



## Course Guidelines, Policies and Procedures

**Active engagement:** Research skills, like any other skills, can best be acquired through practice, reflection and application. Therefore students will learn by doing in all aspects of the course. Most of our time will be divided between discussion, hands-on exercises and peer feedback on research proposals. I expect you to have studied the required readings prior to class. Take time to digest the new methods and ideas before you come to class and be prepared to apply them or to ask about points that remain unclear. Each week we will spend some time hearing from class members on the development of your research proposal. Perhaps the most important part of the course is this process of creating a research community that shares ideas, experiences, expertise, challenges, and reflective thought. Everyone must come to class prepared to offer constructive feedback and suggestions. Since these assignments build on each other, you will be able to leverage your work and your understanding most effectively by completing and reflecting on each piece as assigned. Expect this course to have a moderate to heavy workload. Ask questions and raise concerns. If something is unclear or is not working effectively for you educationally, please tell me. I am reachable by e-mail and/or during office hours and by appointment.

**Missed classes:** As this class is taught in a seminar/discussion format, its success depends on active and sustained participation by all those in the course. The more each person participates, the more learning will take place for everyone. If you miss a class, you should take responsibility for finding out what you missed and get the notes from a colleague. You will be asked to evaluate your own participation in and preparedness for class at the end of the semester.

**Due dates:** You are responsible for completing assignments on time. Late assignments may be penalized.

**Assistance:** If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703.993.2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

The ability to write papers that are clear, analytical and your own work is essential. If you aren't already good at this, you can learn. The Writing Center is available to all Mason students and offers online and individual consultations as well as workshops and mini-courses. The Writing Center is available to all Mason students and offers online and individual consultations as well as workshops and mini-courses. Writers at all levels can benefit. Each Mason campus has a location. You can find them on the Arlington Campus in the Founder's Hall, Room 212, by phone at (703) 993-4491, by email at [wcenter@gmu.edu](mailto:wcenter@gmu.edu), or online at: [writingcenter.gmu.edu/](http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/)

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) 993-3660 or [eli@gmu.edu](mailto:eli@gmu.edu).

**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](http://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 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.

The writing center provides excellent resources on research and avoiding plagiarism at: <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/resources-template.php?id=1> . I strongly recommend that you review requirements regarding use, paraphrasing and citation of sources prior to submitting your final work.

**Incompletes:** Per GMU policy, incomplete grades will not be granted save in cases of personal or immediate family illness or emergency.

**Assignments:** All assignments should be double-spaced and use standard Times New Roman-12pt font. Consistent use of a standardized citation format is required.

## Course Materials

We will be using the following required texts:

Creswell, John W. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009.

Robson, Colin. *Real world research: A resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002.

Seidman, Irving. *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Teachers College Press, 2006.

Yin, Robert. *Case study research: Design and methods*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, *Applied Social Research Methods Series, Vol. 5*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009.

Additional required readings and supplemental materials will be available on the class website and several assignments will utilize the discussion section for posting and feedback. All students are responsible for downloading and reading assignments *before* they are discussed in class. The course website is at: [courses.gmu.edu](http://courses.gmu.edu)

## Course Requirements

Active Engagement: (10%) Attendance is extremely important as the course is interactive and elicitive in nature. Participation is critical to student learning; students will be expected to engage each other in discussions about the assigned readings and research proposals. You can also participate by asking questions, circulating emails, organizing study groups, exchanging writing, or introducing new ideas and resources.



**Research Log:** Keeping a journal provides another mechanism for active engagement with the readings and concepts. When kept from the initial attempts to formulate a question through the analysis of results this can provide an invaluable record of your progress as well as a place to work out difficult aspects of the research process. Informal prompts will be given on suggested journaling topics and an online space is provided—see the Research Log in the online discussion section. At the end of the course, a final entry will be a self-assessment. Further guidelines will be provided in class. Due: November 30<sup>th</sup>.

Exam/Quiz: (5%) A short answer and multiple choice question quiz will be posted online in October covering key concepts in social science research.

Problem Statement and Literature Review: (20%) The first steps toward the development of your research proposal require identifying an area of investigation and the literature which informs your topic. The problem statement should contain:

- A basic introduction to the problem you are investigating.
- References to your literature review to show why this problem is significant.
- The purpose of your study. What is your aim?
- Questions or hypotheses that guide your investigation.

