

WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA FAMILY CENTER
Post Graduate Education Program
Basic Seminar
September 2008 – April 2009

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Basic Seminar is one of the core offerings of WPFC. It is viewed as a two-year program, designed to introduce the basic ideas and concepts of Bowen family systems theory. First-year and second-year students meet together. The curriculum for first and second year students is the same. The assumption is that no matter the amount of past formal and informal study, all students start at their own level of understanding. Consistent with Bowen theory, the emphasis is on self-learning through didactic presentations by faculty and personal reading, use of audio-visual resources, writing, and application of theory by students in their own personal and professional relationships.

In Bowen theory the human is viewed as being more similar to then different from the rest of life on earth. As a species, the human has organized itself naturally into social groups called families. In this sense the human family is understood to be a natural system. The ideas and concepts of Bowen theory describe predictable emotional and relationship patterns operating through past generations of a family that influence variation in individual functioning within the family in the present. The human is unique from other species in its ability to effect individual functioning. Knowing the part self plays in these multigenerational processes allows planned change. Bowen theory is the result of the efforts of one individual whose ideas have been, and continue to be, tested in clinical research. It is anticipated that Bowen theory will be extended in light of further facts about human functioning, as they become known.

Faculty Responsibilities

Faculty members of Western Pennsylvania Family Center are responsible to present, teach and consult with students in a manner consistent with the assumptions and principles of Bowen theory. This has an impact not only on what information is presented, but also on the way in which it is presented. Faculty members make considerable effort to avoid presenting assumptions and hypotheses as facts. They make every effort not to tell students what to think, what to say or what to do; they also make every effort to hold students accountable for what they do or don't say, think or do. Faculty members attempt to state clearly their own views and positions, ideas and assumptions, being careful to label them as such. The continuous goal of faculty members is to aid students in developing their own understanding of Bowen theory.

Student Responsibilities

Students in the Basic Seminar are responsible to develop their own understanding of Bowen theory. The basic ideas and concepts in Bowen theory are easily learned in the abstract. The process of making Bowen theory one's own requires years of study, application, individual effort and thinking. Multiple educational experiences are available to students, who are encouraged to use a variety of means in their effort to understand the

various aspects of the theory and its applications. Much of the learning is derived through the student's reading, writing, and use of audio-visual resources, participation in class lectures and other educational opportunities. **The crux - and acid test - of the learning comes in the ongoing effort to be a more responsible person who is more willing and able to better regulate their own functioning in their own lives.** Students will be asked to comment on this process from week to week.

Learning Bowen theory requires a shift from passive learning, to actively thinking through ideas for themselves. The ideas and concepts of the theory provide a roadmap for what is observed, and what one can expect to observe, if one is observing through the lens of Bowen theory. Student motivation and ability to objectively observe self in relationships guides the learning effort. Learning requires a willingness to practice observation of self in relationships, how this influences what is learned, including the revision of personal assumptions about self and others and the tolerance of anxiety. Learning Bowen theory is not simply an intellectual process. It requires students to continually observe, track, experiment with, and hypothesize how self and others function within emotional systems. The subtleties in accomplishing this necessitate a consistent, ongoing long-term effort.

It is predictable that some experiences in the Basic Seminar may trigger strong emotional responses. These often enhance learning and understanding. Persistent, unmanageable emotional responses should be discussed with the course organizers.

Program Structure

The Basic Seminar is divided into two terms. The first term runs from September 16, 2008 until December 16, 2008. The second term runs from January 13, 2009 until April 14, 2009.

The Basic Seminar is divided into two sections in both terms:

Lectures run from 5-6:30 PM. Lectures in the first term cover the major ideas and concepts of the theory. Lectures in the second term present how WPFC faculty members use Bowen theory in their personal and professional lives. The lectures are one source of information about ideas and concepts in Bowen theory and provide an opportunity to discuss the ideas and concepts. Students are expected to read about the ideas and concepts in advance of the lectures and will be expected to comment about this. A general reading list and suggested readings for each lecture is provided. Books and audio and video materials are available from the Educational Resource Center (ERC). Lectures are presented by different WPFC faculty members from week to week.

The Application of Theory section of the Basic Seminar runs from 6:30-8PM. Students present their efforts at learning the ideas and concepts of the theory as they apply in the context of their own family, work, and/or clinical relationships. The course organizers lead this each week.

Class Attendance

Class attendance is expected, as is class participation. Material presented in class will complement readings but will not duplicate them.

Writing

Some students have said that they have found it useful to prepare topic papers prior to the presentation of that topic in class. This might include the student's current best understanding of the topic of the week and/or its application in a personal or professional area. Others have found it useful to keep an ongoing record of what they read, and the ideas these readings stimulate in them. Others have found it useful to define in writing their best understanding of basic concepts and ideas. In addition, some faculty may ask students to address questions prior to that faculty member's lecture. The course organizers will comment on any writing if requested.

Student Project and Paper

During the year students are required to select and study a social organism from a natural systems perspective. The goal of the project is to observe and understand emotional systems in nature, to think beyond verbal communication and human functioning. The project is to be organized into a paper to be presented in class to students and faculty in April. The course organizers are available to assist in the development and completion of the project.

Educational Resource Center Library

The Educational Resource Center Library of Western Pennsylvania Family Center is unique in providing faculty, students and members with various educational resources on Bowen theory. DVDs, audio and videotapes, books, articles, reference materials and research assistance are some of the available resources. Students are strongly encouraged to use the resources of the ERC Library to provide individual learning experiences.

Other Learning Resources

Attendance at the Pittsburgh Conference/Symposium, the three lectures in the Lecture Series on Bowen Theory, and the five Clinical Forums are included in the Basic Seminar fee. Students are encouraged to attend as many of these events and other WPFC offerings as possible.

General Reading List

Students are expected to utilize the books, articles, audio, DVDs, and videotapes, and other learning resources that they find most useful to their own understanding of Bowen theory. Following are several texts that students may want to utilize. Suggested readings for each idea and concept will also be provided.

Bowen, M. (1978). *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*. New York: Jason Aronson.

Gilbert, R. *Extraordinary Relationships*. New York: John Wiley.

Kerr, M. and Bowen, M. (1988). *Family Evaluation*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Papero, D.V. (1990). *Bowen Family Systems Theory*. Needham Heights, MA, Allyn and Bacon.

Toman, W. (1976). *Family Constellation*, Springer.