Course Title:
Family Systems and Reconstruction

Course Number:
HR 5423-101

Course Description:
Whenever two or more people come together, a system of rules, processes, conscious, and unconscious behavior comes into being. The family is the first and most powerful system a person experiences. Thus, people learn most of their ways to function in any system from their family of origin. There are certain dynamics common to all families, such as: the need to bond and how to relate; how to respond to feelings such as love, hurt, fear, anger; the need for rules; how to deal with certain basic life events as birth, change, death, threats, members going to and from the system; the need to make meaning out of human behavior and phenomena, and to make meaning of life, the world and oneself.

Most of this learning serves us well throughout life. Some of this learning we may wish to change as we grow older. This is part of the process of growing, developing, and maturing. Some changes are easy to make; others seem well-nigh impossible. Dealing with one’s family roots is crucial to this process of growth. How we deal with our roots facilitates or impedes our changing and growing.

In this course, through experiential exercises and lectures, we learn the basic dynamics common to all families and how one’s family roots influence adult behavior. Toward the end of the course, an imaginative process known as “Family Reconstruction” will be demonstrated showing how we can reconnect with our family roots in a more human and growth-producing way. This demonstration will be a powerful way to learn how the common, basic dynamics function in all families. Since the class hours are spent in experiential exercises, this course will not appeal to those who desire reading texts and attending lectures upon which an examination is based for a grade.

Class Dates, Location and Hours:

Dates: April 16-22, 2012
Location: Nellis AFB, Las Vegas, Nevada. See Site Director for classroom location.
Hours: Mon-Fri: 6:00-9:30, Sat: 8:00 am - 4:30 pm; Sun 8:00 am-12:00
Last day to enroll or drop without penalty: March 18, 2012

Site Director:
Megan Fitzpatrick Meneses. Phone: 702-643-5354; E-mail: apnellis@ou.edu

Professor Contact Information:
Course Professor: William Nerin, M.A.
Mailing Address: 11221 35th Avenue Court, NW
Gig Harbor, WA 98332
Telephone Number: (253) 851-8888
Fax Number: (253) 851-8888
E-mail Address: nerinou@comcast.net
Professor availability: The professor will be available via e-mail to students before and after the class sessions. On-site office hours are half an hour before and after each class session, by appointment.
Textbook(s) and Instructional Materials:

Student materials are available at the Follett/AP Bookstore located in the Oklahoma Memorial Union, 900 Asp Ave., Norman, OK. Orders can be placed online at www.oklahomaunion.bkstr.com or by telephone at 866-369-9713 (toll free in the U.S.) or 405-325-5960 (outside the U.S.). E-mail orders may be sent to oklahomaunion@bkstr.com. Representatives are available from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. CST Monday through Thursday and 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. CST on Friday. Summer hours: 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. CST. Faxed orders may be placed 24 hours a day to 866-223-5607 (toll free in the U.S.) or 405-325-1557 (outside the U.S.).


Note: The Follett/AP Bookstore is the Advanced Programs contractual textbook provider. Should text changes become necessary after publication of the course syllabus, Advanced Programs will facilitate text returns/refunds only for texts purchased through the Follett/AP Bookstore.

Course Objectives:

Upon completion of this course, the student will:

- understand systems, especially family systems, and think in a systemic fashion;
- see how several basic dynamics operate in all family systems, especially on an unconscious level;
- appreciate the power one’s family of origin has in one’s adult life;
- see the value in reconnecting to one’s family roots in such a way as to accept those roots as part of oneself;
- demonstrate how a person may be able to see his or her parents as human as well as “mother” and “father”;
- understand an imaginative process known as “Family Reconstruction,” which helps a person see one’s family roots as humans living out the basic dynamics common to all families (see #2 above);
- appreciate the power of the unconscious in our daily life; and
- gain a deeper respect of oneself and of the families one has come from.

Assignments, Grading and Due Dates:

Journal:

The journal is a simple log written at the end of each day (dated), expressing what ideas and experiences were particularly valuable to you, with any further autobiographical comments that are important to you. The purpose of the journal is to allow you to express yourself in this additional written personal form. As you express yourself and collect your thoughts and feelings, you sum up the day, as it were, and you reinforce important learning for yourself. This reinforcement will be of some help in integrating the experience more deeply into your life. The journal is for your personal benefit and is not to be handed in. You will be asked to write down at the end of the class what your experience was like in keeping the journal.

