

CONFLICT 301
Research and Inquiry in Conflict Resolution
Fall 2007

Instructor: Karen Grattan
Meeting: Tues/Thurs 12:00-1:15 p.m.
Location: Innovation Hall 207

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Additional office hours available by appointment.

INTRODUCTION:

Practitioners in the field of conflict analysis and resolution are frequently called on to describe and explain a particular social conflict as well as propose and assess interventions for their resolution. For this reason, a conflict analysis and resolution specialist often takes a “practitioner-as-researcher” approach, ever bridging the gap between research and practice. This course will explore approaches to the production of knowledge for the purposes of analyzing and ultimately impacting complex social situations—specifically contexts where conflict is present. Most social problems are far too complex to be analyzed from just one perspective or resolved with the application of a few techniques. Because the field of conflict analysis and resolution is relatively young and takes a cross-disciplinary approach, this course will use exemplars from other fields as well as our own to explore the systematic study of human behavior and interaction.

This course will use lecture, discussion and experiential approaches to learning. We will take advantage of several exciting and very relevant events that are taking place around campus to support our study. For this reason, the syllabus will remain somewhat flexible and topics may be moved to accommodate class activities.

This class will also make heavy use various technologies to support our collaboration and communication. You will be introduced to our class LearningSpace during the first week. This technology is very easy to use and most students find it supportive to their classroom experience.

OBJECTIVES:

- Introduce students to ways of thinking about complex problems and to the various methods employed for producing knowledge about human social issues.
- Provide a basis for more advanced study of research methodology
- Assist students in becoming more capable readers, critics, users and doers of research
- Build basic competencies in action research and evaluation
- Develop an appreciation for, and improve skills related to collaboration in the research endeavor.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Cultural Autobiography—your first assignment of the semester will be to consider your personal ‘cultural’ autobiography. This assignment encourages you to consider how you “show up” in the world based on the rich and varied aspects of your cultural heritage—e.g. country and/or region of origin, gender, education and experience, language, race, religion, physical abilities or disabilities, etc. The aim of this assignment is to improve the relevancy of your analyses by promoting your awareness of your individual values, beliefs and assumptions and how they impact your work.

Ethnographic exercise—beginning with an issue or context of your choosing, this exercise will allow you to extend your understanding of the experience and perspectives of stakeholders “native” to the issue/context. You should plan on spending at least 2 hours engaged in participant observation (you can break this into 2 visits if needed.) This will be a

place in which you are novice about the beliefs, values, concerns, behavior and cultural patterns being practiced by the group. You will take careful fieldnotes as part of this exercise that will serve as the basis for formulating descriptions and producing accounts. Details will be provided later in the course and we will brainstorm possible sites for your observation.

Portfolio Entries—during the semester you will post 3 short (approximately 1 single-spaced page) pieces in the class LearningSpace. You will also respond to 3 of your colleagues work. These will be analytic pieces that do not require outside research, rather, they are practice opportunities for assessing some of the types of data that we will be working with and talking about in class. Details will be placed in the course LearningSpace and discussed during class including due dates, exactly how your work will be evaluated, and what is expected in terms of your reading of classmates work.

Research and Inquiry Capstone—this is final project for the class and will serve to bring together and extend the approaches we have taken during the course in a **TEAM CONTEXT**. The object of the project is identify and frame an issue—giving key questions you would ask and approaches you might take for your analysis. In effect, your group **IS** the stakeholder group and you will practice navigating divergent views and making meaning around an issue of joint concern. There will be a group presentation, but the written piece (7-10 double-spaced pages) will be an individual submission. Much more detail will be given later in the course and class “workshop” time will be allotted.

EVALUATION:

Cultural Autobiography—15%

Ethnographic exercise—15%

Portfolio entries and portfolio responses—20%

Research and Inquiry Capstone—30%

Class participation—20%

An important word about participation: A pedagogical premise of this course is that learning is most effective when supported by cycles of reflection and action. A further basic premise is that critical reflection is enhanced through generative dialogue. The course is structured to support lively interaction among students. Students participate fully when they prepare appropriately for discussions and are able to make contributions by offering their own thoughtful perspectives, attending carefully to others' thoughts, and asking good questions. Such participation requires constancy in all the course modalities—face-to-face and online. Participation is time-dependent; it is not possible for an individual to somehow “make up” a lack of participation. Class attendance is mandatory except in very extenuating circumstances.

... and group work: Practice and research in conflict analysis and resolution never occurs in isolation. Making a commitment to your collaborations and practicing the skills that make collaboration effective is critical to your success both in this class and in your future practice. Because your group collaboration will in part occur during class as well as in your private (to other groups) group room in the LearningSpace, the instructor will be fully aware of the level of participation of each group member. Also, the instructor will provide a confidential assessment that each person will submit in which they evaluate the contribution of each group member (including themselves).

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Stringer, Ernest (1999). *Action Research, 2nd Edition*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. (Note: Book abbreviation used: **AR**)

Other assigned materials will be posted in the **Course Materials** area of the LearningSpace under the week for which the reading is due, or placed on e-reserve.

