

Conflict 601: 001
Theories of Conflict and Conflict Resolution
Fall 2011
David Alpher, Ph.D.
Tuesdays, 7:10-10PM

Welcome to Conflict 601! This course will explore a variety of conceptual frameworks for analyzing and resolving conflict. Our objectives include:

1. Examining and critiquing social theories that may prove useful in analyzing various types of social conflict;
2. Evaluating the usefulness of these social theories by applying them to specific conflict situations;
3. Assisting students to become better critics of conflict-related theories and more acute conflict analysts;
4. Enabling them to develop their own abilities to construct useful theories of conflict and conflict resolution; and
5. Empowering students to become explicitly aware of their own personal and cultural assumptions about the causes of conflict and possibilities for its resolution.

Instructor and Office Hours

This section of the course is taught by David Alpher. He can be reached at dalpher@gmu.edu, or in an emergency at 703-380-5755. His office hours are before class and by appointment; he is available to discuss the course or other matters of interest.

Grading and Related Matters

Grades in this course will be based on three major components. The first will be a take-home mid-term (35%). The second will be a final research paper in which each student will select a conflict of particular interest to him or her, and offer original analysis and proposals for resolution (40%). Finally, participation will count 25%, reflecting its importance to the course. In order to receive a passing grade, it is necessary to attend classes prepared to discuss the week's reading. Late examinations or papers will be graded down one full grade for each day or part of a day that the paper is late, unless the student furnishes written documentation of the medical or family emergency which made timely completion of the work impossible. Please note that it is S-CAR policy to refuse to grant grades of Incomplete for reasons other than documented medical or family emergencies. (For more information about grading, please look at the statement on academic standards in the S-CAR Handbook and GMU's Honor Code.)

Course Materials

Those articles not within assigned books will either be emailed or placed on the class blackboard site. Depending upon course dynamics, the professor reserves the right to make alterations in the reading materials and/or weekly focus; the books I have required for purchase will not shift, however.

Required reading materials are mandatory. Discussions in class will be facilitated based on the assumption that all students have read and reflected on all the required reading. Further reading materials are optional yet useful for students to deepen their understanding of the particular subjects under study. In addition, students are encouraged to follow and critically examine daily news reports

on current events related to social conflict, for they will be discussed in class to supplement the assigned reading materials.

University requirements are listed immediately below in language suggested by the Provost's Office. We will take time in the first class to discuss any questions that you may have about this material, including questions about plagiarism.

Academic integrity:

All George Mason University students have agreed to abide by the letter and the spirit of the Honor Code. You can find a copy of the Honor Code at academicintegrity.gmu.edu. All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee for review. With specific regards to plagiarism, three fundamental and rather simple principles to follow at all times are that: (1) all work submitted be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification. If you have questions about when the contributions of others to your work must be acknowledged and appropriate ways to cite those contributions, please talk with the professor.

S-CAR requires that all written work submitted in partial fulfillment of course or degree requirements must be available in electronic form so that it can be compared with electronic databases, as well as submitted to commercial services to which the School subscribes. Faculty may at any time submit a student's work without prior permission from the student. Individual instructors may require that written work be submitted in electronic as well as printed form. S-CAR's policy on plagiarism is supplementary to the George Mason University Honor Code; it is not intended to replace or substitute for it.

English Language Institute:

The English Language Institute offers free English language tutoring to non-native English speaking students who are referred by a member of the GMU faculty or staff. For more information contact 703-993-3642 or malle2@gmu.edu.

The Writing Center:

The Writing Center is a free writing resource that offers individual, group, and online tutoring. For general questions and comments please contact us at wcenter@gmu.edu or call: 703-993-4491. GMU email accounts: Students must activate their GMU email accounts to receive important University information, including messages related to this class.

Office of Disability Services:

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS. [Hht://ods.gmu.edu](http://ods.gmu.edu)

Course Materials:

The required articles and book chapters in this course will be delivered to students via email or placed on the ICAR Community Forum (<http://icarcommunity.ning.com>), or will be available at the John Burton Library. This will be communicated at least one week prior to each successive class.

Required reading materials are mandatory. Recommended materials are optional but very useful for students wishing to deepen their understanding of the subjects under study. In addition, students are strongly encouraged to follow and critically examine daily news reports on current events related to social conflict; they will be discussed in class to supplement the assigned reading materials.

Required texts:

Rhodes, Richard. *Why They Kill: The Discoveries of a Maverick Criminologist*. Vintage Books, 1999

Bates, Robert H. *When Things Fell Apart: State Failure in Late-Century Africa*. Cambridge University Press, 2008

Sprinzak, Ehud. *Brother Against Brother: Violence and Extremism in Israeli Politics from Altalena to the Rabin Assassination*. Free Press, 1999

Course Structure

In broad outline, three types of social theories will be studied in this course:

1. Theories of human nature – viewing each individual as a unit of analysis; accounting for “what is inside *you*,” with an emphasis on what lies beneath the person’s consciousness. In application we could understand this as increasing our ability to understand the mind and reactions of a person in a conflict situation.
2. Theories of culture – viewing an epistemological system of meaning-making as a unit of analysis; accounting for “what is inside *us*,” with an emphasis on shared interpretive lenses with which to understand social phenomena.
3. Theories of structure – viewing a social institution, typically comprised of sustained, hierarchical and multi-layered human relationships, as a unit of analysis; accounting for “what you/we are *inside of*.”

These three types are loose categories that overlap significantly and are best understood when cross-pollinated. Human nature theories include basic human needs, aggression and psychoanalysis. Structural theories include realism and functionalism, Marxism and modernization and globalization (week 10). Cultural theories include meaning-making and some aspects of the session focusing on alternative starting points for theory-building. Other specific theories may be mentioned in a specific week and will be discussed in class.

