

Syllabus for  
**GCSL 643—Marital and Family Systems Theory**  
3 Credit Hours  
Fall 2015

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

An overview of the principles of general system theory as applied to understanding couple and family relationships, including the church family. Emphasizes learning to think relationally by attending to patterns, organization, structure, communication, and the distinctions between first and second-order change.

Prerequisites: None

II. COURSE GOALS

The purpose of this course is to enable the student to do the following:

- A. Study the history and development of systems theory as they relate to marriage and family therapy.
- B. Examine the work of major marriage and family systems theorists.
- C. Explore the relationship of the family life cycle, gender issues, and family development to family systems therapy.
- D. Study the differences between functional and dysfunctional families.
- E. Be exposed to the role of the therapist and other professional and ethical issues in marriage and family therapy.
- F. Gain increased knowledge and awareness of the family or origin issues in personal life.
- G. Recognize the historical Judeo-Christian roots of family systems.
- H. Be introduced to the use of professional journals.

III. STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR THIS COURSE

As a result of successfully completing this course, the student will be able to do the following:

- A. Trace the history and development of marriage and family therapy.
- B. Identify selected contributors to the systems approach to marriage and family therapy, and explain the concepts and principles of the system they represent.
- C. Discuss how family development, gender issues, and communication patterns influence the practice of marriage and family therapy.
- D. Express how families become dysfunctional and how to assess the degree of functionality of a marriage or family system.
- E. Discuss the impact of the student's family of origin on personal life.

- F. Identify and discuss functional and dysfunctional families from early biblical history.
- G. Enumerate the professional and ethical issues involved in marriage and family therapy.
- H. Use professional journals and books in research and writing.

#### IV. TEXTBOOKS AND OTHER LEARNING RESOURCES

##### A. Required Materials

###### 1. Textbooks

Becvar, D. S., and R. J. Becvar. *Systems Theory and Family Therapy*. New York: University Press of America, 1999. ISBN: 9780761812951

Nichols, Michael P., and Richard C. Schwartz. *Family Theory: Concepts and Methods*. 10<sup>th</sup> ed. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 2012. ISBN: 978-0205827190

Smith-Acuña, Shelly. *Systems Theory in Action: Applications to Individual, Couple, and Family Therapy*. Hoboken: Wiley, 2010. ISBN: 978-0470475829

Watzlawick, P., J. H. Weakland, and R. Fisch. *Change: Principles of Problem Formation and Problem Resolution*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1974. ISBN: 9780393011043

###### 2. Other None

##### B. Optional Materials

###### Textbooks

Gilbert, R. M. *Extraordinary Relationships: A New Way of Thinking About Human Interactions*. Minneapolis, MN: Chronimed Publishing, 1992. ISBN: 9780471346906

Steinke, P. L. *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems*. Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 2002. ISBN: 9781566993296

###### 1. Other None

#### V. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

##### A. University Policies and Procedures

- 1. Attendance at each class or laboratory is mandatory at Oral Roberts University. Excessive absences can reduce a student's grade or deny credit for the course.
- 2. Students taking a late exam because of an unauthorized absence are charged a late exam fee.
- 3. Students and faculty at Oral Roberts University must adhere to all laws addressing the ethical use of others' materials, whether it is in the form of print, electronic, video, multimedia, or computer software. Plagiarism and other forms of cheating involve both lying and stealing and are violations of ORU's Honor Code: "I will not cheat or plagiarize; I will do my own academic work and will

not inappropriately collaborate with other students on assignments.” Plagiarism is usually defined as copying someone else’s ideas, words, or sentence structure and submitting them as one’s own. Other forms of academic dishonesty include (but are not limited to) the following:

- a. Submitting another’s work as one’s own or colluding with someone else and submitting that work as though it were his or hers;
- b. Failing to meet group assignment or project requirements while claiming to have done so;
- c. Failing to cite sources used in a paper;
- d. Creating results for experiments, observations, interviews, or projects that were not done;
- e. Receiving or giving unauthorized help on assignments.

