

CONF 660: Conflict Assessment and Program Evaluation
School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution
George Mason University

Class Time: 10:00am – 5:00 pm
Saturday 1/25, 2/1, 2/8, Saturday/Sunday 2/22 and 2/23, and Saturday 3/1

Location: Arlington Campus – Founders Hall, Room 475
Online at: mymason.gmu.edu

Instructor: Dr. Mara Schoeny
703 993-9191 (office), mschoeny@gmu.edu

Office Hours: Wed. 5:00—7:00 and by appointment

Introduction

Prerequisites or co-requisites: CONF 501 or 502, and acceptance in the graduate certificate program or graduate program in Conflict Analysis and Resolution, or permission of instructor.

The course examines the monitoring and evaluation of conflict resolution programs and initiatives and will teach strategies relevant for the evaluation of programs in conflict or post-conflict contexts. Course readings will emphasize conflict assessment and evaluation methods for conflict resolution initiatives generally and specifically as these topics relate to the certificate programs, including: community planning and collaboration initiatives; conflict prevention, reconstruction and stabilization; regional conflict resolution and peacebuilding; and evaluating the use of specific conflict resolution skills and processes.

Practical difficulties and issues to consider for evaluation will include: balancing multiple purposes of evaluation; defining success; power and empowerment; utilization and learning; impartiality; ethics; cultural issues; conflict sensitivity; and working in conflict environments. Students will develop an appreciation and understanding of both established and emergent approaches for evaluating conflict interventions. Students will complete an evaluation design for a conflict intervention initiative as the major course requirement.

An understanding of evaluation and the ability to evaluate complement the ability to analyze conflict and design programs that are intended to ameliorate or transform conflicts. The general approach to the course is that evaluation is a form of feedback and learning and when done well, serves as a mechanism for improving conflict resolution practice and theory.

Objectives and Core Competencies

The course focuses on the following objectives:

- ❖ *To provide an overview of the role and importance of program evaluation and the variety of approaches and tools available.*

- ❖ *To provide an overview of the phases and steps in designing and implementing a monitoring and evaluation plan.*
- ❖ *To explore the constraints, challenges and other considerations an evaluator working in conflict environments might face, and how these influence the design and implementation of assessments and evaluations.*

By the end of the course, students will be expected to have the following core competencies:

- *Select appropriate approaches and tools for monitoring and evaluation given the goals of the evaluation and constraints and challenges to design and implementation.*
- *Explain their reasons for their evaluation design choices*
- *Design a monitoring and evaluation plan that links theories of change to intervention goals, objectives, design and implementation.*
- *Design specific data collection methods, measures, and indicators for use in monitoring and evaluation.*
- *Know how to conduct an evaluation, write an evaluation report and encourage utilization of findings.*

Course Expectations

1. *Consistent attendance.* Barring exceptional circumstances, you are expected to attend all weekends for the full time scheduled.
2. *Effective preparation.* Class discussions and activities depend on your preparation. With the exception of the first class, reading-related online quizzes must be completed 24 hours prior to all class meetings.
3. *Appropriate participation.* Engage actively in the course in whichever of the formats you are most comfortable with: large group discussions, small group discussions, class exercises, on-line homework assignments between classes, etc.
4. *Course completion.* In keeping with departmental policy, incomplete grades will be given only in cases of personal or immediate family illness.

Course Requirements

Students are responsible for completing individual and group assignments on time. You may be penalized the equivalent of a full letter grade for each day the assignment is late. Some class assignments and readings will be on the course homepage or sent via e-mail. Students are responsible for checking GMU email and keeping up-to-date with these.

1. **Preparation (5%)** Students are expected to demonstrate content comprehension by completing brief online quizzes due 24 hours before class. There is no quiz prior to the first class. The quizzes are designed to help faculty determine what concepts and content need additional work. After the class, students will have the opportunity to retake the quiz.
2. **Active Participation (15%)** Students are expected to actively participate in class and online in all discussions and exercises. Given the intensive schedule of this course, absences will be excused only in exceptional circumstances (for example, death in family and medical

emergencies). Unexcused absences will negatively affect participation grades. An alternate assignment may be required for any excused absences (to be negotiated with the instructor).

