

APPLICATION CHECKLIST
Research, Scholarship, and Creativity Grant

Application Deadline: March 11, 2005

Please print and complete this checklist and attach it as the cover page of your grant application. For more information about RSC grants, please see <www.gustavus.edu/oncampus/facdev/grants/RSC.cfm>.

FACULTY INFORMATION

Name: Barbara L. Zust Dept.: Nursing
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CHECKLIST

☒ **Description of previous projects (and outcomes) funded by RSC grants**

☒ **Complete project description, including separate statements of:**

1. **Purpose.** What are the intellectual, conceptual, or artistic issues? How does your work fit into other endeavors being done in this field?
2. **Feasibility.** What qualifications do you bring to this project? What have you done/will you do to prepare for this project? What is the time period, i.e. summer, summer and academic year, academic year only? Is the work's scope commensurate with the time period of the project?
3. **Project Design.** This should include a specific description of the project design and activities, including location, staff, schedules or itineraries, and desired outcomes.

☒ **RSC Budget Proposal Form attached as last page of application**

☒ **Eight copies of complete application (including this checklist) to be submitted to the Faculty Development Resource Center (SSC 119)**

☒ **If successful, my proposal can be used as an example to assist future faculty applicants. This decision will not in any way influence the evaluation of my application.**

Yes / No (please circle one)

**Research, Scholarship, and Creativity Grant
Application
Barbara L. Zust, RN, PhD**

1. Statement describing any work previously supported from the Research, Scholarship, and creativity Fund, including outcomes.

I have not had a previous project funded by a RSC grant.

2. Description of project for which funding is being sought including separate statements of #1. Purpose; #2. Feasibility and #3. Project Design.

#1. Purpose: (What are the intellectual, conceptual, or artistic issues? How does your work fit into other endeavors being done in this field?)

Over the last eight years my research has involved the testing of a therapeutic intervention designed to increase battered women's self-esteem and self- agency. Based on feminist critical theory, the intervention involved group dialogue and a variety of experiential activities intended to increase self-awareness, self-acceptance and self-affirmation as a means of self-discovery and empowerment. Although empirical data indicated strong but inconclusive findings, anecdotal data indicated that significant life changes were made as a result of participating in the intervention (Zust, 2000). In my dissertation research, I used a qualitative design to explore the women's perception of the intervention. One consistent finding among all of the women interviewed was the wish that the intervention could have come earlier in their lives, and their strong suggestion that this intervention be offered to students at the high school level (Zust, 2003).

The U.S. Surgeon General recently declared the mental health situation of youth in the United States to be a national crisis (Melnik, 2004). Childhood is the foundation for quality of life in adulthood. Presently, one out of four children has mental health issues or psychosocial problems that affect their functioning at home and at school. Low self-esteem, depression, lack of self confidence, hopelessness and anxiety interfere with a child's ability to learn. The number of children who struggle with these issues has now surpassed the number of children affected by physical disorders. The cause of this increase is riddled with multi-dimensional complexity. Mental health issues, such as depression and low self-esteem, are even higher in the rural areas due to isolation, social stigmatization, and lack of resources. St. Peter is a relatively small, rural community with a limited number of resources that are youth specific concerning mental health services.

There are several studies that describe the psychosocial/emotional crisis of American youth today. However, there is a dearth of studies that examine effective interventions to reduce emotional turmoil in youth and resulting behavioral problems associated with the turmoil. **The purpose of this quasi-experimental pilot study is to explore the efficacy of a therapeutic group intervention on increasing self-esteem and self-agency among**

a sample of St. Peter High School students. The intervention, involving equine assisted experiential learning, is described later in this document.

Conceptual framework.

Margaret Newman's Theory of Nursing (1994) is the conceptual framework incorporated in this study. Drawing from David Bohm's (1980) Theory of Implicit Order, Newman contends that there is an unseen, underlying pattern of perceiving the world (implicit order) that is the basis for that which is observable behavior (explicit order). The implicit order is one's multi-dimensional interchange of historical, cultural, religious, and societal norms and beliefs enmeshed with one's inherent aptitudes, strengths, and weaknesses interacting with the contextual environment. The implicit order is a collection of meaning based on one's understanding or interpretation of past experiences. According to Newman's theory, becoming aware of the underlying thoughts that color the lens through which one sees the world is an essential turning point for change in behavior. Gaining insight or pattern recognition is transformational because reflection on meaning provides the opportunity to re-interpret the meaning. Awareness—or pattern recognition—is the cornerstone of change. This concept is fundamental in Social Critical Theory and Feminist Critical Theory.

