CONFLICT 301
Research and Inquiry in Conflict Resolution
Fall 2006

Instructor: Karen Grattan   Office Hours: Tues. 2:00-3:00 p.m.
Meeting: Tues/Thurs 12:00-1:15 p.m.   Office: Robinson B365
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Additional office hours available by appointment.

INTRODUCTION:
Practitioners in the field of conflict analysis and resolution are frequently called on to describe and explain a particular social conflict as well as propose and assess interventions for their resolution. For this reason, a conflict analysis and resolution specialist often takes a "practitioner-as-researcher" approach, ever bridging the gap between research and practice. This course will explore approaches to the production of knowledge for the purposes of analyzing and ultimately impacting complex social situations—specifically contexts where conflict is present. Most social problems are far too complex to be analyzed from just one perspective or resolved with the application of a few techniques. Because the field of conflict analysis and resolution is relatively young and takes a cross-disciplinary approach, this course will use exemplars from other fields as well as our own to explore the systematic study of human behavior and interaction.

This course will use lecture, discussion and experiential approaches to learning. We will to take advantage of several exciting and very relevant events that are taking place around campus to support our study. For this reason, the syllabus will remain somewhat flexible and topics may be moved to accommodate class activities.

This class will also make heavy use various technologies to support our collaboration and communication. You will be introduced to our class LearningSpace during the first week. This technology is very easy to use and most students find the experience quite fun.

OBJECTIVES:
- Introduce students to ways of thinking about complex problems and to the various methods employed for producing knowledge about human social issues.
- Provide a basis for more advanced study of research methodology
- Assist students in becoming more capable readers, critics, users and doers of research
- Build basic competencies in action research and evaluation
- Develop and appreciation for, and improve skills related to collaboration in the research endeavor.

ASSIGNMENTS:
Portfolio Entries—during the semester you will post 3 short (1-2 single-spaced pages) pieces in the class LearningSpace. You will also respond to 3 of your colleagues work. These will be reflection pieces that do not require outside research, rather, they are designed as responses to specific experiences. Details will be handed out and discussed the first week of class including due dates for each piece and the due dates for your responses to others' work.

Investigating and Interrogating Data Sets—this project is designed to encourage questioning and critical assessment of data and its uses. This project will be done collaboratively with a group of your classmates. There will be class "workshop" time

provided with the rest of your collaboration occurring through threaded discussions in the class LearningSpace (online). You will present your project during a class meeting, posting your slides in the LearningSpace. No formal written report is required. Details will be handed out in class during week 5. Due date: October 17

Research and Inquiry Capstone—this is final project for the class and will serve to bring together and apply some of the approaches we have taken during the course. This project is also done in collaboration with your classmates, but the written pieces (7-10 double-spaced pages) will be individual submissions. We will use a special organization technique to form groups around an issue of common interest for analysis. The object of the project is identify and frame the issue—giving key questions you would ask and approaches you might take for your analysis. Much more detail will be given later in the course and class "workshop" time will be allotted. This project will begin during week 8 of the course. Due date: December 5

EVALUATION:
Portfolio entries and portfolio responses—20%
Investigating data sets—25%
Research and Inquiry Capstone—35%
Class participation—20%

An important word about participation: A pedagogical premise of this course is that learning is most effective when supported by cycles of reflection and action. A further basic premise is that critical reflection is enhanced through generative dialogue. The course is structured to support lively interaction among students. Students participate fully when they prepare appropriately for discussions and are able to make contributions by offering their own thoughtful perspectives, attending carefully to others' thoughts, and asking good questions. Such participation requires constancy in all the course modalities—face-to-face and online. Participation is time-dependent; it is not possible for an individual to some how "make up" a lack of participation. Class attendance is mandatory except in very extenuating circumstances.

… and group work: Practice and research in conflict analysis and resolution never occurs in isolation. Making a commitment to your collaborations and practicing the skills that make collaboration effective is critical to your success both in this class and in your future practice. Because your group collaboration will in part occur during class as well as in your private (to other groups) group room in the LearningSpace, the instructor will be fully aware of the level of participation of each group member. Also, the instructor will provide a confidential assessment that each person will submit in which they evaluate the contribution of each group member (including themselves).