By submitting an assignment in any form, the student gives permission for the assignment to be checked for plagiarism, either by submitting the work for electronic verification or by other means. Penalties for any of the above infractions may result in disciplinary action including failing the assignment or failing the course or expulsion from the University, as determined by department and University guidelines.

4. Final exams cannot be given before their scheduled times. Students need to check the final exam schedule before planning return flights or other events at the end of the semester.
5. Students are to be in compliance with university, school, and departmental policies regarding Whole Person Assessment requirements. Students should consult the WPA handbooks for requirements regarding general education and the students’ majors.
  - a. The penalty for not submitting electronically or for incorrectly submitting an ePortfolio artifact is a zero for that assignment.
  - b. By submitting an assignment, the student gives permission for the assignment to be assessed electronically.

## B. Graduate School of Theology and Ministry Policies and Procedures

### 1. **Completion of Assignments**

Assignments are due on the dates established in the course calendar, which is published in the syllabus. **Any assignments turned in after the scheduled due date are penalized five percent (5%) of the original value per day including weekends, breaks, and holidays.** All work turned in two weeks after the assignment deadline is received but is granted a grade of zero for that assignment. **No work** is accepted after the final date of regular classes.

### 2. **Incompletes**

- a. An incomplete is given only after the student establishes with the academic committee by written petition that student’s work is incomplete for good cause (i.e., lengthy illness, death in the family). **Incompletes are rarely granted.** Only those absences that are incurred within the time period of the extenuating circumstances prompting an incomplete are excused. The student is still accountable for any other absences and will be penalized for them according to the attendance policy.
- b. A Petition for Incomplete Grade with all supporting documentation must be submitted for approval one week prior to the end of normal classes. **The submitting of a petition does not automatically ensure the granting of an incomplete.** The petition must be approved by the

academic committee of the School of Theology and Ministry. Students are expected to continue all course work until an incomplete is granted.

3. **Examinations**

- a. Early examinations **are not** allowed. Late examinations without grade penalty are administered only when extenuating circumstances are present (such as a death in the family the week before exams or a sudden and major illness the week of exams that is documented by a physician).
- b. A Petition for Late Examination must be submitted to the academic dean's office. A **\$15 fee**, plus proper documentation, must accompany the petition. The academic committee reviews each petition and grade penalties are assessed. (Late exam fee is not a grade penalty.)
- c. Students taking late exams should expect alternate versions of the original exams.
- d. **Not being present for the final examination automatically results in failure of the course.**

4. **Attendance**

The administration and faculty of the Graduate School of Theology and Ministry believe that class attendance is crucial in order for students to receive impartation, spiritual formation, and a community experience. Therefore, the Official Attendance Policy for the GSTM is as follows:

- a. Students will receive one letter grade reduction after missing more than two weeks of classes.
- b. Students who miss more than one month of classes will fail the course.
- c. **The absences allowed prior to a grade reduction are designed to allow for emergencies and illnesses and are not designed for indiscriminate use.**
- d. Administrative excuses are granted only when a student is on official university business and has received approval in advance from the university administration.
- e. Students are expected to be prompt for classes.
- f. Students are expected to remain for the entire class session.
- g. Leaving early without permission constitutes an absence.

5. The Disability Service Center, in compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, assures that no qualified individual with a disability will be denied reasonable accommodations based upon the individual's needs. It is the responsibility of the student to contact the Disability Service Center and properly register for these services. For more information, call 918.495.7018 or go to [www.studentresources.oru.edu](http://www.studentresources.oru.edu).