ACADEMIC POLICIES AND INFORMATION

Academic Honesty

George Mason University has an Honor Code with guidelines regarding academic integrity and which is designed, "to promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community" (www.gmu.edu/catalog/apolicies). The Honor Code lays out strict penalties for cheating and plagiarism.

Plagiarism is a serious offense, and all written work for this course should include proper citations in a standard citation format (MLA, APA, etc.). *If you are unsure about how to cite a direct quotation or concept from course or outside readings, then ask for help.* Copies of common style manuals are available at the GMU library reference desk or online.

GMU Writing Center

"The Writing Center seeks to foster a writing climate on campus and beyond by offering free writing support to George Mason students, faculty, staff and alumni. No matter what your writing abilities are, writing specialists can help you develop the skills you need to become a successful writer....Free services include: One-on-one 45 minute sessions with a writing specialist; online writing lab; one-on-one sessions with an ESL specialist; workshops on such topics as documenting sources, grammar and punctuation; writing handouts on a variety of subjects; a library of handbooks and writing manuals; [and an] online chat with a tutor about papers submitted to the Online Writing Lab" (<http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>).

Disability Support Services

Any student with documented learning disabilities or other conditions that may affect academic performance should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with the Office of Disability Support Services (993-2474) to determine the possible accommodations you might need; and 2) contact her or his instructor to discuss reasonable accommodations.

"George Mason University is committed to providing appropriate services and accommodations that allow self-identified students with disabilities to access programs and activities at the university as stated in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

To achieve this goal, the university maintains and supports the Disability Resource Center Office which is responsible for assuring that students receive the services and accommodations to which they are entitled. The professional staff of the Disability Resource Center Office coordinate services for students with disabilities, determine reasonable services and accommodations on the basis of disability, and act as a liaison between students and faculty/administration on concerns relating to services and accommodations" (<http://www.gmu.edu/departments/advising/dss.html>).

WEEKLY SCHEDULE:

NOTES:

- Week 1:** August 28/ August 30 **DUE:** Access and post in LS
- Topics: Introduction to the course and technology
Prep: NONE
- Approaches to knowledge creation in the social sciences (Rothbart)
Prep: **AR** *Forward, Preface, Chapter 1, Chapter 2*
- Week 2:** September 4/September 6
- Topics: Introduction to evaluation research in CAR (Rothbart)
Prep: *Action Evaluation in the theory and practice of CR* (in **LS**)
- Class discussion: Listening for understanding (Stryjewski)
Prep: *Hermeneutic Listening in Multicultural Conversations* (in **LS**)
- Week 3:** September 11/September 13
- Topics: Introduction to ethnographic methodology and culture (Hirsch)
Prep: Readings in LearningSpace, Review **AR** *Chapter 2*
- REQUIRED** CAR Event: Reports from the field (light lunch provided)
Prep: NONE
- Week 4:** September 18/September 20 **DUE:** Cultural Autobiography
- Topics: Setting the Stage: Conflict as a complex social problem
Prep: **AR** *Chapter 3*
- Practitioner-as-researcher, Action research and action evaluation
Prep: *Dilemmas* article (**LS**)
- Week 5:** September 25/September 27
- Topics: LOOK: Building the Picture
Prep: **AR** *Chapter 4*
- THINK: Interpreting and Analyzing
Prep: **AR** *Chapter 5*
- Week 6:** October 2/October 4 **DUE:** Details of Ethnographic Exercise & Portfolio submissions & responses
- Topics: Interviews and focus groups
Prep: Web resources—Links provided in **LS**
- Class exercise in interviewing
Prep: Review Tuesday's notes and readings
- Week 7:** October 9/October 11 **Fall Break** (No class Tuesday)
- Topic: Narratives all around us—people's stories as data
Prep: Web resources—Links provided in **LS**

Week 8: October 16/October 18

DUE: Portfolio Submission 1

Topics: What is discourse? How is it analyzed?
Prep: Web resources—Links provided in **LS**

Class exercise

Week 9: October 23/October 25

DUE: Portfolio Submission 2

Topics: Images, Icons and visual media
Prep: Web resources—Links provided in **LS**

Class exercise

Week 10: October 30/November 1

DUE: Portfolio Submission 3

Topics: Introduction to the final project and all its components
Class activity: Forming groups (No prep)

Week 11: November 6/November 8

Topics: Determining what is important
Project workshop

Prep: **AR:** Chapter 6

Week 12: November 13/November 15

Topics: Developing models

Prep: **AR:** Chapter 7

Week 13: November 20/November 22

Thanksgiving (No class Thursday)

Topics: Formal reports

Prep: **AR:** Chapter 8

Week 14: November 27/November 29

Course Evaluation

In-class project workshop

Week 15: December 4/December 6

Final Project Presentations

Tuesday December 11, 2007

Final Paper Due 1:00 p.m.