



CO 603 Foundations of Systemic Therapy Winter 2026

Professor: Jesse Schellenberg

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Course Dates: January 5-9, 2026

Course Delivery Method: In-Person Modular

3 Credit Hours

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is a survey of ideas and praxis essential for marriage and family therapy. The content will include theological, psychosocial, systems, and constructivist perspectives.

COURSE INTEGRATION

The purpose of this course is to set a direction for the development of counsellors that will help students in their future training (SO #2; MACC/MACFT #1). It provides an integrated body of knowledge and thought, including theological and biblical foundations and individualist and systemic theories of human behavior that lays the bedrock for understanding people, problems and how people change (SO #1 & 2; MACC/MACFT #1, 2, 4).

COURSE TEXTS

Kindle versions of these texts are acceptable

- 1) Berg, S. (2023). *Healing Disquiet: An integrative model for relational therapy*. Living Water Press.
- 2) Johnson, E.L. (Ed.). (2010). *Psychology and Christianity: Five views* (2nd edition). InterVarsity Press.
- 3) Nouwen, H., McNeill, D., & Morrison, D. (2006). *Compassion: A reflection on the Christian life*. Image.
- 4) Richardson, R. (1995). *Family Ties that Bind: A self-help guide to change through family of origin therapy*, 3rd edition. Self-Counsel Press.
- 5) Van Vonderen, J. (2008) *Tired of Trying to Measure Up*. Bethany House Publishers.

Students are expected to refer to Briercrest Seminary's Format and Style Guides and Guide for Writing Research Papers, available as PDF documents here: <https://www.briercrestseminary.ca/seminary-life/documents>.

These texts are available in store and online at the Briercrest Bookstore: <https://www.briercrestseminary.ca/seminary-life/bookstore>.

Students are responsible for course materials and communication on Canvas (<https://briercrest.instructure.com>) and their myBriercrest.ca email account.

SEMINARY-WIDE OUTCOMES

Students will graduate:

1. Describing and demonstrating evangelical faith and values.
2. Preparing to serve God's kingdom in its diversity. Describe God, God's kingdom, and your calling (vocational sensitivity) within it, including the types of contexts and people you feel best prepared to serve.
3. Participating in the action of our Triune God through formation of the soul (i.e., virtue and spiritual integrity), mind (academic rigor), and strength (vocation).

Program Outcomes for MACC/MACFT

1. Students and graduates will demonstrate a systemic* and strength-focused perspective on people and their problems.
2. Students and graduates will demonstrate competence in a client-centered, collaborative therapeutic approach.
3. Students and graduates will demonstrate ethical clinical practice.
4. Students and graduates will take a reflective stance in their clinical work.

Additional Program Outcome for MACFT

5. Students and graduates will demonstrate skills in working with couples and families to improve their relationship quality.

COURSE OUTCOMES

1. The student will begin to form connections with fellow students and Seminary faculty/staff, to form the basis of a spiritual and professional peer support network.
2. The student will consider issues in historical and cultural influences on the nature of family.
3. The student will develop an integrated understanding of biblical anthropology, psychodynamic and systems theories, and the ideas underlying the narrative approach to counselling.
4. The student will develop a biblical, theological, and psychological theoretical foundation for the professional skills required to engage in the practice of counselling.
5. The student will develop a growing ability to recognize the power of language and narrative to construct our perceptions of our world and an ability to wonder about and question those perceptions.

COURSE OUTLINE AND CONTENT

- 1) Introduction to Foundations of Marriage and Family Therapy
- 2) Theological Anthropology
- 3) Psychology and Christianity
- 4) Genograms
- 5) Person of the Therapist Issues
- 6) Marriage and Family Therapy Skills
- 7) Self-care and Psychotherapy

ASSIGNMENTS

Please submit all written assignments to Canvas.