B. Course Policies and Procedures

1. Evaluation Procedures:

- a. The final evaluation for this course is based on the 400 possible earned points available, allotted as follows:

Take-Home Exam	100 points
Systemic Diagram	100 points
Problem Formation	100 points
Final Exam	<u>100 points</u>
Total	400 points

- b. Grading scale:
  - A=360-400 points
  - B=320-359 points
  - C=280-319 points
  - D=240-279 points
  - F=239 points and below
- 2. Whole Person Assessment requirements
  - a. All students entering the seminary are required to enroll in PRF 059—ePortfolio: Whole Person Assessment, which provides specific training to develop the skills needed to create an ePortfolio.
  - b. WPA requirements for this course:
    - None
- 3. Other Policies and/or Procedures
  - a. Problem Formation and Resolution Assignment: Working in groups, students seek to demonstrate how second-order change could be facilitated based on an assigned case study. Instructions are provided in class.
  - b. **Systemic Diagram of a Patterned Interaction**

Using the format presented in class, each student diagrams a patterned interaction between two or more people. Although the student is not required to be one of the people involved in the interaction, it may be insightful if a pattern that includes the student is diagrammed. There is both a visual and written component to this assignment.

## VI. COURSE CALENDAR

<b>Week</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Reading</b>
1	Overview and Introduction to Systems Theory	Becvar, ch. 1; Acuna, ch. 1
2	The Paradigm Shift to Systems/Cybernetics Thinking Cybernetic Epistemology	Becvar, ch. 2; Acuna, ch. 2
3	Concepts from First-Order Cybernetics	Becvar, ch. 3; Acuna, ch. 3
4	Concepts from Second-Order Cybernetics	Becvar, ch. 4; Acuna 4
5	Second-Order Change	Watzlawick, et.al. chs. 1-2, 7-8 Acuna, ch. 5
6	Family Interpretive Systems/Stories & Narrative Therapy	Becvar, ch. 5; Acuna, ch. 6
7	The Family as a System	Becvar, chs. 7-8; Acuna, ch. 7
8	Implications for Family Therapy	Becvar, ch. 9; Acuna, chs. 8-9
9	Introduction to Bowenian Family Systems Theory	Steinke, chs. 1-2 Gilbert, chs. 1-2
10	<b>Take-Home Exam Due</b> Differentiation of Self: Individuality vs. Togetherness	Gilbert, chs. 3, 16-18
11	Emotional Process and Relationship Patterns	Gilbert, chs. 4-12
12	Application of Bowen Family Systems Theory	Gilbert, chs. 3-14, 19-20
13	Congregations as Emotional Systems	Steinke, chs. 6-10
14	Differentiation of Self and Leadership	Handout
15	Review for Final <b>Final Exam</b> (university schedule)	

**Inventory for Student Learning Outcomes  
Graduate School of Theology and Ministry**

**M. A. Christian Counseling**

**GCSL 643 Marital and Family Systems Theory**

**Dr. Bill Buker, Instructor**

**Fall 2015**

This course contributes to student learning outcomes for the M.A. Christian Counseling degree as indicated below:

**Significant Contribution** – Addresses the outcome directly and includes targeted assessment.

**Moderate Contribution** – Addresses the outcome directly or indirectly and includes some assessment.

**Minimal Contribution** – Addresses the outcome indirectly and includes little or no assessment.

**No Contribution** – Does not address the outcome.

Degree Program Outcomes	Significant Contribution	Moderate Contribution	Minimal Contribution	No Contribution
<b>Theology/Philosophy of Counseling</b>				
Develop a cohesive theology of counseling with theological reflection on the counseling process, emphasizing Spirit-directed change.	X			
<b>Assessment Techniques</b>				
Exhibit skill in selecting, administering, scoring, interpreting, and reporting the results from various assessment instruments.		X		
<b>Clinical/Theoretical Diagnostic Appraisal</b>				
Demonstrate the ability to interpret case specific information by translating it into accurate diagnostic appraisals.	X			
<b>Treatment Plans in Response to Diagnosis</b>				
Display the ability to develop relevant treatment plans in response to specific diagnoses, and the skill to implement them in the context of a therapeutic relationship.	X			
<b>Research Skills and Methodologies</b>				
Demonstrate basic research skills and methodologies through critiquing research findings and evaluating ESTs.		X		
<b>Professional Code of Ethics</b>				
Demonstrate knowledge of professional codes of ethics and the ability to apply those codes to ethical dilemmas.	X			