

9/5//14

Steve Wessler

Conflict Resolution for the Long Haul: Syllabus

Overview of Course: This one credit course will meet over the weekend of Friday through Sunday October 17, 18 and 19.

Course Title: CR for the Long Haul

Course Description: Providing students with skills and strategies to engage in CR in the human right field over a career without burning out or becoming too distant from the emotional content of conflict. Students will develop these skills through in class discussion and through practice sessions.

- Avoiding becoming the caricature of the "fly-in expert: Learning strategies for preparing for CR in places you have never been through focus groups and interviews
- Telling Stories: The use of stories in CR can motivate participants to rethink their perspectives on conflict and also give you a sense of continuity as you bring your experience and wisdom from past work to new situations
- Responding to Difficult Questions, Comments or Outbursts: How we respond to difficult comments and questions are pivotal events in CR. We will practice skills for responding in the moment.
- Coping with Vicarious Trauma: Learning skills for understanding and coping with the wrenching stories of emotional and physical trauma we hear in human rights and CR work.

Class Days and Times:

Friday: 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm

Saturday 10:00 am to 5:00 pm

Sunday 10:00 am to 5:00 pm.

On Friday I will provide pizza and coffee and soda for a working dinner.

On Saturday students may need to work over lunch with a partner to prepare for a presentation.

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Short Bio and Contact Information:

Steve has worked in the human rights field for over 22 years, first directing a state wide hate crime investigation and enforcement unit, than starting his own human rights NGO, and now consulting with NGOs and IGOs. He has engaged in conflict resolution on issues of race, nationality, religion and sexual orientation across the US and in Europe, including in Northern Ireland and Kosovo. The participants in his CR work range from youth to police officers to religious leaders to NGO staff to the general public. Steve teaches courses on human rights at the College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, Maine. Steve lives on Mount Desert Island, Maine.

stevewessler@gmail.com

Home and Office: 207 288 1101

Mobile 207 232 9905

Important: The best way to reach me is by email, even if you want to talk with me on the phone. We can schedule our phone call via email more effectively than by trading voice mail messages.

Assignments and Grading

Assignments Outside of Class Hours

1. Readings to be completed before Sunday the 19th on secondary trauma.
2. Paper on "what brings you to CR work?" We will spend time in class on Friday evening talking about this topic and why it is important to your future CR practice. The length of the paper is between 350 and 500 words. On Saturday morning students will read and discuss their papers in small groups and/or to the whole class. The paper is due at the beginning of class on Saturday morning.
3. Outline of the story you will tell in class on Sunday. The outline is due at the beginning of class on Sunday morning. The outline is between 350 and 500 words.

Grading

Students will be graded on class participation and the 2 short papers.

Class Participation: Class participation is 70% of the grade for the course.

Papers: Each paper is 15% of the grade for the course.

Important: If you find it very hard to participate in class discussions please email me at least 2 weeks before the course begins so we can talk on the phone and try to develop alternative ways for you to participate during class. All students will need to participate in the practice sessions.

Important Alert About the Content of the Course: In class I will be using examples from my practice that are likely to contain descriptions of genocide, ethnic cleansing, hate crimes or hate speech told to me by participants in conflict resolution dialogues, workshops and focus groups. The incidents that I will describe may involve issues of race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity. If you are concerned about how these discussions may impact you emotionally and/or physically please email me at least 2 weeks before the course begins so that we can work together to try to address your concerns.

Tentative Schedule for the 3 Day Course

Friday: 6 pm to 9 pm

- Introductions: to the course, from each student and about myself
- Discussion of what constitutes the work of conflict resolution: how varied is CR practice
- Interactive exercise and discussion focusing on the skills and experience each of us has for doing conflict resolution work
- Discussion of what in your experience, background and identity (including gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability and socio-economic status) led you to be interested in conflict resolution and/or human rights work and why understanding this is important for your future practice as a CR and human rights professional
- Discussion of the writing assignment due on Saturday morning.

Saturday: 10 am to 5 pm

- Students read and discuss in small groups their written assignments on why they want to engage in conflict resolution work. This will be followed by discussion in plenary session
- Discussion of importance of preparing for conflict resolution
- Developing strategies for conducting focus groups to learn about conflict before you begin CR work
- I will conduct a focus group with the members of the class on a topic that could be used in conflict resolution, following by a debrief of the focus group
- Work in pairs on case studies focusing on preparing for conflict resolution
- Practice Session: presenting in pairs to the entire class your completed case study

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- Telling stories as a critical tool in conflict resolution
 - What are the pitfalls in story telling
 - What makes a strong and impactful story
 - How story telling connects different parts of you CR practice
 - Begin to work on the assignment due Sunday morning: developing a story in the context of a conflict resolution dialogue

Sunday: 10 am to 5 pm

- Bring a personal item to class which is of emotional importance to you
- Practice Session: Presentation by each student of their story followed by discussion of what worked well and what might be done differently
Answering difficult (and sometimes angry) questions arising in conflict resolution
- Practice Session: Students will practice answering difficult question in simulated conflict resolution dialogues
- Trauma and Vicarious Trauma
 - Learning what secondary trauma is and how it can affect CR and human rights professionals
 - Learning and discussing strategies for ameliorating the harmful impact of repeated exposure to vicarious trauma
 - Practice session: Responding to CR participants who describe the trauma they and their families' have experienced
- Closing session: The joys of CR work and what we gained from the 3 day course