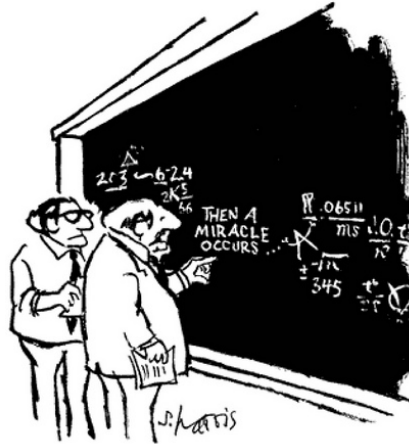


**CONF 301  
Research & Inquiry in Conflict Resolution**



"I think you should be more explicit here in step two."

Office Hours: By appointment

Office Location: 116 Northeast Module II

Email: [pfirchow@gmu.edu](mailto:pfirchow@gmu.edu)

Class Day: Mondays

Class Times: 1:30-4:10pm

Classroom: Music/Theater Building 1004

**Course Description**

Conflict Resolution professionals are frequently asked to conduct analysis on the effectiveness of peacebuilding interventions in the field. In fact, one of the fastest growing sectors in peacebuilding and development is in the 'monitoring and evaluation' field. Just a quick perusal of job sites results in dozens of searches for 'monitoring and evaluation' professionals, yet few graduates of conflict resolution or peace studies programs know exactly what that means. This course provides a foundation, and a beginning, to introduce undergraduates to the world of methods for conducting social analysis of conflict-affected contexts. The goal is to give students the training necessary to create a research project and employ social science methods to carry it out. Students will also gain a cursory understanding of how these methods are operationalized by conflict resolution professionals today.

Therefore, this course examines the kinds of activities, skills, tasks and goals that are needed for sound research in conflict resolution. Throughout the semester, students develop their critical understanding of the research process as they investigate case studies of empirical research that raise central questions about contemporary conflict, conflict resolution and methodology. Students will also develop their own comprehensive research proposal on an individually identified research problem situated within the conflict analysis and resolution literature.

## Course Objectives

- Learn how to frame a topic for research and to develop a research proposal
- Survey a wide variety of research methods for collecting or producing data and learn how to use them to address your research problem
- Examine the strengths, limitations and theoretical underpinnings of quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods research
- Provide a basis for more advanced study of research methodology
- To bridge theory & findings with practice (praxis)
- Begin to explore how these methods are used to monitor and evaluate peacebuilding projects by practitioners

## Evaluation

### Course Requirements

Course requirements include leading class discussions, active class participation and a four-stage Research Proposal process. Each stage of the Research Proposal will be graded separately beginning with the ‘Introduction, and Research Question’ – Research Proposal 1. Each stage of the proposal builds on the previous paper and includes a revised version of the first paper. Therefore, in Research Proposal 2, you will have revised your first paper and then added a Literature Review section and so on. Your final Research Proposal will be accompanied by a letter responding to comments given by the professor and peer reviewers and why or why not the student decided to integrate these into their final draft. By the end of this class, each of you will have a thoroughly thought out research project proposal that has been revised several times with my help and that of your colleagues through a peer review process. I have designed the work for this class so that you read before class, participate and learn during class, and work on your Research Proposal after class. All the readings listed for a particular week must be completed before coming to class. All assignments are due at midnight on the day they are due (unless otherwise noted in the syllabus).

### The class components are worth the following:

1. Class participation (15%)
2. Discussion Board (15%) – Due weekly on Sundays
3. Research Proposal - 1 (5%) – Due September 21<sup>st</sup>
4. Research Proposal - 2 (20%) – Due October 13<sup>th</sup>
5. Research Proposal - 3 (20%) – Due November 16<sup>th</sup>
6. Peer Review of Colleague’s Research Proposal (5%) – Due December 1<sup>st</sup>
7. Research Proposal Presentation (10%) – November 16<sup>th</sup> or 23<sup>rd</sup>
8. Final Research Proposal (10%) – Due December 14<sup>th</sup>

Assignments are due on BLACKBOARD by midnight on the due date (unless otherwise instructed). Undocumented excuses will not be accepted. All submissions will be checked by SafeAssign – Blackboard’s plagiarism detection software.

## **Grades and Grading**

**A** Given for work that meets all expectations: shows creative and original thinking, is well organized and clearly written without grammatical and spelling errors, and demonstrates rigorous reading and reflection of assignments.

**B** Given for work that meets most expectations: good work with a strong argument, sound organization and solid writing.

**C** Given for work that meets some expectations: the work satisfies the assignment, but offers a more limited analysis and grasp of material explored in the course.

**D** Given for work that does not meet expectations: inability to engage with concepts and theories discussed in class and in readings, low attendance and/or effort, but reflects a certain degree of participation and effort to learn.

**F** Given for work that is unacceptable and/or incomplete: no degree of participation and effort to learn material, inability to engage with the concepts and theories learned in class and readings, difficulty writing a comprehensible assignment.

**Late Work:** Class assignments that are submitted late will be penalized by half a grade for each day they are late (e.g. B instead of B+). Please email Professor Firchow if you have a **documented** personal illness with scanned documentation of your illness or official documentation from the GMU Office of Disability Services. **Undocumented excuses will not be accepted.**

**Paper Format:** Papers for the course should be typed, double-spaced, have 1” margins, and use a common 12-point font. Headers should include only the course number, CONF 340. Please upload your papers to Blackboard before.

Sources should be cited using a single standard academic citation format (**either APA or Chicago**) and papers must include a bibliography. Wikipedia is not an appropriate source for academic paper writing. Your papers should cite primarily academic journals and books, although occasional inclusion of online newspapers is acceptable.

Chicago Style Manual:

[http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)

APA Style Manual:

<http://www.apastyle.org>

**Required Course Materials** (available at the GMU bookstore or online)

Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy. 2011. *The Practice of Qualitative Research* - Second Edition. Sage Publications.

John W. Creswell. 2014. *Research Design* – Fourth Edition. Sage Publications.

## Academic Honesty

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](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 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.

Plagiarism is a serious offense, and all written work for this course should include proper citations in a standard citation format (either APA or Chicago). *If you are unsure about how to cite a direct quotation or concept from course or outside readings, then ask for help.* “I wasn’t sure how to cite a source, so I left out the reference,” is not an acceptable defense for plagiarism. Copies of common style manuals are available at the GMU library reference desk or online at <http://library.duke.edu/research/citing/workscited/>

For individual class assignments, you may discuss your ideas with others or ask for feedback; however, you are responsible for making certain that there is no question that the work you hand in is your own. **All of your work in this class will be checked by SafeAssign, Blackboard’s plagiarism detection software.** You may not submit papers or presentations from other courses to fulfill assignments for this class.

## Classroom Expectations

Additionally, to be courteous to others, including the instructor, you must be on time for class and *turn off all cell phones*. No texting or use of phones during class. Since this is a seminar class and its success ultimately rests with your engaged participation, the use of computers during class is *not allowed* (unless otherwise instructed).

Class attendance is mandatory. After the first undocumented absence, each subsequent undocumented absence will lower your participation grade by one grade (e.g. B instead of A). Please make sure you arrive on time and prepared for class. Chronic tardiness will result in a lower final grade for this class.

## Student Resources

### The Writing Center

The Writing Center is a free writing resource that offers individual, group, and online tutoring. For general questions and comments, please visit <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/> or e-mail [wcenter@gmu.edu](mailto:wcenter@gmu.edu) or call 703-993-4491.