Attendance and Participation:

Most of the learning in the classroom situation will originate from exercises designed to give the student an experience in the psychological dynamics and processes of family systems. Full attendance and participation is a requirement of this course for a grade. Therefore, if anyone misses the first class, that person cannot take the course. If any four-hour evening class is missed, a C grade will be given. Any further absence, or being late an hour or more, renders an F grade.
If a military assignment or duty requirement is made of a student prior to the beginning of the course that necessitates missing a class or several hours equivalent to one class period other than the first class, the student can decide to accept a “C” grade or apply for a waiver from the contract office for reimbursement and drop the course. If the assignment is made after the course begins, then that will be considered an excused absence.

Readings and Paper:
Before class, *Family Reconstruction: Long Day’s Journey into Light* must be read. On the first day of class, the student is to submit a paper containing the following (guess at what you don’t know, e.g., names, dates, events):

1. The complete family reconstruction homework outlined in Chapter 3 of the book, with the following deletions:
   a. in the Circle of Influence, do not write the adjectives or brief phrases describing how you experienced their influence;
   b. in the genograms, do not list the adjectives describing the personalities and the lines describing the way mother and father, parent and child, related to each other; and
   c. in the chronology, delete any entry you deem negative.

   It is important that you submit each aspect of the work detailed in Chapter 3, including the birth fantasies.

2. On your own, for your private keeping, make a copy of the work described in #1 above and add what was deleted, i.e., a, b, and c. Then, in the paper submitted to me, describe the differences in your personal reactions, feelings, and learning between doing the deleted piece and the completed piece (i.e., describe how completing the entire work added to your insights, speculations, thoughts, and feelings).

3. Identify in the paper one functional and one dysfunctional rule operating in your family of origin and one functional and dysfunctional rule operating or that has operated in you.

4. Identify in the paper a favorite way of coping with threat or stress used by your mother, father, and you when you were growing up in your family.

5. In Chapter 7, pp. 105-114, identify each transaction or event that helped Ann grow in her self-esteem and how you think it helped her. For example, on the bottom of page 105, Ann cries as she remembers her mother’s behavior when Ann was a child. She is able to express sadness, rather than trying to cover it up as she has in the past. Being congruent this way helps her self-esteem. She behaves according to a new rule, “It is okay to be as you are, rather than pretend to be otherwise.”

6. In Chapter 16, choose two themes that mean the most to you and explain why you chose them.

Final Class Day:
The student will write a page or two relating what knowledge was deepened, added to, or enlarged upon from the class experience as compared to reading the book as well as a paragraph or two describing what your experience was in keeping your journal.

Post-Seminar Final Paper:
Due within 20 days after last class date. The student will submit a paper based upon reading *The Intimacy Paradox* and *You Can’t Grow Up Till You Go Back Home*. This paper is to reinforce and enhance the objectives of the course and also show students that there are different ways to achieve a new connection with one’s family of origin and different ways to view this work. The paper is to be presented in the following format:

1. List, by numbering, the basic concepts found in the two books that the authors agree upon.
2. List, by numbering, the concepts in which the authors disagree.
3. List the ideas found in one book, but not in the other.
4. Describe in detail Williamson’s steps used in PAFS.
5. Write a list of questions that you would like to ask your parents if you wanted to know what their early life was like from birth to marriage.
A Note on the Book:

If I had to revise the book, I would de-emphasize the word “therapy” with its connotation, and stress the concept of growth. Unfortunately, “therapy” connotes a medical model of sickness and health, i.e., in order to qualify for “therapy” one must be “sick.” I think this is unfortunate. The issue as I see it is to grow as human beings regardless of whether that growth is called therapy, education, religion, financial achievement, success, or enrichment. All growing is learning and experiencing whereby a person transcends previous boundaries and grows into maturity. This is how I see family reconstruction. It is simply one of the myriad ways available to transcend one’s boundaries and achieve personal integration.

