

CONF 320 – Interpersonal Conflict Analysis and Resolution

Fall Semester 2015

Instructor:
Alison Castel

Tuesdays, 4:30pm-7:10pm
Planetary Hall 224

Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:30-2:30pm by appointment acastel@gmu.edu

Course Description and Objectives

It can be argued that all conflicts are “interpersonal” in the sense that conflicts are a function of the relations between (inter) persons. Conflicts in organizations, in families, in communities, within and between nations, are, from this perspective, inevitably “interpersonal.”

This course examines a variety of theories, models, and frameworks for analyzing and resolving interpersonal conflict. We will begin by exploring the role of conflict in your own individual development, family relations, and social experiences early in life. You will consider the various dimensions of yourself and your social interactions that lead to interpersonal conflict situations. You will have opportunities to analyze a range of interpersonal conflicts, their possible associated causes, and methods of inquiry that lead to resolution. You will learn and practice skills for responding constructively to conflict and engaging in difficult conversations. Through interviews, class discussions, analyses, exercises, and simulations, you will reflect on such questions as:

- Who am I and what do I bring to this particular conflict?
- What is my range of options to begin a resolution process?
- What skills do I have to prevent, deescalate and resolve interpersonal conflicts?
- What skills do I need to develop?

Reflection is encouraged at both the individual and group levels to further develop skills and deepen your understanding of interpersonal conflict and its management or resolution.

Course Requirements

There are four components of the course: class participation, skill building, learning via research and readings and self-reflection. These are of equal importance and will be assessed as follows:

1. Participation (20%)

Because much of this course involves in-class, experiential learning, participation constitutes a significant portion of the course grade. While attendance is expected, you are to participate fully in all exercises and complete all weekly, required assignments and readings in preparation for class discussion. We will begin and end each class on time. Sometimes absence from class is unavoidable. If you know you are going to be absent, contact me in advance (acastel@gmu.edu). Please come prepared for full participation.

As part of your participation grade, you will be asked to submit at minimum one journal entry per week that demonstrates how you are reflecting on your interpersonal conflict and connecting it to the readings. Two entries, one before the midterm and one after the midterm should include a news article or current event of your choice that represents interpersonal conflict out in the world with an explanation of why you chose your particular article. You may submit this any week with your journal entry and I may ask people to share their submissions with the class. These will be due on BB before the start of class.

3. Reflection Paper and Midterm Paper (30%)

You will be given an assignment on September 29 for a **midterm paper due October 6th**. The primary purpose of the 5-6 page paper is to demonstrate your integration of the readings and class lectures. [Note: the specifics of the paper will be discussed in class]

4. Skill Building and Group Presentation (20%)

While each week we will have cases to discuss and analyze, One full Saturday session is set aside specifically for interpersonal conflict resolution role-play and skill building. You will work in small groups on ways to intervene in interpersonal conflict. Following practice, you will submit a video recorded conflict scenario and prepare a group presentation discussing your strategies for intervention. [Note: The details and expectations will be discussed in class.]

5. Final Synthesis Paper (30%)

Early in the semester you will identify a specific interpersonal conflict you are experiencing that deeply affects you. As you move along in the semester you will be able to apply what you are learning from the readings and class exercises to this conflict. By the end of the class you submit a self-reflection paper that demonstrates your ability to analyze the conflict, identify changes in your own thinking and behavior regarding the conflict, including how you view the other person(s). The final reflection paper (8-10 pages) will demonstrate your capacity to integrate readings, exercises, skill building and self-reflection. [Note: you will receive specific guidelines in class.] **The paper is due November 9th 11:59pm.**

Papers will be graded for clarity (30 pts), analytic creativity (40pts), and the reference of course materials (lectures and readings) (30pts).

Required Text (Available in Bookstore)

Wilmot, William W. and Joyce L. Hocker. *Interpersonal Conflict*, 8th Ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011.

White, Michael. *Maps of Narrative Practice*. 1st ed. W. W. Norton & Company, 2007.

Required Articles/Book Chapters, Available on Blackboard

Gopin, Marc, *Healing the Heart of Conflict: 8 Crucial Steps for Making Peace with Yourself and Others*. New York: Rodale Inc. 2004. (Ch. 1, 2, 4, 8)

Rosenberg, Marshal, *Nonviolent Communication: The Language of Compassion*.

Stone, Douglas, Bruce Patton and Sheila Heen. *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*. New York: Viking, 1999. (Introduction & Ch. 1)

Winslade, John, Monk, Gerald. *Practicing Narrative Mediation: Loosening the grip of conflict*. Jossey-Bass. 2000. (Introduction)

Class Policies and Procedures

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

Please familiarize yourself with the Honor System and Code, as stated in the George Mason University's *Undergraduate Catalog*. While collaboration is certainly important to learning, for this class, written assignments, unless otherwise specified, are to be done by each student, by himself or herself. Some of your work may be collaborative; work of individual group members must be carefully documented for individual contributions.

For an overview of the Honor Code, see: <http://mason.gmu.edu/~montecin/plagiarism.htm>. I will randomly and routinely use *Turn it In* and other online tools to make sure the work is original or properly cited.

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.

ADD/DROP Deadlines for Course

Last Day to Add or Drop without Penalty: September 8th

Last Day to Drop: October 2nd

See <http://registrar.gmu.edu/calendars/fall-2015/> for the academic calendar for the fall, which lists important dates.