3. **Theories of Change and Process Tracing (20%)** Consider the program proposal example posted (online). First, draft a logframe (include as an appendix) or other chart format that creates a graphic depiction of the processes and links. Then, discuss the theories of change that appear to inform the intervention proposed (these may be directly or indirectly present in the program proposal). Discuss the processes of change from intervention to output, outcome, and impact as captured in the logframe. These two steps should be written up as a three page narrative summary of the core theory or theories of change and the core process tracing relevant to the proposal. Finally, include a brief reflection on your own critique of these ToC and process assumptions. **Due: Monday, Feb.10th (midnight).**
4. **Group Bibliographic Essay and Poster Presentation (25%)** The class will be divided into groups of 4-5 students (TBD in class by second weekend). The group assignment requires investigating, analyzing, and organizing existing resources for evaluation into a *bibliographic essay*, focusing on one specific conflict and intervention program arena (such as interfaith dialogue, public participation processes or in-house ADR programs). The bibliographic essay is a narrative discussion and review of the literature, issues, indicators, evaluation approaches, organizations and resources relevant to your particular program type, presented to help orient those new to the subject. Each group will present their results during a poster session; the bibliographic essay will be posted online as a resource guide available to all class members. Further details to be provided in class. **Due: Final Weekend, March 1**
5. **Final Paper (35%)** The final paper is an evaluation design demonstrating application and mastery of the course material. All papers should be 12-15 pages and be well supported and documented. The evaluation proposal should be as specific and practical as possible since the assignment is designed for you to demonstrate your ability to design a monitoring and evaluation plan that can be utilized in real world settings.

Design focus and approval: identify one project or initiative for which you will prepare an evaluation design. Students should have personal access to the program or be able to do research via available documentation. In a paragraph, describe what intervention/program you propose to evaluate and to select a primary purpose for the evaluation you will plan. Do not choose too complicated a project for this assignment! **Due: By 3rd weekend**

Evaluation Design: consider the conflict resolution project you choose to work with for the semester. Very briefly describe the conflict and the assessment that the intervention was designed to impact. Identify the goals and objectives of the intervention, as well as the relevant theories of change and process tracing. Identify a core purpose for the evaluation.

Now, design a monitoring and evaluation plan to achieve the evaluation's purpose, such as measuring progress towards achieving the initiative/program's goals and objectives. Identify the type of evaluation you have selected and discuss the alternative approaches considered. Also include the purpose of the evaluation, hypothesis (if any), intended audience, specific data collection and analysis plan, including samples of data collection instruments, and how

the results of the evaluation will be distributed and utilized. The paper should be written in a format consistent with typical evaluation plans/reports (minus the results and conclusions section since this is a plan proposal). Your design should reference and utilize insights from course readings and your own research about similar evaluation efforts. Further details to be provided in class. Please include the project document or links. **Due: Sunday, March 16th (midnight)**

***Doctoral student requirements:* In accordance with S-CAR policy, doctoral students enrolled in CONF 660 will be required to complete additional course assignments. Please see your instructor for guidelines tailored to your doctoral course of study.

University Resources and Assistance

Writing Center: The Writing Center provides tutors and online services to help you develop ideas and revise papers at no charge. It can sometimes accommodate walk-ins, but generally it is best to call for an appointment. **Location:** Arlington, Founder's Hall, Room 212 (also in Fairfax). **Contact:** (703) 993-4491 <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>

Disability Resource Center: The Disability Resource Center assists students with learning or physical conditions affecting learning. Students with learning differences that require special conditions for exams or other writing assignments should provide documentation provided by the Disability Resource Center. Please see one of the instructors the first week of classes. **Location:** Fairfax, SUB I, Room 2500. **Contact:** 703-993-2474 <http://ods.gmu.edu/>

Honor Code and Plagiarism: 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 <http://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. You should review requirements regarding use and citation of sources prior to submitting your final work.

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.

For each major assignment in this course, students will include a signed statement:
"On my honor, I have neither given nor received any unauthorized aid on this assignment."

Readings

Required Text (available at the GMU Arlington Bookstore or from online booksellers)

Bamberger et al. *RealWorld Evaluation*. Sage Publications, 2011.

