

CONF 320 – Interpersonal Conflict Analysis and Resolution

Semester: Spring 2012

Section/CRN: 002/13704

Class Time: Thursdays 1:30 – 4:15 p.m.

Location: East 122

Office Hours: Thursdays 11:00 – 12:30 p.m., Robinson B365

Instructor: Leila Peterson, Undergraduate Program in Conflict Analysis and Resolution lpetersh@gmu.edu, 703-861-0931.

Course Description and Objectives

This course explores a variety of theories, models, and frameworks for analyzing and resolving interpersonal conflict. We will begin by exploring the role of cognition in conflict and then focus on theories framing individual development, family relations, and social experiences early in life. Students will examine the various dimensions of one's self and social interaction that lead to interpersonal conflict situations. Students will have an opportunity to consider a range of possible interpersonal conflicts, their possible associated causes, and methods of inquiry that lead to resolution. Of equal importance, students will learn and practice skills for responding constructively to conflict and engaging in difficult conversations. Through analysis, exercises, and role plays, students will reflect on "who am I and what do I bring to this particular conflict?" and further, "what are my range of options to begin the resolution process?" Reflection is encouraged at both the individual level and the group level to further develop skills and deepen understanding.

Course Requirements

A. Participation, Knowledge of Course Materials and Contributions in the Classroom (20%)

Students are expected to participate fully in all exercises and complete all weekly, required readings in preparation for class discussion. Students are expected to show up on time for each class and stay for the duration. Sometimes absence from class is unavoidable. If you know you are going to be absent, contact me in advance. Otherwise I expect you to be there.

- For each class I will randomly select 2-3 people to provide reflection on the readings due that day. Be prepared.
- During most classes, there will be a practice exercise you will complete in class and hand in. If you are not in class you are responsible for completing and handing in the exercise on your own. The exercises are posted on Blackboard.
- There are two ways to get extra credit:

- Attend an S-CAR Brownbag or Dialogue & Difference Discussion during the semester and turn in a 1-page reflection on what you learned and how it connects to what we are covering in CONF 320.
- Find an article about how technology is changing the way that we interact with each other. Write a 1-page reflection on the ramifications for conflict and conflict resolution.

B. Early Semester Essay (10%)

Students will be provided with an essay topic early in the semester that requires them to apply certain readings to a given situation. The purpose of this exercise is 1) to see how well students integrate readings; and 2) provide students with a sense of my grading standards and expectations. Specific instructions for this assignment will be provided in class. Length: 2-3 pages. Due: 2/23, in class

C. Midterm Exam (25%)

The midterm exam will be an in-class short answer and essay exam containing interpersonal conflict scenarios and questions from the readings. 3/29

D. Team Presentation (20%)

Students will work in groups of three to prepare a team presentation. The goal of the assignment is to review an interpersonal conflict scenario from a film or book and present an analysis and recommendations for possible resolution or prevention of the conflict. Presentations should last approximately 15-20 minutes and will be presented in-class during the middle of the semester. Specific instructions for this assignment will be provided in class. Presentations: 4/12 & 4/19

E. Final Exam (25%)

The final exam will be a take-home essay exam containing interpersonal conflict scenarios and questions from the readings. Due 5/10 by 11:59 PM via email. Note: If you do not receive an email confirmation from me by 10 AM on 5/11, then contact me immediately to ensure that I have received your exam.

Class Policies and Procedures

Cell Phones and Computers: Please keep cell phones OFF during class. Use of computers is only permitted during lectures for note-taking. Computers should be shut off during class discussions, student presentations, exercises, and exams.

Late Assignments: Students are responsible for completing individual and group assignments on time. You will be penalized the equivalent of a 1/2 letter grade for each day the assignment is late.

GMU Email: Some class assignments and readings will be sent via e-mail and students are responsible for checking GMU email and keeping up-to-date with these. Incomplete

grades will not be granted save in cases of personal or immediate family illness or emergency.

Honor Code: *"To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the university community, have set forth this honor code: **Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.**"* For an overview of the Honor Code, see:

<http://mason.gmu.edu/~montecin/plagiarism.htm>

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 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. 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."

All work for CONF 320 must be submitted in both hard copy and electronic form, with the exception of the final exam (Due 5/10). The final exam should be submitted electronically only.

University Resources and Assistance

Writing Center: The Writing Center provides tutors who can 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. The services of the Writing Center are also available online. **Location:** Robinson Hall A, room 114. **Contact:** (703) 993-1200 or <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu> **Hours:** Tuesday through Thursday from 9:30 to 7:30. Friday hours are 9:30 to 2:30.

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: SUB I, Room 222 **Contact:** 703-993-2474 www.gmu.edu/student/drc/

Electronic Reserves

Adobe Acrobat must be installed on your computer to view and print some E-Reserves Readings. E-Reserves permit students to access Course Readings remotely from home or office, and allow students to view and print materials using Adobe Acrobat Reader. All users of the E-Reserves must comply with the University Policy and Copy Right Law (Title 17, United States Code)

Accessing E-Reserves:

1. Go to <http://oscr.gmu.edu>
2. Click on the magnifying glass (Search electronic reserves)
3. Using the drop-down boxes, select the course [CONF 320-002] and instructor [Peterson]. Be sure it says “Spring 2012” and that you have the correct Section.
4. Enter in the password (**to be given in class**) and click submit to view the item
5. To view and print an article click on the small PDF button or the Link button if available

If you experience problems with an electronic reserve item or need additional help please contact the E-Reserves Coordinator at 993-9043. If you need additional assistance please e-mail ereserves@gmu.edu.

