

**CONF 330:
Community, Group and Organization Conflicts Analysis and Resolution
Spring 2012**

Thursday 10:30 pm to 1:15 pm
Robinson Hall B, Room 220

Taught by Arthur Romano
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Assistant Professor, School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution
Office Hours: Tuesday 2 to 3pm and by appointment (Room 116, Northeast Module II)

Course Description:

This course examines theories of conflicts stemming from analysis of group dynamics, and it explores methods for engaging constructively with group, organizational and community-level conflicts. It draws on a broadly interdisciplinary approach which includes literature from the fields of conflict analysis and resolution, social psychology, global studies, management, and sociology. This course will provide opportunities to apply this theoretical knowledge to participant's personal experiences as groups, organizations and communities are powerful places that shape the ways we think about ourselves, the ways we see others, and others see us, especially under conditions of interdependency. Through class discussions, films, case studies, and a role plays of real-world conflicts, you will further develop the ability to analyze social group conflicts and consider a wide range of contingencies when designing interventions.

Learning Outcomes:

Students will:

- Familiarize themselves with theoretical and conceptual tools for examining group dynamics
 - Examine the stages and variety of social conflicts
 - Further develop critical thinking and collaborative learning skills
 - Evaluate the role of self-reflexivity in the analysis and resolution of social conflicts
 - Examine social and cultural variables including the role of power, context and intergroup relations
 - Become more familiar with conflict analysis and resolution strategies that focus on group dynamics in the field.
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Course Requirements:

Participation: 20%

Regular attendance and consistent informed participation in class discussions and activities is expected. **It is critical to complete all assigned readings** prior to each class so that you are prepared to engage in discussions. Also you should bring books and class materials with you so that you can cite the text when needed in class. Further, you will need **to take notes** to be able to capture the material discussed in class. We will frequently engage in small group work and experiential activities and the quality of your participation and preparation is essential for maximizing learning and excelling on written assignments

Group Projects: 20%

You will work in a team of 4 or 5 to facilitate an activity and discussion in the final weeks of the class for the entire group that applies the concepts and theories of group dynamics in relation to conflict. The group will be responsible to create a role-play that reveals a specific problem related to group, organizational or community conflict. The problem should help illuminate, but not solve the problem. Also it should have a direct conceptual referent or theory in the reading (e.g., the role of power in reinforcing conflictual dynamics). Most importantly, the role-plays will be based on one or more personal experiences of the team members. The group project (role play/group discussion) will be facilitated in the final weeks of class and you will be required to generate a presentation for the class that elucidates the concepts and theories that informed your role-play. A detailed description of the activity will be posted on blackboard under the “assignments” link in the coming weeks and groups will and presentation dates will be assigned later in the semester.

Due April 12-26

Mid-Term Exam (20%)

This is a take-home essay examination. You will receive the exam in class on **March 1** and will have one week to complete it and turn it in at the start of class on **March 8**. No late assignments will be accepted. The only exceptions to this policy are for those with a documented learning disability, emergent medical problem or a death in the family. In all cases, I will need to receive written documentation and discuss the issue with you. Your assignments should only contain your G number and **not your name** as the assignment will be graded anonymously. You are permitted to go to the writing center to seek feedback on your writing.

Due: March 8

Pop Quizzes (15%)

There will be three pop quizzes that will be given during class. The lowest grade of the three will be dropped. The quizzes will test you on concepts and factual information from the

required readings that have been assigned for the class in which they are given. If you miss the quiz you get a grade of zero. If I hand out the quiz at the beginning of class, those who are late to class and miss the quiz will also get a zero. The only exceptions to this policy are for those with a documented learning disability, emergent medical problem or a death in the family. In all cases, I will need to receive written documentation and discuss the issue with you.

Final Exam (25%) The final exam is also a take-home essay examination. You will receive the exam on April 19 and turn it at the start of class April 26. No late assignments will be accepted. The only exceptions to this policy are for those with a documented learning disability, emergent medical problem or a death in the family. In all cases, I will need to receive written documentation and discuss the issue with you. Your assignments should only contain your G number and **not your name** as the assignment will be graded anonymously. You are permitted to go to the writing center to seek feedback on your writing.

Due: April 26

Required Texts:

Kriesberg, Louis. Constructive conflicts : from escalation to resolution. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007.

Forsyth, Donelson. Group dynamics. Belmont, Calif: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2010.

Block, Peter. Community the structure of belonging. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2008.

*Please note additional readings will be announced through Blackboard throughout this course and it is **IMPERATIVE** that you check the announcements and your GMU email regularly.

Class Schedule:

January 26:

Welcome, overview, class norms, and initial exploration of group, organization and community dynamics.

February 2: Are groups, organizations and communities different? What is a group/organization? How do groups form and functions do they serve?

Readings to be completed for class:

Block; 1, 2

Forsyth; 1, 2

February 9: Group Dynamics: Inclusion, Identity and Power. What are the some of the major challenges to building and maintaining communities and organizations over time?

