General Course Information

NOTE: We expect to refine the course design and the syllabus (largely in response to student suggestions and interests) over the course of the semester. You'll receive emails highlighting any significant changes.

Course Format: Hybrid "Face-to-Face" / Online Course.   Your instructors are based at the Conflict Information Consortium at the University of Colorado and will only be able to visit S-CAR once during the semester for a Saturday, September 15 session.   Other classes will be held online as a videoconference between our conference room in Colorado and a classroom at S-CAR. Times and logistics for these sessions will be worked out on the 15. Time for the Sept 15 course is 9:30 - 12 and 1-3:30. Location TBD.

Instructors: Heidi Burgess and Guy Burgess

Contact Information: The easiest way to contact us is by email. We are currently in the process of setting up a GMU email account. Until we get this working, you can reach us at burgess@colorado.edu. (We share a single email address so you can reach both of us with this.) We can then set up a time to talk by telephone, Skype, or gchat--often within a few minutes.

Office Hours: We have no formal office hours for this course. We are, however, generally available and are happy to talk with you whenever we are not teaching (we also teach at the Universities of Colorado and Denver, so our schedule is a little crazy. Also, remember, we are two hours earlier than you, so if you write at 8 am, we won't be up!)   E-mail us with times when you're available, and we will set something up as soon as possible.

Texts: There are no paper-bound texts for this course. All required readings will come from the Beyond Intractability knowledge base or other online materials (linked here).

Beyond Intractability Access: All students will need to set up an account on the Beyond Intractability system if they have not already done so. This can be done from our [Join Beyond Intractability](#) page.

Course Description

This course explores the concept of a conflict resolution "knowledge base" and "learning community," particularly as those concepts are being developed through the [Beyond Intractability](#) Project. As you are probably discovering as you delve into your graduate program, the knowledge base underlying the conflict resolution and peacebuilding field is far too extensive to be fully mastered by any one person or even one program of graduate study. There is simply too much information and too many ideas for one person to learn, At the same time, however, much is to be gained by many people and programs sharing expertise, which is precisely the purpose of the Beyond Intractability (BI) Project. BI brings together many hundreds of practitioners and scholars from around the world who have asked questions and contributed answers so that together we can grow the knowledge base of the field.

This one credit course introduces participants to BI and to the conflict resolution " knowledge cycle." You will learn how to use BI (www.beyondintractability.org)--and the web more generally--to navigate the field's knowledge base effectively. We will explore how BI is actually something of a map of the field (a

map that is being constantly expanded, re-drawn, and filled in.) By becoming "power users" of BI (or continuing the metaphor, skilled map-readers), you will have a better understanding of how and where your work and interests fit into the bigger picture of what many are calling "peace writ large."

Unlike most other classes, much of the work done for this course will be formally published on Beyond Intractability (assuming it is of sufficient quality) . Thus, instead of writing a paper, which then gets discarded or forgotten, your work can become a permanent part of the field's accumulating knowledge base and can be read by BI's over 100,000 users/month. Therefore, a big part of the course will be giving you the skills you need to produce publication-quality materials within your area(s) of expertise and interest.

Course Assignments and Grading

Get Acquainted Assignment

To make it easier for us to get to know you, we are asking everyone to send us a get acquainted message by September 13. We are interested in learning something about your background, where you are in the S-CAR program (e.g. first year MS student, third year Ph.D. student, etc.), your areas of focus and interest, career aspirations, and what you are hoping to learn from the course. Also, of course, tell us your name and how you would like to be addressed (your nickname, if any).

Seminar Attendance, Preparation, and Participation -- 30%

Participants are expected to attend all seminars or do a makeup assignment if attendance is not possible. We will try to record all sessions, but hope, given the small number of people particularly, that most of you can "attend" most classes. Contact your instructors for details about makeups. Everyone is also expected to do the prepare for and participate in class discussions.

Written Products -- 70%

For the course, each participant will be asked to make a significant and useful contribution to the Beyond Intractability Knowledge Base in an area of their interest and expertise. We realize, of course, that some of you may have areas of interest that you have not yet developed into areas of expertise. In that case, we ask you to explore these areas of interest in ways that make what you learn more easily accessible to future Beyond Intractability users (so that it will be easier and faster for the next person to learn what you have learned during this course).