Pre-Course Assignments:

1) Person of the Therapist Paper, 25% (6 pages; MACC/MACFT #1 & 4; SO #3):

Students will read *The Family Ties That Bind* and *Tired of Trying to Measure Up*, and write a thoughtful reflection which interacts with the material of the texts, as well as noting the patterns, trends, strengths, and weaknesses shown in their genogram. *This paper is not intended as a book review or summary of the texts*, though material from the texts should be referenced throughout the paper. Students will identify their *Person of the Therapist Issues* (personal issues and difficulties stemming from the counselor's family of origin that may negatively impact their personal or professional life) and the family of origin dynamics that gave rise to these issues. In light of the material in the texts and the genogram, you are asked to examine the issues that need further reflection and attention to help you become, not just a qualified therapist, but a competent and skilled therapist.

Questions for the student to reflect on are as follows (please emulate these headings in your paper):

- 1) What are some of the issues that you need to grapple with from your family of origin and how might they be triggers for you in the therapy setting?
- 2) What were the unspoken rules in your family of origin and what happened when someone broke these rules?
- 3) How were strong feelings like love and anger expressed in your family growing up?
- 4) How were issues of sex, money, and power dealt with in your family of origin?
- 5) How might your family of origin experiences influence your relating to personality types you find difficult?
- 6) What family messages did you receive about interacting with those who are different from you (such as race, gender, religion, disabilities, etc.)?

Due the first day of class, January 5, 2026

2) Genogram, 5% (MACC/MACFT #1 & 4; SO #3):

Students will read *The Genogram as Process* (posted on Canvas). Students will then draw a family genogram, either on paper or on their computer (a Word doc using Shapes and Draw works fine, hand drawn is also acceptable) depicting their family (grandparents, parents, partner, and children, as well as any other significant family members). Students will use the appropriate symbols and relationship descriptors for their genogram as listed in the PDF file on Canvas. Students will then submit the file or a picture of the file.

Due the first day of class, January 5, 2026

3) Integration Paper #1, 25% (6 pages; SO #1):

Students will read *Psychology & Christianity* and write a reflection paper. *This paper is not intended as a book review or summary of the text*, though material from the text should be referenced throughout the paper. Students will critically engage with the ideas in the text and identify points of continuity and discontinuity between their own personal beliefs and each of the five views. Students will also identify their preferred approach, noting why they chose this particular view, as well as identifying their least preferred approach, noting why they would not choose this view.

Due the first day of class, January 5, 2026

Mid-Course Assignments:**4) Student Presentations, 5% (MACC/MACFT #1, 2, 4; SO #3):**

Students will make a short presentation (10-15 min) of their findings from their Genogram paper in discussion groups to their peers during class.

5) Online postings, 5% (minimum 250 words per post: MACC/MACFT #4):

At the end of each class, students will post a response in the online discussion form, reflecting on the information and activities of the day. Students will additionally post a thoughtful response to one of their cohorts' reflections. Responses are due prior to the following class.

Post-Course Assignments:**6) Integration Paper #2, 35% (8-10 pages; MACC/MACFT #1& 4; SO #1):**

Students will read *Healing Disquiet* and *Compassion* and write a thoughtful reflection paper using material from both texts, as well as course lecture notes. *This paper is not intended as a book review or summary of the texts*, though material from the texts should be referenced throughout the paper. Students are free to use material from other texts but are not required to do so. This paper is intended to develop the student's theological and therapeutic understanding of marriage and family therapy, and how these concepts interrelate. Students will answer questions including but not limited to: how does your Christian faith integrate with counselling? What is your view of humanity from a Christian standpoint and how might this inform your therapeutic views? What do you perceive might be areas of disagreement between your faith and your practice? What POTT issues have you identified and how do they relate to your faith and practice of counselling?

Due March 6, 2026

SEMINARY CALENDAR

Students are expected to be aware of the policies that govern course work at Briercrest Seminary, all of which are published in the current [Seminary Calendar](#).

Attendance Policy

In order to benefit fully from a seminary education, to be good stewards of time and finances, and to be considerate of their classmates and faculty members, students must be in class at every opportunity.

