

Specialized Training in Bowen Family Systems Theory and Therapy (Optional Practicum)

September 2025-June 2026 – Online Format

PROGRAM OUTLINE & APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Overview:

The specialized training program enables trainees to apply Bowen family systems theory to efforts in one's own family, clinical work and/or workplace. This program is approved by the registrar of the Private Training Institutions Regulatory Unit (PTIRU) of the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills & Training. The program began in 1984 and has developed a reputation within the community for providing a quality training option for clinicians and other professionals.

Murray Bowen, MD was one of the first persons to “think (natural) systems” about the human family. He is widely recognized as an originator of family systems theory and family therapy. The specialized training program is designed to provide a thorough introduction to Bowen theory, which provides the foundation for all the counselling, education and research conducted by Living Systems.

Learning Objectives

- To provide the trainee with a thorough introduction to systems thinking from the perspective of Bowen Theory, its methods, and techniques
- To apply the theory to efforts in one's own family and, if applicable, to their clinical work and workplace
- To relate Bowen Theory to knowledge from the natural sciences
- To introduce trainees to systems research

Admission Requirements

Applicants have a master's degree or are enrolled in a master's degree in counselling, social sciences or related fields, or are a member in good standing with the BCACC, CAMFT or CPCA. Applicants who are not pursuing a master's degree may also apply. All applicants can demonstrate a combination of life and work experience that, in the judgement of the faculty, will enable them to function successfully in the program as well as demonstrate an ability to reflect objectively on their own functioning in family and professional relationships. The faculty will make these judgments during the admissions interview and from letters of evaluation by others who know the candidates' personal and professional functioning. At least as important as educational preparation is the individual's openness to learning a new way of thinking about human functioning and the ability to manage oneself with reasonable maturity in their relationships with others.

Adequate English proficiency is requirement for trainees success in the program, as such, we require proof of English proficiency with either the International English Language Testing System (IELTS-academic version) at overall band score of 6.0 (with no band less than 6.0), the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) with 79 (Internet-Based), or 213 (computer-based), or 550 (paper based) and or English 12 (minimum 67%) in a Canadian school or English speaking US or International high school).

Method of Evaluation

Evaluation is based on the quality of trainees' engagement with the learning opportunities provided by the program. This includes participation in discussion of assigned readings, their effort to apply what they are learning in their own family and, if relevant, in their clinical work, and their openness to learning through individual and group consultation or supervision. Evaluation will also be based on the quality of short written assignments and the final research paper.

Trainees may only miss two scheduled meetings in the first year. Missed meetings must be made up as outlined in our attendance policy. Trainees must satisfactorily complete all aspects of the program including the final written paper at the end of the year. The course grade is pass, fail or incomplete. For further details see our Grade Evaluation Policy on the Living Systems website.

Optional Practicum Requirements

A trainee's opportunity to counsel clients of Living Systems depends on 4 variables: 1) The trainee must have a master's degree in a related field or be enrolled in a master's program in a related field 2) availability of clients, 3) Trainees must have sufficient professional and personal maturity to manage a clinical caseload responsibly and 4) The trainee resides in Canada. It will be assessed upon entry to the program that the Intern has had a course or training in counselling ethics and risk assessment. If this has not occurred additional training may be necessary. Ethical guidelines for clinical work are contained in the BCACC Code of Ethics. It is essential that all trainees seeing clients review this material thoroughly. Trainees are paid \$25 a session to see Living Systems clients but this does not include paperwork or preparation time.

Career Preparation

The training program enables trainees to work towards registration with the British Columbia Association of Clinical Counsellors and the Canadian Couple and Family Association or the Canadian Psychotherapy Counselling Association. The program contributes to trainees becoming competent marriage and family therapists, clinical counsellors, school counsellors, pastoral counsellors and social workers.

Program Duration

The program is a bi-weekly, part-time, nine-month period of study, beginning mid September and ending the first week in June (approximately 34 weeks in duration). The training components include lecture/discussion of theory, group and individual consultation, clinical meetings and conferences. It is defined as group and individual supervision if the trainee is seeing Living Systems clients and for those not seeing Living Systems clients it is defined as consultation. The program is usually scheduled bi-weekly on Tuesdays (with weekly group consultation or supervision). Trainees are also required to attend the monthly Clinical Meeting held once a month on a Tuesday evening. Trainees are required to attend any conferences sponsored by Living Systems.

Delivery Method

The program hours are 100% through distance education offered remotely from a BC location, excluding practicum experience, if applicable. There are approximately two hybrid events offered through the training year that provide an opportunity to network with colleagues. The program is synchronous, meaning students attend virtually in "real time" with instructors and classmates.

Required Hours

A breakdown of the program hours is listed below. It is defined as group and individual supervision if the trainee is seeing Living Systems clients and for those not seeing Living Systems clients it is defined as consultation.

1. Theory/presentation/dialogue/clinical meetings and conferences: 60 hours.
 2. Weekly Group Consultation or Supervision: 60 hours
 3. Individual or Paired Consultation or Supervision: 8 individual or 16 paired
- Total Requires hours = 128. These 128 hours are required for all trainees.

Each trainee is required to write an 8-10 page paper, double spaced, exploring some aspect of Bowen theory, its clinical or work application, its relationship to knowledge from the natural sciences and/or theological understanding. The paper is to be based on an academic or clinical research project and is to be presented in a specially designated clinical conference in the spring of the training year. Successful completion of the program requires both the oral and written presentation.

Other short assignments include a belief paper and a presentation of one of the concepts. A brief description of each assignment will be provided at the start of the program. A certificate will accompany the successful completion of the year's requirements. Please refer to the Program Policies for a complete description of the Grade Evaluation Policy and other important policies. There typically is one professional conference for Interns to attend, either the fall or spring, which is sponsored by Living Systems. Examples of these conferences can be found on our website. The Interns are also invited to other functions and presentations throughout the training year.

Class Size

The course is designed to allow in depth exploration of theory and discussion around the ideas; therefore, Living Systems works to maintain smaller training cohorts. The year one program needs a minimum of 5 to run each academic year, with a maximum of 12 participants being accepted. Clinical consultation or supervision groups will have a maximum of 6 participants per group.

Reading Material and Equipment

A book list (with price and source information for the required books) will be included in the acceptance letter (approximately \$200) and students are responsible for purchasing these items before the start of the program. Living Systems also has a library of family counselling related books, journals, audio and videotapes available upon request. Interns will have an opportunity to view the videotape collection of Dr. Bowen and other Bowen Center faculty discussing aspects of the theory. Students are required to supply their own computer and reliable internet connection.

Online Learning Platform

The training program utilizes a professional online learning platform called Google Classroom. A short tutorial is provided to new students to learn how to navigate this learning platform. Technical support is available during business hours. This professional learning platform has security features to protect personal information and student identify. Assignments are very individualized and there is a lot of one-on-one interaction to ensure students are understanding assignments and materials.

Tuition and Pay Schedule

The tuition for the first year is \$3,200. A deposit is due three weeks prior to the start of the program. The first tuition payment is due on the first day of class and the second portion is due January 3rd. Trainees are paid \$25 a session to see Living Systems clients but this does not include paperwork or preparation time.

Admissions Material (see APPLICATION FORM). The non-refundable application fee is \$120.

Deadline to Apply: Applications will be open in May and interviews will begin in June. We accept final applications by August 1 (late applications may be considered). A personal interview (or negotiated equivalent if distance precludes this) will be arranged with all applicants who are being considered for training on the basis of their written materials. Interviews will be completed by early September.

Please address inquiries and applications as follows:

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training@livingsystems.ca www.livingsystems.ca.