In the paragraphs that follow, we describe the primary kinds of materials that we currently have on BI. We suggest that each of you chose a particular topic, and then discuss with us which combintation of written products makes sense for your level of expertise and topic choice. For people who are interested in topics that are already well covered by BI, we suggest that you review what we already have, work on updating things that are old (much is, at this point), and perhaps write one or two new pieces to add to our collection (a new book summary and/or peacebuilder profile, perhaps). For people who are interested in topics that are not well (or not at all) covered, you can start more "from scratch," -- writing a new case study or theoretical essay on a topic we do not yet have, and providing an annotated bibliography of new web resources to supplement what you write.

We expect everyone to negotiate different "deliverables," and you may even have different due dates depending on whether you are producing several short items, or one longer item. (For longer items, we ask that you submit at least one draft 3-4 weeks before the final draft is due, to make sure you are proceding on a good track. (We will negotiate firm due dates with each of you individually. The only hard constraint is that everything has to be finished by the end of S-CAR's formal semester.)

As a general guideline, however, we ask that everyone plan to contribute at least one annotated bibliography and one more substantial piece of work, or alternatively, an update to several (3-10+) existing resources (the number varies depending on the amount of work a particular resource needs. Some articles are close to up to date, and might only need an hour or so of work to change an example or two. Others need much more substantial work, in which case, we would ask you to update fewer articles.   In any case, *IT IS ESSENTIAL* that you negotiate your work plan with Heidi, as she is the person most knowledgable about what we currently have, who is doing what, and what is needed. (We don't want multiple people working on the exactly the same thing, although having different "takes" on complex topics is sometimes possible and useful.)

Types of potential written products (i.e. "deliverables) include:

- Option #1: **Create One or More Sets of Recommended Web Resources on a Particular Topic:**

BI's first objective is to find and make more readily accessible quality, existing *Web-based* resources on specialized conflict topics. We see ourselves as a fill-in-the-gaps project that tries to highlight and publicize, rather than duplicate and compete with, quality work done by others. As such, the first step toward developing a topic for inclusion in Beyond Intractability is to systematically search for existing high-quality information on that topic. (We also need to update our recommendations for existing BI topics.)

Our goal is not to try to find everything available, but rather, highlight the best of what is available both in terms of the ideas presented, and the clarity and understandability of those ideas to diverse audiences. This enterprise is different from most academic literature reviews because we are focusing on web-accessible materials. BI users tend to be people who prefer to or must work online--many do not have access to libraries and bookstores, and others just want information quickly. So our users often use the web as their first and only source of information. For that reason, we strongly preference materials that are electronically accessible--preferably for free. But we do not want to sacrifice quality. Thus, we do include some proprietary material, such as journal articles that are only available online through subscriptions. But those are only used when good, freely-accessible material is not available.

To prevent information overload, most of our lists of recommended web references generally contain 10-15 items. If you have more than that which is really high-quality, we might consider whether you can divide your materials into multiple subtopics.

Rather than submitting these reference lists in MS Word , we ask everyone to enter these resources into the Zotero bibliographic system, using a specific BI format.   Details about how to do that can be found here.

Contributors should note that BI already has initial sets of recommended resources on most of the topics for which we currently have essays. However, some of these have not been updated since the original essays were written (in 2003-4) and those that were updated were done so, in many cases, by non-expert student assistants. So if your topic interest overlaps with one or more topics that are already in BI, it would be useful to have you read the related articles, update them as necessary (see below) and review the existing list of recommended resources, supplementing or improving that list where possible as well.

Examples of existing collections of Additional Resources are available by clicking *on the stars* on this list of Beyond Intractability Topics. (The stars indicate items that have additional resource lists that have been

updated since the original essay was written. These may well benefit from further work, however.

- **Option #2:** **Create a User Guide or Checklist**

Beyond Intractabiliy User Guides and Diagnostic Checklists are designed to help users overcome "information overload" -- a continuing problem for large-scale knowledge bases. These user guides can be thought of as annotated course syllabi which seek to guide users to the information that they really need to know to master a particular subtopic in BI, such as humanitarian aid, transitional justice, or identity conflicts. Each user guide is built around an outline of available knowledge in a particular area, with sections highlighting and introducing the big ideas that people really ought to understand. Accompanying these ideas are links to Beyond Intractability internal and external resources that provide more in-depth information on each topic and subtopic. Accompanying these links are short descriptions explaining what is useful about each resource. Checklists take a somewhat different format--they are lists of questions or things particular user groups (practitioners, particularly) should think about as they try to engage in constructive conflict resolution. They, too, then link to BI essays and external resources that users can read if they need more information to answer any particular question. Sample user guides can be found here, and sample checklists are available here. Detailed style guides are available here.