For decades, mental health therapists have known the importance of pattern recognition. Cognitive therapy is based on recognition of underlying negative beliefs and thoughts that are then reframed in order to change one's perception of life (Gordon, 1995). An example of using pattern recognition with youth was Dexheimer-Pharris' (2002) work with adolescent boys who were incarcerated for murder. Reflecting on meaningful relationships and experiences in their lives led to the recognition of an underlying pattern of belief about their own worthlessness based on their interpretation of experiences of neglect and abandonment by their mothers. They interpreted their isolation and loneliness to mean that they were not worthy of love. Loathing their own lives, they placed themselves in dangerous situations where they did not care if they lived or died and did not care if anyone else lived or died. When these incarcerated boys recognized their underlying pattern of thought and the meaning that it had in their lives, several boys cried for the first time in years. Becoming aware of the underlying pattern prompted a change in self-understanding and acceptance. Understanding their actions from a deeper level of awareness changed how they felt about themselves. (One can only speculate if a greater self-awareness and understanding may have made a difference in their lives prior to their incarceration for murder).

How the proposed intervention fits into other endeavors being done.

The intervention I am proposing is similar to the intervention that was used among the groups of battered women. It is an intervention that relies heavily on the importance of self-awareness as a fundamental turning point of change in reframing one's perception and understanding of self. As mentioned earlier, the intervention with battered women involved a variety of experiential activities to facilitate self-awareness. The women in my dissertation research consistently noted the importance of the experiential activities as a means of raising self-awareness (Zust, 2003). Cindy Wittwer, the certified nurse

therapist who facilitated most of the battered women's groups, has since expanded her practice with groups of women to include animal assisted therapy as a means of raising self-awareness. The results are remarkable, according to Wittwer(2003).

Animal assisted therapy is a growing modality in treating emotional behavioral disorders in children. It is known to be a powerful intervention in helping troubled youth with self-discovery, and healing. One of the most popular forms of animal assisted therapy is equine assisted therapy. Horses are powerful and simultaneously vulnerable creatures. As non-predators, they have survived through time with a keen sense of their environment (Wittwer, 2003). In Wittwer's words, "Horses have needed to judge their environment accurately, in order to avoid becoming someone's lunch. They operate at a basic, instinctual level that allows us to get feedback at a deeper level. However we are, a horse will pick up on it immediately." Therapists who use equine assisted therapy note that because the horse does not know how to lie, cover-up, or pretend, horses present a link to life in its purest form. They "stir something new inside and inspire a quest for the divine" (McCormick and McCormick, 1997, p.6) Horses are said to act like a mirror through which we catch a glimpse of our true selves when we form a relationship with the horse. Although it is possible to hide one's true feelings from another human being, it is impossible to hide one's feelings from a horse. We give off signals, including movement and smell that convey our true feelings. Horses can smell our fear, our anger, our joy, etc. and have a way of mirroring back to us our feelings. The fact that horses appear large and powerful creates a level of tension that heightens one's attention to their interaction with the horse, thus creating a heightened sense of awareness and openness to insight. Horses create a natural opportunity for overcoming fears and developing confidence because of their size.

Equine assisted therapy is growing in credibility as an effective alternative therapy. It involves a collaborative effort between therapist, horse, and participant. The participants learn about themselves and others by participating in activities with the horses and then reflecting on their own feelings, behaviors, and patterns. Over 90% of the therapy takes place on the ground. Participants are involved in activities such as brushing the horse, or getting their horse to jump over a log, or getting their horse to walk around an area. The activities are designed to allow the participant to spend time with the horse in order to draw feedback from the horse. There is group processing all along the way, led by the therapist.

