



**TYNDALE**

• SEMINARY •

## **Course Syllabus**

**FALL 2019  
FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY  
COUN 0677**

**SEPTEMBER 12 – DECEMBER 5, 2019  
THURSDAYS, 2:15 – 5:05PM**

**INSTRUCTOR: DR. SUSAN ELLFELDT**  
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Office Hours: Available for consultation Thursdays 9:30 am -12 pm and Wednesdays 9:30 am – 11 am or by appointment

Access course material at <http://classes.tyndale.ca/>  
Course emails will be sent to your @MyTyndale.ca e-mail account only.  
[Learn how to access and forward emails to your personal account.](#)

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.

### **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 perspectives 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 one's self in relation to one's own family of origin
- Demonstrate an understanding of the impact of one's self and context on the therapeutic relationship

### III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

#### A. REQUIRED READING

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

Becvar, D. S. & Becvar, R. J. (2018). *Systems theory and family therapy: A primer* (revised 3<sup>rd</sup> 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

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

Smith-Acuna, S. (2011). *Systems Theory in action: Applications to individual, couples, and family therapy*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons. ISBN 978-0-470-47582-9.

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. 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 November 28<sup>th</sup>; 35% of final grade

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.

The texts for this course have a system's orientation. Considering the information gained in these readings and in the lectures, I would like you to:

- 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.
- b. Analyze your family and identify family patterns to understand how the themes, issues and interactional patterns are transmitted across generational lines. Please use system's terminology where it applies. 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. Interviewing willing family members to get adequate information for this project is expected.

- c. Identify problematic patterns in your family of origin and how they have influenced you as an adult, and how they will impact safe and effective use of self as a therapist.
- d. 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 an 8 to 12 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, 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.

## **2. Richardson Assignments; Due weekly as noted in Course Schedule; 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. 1<sup>st</sup> Quiz: Due October 3; 10% of final grade**

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

## **4. 2<sup>nd</sup> Quiz: Due November 14<sup>th</sup>; 10% of final grade**

This will be a short answer quiz in which the student must define various systems terms of 2<sup>nd</sup> Order Cybernetic Theory discussed over the course of the semester.

## **5. Final Examination; Due December 12th; 40% of final grade**

(Date/time to be confirmed by the Office of the Registrar)

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 quiz, and in-class video discussions as well as the texts.

**In addition to the above assignments, all counselling majors are now mandated to have 6 “self-awareness” counselling sessions** with counsellors at the Tyndale Counselling Services. 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.**

#### D. 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.

#### E. 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%

#### F. 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.

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 December 15<sup>th</sup>.

### **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 are encouraged to consult [writing resources](#).

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 approval by the [Tyndale Research Ethics Board \(REB\)](#). Check with the Seminary Office (Room B302; [aau@tyndale.ca](mailto:aau@tyndale.ca)) before proceeding.

## **G. 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**

##### **Sept. 12 Session I: Paradigm Shift**

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

**Reading:** Becvar Chapter 1, Chapter 2 (pp 5-9), Chapter 10  
Barker and Chang: Chapters 1, 4 & 8  
Richardson: Chapter 1

##### **Sept. 19 Session 2: First Order Cybernetics**

- Circular causality
- Rules and roles
- Positive and negative feedback
- Boundaries
- Video: Strategic (and Structural)

**Reading:** Becvar Chapter 3, Chapter 7  
Barker & Chang: Chapter 3 (pp27-38)  
Richardson: Chapter 2 (**5 sets of questions due**)

##### **Sept. 26 Session 3: First Order Cybernetics**

- Summary of First Order assumptions
- Assessments considerations
- Information flow, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Order Change,
- Equifinality
- Video: Cognitive Behavioural and Multi generational
- Quiz Review

**Reading:** Becvar: Chapter 8  
Barker & Chang: Chapter 10, Chapter 11 (pp156-163)  
Richardson workbook: Chapter 3 (**1 Question set & 2 exercises due**)

### **Oct. 3 Session 4: Second Order Cybernetics**

- **First Quiz**
- Introduction to 2nd Order Cybernetics
- Cultural Changes
- Objective truth
- Origin of Knowledge
- Position of observer
- Not knowing stance
- Video: Solution Focused and repeat Structural