Grading:

This is a letter-graded course: A, B, C, D, or F. The grade will depend on all of the above being completed, which is, the paper submitted the first day of class containing the six items listed above, class attendance, participation and journal; the written description on the final class day and the post-seminar final paper analyzing the two books.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Percent of Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paper</td>
<td>First day of class</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Attendance &amp; Participation</td>
<td>During class sessions</td>
<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post Seminar Final Paper</td>
<td>20 days after last class session</td>
<td>20</td>
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NOTICE: Failure to meet assignment due dates could result in a grade of I (Incomplete) and may adversely impact Tuition Assistance and/or Financial Aid.

Recommended Reading* (Not provided by Advanced Programs)


*The above recommended readings may be ordered from the following publisher(s):

Science & Behavior Books
P.O. Box 11457
Palo Alto, CA 94306
(405) 965-0954

Harper & Row
Keystone Industrial Park
Scranton, PA 18512
(717) 343-4761
POLICIES AND NOTICES

Attendance/Grade Policy

Attendance and participation in interaction, individual assignments, group exercises, simulations, role playing, etc. are valuable aspects of any course because much of the learning comes from discussions in class with other students. It is expected that you attend all classes and be on time except for excused emergencies.

Excused absences are given for professor mandated activities or legally required activities such as emergencies or military assignments. Unavoidable personal emergencies, including (but not limited to) serious illness; delays in getting to class because of accidents, etc.; deaths and funerals, and hazardous road conditions will be excused.

If you are obtaining financial assistance (TA, STAP, FA, VA, Scholarship, etc.) to pay all or part of your tuition cost, you must follow your funding agency/institution’s policy regarding “I” (Incomplete) grades unless the timeline is longer than what the University policy allows then you must adhere to the University policy.

Students who receive Financial Aid must resolve/complete any “I” (Incomplete) grades by the end of the term or he/she may be placed on “financial aid probation.” If the “I” grade is not resolved/completed by the end of the following term, the student’s Financial Aid may be suspended make the student ineligible for further Financial Aid.

Students are responsible for meeting the guidelines of Tuition Assistance and Veterans Assistance. See the education counselor at your local education center for a complete description of your TA or VA requirements.

Academic Honesty

Honesty is a fundamental precept in all academic activities and … [you] have a special obligation to observe the highest standards of honesty. Academic misconduct in any form is inimical to the purposes and functions of the University and is therefore unacceptable and is rigorously proscribed. Academic misconduct includes:

- cheating (using unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise), plagiarism, falsification of records, unauthorized possession of examinations, intimidation, and any and all other actions that may improperly affect the evaluation of a student’s academic performance or achievement;
- assisting others in any such act; or attempting to engage in such acts.

All acts of academic misconduct will be reported and adjudicated as prescribed by the student code of the University of Oklahoma. All students should review the “Student’s Guide to Academic Integrity” found at http://www.ou.edu/provost/integrity

Accommodation Statement

The College of Continuing Education [Advanced Programs] is committed to making its activities as accessible as possible. For accommodations on the basis of disability, please contact your OU Site Director.

Course Policies

Advanced Programs policy is to order books in paperback if available. Courses, dates, and professors are subject to change. Please check with your OU Site Director. Students should retain a copy of any assignments that are mailed to the professor for the course.

Copyright

Any and all course materials, syllabus, lessons, lectures, etc. are the property of professor teaching the course and the Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma and are protected under applicable copyright.

For more information about Advanced Programs, visit our website at: http://www.goou.ou.edu/
INSTRUCTOR VITA

William F. Nerin, M.A.

Education

1965  M.A., Marriage and Family Life Education with emphasis in Psychology, Columbia University – Teacher’s College of New York

Current Positions

- Advanced Programs professor since 1977
- Private practice, 1965-2001: Marriage, family and child therapy; trainer and consultant

Frequently Taught Advanced Programs Courses

HR 5423  Family Systems & Family Reconstruction

Major Areas of Teaching and Research Interest

Professor Nerin conducts workshops and seminars in the U.S. and abroad. He has conducted seminars at the American Psychiatric Association’s annual conventions, and in Lithuania, Venezuela, Moscow and Portugal.

Representative Publications and Presentations

Books:

- Family reconstruction, Long day’s journey into light, New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1986.
- Familienrekonstruktion In Aktion, Junfermann-Verlag, Paderborn, 1989
- You can’t grow up till you go back home again: A safe journey to see your parents as human, Magic Mountain Publishers, Gig Harbor, WA. 1993.

Articles: