

Philosophy and Methods of Conflict Research
CONF 610:002 Fall 2013

Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with purpose.
-Zora Neale Hurston-

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 5:00-7:00 p.m. and by appointment

Course time and location: Tuesday, 7:20-10:00 p.m., Arlington Founder's Hall 478
mymason.gmu.edu (courses)

Course Description

This course introduces students to the philosophies behind social science research and the methods for conducting research in the field of conflict resolution. The concepts we will cover include the identification of valid knowledge (*epistemology*), the nature of the world and how we identify what we study about conflicts (*ontology*), and the means (*methodology*) by which we conduct research to test existing knowledge or generate new knowledge about conflicts and conflict resolution. Even as you craft individual research plans, we will be giving equal attention to putting methodological choices and actions in analytic perspective, recognizing them as *choices* that produce specific ways of knowing.

This course provides an overview of the research process and asks that you acquire hands-on experience with that process. Accordingly we will focus on the:

- 1) identification of research problems associated with particular conflict situations.
- 2) selection of appropriate research methods for use in exploring the problem at hand.
- 3) design of effective research projects

Course Objectives

- Develop familiarity with research concepts and tools to use in examining and analyzing conflict and conflict resolution and be able to articulate the strengths and weaknesses of different methods.
- Demonstrate ability to frame and communicate a feasible research question pertinent to conflict resolution and design research to answer it.
- Improved ability to critically evaluate research, your own and that of other social scientists.
- Gain skills in locating and assessing research information relevant to conflict and conflict resolution from different academic disciplines.
- Understand forms of research for multiple contexts, including academic, organizational, and community contexts and develop awareness of the expectations of different audiences and applications.
- Understand the ethical implications of research.

Course Guidelines, Policies and Procedures

Active engagement: Research skills, like any other skills, can best be acquired through practice, reflection and application. Therefore class members 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. Many weeks 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. 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 or online at: 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 or see me for a referral.

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. 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 early in the drafting of your papers.

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, 12point 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*, 4th Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013.

Robson, Colin. *Real world research: A resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers*, 3rd Edition. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2011.

Seidman, Irving. *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*, 4th Edition. Teachers College Press, 2012.

Yin, Robert. *Case study research: Design and methods*, 5th Edition, *Applied Social Research Methods Series, Vol. 5*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013.

Case studies (required reading) and supplemental materials are posted to the class website. 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: mymason.gmu.edu

Course Requirements

Active Engagement: (15%) Attendance is extremely important as the course is interactive and elicitive. 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. At a minimum, the research log is a place to engage with the readings and a place to record questions raised by the readings before each class. Even better, when kept from the initial attempts to formulate a question through the analysis of results, journaling provides an invaluable record of your progress as well as a place to work out difficult aspects of a particular project and of research issues in general. 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, there is a final self-assessment entry. Further guidelines provided in class. Due: November 19th.

Exam/Quizzes: (5%) One short answer and multiple choice question quiz will be posted online during the semester 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 others who have studied the topic. You should frame a problem and a study that could be completed over a summer. 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 will include a review of 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 and feasibility of studying the problem. The literature review should contain:

- A basic definition of your problem or question.
- An overview of the arguments and perspectives in the field regarding the problem or question.
- An analysis of the current literature a) to define for your study relevant concepts and relationships, and b) identify strengths, deficiencies and the gaps or continuing questions where your research fits.

Length: approximately six to eight 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: October 1.

Draft Research Design: (25%) This assignment is a five to six 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 research design establishes how you will systematically obtain data that is relevant to your question and credible. As with the literature review, you should reference sources relevant to your design concerns and decisions. The draft research design should contain:

- A *brief* ($\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ page) reintroduction of your problem and a clear statement of your hypotheses/questions.
- An overview of your research design, including the data sources, data collection and analysis methods you will use. Be sure to explain why this design suits the problem.
- A sampling scheme or where you plan to obtain your data.
- A discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of your design and data 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 22. Final due October 29.

Research Portfolio: (35%) 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. Overall contents:

Proposal: integrating 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, and your revised research design. Your conclusion should include some indication of your final product and how you plan to disseminate it.