- Option #3: **Write a Book or Article Summary**

Another major type of content contained in BI are short "executive-type" summaries of key books and articles. These summaries (most of which are more like annotated tables of contents than critical reviews) provide, in a few pages, a quick overview of a the key ideas in a book or article. We initially wrote these summaries to provide at least some of their key ideas to people living in places where they did not have access to these books and articles. However, we have also found that the summaries are heavily used by people in the US as well. They provide a way for people to quickly peruse the literature and decide what books and articles are worth acquiring and studying carefully, and they provide a quick overview of the key ideas for people who are pressed for time, and most likely will not be able to read the entire book, even if they can get it. So these summaries are very popular. Most of our summarizing work was done in the late 1990s and early 2000s. So there are many, many important books and articles that we need summaries of now. However, so many good summaries are already available on the web from other sources, that we ask potential summary writers to first check online to see if a good summary already exists that we can link to. If it does, please put it into a zotero RIS file (even with only one entry) and we will upload it to BI. If none is available, talk to Heidi about writing one. Instructions on how to do a book or article summary are posted here.

- Option #4: **Wrtie a Personal Reflection, Peace Builder Profile, or Case Study**

Other important components of the Knowledge Base include our Case Studies (written primarily by outsiders) and Personal Reflections (written primarily by people involved in a conflict). These tell the story of the events surrounding a particular conflict at a particular time and place. Also included are Peacebuilder Profiles describing how specific individuals or organizations have worked or are currently working to promote more constructive approaches to difficult conflict situations.

These accounts can be controversial, since different people usually have very different persepctives, even on the "facts" of a conflict situation.   Still, they offer an invaluable window into how theoretical ideas play out in the real world and what the nature of intractable conflicts are.   Our goal is to assemble and link to an increasingly large collection of case study, reflective, and profile materials, in the belief that they *collectively* offer an increasingly accurate (or at least provocative) view of events.   Much of your semester project could focus on creating one of these documents. Detailed instructions on writing these

kinds of resources is provided here.

- **Option #5: Practitioner Interviews**

Another source of important information in the Knowledge Base is our collection of audio interviews with practitioners -- people who tend to be so immersed in the day-to-day business of dealing with conflict that they seldom have an opportunity to reflect, write, and publish. BI's interview program is intended as a way to get around this problem, without making unrealistic demands on the time of busy practitioners. Under this program, we post both Full Interviews and Interview Segments organized by topic. If you're interested in doing such an interview, tell us whom you would like to interview and why you chose that person (or people). We can help you finalize a list of interview questions and work out the mechanics of recording the session (which can be done via telephone or online). The interviews are then transcribed (to make them searchable) and both the audio and the transcription is posted. Instructions on how to do this are included here.

- **Option #6: "Encyclopedic" Essays**

The last and, in many ways, the most important component of the Beyond Intractability system is our collection of "encyclopedic" Essays. These essays seek to provide a succinct, generally accessible, jargon free, comprehensive overview of each of the field's "core ideas." These essays are also backed up with links to 10 to 15 more in-depth "Additional Resource" materials (described at option #1, above) to try to strike a balance between understandability, brevity, and comprehensiveness. We see these essays as the fastest and most efficient way of transmitting the field's core insights to a much broader audience. If there is an existing essay (or set of essays) that you think could be improved--or an area where we do not now have an essay--we would welcome your work correcting these shortcomings over the fall semester. (Most of the BI essays were written around 2002-4, so they all need review and potential updating, though people in Colorado are also working on this effort so we need to coordinate so as not to be working on the same articles!)

The above quick descriptions of the various components of the Knowledge Base is quite superficial. Additional information is available on our Learning Community page, list of Learning Community Options, and in our Call for Papers.

Overall, we will probably suggest that each of you start with a web-based literature review on your topic and submit one or more new or updated lists of recommended resources as a starting "small" contribution to BI. Then everyone should choose to do one or two more major contributions---two book summaries or inteveiws, one case study or "encyclopedic essay", or a bit more than that if you are just updating existing materials, rather than writing something new. (If you are updating, you will get your name on as a second--subsequent--author.) For instance, one person might be interested in the intersection of development work and conflict. This is a topic that has quite a few articles on BI, but they were all written almost 10 years ago by one contributor from Brazil, so they are dated and have a very particular geographical--and philisophical-- focus. Updating and extending those and updating the additional resources on that topic would be very useful. Another person might be interested in the "austerity-related" conflicts arising from the Euro zone currency crisis which threaten to reverse the larger process of European integration and reconciliation. This is a topic that is not yet explored at all in BI, so you might start with a review of the good material already available (option 1) and then perhaps write an essay on this topic (option 6) or do two summaries of the key books written on the topic that do not have existing online summaries or reviews (external to BI) (option 3). Alternatively, you could write a user guide which helps readers understand the nature of the problem with many links to either BI or external resources as backup materials (option 2) or a case study of how it has been handled over the last year or so (option 4).

Since we are new to GMU, we are not familiar with typical workloads or expectations here. But we do teach grad classes at the University of Denver, so we are assuming workloads are somewhat comparable. There students are expected to do a lot of reading, usually have a number of short papers (such as reading discussion points) over the course of the semester and one large research paper. Since this is a one-credit course, we assume that you would do about 1/3 of that amount of work. For that reason we are assigning much less required reading, but want you to focus most of your reading in your own topical areas. We then are asking that you do at least one short and one longer written product--though even the longest BI essays or user guides are not as long as typical semester-long research paper. They key here is to cover the key ideas just as clearly and succinctly (and accurately, of course) as possible! We have been told over and over again by users "if you want it read, keep it short!" But everything still needs to be clear, well documented, explained, and defended.

We are asking each of you send us by September 24 a proposal outlining what you would like to work on this semester.   Between now and then we're free to talk about possibilities.

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Course Schedule

Session #1 *(Face-to-Face)* September 15, 9:30-12:00; 1:00-3:30 (Location at S-CAR to be Determined)

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   Topics:

   - o **The Theory Behind Beyond Intractability**
     We will start with the consideration of the nature of intractable conflict, the role of information in determining the course conflict processes, the information profile of the conflict resolution and peacebuilding fields, and an initial consideration of the potential contributions of emerging knowledge base and social networking technologies.
   - o **Ways of Knowing**
     We will then go on to examine the nature of conflict knowledge. We will discuss different "ways of knowing" and their relative advantages and disadvantages with respect to constructive conflict transformation and/or resolution. Here we will compare theoretical and practical knowledge, qualitative and quantitative analysis, scientific versus "folk"/anecdotal/personal knowledge and social, religious and other ways of knowing and learning. What of this is legitimate and useful knowledge and what isn't? How do we know? How can we present the most useful and legitimate knowledge in the knowledge base in ways that it is accessible, credible, and useful to a variety of audiences (both scholarly and not)?
- *Assignments:*
   - o In preparation for the first class session on Sept. 15, we ask you, first, to send us a "get aquainted email" (see above). We also ask you to review the course syllabus and especially, the assignments. Be sure to follow the links to each of the various types of knowledge base content and spend a little time looking around BI to see what is there and how it is arranged. Read a couple of articles, listen to an interview or two, look at a book summary to figure out what these kinds of materials are. Start thinking about which types of content you might like to create and what specific topic you might want to explore. We will spend a bit of time sharing ideas with each other, so that people can get an idea of each others' interests, and perhaps build off each others' ideas. Remember that

Session #2 *(Video Conference)* Week of September 24, 1 hour 30 minutes (Date, Time, and S-CAR Location to be Determined)

- *Topics:*
    - o **Defining the Scope of the Field**
      Complex society-wide conflicts encompass all aspects of society--not just politics, but also the economy, social structure, psychological dynamics, evironmental concerns, demographic issues, etc. Efforts to transform or reconcile deep-rooted conflicts often require changes in all of these sectors. During this session we want to talk about what, exactly, constitutes the "core expertise" of the conflict resolution field, and how this expertise relates to the expertise of adjacent fields such as humanitarian assistance, development, human rights, security, trauma healing, etc. (We will also consider whether these are actually not "adjecent," but wholly included subsidiary fields.) We then want to talk about how best to incorporate the insights from these fields into the knowledge base. Or is that going "too far?" We will also consider how best to address those whose approach to conflict problems is antithetical to the values of the field (for instance those who take a Machiavellian, "power-over," "winner-take-all" approach to conflict).
- Readings (do before today's session):
    - o Draft of The Alliance for Peacebuilding Peace Building Mapping Report. To be provided by Sept. 15.

- *Assignments:*
    - o Background work and submission of a proposal outlining the projects that you plan to undertake this semester.

