

CONF 210:001: Theories of Conflict and Conflict Resolution

CRN: 73158

Tuesday, 1:30-4:10

Robinson Hall A249

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Description

The primary mission of our field is to analyze the preconditions, causes and consequences of protracted conflict. Our field also seeks as a primary goal to develop and implement methods of intervention that are intended to mitigate, terminate or prevent such conflicts from occurring or recurring. For both missions—analysis and resolution—theories are essential. They are needed to organize the knowledge gained about the nature of conflicts and lessons learned about promising and productive modes of intervention, towards the goal of positive change in the ways in which conflict parties settle their disputes, better through peaceful means than through violence.

The major objective of this course is to dig beneath the surface of this or that protracted conflict and discover its meaning regarding how and why such a conflict occurred and how the conflict parties can change in pro-social ways. To achieve this goal we examine those architects of the field who developed valuable theories of conflict analysis and resolution. We learn how such theories emerged in reaction to the insights and limitations of theories from other disciplines and fields, such as international relations, sociology, social psychology, and the study of race/ethnic relations. Particular attention is given to the conflict dynamics, that is, the patterns of intergroup relations and the forces affecting those relations. We also rely on cases of those contemporary conflicts that served as prototypes for our understanding of the conflict dynamics.

The course addresses the following topics:

Unit I– power, tyranny, and injustice,

Unit II– the mind, instinct, and violence,

Unit III– society, culture, and identity,

Unit IV– injustice, power, and voice.

Course objectives:

1. To understand the primary theories of protracted conflict that seek to explain their causes, sources, and mechanisms.
2. To apply their theories to contemporary conflicts, recognizing that the complexity of conflicts calls for a multiplicity of conflict theories.

3. To critically evaluate the conflict theories, assessing their strengths and weaknesses for explaining contemporary conflicts and for understanding the conflict dynamics.

4. To demonstrate the currency of conflict theory to conflict analysis and practice.

Each student is expected to come to each class session prepared to participate actively in both the lecture and the class discussion that addresses central themes of the week's topics.

Required Textbooks:

Lewis A. Coser. 1956. *The Functions of Social Conflict*. [New York] Free Press of Glencoe [1964, c1956]

Jolle Demmers, *Theories of Violent Conflict*. New York: N.Y.: Routledge, 2012. ISBN 13: 978-0-415-55534-0 pbk.

Articles and Book Chapters:

All additional readings should be accessible through the GMU's blackboard at <https://gmu.blackboard.com/>. To use the blackboard, allow pop ups, enter you GMU e-mail username and password and choose CONF210.000 from the menu.

Machiavelli. *The Prince* Chapters XIV-XV, XVII- XVIII, XXV

Hobbes. *Leviathan*. Chapter X: "Of Power, Worth, dignity, Honour, and Worthiness." Chapter XIII "Of the Natural Condition of Mankind".

Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*

Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*

Karl Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*

Galtung, J. (1969). "Violence, peace and peace research." *Journal of Peace Research*, 6 (3): 167-191.

Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its discontent*, pp. 104-122.

Vamik Volkan. 2004. *Blind Trust: Seven Threats of Large Group Identity*, pp. 23-55.

Vamik Volkan. 1997. *Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism*. Chapter 3, pp. 36-49,

R. Gurr. "Psychological Factors in Civil Violence"

A.H. Maslow. 1943. "A Theory of Human Motivation"

John Burton. "Introducing the Person into Thinking about Social Policies."

Roger Coate and Jerel Rosati, "Human Needs in World Society"

Avruch, Kevin and Black, Peter (1993). "Conflict resolution in intercultural settings: problems and prospects."

Galtung, "Cultural Violence"

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

Martin Luther King, "Letter from the Birmingham Jail"

Rothbart, Daniel and Karina V. Korostelina, "Moral Denigration of the Other"

Michel Foucault. "The Body of the Condemned"

Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power"

Rothbart and Bartlett, "Rwandan Radio Broadcasts and Hutu/Tutsi Positioning"

Richard Rubenstein, "Education in Conflict Analysis and Resolution"

GMU EMAIL ACCOUNTS

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

Course Schedule and Readings:

Week 1 [September 1]: Conflict theory: Why, what, and how.

Required Reading:

Demmers, *Theories of Violent Conflict*, Chapter 1.

Unit I: Power, Tyranny, and Injustice

According to theorists in this unit, state power is essential for the protection of the citizens. But many critics of this notion see that power tends to convert rulers to tyrants, creating systems of increasing inequality, and causing extreme suffering among the general population. Genuine liberation cannot be achieved through liberal reform but requires a complete dismantling of the systems of state power. The authority of state governments is shaken by revolutionary forces that

seek to protect the rights of ‘man’, the proletariat class, and those who are disenfranchised from power.

Week 2 [September 8]: Realism in International Relations and Rebellion

Required Reading:

Machiavelli. *The Prince* Chapters XIV-XV, XVII- XVIII, XXV

Hobbes. *Leviathan*. Chapter X: “Of Power, Worth, dignity, Honour, and Worthiness.” Chapter XIII “Of the Natural Condition of Mankind”.

Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*

Week 3 [September 15]: Marxism and Conflict Analysis/Resolution

Required Reading:

Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*

Karl Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*

Week 4: [September 22]: Structure Violence

Required Reading:

Galtung, J. (1969). “Violence, peace and peace research.” *Journal of Peace Research*, 6 (3): 167-191.

