

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

<b>Course</b>	<b>FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY</b> COUN 0677 1S
<b>Date and Time</b>	JANUARY 14 – APRIL 8, 2025 TUESDAYS 2:15-5:05 PM SYNCHRONOUS ONLINE
<b>Instructor</b>	<b>Holly Kristensen, PhD (Cand)</b> Email: <a href="mailto:hkristensen@tyndale.ca">hkristensen@tyndale.ca</a>
<b>Class Information</b>	Classes will be livestreamed <i>via Zoom</i> on Tuesdays from 2:15 – 5:05 PM.  Office Hours: After class or by appointment.
<b>Course Material</b>	Access course material at <a href="https://classes.tyndale.ca">classes.tyndale.ca</a> or other services at <a href="#">Tyndale One</a> . Course emails will be sent to your @MyTyndale.ca e-mail account only.

## 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 program coordinator.*

## II. LEARNING OUTCOMES

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

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

### III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

#### A. REQUIRED READING

Becvar, D. S. & Becvar, R. J. (2018). [\*Systems theory and family therapy: A primer\*](#) (revised 3rd ed.). Lanham, MD: Hamilton Books. ISBN 978-0-7618-6981-8

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

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

#### B. SUPPLEMENTARY / RECOMMENDED READING AND TOOLS

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

Tyndale recommends [www.stepbible.org](http://www.stepbible.org) – a free and reputable online resource developed by Tyndale House (Cambridge, England) – for word searches of original-language texts, as well as for topical searches, interlinear texts, dictionaries, etc. Refer to the library for other [online resources for Biblical Studies](#).

#### C. INTERACTIVE LIVESTREAM AND/OR HYBRID COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- Livestream attendance for the entire duration of the class 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
- Full name displayed on Zoom and Microsoft Teams for attendance purposes\*

- A commitment to having the camera on to foster community building\*exceptions with permission from professor

#### **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](http://classes.tyndale.ca).

#### **E. ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING**

**Regular attendance and punctuality to all LIVE lectures is expected.** Absence from more than 2 classes may result in the loss of credit.

##### **1. RICHARDSON REFLECTION QUESTIONS: Due dates noted on Course Schedule (10% of final grade).**

From the Richardson text, students will be required to submit their answers to at least THREE of the “Questions” embedded in the required Richardson reading for that week in a Discussion Forum Format. There will be five reflection question sets/exercises (see course schedule) worth 2% each for a total of 10% of the final grade. Detailed instructions will be provided in class.

**Note:** The information in this text is very useful for preparation for Family of Origin paper and genogram.

##### **2. QUEST #1: Due: FEB 14 at 11:59pm (10% of final grade)**

This will be a short answer quiz/test (quest) in which the student must define and demonstrate recognition of various systems and dynamics of 1<sup>st</sup> Order Cybernetic Theory discussed over lectures 1-4.

*[Note: Quests will be take-home, and students given 3 days to complete and submit via the class page.]*

##### **3. QUEST #2: Due: MARCH 14 at 11:59pm (10% of final grade)**

This will be a short answer quiz/test (quest) in which the student must define various systems terms of 2<sup>nd</sup> Order Cybernetic Theory discussed over lectures 5 to 7.

*[Note: Quests will be take-home, and students given 3 days to complete and submit via the class page.]*

#### **4. FAMILY OF ORIGIN PAPER AND GENOGRAM: Due MARCH 25 at 11:59pm (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/her 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 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, students will be required to do the following:

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. **Construct 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. To be complete, your genogram should express the following:
  - Relationship dynamics among members (enmeshment, cut off, conflict, separation, divorce, abuse, healthy)
  - Ethnic background

- Immigration dates
- Dates of birth, deaths, marriages, divorce
- Other issues of note such as disease, mental illness, addictions, etc.
- Brief indicator of individuals of importance in your family history

