

“The mission of Tyndale Seminary is to provide Christ-centred graduate theological education for leaders in the church and society whose lives are marked by intellectual maturity, spiritual vigour and moral integrity, and whose witness will faithfully engage culture with the Gospel.”

Course	FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY COUN 0677
Date and Time	JANUARY 11 – APRIL 5 TUESDAYS, 2:15 – 5:05PM
Instructor	DR. SUSAN ELLFELDT 416-226-6620 ext. 6787, 647-223-2149 Email: sellfeldt@tyndale.ca
Class Information	The classes will be livestreamed <i>via Zoom</i> on Tuesdays 2:15 PM–5:05 PM. Office Hours: by appointment.
Course Material	Access course material at classes.tyndale.ca or other services at Tyndale One . Course emails will be sent to your @MyTyndale.ca e-mail account only. For security reasons, email forwarding function will no longer be available. It is the student’s responsibility to check MyTyndale.ca e-mail account frequently.

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; family rules, roles, structure and interaction patterns; functional and dysfunctional family systems; life cycle issues in marriage and family and ethnicity and family therapy.

Recommended prerequisite: COUN 0574. COUN majors only or by permission of instructor.

II. LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate a theoretical understanding of the differences between individual/intrapsychic and a systemic/interpersonal perspective of human behaviour.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the theoretical concepts of family systems theory.
- Demonstrate recognition of system dynamics in individual, couple and family behaviours.
- Demonstrate understanding of the therapeutic relationship, assessment, change techniques and termination of therapy using systems theory
- Demonstrate an understanding of oneself in relation to one's own family of origin
- Demonstrate an understanding of the impact of oneself and context on the therapeutic relationship

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. REQUIRED READING

Smith-Acuna, S. (2011). *Systems Theory in Action*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. ISBN 978-0-470-47582-9

Becvar, D. S. & Becvar, R. J. (2018). [*Systems theory and family therapy: A primer*](#) (revised 3rd ed.). Lanham, MD: University Press of America Inc. ISBN 978-0-7618-6982-5

Richardson, D. (2011). [*Family ties that bind*](#). (4th ed.) North Vancouver, BC: Self Counsel Press. ISBN 978-1-77040-086-3

B. SUPPLEMENTARY / RECOMMENDED READING AND TOOLS

Barker, P. & Chang, J. (2013). [*Basic Family Therapy*](#) (6th ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & sons, Ltd. ISBN 978-1-119-94505-5

McGoldrick, M. & Shellenberger, S. (1999). *Genograms in family assessments*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company. ISBN 0-393-70294-4

Napier, A. & Whitaker, C. (1978). *The family crucible: The intense experience of family therapy*. New York, NY: Harper & Row. ISBN 0-06-091489-0

Watzlawick, P. Weakland, J. & Fisch, R. (2011). *Change: Principles of problem formation and problem resolution*. (Reprint ed.) New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company. ISBN 0-393-01104-6

Watzlawick, P., Bavelas, J. B. & Jackson, D. D. (2011). *Pragmatics of human communication: A study of interactional patterns, pathologies, and paradoxes*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company. ISBN 978-0-393-70707-6

Worden, M. (2003). *Family therapy basics* (3rd ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole-Thompson Learning. (ISBN 0-534-51971-7)

C. INTERACTIVE LIVESTREAM AND/OR HYBRID COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- Livestream attendance at announced times
- Headphones (preferred), built-in microphone, and web-camera
- Well-lit and quiet room
- Stable high-speed internet connection, preferably using an Ethernet cable over Wi-Fi

D. GUIDELINES FOR INTERACTIONS

Tyndale University prides itself in being a trans-denominational community. We anticipate our students to have varied viewpoints which will enrich the discussions in our learning community. Therefore, we ask our students to be charitable and respectful in their interactions with each other, and to remain focused on the topic of discussion, out of respect to others who have committed to being a part of this learning community. Please refer to “Guidelines for Interactions” on your course resource page at classes.tyndale.ca.

E. 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 and Genogram: Due March 29th; 35% of final grade You will submit the completed genogram and paper via the course resource page.

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, however, we need words that identify and validate family strengths as well as family limitations.

Considering the information gained in the readings and lectures, and using system's theory and terminology, apply the concepts from the texts and the content of the course to your reflections on your family and to your family genogram as follows:

- a. Do a "Family-of-Origin Genogram" (incorporating 3 generations). You may do this free hand or use a computer program for genograms such as Genopro. Whatever method you choose, you **must include a legend to indicate** what the various symbols mean. **You must convert your genogram to an electronic copy that can be read as a word document.**

Note: Genograms must be formatted on an electronic word document and emailed in with the rest of the Family of Origin assignment. (Be aware that Genopro and other specialized programs cannot be downloaded unless the receiving computer has that program.)

- b. Analyze your family and identify **the themes, issues and interactional patterns in your family of origin**, and where these patterns have been transmitted across generational lines.
- c. **Reflect on how these patterns impact you personally today.**
- d. Identify problematic patterns in your family of origin and **how they will impact your safe and effective use of self as a therapist.**

I am especially interested in your reflections on how, in the light of your family of origin study, you understand yourself, your current relational patterns, and the impact of those patterns on you as a therapist.

