

CONF 320 – Interpersonal Conflict Analysis and Resolution

Semester: Spring 2011

Section/CRN: 001/10893

Class Time: Tuesdays 10:30 – 1:15 p.m.

Location: Robinson, Room B 120

Office Hours: By Appointment

Instructors: Leila Peterson, Undergraduate Program in Conflict Analysis and Resolution lpetersh@gmu.edu

Course Description and Objectives

This course explores a variety of theories, models, and frameworks for analyzing and resolving interpersonal conflict. We will begin by exploring the role of cognition in conflict and then focus on theories framing individual development, family relations, and social experiences early in life. Students will examine the various dimensions of one's self and social interaction that lead to interpersonal conflict situations. Students will have an opportunity to consider a range of possible interpersonal conflicts, their possible associated causes, and methods of inquiry that lead to resolution. Of equal importance, students will learn and practice skills for responding constructively to conflict and engaging in difficult conversations. Through analysis, exercises, and role plays, students will reflect on "who am I and what do I bring to this particular conflict?" and further, "what are my range of options to begin the resolution process?" Reflection is encouraged at both the individual level and the group level to further develop skills and deepen understanding.

Course Requirements

A. Participation, Knowledge of Course Materials and Contributions in the Classroom (20%)

Students are expected to participate fully in all exercises and complete all weekly, required readings in preparation for class discussion. Students are expected to show up on time for each class and stay for the duration. Sometimes absence from class is unavoidable. If you know you are going to be absent, contact me in advance. Otherwise I expect you to be there. **For each class I will randomly select 2-3 people to provide reflection on the readings due that day. Be prepared.**

B. Early Semester Essay (10%)

Students will be provided with an essay topic early in the semester that requires them to apply certain readings to a given situation. The purpose of this exercise is 1) to see how well students integrate readings; and 2) provide students with a sense of my grading

standards and expectations. Specific instructions for this assignment will be provided in class. Length: 2-3 pages.

C. Midterm Exam (25%)

The midterm exam will be an in-class short answer and essay exam containing interpersonal conflict scenarios and questions from the readings.

D. Team Presentation (20%)

Students will work in groups of three to prepare a team presentation. The goal of the assignment is to review an interpersonal conflict scenario from a film or book and present an analysis and recommendations for possible resolution or prevention of the conflict. Presentations should last approximately 15-20 minutes and will be presented in-class during the middle of the semester. Specific instructions for this assignment will be provided in class.

E. Final Exam (25%)

The final exam will be an in-class short answer and essay exam containing interpersonal conflict scenarios and questions from the readings.

****Cell Phones and Computers: Please keep cell phones OFF during class. Use of Computers is only permitted during lectures for note-taking. Computers should be shut off during class discussions, presentations, exercises, and exams.

Class Policies and Procedures

Students are responsible for completing individual and group assignments on time. You will be penalized the equivalent of a 1/2 letter grade for each day the assignment is late.

Some class assignments and readings will be sent via e-mail and students are responsible for checking GMU email and keeping up-to-date with these. Incomplete grades will not be granted save in cases of personal or immediate family illness or emergency.

Please familiarize yourself with the Honor System and Code, as stated in the George Mason University *Undergraduate Catalog*. When you are given an assignment as an individual, the work must be your own. Some of your work may be collaborative; source material for group projects and work of individual group members must be carefully documented for individual contributions. For an overview of the Honor Code, see: <http://mason.gmu.edu/~montecin/plagiarism.htm>

University Resources and Assistance

Writing Center: The Writing Center provides tutors who can help you develop ideas and revise papers at no charge. It can sometimes accommodate walk-ins, but generally it is best to call for an appointment. The services of the Writing Center are also available online.

Location: Robinson Hall A, room 114. **Contact:** (703) 993-1200 or <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>

Hours: Tuesday through Thursday from 9:30 to 7:30. Friday hours are 9:30 to 2:30.

Disability Resource Center: The Disability Resource Center assists students with learning or physical conditions affecting learning. Students with learning differences that require special conditions for exams or other writing assignments should provide documentation provided by the Disability Resource Center. Please see one of the instructors the first week of classes.