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

**b. Write a 10–12-page paper** with discusses the following in 4 parts:

- Section 1: **A brief introduction** to your family and any pertinent information the reader should know
- Section 2: Analysis of your family identifying the **themes, issues, and repetitive interactional patterns** in your family of origin and where these patterns have been transmitted across generational lines. This section should identify patterns using First Order Cybernetic language and terms primarily
- Section 3: Reflection on how these patterns (positive and negative) **impact you personally today.**
- Section 4: Identification of problematic patterns in your family of origin and how these will impact your **safe and effective use of self as a therapist.**
- *Note: I am especially interested in your reflections on how, considering your family of origin study, you understand yourself, your current relational patterns, and the impact of those patterns on you as a therapist*

### **Your Family Interviews:**

- PLEASE NOTE: The research and reflection for this assignment is extremely time consuming. To complete this assignment satisfactorily you will need to begin early in the semester by interviewing willing family members to get adequate information for this project. It is not enough to rely solely on your own experience in your family.
- Use the handouts titled, “Family of Origin paper” found on our class moodle page for suggestions on questions to ask family members.
- Personal Interviews are best in that they give you opportunity to ask additional questions about the family members’ answer. This allows for greater depth of understanding of the family processes.

- If you cannot locate three generations for personal interviews, access information about those generations from aunts, uncles, cousins, and parents.

## 5. FINAL VIDEO SUMMATIVE: Due APR 8, 2025 (35% of final grade)

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 assignment will be a video summative on the last day 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 summative 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 summative 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, students are encouraged to review the lectures, their take-home quiz, and in-class video discussions as well as the texts.

## 6. SEUS COUNSELLING SESSIONS – TO BE COMPLETED BY APRIL 15, 2025

**“In addition to the above assignments, all counselling majors are now mandated to have 6 counselling sessions** with a counsellor as part of their coursework. Students who reside in Canada may book with a counsellor at the [Tyndale Wellness Centre](#). Directions for this booking will be found on a video on the class page. These bookings must be done by the first class session. The sessions will be \$35.00 each. (If students want to engage in counselling beyond this mandated 6, they may make further arrangements with the Wellness Centre later in the semester.) Students residing outside Canada are responsible for arranging and paying for the cost of 6 sessions with a qualified provider, and they must email their professor about their arrangements by the first week of the semester. These 6 sessions must occur during the 12 weeks of the course, and documentation from their therapist is required at the end of the 6 sessions to prove attendance.

During these required 6 sessions, students are responsible for the agenda for each session. If a student has difficulty deciding on agendas for their sessions, they may read from the suggested references found in the directions on the class page to generate ideas about issues in their lives that might impact safe and effective use of self as a future psychotherapist. **When these sessions are completed at the Wellness Centre, a Certificate of Completion will be released, allowing the student to receive a grade for the course. If sessions are taken outside the Wellness Centre, a similar note of completion must be emailed to your professor prior to final's week.”**

## 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

Evaluation is based upon the completion of the following assignments:

Richardson Reflection Question Forums	10 %
Quests (2 @ 10% each)	20 %
Family of Origin and Genogram Paper	35 %
Final Video Summative	35 %
<b>Total Grade</b>	<b>100 %</b>

## H. GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR THE SUBMISSION OF WRITTEN WORK

Your work should demonstrate the following characteristics:

- Reports of psychological research should follow the rules set forth in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 7<sup>th</sup> ed.* (2019).
- All parts of the report are typed double-spaced, and without justifying the right-hand margin. 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.

For non-psychology/counselling students, Chicago style may be used.

For proper citation style, consult the [tip sheet, “Documenting Chicago Style”](#) (Tyndale e-resource) or the full edition of the [Chicago Manual of Style Online](#), especially ch. 14. For citing scripture texts, refer to sections 10.44 to 10.48 and 14.238 to 14.241 from the Chicago Manual of Style or reference the [tip sheet, “Citing Sources in Theology”](#).

### 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 (including improper use of artificial intelligence programs). Tyndale University takes seriously its responsibility to uphold academic integrity, and to penalize academic dishonesty. Please refer to the [Academic Integrity website](#) for further details.

