Course Syllabus
FALL 2013

FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY
COUN 0677

SEPTEMBER 12 – DECEMBER 5, 2013
THURSDAYS 6:30 – 9:20 PM

INSTRUCTOR: DR. SUSAN ELLFELDT
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Office Hours: Available for consultation Tuesdays 9-11:30 am and Wednesdays 1-4 pm or before class

To access your course materials, go to your Tyndale email account: http://mytyndale.ca. Please note that all official Tyndale correspondence will be sent to your @MyTyndale.ca e-mail account. For information how to access and forward Tyndale e-mails to your personal account, see http://www.tyndale.ca/it/live-at-edu.
I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

A critical appraisal of basic theoretical concepts in Family Systems Theory. Topics: historical and conceptual development of Family Systems Theory, introduction to General Systems Theory (both first order and second order cybernetics), family roles, rules, structure and interaction patterns, functional and dysfunctional family systems, life cycle issues in marriage and family and ethnicity and family therapy.

This course will provide students with a foundational understanding of the dynamics of family interaction from a systems perspective. The development of an understanding of systems theory, its application to family interaction, and its evaluation will form the basis of the course content.

Prerequisites and Corequisites:
Family Systems Theory is a first year counselling course, open only to Counselling majors or with permission of instructor.
Pre- or co-requisite: COUN 574

II. LEARNING OUTCOMES

Successful completion of this course will involve achievement of the following competencies:

- Demonstrate a theoretical understanding of the differences between an individualist/intrapsychic and a systemic/interpersonal perspective of human behaviour.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the theoretical concepts of family systems theory.
- Demonstrate understanding of the therapeutic relationship, assessment, choice of therapeutic model, treatment plan, change techniques and termination of therapy.
- Demonstrate application of family systems theory to family interaction.
- Demonstrate an understanding of one’s self in relation to one’s own family of origin.

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. REQUIRED TEXTS


B. Additional suggested reading:


C. ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Regular attendance in and punctuality for all classes is expected. Out of respect for your colleagues, please try to be on time for all classes. Absence from more than 2 classes may result in the loss of credit.

1. FAMILY OF ORIGIN PAPER – 40% Due Date: Thursday, Nov 28

Through the course of our lives we interact in many systems. However, it is the first system with which we interact, our family of origin, that has the most powerful and persistent influence on how we think and feel about ourselves and on how we interact with others. It is this system that has the most powerful impact, both positive and negative, on our future relationships. (Fredda Herz Brown)

An individual acquires from his early-family experiences, or "family of origin," a set of explicit and implicit expectations, values, attitudes, and beliefs which serve as points of reference for the evaluation of all interpersonal life experiences. These interactions with the family of origin begin with the birth of an individual and continue to exert an influence throughout life. (Brian Canfield)
Both of these quotes point to the influence of the family of origin on the individual. Understanding oneself, especially oneself within relationships, requires some understanding of the interpersonal dynamics of one’s family of origin.

Most families, however, with all their inadequacies, generally care for their members. To celebrate this reality we need words that identify and validate family strengths as well as family limitations.

The texts for this course have a systems orientation. After reading these books I would like you to:

a. Do a “Family-of-Origin Genogram” (incorporating 3 generations),
   Apply the concepts from the texts and the content of the course “Family Systems Theory” to your reflections on your family and to the genogram. You may have to interview family members to get adequate information for this project.

b. Identify problematic patterns in your family of origin and how they have influenced you as an adult

c. Identify qualities and strengths in your family of origin and how they enriched your adult life.

You will then hand in your completed genogram and a 5 to 8 page paper in which you consider the dynamics you identify in your family system, using family system terminology.

I am especially interested in your reflections on how you understand yourself and your current relational patterns in light of the work you have done on your family-of-origin study.

PLEASE NOTE: The research and reflection for this assignment is extremely time consuming. In order to complete this assignment satisfactorily you will need to begin early in the school year.

Learning Objectives:

1. to translate learning from the classroom and from textbooks in relation to family systems theory in general and intergenerational family systems theory in particular, into one’s own experience.
2. to develop the skills to be able to observe interaction patterns within your own nuclear and extended families.
3. to develop a sensitivity in perceiving how themes, issues and interactional patterns etc. are transmitted across generational lines.
4. To reflect on how intergenerational issues within your family of origin have influenced you personally.

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5. To reflect on how intergenerational issues within your family of origin have influenced your interpersonal patterns.

This assignment will not only give you the opportunity for increased self-understanding but also help you develop skills that will facilitate your work with other individuals and families.