Location: SUB I, Room 222 **Contact:** 703-993-2474 www.gmu.edu/student/drc/

Electronic Reserves

Adobe Acrobat must be installed on your computer to view and print some E-Reserves Readings. E-Reserves permit students to access Course Readings remotely from home or office, and allow students to view and print materials using Adobe Acrobat Reader. All users of the E-Reserves must comply with the University Policy and Copy Right Law (Title 17, United States Code)

Accessing E-Reserves:

1. Go to <http://oscr.gmu.edu>
2. Click on the magnifying glass (Search electronic reserves)
3. Using the drop-down boxes, select the course [CONF 320-001] and instructor [Staff]
 - a. The section and faculty are opposite of what is on the schedule
 - b. Be sure it says "Spring 2011"
4. Enter in the password (**to be given in class**) and click submit to view the item
5. To view and print an article click on the small PDF button or the Link button if available

If you experience problems with an electronic reserve item or need additional help please contact the E-Reserves Coordinator at 993-9043. If you need additional assistance please e-mail ereserves@gmu.edu.

Required Readings

Stone, Douglas, Bruce Patton and Sheila Heen. *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*. New York: Viking. (Available in the Bookstore)

Wilmot, William W. and Joyce L. Hocker. *Interpersonal Conflict*, 8th Ed. New York: McGraw-Hill. (Available in the Bookstore)

Course packet available through electronic reserve.

Folger, Joseph P., Marshall Scott Poole and Randall K. Stutman, "Face-saving"
Working Through Conflict. New York: Longman, Inc., 2001. 155-184.

Mullen, John D. And Byron M. Roth. "Psychological Impediments to Sound
Decision-Making" Decision Making: Its Logic and Practice. Savage, MD:
Rowman & Littlefield, 1991, 19-49.

Tannen, Deborah. "Asymmetries: Women and Men Talking at Crosspurposes"
You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation. New York:
Ballantine Books, 1990. 49-73.

Weekly Themes, Readings and Assignments

WEEK 1 TUESDAY JANUARY 25

Introduction to Interpersonal Conflict

Introductions and expectations; Overview of course and syllabus;

Week 2 Tuesday February 1

What are the causes of interpersonal conflict? (Part 1)

Cognition and conflict: selection and interpretation of information. Cognitive dissonance.
Cognitive perspectives on interpersonal conflict

Readings Due:

Wilmot & Hocker, Chapters 1, Chapter 2 (pp. 29-52 only).
Stone: Introduction and Chapter 1

WEEK 3 TUESDAY FEBRUARY 8

What are the causes of interpersonal conflict? (Part 2)

Basic human needs in the interpersonal realm

Readings Due:

Wilmot & Hocker, Chapter 3.
Stone: Chapters 2-4

WEEK 4 TUESDAY FEBRUARY 15

How do we behave in interpersonal conflict?

Styles and tactics

Readings Due:

Wilmot and Hocker, Chapter 5

WEEK 5 TUESDAY FEBRUARY 22

How does our identity and background impact interpersonal conflict?

Gender, culture, life experiences

Readings:

Tannen [eReserve]

Wilmot & Hocker, Chapter 2 (pp. 53-61 only)

Give essay assignment, due 3/8 in class

WEEK 6 TUESDAY MARCH 1

Power and Interpersonal Conflict

Readings:

Wilmot and Hocker: Chapter 4

Folger [eReserve]

WEEK 7 TUESDAY MARCH 8

How do we feel and how do emotions impact conflict and conflict resolution?

Readings:

Wilmot and Hocker: Chapter 7

Stone, Chapter 5

ESSAY DUE

WEEK 8 TUESDAY MARCH 15

Spring Break – No Class

WEEK 9 TUESDAY MARCH 22

Assessing Interpersonal Conflict

Readings:

Wilmot and Hocker: Chapter 6

Stone: Chapters 6-7

Review for midterm

WEEK 10 TUESDAY MARCH 29

Midterm Exam

WEEK 11 TUESDAY APRIL 5

Moderating Conflict

Readings:

Wilmot and Hocker, Chapter 7
Stone, Chapters 8-9

WEEK 12 TUESDAY APRIL 12

Class presentations
Negotiation Skills

Readings

Wilmot and Hocker, Chapter 8
Stone, Chapter 10

WEEK 13 TUESDAY APRIL 19

Class presentations
Negotiation Skills

Readings Due:

Wilmot and Hocker, Chapter 9
Stone, Chapters 11

WEEK 14 TUESDAY APRIL 26

Reconciliation & Forgiveness

Readings Due:

Wilmot and Hocker, Chapter 10
Stone, Chapters 12

Activities:

WEEK 15 TUESDAY MAY 3

Leadership & Problem-solving
Review for Final Exam

Readings Due:

Mullen and Roth [eReserve]