In conjunction with your problem statement you should conduct a fairly thorough review of the relevant literature and analyze what is known and not known about this problem, including the best methods for inquiry. The goal here is to increase and demonstrate your familiarity with the subject, to locate the problem within existing sources and resources, and to convince the readers, myself and other class members, of the necessity for studying the problem. The literature review should contain:

- A basic definition of your problem or question.
- An overview of the arguments in the field regarding the problem or question.
- An analysis of the current literature to show a) its strengths and deficiencies and b) the necessity for your research.

Length: approximately 6 to 8 pages. We will work with your initial drafts of the problem statement and literature review in class and online prior to the final due date. Due: September 28<sup>th</sup>.

Draft Research Design: (25%) This assignment is a 4 to 5 page paper referring to your Research Question and Literature Review, but focusing on your overall research design and the methods you plan to use to collect and analyze data. The draft research design should contain:

- A *brief* (½ to ¾ page) reintroduction of your problem and a clear statement of your hypotheses/questions.
- An overview of your research design, including the data collection and analysis methods you intend to use. Be sure to explain why this design suits the problem at hand.
- Your sampling scheme or where you plan to obtain your data.
- A discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of your design and data collection and how you plan to address any weaknesses.
- A description of the portion of the research design you intend to pilot for the purposes of producing your final Research Report.

Due dates: Draft due for peer review October 19<sup>th</sup>. Final due October 26<sup>th</sup>.

Research Portfolio: (40%) The culminating assignment for this course will be a research portfolio that contains several elements. The first is a proposal submitted as though you were applying for funding from a particular agency. There is no word limitation on this paper, but I will find it difficult to read papers that are too lengthy—recommended length is 18 to 20 pages excluding appendices. The proposal should include elements from all of the previous assignments—significant editing and revising is expected. You will also include in the portfolio a summary report (4-5 pages) on your pilot study addressed to fellow researchers:

- Your revised Problem Statement with arguments or hypotheses.
- A refined version of your Literature Review focusing on highlights, analyses and why your research is necessary.
- Your revised research design.
- A work plan including a timeline for completion of a final study.
- A resources required section with categories.
- Some indication of your final product and how you plan to disseminate it.
- Human subjects review application.
- Draft research instruments for your pilot study. Depending on your study design these may include interview questionnaires, survey instruments, focus group guides and questionnaires, observation protocols, and/or document collection protocols.

Pilot report:

- A description of the pilot research you performed
- An analysis of the pilot research you performed: how you did it, what you learned and how it has affected your research design (confirming it, requiring modifications, etc.)
- Reflections on you the researcher and the research process

So that we may learn from each other, part of this assignment will be a public presentation on your research topic and/or process—venue and format to be determined.

Final Research Portfolio: Due December 14<sup>th</sup> by 6pm.

## Initial Class Schedule and Assignments

(Note: This schedule may be modified during the semester)

### **Week 1, August 31:**

Introduction to the course, administrative matters, conflict interests, research background.  
Research as awareness and observation.

**To do:** Brainstorm ideas and problems in conflict and research (in class)

### **Week 2, September 7:**

Social science research and the multidisciplinary nature of conflict studies. Overview of research approaches: inductive and deductive, qualitative and quantitative, positivists and constructivists.

**Reading:** Creswell, Chapter 1  
Robson, Part One—Chapters 1 & 2

Research examples: Selections from *Peace and Conflict*, special issue on Forgiveness (online)

**To Do:** Review the articles on forgiveness. Which studies did you find most appealing? Difficult? Why? How would you categorize the studies? (see worksheet)

### **Week 3, September 14:**

Problems & questions in conflict analysis & resolution. Developing questions; designing research. Concept mapping. Turning questions into projects. Locating background material and understanding what you've found. Purpose statements. Hypotheses and research questions.