Required Readings

Arbinger Institute, The Anatomy of Peace: Resolving the Heart of Conflict. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc. (Available in the Bookstore)

Stone, Douglas, Bruce Patton and Sheila Heen. Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most. New York: Viking. (Available in the Bookstore)

Wilmot, William W. and Joyce L. Hocker. Interpersonal Conflict, 8th Ed. New York: McGraw-Hill. (Available in the Bookstore)

Course packet available through electronic reserve.

Folger, Joseph P., Marshall Scott Poole and Randall K. Stutman, “Face-saving” Working Through Conflict. New York: Longman, Inc., 2001. 155-184. [Ereserve]

Shearouse, Susan, “Building Trust,” Conflict 101: A Manager’s Guide to Resolving Problems So That Everyone Can Get Back to Work. New York: American Management Association. (2011) [Ereserve]

Tavris, Carol and Aronson, Elliot, Mistakes Were Made (but not by me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions, and Hurtful Acts. New York: Harcourt,

Inc., 2008. Introduction, pp. 1-10; Chapter 1: Cognitive Dissonance: The Engine of Self-justification; pp. 11-39; Chapter 7: Wounds, Rifts, and Wars, pp. 185-212; Chapter 8: Letting Go and Owning Up, 213-236. [Ereserve]

Weekly Themes, Readings and Assignments

WEEK 1 THURSDAY JANUARY 26

Introduction to Interpersonal Conflict

Introductions and expectations; Overview of course and syllabus

Week 2 THURSDAY FEBRUARY 2

What are the causes of interpersonal conflict? (Part 1)

Cognition and conflict: selection and interpretation of information. Cognitive dissonance. Cognitive perspectives on interpersonal conflict

Readings Due:

- Wilmot & Hocker, Chapters 1, Chapter 2 (pp. 35-60 only).
- Stone: Introduction and Chapter 1
- Tavris, Carol and Aronson, Elliot, Introduction, pp. 1-10; Chapter 1: Cognitive Dissonance: The Engine of Self-justification; pp. 11-39. [Ereserve]

WEEK 3 THURSDAY FEBRUARY 9

What are the causes of interpersonal conflict? (Part 2)

Basic human needs in the interpersonal realm

Readings Due:

- Wilmot & Hocker, Chapter 3.
- Stone: Chapters 2-4

Give essay assignment, due 2/23 in class

WEEK 4 THURSDAY FEBRUARY 16

Styles and tactics: How do we behave in interpersonal conflict?

Readings Due:

- Wilmot and Hocker, Chapter 5
- The Anatomy of Peace, Part I

WEEK 5 THURSDAY FEBRUARY 23

How do we feel and how do emotions impact conflict and conflict resolution?

ESSAY DUE (IN CLASS)

Readings Due:

- Wilmot and Hocker: Chapter 6

- Stone, Chapter 5

WEEK 6 THURSDAY MARCH 1

How does our identity and background impact interpersonal conflict?

Readings Due:

- Stone, Chapter 6
- Wilmot & Hocker, Chapter 2 (pp. 60-69 only)
- Folger [eReserve]

WEEK 7 THURSDAY MARCH 8

Power and Interpersonal Conflict

Readings Due:

- Wilmot and Hocker: Chapter 4
- Anatomy of Peace, Part II

WEEK 8 THURSDAY MARCH 15

Spring Break

WEEK 9 THURSDAY MARCH 22

Assessing Interpersonal Conflict

Review for midterm

Readings Due:

- Wilmot and Hocker: Chapter 7
- Stone: Chapters 7-8

WEEK 10 THURSDAY MARCH 29

Midterm Exam – Bring notebook paper or Blue Books to class.

WEEK 11 THURSDAY APRIL 5

Moderating Conflict

Readings Due:

- Wilmot and Hocker, Chapter 8: Interpersonal Negotiation and Chapter 9: Third Party Intervention
- Stone, Chapters 9-10

WEEK 12 THURSDAY APRIL 12

Reconciliation & Forgiveness

Readings Due:

- “Vienna Presbyterian Church seeks forgiveness, redemption in wake of abuse scandal” by Josh White.
http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/vienna-presbyterian-church-works-to-overcome-revelations-of-sexual-abuse/2011/03/30/AF3hNxQC_story.html [Need for class, please bring a copy]
- Wilmot and Hocker, Chapter 10
- Tavris, Carol and Aronson, Elliot, Chapter 7: Wounds, Rifts, and Wars, pp. 185-212; Chapter 8: Letting Go and Owning Up, 213-236. [Ereserve]

WEEK 13 THURSDAY APRIL 19

Putting it all together -- Problem-solving exercise

Readings Due:

- Stone, Chapters 11-12
- Shearouse, Building Trust [eReserve]

WEEK 14 THURSDAY APRIL 26

Class presentations

Readings Due:

- Anatomy of Peace, Part III

WEEK 15 THURSDAY MAY 3

Class presentations

Readings Due:

- Anatomy of Peace, Part IV
- Stone, Chapters 12

Pass out Final Exam (Due: Day of final exam)