

Conflict Resolution Techniques and Practice
CONF 300 (Section 002) – Spring 2011

Time: Mondays, 4:30 – 7:10 PM

Location: Fine Arts Bldg., Rm. B108

INSTRUCTOR

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Office Hours: By appointment, Robinson B, Rm. 365

COURSE DESCRIPTION

GMU Course Catalog description: “CONF 300, Conflict Resolution Techniques and Practice. Prerequisites: CONF 101 and 60 credits. Advanced consideration of CONF 101 topics, introduction of the core notion of reflective practice, critical thinking, conflict resolution techniques, practice, third party roles, and ethics.”

Building on what students have learned in CONF 101, this course further explores a variety of theories and frameworks for analyzing conflict. Students will move from conflict analysis to exploring techniques, process models, and third-party roles to constructively intervene in conflict.

Because this class emphasizes building conflict resolution skills and abilities, a significant portion of the class will be experientially-based. Much of the class will involve engaging in simulated conflict scenarios and subsequent reflection. The class will also introduce students to unique forms of practice and, on occasion, give students the opportunity to meet, question, and learn from professionals who are active in the work being studied.

Interpersonal, small group, community, and international conflict will be discussed in the course, but special emphasis in practice will be placed on interpersonal and small group conflicts as the building blocks for doing conflict resolution in larger and more complex social conflicts. The emphasis will be on enhancing the ability to engage in reflection and think critically in the midst of conflict dynamics.

At the end of the course, students will have learned theories and techniques for assessing conflicts, be able to make informed summaries of conflict intervention options, and will have a set of skills and techniques to help parties in conflict have constructive conversations and move conflicts toward resolution. While students will learn and practice several conflict resolution process models and roles, the goal is not to be fully trained as mediators or facilitators, although this course will be an excellent introduction should students decide to pursue further training or credentialing in such areas.

COURSE MATERIALS

Required Texts (available in the GMU bookstore)

Mayer, B. (2000). *The Dynamics of Conflict Resolution: A Practitioner's Guide*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Rosenberg, M. (2005). *Speak Peace in a World of Conflict: What You Say Next Will Change Your World*. Encinitas, CA: Puddledancer Press.

Schirch, L. & Campt, D. (2007). *The Little Book of Dialogue for Difficult Subjects*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books.

Additional Readings

Additional materials and required readings will be passed out in class, emailed to students, or can be retrieved electronically from GMU e-reserves or the GMU Blackboard system. Unless otherwise specified, all readings in the course agenda (except those from the required texts above) can be accessed and downloaded from e-reserves and Blackboard.

The e-reserve password for our class is _____.

ACADEMIC POLICIES & INFORMATION

Academic Honesty and Collaboration

George Mason University has an Honor Code with guidelines regarding academic integrity. The Code reads as follows:

“To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the university community, have set forth this honor code: *Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.*” The text of this Honor Code, and additional information, is available on the web at (<http://catalog.gmu.edu/content.php?catoid=5&navoid=410#Honor>).

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, Chicago Style, etc.). If you are unsure about how to cite a direct quotation or concept from course or outside readings, then ask for help. “I wasn’t sure how to cite a source, so I left out the reference,” is not an acceptable defense for plagiarism. Copies of common style manuals are available at the GMU library reference desk or online at (<http://library.duke.edu/research/citing/workscited>).

For individual class assignments, you may discuss your ideas with others or ask for feedback; however, you are responsible for making certain that there is no question that the work you hand in is your own. You may not submit papers or presentations from other courses to fulfill assignments for this class.

For group class assignments, the names of all participants should appear on the work. While it is fine for groups to divide project work among team members, the final product submitted should represent a single, conceptually linked piece of work. With rare exception, each student working in a group is given the same grade for an assignment. If a group is having trouble with a member not fulfilling his/her work obligation, then the group needs to bring the problem to the instructor’s attention immediately.

Late Work

Class assignments that are submitted late can be penalized by one letter grade for each day they are late. If a student has a documented emergency, special arrangements can be made with the instructor.