**Expected Standards:** A personal reflection paper that demonstrates
2. The ability to apply those concepts in achieving a greater understanding of one’s self and one’s current interpersonal relationships.

2. **Richardson Assignments–10%**  Due weekly as noted in Course Schedule

From the Richardson text, students will be required to submit their answers to the **Questions** embedded in the required reading for that week. The assignments will be graded on a pass/fail basis.

**Learning Objective:** to apply Systems Theory to one’s own family

3. **FINAL EXAMINATION – 45 %**  Due Date: Thursday, Dec 12

The concepts of "Family Systems Theory" are significantly different from those involved in the traditional forms of psychotherapy. As you will discover, it is very much like learning a new language. As in the learning of a new language, learning the meanings of the symbols of that language often requires a lot of ‘muscle work.’ To encourage this process there will be a video-exam at the end of the course that will focus on your ability to ‘see’ interactional patterns and to ‘think’ in family systems terms.

The content you will be expected to master will be drawn from the class discussions, the texts and handouts distributed during the course.

The format of this exam will be discussed in more detail later on in the course. Essentially, it will involve watching a portion of a ‘professor-selected’ video. Then you will be required to answer questions that will reflect your understanding from a systems perspective of the dynamics in that family. The examination will include questions on the processes of counselling as well (therapeutic relationship, plans, change processes, etc.). In preparation for this exam students are encouraged to review the lectures and in-class video discussions and the texts.

**Learning Objectives:**
1. to use family systems theory to describe interactional patterns within a particular family case-study.
2. To demonstrate an understanding of the therapeutic process.
Expected Standard:
3. A demonstrated ability to ‘think’ family-systems, while ‘hearing’ and ‘seeing’ the interactional patterns of a family, to describe those interactional patterns in family systems terminology and be able to identify and give critical commentary on aspects of the therapeutic process.

4. CLASS PARTICIPATION – 5%

Active interaction and critical involvement with both the content and the other members of the class will be expected. Some consideration will also be given to matters of attendance, punctuality, and general class deportment.

C. GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR THE SUBMISSION OF WRITTEN WORK

Academic Integrity
Integrity in academic work is required of all our students. Academic dishonesty is any breach of this integrity, and includes such practices as cheating (the use of unauthorized material on tests and examinations), submitting the same work for different classes without permission of the instructors; using false information (including false references to secondary sources) in an assignment; improper or unacknowledged collaboration with other students, and plagiarism. Tyndale University College & Seminary takes seriously its responsibility to uphold academic integrity, and to penalize academic dishonesty.

Students should consult the current Academic Calendar for academic polices on Academic Honesty, Gender Inclusive Language in Written Assignments, Late Papers and Extensions, Return of Assignments, and Grading System. The Academic Calendar is posted at http://tyndale.ca/registrar.

1. The reflection papers should demonstrate the student’s ability to process his or her internal responses personally and professionally. The ability to reflect upon and process feelings and thoughts is an important skill in counselling work.

2. Title page and documentation: The title page should include the name of the course, name of the instructor, title of the paper/assignment, student’s name, and the due date. Students are expected to honestly reflect use of materials other than their own. Tyndale does not tolerate plagiarism in any form. Any sources used in the paper should be properly documented using the format provided by the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association.

3. Papers must be typed, double spaced, and written using inclusive language. Students are required to retain a copy of all assignments in hard copy or electronic form. Graduate level spelling, grammar and style are expected and grades will be lowered if written expression is poor.

4. Tyndale Seminary’s policy on late assignments will be followed. For each week late, the grade will be reduced by one letter grade. Extensions will be considered if the

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circumstances are extreme. **No final assignments or examinations will be accepted later than 5:00 PM on Dec 13.**

5. Students should consult the current *Academic Calendar* for academic policies on Academic Honesty, Gender Inclusive Language in Written Assignments, Late Papers and Extensions, Return of Assignments, and Grading System.

All assignments must be completed and submitted in order to receive credit in this course. **NOTE:** All written submissions must adhere to APA standards. All written submissions should reflect graduate-level competency in regards to matters of grammar, punctuation, etc.

