

CONF 900.001  
Integrating Theory, Practice and Method in Conflict Analysis  
Mondays, 4:30-7:10  
Founders Hall 467

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## **DESCRIPTION**

This course is designed around three primary objectives. First, the course is intended to enhance the students' skills for understanding, reflecting upon, and writing about protracted conflicts at a professional level. With this objective, the course will operate as a seminar in which students engage in a variety of in-class activities. These include analyzing contemporary conflicts, reflecting critical upon case studies of conflicts, and presenting individual research plans on a conflict of the student's choice. Second, the course develops and applies what can be called a generative approach to the integration of theory, research and practice. Such an approach centers on the ways in which these three pillars of the field are formed, developed, assessed and then transformed in response to critical reflection, focusing on the primary and secondary concepts in our field. Linked to such constructions are skills for thinking critically about conflicts and conflict interventions. Third, regarding the substance of protracted conflicts, the course gives special attention to the methods and modes of understanding social interactions generally and conflictual relations in particular. Such understanding centers on the ways in which individuals interact with others a social group, how they think about themselves in relation to others in lived experiences, and how such reflection one's identity reveal interdependencies of various kinds in one's life. Such understanding is both constructivist—reflecting the formation and reliance on socially-defined constructs—and ontology—reflecting one's 'reality' about oneself in relation to others.

## **OBJECTIVES**

To enhance skills for critical reflection on the analysis protracted conflict

To learn the generative perspective to integrating theory, research and practice

To improve upon the understanding of the ways in which individuals understand each other in lived experiences, with particular attention given the negative relations among conflict actors.

## READINGS

Books Required: [Available at the Arlington Campus Bookstore]

Fay, B. 1996. Contemporary philosophy of social science: a multicultural approach. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing. 1-55786-538-8 pbk.

B. Flyvbjerg. 2001. Making Social Science Matter. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. 0-521-77568 x pbk

J. Lester and J. Lester, Writing Research Papers in the Social Sciences, New York: Pearson Education Inc. 0-321-26763-X pbk.

Articles and Book Chapters [Available in Blackboard]

K. Avruch, "Culture, Relativism, and Human Rights"

Taylor, "Inescapable Frameworks"

Celia Cook-Huffman, "The role of identity in conflict"

Toolan, Narrative, Chapter 1

A. Veal and A. Stavrou, "Former Lord's Resistance Army Child Soldier Abductees" [Blackboard]

Litzak-Hirsch, et. al. "Whose House is This? Dilemmas of Identity Construction in the Israeli-Palestinian Context?" [Blackboard]

N. Oren, D. Rothbart, K. Korostelina, "Striking Civilian Targets During the Lebanon War: A social psychological analysis of Israeli Decision Makers"

## SCHEDULE OF TOPICS, READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS

Session 1 [August 25]: Introduction: Understanding, Thinking and Speaking about Conflicts

Activity: Discuss individual topics of interest

Assignment: Analyze one article from Washington Post for conflict related issue, question, topic.

UNIT I: Frames and Domains of Conflict

Session 2 [September 8]: Norms, Values and Moral Frames

Readings:

Flyvbjerg, Making Social Science Matter, Chapters 5, 6, 7.

K. Avruch, “Culture, Relativism, and Human Rights” [Blackboard]

Lester and Lester, Writing Research Papers, Chapter 2.

Guest Speaker: Prof. Sandra Cheldelin

Activity: Discuss analysis of articles

Assignment: For the next class prepare a one page abstract of project of your choice

Session 3 [September 15]: Reforming Conflict Analysis

Readings:

Flyvbjerg, Making Social Science Matter, Chapters 8 and 9.

Taylor, “Inescapable Frameworks” [Blackboard]

Lester and Lester, Writing Research Papers, Chapters 4 and 14

Activity: Discuss abstract of project

Assignment: For next class prepare a problem statement that includes one or two research questions for chosen project

Session 4 [September 22]: Identity: Knowing Oneself

Readings:

Fay, Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science, Chapters 1, 2, 3.

Celia Cook-Huffman, “The role of identity in conflict” [Blackboard]

Lester and Lester, Writing Research Papers, Chapters 4 and 14.

Activity: Presentation of problem statement

Submit assignment #1: Problem statement

Assignment: For next class prepare literature review

Session 5 [September 29]: Identity: Knowing Others

Readings:

Fay, Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science, Chapters 3, 4, 5.