Paper Format

Papers for this course should be typed, double-spaced, have 1” margins, and use a common 12-point font (e.g. Times New Roman). Papers should also have a title, include your name and the instructor’s name, and consistently follow a single standard academic citation format. Please be sure to number your pages. Papers should be handed in on the assigned due date *before* the beginning of class with the exception of the final exam, which is due May 13 by 5:00 PM. **All written assignments should be submitted via the GMU Blackboard system (not in hard copy or by email).**

STUDENT RESOURCES

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 (703-993-2474) 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://ods.gmu.edu>).

Library Services

The CAR program library liaison is Sarah Sheehan. Ms. Sheehan is located at the Fenwick library. She is available by email at ssheehan@gmu.edu and by phone at 703-993-3709. Do not hesitate to contact her with specific questions about holdings and research. Also, the library provides an excellent online resource called an InfoGuide with links to many great sources of information on Conflict Analysis and Resolution

(<http://infoguides.gmu.edu/conflict>).

ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION

Participation (15%)

Because much of this course involves in-class, experiential learning, participation is a vital component. Because of the importance of interactive activities for the learning of each student and the class as a whole, course attendance is expected and is part of your grade. However, *just showing up for class does not represent A-grade participation work*. Students are expected to complete their reading assignments on time and to contribute to in class discussions and exercises. Active participation by everyone will greatly enrich our class experience.

Reflection Papers (30%)

Students will be responsible for submitting **two (2) reflection papers of between 5 and 8 pages in length, each worth 15% of the student's overall grade**, for a total of 30 percentage points. These papers will be focused on course themes considered throughout the semester and should draw heavily on course readings, as well as in-class discussions and activities. The objective of these papers is to practice and demonstrate *critical thinking* in the application of theory to practice, which is essential to effective conflict resolution. Each student should choose a formal citation style he or she prefers (e.g. APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.), and then employ it consistently throughout. Questions for these reflection papers will be handed out on February 14 and March 28, and **student responses will be due on February 28 and April 11 respectively (via Blackboard)**.

Learning Cells (35%)

Effective teamwork is a vital element of conflict resolution practice in real life and, in order to prepare for that eventuality, students will complete one small-group project by the end of the semester. In these groups (learning cells) of 5 or 6, students will complete two parts of this assignment:

1. *Videotaped Simulation*: Each group will create a short conflict simulation, similar to those conducted throughout the semester in class, in order to demonstrate core ideas and skills from the course. They will imagine a conflict scenario, select a form of intervention (e.g. negotiation, mediation, dialogue, etc.), and then play out the simulation, each taking on a role, *while videotaping*. The result will be presented in the second half of this assignment...
2. *In-Class Presentation*: **Each learning cell will then present their videotaped simulation to the rest of the class on one of two days set aside for this purpose (April 25 and May 2) at the end of the semester.** This will offer each group an opportunity to reflect openly about their intervention approach, and the outcomes, while also receiving feedback from their peers.

Final Exam (20%)

The final exam for this course will be **an open-book, take-home essay of between 5 and 8 pages in length**, which will ask students to think holistically about a given conflict scenario, and to analyze it and propose an intervention strategy in an integrated way. **The exam will be distributed at our last class session on May 2 and will be due on Friday, May 13, by 5:00 PM via Blackboard.**

COURSE AGENDA

Part I: Foundations

Week 1 (January 24): Introductions and Core Concepts

Readings:

- Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, Chs. 1 & 2
- Mayer, Preface
- Rosenberg, Introduction

In-Class Activities:

- Creating a social contract for our learning community

Week 2 (January 31): Analyzing Conflict pt. 1: Approaching a Case

Readings:

- Mayer, Ch.1: *The Nature of Conflict* and pp. 46-49

In-Class Activities:

- Video: *Matewan*

Week 3 (February 7): Analyzing Conflict pt. 2: Tools and Frameworks

Readings:

- Rosenberg, Chs. 1 & 2

In-Class Activities:

- Group Activity: Analysis of conflict from *Matewan*

Week 4 (February 14): Conflict and Communication

Readings:

- Mayer, Ch. 6: *Communication*
- Rosenberg, Chs. 3 & 4

In-Class Activities:

- Video: NYPD Hostage Negotiators
- Simulation: Communicating in Conflict

Part II: First-Party Techniques and Practices

Week 5 (February 21): Negotiation

Readings:

- Mayer, Ch. 7: *Negotiation and Advocacy* and Ch. 10: *Other Approaches to the Resolution of Conflict*
- Rosenberg, Chs. 5 & 7
- Fisher, Ury, & Patton, *Getting to Yes*, Ch. 1

In-Class Activities:

- Simulation: Morgan's Market

Week 6 (February 28): Advocacy, Activism, and Nonviolent Action

Readings:

- Ackerman & Duvall, *A Force More Powerful*, Ch. 14 & Conclusion
- Laue & Cormick, *The Ethics of Intervention in Community Disputes*
- Rosenberg, Ch. 10

In-Class Activities:

- Video: Selections from *A Force More Powerful*

Assignment: **Reflection Paper #1 DUE (via Blackboard)**

Part III: Crosscutting Concepts

Week 7 (March 7): Power and Identity

Readings:

- Mayer, Ch. 3: *Power and Conflict*
- Wilmot & Hocker, *Power: The Structure of Conflict*
- Black, *Identities*
- Korostelina, *Social Identity and Conflict* (excerpts)

In-Class Activities:

- Identity groups exercise
- Simulation: Housemates in Conflict

Week 8 (March 14): SPRING BREAK (No Class)

Assignment: Please watch the short (1 hour) film *Gang War: Bangin' in Little Rock* online via YouTube (URL will be provided on Blackboard)

Week 9 (March 21): Culture and Values

Readings:

- Mayer, Ch. 4: *Culture and Conflict*
- Avruch, *Culture*
- Forester, *Exploring Values-Based Disputes*
- Washington Post, "Cherokee Nation to Vote on Expelling Slaves' Descendants" (URL will be provided on Blackboard)

In-Class Activities:

- Group Activity: Analysis of conflict from Post article

Part IV: Third-Party Techniques and Practices

Week 10 (March 28): Mediation

Readings:

- Mayer, Ch. 9: *Mediation*
- Rosenberg, Ch. 9
- Bush & Folger, *The Mediation Movement: Four Diverging Views*
- Rifkin et al., *Toward a New Discourse for Mediation*
- Moore, *Twelve Stages of Mediator Moves*

In-Class Activities:

- Video: A Case of Mediation
- Guest Speaker: Samantha Levine-Finley, Associate Ombudsman, NIH

Week 11 (April 4): Facilitation and Dialogue

Readings:

- Schirch & Campt, Chs. 1-4
- Schwarz, Chs. 1 & 3

In-Class Activities:

- Video: A Post-9/11 Dialogue
- Simulation: A Story of Identity, Culture, and Conflict

Week 12 (April 11): Dialogue and Appreciative Inquiry

Readings:

- Schirch & Campt, Chs. 5-9
- Rosenberg, Ch. 12
- Watkins & Mohr, *Appreciative Inquiry: History, Theory, and Research*

In-Class Activities:

- Simulation: An AI Approach to Dialogue

Assignment: **Reflection Paper #2 DUE (via Blackboard)**

Part V: Bringing It All Together

Week 13 (April 18): Ethics, Best Practices, and Integration

Readings:

- Mayer, Ch. 11: *Conclusion: Conflict Resolution in Our Lives*
- Rosenberg, Ch. 11
- Warfield, *Is This the Right Thing to Do?: A Practical Framework for Ethical Decisions*
- Slim, *Dealing with Moral Dilemmas*
- Menkel-Meadow, *What's Fair in Negotiation* (excerpts)

In-Class Activities:

- Ethical Dilemmas: What Would You Do?

Week 14 (April 25): Learning Cell Presentations

Week 15 (May 2): Learning Cell Presentations and Conclusions

Final Exam Due by 5:00 PM Friday, May 13 (via Blackboard)