In order to help students assess the practical strengths and limitations of these theories, we will incorporate a series of case studies within the course. We will also stress examples from our collective experience and from current news.

Schedule of classes and assignments

Week 1: *Introduction to the course*

This session will offer an overview of the course and explore why we need to study social theory for conflict analysis and resolution.

No required reading

Week 2: Realism and Functionalism

Required reading:

Hans J. Morgenthau. 1967. *Politics among Nations*, 3-14, 25-35 and 162-171

Lewis A. Coser. 1956. *The Functions of Social Conflict*, 33-65

Further theory to consider: structuration

Week 3: *Basic Human Needs*

Required reading:

John Burton. 1979. *Institutional Values and Human Needs*, from *Deviance, Terrorism and War: The Process of Solving Unresolved Social and Political Problems*, 85-94

Johann Galtung. 1991. *Conflict: Human Needs Theory*. Ed. John Burton, 301-335

Robert H. Bates: *When Things Fell Apart*, Intro - chapter 4

Week 4: *Aggression and relative deprivation*

Required reading:

Richard Rhodes: *Why They Kill*

Ted Robert Gurr, 1971. *Why Men Rebel*, chapter 2: Relative Deprivation and the Impetus to Violence.

Theories to consider: social learning theory; cognitive dissonance; frustration-aggression

Week 5: *Psychoanalytic Perspectives*

Required reading:

Stephen A. Mitchell and Margaret J. Black: *Freud and Beyond, A History of Modern Psychoanalytic Thought*. Chapter 1

Vamik Volkan: 1997. *Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism*. Pp.19-29, 36-49 and 81-100

David Alpher and Daniel Rothbart: *Good Violence and the Myth of the Eternal Soldier*, in *Identity, Morality and Threat*, 2006

Theories to consider: direct, structural and cultural violence

Week 6: *Case Analysis*

There is no reading assigned for this week. As opposed to regular case study examples, this will be a more in-depth examination. Case study materials will be emailed to you at least one week prior to this session. Be ready to apply each of the theories learned in weeks 1 through 5 in the analysis and resolution of the conflict described in the scenario. Then ask these questions: 1) how useful is each theory for explaining why the conflict emerged and grew in a way it did? 2) How helpful is the theory in your attempt to explore possible ways to resolve the conflict? 3) What similarities and differences do you find between alternative theoretical approaches to conflict analysis and resolution? There is no need to submit your answers to these and other questions in writing. But be prepared to present your thoughts in class.

Week 7: *Meaning-making (including culture, worldview and civilization)*

MIDTERM EXAM DISTRIBUTED IN CLASS

Required reading:

Kevin Avruch and Peter Black. 1991. *The Culture Question and Conflict Resolution*. *Peace and Change*, 16 (1) 22-45

Ehud Sprinzak: *Brother Against Brother*, chapters 1-5

Week 8: *class...*

Required reading:

David McLellan, *Karl Marx*, Penguin 1976, pp. 19-75

Richard Rubenstein, *Analyzing and Resolving Class Conflict*, chapter 10, Conflict Resolution Theory and Practice: Integration and Application; Dennis J.D. Sandole and Hugo van der Merwe, eds.

Week 9: *... and sector*

Required reading:

Brother Against Brother, chapters 6-9

Week 10: *Modernization and globalization*

Required reading:

C.E. Black. 1966. *The Dynamics of Modernization: A Study in Comparative History*, 1-34

Paul Collier, 2006. *Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and Their Implications for Policy*. 1-25 (available online at <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~econpco/research/pdfs/EconomicCausesofCivilConflict-ImplicationsforPolicy.pdf>)

Richard Rubenstein. 2008 *Conflict Resolution in an Age of Empire: New Challenges to an Emerging Field*, from Sandole and Byrne, Handbook of Conflict Resolution Theory and Practice.

When Things Fell Apart, chapters 5 and 6

Week 11: *Non-Western perspectives on conflict*

Most reading materials for this course are derived from contemporary Western epistemological traditions. In this session, we will explore alternative epistemological starting points for theory-building, asking questions like: What if CONF 601 were to be taught in a completely different epistemological and geographic context?; What would this syllabus look like if S-CAR had emerged as an epistemic community based in Baghdad, Hanoi, Durban or elsewhere? The point of asking these counterfactual questions is to critically reflect on the underlying assumptions from which the theoretical knowledge learned in this course has historically evolved. Through this exercise, we will explore alternative approaches to conceptualizing social conflict and conflict resolution.

Required reading:

Mohammed Abu-Nimer. 2000-2001. *A Framework for Nonviolence and Peacebuilding in Islam*. The Journal of Law and Religion. Vol. 15, no 1 & 2. 217-265

Nomonde Masina. 2000. *Xhosa Practices of Ubuntu for South Africa*. Traditional Cures for Modern Conflicts. Edited by I.W. Zartman, pp. 169-181

Week 12: *Postmodernism*

Required reading:

Michel Foucault. 1979. Chapters titled “The Body of the Condemned and “Illegalities and Delinquency.” *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Pp. 3-31 and 257-292

STUDENT RESEARCH PAPER TOPICS MUST BE APPROVED BY THIS DATE

Week 13: *Interventions and resolutions*

Articles researched by students

Week 14: *Conclusion: What have we learned about conflict theory? What more do we need to discover?*

This session will provide 360-degree reflections on the course. Exercises include: 1) mapping the theories of conflict from a bird’s eye perspective and identifying different types of theories; 2) offering a brief overview of important theories left out of this course; 3) understanding similarities and differences between theories of conflict analysis and theories of conflict resolution; and 4) envisioning what new theories are needed and what they might look like. Bring your questions to class for discussion.

Week 16: FINAL EXAMS DUE BY 5pm