Unit II: the Mind, Instinct, and Violence

Violent conflict can also find its source in psychic reactions to oppressive social forces that prevent fulfillment of instinctual needs. In Unit II, we examine models of the mind’s inner workings, identifying the mysterious forces that drive groups to violence as a means for settling their disputes with their adversaries.

Week 5 [September 29]: Psychoanalysis

Required Reading:

Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its discontent*, pp. 104-122.

Vamik Volkan. 2004. *Blind Trust: Seven Threats of Large Group Identity*, pp. 23-55.

Vamik Volkan. 1997. *Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism*. Chapter 3, pp. 36-49,

Week 6 [October 6]: Relative Deprivation

Required Reading:

R. Gurr. "Psychological Factors in Civil Violence"

Demmers, *Theories of Violent Conflict*, Chapter 4, pp. 77-99.

Week 7 [October 20]: Basic Human Needs

Required reading:

A.H. Maslow. 1943. "A Theory of Human Motivation"

John Burton. "Introducing the Person into Thinking about Social Policies."

Roger Coate and Jerel Rosati, "Human Needs in World Society"

Unit III: Society, Culture, and Identity

We move from the inner workings of the mind to the external forces of society, culture and identity groups of various kinds. Such forces create the conditions of relative deprivation and systematic injustice. The need to respond to such maladies is cast as essential for collective survival, understood as a matter of life or death. In such cases the conflict dynamics are framed in terms of normative dualities between justice/injustice, right/wrong, and good/bad.

Week 8 [October 27]: Culture and violence

Required:

Kevin Avruch and Peter Black, "Conflict resolution in intercultural settings."

Galtung, "Cultural Violence"

Week 9 [November 3]: Functionalism and Social Conflict

Required:

Lewis A. Coser. 1956. Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. *The Functions of Social Conflict*

Week 10 [November 10]: Identity, Difference, and Conflict

Required:

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

Demmers, *Theories of Violent Conflict*, Chapters 1 and 2, pp. 18-53.

Week 11 [November 17]: The politics of dignity, recognition and justice

Required:

Martin Luther King, "Letter from the Birmingham Jail"

Rothbart and Korostelina, "Moral Denigration of the Other" in *Identity, Morality, and Threat: Studies in Violent Conflict*

Unit IV: Injustice, Power, and Voice

Many conflicts find their source in systems of domination that are interwoven seamlessly in our lives. In this unit we examine the promises and failings of modern society, focusing on its pernicious character that, presumably, contaminates social relations and alienates each individual from him- herself. Special attention is given to the intersection of power and institutions of truth associated with many institutions, even humanitarian organizations such as the United Nations.

Week 12 [November 24]: Post-Modernism

Required:

Michel Foucault. "The Body of the Condemned"

Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power"

Week 13 [December 1]: Discursive Approach to Conflict

Required:

Demmers, *Theories of Violent Conflict*, Chapter 6, pp. 116-138.

Rothbart and Bartlett, "Rwandan Radio Broadcasts and Hutu/Tutsi Positioning" in Global Conflict Resolution through Positioning Theory, Fathali M. Moghaddam, Rom Harré, and Naomi Lee, Eds., Springer (New York), 2008.

Week 14 [December 8]: the Future of conflict theory

Required:

Richard Rubenstein, "Education in Conflict Analysis and Resolution"

Course Requirements:

1. Participation.

Each class session will include a discussion-component that calls for active participation. Since you are expected to attend each of the fourteen sessions of this course, each session that is missed as an unexcused absence will result on a reduction of the participation grade, according to the following matrix:

Out of a maximum of 100 points for the participation grade:

One unexcused absence results in 10 point reduction in participation grade

Two unexcused absences results in 20 point reduction in participation grade

Three unexcused absences results in 30 point reduction in participation grade

Four unexcused absences results in 40 point reduction in participation grade

And so on...

An unexcused absence is one in which I do not receive an adequate explanation for absence on or before the class session. The best means for communication is email: drothbar@gmu.edu.

The participation score represents 20% of course grade. So, for example, if your participation score is 80, as a result of two unexcused absences, then this score will be factored into 20% of the course grade.

2. Exam #1. This essay exam will address the course content from weeks 1 to 7. This will be distributed during class time of week 7, October 20, and due back one week later, week 8 [October 27]. The grade for your exam will comprise 30% of the course grade.

3. Theory Comparison. The purpose of this assignment is to compare and contrast two theories that we discussed in this course. Your case study will include the following elements: First, a summary of the central concepts and themes of one theory that we study in this course, second, a summary of a second such theory, third, a comparison of similarities and differences between the two theories, and fourth, an application of both theories to a contemporary protracted conflict. The length will be between 4000 and 6000 words, including references. The grade for this theory-comparison will comprise 20% of the course grade.

4. Exam #2. This is a cumulative final exam, essay format, addressing the content of the whole course. This will be distributed during class of week 14, December 8, and due one week later by email. The grade for your exam will comprise 30% of the course grade.

HONOR POLICY

Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code (See <http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code>). 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.

Student Services

Writing Center:

The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing. (See <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>). ESL Help: The program was designed specifically for students whose first language is not English who feel they might benefit from additional, targeted support over the course of an entire semester. (See http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/?page_id=10).

University Libraries:

University Libraries provides resources for distance students. (See <http://library.gmu.edu/distance>).

Counseling and Psychological Services

The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance [See <http://caps.gmu.edu>].

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), also known as the "Buckley Amendment," is a federal law that gives protection to student educational records and provides students with certain rights. [See <http://registrar.gmu.edu/privacy>].