

Culture and Conflict
George Mason University
Spring 2009

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Office hours: Wednesdays, 6PM – 7PM, or by appt.

Course time and location: Wednesdays, Original 335 (TBD), 7:20 pm - 10:00 pm

INTRODUCTION:

This graduate course will explore the relationship between culture and conflict resolution as a key problem for our field. We will consider the conceptual difficulties in understanding “culture” and other frameworks of group identity, study how group identity becomes important in protracted social conflicts, and examine the problems of culture through case studies and special topics. This is obviously a big and important area and there is only so much we can do over a semester. Nevertheless, when you leave this course you should have a greater appreciation for the ways in which culture and cultural systems present both challenges and opportunities for conflict researchers and practitioners.

BOOKS (required):

1. Avruch, Kevin, *Culture and Conflict Resolution*, USIP Press, 1998. [CCR]
2. Avruch, Kevin, Peter Black, and Joe Scimecca, *Conflict Resolution: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, Praeger, 1998. [CR]
3. Cohen, Raymond, *Negotiating Across Cultures*, USIP Press, 1997. [NC]
4. Malkki, Liisa, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*, University of Chicago Press, 1995. [PE]
5. Goodale, Mark, *Dilemmas of Modernity: Bolivian Encounters with Law and Liberalism*, Stanford University Press, 2009. [DoM]

COURSE FORMAT:

The course is a graduate seminar and will, therefore, involve the following features and expectations: (1) students will be expected to come to each seminar with the readings fully digested and prepared to engage in a sustained interactive discussion of both critical concepts found in the readings, and ongoing themes that the seminar will inevitably develop; (2) seminar participants will be expected to engage in discussion and, at times, debate, with respect for the differences in background, belief, and ideology found at ICAR; and (3) students will be expected to devote themselves to their written work with the kind of energy associated with graduate study and to turn in assignments on time. Seminars will feature a combination of context-setting exposition by the professor,

student presentation of critical concepts in the readings, discussion structured by student-prepared questions, free discussion, and, hopefully, guest lectures or presentations.

EVALUATION:

1. Mid-term paper: Students will turn in a mid-term paper worth 25% of the final grade. Papers are due on **March 18**. Students will write an 5-page, double-spaced essay, *using the course readings*, in response to one of several possible questions, to be distributed at the end of class on **March 4**.

2. Research Paper and Presentation: students will write a 15-18-page, double-spaced research paper on a relevant topic on culture and conflict. Proposals for research papers are due in class on **February 25**. These papers will be due on or before **April 29**. During the last two class sessions, students will make presentations on the substance and importance of their culture and conflict research papers. Students should feel free to use whatever audio-visual techniques will enhance presentations. The paper and presentation will be worth 45% of your final grade.

3. Culture and Conflict of the Week: Beginning in the second week, student teams will begin each course with a presentation of a “culture and conflict of the week.” Students will select one conflict from current news and present a 20-minute SPITCEROW-type conflict analysis. Assignments will be randomly made and distributed during the first week of class. This will be worth 10% of your final grade.

4. Points for Discussion: Beginning in the second week of class, students will be assigned points for discussion. They will have the responsibility for preparing “points for discussion” for the rest of the class. If possible, the points should be distributed via email before our Wednesday evening seminars. During the second part of each class, the discussion teams will introduce the points and take the lead in facilitating a discussion about them. This will be worth 15% of the final grade.

5. Participation: Because this is a graduate seminar, active participation is vital to its success. Even if students will be reading and thinking about certain issues and concepts for the first time, they will be expected to address them critically, substantively, and with an eye toward developing reasoned independent positions. This portion of the class will be worth 5% of the final grade.

** We will discuss class requirements and expectations in detail during our first class meeting.

Introduction to course and course participants

Wednesday January 21

- Detailed introduction to course, assignments, expectations, participants.

The Culture Concept and Conflict Resolution

January 28

Avruch, CCR, pp. 3-22

Avruch, et. al., CR, pp. 1-18

Goodale, "Culture on the Half Shell" to be distributed via email

February 4

Avruch, CCR, pp. 23-73

Avruch, et. al., CR, Ch. 6, 8

February 11

Avruch, CCR, pp. 74-109

Avruch, et. al., CR, Ch. 5, 7

Culture, Conflict Resolution, and International Diplomacy

February 18

Cohen, NC, pp. 3-66

February 25

Cohen, NC, pp. 67-134

March 4

Cohen, NC, pp. 135-226

MIDTERM QUESTIONS DISTRIBUTED

Ethnic Conflict, Violence, and Memory

March 18

Malkki, PE, Ch. 1, 2, 3

MIDTERM ESSAYS DUE IN CLASS

March 25

Malkki, PE, Ch. 3, 4, 5, Postscript

Culture and Conflict in Out-of-Way Places

April 1

Goodale, DOM, Ch. 3, 4

April 8

Goodale, DOM, Ch. 5, 6, Conclusion

Culture, Human Rights, and Conflict Resolution

April 15

Speed, Shannon, *Rights in Rebellion*, Ch. 1, 5, 8, books and photocopies available on ICAR reserve

April 22

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS OF RESEARCH PROJECTS

April 29

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS OF RESEARCH PROJECTS

COURSE EVALUATIONS

Final research papers due in class