

CONF 795 POSITINING THEORY:
Understanding, applying and customizing Positioning Theory

General:

Semester: Spring 2013
Class Time: 1200am-0500pm
Classroom: Founders Hall 312
Instructor: Tobias Greiff
Office hours: Monday-Thursday 0800am-0500pm (by appointment)

Contact:

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Seminar overview:

Welcome to this course on Positioning Theory. Positioning Theory is a recently developed concept providing researchers from a wide variety of backgrounds and interests with a new conceptual framework on how to understand human behavior. Not surprisingly, several researchers have successfully utilized Positioning Theory as a framework to capture a variety of inter-personal and inter-group conflicts. However, Positioning Theory is more than just a new model on how to understand the world we are living in, it also offers a foundation on which researchers and practitioners can combine a vast variety of recent theories and methods in order to develop customized tools to tackle specific and highly complex conflict situations.

Therefore this seminar seeks to introduce Positioning Theory, together with some of its most promising applications for the field of conflict studies, to provide a new generation of researchers with a powerful tool for their own research projects. Because I believe that the best way of learning a complex theory lies in discovering its potential through hands-on experiences, students will be provided with extensive opportunities to observe, apply and criticize Positioning Theory in action. Combined with lectures on key elements of Positioning Theory the students will gain a comprehensive understanding of this new paradigm, how they can profit from its concepts, but also where they have to expect limitations.

Class schedule:

20. April: I.1 Introduction
Introduction/Syllabus
Before & after test (part 1)

(break)

I. 2 Positioning Theory (part 1: Moving from practice to theory)
Roots and genesis of Positioning Theory
The core concepts behind Positioning Theory
Positioning Theory: a new conflict theory?

(break)

I. 3 Positioning Analysis of an episode of inter-personal conflict
In class exercises
Discussion of assignment I. (Short paper)

27. April: II.1 Problems, problems, problems...
Review of core concepts
Presentations of assignment I. & discussion of problems

(break)

II. 2 Positioning Theory (part 2: Moving from theory to practice)
Finding creative solutions
Positioning Theory as a method
Developing new research tools

(break)

II. 3 Applying PT to model peace-negotiations
In class exercises
Discussion of assignment II. (Group presentation/simulation)

04. May: III. 1 Group presentations
Presentation of assignment II.
Discussion

(Short Break)

III. 2 Evaluation

Before & after test (part 2)

Evaluation of PT

(Short Break)

III. 3 Outlook

Discussion of future research/practice projects

Evaluation of class

Class requirements:

Final grades will be calculated with the following scheme:

Active class participation:	50 percent
Group presentation/simulation:	30 percent
Short paper:	20 percent

Active class participation: This is a graduate level seminar, and will include an introduction lecture to each topic followed by a facilitated discussion and practical in class exercises. Both discussion and exercises are crucial elements of academic reasoning and important for successful learning experience. You will be expected to do significant preparation outside of class by critically thinking about the different contents explored in class and the assigned texts, and come prepared with your thoughts and critical questions. Active participation in class discussions makes up 50 percent of the final grade.

A note on class readings: Each week of class has one essential text as your required reading, which you will be expected to complete in its entirety and come prepared to discuss. In addition, a list of suggested readings can be found at the end of this syllabus. These readings are not required, and will not count for or against your participation grade, but will significantly help to broaden your understanding of the concepts discussed, and may be useful in completing your homework assignments.

Short Paper: Your first homework will be to perform a complete positioning analysis of a recorded episode of conflict between two parties. Detailed explanation about the nature of the conflict and the different steps of analysis will be made in class. The paper should be around 1000 words (not including references) and is due in class on April the 27th. Please bring a hard copy to class so that you can refer to your findings in the discussion AND submit a copy as an email attachment formatted as either .doc, .docx, or any other open format for plagiarism checking (NO .pdfs). Late papers cannot be accepted. The paper will count towards 20 percent of the final grade.