Readings to be completed for class:

Forsyth; 3, 8
Block; 3

February 16: Introduction to Social Conflicts and the Role of Inequity and power in Conflict Dynamics

Readings to be completed for class:

Kriesberg; 1, 2

Multinational Corporations and Local Communities: A Critical Analysis of Conflict

Lisa Calvano [Journal of Business Ethics](#) Vol. 82, No. 4 (Nov., 2008) (pp. 793-805)
Okonta, Ike. Where vultures feast : shell, human rights, and oil in the Niger Delta. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2001. Chapter 3

Febraury 23: Social Conflicts

Mountain Top Coal Mining Simulation

Readings to be completed for class:
Kriesberg; 3, 4

March 1: Conflict-decision making, participation and negotiating differences

Mountain Top Coal Mining Simulation Continued

Mid-Term Posted on Blackboard

March 8: Participation and Restorative Approaches to Community-building

Readings to be completed for class:
Block; 4, 6, 7

Mid-Term Exam Due

March 15: Spring Break

March 22: Exploring Difference: Diversity and Intergroup Relations

Readings to be completed for class:
Forsyth; 14
Kriesberg; 5, 6

March 29: Conflict Resolution and Transformation

Readings to be completed for class:

Kriesberg; 7, 8

Lederach, J. (2005) The Moral Imagination, Chapter 2 (blackboard)

Guest Speaker TBA

April 05: Conflict Resolution and Transformation in Group Contexts: Conversational Leadership

Readings to be completed for class:

Sampson et al., Positive Approaches to Peacebuilding, Ch 5, 14
Available on Blackboard

Block: 10, 11, 12

April 12: In-class Group Projects

Readings to be completed for class:

Kriesberg; 9, 10

April 19: In-class Group Projects

Exam Posted on Blackboard

Readings to be completed for class:
Kriesberg; 11

April 26: In-Class Presentations

Exam Due

May 3:

Closing, Evaluation and Appreciations

Grading:

I do not curve for this course and most assignments are graded anonymously. You may contest grades. It is in your interest to take some time to formulate your questions/concerns about your grade in advance and make them clear to me in writing before we meet. Contesting grades can cut both ways—you may make a good case for **raising your grade**, however, I may find mistakes I missed the first time and I may **deduct points** after reviewing it again.

Attendance, Late Work, Participation, and Special Needs:

- While points are not directly deducted for missed classes, not attending classes makes it difficult to participate and generally result in lower participation grades. As a rule of thumb, **more than two unexcused absences tends to result in a 25% deduction from your participation grade where more than four absences results in an F for your participation grade.**
 - If you anticipate absences from this class, please notify me in advance so we can make arrangements if necessary.
 - If you are absent due to illness, crisis, or unexpected obstacles, get in touch with me as soon as you can so we can discuss possible arrangements.
 - I encourage you to communicate with me regarding absences and challenges that may disrupt your ability to complete requirements for the course. Timely and honest communication regarding absences can often prevent falling behind and feeling overwhelmed and can allow us to consider creative possibilities.
 - In terms of content if you miss a class, it is a good practice to reach out to your classmates to get an idea of what you have missed in advance of contacting me.
 - No text-messaging, personal web surfing, talking on cell phones, or private conversations. These activities are disruptive to others and will negatively affect your participation grade.
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Student Resources:

English Language Institute:

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.

GMU Writing Center:

“The Writing Center seeks to foster a writing climate on campus and beyond by offering free writing support to George Mason students, faculty, staff and alumni. No matter what your writing abilities are, writing specialists can help you develop the skills you need to become a successful writer. Free services include: One-on-one 45 minute sessions with a writing specialist; online writing lab; one-on-one sessions with an ESL specialist; workshops on such topics as documenting sources, grammar and punctuation; writing handouts on a variety of subjects; a library of handbooks and writing manuals; [and an] online chat with a tutor about

papers submitted to the Online Writing Lab” (<http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>). Students who regularly use the writing center tend to score better marks in my classes.

Disability Support Services:

Any student with documented learning disabilities or other conditions that may affect academic performance should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with the Office of Disability Support Services (993-2474) to determine the possible accommodations you might need; and 2) **contact her or his instructor to discuss reasonable accommodations at the beginning of the semester.**

George Mason University is committed to providing appropriate services and accommodations that allow students with disabilities to access programs and activities at the university as stated in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. To achieve this goal, the university maintains and supports the Disability Resource Center Office, which is responsible for assuring that students receive the services and accommodations to which they are entitled. The professional staff of the Disability Resource Center Office coordinate services for students with disabilities, determine reasonable services and accommodations on the basis of disability, and act as a liaison between students and faculty/ administration on concerns relating to services and accommodations.” (<http://www.gmu.edu/departments/advising/dss.html>).

LAST BUT NOT LEAST: 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 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.