### D. SUMMARY OF ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family of Origin Paper</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richardson Assignments</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>45%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Grade</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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### IV. COURSE SCHEDULE, CONTENT, AND REQUIRED READINGS

**Sept. 12 Session I:** Paradigm Shift
- History of systems theory and major theorists
- Paradigm of individual psychology
- Paradigm of relational psychology
- Emergence of Systems Theory

**Reading:** Becvar Chapter 1, Becvar Chapter 2 (pp 5-9), Becvar Chapter 10
Worder Chapter 1 (pp 1-8)

**Sept. 19 Session 2** First Order Cybernetics
- Culture and theory
- Boundaries
- Open/closed systems
- Subsystems and structure
- Entropy/negative entropy
- Information flow and punctuation
- Rules
- Homeostasis

**Reading:** Becvar Chapter 3 (p13-21)

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Richardson workbook: Chapter 1 (no Questions due)

Sept. 26 Session 3 First Order Cybernetics
Begin Explanation of Genograms
- Issues of change
- Feedback processes
- Homeostasis & zone of tolerance
- Morphostasis & morphogenesis
- Equifinality
- Equipotentiality
- Reframe
- Recursion & circular causality
- Punctuation
- Wholeness

Reading: Becvar Chapter 3 (21-34)
Richardson workbook: Chapter 2 (all 5 sets of Questions due)

Oct. 3 Session 4 First and Second Order Cybernetics
- Challenges to Systems Theory
- Objective truth
- Change – Constructing new meanings
- Reality is social convention
- Expert or fellow traveler
- Benefits & criticisms of second order cybernetics

Reading: Becvar Chapters 2 (pp 9-12), 4, & 5
Worden Chapter 1 (pp 8-15)
Richardson workbook: Chapter 3 (1 Question set & 2 exercises due)

Oct. 10 Session 5 Second Order Cybernetics
- Position of Observer
- Consensual domains
- Epistemology of participation
- Feedback – always negative
- Non-purposeful drift
- Open or closed?
- Reality as a multiverse
- Structural coupling
- Structural determinism
- Wholeness
**Reading:** Becvar Chapter 8  
Richardson workbook: Chapter 4  *(5 Question sets due)*

**Oct. 17 Session 6** Integration of 1st and 2nd Order Cybernetics  
Human Development  
- An integration of 1st and 2nd Order Cybernetics  
- Erikson – Individual development  
- Theory and transitional stress  
- Gender concerns

**Reading:** Becvar Chapters 7 & 6,  
Richardson workbook: Chapter 5  *(3 Question sets & 2 exercises due)*

**Oct. 24 Session 7** Family Life Cycle  
Communication Principles  
- Phases of family life (from Nichols: *Marital Therapy: an Integrative Approach*)  
- Cybernetics and communication  
- Axioms of communication

**Reading:** *(Communication material drawn from Watzlawick et al, *Pragmatics of Human Communication*)  
Richardson workbook: Chapter 6 *(4 Question sets & 2 exercises due)*

**Oct. 31 Reading Week No Class**

**Nov. 7 Session 8** Communication Pathology  
Therapeutic Relationship  
- Pathological communications  
- Therapeutic alliance - quality of relationship  
- The person of the counsellor  
- Therapeutic alliance  
- Issue of empathy  
- Therapist model & role  
- Therapeutic boundaries  
- Use of self

**Reading:** Worden Chapter 3  
Richardson workbook: Chapter 7 *(1 Question set due)*

**Nov. 14 Session 9** Observation/Assessment  
- The Family: Gender, Family Life cycle, Ethnicity  
- Rules-an observation lens  
- Boundaries
- Disengaged/enmeshed
- Around power
- Around intimacy
- Around communication patterns

**Reading:** Worden: Chapter 2
   Richardson workbook: Chapter 8 *(use exercises to facilitate your Family Paper)*

**Nov. 21 Session 10** Observation/Assessment
- Observation through a Bowen lens
- Fusion, differentiation of self, Triangles, Tracking relational processes
- Assessment: The therapy process and therapeutic plans
- Relevance of theoretical orientation
- Methods of assessment

**Reading:** Worden: Chapters 5 & 6

**Nov. 28 Session 11** Change
- Establishing goals and clarifying treatment plans
- Change techniques from a systems perspective
- Change and resistance to change
- Dance of change
- Problem versus solution
- Frequent resistance patterns
- First order change techniques

**Reading:** Worden: Chapter 7

**Assignments**  Family of Origin paper and genogram due

**Dec. 5 Session 12** Treatment Summary and Termination
- Second order change techniques
- Termination and treatment summary
- Meeting treatment goals
- Consolidating gains

**Reading:** Becvar Chapter 9
   Worden Chapter 8

**Dec. 12**  Final Examination

**No work accepted after 5pm on Dec 13**