Group Presentation: Your second homework will be to model a peace negotiation and present your findings in class. This will be a group projects in which different ideas derived from your knowledge of Positioning Theory shall be applied in a creative way. Detailed instructions will be given in class. The presentations will be held on the 4th of May and count as 30 percent of your final grade.

Assessment framework for written assignments

All assignments will be assessed and graded according to the following list of criteria. All points are important to achieve high grades, although the higher ranked criteria hold the most weight.

1. Overall complexity of chosen topic and depth of thought and reasoning
2. Clear reasoning, meaning:
 - a. A clear structure starting with a short introduction leading to a well-crafted thesis with a corresponding lead question
 - b. Strong development of points to support that thesis
 - c. Clarity of argument and conclusion
3. Chosen level of criticism, acknowledgment of one's own role as researcher
4. Efficient and proper use of references and citations
5. Precise and appropriate use of language and technical terminology
6. Overall text flow, special consideration of logical transition between paragraphs
7. Consistency in style of citation
8. Correct spelling, grammar and syntax

Layout for all written assignments:

All written work should be typed, double-spaced, using Times New Roman font size 12pt, with page numbers at the bottom of the page. Please keep the use of bolding and italicizing to a minimum.

Citation style:

Please use Chicago Style with EITHER footnotes or in-text citations and provide a full list of references. Do not use endnotes. Bibliographies will be graded for accuracy as well as diversity of references (do not use all websites, or all articles from one journal).

For an introduction to the Chicago style as well as many examples please visit:
http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism in any form will not be accepted, and plagiarized papers will receive a failing grade. Violations of the Honor Code will be reported. Please review the full University's Honor Code. <http://www.gmu.edu/academics/catalog/9798/honorcod.html#code>

Excerpt from George Mason University's Honor Code:

“II.B Plagiarism encompasses the following:

1. Presenting as one's own the words, the work, or the opinions of someone else without proper acknowledgment.
2. Borrowing the sequence of ideas, the arrangement of material, or the pattern of thought of someone else without proper acknowledgment.”

Student Writing Center:

For additional support of your written assignments please contact:

The Writing Center at George Mason University

Email: wcenter@gmu.edu

Telephone: 703-993-4491 (Arlington Campus)

Readings for:

27. April:

Required:

Davies, Bronwyn, and Rom Harré. "Positioning and Personhood." In *Positioning Theory: Moral contexts of intentional action*, edited by Rom Harré and Luke van Langenhove, pp. 32—52. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999. (Available on black-board)

Additional:

Harré, Rom, and Fathali Moghaddam. "Introduction: The Self and Others in Traditional Psychology and in Positioning Theory." In *The Self and Others: Positioning Individuals and Groups in Personal, Political, and Cultural Contexts*, edited by Rom Harré and Fathali Moghaddam, pp. 1–11. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003. (Available on black-board)

4. May:

Required:

Harré, Rom, et al. "Recent Advances in Positioning Theory." *Theory Psychology* 19, no. 1 (2009): pp. 5–31. (Available via e-journals)

Additional:

Friedman, Jonathan. "The Past in the Future: History and the Politics of Identity." *American Anthropologist: New Series* 94, no. 4 (1992): pp. 837–859. (Available via e-journals)

Tirado, Francisco, and Ana Gálvez. "Positioning Theory and Discourse Analysis: Some Tools for Social Interaction Analysis." *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 33, no. 1 (2008): pp. 224–251. (Available via e-journals)

Core texts on Positioning Theory:

Harré, Rom, and Luk v. Langenhove. *Positioning Theory: Moral Contexts of Intentional Action*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Harré, Rom, and Fathali Moghaddam. *The Self and Others: Positioning Individuals and Groups in Personal, Political, and Cultural Contexts*. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003.

Moghaddam, Fathali, Rom Harré, and Naomi Lee, eds. *Global Conflict Resolution through Positioning Analysis*. New York: Springer, 2008.