**Reading:** Creswell, Chapters 2 & 3  
Robson, Chapter 3

Research examples: Negotiation journal research digest (webpage, choose one) and “*Effects of Race, Sex, and Victims’ Reasons for Victim-Offender Dialogue,*” Ian M. Borton

**To do:** Initial Problem Identification, before class. Your first assignment will be to draft one page (200-700 words) detailing a problem in conflict resolution that you feel needs to be addressed with a research project. This assignment will lead to your literature review and research question, so you should try to think of something that interests you, that you have some knowledge about and that is researchable. Post to class web page prior to class and respond with feedback to at least two classmates before the next class.

#### **Week 4, September 21:**

Designing the inquiry. Fixed and flexible designs. Peer discussion of research problems.

**Reading:** Creswell, Chapters 4, 5, 6 & 7  
Robson: Chapter 4  
Yin, Chapters 1 & 2 (Introduction, Designing Case Studies)

**To do:** Concept mapping in-class for literature review.

#### **Week 5, September 28:**

Flexible designs: Case Studies and Grounded Theory.

**Reading:** Creswell, pp. 129-132, 173-202  
Robson, Chapter 6

Research examples: Hill, “*Problem-solving workshops*,” Nan, et al  
“*Unofficial International Conflict Resolution...*” (Case Studies), Veale &  
Stavrou, “*Former Lord’s Resistance Army Child Abductees*” (Grounded  
Theory)

**To do:** Literature review & problem statement due.

#### **Week 6, October 5:**

Fixed designs. Design focus: Experiments and Surveys, Thinking with numbers and structure.

**Reading:** Creswell: pp. 132-170  
Robson, Chapter 5

Research examples: Tjosvold, et al. ‘*Is the Way You Resolve Conflicts...*’  
(survey), and Lilliea & Janoff-Bulmana, “*Macro versus Micro Justice...  
TRC’s*” (experiment)

**To do:**

#### **Week 7, October 12:**

Research design continued. Focus: Action and Evaluation research. Subjects or partners?

**Reading:** Robson, Chapter 7 and review Chapter 6

Research examples: Rothman, Jay. (1997) “*Action evaluation and conflict  
resolution training...*” and Wayne, Ellen. (2008) “*Is it just talk?  
Understanding and Evaluating Intergroup Dialogue.*”

**To Do:** (Provisional: Online quiz will be available for the next two weeks.)

**Week 8, October 19:**

Data collection: Questionnaires & Interviewing. Operationalizing concepts and writing questions.

**Reading:** Robson, Part III—Chapters 8-10  
Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, Chp 1-3 and 6-7

Research example: TBA

**To do:** Draft research design due for peer review and discussion in class.

**Week 9, October 26:**

Data collection continued. Observation and archival data. Validity. Primary and secondary sources.

**Reading:** Robson, Chapters 11-12.  
Yin, *Case Study Research*, Chapters 3 & 4

Research example: TBA

**To do:** Final draft research design due.

**Week 10, November 2:** Guest Faculty, Karina Korostelina

Analyzing data: quantitative approaches.

**Reading:** Robson, Introduction to Part IV and Chapter 13  
Review Creswell, Chapter 8

Research example: TBA

**To do:** Peer review of instruments for pilot. Post online for comments.

**Week 11, November 9:**

Analyzing data continued: qualitative approaches. Representation, authenticity.

**Reading:** Robson, Chapter 14  
See also Seidman and Yin relevant chapters

Research examples: Goldberg and Shaw, "*The secrets of successful (and unsuccessful) mediators.*" Hole, "*Working between languages...*"

**To do:** Peer review of instruments for pilot, continued.

**Week 12, November 16:**

Research ethics and principles. Standards of quality. Reporting on research.

**Reading:** Robson, Chapter 15  
Seidman, Chapter 5  
Creswell, review Chapter 4 on Ethical Considerations  
Yin, Chapter 6

**To Do:****Week 13, November 30:**

Issues in conflict analysis and resolution research revisited: audiences, context, researcher role, violence in the field. Loose ends.

**Reading:** Robson, Appendices A & B  
Research example: TBA

**Week 14, December 7:**

Presentations, discussion and wrap-up of the semester. Evaluations.

**December 14:**

Research Portfolio due by 6:00 p.m.

*Conflict is the gadfly of thought. It stirs us to observation and memory.  
It instigates invention. It shocks us out of sheep-like passivity,  
and sets us at noting and contriving... John Dewey*