REQUIRED TEXTS:
Best, Joel (2004). *More Damned lies and statistics: How numbers confuse public issues.* Berkeley: University of California Press. (Note: Book abbreviation used: **DLS**)

Stringer, Ernest (1999). *Action Research*, *2nd Edition*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. (Note: Book abbreviation used: **AR**)

Davidson, E. Jane (2005). *Evaluation methodology basics: The nuts and bolts of sound evaluation*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. (Note: Book abbreviation used: **EM**)

Other assigned materials will be posted in the "Library" folder of the LearningSpace or placed on e-reserve.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE:

Week 1: August 29/ August 31

        Topics: Introduction to the course and each other; Introduction to the technology and some basic terms we will use throughout the course

        Prep: **AR** p. *xvii-xxii*; **EM** p. 1-9; **DLS** p. xi-xvii

Week 2: September 5/September 7

        Topics: Conflict as complex social problem; Ways of seeing the world: Some differing philosophies of social research

        Prep: **AR**: Chapter 1; Rittel & Webber (1973) in LearningSpace Library

Week 3: September 12/September 14   Conflict Zones Narrative Event (Thurs.)

        Topics: The role of the researcher
Brief intro to narratives and prep for class activity

        Prep: **AR**: Chapter 2; Brief readings from Web (links provided)

Week 4: September 19/September 21   Welcome Back Reception (Tues.)

        Topics: More on narratives; Ethnography

        Prep: Web resources, links provided in the class LearningSpace

Week 5: September 26/September 28

        Topics: Observations and levels of participation; Interviews and focus groups

        Prep: **AR**: Chapter 4

Week 6: October 3/October 5   Investigating Data project

        Topics: Quantitative approaches; Surveys and experiments

        Prep: Web resources, links provided in the class LearningSpace

Week 7: October 10/October 12   Fall Break, No class Tuesday

        Topics: Developing questions, choosing methods

        Prep: **DLS**: Assigned Chapters (one per group)

Week 8:   October 17/October 19

        Topics: Making sense of data, what makes information knowledge?

        Prep: **AR**: Chapter 5

Week 9:   October 24/October 26   Hand out final project details

        Topics: Interrogating and Investigating Data presentations

        Prep: Complete projects

Week 10:   October 31/November 2

        Topics: Assessing the context, Gaining entry into a community

        Prep: **AR**: Chapter 3; **EM**: Chapter 2

Week 11:   November 7/November 9

        Topics: Collaborative inquiry; Developing accounts

        Prep: **AR**: Chapter 6

Week 12:   November 14/November 16

        Topics: Determining what is important

        Prep: **EM**: Chapter 6 and Chapter 7

Week 13:   November 21/November 23   Thanksgiving break, No class Thursday

        Topics: In class workshop; Prep for final presentation

        Prep: Project work

Week 14:   November 28/November 30   Final Project Presentations

Week 15:   December 5/December 7   Course summary and evaluation

ACADEMIC POLICIES AND INFORMATION

Academic Honesty
George Mason University has an Honor Code with guidelines regarding academic integrity and which is designed, "to promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community" (www.gmu.edu/catalog/apolicies). The Honor Code lays out strict penalties for cheating and plagiarism.

Plagiarism is a serious offense, and all written work for this course should include proper citations in a standard citation format (MLA, APA, etc.). *If you are unsure about how to cite a direct quotation or concept from course or outside readings, then ask for help.* Copies of common style manuals are available at the GMU library reference desk or online.

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).

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.

"George Mason University is committed to providing appropriate services and accommodations that allow self-identified 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).

Library Services
The ICAR liaison at Fenwick Library is Marissa Cachero Stone (mcachero@gmu.edu). Marissa can help you locate journal articles and other helpful outside reading for the course. She also maintains a list of CR-related library resources and a conflict resolution blog, both accessible through her website (http://mason.gmu.edu/~mcachero/).