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 semester. **Interviewing willing family members to get adequate information for this project is expected.**

2. Richardson Assignments; submit weekly on the course resource page (classes.tyndale.ca); 5% of final grade

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 weekly on a pass/fail basis. Note: Information in this text is very useful for preparation for Family of Origin paper and genogram.

3. 1st Quiz: Due March 1st; 10% of final grade

This will be a short answer quiz in which the student must understand various systems terms of 1st Order Cybernetic Theory discussed over the course of the semester.

[Note: Quizzes will be take-home and students given 3 days to complete and submit via the course resource page.]

4. 2nd Quiz: Due March 22nd; 10% of final grade

This will be a short answer quiz focused on concepts discussed over the course of the semester. *[Note: Quizzes will be take-home and students given 3 days to complete and submit via the course resource page.]*

5. Final Examination; Due April 12th; 40% of final grade

[The Final will be done during class over Zoom and turned in at the end of that allotted time via email.]

To encourage this process of translating theory into practice, there will be a video presentation most weeks and students will participate in a family system’s analysis of each video. The final will be a video exam at the end of the course that will focus on your ability to analyze the relational dynamics using Family Systems terms and understandings and to ‘think’ in family systems terms.

The content which you will be expected to master will be drawn from the class discussions, the texts, and from any handouts that are distributed during the course. This exam will involve watching a portion of a ‘professor-selected’ video. Then you will be required to answer questions which will reflect your understanding from a systems perspective of the dynamics in that family in the video. The examination will include questions on the processes of counselling as well (type of therapeutic relationship, therapist’s use of self, therapeutic plan and change processes, etc.). In preparation for this exam, students are encouraged to review the lectures, their take-home quizzes, and in-class video discussions as well as the texts. Students will email

their final to sellfeldt@tyndale.ca and title their email "Final" and their last name (e.g. "Final Wong").

In addition to the above assignments, all counselling majors are now mandated to have 6 "self-awareness" counselling sessions with counsellors at the [Tyndale Wellness Centre](#). These sessions will be scheduled during the Family Systems course for all beginning counselling students. The sessions will be \$25.00 each. If students want to also engage in therapeutic goals beyond this mandated goal, that would be their decision. During these 6 sessions, students will be expected to read 25 pages of suggested readings prepared for each session (150 pages in all), which will be discussed during their sessions. The suggested references are attached below and the reading is not limited to this list. **When these sessions are completed, the student will receive a Certificate of Completion, which will be held by the instructor and placed in the students file for graduation.**

F. EQUITY OF ACCESS

Students with permanent or temporary disabilities who need academic accommodations must [contact](#) the [Accessibility Services](#) at the [Centre for Academic Excellence](#) to [register](#) and discuss their specific needs. *New students* must self-identify and register with the Accessibility Office at the beginning of the semester or as early as possible to access appropriate services. *Current students* must renew their plans as early as possible to have active accommodations in place.

G. SUMMARY OF ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Family of Origin Paper	35%
Richardson Assignments	5%
2 Midterm Quizzes (10% each)	20%
Final Exam	40%
Total Grade	100%

H. GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR THE SUBMISSION OF WRITTEN WORK

1. **The reflection papers** should demonstrate the student's ability to process his/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 date due. 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, 7th ed. (2019). Use a 12 point font (“Times New Roman” or “Courier” is preferred). The [APA Style Guide](#) is a helpful web site for all questions regarding APA style.

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 1 letter grade. Extensions will be considered if the circumstances are extreme. No final assignments or examinations will be accepted later than 5:00 PM on April 15.

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 takes seriously its responsibility to uphold academic integrity, and to penalize academic dishonesty.

Students are encouraged to consult [Writing Services](#). Citation and other [tip sheets](#).

Students should also 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.

Research Ethics

All course-based assignments involving human participants requires ethical review and may require approval by the [Tyndale Research Ethics Board \(REB\)](#). Check with the Seminary Dean’s Office (aa@tyndale.ca) before proceeding.

I. COURSE EVALUATION

Tyndale Seminary values quality in the courses it offers its students. End-of-course evaluations provide valuable student feedback and are one of the ways that Tyndale Seminary works towards maintaining and improving the quality of courses and the student’s learning experience. Student involvement in this process is critical to enhance the general quality of teaching and learning.

Before the end of the course, students will receive a MyTyndale email with a link to the online course evaluation. The link can also be found in the left column on the course page. The evaluation period is 2 weeks; after the evaluation period has ended, it cannot be reopened.

Course Evaluation results will not be disclosed to the instructor before final grades in the course have been submitted and processed. Student names will be kept confidential and the instructor will only see the aggregated results of the class.