There are hundreds of psychotherapists using horses with clients in therapy across the USA in order to address eating disorders, chemical abuse, physical and/or sexual abuse, depression, anxiety, and relationship problems (Irwin, 2004). In Ireland, therapists have used equine assisted therapy with individuals who have chemical dependency issues and for persons within the criminal justice system (Martin, 2004). Graduate students at Southern Illinois University use horses to build self-confidence and enthusiasm for life with groups of special education students (Lawrence, 2003).

Anecdotal evidence indicates that equine assisted therapy has been the missing link in creating positive change for children with emotional disorders. However, there are no

known studies that examine the efficacy of this treatment modality in terms of increasing self-esteem and self-agency among youth. Therefore, the purpose of this quasi-experimental pilot study is to explore the efficacy of a therapeutic group intervention on increasing self-esteem and self-agency among a sample of St. Peter High School students. The findings of this study will add to the growing body of knowledge regarding the efficacy of this intervention. The results are not limited in significance to nursing but may have relevance for multiple disciplines in addition to nursing, such as education, psychology and sociology.

#2. Feasibility: (What qualifications do you bring to this project? What have you done /will you do to prepare for this project? What is the time period, i.e. summer, summer and academic year, academic year only? Is the work's scope commensurate with the time period of the project?)

There are several factors that make this project feasible. To begin with, we have an expert nurse therapist, Cynthia Wittwer, who has agreed to facilitate this intervention for eight senior high school youth. I have co-facilitated therapeutic groups with Cindy in the past. She is committed to excellence in providing effective care that lends itself to a life long trajectory of positive change. She is enthusiastic about advancing knowledge in the area of equine assisted therapy. I personally bring to this project my expertise in nursing research. I am qualified to be the principle investigator in this research study. I have researched group therapy programs with vulnerable populations in the past and am familiar with procedures of confidentiality and human subjects protocol. The fact that Cindy has had experience working within the school system to implement this type of therapy with children in Redwood Falls is an important logistic asset. She has already created a permission/ consent form for both student and parent to sign. The fact that I have served as a public health nurse in this geographical area and live in this area is an important asset in the event that referrals need to be made that are beyond the scope of this therapy. Secondly, it is very important that the principal of the St. Peter High School (Paul Peterson) is supportive of this project. I have consulted with Principal Peterson and he has encouraged me to proceed with this project. Thirdly, I have the verbal support of the Gustavus Community Service office in providing transportation of the students to and from Wittwer's counseling center and ranch in rural, Redwood Falls. I have also talked to the St. Peter Ministerial Board and have verbal support that the local churches could tapped for volunteer transportation assistance. Finally, it is completely feasible to begin and finish this project this summer as the length of the intervention is eight weeks.

#3. Project design: (This should include a specific description of the project design and activities, including location, staff, schedules or itineraries, and desired outcomes.)

The intervention that is proposed for this study will involve eight weeks of equine assisted group therapy as an experiential exercise in self-discovery for eight local youth.

The sample

Following Internal Review Board approval of the project, eight students will be recruited from St. Peter High School who self-identify as struggling with issues of anxiety, acceptance, and/or manifestation of low self-esteem such hopelessness, risk-taking behaviors, etc. will be invited to participate. Information about the study will be available to the students through the senior high office. Recruitment of student for this summer project will begin before the current school year ends. Student consent to participate will also be accompanied by parental consent. Information about the risks and benefits of the program will be given by Cynthia Wittwer prior to obtaining consent. The permission form used for students participating in equine assisted therapy in the Redwood Falls High School will be modified for use in this study. (See attached document). A minimum of five students is needed to participate in this group intervention. A maximum of eight students is a necessary cap. Adhering to both the minimum and the maximum number of students is important in order to maintain the quality of the group processing time together.

Equine assisted therapist and staff

Cynthia Wittwer is a certified Adult and Family Nurse Therapist who has agreed to facilitate this program. She has received additional training in a national program on equine assisted therapy. She is currently working as a school therapist for the Redwood Falls High School and has implemented equine assisted therapy in her work with children who have emotional and behavioral concerns. She has had over 20 years of experience in one-to-one counseling; as well as facilitating group cognitive therapy. Her counseling center is located on her ranch outside of Redwood Falls. She has lived with and worked with horses almost all of her life. Cynthia will hire trained additional staff to work with the students and the horses. Because she has been working with equine assisted therapy in this area for the past five years, she is familiar with the appropriate staff to hire.