Required Manuals (Available On-line)

Church, Cheyanne and Mark Rogers. *Designing for Results: Integrating Monitoring & Evaluation in Conflict Transformation Programmes*. Washington, DC: Search for Common Ground, 2005. http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/ilr/ilt_manualpage.html

Lederach, John Paul, et al., *Reflective Peacebuilding: A Planning, Monitoring and Learning Toolkit*. The Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace, University of Notre Dame, Indiana and Catholic Relief Services Southeast Asia, 2007. http://crs.org/publications/showpdf.cfm?pdf_id=80 (and on course homepage)

Required Additional Reading (Available on course homepage)

D'Estree, Tamra Pearson, Larissa Fast, Joshua Weiss, and Monica Jakobsen. (2001) "Changing the Debate about 'Success' in Conflict Resolution Efforts." *Negotiation Journal*, vol. 17., no. 2. pp. 101-113.

Elliot, Michael, Pearson d'Estree, Tamra, and Kaufman. "Evaluation as a Tool for Reflection," *Beyond Intractability*. Ed. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess. Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado, USA. September 2003. <http://www.beyondintractability.org/bi-essay/Evaluation-Reflection>

Gasper, Des (2001) 'Evaluating the 'Logical Framework Approach' Towards Learning-Oriented Development Evaluation,' *Public Administration and Development*, 20, pp.17-28, 2000.

Mercy Corps Theory of Change, Youth and Conflict Toolkit, pp 7-17
<http://www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org/resource/collection/9E786610-CF07-4073-9E34-A03818697B2E/MCYouthandConflictToolkit-3.pdf>

Search for Common Ground. "Evaluation Guidelines." July 2006.
http://www.sfcg.org/sfcg/sfcg_evaluations.html

Patton, Michael Quinn, *Utilization Focused Evaluation*, 4th Ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2008. (selected chapters)

Patton, Michael Quinn, *Developmental Evaluation: Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation and Use*. Guilford Press, 2010. Chapters 1 & 2

Preskill, Hallie and Tessie Tzavaras Catsambas, *Reframing Evaluation Through Appreciative Inquiry*. "Focusing the Evaluation Using Appreciative Inquiry" Chapter 3. Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, 2006.

Ross, Marc Howard. (2004) "Some Guidelines for Conceptualizing Success in Conflict Resolution Evaluation," *Peace and Conflict Studies*. 11(1). pp. 1-18.

Case examples: conflict resolution program proposals and evaluation designs for in-class and online assignments, will be posted to the course webpage.

*A useful website is the online portal for Design, Monitoring and Evaluation in Peacebuilding:
<http://dmeforpeace.org/>*

CLASS PLANS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Weekend 1

Saturday: January 25th, 10 am-5 pm

Introductions

- Class members
- Introduction to the Course, Syllabus Overview

Overview

History and purpose of evaluation

Types of evaluation and evaluation roles

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) for Conflict Interventions

- Evaluation cycle and stages
- Assessment/analysis, design & implementation, monitoring & evaluation

Evaluation Exercise: developing criteria, measures

Required Reading for Weekend One:

Bamberger et al. *RealWorld Evaluation*. Chapter 1

Church and Rogers. *Designing for Results*, Chapters 1, 7

http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/ilr/ilt_manualpage.html

Elliot, Pearson d'Estree, and Kaufman. "Evaluation as a Tool for Reflection," *Beyond Intractability*. <http://www.beyondintractability.org/bi-essay/Evaluation-Reflection>

Lederach, John Paul, et al., *Reflective Peacebuilding: A Planning, Monitoring and Learning Toolkit*. http://crs.org/publications/showpdf.cfm?pdf_id=80 (Sections 1,2,3)

Due: (between Weekends 1 & 2)

1. Start Evaluation Project Selection
2. Complete Content Comprehension Quiz on readings for Weekends 1 and 2.
Due: Friday morning 9 am, January 31

Weekend 2

Saturday: February 1, 10 am-5 pm

Logic Models

- Connecting evaluation to assessment, intervention design & program planning
- Theories of change, process tracing, logical frameworks

Indicators

- Recognizing change
- Operationalizing abstract concepts

Applications

- Case Studies
- Discuss chosen semester project topics
- Sign up/Select Group for Group Presentation

Required Reading for Weekend Two:

Bamberger et al. *RealWorld Evaluation*. Chapter 2, 10

Church and Rogers. *Designing for Results*: Chapter 2, 3, 4

http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/ilr/ilt_manualpage.html

Gaspar. "Evaluating the Logical Framework Approach..." See course homepage.