IV. COURSE SCHEDULE, CONTENT AND REQUIRED READINGS

Jan. 11 Session I: Paradigm Shift

- History of systems theory and major contributors
- Paradigm of individual psychology
- Paradigm of relational psychology
- General Systems Theory
- Emergence of Systems Theory

Reading: Becvar: Chapter 1, Chapter 2, Chapter 10
Smith-Acuna: Chapters 1 & 2
Richardson: Chapter 1
Griffin: pp13-33 (on course resource page)

Jan. 18 Session 2: First Order Cybernetics

- Positive and negative feedback loops
- Circular causality
- Family structure
- Family rules
- Video: Strategic

Reading: Becvar Chapter 3
Smith-Acuna: Chapter 5
Richardson: Chapter 2 (**5 sets of questions due**)
Smith et al; pp123-133 (on course resource page)

Jan. 25. Session 3: First Order Cybernetics (cont.)

- More about family rules
- Zones of tolerance
- Video: Structural

Reading: Becvar: Review Chapter 3
Smith-Acuna: Chapter 3
Richardson workbook: Chapter 3 **(1 Question set & 2 exercises due)**

Feb. 1 Session 4: First Order Cybernetics (cont.)

- Boundaries
- Open and closed systems
- Entropy and negentropy
- Information flow
- Family roles
- Change and resistance to change
- Video: Cognitive Behavioural

Reading: Becvar: Chapter 9
Smith-Acuna: Chapter 6
Richardson workbook: Chapter 4 **(5 Question sets due)**

Feb. 8 Session 5: Closeness and Distance and Interaction Patterns

- Dysfunction around change
- 1st and 2nd Order Change,
- Mishandled change attempts
- Equifinality
- Recursion and Circular Causality
- Family boundary issues
- Closeness and distance in families
- Circumplex model
- Video: Multigenerational therapy

Reading: Barker & Chang: pp 63-64 (on course resource page)
Becvar: Chapter 8
Richardson workbook: Chapter 5 **(3 Question sets & 2 exercises due)**
Circumplex graph (on course resource page)

Feb. 15 Session 6: Second Order Cybernetics

- Bowen Model: Differentiation of self
- The family emotional process

- Triangles
- Tracking the family emotional process
- Common patterns of interaction
- Laying the groundwork for 2nd Order Cybernetic Theory
- Video: Corrales

Reading: Becvar Review Chapter 5
Richardson workbook: Chapter 6 (4 Question sets & 2 exercises due)

Feb. 22 READING WEEK

March 1 Session 7: Theoretical Constructs of 2nd Order Cybernetics

Quiz #1

- Introduction to 2nd Order Cybernetics
- Objective truth
- Origin of Knowledge
- Position of observer
- Not knowing stance
- Reality a social invention
- Benefits of the two systems branches
- Theology of family health
- Video: Narrative Therapy

Readings: Becvar: Chapter 4
Richardson workbook: Chapter 7 (1 Question set due)

March 8 Session 8: Developmental Theory

- Theoretical assumptions and constructs of 2nd Order Cybernetics
- Autopoiesis
- Consensual domains
- Epistemology of participation
- Feedback
- Non-purposeful drift
- Video: Solution Focused
- Open or closed
- Reality as a multiverse
- Structural coupling
- Structural determinism

- Wholeness and self-reference
- Similarities and differences in 1st and 2nd Order Cybernetics
- Video: Solution Focused and/or Feminist

Reading: Becvar: Chapter 7

Richardson: Chapter 8 (use exercises to facilitate your Family of Origin Paper)

March 15 Session 9: Human development/Family Life Cycle

- Erikson Social Development Theory through adolescence
- Emerging Adulthood
- Adulthood
- Old Age
- Criticisms of Erikson
- Phases of family life (from Nichols: *Marital Therapy: an Integrative Approach*)
- Common transition issues
- Dislocations of Life Cycle
- Horizontal and vertical stressors
- Video: McGoldrick 1

Readings: Becvar: Chapter 6

Emerging Adulthood article (on course resource page)

March 22 Session 10: Therapeutic Relationship

Quiz #2

- The therapeutic alliance
- Therapist role
- Therapeutic boundaries
- Therapist use of self
- Gender and the therapist
- Family Life Cycle and the therapist
- Video McGoldrick 2

Readings: Worden: Chapter 3 (on course resource page)

March 29 Session 11: Therapeutic Boundaries/Assessment

- Therapeutic boundaries
- Therapeutic process
- Assessment
- Presenting Problem
- Questions and Statements
- Video: McGoldrick 3

Assignment #1 Due: Family of Origin paper and genogram

Readings: Barker and Change: Ch. 8 (on course resource page)

April 5 Session 12: Termination/Communication Theory (material drawn from Watzlawick et al, *Pragmatics of Human Communication*)

- The ebb and flow of therapy
- Termination
- Axioms of communication
- Problems in communication
- Video: Hardy

Reading: Watzlawick et al: (Chapter on the course resource page)

April 12 Final Examination

Self-Awareness Counselling Session Completion Form due

No work will be accepted after 5pm on April 15

V. SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

([Tyndale Library](#) supports this course with [e-journals, e-books](#), and the [mail delivery of books](#) and circulating materials. See the [Library FAQ page](#).)