professor  
School of Professional Counseling, Lindsey Wilson College  
(c) 205 516-9713

## Appendix B

### Pre/Post Romania Participant Focus Group Protocol

#### Focus Group – Pre Trip Discussion Questions

- How did you first hear about the “Romania Program”?
- What interest(ed) you most about the idea of going to Romania?
- When did you actually decide to participate in the “Romania Program”? Why?
- What was the most difficult consideration in regard to participating in the program?
- What do you expect to gain (“get out of”) participating in the program?
- What do you wish to contribute to the people of Romania (i.e., what do you want them to gain from you having participated in the program)?
- What is your greatest fear about going on this trip? (potential negative outcome)
- What is your greatest expectation about going on this trip? (positive expectation)
- What would be the highest cost in dollars that would have kept you from participating?

#### Focus Group – Post Trip Discussion Questions

- What was your first impression upon arriving in Romania?
- What was your final impression after having departed Romania?
- What did you gain the most from participating in this program (the big “take-away”)?
- What do you feel that you contributed most to the people of Romania (i.e., what did they gain from you participating in the program)?
- What was your greatest fear during this trip? (negative outcome)?
- What was your greatest experience during this trip? (positive outcome)
- Would you do this trip again? (Yes or No) Why or why not?
- Do you have any regrets about going on this trip? What?
- What was your greatest surprise during this trip?
- What was your greatest disappointment associated with this trip?
- What do you imagine you learned from this trip that will make you a better mental health practitioner (counselor)?
- Would you recommend this trip to your classmates?
- On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being highest), how would you rate this trip overall?
- How has this program affected you most? [What part of this program helped you the most?]
- What could be done to improve this program? [If you were in charge, what one thing would you change about this program?]
- What is missing from the program that you wish could be added?
- What was the most important part of the program for you?
- What additional comments would you like to make?

## Appendix C

### My Experience of a Lifetime

Many people claim to have participated in “the experience of a lifetime,” and I have always found that expression to be somewhat cliché, insignificant, and non-descriptive. However, my beliefs regarding those words changed when I discovered the significance they entail. When truthfully used, that expression is the attempt to describe an unexplainable happening. I know this because the time I spent in Romania was the experience of my lifetime. It was an event that changed the foundation of who I am and shaped the counselor I desire to become.

When departing for Romania, I strived to stay void of expectations. I believe expectations limit the freedom of experience, and I eagerly sought to explore the essence of Romania. I never thought the heart of Romania would transform the core of my being. Upon arriving in Bucharest, the scenery was very alluring. The beauty of the city was the equivalent of Rembrandt’s painted canvas emerging into livelihood. Beholding this artistry intensified my desire to experience the spirit of this divine culture, and I later realized that my first day there was only a preview of the greater treasures I would behold.

The second day we eagerly began our journey to the Home of Hope, an orphanage in Braila which would become our home for the next two weeks. After driving for some time, the smooth paved roads began to turn into broken pavement. The beautiful buildings began to fade until eventually they were out of sight, and our new scenery was very monotonous. The new surroundings brought us face to face with the reality of communism that previously dictated the country and its extraordinary citizens. Although the remnants portrayed communism, the people depicted transformation.

The majestic panorama we beheld the first day was not comparable to the captivating beauty radiating from the people we embraced. We had the opportunity of encountering several different facilities, and at every site we were greeted with warm smiles and accepted with grateful spirits. During our time at Darius (a center for under-privileged children), we had the liberty of taking the children to a nearby park. For hours our group played ball, swung, and ran around the park hand in hand with the children. A bystander would have never realized the barrier of language that existed between us and the children. For the most part we could not carry on a conversation, but the language barrier did not affect our level of communication nor our ability to connect with the children. That day I realized I had the ability to connect with anyone despite any differences that may exist, and I became very aware of the power of non-verbal communication. The following truth became very evident: You are always communicating a message even if you are not speaking a single word.

We also had the pleasure of going to Sparta (a center for adults with Developmental Disorders) and Trebui (a center for children with Autism). The two centers had a very common theme being that they were both facilitated by the heart of the people working there. When asking how they maintained existence, they simply replied we do what we must to get by. We later explored that answer and realized these centers received no funding from the government and they were brought into existence by people who saw a need and desired for the need to be met. The people employed at the centers never complained and were not focused on monetary gain, their sole purpose was to

better the lives of the individuals that the organizations were intended for. Although the employees had never received formal training to deal with development disorders or autism, they passionately gave their all to better the lives of the adults and children they encountered daily. It was very apparent that those at the facilities were aware of the overwhelming love being showered on them, and the knowledge of this love and belonging was shown by the immense joy they portrayed. This experience awakened me to the power of being loved and having a place to belong.

Approaching our last night in Braila, we were honored by sharing a night at a local church with some adults who had aged out of the Romanian state orphanages and were given a condemned building by the government to call their home. Through the course of the night, we provided a meal for them. Although the adults have to face the demands of surviving day by day, different ones tried to give us food before they began eating. They unselfishly desired to ensure we had the opportunity to eat before the food was gone. Gazing in their eyes, you could see the evidence of a painful past. If you could not decode the message their eyes revealed, the scars that marked some of their bodies portrayed the harsh reality. They depicted a message that every other Romania citizen exuberated, and that was a message of immense strength and hope.

Romania opened my eyes to the value of living in the moment. The people we encountered did not live in the hardships of the past, nor did they cling to what they hoped their future would behold. Instead, they actively sought to encounter the value of each moment, and the value they embraced was to better the people's lives around them. A lady from Darius was sharing her life story, and while describing her travels she said, "Wherever I go, I go with all my heart." The people of Romania turned that lady's words into something I actively pursue daily. I desire the core of who I am as a counselor and a person to express the values I saw earnestly lived out in Romania, and I will attempt to mimic those wonderful people and use my education to benefit mankind.