For further help with writing and formatting, you can use these websites:  
Indiana University – <http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets.shtml>  
Purdue Online Writing Lab - <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/>  
Oatmeal Guide to Spelling - <http://theoatmeal.com/comics/misspelling>

### **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.

<http://ods.gmu.edu/>

## **Course Schedule and Assignments**

### **Part 1: Designing Research**

#### Week One, August 31: Introduction to Research & Inquiry

- William Zinsser. *On Writing Well*, Chapters 1 & 15

#### **Labor Day – No Class September 7<sup>th</sup>**

#### Week Two, September 14: Designing your Research

- PQR, Chapters 1 & 2
- RD, Chapter 1
- Craig J. Calhoun. *Dictionary of the social sciences*  
<http://www.oxfordreference.com.mutex.gmu.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780195123715.001.0001/acref-9780195123715>

#### Week Three, September 21: Asking Good Questions

#### **\*Research Proposal 1 Due**

- PQR, Chapter 3
- RD, Chapters 5, 6 & 7
- Please complete this survey for next week's class: <http://bit.ly/1vFfAwX>

#### Week Four, September 28: Writing a Literature Review and Bibliography

Mary Oberlies, S-CAR Librarian **Please bring laptops!**  
Gateway Library Instruction Room (Johnson Center, Room 228)

- RD, Chapters 2 & 3
- Knopf, J. W. (2006). Doing a literature review. *PS, Political Science & Politics*, 39(1), 127-132

#### Week Five, October 5: The Researcher Identity & Research Ethics

- PQR, Chapter 4
- RD, Chapter 4

- Rosaldo, Renato. 2003. Grief and a Headhunter's Rage
- Milgram, Stanley. 1963 "Behavioral study of obedience" *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, Vol. 67, No. 4.
- Watch The Stanford Prison Experiment Documentary  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L\\_LKzEqIPto](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L_LKzEqIPto)
- IRB human subjects guidelines, the Belmont report  
<http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/belmont.html>

## **Part 2: Conducting Research**

Week Six, October 13: Surveys & Content Analysis

**\*Research Proposal 2 Due**

**Columbus Day – Class meets on Tuesday**

- PQR, Chapters 9 & 13
- RD, Chapter 8

Week Seven, October 19: Working with Big Data

- PQR, Chapter 11
- RD, Chapter 10
- Patrick M. Regan, "Quantitative Approaches." In Roger Mac Ginty, 2013. *Routledge Handbook of Peacebuilding*.
- Familiarize yourself with these indices and databases:
  - ❖ Global Peace Index  
<http://www.visionofhumanity.org/#/page/indexes/global-peace-index>
  - ❖ Human Development Index  
<http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi>
  - ❖ Uppsala Conflict Data Program <http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/UCDP/>
  - ❖ Correlates of War <http://www.correlatesofwar.org/>

Week Eight, October 26: Interviews & Case Studies

- PQR, Chapters 5, 8 & 10
- Hinton, A. L. (1998). Why did you kill?: The Cambodian genocide and the dark side of face and honor. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 57(01), 93-122.

### **Midterm Evaluations**

Week Nine, November 2: Interview Debrief

- Prepare group presentations
- RD, Chapter 9

Week Ten, November 9: Focus Groups

- PQR, Chapter 7

- Firchow, Pamina. 2014. The Implementation of the Institutional Program of Collective Reparations in Colombia. *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, Vol. 6, Issue 2: 327-355.

### **Part 3: Practicing Research**

Week Eleven, November 16: What is Peer Review? & Research Proposal Presentations

**\*Research Proposal 3 Due**

- Linda B. Nilson. 2003. Improving Student Peer Feedback. *College Teaching*: Vol. 51: 1.

Week Twelve, November 23: Research Proposal Presentations

**\*Draft of Final Research Proposal Due**

Week Thirteen, December 1: Undergraduate Research Symposium

Class will meet on Tuesday instead of Monday from 1:30 to 4:10pm in Merton Hall, 1201. If you have a class conflict, please email Professor Firchow.

**\*Peer review comments Due**

Week Fourteen, December 7: Operationalizing Research in Conflict Resolution and Writing Up

- PQR, Chapters 12, 13 & 14

**\*Final Research Proposal Due December 14<sup>th</sup>**