

PHILOSOPHY AND METHODS OF CONFLICT RESEARCH
CONFLICT 610
FALL 2012

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Meeting Time: Tuesday, 7:20–10:00 PM
Classroom: Founders Hall 317
Office hours: Tuesday, 5:30–6:30 PM;
by appointment, phone call, and walk-in

Questions and Goals

“I cannot give any scientist of any age better advice than this: the intensity of the conviction that a hypothesis is true has no bearing on whether it is true or not. . . . If an experiment does not hold out the possibility of causing one to revise one’s views, it is hard to see why it should be done at all.” – P.B. Medawar

In the study of conflict and peace, we must wrestle with profound questions regarding human nature. Some of these questions are conceptual (e.g., What is positive peace?). Others ask us to build theory to explain human behavior (e.g., Why do civil wars break out and why are some longer and more violent than others)? Still others demand that we evaluate the success of conflict resolution efforts (e.g., Do truth and reconciliation commissions actually encourage reconciliation in divided communities?). Yet our answers to these challenging questions cannot solely be theoretical or we risk alienating ourselves from the real world that inspired these questions. We instead rely on research to help us explain human behavior, test whether our theories correspond to reality, evaluate programs, and discover new puzzles that require explanation. And in conflict studies, unlike other disciplines, we utilize the full gamut of research methods available in the social sciences and humanities. That diversity of approaches presents exciting opportunities but can also provoke bewilderment to students new to the field.

This class is thus meant to smooth your immersion into the world of conflict and peace research. We will first discuss how to ask good questions about conflict and build new answers to those questions. Then, we’ll define the major approaches to knowledge in conflict and peace studies, discussing how they identify valid knowledge (*epistemology*), the nature of the world and the causes of conflict (*ontology*), and the means by which research is conducted (*methodology*). Along the way, we will pause to consider carefully the ethics of social research and how to write effectively about research. Each week, we will read real-world examples of research into conflict, broadly construed, including influential articles and books.

The objectives of CONF 610 are therefore to develop your familiarity with research concepts and tools, improve your ability to critically evaluate research in the field, and assist you in identifying research methods that will inform your own research.

Details: Requirements, Grading, Etc.

“*The harder I work, the luckier I get.*” - Samuel Goldwyn

Course Materials

The following book is required and can be purchased in the Arlington branch of the GMU Bookstore or from online booksellers.

- Robson, Colin. 2011. *Real World Research*. 3rd Edition. John Wiley & Sons Ltd. ISBN-13: 978-1405182409. “Robson” in the syllabus.

Readings from outside of the textbook will be available on our Blackboard site in a folder named “Readings.” These readings are marked “online” in the reading list.

Participation and Effort

This class will likely require more effort than the average discussion class at SCAR. The reading and writing assignments will ask you to assess published and celebrated research in conflict and propose how you might improve on it. The class is also conceptually demanding and cumulative; that is, missing one week will hurt your ability to understand the next weeks’ material. I therefore would like to define precisely what this class will demand of you. By enrolling in this course, you agree to the following:

- You will attend every class and arrive on time; there are only fourteen meetings, so missing one means missing a big chunk of material. You will turn off *all* electronic devices; laptops may be left on for note-taking, but the wireless device must be turned off. You will give class your full attention. I will take attendance in every class. You are allowed to miss only one class meeting, regardless of the reason. After that one class, you will lose a half grade off your final grade per class missed. If you for some reason must miss class because you’re physically absent from the Arlington area, you may attend class electronically by using Skype or a similar mechanism, but you must ask for my approval beforehand. You may ‘attend’ class in this manner only twice during the semester. There are no exceptions to the attendance policy.
- You will complete all readings *before* the class in question. *Do not fall behind — it will prove very difficult to catch up.* Read carefully and, above all, *think!* Take notes in preparation for assignments, take time to complete written assignments (see below), and prepare questions you wish to ask in class.
- I will expect you to participate in the intellectual life of our class. There are three ways you can do so:
 - *In class.* At most, I will use only half of class time for lecture. Mostly, I will use a more Socratic approach — in other words, I will constantly pepper you with questions and ask your opinions regarding our subject material and the day’s assignment(s). I also expect that you will ask interesting questions, respond to others’ questions and comments,

discuss your written assignments in class, etc. Class time represents an opportunity to talk about foundational questions of how to do good research in conflict analysis. Take advantage of it!

- *Online.* E-mailed questions are also welcome and, if the class finds it useful, we can establish an online discussion board to maintain contact as a group during the week.
- *In office hours.* I encourage you to come to office hours. I am flexible on meeting times; just e-mail and we'll establish a time.

Assignments and Grading

There will be three components to your grade in this course.

1. **Participation (15%).** As discussed above, participating in class is required.
2. **Problem Sets (30%).** For 12 weeks of the semester, beginning in Week 2 and ending in Week 13, I will hand out a problem set asking a question based on the *next* week's readings. You will complete the problem set and turn it in by 2 PM of the day of class. Problem sets will be focused on designing research into a topic that is of interest to you; they will never be mathematically demanding. You will be required to complete six problem sets and each is worth 5% of your grade. If you wish to complete more than six, I will take your best six grades.
3. **Replication and Extension (55%).** You will write three papers in which you review a piece of research — preferably an article or report — in the area of peace and conflict studies in which you're interested. The schedule of the papers is as follows:
 - **Topic Choice.** You will obtain my approval, either in person or via e-mail, of the piece of research you've chosen by the beginning of class in **Week 3 (September 11)**.
 - **Short paper: theory (15%).** The first paper will describe the questions the article tackles, why the question is important, and the theories the author on which the author relies. It is due at the beginning of class in **Week 5 (September 25)** and should be 5–6 pages long.
 - **Short paper: research design (15%).** The second paper describes and critiques the research design of the article or book. It is due at the beginning of class in **Week 10 (November 6)** and should be 5–6 pages long.
 - **Long paper (25%).** The third paper will synthesize your first two papers, add a discussion of the analysis used in the paper, and how you would improve upon the research if you had time and a budget to do so. You could discuss the theoretical questions left unanswered, weaknesses in the research done to date, etc. It is due one week after class ends, on **December 11** and should be about 20–25 pages long.

In this course, I will respond to your work using two channels: written feedback and grades. Students often pay more attention to the latter than the former and I implore you to resist that tendency. While grades rate your scholarship along an ordinal scale, comments detail your strengths and weaknesses as a scholar and how you can continue to develop your thinking. They are thus a fuller, more direct assessment of your performance.

That said, I know that many of you are concerned about your grades and I will do everything in my power to help you throughout the course. Yet I do have high standards for you, a function of the respect I have for your ability and ambition and a recognition that the academic and policy worlds outside of S-CAR are extremely competitive. I therefore simply will not allow you to produce work that is below your potential. Therefore, do not expect a high grade for minimal effort. In general, these will be the standards for your written assignments:

- **A:** Excellent work that thinks precisely, creatively and clearly. The research, if necessary for the assignment, is appropriate to the ideas under examination, creative, and exhaustive in nature. The paper is ready to begin the process of being transformed into a published report, article, or thesis.
- **A-:** Strong work that does everything an ‘A’ paper does but not quite as strongly. There are small gaps in the author’s thinking and/or research. I would want the author to revise and resubmit the work before she committed to it for a published report, article, or thesis.
- **B+:** About average work for a graduate student. The paper contains some strong ideas or research, but suffers from at least one major problem that remains unresolved (e.g., only weak research, ideas not fully thought out, etc.). The work is still several revisions away from being considered for a published report, article, or thesis
- **B:** Work that only barely rises to the standards I set for a graduate student. There may be a core idea that deserves merit, but the author fails to consider that idea fully. There are extensive problems with both the ideas and research.
- **B- or lower:** Failing work. There is virtually nothing deserving about the analysis in the paper. The author fails to develop a central theme or line of research. There are such massive problems in ideas and research that the author cannot expect to pass this class.

We’ll talk about standards for the long assignment during Week 1.

I do not give extensions on written assignments. Any late assignment will earn a 0.

Course Schedule

“There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics.”

– Benjamin Disraeli (often attributed to Mark Twain)

This course will be split into three parts. During Part I, we will introduce the class and how social research has been used in conflict studies. We’ll also talk about how to identify good questions and construct good answers to important questions. In Part II, we’ll discuss approaches to knowledge and the methodologies each employs, focusing on the differences between fixed and flexible approaches. In Part III, we will discuss how researchers collect data in the field, from large-scale surveys to archival research. Finally, Part IV discuss how we analyze data and then write about our results.

Part I. Foundations

Week 1: August 28. Course Introduction

- None

Week 2: September 3. An Introduction to Research Design in Conflict

- Robson, Chapter 1, 2, 4, pp. 399–406
- Selected articles from special issue of *Peace and Conflict* on forgiveness. 2007. Volume 13, Issue 1. Online.
 - Kadiangandu, Joachim Kadima and Etienne Mullet, “Intergroup Forgiveness: A Congolese Perspective.”
 - Mellor, David, Di Bretherton, and Lucy Firth, “Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Australia: The Dilemma of Apologies, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation.”

Week 3: September 11. Good Questions and Good Answers (*Paper topic due*)

- Robson, Ch. 3
- Babbie, Earl. 2010. *The Practice of Social Research*. New York, NY: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning. pp. 19–23. Online.
- Lave, Charles and James March. 1975. *An Introduction to Models in the Social Sciences*. New York, NY: University Press of America. Chapters 1–2. Online
- Weinstein Jeremy, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. pp. 1–60. Online.

Part II. Research Design**Week 4: September 18. Introduction to ‘Fixed’ Designs**

- Robson, Ch. 5
- Hyde, Susan D. 2007. “The Observer Effect in International Politics: Evidence from a Natural Experiment.” *World Politics* 60(1): 37–63. Online.
- Valentino, N., V. Hutchings, and I. White, 2002, “Cues That Matter: How Political Ads Prime Racial Attitudes During Campaigns,” *American Political Science Review* 96(1): 75–90. Online.

Week 5: September 25. Introduction to ‘Flexible’ Designs (*First short paper due*)

- Robson, Ch. 6
- Veale, Angela and Aki Stavrou. 2007. “Former Lord’s Resistance Army Child Soldier Abductees: Explorations of Identity in Reintegration and Reconciliation.” *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 13(3): 273–292. Online.
- Excerpts from Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion*. Chapters 2–3 (pp. 61–126. Online.

Week 6: October 2. The Qualitative-Quantitative Divide

- Robson, Ch. 7
- Tarrow, Sydney. 2004. "Bridging the Quantitative-Qualitative Divide." In *Redesigning Social Research*. Edited by Henry Brady and David Collier. Online.
- Lieberman, Evan S. 2005. "Nested Analysis as a Mixed-Method Strategy for Comparative Research" *American Political Science Review* 99(3): 435–452. Online.
- Wayne, Ellen K. 2008 "Is It Just Talk? Understanding and Evaluating Intergroup Dialogue." *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 25(4): 451–578. Online.

Week 7: October 16. Action and Evaluation Research

- Robson, Chapter 8
- USAID. 2005. "Post-Conflict Elections and Democratization: An Experience Review." Issue Paper No. 8 (May). Washington, DC: Department of State. Online.
- Shechtman, Zipora, et al. 2009. "Effectiveness of a Forgiveness Program for Arab Israeli Adolescents in Israel: An Empirical Trial." *Peace and Conflict* 14: 415–438. Online.

Week 8: October 23. The Ethics of Research

- Robson, Ch. 9
- Milgram, Stanley. 1963. "Behavioral Study of Obedience." *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 67: 371–378. Online.
- Williams, Terry. 1996. "Exploring the Cocaine Culture." In *In the Field: Readings on the Field Research Experience*, edited by Carolyn D. Smit and William Kornblum. 2nd Edition. Westport, CT: Praeger. pp. 27–32. Online.
- Williams, Terry. 1989. *The Cocaine Kids: The Inside Story of a Teenage Drug Ring*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books. pp. 1–30. Online.
- *Optional*. Watch *Human Terrain*, a movie available for purchase, but also available at the Burton Library.

Part III. Data Collection**Week 9: October 30. Interviews and Focus Groups**

- Robson, Chapter 11
- Maclure, Richard and Myriam Denov. 2007. "I Didn't Want to Die So I Joined Them': Structuration and the Process of Becoming Boy Soldiers in Sierra Leone." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 18(1): 119-135. Online.
- Dsilva, Margaret U. and Lisa O. Whyte. 1998. "Cultural Differences in Conflict Styles: Vietnamese Refugees and Established Residents." *Howard Journal of Communications* 9(1): 57–68. Online.

Week 10: November 6. Surveys

- Robson, Chs. 5, 10, 12
- Huphreys and Weinstein, Materials from “What the Fighters Say.” Online.
- Special assignment on polling in presidential elections: TBA

Week 11: November 13. Observation (*Second short paper due*)

- Robson, Chs. 13–14
- Codebook and Excel file from UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset. Online.
- Choose one of the following:
 - Porter, Sam. 1991. “A participant observation study of power relations between nurses and doctors in a general hospital.” *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 16: 728–735. Online.
 - Hoffman, Danny. 2004. “The Civilian Target in Sierra Leone and Liberia.” *African Affairs* 103: 211–226. Online.

Part IV. Data Analysis and Writing**Week 12: November 20. Quantitative Analysis**

- Robson, Chs. 12, 16
- Humphreys, Macartan and Jeremy Weinstein. 2007. “Who Fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil War.” *American Journal of Political Science* 52(2): 436–455. Online.

Week 13: November 27. Qualitative Analysis

- Robson, Ch. 17
- Bungay, et al. 2005. “Life with jib: a snapshot of street youth’s use of crystal methamphetamine.” *Addiction Research and Theory* 14(3): 235–251. Online.
- Donohue, William A. and Daniel Druckman. 2008. “Message Framing Surrounding the Oslo I Accords.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53(1): 119–145. Online.

Week 14: December 4. Writing

- Robson, Chs. 15 and 18
- TBA

FINAL PAPER DUE ON DECEMBER 11 AT 11:59 PM