**Reading:** Becvar: Chapter 2 (pp 9-12),  
Barker and Chang: Review Chapter 1 (pp9-13), Review Chapter 3 (pp41- 46), Chapter  
11 (pp163-167)  
Richardson workbook: Chapter 4 (**5 Question sets due**)

### **Oct. 10 Session 5: Second Order Cybernetics**

- Theology of family health
- Theoretical assumptions and constructs of 2<sup>nd</sup> Order Cybernetics
- Autopoiesis
- Consensual domains
- Epistemology of participation
- Feedback
- Video: Feminists and Narrative

**Reading:** Becvar Chapter 4  
Barker and Change: Chapter 2  
Richardson workbook: Chapter 5 (**3 Question sets & 2 exercises due**)

### **Oct. 17 Session 6: Theoretical Constructs of 2nd Order Cybernetics**

- Brief review
- Non-purposeful drift
- Open or closed
- Reality as a multiverse
- Structural coupling
- Structural determinism
- Wholeness and self-reference
- Similarities and differences in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Order Cybernetics

- Conclusions and integration of the two
- Video: Human Validation

**Reading:** Becvar Chapters 5

Richardson workbook: Chapter 6 (**4 Question sets & 2 exercises due**)

**Oct. 24 Reading Week (NO CLASS)**

**Oct. 31 Session 7: Human Development**

- Erikson Social Development Theory
- Leaving Home
- Emerging Adulthood
- Old Age
- Criticisms of Erikson
- Video: McGoldrick Part 1

**Readings:** Becvar: Chapter 6

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

**Nov. 7 Session 8: Issues of Developmental Theory/Therapeutic Relationship**

- Phases of family life (from Nichols: *Marital Therapy: an Integrative Approach*)
- Dislocations of Life Cycle
- Cultural considerations
- Horizontal and vertical stressors
- The therapeutic relationship
- Therapeutic Boundaries
- Model and role of therapist
- Gender biases
- Family Life Cycle distractions
- Therapeutic boundaries
- Therapist use of self
- Video: McGoldrick Part 2

**Reading:** Barker and Chang: Chapter 6 (PP70-74), Chapter 9, Review Chapter 4

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

**Nov. 14 Session 9: Observation and Assessment**

- **Quiz 2**
- Observation /Assessments
- Gender
- Intimacy
- Communication/conflict
- Power
- Ethnicity/culture
- Family life cycle
- Family Rules
- Family Boundaries
- Family Roles
- Video McGoldrick Part 3

**Readings:** Becvar: Chapter 9  
Barker and Chang: Chapter 6 (pp75-86), Chapter 5 (pp57-62),

**Nov. 21 Session 10: Observation & Assessment**

- Closeness and distance in families
- Circumplex model
- Bowen Model: Differentiation of self
- Triangles
- Tracking the family emotional process
- Common patterns of interaction
- The therapy process
- Individual and systems assessments
- Considering the presenting problem
- Information gathering methods
- Video Hardy

**Readings:** Barker and Chang: Chapter 5 (pp63-68), review Chapter 10

**Nov 28 Session 11: Process of Change/Termination**

- More about the interview process
- Statements and questions
- Conceptualizing change
- 1st and 2nd order change
- Mishandled change attempts

- Resistance to change
- The ebb and flow of therapy
- Termination
- Video: Corrales

**Assignment #1 Due: Family of Origin paper and genogram**

**Readings:** Barker and Chang: Chapter 7, 13 & 15

**Dec. 5 Session 12:** Cybernetics and communication (material drawn from Watzlawick et al, *Pragmatics of Human Communication*)

- Axioms of communication
- Problems in communication
- Video reviews

**Reading:** Barker and Chang: Chapter 3 (pp38-41), Chapter 11 (pp147-156)

**Dec 12 Final Examination** (date/time to be confirmed by the Office of the Registrar)  
**Self-Awareness Sessions Completion Form due**

**No work will be accepted after 5pm on December 13**

## **V. SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

(Tyndale Library supports this course with [e-journals and e-books](#). See the [Library FAQ page](#).)