Session #3 *(Video Conference)* Week of October 8, 1 hour 30 minutes (Date, Time, and S-CAR Location to be Determined)

- *Topics:*
    - o **Theory Versus Practice**
      One of the biggest problems in our field, which we touched on during the first day, is the division between theory and practice. GMU is one of the few institutions in which many of the scholars are also practitioners and vice-versa, but such duality is still relatively rare. Today we will discuss how best to bridge this gap for people who are not lucky enough to be studying at GMU, but who are crossing the divide by reading and participating in the BI learning community. What do practitioners need from scholars and how can we best provide that? What do scholars need from practitioners, and what can we do to provide that? What are the implications for BI content?
    - o In addition to discussing this topic, we will allow at least 30 minutes to discuss people's projects--making reports on progress, challenges, questions, problems, and sharing ideas and potential solutions.
- Readings (do before today's session):
    - o Here there be Monsters
- *Assignments:*
    - o Everyone should have completed at least one set of recommended web resources related to their topic and/or updated two or more sets that we alreay have (as per negotiated "deliverable" agreements)
    - o Start working on your second BI contribution.

Session #4 *(Video Conference)* Week of October 22, 1 hour 30 minutes (Date, Time, and S-CAR Location to be Determined)

- *Topics:*
  - **Quality Control**
    The conflict literature is full of seemingly perceptive insights offering sensible suggestions of how to engage in conflict more consructively. Unfortunately, this advice is often contradictory, with many different approaches being advocated for dealing with the same (or similar) problems. How do we know what of this information is valid and useful and what not? What do we *really* know? How do we know that we know it? How do we know what ideas will work under what circumstances? We want to offer people reliable advice and we don't want to oversell what we know. The question for this week is, in practice, how do we do this?
  - In addition to discussing this topic, we will allow at least 30 minutes to discuss people's projects--making reports on progress, challenges, questions, problems, and sharing ideas and potential solutions.
- *Readings* (do before today's session):
  - [Evaluating Peacebuilding: Not Yet All it Could Be](#)
  - [Improving Peacebuilding Evaluation: A Whole-of-Field Approach](#)
- *Assignments:* Continue working on your second (or third) BI contribution.

Session #5 *(Video Conference)* Week of November 5, 1 hour 30 minutes (Date, Time, and S-CAR Location to be Determined)

- *Topics:*
  - **Learning Materials**
    The Knowledge Base seeks to make available to individuals materials that will help them learn how to more constructively deal with challenging conflicts. In doing this, it is not enough to present reliable advice. We must also figure out how to present this advice in ways that are trustworthy, easily understandable by a diverse audience, and presented in a form that can be conceptually processed by individuals with different learning styles and different information need. This session will focus on the relative advantages and disadvantages of of different ways of presenting ideas in the knowledge base so they will most effectively be utilized when and where they can make a significant difference.
- *Readings:* "[Knowledge Networking: Implications for Peacebuilding Activities](#)"
- *Assignments:*
  - Draft Beyond Intractability contributions to be submitted to us by Monday Nov. 12, unless we have negotiated different due dates with you. (We may negotiate earlier or later due dates for particular people, based on your planned deliverables)

Session #6 *(Video Conference)* Week of November 26, 1 hour 30 minutes (Date, Time, and S-CAR Location to be Determ.ined)

- *Topics:*
  - **The Relationship Between Big Picture Thinking and Specialized Practice**
    There is a continuing need to balance an understanding of large-scale conflict dynamics with the specialized local knowledge needed to successfully complete particular interventions. This session will focus on how the knowledge base might support efforts to structure small-scale projects in ways that are successful at the individual project level, while also contributing to what Mary Anderson calls "peace writ large."
- Readings:
  - "An Integrated Framework for Peacebuilding" (JP Lederach, Chapter 6 of Building Peace." (forthcoming)
  - [Conflict Transformation](#) - Note particularly the section entitled "The Big Picture".
- *Assignments:*

        o   Work on revisions (if necessary) to BI submissions.

Session #7 *(Video Conference)* Week of December 10, 2 hour 30 minutes (Note longer time!! Date, Time, and S-CAR Location to be Determined)

- *Topics:*
    - **Conflict: a "Climate Change-class" Problem**
    This session starts with the recognition that the conflict problem is every bit as serious as the problems of climate change and infectious disease. Any honest look into the future paints a pretty dismal picture, unless we can find better ways of dealing with each of these problems. Climate change and infectious disease receive lots of support and attention. In the conflict field, we spend lots of money fighting the same old destructive conflict games and almost nothing trying to figure out how to change the game. For this, concluding session we want to ask is how might the Beyond Intractability Knowledge Base and Learning Community be structured to help change this.
    - **Student Presentations** 15 min. each. Discuss both content of your project and process of doing research and writing--what did you learn about both? What suggestions do you have to make this process easier? If you are going to continue to work with BI, where would you like to go from here?
- *Assignments:*
    - No readings, work on your final papers and presentations.