Lederach, John Paul, et al., *Reflective Peacebuilding: A Planning, Monitoring and Learning Toolkit*. http://crs.org/publications/showpdf.cfm?pdf_id=80 (Sections 5, 6, 7)

Patton, *Utilization Focused Evaluation*, Chapter 10 (available on course homepage, see discussion guide)

Resource: Mercy Corps Theory of Change, Youth and Conflict Toolkit, pp 7-17
<http://www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org/resource/collection/9E786610-CF07-4073-9E34-A03818697B2E/MCYouthandConflictToolkit-3.pdf> (*focus on ToC and indicators*)

Due:

1. (Next class) Draft of process tracing for peer discussion (Feb. 8)
2. Content Comprehension Quiz on readings for Weekend 3
Due: Friday morning 9 am, February 7

Theories of Change and Process Tracing Reports

- Paper draft peer discussions

Overview of Evaluation Designs and Addressing Budget, Time & Information Constraints

Evaluation Planning

- Steps in planning an evaluation
- Case Study examples
- Conflict context
- Participatory focus

Required Readings for Weekend Three:

Bamberger et al. *RealWorld Evaluation*. Chapters 3, 4, 5, 11

Church and Rogers. *Designing for Results*. Ch. 5, 8

http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/ilr/ilt_manualpage.html

Preskill and Catsambas, “Focusing the Evaluation Using Appreciative Inquiry” Chapter 3

Due:

1. Assignment: Theories of Change and Process Tracing.
Due: February 10th (Monday, by midnight)
2. Submit topic and focusing description for group project research
3. Complete Content Comprehension Quiz on readings for Weekend 4.
Due: Friday morning 9 am February 21

Saturday

Theories of change, process tracing and indicators debrief and review

Methods and Measures

- Baselines
- Collecting data, developing measures
- Writing questions for interviews, surveys
- Conducting focus groups

Developmental Evaluation

Sunday

Defining Success and Effectiveness for Conflict Programs/Interventions

Emerging Data Collection Techniques

- Reading TBD

Data Analysis

Guest speaker

Required Readings for Weekend Four

Bamberger et al. *RealWorld Evaluation*. Chapters 7, 14, 15 (*Resources: Chapters 12, 13*)

Church and Rogers. *Designing for Results*. Ch. 5, 9 and 12

http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/ilr/ilt_manualpage.html

D'Estree, Fast, Weiss, and Jakobsen. "Changing the Debate about 'Success' in Conflict Resolution Efforts." pp. 101-113

Patton, *Developmental Evaluation*, Ch. 1 and 2.

Marc Howard Ross "Some Guidelines for Conceptualizing Success in Conflict Resolution Evaluation

Data technique reading: TBA

Due:

1. Continue group project research and preparation for group assignment due final class
2. Complete Content Comprehension Quiz on readings for Weekend 5
Due: Friday morning 9 am February 28

Poster session: Conflict Resolution Sectors Evaluation Resources

Evaluation Challenges

- Political constraints
- Ethics
- Utilization and participation

Evaluation planning: Peer discussion final papers

Professional development and networking in evaluation

Course Wrap-Up

- Picture
- Course Evaluations

Required Readings for Weekend Five:

Bamberger et al. *RealWorld Evaluation*. Chapters 6, 8, 9 and 19

Church, Cheyanne and Mark Rogers. *Designing for Results: Integrating Monitoring & Evaluation in Conflict Transformation Programmes*. Ch. 10 and 11
http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/ilr/ilt_manualpage.html

Resource: Search for Common Ground Evaluation Guidelines
http://www.sfcg.org/sfcg/sfcg_evaluations.html

Due: before Weekend 5

1. Complete Content Comprehension Quiz on readings for Weekend 5
Due: Friday morning 9 am, February 28

**** FINAL Assignment Due: (after last class) Sunday, March 16th (midnight)**