Modular Courses

Students are expected to attend 100 per cent of each modular for which they register. If this is impossible due to extenuating circumstances, arrangements must be made with the course professor before the first day of class. If extenuating circumstances prevent a student from attending class, a maximum of one (1) full day of class can be foregone. If additional time is missed, the student will fail the course unless they first request to withdraw from the course or move the course to an audit.

Online Courses

If extenuating circumstances prevent a student from attending scheduled meeting times, then up to 20% of meeting time can be foregone. Students missing scheduled meeting times should make every effort to inform the course professor prior to any time missed. If additional time is missed, the student will fail the course unless they first request to withdraw from the course or move the course to an audit.

Semester-Based Courses

All students missing more than two full weeks of a particular course from registration to the last day of classes will receive an automatic fail (0%). A student may appeal a course failure due to excessive absences. Successful appeals will be granted only in rare cases where all absences are clearly beyond the student's control. Appeals must be made through the Academic Appeal Process.

Modular Course Schedules

Modular classes begin at 9:00 a.m. on Monday morning and run a minimum of 30 hours through the course of the week. The schedule is determined by the course professor. Students should check the syllabus for specifics. When the syllabus does not state class times, students are responsible to check with the professor prior to making travel plans.

Assignment Submission

All assignments must be submitted no later than eight weeks after the last day of class as stated in the syllabus. The correct due dates will be clearly noted in the syllabus and each faculty member will state in their syllabus how assignments should be submitted. Assignments submitted within a week after the due date will be accepted with a 10 per cent penalty. For additional information refer to the late assignment policy or the extension policy in the [academic calendar](#).

Return of Graded Assignments

Professors are expected to return graded assignments within six weeks of the due date. If they fail to do so, students may submit an inquiry to the [Seminary](#). If an extension is granted, the professor is no longer obligated to meet this deadline.

Academic Honesty

As members of the Briercrest learning community, students have a responsibility to conduct themselves with integrity and honour. Students who cheat on exams, plagiarize, inappropriately collaborate, or use generative AI without instructor authorization violate the trust placed in them by their instructors, fellow students, and the seminary. Any such actions constitute a breach of academic honesty and will result in serious consequences, such as failure of an assignment, failure of a course, or expulsion from the seminary.

Plagiarism, whether intentional or involuntary, is the submission of the work of others, published or unpublished, in whole or in part without acknowledgment or proper documentation. All information, ideas and/or direct quotations taken from other primary or secondary sources must be documented appropriately.

Generative AI is an umbrella term for a type of machine learning and a group of algorithms that can create new content, such as text, code, images, videos, music, or a combination of all these formats. Generative AI produces output in response to a query or prompt using generative models such as Large Language Models (LLMs) that rely on large datasets. Generative AI features are also often embedded within tools such as Grammarly, allowing these tools to generate new content, such as the rewriting, paraphrasing, or summarizing of existing text. The generated responses of these tools are probabilistic, which can result in errors and biases in responses.

The use of generative AI to create audio or visual media, to produce outlines, to generate partial or complete drafts of assignments, to answer questions on quizzes or exams, or to edit the grammar of assignment drafts is considered unauthorized unless it is explicitly permitted by the course instructor in writing. All use of generative AI tools must be properly documented.

Students are responsible for ensuring they are using their sources and completing their assignments with transparency and honesty. For more details, consult the [Seminary Calendar](#) and the Briercrest Format Guide. In addition to being familiar with these pages, instructors assume that you have completed the Briercrest Academic Integrity course on [Canvas](#) and understand the information contained in it.

Academic Accommodations

Any student with a disability, injury, or health condition (mental or physical) who may need academic accommodations (permanent or temporary) should contact the ARC Coordinator in person (L234 in the Library), by phone (1-306-801-6159), or by email (arc@briercrest.ca). Documentation from a qualified practitioner will be required (i.e., medical doctor, psychologist, etc.). It is recommended that students meet with their professors to discuss the requirements of their accommodations (i.e., how the student will receive lecture notes, or how the professor wants to receive extension requests).