Course Description

A preparation for marriage and therapy training, focusing on foundations of systems thinking and current trends in philosophical assumptions.

Course Objectives

- To understand the philosophical foundations that led to the development of marriage and family therapy as a discipline.
- To explore the interaction and limitation of linear and non-linear thinking.
- To observe how belief systems based on ethnicity, culture, gender, and spirituality interact with human systems
- To conceptualize your own model of marriage and family therapy for clinical practice and/or pastoral ministry

Class Process

The first half of the class will focus on the class topic and assigned readings through a lecture/discussion. After a break, the remainder of the class will focus on a case study, film vignette, music, art, play, or other piece of literature in addition to reflection team presentations that will offer an opportunity through discussion and experiential exercises to integrate the focal reading in a systemic approach.

The format of the class may be changed by the professor if it appears that another approach would better serve the course objectives. Students are encouraged to share what is helpful and not helpful in the course during the process of the class before the time for the course evaluation.

Students will be assigned to a reflection team composed of people representing differences in ethnicity, culture, and gender. In addition, an attempt will be made to address distinctive interests such as the differences and commonalities between counseling and ministry. These reflection teams will respond to material and present material to peers at periodic times during the semester.
Class Expectations

Class attendance is mandatory. Students are to contact the professor if unable to attend due to illness or emergency. Three tardy classes will comprise an unexcused absence. The sign-in sheet will be circulated at 2:25pm. Extensions of deadline, if granted, must be negotiated with the instructor prior to the due date. Late written assignments will be deducted a minus from what the paper would earn if submitted on time. For example, a paper that merits a B+ would receive a B if submitted late.

Course Assignments

Class and Blackboard participation — The student will be expected to complete reading assignments and demonstrate knowledge of the material through discussions in class and on Blackboard. The professor will make notations through the semester on each student’s progress.

Reflection team presentations — Reflection teams will lead discussions on reading assignments and make class presentations on specific topics during the course. Teams can use Blackboard to facilitate their work together in addition to face-to-face meetings.

Team members will evaluate each other in addition to evaluations from class members and the professor. All team members will receive the same grade based on a grading rubric to be distributed in class.

Major theoretical paper — The student will write a major paper (15-20 pages) outlining her/his personal/professional assumptions that leads to creating your own systemic theory to practice in a clinical/ministry setting. This paper should include at least the following: 1) personal philosophical assumptions and spiritual values, 2) anthropological statement that defines what the human person is and relationship to human systems, 3) what constitutes dysfunction, 4) the nature of change 5) role of the therapist/minister in this theory, 6) criteria for assessment of person/system, and 7) approaches/techniques of this theoretical approach.

More detailed guidelines for this paper will be distributed in class. Depending on the learning process in the class, some modifications to the above mentioned criteria for the paper may be made.
Final exam — A final take-home exam will be given to students on the last class meeting. It will be due on the final exam date.

Grading

Grades will be assigned as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation/attendance</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection team presentations</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major theoretical paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>30%</td>
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</tbody>
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Marriage and Family Therapy Core Competencies Addressed

Domain 1: Admission to Treatment

1.1.1 Conceptual—Understand systems concepts, theories, and techniques that are foundational to the practice of marriage and family therapy.

1.2.1 Perceptual—Recognize contextual and systemic dynamics (e.g., gender, age, socioeconomic status, culture/race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, spirituality, religion, larger systems, social context).

Domain 2: Clinical Assessment and Diagnosis

2.1.6 Conceptual—Understand the strengths and limitations of the models of assessment and diagnosis, especially as they relate to different cultural, economic, and ethnic groups.

2.4.2 Evaluative—Assess ability to view issues and therapeutic processes systemically.
Domain 3: Treatment Planning and Case Management

3.1.1 Conceptual--Know which models, modalities, and/or techniques are most effective for presenting problems.

Domain 4: Therapeutic Interventions

4.1.1 Conceptual--Comprehend a variety of individual and systemic therapeutic models and their application, including evidence-based therapies and culturally sensitive approaches.

4.1.2 Conceptual--Recognize strengths, limitations, and contraindications of specific therapy models, including the risk of harm associated with models that incorporate assumptions of family dysfunction, pathogenesis, or cultural deficit.

Required Texts and Reserve Readings


Reserve readings to be assigned on spirituality.
January 16 — Introduction to Class Content and Process
            Context of Marriage and Family Therapy

January 23 — Philosophical Foundations—Anthropology
Reading: Bateson—Forewords, Introduction, Part I and Part III.

January 30 — Philosophical Foundations—Anthropology
Reading: Bateson—Parts II, IV, V, and VI assigned to reflection teams.
DUE: Reflection teams lead discussion on Bateson

February 6 — Philosophical Foundations—General System Theory
Reading: von Bertalanffy—Foreword, Acknowledgments, Preface, Chapters 1, 2, and 9.

February 13 — Philosophical Foundations—General System Theory
Reading: von Bertalanffy—Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 6, 10, and Appendices I and II assigned to reflection teams.
DUE: Reflection teams lead discussion on von Bertalanffy

February 20 — Philosophical Foundations—Communication Theory
Reading: Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson—pp. 13-186.

February 27 — NO CLASS—READING WEEK

March 6 — Philosophical Foundations—Communication Theory

March 13 — Philosophical Foundations—Social Constructionism
Reading on reserve: Gergen and Gergen—Introduction and essays by Gergen on knowledge and meaning in relationship, Wittgenstein, Garfinkel, and rejoinder to social constructionism by Edwards, Ashmore, and Potter.
DUE: Reflection team presentations on linear/non-linear thinking as illustrated through the visual and performing arts
March 20 — Creating a Systemic Frame—Epistemology and Cybernetics  
Reading: Keeney, pp.xi-109.

March 27 — Creating a Systemic Frame—Aesthetics of Family Therapy  
Reading: Keeney, pp.110-201.

April 3 — NO CLASS — EASTER RECESS

April 10 — Creating a Systemic Frame—Lens of Ethnicity, Culture, Gender, and Spirituality  
Reading: McGoldrick and reserve reading on spirituality.

April 17 — Creating a Systemic Frame—Finding Your Voice  
Reading: Simon, Introduction and Chapters 1, 2, and 3 with Kuhn essay in Gergen and Gergen.

April 24 — Creating a Systemic Frame—Finding Your Voice  
Reading: Simon—Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 8.  
DUE: Major theoretical paper

May 1 — FINAL TAKE-HOME EXAM DUE  
Class will meet for final conversation and fellowship