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/

Email and Blackboard

Mason uses only Mason e-mail accounts to communicate with enrolled students. Students must activate their Mason e-mail account, use ONLY Mason email to communicate with the instructor for this course; as Mason email is critical to the delivery of information pertinent to this course, it must be checked regularly.

Course materials will be archived in BlackBoard. To Access Blackboard see <http://ondemand.blackboard.com/students.htm>. You can also follow these instructions:

1. Go to <http://mymason.gmu.edu>.
2. Login using your NETID and password.
3. Click on the 'Courses' tab.
4. Double-click on [201570.70541 CONF-320-001 \(Fall 2015\)](#) under the "9.1 Course List" heading.

I will be using Blackboard as an organizational tool, posting materials related to the course on the site, and sending you collective emails.

Weekly Themes, Readings and Assignments

Tuesday, September 1, 2015

Introduction and Course Overview

Class Exploration:

- Introductions and expectations
- Overview of course and syllabus
- Interpersonal conflict—the context of studying conflict

Assignment:

- Identify a personal goal for the class. What interpersonal conflict are you currently struggling with? What skills do you want to develop or improve to address this conflict? What do you want to do differently when you find yourself steeped in this interpersonal conflict as well as others? Be specific. Include your goals in your introductory reflection paper.
- Introductory Reflection Paper: 3-5 pages
For this assignment ([post to BB by 11:59pm September 7](#)), you will write a detailed description of an interpersonal conflict that you would like to work on and refer to for the entirety of the semester. You will build on this conflict scenario for your midterm and final and you can consider it your case study. You may also use this reflection piece as an opportunity to look at the pattern of conflicts in your life. You may draw on theories and frameworks that are presented in class.

Tuesday, September 8, 2015

An Introduction to Interpersonal Conflict

Readings and assignments (complete before class):

Wilmot & Hocker, Chapters 1 and 2: *The Nature of Conflict* and *Perspectives on Conflict* (pages 19-53 only), Chapter 3: Interests and Goals (pages 71-102)

Class Exploration:

- Review of individual goals; discussion
- What is interpersonal conflict?
- Why is it important to study interpersonal conflict?
- What are the causes of interpersonal conflict?
- Exercise

Tuesday, September 15, 2015

How do we behave in interpersonal conflict?

Readings (Complete before class)

Wilmot and Hocker, Chapter 5, *Styles and Tactics* (pages 144-191)

- <http://developmentalobserver.blog.com/2010/06/09/an-overview-of-constructive-developmental-theory-cd/>
- http://www.shiftingthinking.org/?page_id=449

Class Exploration:

- Styles and tactics and your preferences
- Activity: personal response to conflict
- Dual Concerns Model
- Emotions and Revenge

Tuesday, September 22, 2015

How does our identity and background impact interpersonal conflict?

Intercultural Communication

Readings and Assignments (complete before class):

Wilmot & Hocker, Chapter 2 (pp. 59-71 only), *The lens model of conflict*

Stone, Patton, & Heen, Chapter 6: “Ground Your Identity: Ask Yourself What’s at Stake?”

Class Exploration:

- Gender, culture, life experiences
- Exercise
- Midterm assignment will be distributed

Tuesday, September 29, 2015

Power and Communication

Readings (complete prior to class):

Wilmot and Hocker: Chapter 4, *Power: the Structure of Conflict* (pages 103-143)

Gopin, Chapter 4, *Hear*

Rosenberg, Marshal, *Nonviolent Communication: The Language of Compassion*.

Class Exploration:

- Power and Influence
- Listening
- Non-violent communication
- How interpersonal conflicts begin and escalate

Tuesday, October 6, 2015

Changing narratives

Readings (complete prior to class):

Winslade: Intro: How to work with conflict stories (on BB)

White: Externalizing Conversations pp.9-60

Class Exploration:

- Narrative mediation
- Externalizing Conversations
- Midterm paper due

Tuesday, October 13, 2015
NO CLASS

Saturday, October 17, 9am-5pm: TBD
Experiential Exercise in Conflict Transformation: Externalization and Re-Authoring Conversations

Readings (complete prior to class):
White: Re-Authoring Conversations p.61-128

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Conflict in the Workplace

GUEST SPEAKER: Samantha Hardy, PhD
Director, Conflict Management and Resolution Program
College of Business, Law and Governance
James Cook University

Tuesday, October 27

Intervening in Interpersonal Conflicts

Readings (complete prior to class):
Wilmot and Hocker: Chapters 8, 9 & 10, Interpersonal Negotiation, Third-Party Intervention and Forgiveness and Reconciliation (pages 244-333)
<http://www.wsj.com/articles/life-lessons-from-the-nypds-top-hostage-negotiator-1440726792>

Class Exploration:

- Interpersonal negotiation
- Apology, forgiveness and reconciliation
- Third Party Intervention

Saturday, October 31, 9am-5pm: TBD
Experiential Exercise in Conflict Transformation: Remembering Conversations, Unique Outcomes, and Scaffolding; Conflict Resolution Simulations

Readings (complete prior to class):
White: 129-164 and 219-292

- Feedback and course evaluation
- **Final Paper Due: November 10 at 11:59pm.**