The intervention

The group of participants will be transported to and from Wittwer 's counseling center and ranch in rural Redwood Falls (~100 miles round trip) once a week for eight weeks. Each session will last three hours. Once at the ranch, the nurse therapist will guide the youth through a number of horse care activities specifically designed to create enough time with the horse to get feedback from the horse as described earlier. These activities may include brushing, feeding, getting their horse to walk around a log or jump over a log, etc. etc. Throughout the horse cares, the therapist will call the group together to process what group members are feeling, thinking and what is going on with the horses. Group members may contribute to exploring the meaning of each other's experience, feelings, and thoughts. Students will return to St. Peter following each session.

Evaluating the intervention

Evaluation of the program will occur in a pre and posttest format. Students will be asked to meet thirty minutes prior to leaving St. Peter for the first session in order to complete two pre-intervention inventories designed to measure self-esteem and self-agency.

Immediately following their last session in the intervention, students will once again be asked to complete the self-esteem and self-agency inventories. They will also be invited to write an open-ended evaluation of the program.

Anticipated outcomes

The desired outcome of this project is that students will increase their self-esteem and self-agency through new awareness and appreciation of self. The outcomes of this study will be disseminated through manuscript submission to a professional journal. It is also hoped that the outcome of this study will lend support for continued research in this area with the possibility of faculty/student partnership.

Budget:

Equipment: No cost.

Materials: No cost.

Personnel

1. Horse rental = \$1500*

*Cindy Wittwer has agreed to facilitate equine assisted therapy; provide the horses, and hire the extra staff needed to work with the students and horses for \$187.50/ session times 8 sessions: = \$1500 The amount \$187.50 comes out to be \$23.44 / student for 3 hours of working with horses.

Travel: Covered by the Community Service office at Gustavus or through the St. Peter Ministerial.

Lodging: No cost.

Other expenses: No cost.

Faculty Stipend: \$700 (assistant prof.)

Total amount requested for this project: \$1500 plus \$700 faculty stipend.

1500
+ 700

2200

References

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- Lawrence, M. (2003). Unbridled enthusiasm. Southern Alumni, 65(4). 68-72.
- Martin, V. (2004). Equine assisted therapy. Available at <http://www.integrityhousertc.com/gilrs/equinetherapy.htm>
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- Newman, M. (1994). Health as expanding consciousness(second edition). New York: National League for Nursing.
- Wittwer, C. (2003) Personal conversation regarding equine therapy. December.
- Zust, B. (2000). Effect of cognitive therapy on depression in rural battered women. Archives of Psychiatric Nursing, 14(2) 51-63.
- Zust, B. (2003). Meaning of INSIGHT participation among women who have experienced intimate partner violence. Dissertation. University of Minnesota. Minneapolis.

BUDGET PROPOSAL FORM
Research, Scholarship, and Creativity Grant

ITEM		AMOUNT
Equipment (not to include computer hardware)		\$
1:	Cost:	0
2:	Cost:	
3:	Cost:	
Materials		\$
1:	Cost:	0
2:	Cost:	
3:	Cost:	
Personnel (check the faculty book white pages for recommended rates)		\$
1:	<i>primary deal: therapist, horses, horse staff</i>	1,500
2:	<i>for 8 sessions: 187.50/session</i>	
Travel Costs		\$
Airfare:		0
Mileage: Number of miles @ \$0.36/mile <i>Covered by Comm. Service</i>		
Lodging		\$
Number of days @ \$ /day		0
Other Expenses (check the faculty book white pages for excluded items)		\$
1:	Cost:	0
2:	Cost:	
3:	Cost:	
Faculty Stipend (<i>\$500 professor; \$600 associate professor; \$700 assistant professor</i>)		\$ 700
TOTAL EXPENSES		\$
AMOUNT REQUESTED (not to exceed \$1500 + stipend commensurate with rank)		\$ 2,200