Lester and Lester, Writing Research Papers, Chapter 12.

Activity: Discuss literature review

Assignment: For next class prepare paper on theory relevant to your project

## UNIT II: Researching Conflicts

Session 6 [October 6]: Sources of information

Readings:

Fay, Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science, Chapters 6, 7, 9, 10.

Lester and Lester, Writing Research Papers, Chapters 4 and 5.

Activity:

Submit assignment #2 on literature review and theory

Presentation of papers on literature review and theory

Assignment: For next class design plan for gathering and analyzing data

Session 7 [October 7, 2:00-4:40] Metropolitan building, room 5183]: Methodology

Readings:

A. Veal and A. Stavrou, "Former Lord's Resistance Army Child Soldier Abductees" [Blackboard]

I. Skjelsbaek, "Therapeutic Work with Victims of Sexual Violence in War and Postwar" [Blackboard]

Litzak-Hirsch, et. al. "Whose House is This? Dilemmas of Identity Construction in the Israeli-Palestinian Context?" [Blackboard]

Activity: Discuss plans for gathering and analyzing data

## UNIT III: Analyzing conflict research

Session 8 [October 13]: Case studies of conflict research [continued]

Activity: Guest speaker: Prof. Karina Korostelina

Session 9 [November 3]: The profession: dissemination of results

Activity: Presentation of results

Assignment: Submit assignment #3 on research methodology

Session 10 [November 10]: Presentation of results

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Since this class will operate as a seminar, it is critical that each student participate in the in-class activities which will include frequently discussion associated with the students' own individual interests and planned research. [10% of course grade.]

Graded Assignment #1: Prepare a problem statement on a contemporary protracted conflict of your choice that includes one or more research question. Give special attention to the specific issues that you plan to examine and the research project that you plan to pursue. Include a statement about the related issues that you will not cover in your project. The length of the submitted work is 12 to 15 pages, and is due 4:30, September 22. [30% of course grade.]

Graded Assignment #2: Prepare a literature review on topics related to your research project. Include a statement about the current state of knowledge on such topics, explaining what is known and not known about the issues you plan to address. For this assignment include also a statement of a theory that underpins your research project you select, showing how the theory provides a conceptual grounding to the issues you plan to address. The length is 12-15 pages and is due 4:30, October 6 and is worth 30% of course grade.

Graded Assignment #3: Prepare a research plan that combines the elements of previous assignments, with the addition of a methodology that best fits your project. Your research plan will include the following: problem statement including research questions, literature review, underlying theory, methodologies for data gathering and analysis, and anticipated results. This is due November 3 and worth 30% of course grade.

## **GMU EMAIL ACCOUNTS**

Students must activate their GMU email accounts to receive important University information, including messages related to this class.

## **HONOR POLICY**

GMU is an Honor Code university; please see the University Catalog for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. The principle of academic integrity is taken very

seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else's work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt (of any kind) please ask for guidance and clarification.

Three fundamental and rather simple 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. No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct.

Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving the person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes. Paraphrased material must also be cited, using MLA or APA format. A simple listing of books or articles is not sufficient. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in the academic setting. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me.

### **GMU E-MAIL ACCOUNTS**

Students must use their Mason email accounts—either the existing “MEMO” system or a new “MASONLIVE” account to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. See <http://masonlive.gmu.edu> for more information. It will not be possible to contact you through another email account, and you should check your email for important course, S-CAR, and Mason information.

### **OFFICE OF DISABILITY SERVICES**

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS. <http://ods.gmu.edu>

### **OTHER USEFUL CAMPUS RESOURCES:**

WRITING CENTER: A114 Robinson Hall; (703) 993-1200; <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>  
UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

“Ask a Librarian” <http://library.gmu.edu/mudge/IM/IMRef.html>; Mary Oberlies is S-CAR's liaison librarian and can be contacted at [moberlies@gmu.edu](mailto:moberlies@gmu.edu).

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES (CAPS):  
(703) 993-2380; <http://caps.gmu.edu>

### **UNIVERSITY POLICIES**

The University Catalog, <http://catalog.gmu.edu> is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university academic affairs. Other policies are

available at <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu>. All members of the university community are responsible for knowing and following established policies.