- Appendices to proposal:
 - A work plan including a timeline for completion of a final study.
 - A resources required section with categories.
 - 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, coding guides 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 yourself as the researcher and the research process

Final Research Portfolio: Due December 10 by 6pm.

Initial Class Schedule and Assignments

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

Week 1, August 27:

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

Reading: Simonelli, “*Field School in Chiapas*” (in class)

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

Week 2, September 3:

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 10:

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 and Chapter 15 (Writing a Project Proposal)

Research example: *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 (200-500 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 17:

Designing the inquiry overview. Fixed and flexible designs. Peer discussion of concept maps/problem draft, literature searches.

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

Research example: Nan, et al “*Unofficial International Conflict Resolution...*” (Case Study)

To do: Concept mapping of literature review before class, peer review during class.

Week 5, September 24:

Flexible designs: Case Studies and Grounded Theory.

Reading: Creswell, *Qualitative Research Questions & Qualitative Procedures* (pp. 129-132, 173-202 in 3rd edition)
Robson, Chapter 6

Research example: Allen, *Violence and voice: using a feminist constructivist grounded theory to explore women’s resistance to abuse* (Grounded Theory). Case study TBD.

To do: Literature review & problem statement due.

Week 6, October 1:

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

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

Research examples: Tjosvold, et al. *'Is the Way You Resolve Conflicts...'* (survey), Lilliea & Janoff-Bulmana, “*Macro versus Micro Justice... TRC’s*”and Kapanake & Mullet, “*Judging the Acceptability of Amnesties: A Togolese Perspective*” (Quasi-experiments)

To do: Online quiz will be available for the next two weeks.

I have yet to see any problem, however complicated, which, when you looked at it the right way, did not become still more complicated.
-- Paul Alderson (1926-...) in "New Scientist", 25 September 1969, 638

Week 7, October 8:

Research design continued: Subjects or partners? Design focus: Action and Evaluation research. Researcher preparation.

Reading: Robson, Chapter 7 and Chapter 8
Seidman, Chapter 2
Yin, Chapter 3

Research examples: Kaomea, “*Dilemmas of an Indigenous Academic: A Native Hawaiian Story*” and Wayne, Ellen. (2008) “*Is it just talk? Understanding and Evaluating Intergroup Dialogue.*”

To Do:

October 15: NO CONF 610 CLASS, MONDAY CLASSES MEET TUESDAY

Week 8, October 22:

Data collection: Interviewing and observation. Issues of access, trust.

Reading: Robson, Part III, Chapters 11 and 13
Seidman, Interviewing as Qualitative Research, Chp 1, 4, 6 and 7
Research example: Chakravarty or Norman, *Trust in conflict zones*

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

Week 9, October 29:

Data collection continued. Questionnaires and archival data. Validity. Primary and secondary sources. Operationalizing concepts part two (writing questions, sampling schemes).

Reading: Robson, Chapters 10, 12, 14
Yin, Case Study Research, Chapter 4
Research example: TBA

To do: Final draft research design due.

Week 10, November 5:

Research ethics and principles. Standards of quality.

Reading: Robson, Chapters 9
Creswell, review Chapter 4 on Ethical Considerations
Research examples: ethical dilemmas handout

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

Week 11, November 12:

Analyzing data continued: qualitative approaches. Representation, authenticity.

Reading: Robson, Chapter 17 and Part IV
Creswell, Chapter 9
See also Seidman and Yin relevant chapters, Data set online.
Research examples: TBA and Hole, “*Working between languages...*”

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

Week 12, November 19:

Analyzing data: quantitative approaches.

Reading: Robson, Introduction to Part V and Chapter 16
Review Creswell, Chapter 8
Research example: TBA—online.

To Do: Pilot.

Week 13, November 26:

Issues in conflict analysis and resolution research revisited: audiences, context, researcher role.
Violence and safety in the field.

Reading: Research example: *Conducting Research in the Middle East’s Conflict Zone*,
Ethnographic Research After Violent Conflicts, and TBA.

Week 14, December 3:

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

Reading: Robson, Chapter 18
Yin, Chapter 6

December 10:

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