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

Students should also 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.

### 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](mailto: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

DATE	LECTURE TOPIC	READINGS	ASSIGNMENTS
Jan 14	- Course Introduction - Family Relational Framework - General Systems Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Becvar: Chapters 1, 2</li> <li>• Richardson: Chapter 1</li> <li>• Smith-Acuna: Chapter 1</li> </ul>	



Jan 21	Family Systems Theory: First Order Cybernetics – Key Family Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Becvar: Chapters 2, 3 (pp 18-29)</li> <li>• Richardson: Chapter 2</li> <li>• Smith-Acuna: Chapters 2, 3</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Due:</b> Richardson Chapter 2: Reflection Questions (Forum # 1)</li> </ul>
Jan 28	Family Systems Theory: First Order Cybernetics – Key Family Structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Becvar: Chapter 3 (pp 11-13; 16-17)</li> <li>• Richardson: Chapter 3</li> <li>• Smith-Acuna: Chapter 6</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Due:</b> Richardson Chapter 3: Reflection Questions (Forum #2)</li> </ul>
Feb 4	Family Systems Theory: First Order Cybernetics: Key Family Communication Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Becvar: Chapter 3 (pp 14-16)</li> <li>• Richardson: Chapter 4</li> <li>• Smith-Acuna: Chapter 4</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Due:</b> Richardson Chapter 4: Reflection Questions (Forum #3)</li> </ul>
Feb 11	Family Systems Theory (First Order Cybernetics) on Family Systems Therapy: Family Genogram	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smith-Acuna: Chapter 5</li> </ul>	<b>QUEST #1: Due Fri, Feb 14 @11:59pm</b>
<b>Feb 18</b>	<b>READING WEEK (FEB 17-21) – NO CLASS</b>		
Feb 25	Family Systems Theory: Shift to Second Order Cybernetics: Core Constructs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Becvar: Chapters 4, 5</li> <li>• Richardson: Chapter 5</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Due:</b> Richardson Chapter 5: Reflection Questions (Forum # 4)</li> </ul>
Mar 4	Family Systems Theory: Second Order Cybernetics and Family Systems Therapy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Becvar: Chapters 7, 8</li> <li>• Richardson: Chapter 6</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Due:</b> Richardson Chapter 6: Reflection Questions (Forum #5)</li> </ul>
Mar 11	Human Development Theory and Family Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Becvar: Chapters 9, 10</li> <li>• Smith-Acuna: Chapter 7</li> </ul>	<b>QUEST #2: Due Fri, Mar 14 @11:59pm</b>

Mar 18	Family Life Cycle Theory and Family Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Becvar: Chapter 6</li> </ul>	
Mar 25	Family Systems Therapy: Therapeutic Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smith-Acuna: Chapter 8</li> </ul>	<b>Due: FAMILY OF ORIGIN PAPER @11:59pm</b>
Apr 1	Family Systems Therapy: Therapeutic Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smith-Acuna: Chapter 9</li> </ul>	
Apr 8	CLOSING AND SUMMARY		<b>FINAL VIDEO SUMMATIVE</b>
<b>SEUS COUNSELLING SESSION – TO BE COMPLETED BY APRIL 15, 2025</b>			

## 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](#).)

Beeton, T. A., & Clark, R. A. (2019). *Assessing family relationships: A family life space drawing manual*. New York: Routledge.

Goldenberg, I., Stanton, M., & Goldenberg, H. (2017). *Family Therapy: An overview* (9<sup>th</sup> Ed). Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.

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.

Sperry, L. (2012). [\*Family assessment: Contemporary and cutting-edge strategies\*](#) (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed). New York: Routledge.

Walsh, F. (2012). [\*Normal family processes\*](#) (4<sup>th</sup> Ed). New York: Guilford Press.

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

Yarhouse, M. A., & Sells, J. N. (2008). [\*Family therapies: A comprehensive Christian appraisal\*](#). Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.